

FIFTY YEARS OF EUROPE

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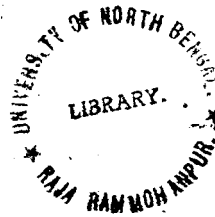


FIFTY YEARS OF EUROPE

A STUDY IN PRE-WAR DOCUMENTS

BY

J. A. SPENDER



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and Sydney

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TO MY JUNIORS

THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED IN
THE HOPE THAT IT MAY HELP THEM TO
UNDERSTAND THE PAST AND TO MEASURE
RIGHTLY THE TASK THAT LIES BEFORE THEM

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PREFACE

THOUGH many books have been written on different aspects of the period between the Franco-Prussian War and the Great War, I hope there may still be room for a study which relies in the main on the great documents published by the principal Governments during the last twelve years, and examines the aims and motives of statesmen in the light of the new material thus provided. Some of this material has already been handled by expert historians, but the greater part of it is still unknown to the public, and the Austrian documents in particular provide additions to our knowledge, as yet undigested, which may require us to revise some preconceived opinions about the parts played by the principal Powers in the last years before the war. In all these matters we have still to find the middle path between the raw judgments formed during or immediately after the war and the reaction from these in the minds of those who thought themselves unjustly condemned. The discovery of this must be the work of time and many hands and the best that one writer can hope is that he may contribute to it.

My approach to the subject is somewhat different from that of the ordinary historian. For two-thirds of this period it was part of my daily duty as a journalist to express opinions on the transactions dealt with in these records; and I have found a special interest in retracing this ground and endeavouring to see these transactions, so to speak, on their obverse side, that is, as they appeared to other nations and Governments. Scientific impartiality cannot be claimed for this method, but it may contribute something which the historian who relies solely on documents may miss.

A few simple clues will indicate the plan of this book. The period roughly divides itself into five parts: (1) the Bismarck era, which may be defined as the quest of security by Germany through the isolation of France and the grouping of the monarchical Powers round a German centre; (2) the breakdown of this policy through the revolt of Russia and the consequent division of Europe into two camps and the re-establishment of a balance of power; (3) the angling of the two groups for the British casting vote and its bestowal finally on the Franco-Russian group under the influence

of the German threat to British sea-power; (4) the effort of the German group by a succession of shock-tactics to disintegrate the French-Russian-British *Entente*; and (5) the concentration of both groups on the Russian-Austrian rivalry in the Near East, which in the end was regarded as the supreme test of their strength by both the great Alliances.

During the whole or the greater part of this period there were four principal factors, the interplay of which determined the politics of Europe. The first, the hostility of France and Germany; the second, the desire of Russia to get to the warm water—to obtain the “key of her house” as Alexander II designated the control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles; the third, the fear of Austria-Hungary that the rise of Serbia and the general spread of Russian influence in the Balkans, as the Turkish Empire decayed, would be fatal to her loose-jointed Empire; the fourth, the great contention from the beginning of the new century onwards between Britain and Germany on the subject of sea-power. I speak of the last as a “great contention,” for the judgment which relegates it to a secondary place and treats British intervention as a mere entanglement or blind stumble into the European morass seems to me profoundly mistaken.

One general observation only I will add here. No writer of this period can go far without feeling a theme being imposed upon him—that theme being, in the familiar words of the Kellogg Pact, “the use of war as an instrument of policy.” The use of war, or what is morally indistinguishable, the threat of war, is throughout the principal weapon of all the Governments and the foundation of their instructions to their Ambassadors and agents. From the use of war and the threat of war followed nearly all else, the Alliances, the armaments competitions, the war scares, and perhaps most important of all, the secret and disingenuous methods of diplomacy. A diplomacy which constantly kept war in view was under strong temptation to adopt the ethics of war, the ethics by which the practice of deceit and chicane, the misleading of opponents, and the withholding from them of material facts are held to be justifiable and even necessary. These methods have of course been practised by statesmen and diplomatists at all times, but never, I think, so systematically, and, if the word may be used, so scientifically, by the principal European nations as in the period between the Franco-Prussian War and the Great War.

The judgment that is most needed is not upon individual Governments or statesmen, most of whom followed a conventional

road in circumstances which seemed to them compelling, but upon the system in which they were involved. That judgment should, as far as possible be *sine ira ac studio*, but it would be hypocrisy for any writer of this generation to pretend to be without bias. My bias is frankly that of an Englishman writing from an English point of view, though not, I hope, in such a way as to prevent the facts from speaking for themselves.

I have hewn only a few blocks out of an inexhaustible quarry, and the material accumulates so rapidly that to publish anything at any moment is to run the risk of being ignorant of new facts which have come to light between writing and going to press. The authentic documents, British, German, Austrian, French, Russian, Belgian, alone mount up to between seventy and eighty stout volumes, and many more are still to come. No one can attempt to deal even provisionally with this mass of material without acknowledging his debt to many editors and students, especially to Drs. Gooch and Temperley, for their careful editing and fair selection of the British documents—how fair and careful I have had rather special opportunities of judging; to Dr. Gooch for his guidance through the labyrinth in his “Recent Revelations of European Diplomacy” and in his own historical narrative and many brilliant studies of individuals and special phases; to Professor Pribram for his orderly presentment of the principal treaties; to Herr Brandenburg for his fair and temperate statement of the facts from a German point of view; to Professor Fay for his work “The Origins of the War,” and to two other American students, Professor Langer and Professor Fuller for their intensive and elaborate studies of certain phases of the Bismarck era.

This book is in no sense intended to compete with the work of these eminent expert historians, and it omits many transactions which would need to be recorded in an exhaustive history. If it may be briefly described, it is the effort of a contemporary to clear his own thoughts and help clear those of others about a period in which he lived and worked.

I must ask the indulgence of Scottish, Welsh and Irish readers for what they may deem to be an improper use of the words “England” and “English.” It is, however, impossible to displace these words from the terminology of foreign statesmen and to vary them in commenting on dispatches and memoranda would often cause unnecessary confusion.

Most of the translations from foreign documents in this book are my own, but where I have quoted documents included in his

selections from the German documents (*Grosse Politik*) Mr. E. T. S. Dugdale and Messrs Methuen have kindly permitted me to make use of Mr Dugdale's excellent translations, and it would, I am sure, be a convenience to English readers and students, if his four volumes ("German Diplomatic Documents," Methuen) were accepted as the standard English version.

I have generally refrained from abbreviations when referring to authorities, but throughout I have used G.P. (*Grosse Politik*) for references to the German documents, and G. and T. (Goöch and Temperley) for references to the British documents. These two conform to general usage, but for others such as the Austrian documents (*Oesterreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik*) it seemed better to describe them in the manner most easily recognized by English readers.

J. A. S.

JUNE, 1933.

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1871-1874

CHAPTER I

AN END AND A BEGINNING

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I

IN the autumn of 1871 Bismarck was afraid. To the rest of the world this seemed absurd; he had disposed of all his enemies, made a great Empire out of a mob of States, welded it in blood and iron until it had become the strongest military Power in the world. Nevertheless he was afraid. The new Germany, as it seemed to him, had scotched but not killed her hereditary enemy; she had done too much for reconciliation to be possible, too little if revenge was to be barred. But there was no going back, and the only way forward was the isolation of France, and her encirclement by a band of Powers who would act with Germany in enforcing the peace.

This, on the face of it, was not easy. Opinion had swung to the side of France in the last stages of the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of Paris. While formally welcoming the new Empire, the old Powers had shown a certain disquiet about recent events, and their effect on the balance of power as they understood it or wished it to be. The six weeks' war was not six years old and Austria-Hungary might be presumed to remember Königgrätz and her overthrow as the chief Germanic Power. Yet also she might remember the unprecedented leniency with which she had been treated after her downfall, and the heroic efforts which the German Chancellor had made on her behalf in the teeth of King and General Staff. To approach her at once was evidently the right plan.

So without delay Bismarck laid his wires to Vienna, and in August, 1871, the new German Emperor went to Ischl to pay his respects to his brother, Franz Josef. What passed is not recorded,

but it was enough to make a start. In the following April the Emperor Franz Josef intimated his desire to pay a visit to Berlin, and suggested the autumn manœuvres as the time he would prefer. This evidently was to be an important event, signifying the burial of the hatchet, and the utmost publicity was given to it.

Then the expected and intended happened. Observing what was going on, the Tsar of Russia became uncomfortable. If Emperors were to meet why should he be left out? Happening to see the German Ambassador at a Naval Review on July 16, 1872, he asked him point-blank whether he had had any intimation that a visit from him (the Tsar) was desired at the same time that the Austrian Emperor was visiting Berlin.¹ In conveying this hint to the Emperor William, the Ambassador enlarged on the probable state of mind of the Russian Sovereign. It was to be presumed first of all that His Majesty saw in a public meeting of the three Emperors the strongest guarantee for the peace of Europe and for the extinction of the French desire for revenge; but it was probable that, without in the least weakening in his trust in the German Emperor, whom he considered to be his best friend, he would desire to be present when his best friend made another friend. Nothing seemed more natural, and the Emperor William wrote at once to his Austrian brother to say that he had anticipated what would doubtless be his wish by inviting their Russian brother to meet him in Berlin.

The three Sovereigns accordingly came to Berlin accompanied by their Foreign Ministers in the following September, but for the moment there was a hitch and French papers reported gleefully that their plans had miscarried. With his usual ill-luck, the Russian Minister, Gortchakoff, contrived to offend Bismarck by suggesting to the Emperor William that "everything had been arranged" between the Ministers, whereas in fact the three Ministers had never met at the same time, and nothing had been arranged.² But by this time Bismarck had created exactly the impression he desired in the mind of the Tsar, namely, that he was threatened with isolation by an alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary, and that it was for the Tsar to take the next step. That step was the conclusion of a military convention, signed jointly by the Russian and German Army Chiefs, whereby each of the two Powers engaged to provide 200,000 men for the assistance of the other, if it should be attacked by a third Power. Bismarck remarked curtly about this that it was no use unless Austria came

¹ *Grosse Politik*, Vol. I, No. 121, p. 197.

² *G.P.* I, No. 125, p. 201.

in, but Austria would do nothing so sweeping and binding. She might pledge herself to neutrality but she would not pledge herself to fight if France attacked Germany to recover Alsace-Lorraine, and still less to join Russia in a war against England. This time the Tsar took up the running and went himself to Vienna to talk to the Emperor Franz Josef. Presently he came back with a much modified draft which engaged Austria and Russia to act together against all disturbances of the peace of Europe, to confer together with a view to common action in case of aggression by a third Power, and if military measures became necessary to conclude a special military convention for the purpose.¹ To this Germany "acceded" and the League of the Three Emperors (*Dreikaiserbund*) was thereby brought into being. (June, 1873.)

Bismarck was content for the time being.

If the two other Powers could not be induced to undertake the defence of German interests everywhere, they were at all events brought within the German orbit and bound over not to fight against Germany. No more could be expected within seven years of Königgrätz, and for the rest there was the unwritten but highly important compact which bound the three leading exponents of the imperial and monarchical principle to stand together against "the Republican anarchy" threatening from France. Knowing his Emperors, Bismarck attached the utmost importance to the last of these considerations and he now made it a cardinal point in his policy that France should play the part of bogey to his Holy Alliance.

II

This is the key to his treatment of the French in the years after the peace. France must be a pariah; no one must give her a helping hand or encourage her to redeem her character smirched by the Commune and the disreputable form of government she had chosen to adopt. There were simple and sentimental people in Embassies and elsewhere who would not see it and were always doing or proposing something which cut across this scheme. Even German officers worked on the Emperor with suggestions of lenience to the late enemy, and had to be sharply told that the Chancellor alone was responsible for German policy, and that military persons who meddled in politics or presumed without his

¹ For the full text see G.P. I, No. 129, p. 206. Pribram, "Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary," Vol. II, 184-186. There was no actual Tripartite treaty until June, 1881.

knowledge to correspond with the All-highest were offending against discipline. He complains that by one of these untimely and unauthorized communications General Manteuffel in command at Compiègne had actually compelled him to interrupt a much-needed cure in order to correct the impression which might otherwise have been made on His Majesty.¹ He said emphatically that, if this went on, his position would become impossible and he would have to consider what to do. No one knew better than Bismarck how to paint the picture of himself remaining dutifully at the helm when gout threatened and nature cried out for repose, and it never failed to move and alarm his countrymen. He could always threaten resignation with the certainty that his Imperial master would cry "never."

His exasperation finds expression in the angry correspondence with Count von Arnim, the German Ambassador in Paris, which fills so large a space in the first volume of the German documents, and which came to its issue three years later in the trial and disgrace of the Count on a trumped-up charge of embezzling official documents. The Count was one of those Ambassadors—detested by Bismarck—who fancied himself a statesman, an insubordinate subordinate, who argued with his superiors. Bismarck despised him as an amateur and dilettante—he remarks contemptuously that he played the piano—and fell into a rage over his foolish and romantic ideas about the French. Von Arnim had a tenderness for French royalists, which led him to suggest that Germany, as the leading exponent of the monarchical principle, should treat them mercifully. Bismarck with his eye on the three Emperors was in despair at this folly. To have a government in France which these monarchs opposed was, he reminded the Count, a cardinal point in German policy, and who could be so foolish as to wish to substitute for it a restored monarchy which the other monarchies would expect Germany to treat indulgently and to admit on a soft and friendly footing to the comity of European Monarchs? "It is certainly not our policy," he writes to von Arnim in December, 1872, "to strengthen France and make her an eligible ally (*Bündnisfähig*) for our present friends by a consolidation of her internal relations and the establishment of a legitimate monarchy. The enmity of France compels us to desire that she should be weak, and we go about our business very unselfishly, if we do not strongly and resolutely oppose the establishment of consolidated monarchical institutions as long as the Peace of Frankfurt is not completely carried

¹ G.P., I, No. 32, p. 64.

out. What we need is to be left in peace by France and to prevent France from finding allies, if she will not keep the peace with us. So long as she has no allies, France is not dangerous to us, and so long as the great Monarchies of Europe hold together, no Republic is dangerous to them. A French Republic will with great difficulty find a monarchical ally against us." "I am convinced," he says finally, "that it would not enter the head of a Frenchman to help us back to the blessings of a monarchy, if it had pleased God to afflict us with a Republican anarchy. The practice of that kind of benevolent solicitude for the fate of a hostile neighbour is an entirely German idiosyncrasy."¹

III

In May, 1873, M. Thiers, who had done great work for his countrymen in one of the blackest periods of their history, was forced to resign. A Chamber with a Royalist majority had kept him in power in spite of his avowed Republican convictions, lest their own cause should be discredited by the sacrifices which any government would have been bound to make after the defeat of 1870-71. But by May, 1873, this distasteful work was done and with the payment of the last instalment of the indemnity, the final evacuation of French territory by German troops was in sight. The time seemed favourable for the Royalists to come on the scene, and when Marshal MacMahon succeeded to the Presidency, it was fully expected that the legitimate monarchy would be restored within a few months. The world in general was full of admiration for the splendid recovery which the French had made and for the fine spirit with which they had produced the means to pay off their invader. Bismarck correspondingly was in his blackest mood. All his plans seemed to be going awry. The recovery of the enemy had been far quicker, and the occupation of his territory far shorter than he wished or expected; the payment of the indemnity seemed, to his great surprise, to have helped French and depressed German trade; the "Republican anarchy" instead of being riveted on France seemed to be very nearly at an end, and a legitimist monarch, whom his brother sovereigns would have to acknowledge as their friend and equal, to be only waiting his opportunity to ascend a throne which the French people were preparing for him. France in fact was in danger of becoming *Bündnisfähig*—an eligible partner in an Alliance, the one thing above

¹ G.P., I, No. 95, pp. 159-60.

all others which he had wished to prevent. Once more he broke out furiously at the unhappy von Arnim whom he all but held responsible for the change of government in France. "If your Excellency has not actually brought it about," he writes on June 19, 1873, "you have at least facilitated it and made the task of the successors of M. Thiers so much the easier by crippling my efforts to support him and his Government in their ever-increasing internal difficulties." All this came of a foolish persistence in the belief that France under the leadership of Thiers was a danger to the monarchical principle in Europe. By harping on that in his dispatches the Ambassador had created a certain impression in the mind of the Emperor which had led to the weakening of German policy and prevented definite instructions being given that the whole weight of German influence should be thrown into the scales for the maintenance of Herr Thiers in power. How disastrous the change was might be seen from the satisfaction with which the fall of Thiers was greeted by every opponent of Germany in Europe. Bismarck winds up angrily by intimating that he is about to lay proposals before the Emperor for establishing unity and discipline in the foreign services, *i.e.* compelling Ambassadors to act strictly on the instructions of the Chancellor.¹

It is highly improbable that the support of Bismarck would have done anything but hasten the downfall of Thiers, and quite possible that the Emperor William, who was a simple man with an honest mind, had without any prompting revolted from the cynicism with which his Chancellor desired to inflict on France the Republican institutions which were abhorrent to his own convictions, on the sole ground that German interests required her to have a bad and disreputable form of government. But Bismarck was unrepentant, and when Gambetta started on his great campaign to save the Republic, he recovered his spirits and watched him with the same grim sympathy that he had previously extended to Thiers. The familiar theme of the von Arnim dispatches reappears in two dispatches to the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg (Prince Henry VII Reuss), and this time Gambetta is the favourite:

I consider a Gambetta Government quite without danger to the peace of Europe, but I am certain that peace would be threatened if the French national power were re-established and placed in safe hands. MacMahon is perhaps not a politician in the sense which Count Andrassy uses the word, but he is an Ultramontane—almost as much as his wife—and can so little master this propensity or his hatred of us that he could not prevail upon himself

¹ G.P., I, No. 115, p. 189.

to return even the customary courtesies to Field-Marshal von Manteuffel after the conclusion of the peace. But he is probably not yet eligible as an ally, at all events not for the sovereigns (although he is probably acceptable as a Minister), and for that reason he is less dangerous than a clerical restoration of the monarchy which might have a broad foundation in Catholic Europe for a durable alliance. That a restored French Empire seems to the leaders of Austrian policy a useful *point d'appui* and a serviceable piece against us on the chessboard does not surprise me. (February 28, 1874.)

Your Excellency will judge for yourself whether it is in our interest to see the strengthening of France hastened. In any case the French army on our frontier is much more dangerous than any Gambetta experiments in France. It is not surprising that other Governments look on the development of things in France with other eyes. They are not neighbours of France, whereas Germany, so to speak, provides Europe with a shock absorber (*Stosspolster*) against the invasion of a warlike population. No one can be deceived about the fact that when France is again strong enough to break the peace, the peace will be at an end, and it is possible that other Governments which are not neighbours of France regard with more composure than we, and perhaps even with a certain satisfaction, the eventuality of Germany being again and for the twentieth time in two hundred years, attacked by France. Count Gortchakoff pursues Russian power politics; and we pursue no power politics but a policy of safety. Gambetta is not so dangerous to us as an organization uniting the whole French Empire and making eligible as an ally for other Powers this neighbouring State, which for 250 years has attacked us at least once in every generation.

This is the German standpoint. That those Russians who have less sympathy with Germany than His Majesty the Emperor Alexander, think otherwise is obvious; and from the acknowledged utterances of Russian statesmen about the present French Government we shall have to infer a connexion between the development of France and the hopes that she may in the future be an effective counterweight to Germany. Anyone who traces the Frenchman's lust for plunder through the last two hundred years of their history, and observes its influence upon all European affairs and combinations must concede that hopes of such a development of policy do not lack support among our eastern and south-eastern neighbours.¹ (Same date.)

The ruling ideas in Bismarck's mind are thus quite plain. France is unappeasable and will be dangerous as soon as she is in a position to obtain an ally. She must therefore be isolated, and German influence must be used to pin her to a form of government which will make her ineligible as an ally for self-respecting monarchies. The despised Republic will then serve the double purpose of preventing France from being well governed, which might make her formidable single-handed, and of keeping the other Powers at arm's length, which is what German security requires.

¹ G.P., I, Nos. 151-2, pp. 239-41.

1875

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WAR SCARE

The War Scare of 1875—Bismarck's Part in it—Protests of the Duc Décazes—Intervention of Queen Victoria and the Tsar—Innocence of the Emperor William—Bismarck's Probable Intention—Shock to the Three Emperors' Alliance.

I

IN spite of MacMahon, the course of events in France was all that Bismarck could have desired, so far, at all events, as her form of government was concerned. Gambetta and Thiers, substantially aided by the follies of the Comte de Chambord, who, slightly varying the tradition of his family, seemed to have learnt nothing and forgotten everything that had happened since 1789, saved the Republic, and in January, 1875, the German Chancellor had the satisfaction of seeing his enemy declass himself by formally adopting a Republican constitution. There was still good hope, to quote his own words in a dispatch of the previous June, that a "strong, militarist, Ultramontane, Alliance-eligible France" would not be substituted for a "weak, civilian, anti-clerical and isolated France."

Yet once again events disappointed his hopes and wishes. The "weak, civilian, isolated France" developed new and disconcerting energies. Not content with setting her domestic household in order and re-establishing her finances, she started seriously reorganizing her army, and in March, 1875, a Bill went through the National Assembly for that purpose. By this time Bismarck was in full eruption, and there followed the crisis of 1875.

The story of this as presented to us in the German documents¹ opens on February 26, 1875, with an agitated inquiry by Bismarck, addressed to the German Ambassador in Paris, about an order for 10,000 cavalry horses for the French army, alleged to have been given to German horse-merchants. "Even though this is merely a normal part of the reorganization scheme which the French have

¹ G.P., I, Chap. VII.

decided upon, the Chancellor sees no reason why Germans should help them in a process of re-armament which can only be aimed at Germany." Ten thousand horses would be a drain on German resources which would be difficult to make good, if in three years or so Germany had to mobilize against France, and in any case there would be an advantage in retarding the preparations of the French, who, if not provided from Germany would find the lack of serviceable horses a real difficulty. He proposes therefore to take counter-measures, but before doing so "wishes to know the views of the Ambassador in Paris and the Military Attaché."

Ambassador and Military Attaché take their cue from their Chief, and report that, though there is no immediate danger of a French attack, the whole French nation, irrespective of party, cherishes the idea of recovering the lost provinces and re-establishing the military glory of France. They are of opinion, and produce technical evidence to show, that the French preparations go far beyond the needs of a peaceful policy and will very rapidly put France in a position to renew war.

The export of horses from Germany was accordingly prohibited, but this was only the beginning. In the next few weeks other measures were taken which led nearly all Europe to suppose that Bismarck was on the war-path. He was already boiling with wrath at what he believed to be the machinations of the Vatican, and had just used very high language to Belgium, where the Catholic party had been agitating against the disabilities inflicted on their German brethren in the *Kulturkampf*, i.e. the struggle between Protestant and Catholic which was going forward in Germany. He now saw, or professed to see, the hand of Rome in the French Military Bill—was not France still the protector of the Vatican against Italy?—and joined up the defence of Protestantism with the cause of German security. On April 5 the *Kölnische Zeitung* published a "letter from Vienna" commenting on the acceleration of French armaments and suggesting that it was part of a scheme to establish a clerical monarchy in France as a first step to a "French-Austrian-Italian-Papist Alliance," i.e. a "Catholic League" against Prussia and Germany, which would immediately start on preparations for a war of revenge. On April 9 the *Berliner Post* founded on this the famous article "Is War in Sight?" which, since that paper was supposed to be directly inspired by Bismarck, created something like a panic in Paris and seriously alarmed the other Governments.

The editor of the *Post*, Konstantin Rossler, afterwards came

forward to say that he had written this article entirely off his own bat without prompting from the Chancellor; and Bismarck himself telegraphed the next day to the Ambassador in Paris to say that it had taken him by surprise. The disclaimer had no effect. Considering Bismarck's relations with the *Post*, it was thought extremely improbable that its editor would have published such an article if he had not had the word "from upstairs," and the official disavowal from him which appeared the next day in the *Norddeutsche Zeitung*, while declaring the suggestion about Austria and Italy to be unfounded, still underlined the disquieting character of the French preparations. Experts recognized the Bismarck touch in the by-play between the two papers, and above all in the idea of a Catholic conspiracy, which by this time was known to be something like an obsession with the author and promoter of the *Kulturkampf*.

It has been generally believed that an article in *The Times* by its famous Paris correspondent, Blowitz, revealed the plot and brought the peace-makers on the scene, and Bismarck himself afterwards encouraged this idea by seeking to brand *The Times* as the villain of the piece. But this is to reverse the order of events. *The Times* article did not appear till May 6—a month after the German papers had launched their scare—and it merely recorded the feelings aroused in France by the German *démarche* and the belief in that country that the military party in Germany thought the moment favourable for a preventive war. Blowitz certainly did not exaggerate when he spoke of the alarm in France. The Duc Décazes visited the German Ambassador on April 29, and all but went on his knees for mercy. France, he protested, was disorganized, and had no confidence in her leaders or in herself. "If we invaded her," the German Ambassador reported him as saying, "the French Army would withdraw to the Loire and let us march unresisted to Paris; if we went to the Loire, it would retire to the Garonne. Do what you like, take Belgium, Luxemburg, Holland, it is all one to us. We shall not fight. You must admit that there is some force in this method."¹ The Duke went on to deny in the most emphatic terms the whole story of the 10,000 horses—which, by the way, were now said to be coming from Hungary—and denounced it as the lie of a swindling Jew. Whatever might have been the real intention of the German Government, there is no doubt at all that the French thought themselves to be in serious danger.

¹ G.P., I, No. 16a, p. 265.

II

But this time France had friends who also had taken alarm. On May 5 Queen Victoria wrote to Disraeli that "every means should be used to prevent such a monstrous iniquity as a war," and Lord Derby on behalf of the British Cabinet gave a formal assurance in the same sense to the French Government. During the next days the Queen wrote to the Emperor William and to the Tsar Alexander, who was about to visit Berlin, and who had assured the British Government that he was prepared to act with them in keeping the peace. Derby meanwhile had been energetic in diplomatic remonstrance with Count Münster in London. On May 11 the crisis was over and Lord Odo Russell telegraphed from Berlin that he had had a most satisfactory interview with Prince Gortchakoff, the famous Russian Chancellor (who had accompanied the Tsar on a visit to Berlin), at Bismarck's house. "They are both agreed that the peace of Europe shall not be disturbed and will co-operate for the maintenance of peace." Gortchakoff was of opinion that the assurances given were so satisfactory that the subject had better be let drop.

What is the truth of the matter? Was Bismarck really meditating another war and only restrained by the remonstrances of the Tsar and Queen Victoria, or was he, as he continued to assert, the victim of an outrageous calumny? The nature of the case precludes positive proof, but his own account of the affair in his "Reflections and Reminiscences"¹ raises a strong presumption that, in spite of his disclaimer, he inspired the two newspapers. Here, even after the lapse of years, he cannot refrain from repeating the story, which was denied in the official *démenti*, of a Catholic conspiracy to restore the French monarchy and join it with Austria in a war of revenge. Evidently the journalists had this from him, and if this, probably most of the rest. Moreover, the method of publishing a letter from abroad in one paper and founding a comment on it after a discreet interval in another is so exactly Bismarck's technique as described in Busch's "Secret Pages" in later years, that it requires great innocence not to see his hand in both articles.

Probably he expected that the threat of war would suffice to intimidate the French, and make an end of their efforts to re-establish their military power. But his own explanations suggest that he was in a state of mind in which he would have gone all lengths, if he had not been sharply checked. He depicts himself as the

¹ English translation, Vol. II., pp. 182-93.

victim of intrigues everywhere, intrigues in foreign Courts, intrigues in the German Court, and especially in the Court of the Empress Augusta, where the women were capable of anything, and had a foolish sentiment for Roman Catholicism. His hostile eye fell specially on the French Ambassador, the Vicomte de Gontaut-Biron, whom he describes as a special favourite of the Empress, and whom he accuses of having conspired with the Russian Chancellor, Gortchakoff, to work up the plot against him. He supposes that Queen Victoria was incited to intervene by either the Crown Princess or the Empress at Gontaut's instigation. But if Gontaut so acted, he appears to have had rather serious reason, for Moltke, and Radowitz, the Foreign Office official, said things to him of which the best that Bismarck can find to plead in excuse was that the clever Frenchman must have lured them on to provide the material he wanted in order to present to Europe "an image of France threatened by us and protected by Russia." But then, as later, German militarists required very little inducement to provide incendiary material, and, what is more, there was serious doubt whether, if they meant business, even the Chancellor would be able to restrain them.

One man at all events seems to have been innocent of the whole affair, and that was the Emperor William. On this occasion Bismarck does not appear to have taken his "old master" into his confidence, and his expression of horrified alarm at the two newspaper articles has a genuine ring.¹ He remarks about the official disclaimer in the *Norddeutsche Zeitung* that the second paragraph about France has anything but a reassuring sound, and that the comparison of French troops with German in all three articles invites the retort that Germany with her 34,000,000 of population has a larger army than France with her 42,000,000. He was not appeased by a long extenuating argument from the Foreign Office, and to the end talked about "our incorrigible newspapers," and wanted to know what had been done to bring home to the editors the enormity of their offence,² probably being well aware that these shots hit higher placed people than the journalistic offenders. When it was all over Queen Victoria wrote him another letter (June 20) which greatly nettled Bismarck, who, after pondering it for two months, wrote the long answer which is published in his "Reflections and Reminiscences." The Queen, after expressing her heartfelt joy that her exalted brother should have repudiated with indignation the idea of attacking France or any other neighbour

¹ G.P., I, No. 162, p. 256.

² G.P., I, No. 173, p. 272.

solely on the ground that its people were thinking of war and only awaiting a favourable opportunity, and after stigmatizing such a policy as one which would have aroused the indignation of all Europe and left Germany without an ally or friend, went on to say that, if it were necessary, she would find it easy to prove that her fears had not been exaggerated and that they rested on serious communications (*e.g.* what Count Moltke was supposed to have said) made by men whom she was obliged to regard as representatives of the German Government. This, Bismarck regards as aimed at Count Münster, the German Ambassador in London, and in defending Münster to the Emperor William, he reveals his own mind:

It is quite possible that both he and Count Moltke may have spoken academically of the futility of a timely attack upon France, although I am not aware of it, and he never received any such instructions. It may indeed be said that it is not conducive to peace for France to feel secure that she would not be attacked under any circumstances, whatever she may do. At this day, as in 1867 on the Luxemburg question, I should never advise Your Majesty to begin war at once, on the score of a likelihood that our enemy would afterwards begin it better prepared. For this we can never sufficiently predict the ways of Divine Providence. But on the other hand, it is not advantageous to give our enemy the assurance that we shall in any case await her attack. Therefore, I should not be inclined to blame Münster if he had let fall an occasional remark to that effect; and this would by no means give the English Government the right to base official action on the unofficial speeches of an Ambassador, and, *sans nous dire gare*, call upon the other Powers to bring pressure to bear on us. A step so serious and so unfriendly leads us to suppose that Queen Victoria must have had some other reasons for believing in our warlike intentions, besides occasional remarks of Count Münster, in which I do not believe.¹

The argument seems to be that though the preventive war might be a usurpation of the function of Divine Providence, the apprehension of it in the mind of a possible enemy is an extremely convenient weapon in the hands of a diplomatist. We may infer that, if they meant no more, Bismarck and Moltke meant at least to keep that apprehension alive in France in 1875. But to maintain the semblance without the reality, to have all the advantages of intimidating an opponent by making him believe that you intend to waylay him in the dark and at the same time the luxury of a virtuous indignation when you are charged with that design, is more than is given to the most skilful diplomatist. If nothing else happened in that year, Bismarck's bluff was called, and from

¹ G.P., I, No. 189, p. 293, note. Bismarck's "Reflections and Reminiscences," English Translation, Vol. II., p. 191.

that time onward it became impossible for him to hold France in submission by hints or threats of a preventive war, or to impose a disarmament which was not exacted in the terms of peace. Another thing was also decided: the League of the Three Emperors could not be stretched to cover a Bismarckian dictatorship. Russia had openly broken away, and Bismarck himself had expressed doubts whether Austria could be relied upon. Plainly there were limits to the zeal of the other two Emperors in the cause of German security.

But the chief part of Bismarck's wrath was reserved for Gortchakoff, whom he accuses of having deliberately arranged a *pièce de théâtre* in which Russia should appear as the protector of France falsely supposed to be threatened by Germany. Queen Victoria he could forgive—for she was a woman and presumably under the petticoat influences which occasionally deflected even the old master from the right path—but Gortchakoff knew better, and was merely venting his spite. He wrote to the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg to take a convenient opportunity of intimating that, though his traditional convictions about Russian and German policy were unaltered, a disagreeable impression remained which made it difficult for him to resume his former confidential relations with the Russian Chancellor. This was to have very important consequences in the subsequent years.

1875-1878

CHAPTER III

THE HONEST BROKER

Different Ideas of the Three Emperors—The Eastern Question and Russia and Austria—The German Casting Vote—Bismarck as Honest Broker—The Russo-Turkish War—The Berlin Congress—Bismarck's Efforts to Keep the Peace—Giving the Casting Vote.

I

BISMARCK prided himself on being teachable, and the four years since the peace had brought him some lessons. For one thing Great Britain had to be reckoned with; for another Russia and Austria could not be relied upon to devote themselves unconditionally to German security as interpreted by the Wilhelmstrasse. Greatly as the other two Emperors might abhor the Republican heresy of France, they were by no means sure what might happen to them if there was no France to control a dictator in Berlin. Next, there was a decided shift of opinion from the side of Germany to that of France, and the crisis of 1875 had in some measure broken the spell which Bismarck till then had cast over all Europe. Finally there were new and serious questions which threatened the unity of the German group.

But for these very reasons the policy of isolating France became the more urgent, and Bismarck set himself to it with renewed energy. The documents show him writing at length to German Ambassadors on his old theme of the supreme importance of preventing her from becoming eligible for an Alliance. Again and again he insists that the peace is only secure so long as she does not find Allies. But there was no way to that except by keeping the three Emperors together in pursuit of German policy, and this became more difficult with every month. All three in Bismarck's scheme were to concentrate on the west and keep their eyes fixed on the French peril, but two of them, as it soon turned out, could not be left alone for even a short time without quarrelling on the Eastern question, which between Turkish massacres and Christian rebellions was now entering upon one of

its acutest phases. To Bismarck this was an annoying perversity, and his reflections on it are richly recorded in his dispatches of 1876. There now loomed ahead of him the necessity of making a choice between his two partners, with the inevitable result of alienating one or other of them; and how to avoid it, and if in the end it could not be avoided, how to cover it up with compensations and consolations for the disappointed partner, were problems which kept his brain spinning during the next three years. Reading between the lines we may be reasonably certain that from the beginning his mind was made up that, if or when the necessity came, the casting vote must be given for Austria, the Germanic Power, against Russia, the Slav intruder, and many references make it clear that he found balm for his own wounded feelings in the thought that he would thus get even with Gortchakoff for the shabby trick he had played him in 1875.

But even so it was imperative to prevent things being carried to extremes. Inquiries from the Russian Emperor as to what his German uncle would do if he (the Russian) thought it necessary to go to war with Austria caused grave apprehension and annoyance. The Military Attaché at St. Petersburg, to whom the Tsar kept putting this question, was sharply called to order and told not to lend himself to questions against his own Government, but this did not prevent the Tsar from putting them again and again and pressing for an answer. It was indeed an extremely inconvenient question, for whatever other strain it might stand, a war between two of its partners would evidently be the end of the Three Emperors' League. Bismarck temporized and began to develop the rôle of Germany as honest broker. She could play this part because she herself, as he kept saying, had no direct interest in the Balkans. But the broker must not be a dictator, nor must he seek solutions which in the name of abstract justice or for the purpose of making ideal settlements between the Balkan tribes, would be equally distasteful to both his clients, and leave him to face the wrath of both. He must be, if possible, on all occasions the *tertius gaudens*. The Ambassadors are begged to remember that the League of the Emperors is not a committee which can be governed by a majority vote. Each of the two other Emperors has his point of view which he is entitled to maintain against the others, and all that the disinterested third party can do, when two of them differ, is to endeavour to bring them together. So when Russia and Austria talk of war Germany must in the politest way offer her services to avert such a calamity.

For the next two years neither of them required these services. In the summer of 1875, when the two Principalities of Montenegro and Serbia rose in rebellion and declared war on the Turks, Russia and Austria conferred together and came to the Reichstadt Agreement in which they mutually arranged that almost any result should be to their advantage. While the war lasted there was to be no disturbance of the *status quo* to the detriment of either. If the Principalities were defeated, Russia was to intervene to save them from any disastrous consequences. If they won, Austria was to get Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Russia to recover Bessarabia which she had lost in the Crimean War. If the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the two Powers were to act together to create autonomous Principalities in Turkey in Europe, and to make Constantinople a free town. All possible eventualities seemed to have been worked out to the advantage of the two Powers, and for eighteen months longer everything followed according to plan. Russia intervened to save Serbia when the Turks had her at their mercy, and in the following year (1877) when the Bulgarians in their turn rebelled, and the Tsar made good his threat to act single-handed if the Powers failed to impose reforms on Turkey, the Austrians renewed the Reichstadt Agreement and gave him a free hand.¹

But the situation changed rapidly in January, 1878, when, after an exhausting campaign, the Tsar stood at the gates of Constantinople and proposed to make peace by the drastic Treaty of San Stefano. The Austrians declared this treaty to be a breach of their pre-war agreement with Russia, and judged that its proposals, and especially the proposal to set up a big Bulgaria under Russian influence, would more than neutralize the advantages they expected from the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and be disastrous to Austrian prestige and influence in the Balkans.

England was now in full eruption and, in spite of Mr. Gladstone's protests, her Government too judged that the Big Bulgaria combined with the Russian threat to Constantinople would be a blow to British interests which must be averted at all costs. Russia in 1871 had snapped her fingers at the Treaty of Paris, re-fortified Sebastopol and created a Black Sea Fleet. She was now said to be preparing the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and her own emergence in power into the Mediterranean, on the flank of the

¹ For the text of these Agreements see G.P., II, No. 265, p. 111. Pribram, Vol. II., p. 188.

British road to India. Austria and England joined hands in protests and threats, and when Prince Gortchakoff announced that Russia intended to occupy Constantinople, Austria replied by mobilizing her army, and England by sending a fleet to the Sea of Marmora. All through the month of February feeling was wrought to the highest pitch on both sides, and war was said to be inevitable. Then the Austrians proposed a European Conference and Russia, threatened by land and sea, and being in no mood or condition, after her exhausting struggle with the Turks, to enter upon a new war with two Powers, very reluctantly consented (March, 1878).

Bismarck was now in a very embarrassing position. It was one thing to be honest broker between Austria and Russia; it was quite another to be called upon to judge between them in the inflamed state of mind in which both were at this moment. He realized, however, that, if all his plans were not to be shattered, he must come off his fence and back the Austrian plan for a Conference. He moved with great reluctance, and to the last wished that Conference to be anywhere except in Berlin, and only agreed to Berlin when Russia refused either London or Vienna. Again his leading thought was that, though Germany had no interest in Turkey which she could not sacrifice to Russia, her main interest in Europe was to stand well with Austria, and to have a Minister in that country who was trustworthy and friendly to her. Hence in the last resort Andrassy, the Austrian Foreign Minister, must be supported against Gortchakoff—the man who played Germany the scurvy trick of 1875 and who had never wavered in his affection for France.¹ Bismarck persuaded himself that this was no personal matter and that Gortchakoff's attitude in fact made it necessary for Germany to walk in step with Austria and England. In these transactions we see Austria, Russia and England graded in Bismarck's mind. In the final resort, Austria was to be supported against Russia and care taken that England was not offended. But since a struggle between England and Russia would certainly involve Austria, and in conceivable circumstances Germany too, that also was to be avoided by all possible means.

¹ G.P., II, No. 310, p. 181.

Andrassy, however, is said to be too sentimental. "I am convinced," says Bismarck, "that he would get on better with Gortchakoff if he followed England's example and relied more on the power of Austria than on written argumentations and confidence in honourable feelings."

II

In the first week of March Russia accepted the proposal for a Conference at Berlin, and hard work had now to be done behind the scenes, not merely to bring England in, but if possible, to get all important points arranged beforehand between her and Russia, so as to ensure success on prearranged lines, which would prevent conflict and save Germany from the unpleasant necessity of giving the casting vote in public. Count Münster reported on March 9 that there was great mistrust in London. Ministers feared an agreement between the three Emperors which would leave England in the cold. There was a feeling that English plenipotentiaries would not acquit themselves well if matched with the highly accomplished diplomatists (*den Grossen Kapazitäten*) who would be assembled at Berlin. Lord Beaconsfield scarcely spoke a word of French; Lord Salisbury was unfavourably impressed by his experiences at the abortive Constantinople Conference, for which he had earned no thanks or prestige in his own country. Lord Derby, the national representative of England, had a very unsuitable personality and would be very unwilling to leave the Foreign Office while Parliament was sitting. Count Münster reports Lord Beaconsfield as having said to him, "I hope it will be clearly understood that we shall not attend the Conference if Russia does not agree to lay all the conditions and stipulations before it," and as having used extremely ominous language about the necessity of continuing military preparations.

There followed a dangerous and tiresome diplomatic word-game between the parties, who, while they negotiated, were all but in a state of war with each other. The British insisted that every line of the Treaty of San Stefano should be submitted to the Conference; the Russians, while admitting that it would finally need ratification, sought a formula which would secure its acknowledgment as the basis of settlement. Russia in the end gave way under German pressure and British threats, and on June 3 it was announced that the Congress would take place at Berlin in ten days' time. But between March and June Bismarck had been feverishly at work to make sure in advance that there should be no breakdown at Berlin and no foreseeable emergency which would require him to show his hand at the Conference.¹ As the world now knows, practically the whole of the conclusions ratified at Berlin were arranged in London between Lord Salisbury and the

¹ For details of these weeks see G.P., II, Chap. XII., pp. 167-339.

Russian Ambassador, Count Schouvaloff, in the last week of May, and embodied in the Secret Convention which they both signed on May 30. The publication of this document by the *Globe* after Lord Salisbury had declared rumours of such an agreement to be "unauthentic and unworthy of serious attention," has made the transaction a leading case in the ethics of diplomacy and diverted attention from the seemingly extraordinary feat by which complete agreement was reached between Schouvaloff and Salisbury in the last week of May. Bismarck, true to his aim of keeping Germany in the background, seeks to give the chief, if not the whole, of the credit for the settlement to Schouvaloff, but the documents show that he had himself been hard at work all through April and the early part of May to procure an Anglo-Russian *détente*. With admirable patience he devised a scheme for synchronizing the withdrawal of the British fleet and the Russian army in such a way as to save the faces and disarm the suspicions of both Powers—no slight matter, as the correspondence shows. Schouvaloff, meanwhile, had been backwards and forwards between London, Berlin and Petersburg. After three conferences with Salisbury, he went to Petersburg on May 7 to confer with his Government, visited Bismarck at Friedrichsruh on the 9th, and had an audience of the Emperor William the same evening; returned to Petersburg on the 12th, came back to Berlin on the 18th, and after conversations with the Foreign Secretary and another audience of the Emperor, paid another visit to Bismarck on the 20th, and stayed with him until the 22nd, when he returned to London. The documents tell us little about these visits, but Schouvaloff undoubtedly discovered that Russia would get no support from Germany if she resisted the final British demands, and since she had no desire to enter upon a second war single-handed against—in all probability—two great Powers, the rest followed.

Bismarck was scarcely less active in Vienna, which was acting with its usual perversity and had contrived to annoy England by its attitude on sundry details of the settlement, while continuing to threaten Russia. The prospect of an Anglo-Russian *détente* gave him a strong card to play here, and he politely warned Austria, that, if she pushed matters to extremes, the efforts to bring Russia to terms might altogether miscarry and even lead to an understanding between Russia and England to Austria's disadvantage. To read the dispatches passing on the same or successive days from Berlin to London, Petersburg and Vienna, is to get a vivid impression of the skill and resourcefulness with which this master of diplomatic

wiles used the same facts for different or opposite purposes in the different capitals. Each in turn had to be cajoled, persuaded or discreetly threatened, and there was almost no fact which would not serve one or other of these ends. All the Governments were incredibly sensitive, and again and again the negotiations appeared to be on the point of breaking down on a small point of pride or etiquette. But the indefatigable ferryman kept at it and succeeded at length in getting fox, goose and bag of corn across the stream to the Conference room in Berlin.

Though agreement on the essentials had been secured in the Salisbury-Schouvaloff negotiations, it would not be true to say that the Berlin Congress was merely a rehearsal in public of their prearranged conclusions. While Russia had agreed to waive for the time being her demand for the "Big Bulgaria," the question of the boundary between the two Bulgarias—that which was to be autonomous and practically independent and that which was to remain in occupation of Turkish troops—was left to be settled by the Congress. It was this question which gave Lord Beaconsfield the opportunity of the spectacular triumph which brought him back to London bearing "peace with honour." By insisting on the horizontal boundary which left the Turks in occupation up to the Balkans and constituted them, as he believed, a firm barrier against a further advance of Russia towards Constantinople, he produced a very real crisis which at one moment threatened to break up the Conference. The story is too familiar to need repeating. Russia fought hard for her vertical boundary, but gave way when Beaconsfield persisted and ordered his special train. "Russia surrenders and accepts the English scheme for the European frontier of the Empire and its military and political rule by the Sultan"—so Beaconsfield telegraphed to Queen Victoria on Saturday, June 22, 1878. It was but a fleeting success destined to be reversed by general consent within seven years, but the British claim that Russia had "surrendered," and the exultation in London rendered doubly difficult Bismarck's task of persuading the Russians that the Congress was a battle drawn in their favour.

III

When it was over, Bismarck seemed to himself to have done extremely well. The dreaded war had been averted, Germany had not been compelled to show her hand; whatever had been settled had been settled by direct negotiations between the Powers directly

concerned—Russia, Austria and England. To the end of his life he maintained that Russia had got everything she could want, and that the differences between the Peace of San Stefano and the results of the Congress were of no political importance.¹ Russia had kept all her gains in Asia Minor, Batoum, Kars, etc., and the separation between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia (as the British insisted on calling it) was, as events were to prove, merely temporary. But this was by no means the opinion in St. Petersburg, where Germany was judged to have tipped the scales against Russia. Bismarck professed astonishment at this ingratitude which he ascribed to the influence of his old enemy, Gortchakoff, who, he suggested, had been compelled to play second fiddle to Schouvaloff at the Congress, and was taking his revenge by representing its results as a humiliation for Russia. He repeats maliciously that his subordinates said of Gortchakoff that he was the sort of man *qui se mire dans son encier*. But the Russians had a good deal of material to work upon when they complained that they had been worsted. There were the shouts of triumph in London, which could hardly mean nothing; there was the disappointment of their Slav clients, both Bulgar and Serb, who had got far less than they expected; there was the shifting of the balance to Russia's disadvantage through the Austrian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina without the full compensation to which she considered herself entitled. There was above all the smothered disappointment at the miscarriage of her avowed aims, the possession of Constantinople and the mastery of the Straits. For all this she blamed Germany, and it became evident before the year 1878 was out that the League of the Three Emperors was in a very frail condition. The confidence weakened by the crisis of 1875 had been all but shattered by the events of 1878.

It may be said that Bismarck served Europe well by averting war in 1878, and for this he undoubtedly deserves great credit. No one but he could have done it at that moment. But his aim, as he constantly repeats, was to serve Germany first, and Europe only in so far as its peace served German interests. He is contemptuous of statesmen who speak grandiloquently of their "duty to Europe" and observes that when they do so, they are almost invariably up to mischief. He at all events will have none of this hypocrisy. First, last and all the time he is for German security threatened by the French lust for revenge, and if the three Emperors cannot be held together by a common antipathy to Republican

¹ "Reflections and Reminiscences," English translation, Vol. II., p. 116.

institutions, he must look elsewhere for guarantees. There were other ominous signs. France during the Berlin Congress had been suspiciously forthcoming to Russia, and it was reported from London that the French Ambassador had broached the idea of a *rapprochement* between England and Russia. Already the future cast its shadow over the scene.

1879-1882

CHAPTER IV

EUROPE UNDER BISMARCK

Discontent in Russia—The Tsar's Grievances—His Letter to the Emperor William—Bismarck's Anger—The Emperor's Reply—His "Sacred Legacy"—Meeting of Tsar and Emperor—Their Reconciliation—Secret Treaty between Germany and Austria—The Emperor's Objections and Agitation—His Letter to the Tsar—Germany and Austria—Bismarck and Andrassy—Alarm of the Tsar—Renewal of Three Emperors' League—Playing off France against Italy—Conclusion of the Triple Alliance—Secret Treaty with Rumania—The Bismarckian System Complete—Its Complications.

I

SCHOUVALOFF, who had gone to St. Petersburg after the Congress, broke his return journey to London at Berlin, and there told a lamentable story. His two colleagues, Gortchakoff and Oubril, contrary to the agreement between them that, while the Congress was going on, none of them should write anything to St. Petersburg which the others had not seen, had written complaints and criticisms in private letters for the information of the Tsar, and these had produced a most painful impression in the highest quarter. His Majesty was greatly embittered; he was speaking of the Congress as a "European Coalition against Russia under the leadership of Prince Bismarck," and he had reproached Schouvaloff as having been Bismarck's dupe from the beginning. Schouvaloff hoped that he had made some impression by the arguments with which he had combated this view and justified his own proceedings, but he reported the whole atmosphere to be bad, and the Russian press in full cry against Germany.¹ At the beginning of February, 1879, Gortchakoff wrote to the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, "the Alliance of the Three Emperors is practically torn to pieces by the action of our two Allies. It remains for us to complete the liquidation of the past, and to seek henceforth support in ourselves alone."

If the Tsar had been mollified by Schouvaloff's explanations, it was only for a very short time. All through the next twelve months

¹ G.P., III, No. 440, p. 3.

he was brooding over his grievances, and presently added to them new complaints about the anti-Russian bias of the German delegates on the International Commission which had been appointed to carry out the details of the Berlin settlement in the Near East. On August 15, 1879, he took up his pen and wrote a long letter (in French) to his uncle, the Kaiser William, in which he asked leave to "speak with all frankness on a delicate subject" which was constantly in his thoughts. He saw enemies at work estranging their two countries, and though he perfectly understood the anxiety of his uncle to preserve his good relations with Austria, he could not understand what interests Germany had in sacrificing the interests of Russia. Was it worthy of a true statesman to weight the scales with a personal quarrel, when nothing less was in the balance than the interests of two States made to live in friendly understanding with each other? Had not Russia, as his uncle had acknowledged, rendered services to Germany (in 1870) which his uncle had said he would "never forget"? "I should not," he went on, "permit myself to remind you of these words, if it were not that the circumstances are becoming too grave to permit me to conceal from you the fears that weigh upon me and the consequences of which might be fatal to our two countries. May God save us from these and inspire you."¹

Bismarck was very angry. Besides the personal affront to himself, he saw in this letter, or professed to see, an "unconcealed threat of war, if Germany declined to offend Austria and England and to subordinate her policy to Russia." If the letter were published, all the world, he declared, would expect a war between Russia and Germany. Such incivilities between monarchs who were in a position to decide on war and peace, would in ordinary circumstances be regarded as a preliminary to a breach of the peace, and even if war were intended, the customary courtesy between monarchs would hardly permit such language. He warned His Majesty that if he replied in the same tones, war would probably follow. He did not advise this, but neither did he advise a soft answer, for that would only be interpreted as a climb-down in face of threats and lead to more browbeating. As to gratitude for 1870, Germany had amply repaid Russian neutrality in the Franco-Prussian War by her own neutrality and veto on the intervention of other Powers in the Russo-Turkish War. Moreover, Russia in 1870 had every motive for preventing the conquest of Germany and the apparition which would have followed of France and

¹ G.P. III, No. 446, p. 14.

Austria victorious and in alliance on her Polish frontier. It was out of the question that Germany should for ever subordinate her policy to Russia and sacrifice her relations with Austria for a mere sentiment.

Accordingly, the Emperor William's reply a fortnight later was less mollifying than he himself had desired. It argued the point of gratitude and politely suggested that in the previous fifty years, Russia had gained quite as much as Prussia or Germany by their much-to-be-desired and greatly cherished friendship. It denied *in toto* the suggestion that German commissioners in the Balkans had been hostile to Russia. It expressed pain at the misunderstanding which seemed to prevail about the character and intentions of "my Chancellor," who was a warm friend of the Tsar and of Russia, and who had never varied in his regard for Russia. "I beg you to believe, my dear nephew," said the Kaiser in a closing sentence, "that in my friendship with you, I see and shall always see a sacred legacy which our fathers of august memory have handed down to us intact and for our use of which God will one day hold us to account. This friendship constitutes for all the European monarchies one of the final and strongest guarantees for the benefit of peace and the monarchical order, which Europe enjoys to this day."¹

The author of this reply was, it need hardly be said, Prince Bismarck, and a large part of it was to his knowledge barely, if at all, within the limits of diplomatic truth. So far from his sentiments to Russia not having varied, they had varied to the extent that before the Tsar wrote, he had started soundings at Vienna for a closer union with Austria, which could only be at the expense of Russia. But with his usual adroitness he now proceeded to make the Tsar's letter a justification of the policy which he had started before it was written and absolutely declined to admit that there could be any doubt of its hostile intention.

II

The Tsar's next move was to suggest a meeting between him and the Kaiser at the frontier station of Alexandrowo. This was not at all what Bismarck desired, and he endeavoured to put it off on the ground that the time was too short to enable the necessary police measures to be taken for the safety of the Tsar's person. The Kaiser insisted, and saw his nephew on September 3, when there appears to have been a complete reconciliation between them.

¹ G.P., No. 448, p. 20.

The Tsar protested against the construction that Bismarck had put on his letter, but since it was open to such a misunderstanding, begged that it might be considered not written. But by this time Bismarck had committed himself to Andrassy, and was determined to go on with his new plan of a special secret treaty between Germany and Austria. All through September the stubbornest duel that had yet taken place between the two men was fought out over this business between Kaiser and Chancellor; the one protesting that he was asked to commit an act of black treachery against his nephew, the Tsar; the other that the hostility of Russia was a patent and dangerous fact which outweighed all sentimental considerations. The Chancellor dragged the Kaiser step by step, first compelling him to give a reluctant consent to his (Bismarck's) visiting Vienna and holding non-committal conversations with Andrassy, then bringing the whole battery of official and military opinion to bear in favour of the proposed treaty drafted in Vienna, whereby Germany and Austria were to bind themselves to come to each other's support if either were attacked by Russia. Emperor and Chancellor alternately pleaded age and infirmity as a reason why the other should yield, and when hard pressed, the Kaiser threatened to abdicate and Bismarck to resign. With pathetic insistence the Kaiser repeats that he had really meant what he had written, when he adopted the phrase about the "sacred legacy" which Bismarck had put into his mouth, and asks what Bismarck himself could have meant if he had not intended to be conciliatory.¹ What Bismarck meant he seems to have withheld from the Kaiser, but he had explained it in a telegram to the Foreign Secretary. "In the phrases 'sacred legacy,' etc., I expressed no opinion about Russian policy but wished only to choose a diplomatic form which might make a favourable impression on the Tsar. This I consider diplomatically useful, in spite of everything, in order to keep the Russian door open, so long as we have not the Austrian assurance safely under our roof. And even if we have it, I shall always consider it useful to remain on as good a footing with the Russian Tsar as our interests and our sense of honour permits."² Kaiser William, in his simplicity, insisted in thinking that a sense of honour required serious importance to be attached to a diplomatic flourish, the express purpose of which, in Bismarck's view, was to mislead the Tsar. Nothing in the whole affair annoyed Bismarck more.

In face of the unanimous opinion of the Imperial Cabinet backed

¹ G.P., III, No. 466, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, No. 454, p. 25.

by the General Staff, the Kaiser gave in, but not before he had fought every inch of the ground and been reduced to a state of physical prostration which alarmed his entourage. One concession he obtained, which was that he personally should make some communication to the Tsar, but this only got him deeper into the mire. Andrassy was firm on the point that the treaty itself should be secret and that Russia should be specifically mentioned in it, but he agreed to the disclosure of the Memorandum on which it was based (or supposed to be based), and this the Kaiser conveyed in a letter to his nephew. The Memorandum talked grandiloquently of the desire of the two Powers to keep the peace, and bring reconciliation to bear on all questions on which an understanding had not been arrived at between them and Russia, and of their resolve not to take advantage of any differences to attack or to threaten Russia. It even seemed to suggest that the main object of the two Powers was to conclude certain new arrangements for trade and tariffs. Nothing in it could have led the Tsar to suppose that it covered a treaty in which Russia was actually named as the Power against which the contracting parties undertook the obligation of mutual defence.¹ By conveying this Memorandum and writing

¹ For the text of the Treaty see G.P., III, No. 485, p. 103. Pribram, Vol. I., pp. 27-8. The operative clauses were:

1. Should, contrary to their hope and against the loyal desire of the two High Contracting Parties, one of the two Empires be attacked by Russia, the High Contracting Parties are bound to come to the assistance one of the other with the whole war strength of their Empires, and accordingly only to conclude peace together and upon mutual agreement.

2. Should one of the High Contracting Parties be attacked by another Power, the other High Contracting Party binds itself hereby, not only not to support the aggressor against its High Ally, but to observe at least a benevolent neutral attitude towards its fellow Contracting Party.

3. Should, however, the attacking party in such a case be supported by Russia, either by active co-operation or by military measures which constitute a menace to the party attacked, then the obligation stipulated in Article I of this Treaty, for reciprocal assistance with the whole fighting force, becomes equally operative, and the conduct of the war by the two High Contracting Parties shall in this case also be in common until the conclusion of a common peace.

The duration of the Treaty was "provisionally" fixed at five years from the day of ratification. The clauses stipulating secrecy are as follows:

This Treaty shall, in conformity with its peaceful character, and to avoid any misinterpretation, be kept secret by the two High Contracting Parties, and only communicated to a third Power upon a joint understanding between the two Parties, and according to the terms of a special agreement.

The two High Contracting Parties venture to hope, after the sentiments expressed by the Emperor Alexander at the meeting at Alexandrowo, that the armaments of Russia will not in reality prove to be menacing to them, and have on that account no reason for making a communication at present; should, however, this hope, contrary to their expectations, prove to be erroneous, the two High Contracting Parties would consider it to be their loyal obligation to let the Emperor Alexander know at least confidentially that they must consider an attack on either of them as directed against both.

in his own hand a letter which suggested that in drawing it up the German and Austrian Ministers had been concerned merely to renew or regularize the old alliance between Austria and the German States in the new circumstances of the German Empire,¹ the unhappy Kaiser made himself party to a deception even deeper than that which he had lately stigmatized as an unheard of act of disloyalty. As if to quiet his own conscience he added a passage in which he called the Tsar's attention to an article in which a Moscow journal had, unrebuked by the authorities, spoken openly of a Panslavist war against Germany, and warned his nephew of the danger which would threaten his country if militarists and Panslavists acting in concert succeeded in compromising his Government in its foreign affairs. Whether the Tsar was as completely deceived as his answer suggested² is perhaps doubtful, but it suited him for the time being to accept the situation.

Thus in the year 1879, the Three Emperors' League was qualified by a secret Treaty aimed at Russia between Germany and Austria-Hungary. If ever a guilty conscience may be read between the lines of an historic document, it is in the clauses which prescribe, define and apologize for the kind of secrecy required on this occasion.

III

Bismarck's conduct in this affair seems at first sight inconsistent with his governing aim of keeping the three Emperors together for the isolation of France, but it was not so in reality, as the sequel proved. Friendship, as practised by Bismarck, might be smiles and flattery, or kicks and cuffs, as the occasion demanded. If a friend did not behave as German interests required, it might be a sincere act of friendship to frighten him into a better frame of mind. It may be supposed that he took some pleasure in getting even with his old enemy, Gortchakoff, but all the evidence suggests that he hoped and expected that the rumour of a new Dual Alliance would frighten the Tsar and bring him back into the German fold. The transition from the one method to the other may seem rather abrupt, but Bismarck never hesitated to apply his big stick to a friend, when persuasion failed.

In his book "Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors," Count Julius Andrassy has given us the Austrian version of these transactions,

¹ G.P., III, No. 509, pp. 126-7.

² *Ibid.*, No. 512, pp. 132-4.

and it amounts to a claim that his father, who conducted the negotiations with Bismarck, was the better man of the two. He pictures the elder Andrassy as having skilfully avoided the snares set for him by the German Chancellor, who wished Austria to accept much heavier obligations than her interests justified, and yet having contrived to pass himself off as Bismarck's best friend. Andrassy, it seems, would not have the League of the Three Emperors in the form in which it was first offered to and accepted by Russia—the form which would have required all three partners to defend each other against any attack—and he would not permit the German-Austrian alliance to point its "defensive edge" against any other Power than Russia. It was he who insisted on the name of Russia being specifically mentioned in the Secret Treaty of 1879 in spite of the strong objection of the German Emperor. Bismarck, moreover, came to Andrassy, not Andrassy to Bismarck, and, unlike Bismarck, Andrassy succeeded in getting through the whole slippery business without seriously compromising himself with Russia.

How slippery a business it was, comes out in Count Julius's narrative. From the first days of their Alliance, the three Emperors had quite different ideas about the policy which they were supposed to be pursuing. Germany desired both Austria and Russia to devote themselves to German security; Russia desired freedom to engage in Eastern and near-Eastern adventures; Austria-Hungary desired German support to repel Russian encroachments. Count Julius sums it all up by saying that, while both Gortchakoff and Andrassy were anxious to make use of the Alliance for the promotion of their differing Eastern policies, Bismarck had formed it for the purpose of eliminating the Eastern question and isolating France. "For Gortchakoff and Andrassy the Alliance was an organ of Eastern policy, for Bismarck an instrument for pushing it into the background."¹ It must be said for Bismarck that he was not the first to intrigue with one of his partners behind the back of the other. In the first years Austria was in a chronic alarm lest her Russian partner should attack her as a preliminary to attacking the Turk and find the way to Constantinople through Vienna, and Count Julius prides himself on the skill with which his father obtained from Russia the secret agreement, unknown to Bismarck (Reichstadt, 1875), described in the previous chapter, whereby it was arranged that if Russia got Bessarabia, Austria was to take Bosnia-Herzegovina; and records Bismarck's annoyance at any

¹ "Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors," English translation, p. 18.

plan which conflicted with his scheme of keeping both his partners dependent on Germany. Bismarck, according to Count Julius, wished that "Austria-Hungary, Russia and England should agree for each of them to occupy in the East—at Turkey's expense—a position satisfying them for the time being, and preventing them turning against each other or seeking the assistance of France; but later setting those Powers by the ears, so that they should all become dependent on the good-will of Germany." Friends who had these amiable intentions towards each other, were not likely to remain for long in a state of trustful alliance, and we may rather be surprised that the Three Emperors' League survived for so long than that it finally broke down.

IV

But for the time being, Bismarck proved right about Russia. Though he may not have known the contents of the Treaty of 1879, the Tsar was alarmed by the evident *rapprochement* between Germany and Austria, and he saw himself again in the position of being without a friend in the world. He thereupon began to feel his way back towards Germany, and had got more than half-way, when, on March 13, 1881, he was assassinated in St. Petersburg. His son Alexander III took up the policy of friendship with Germany both as a legacy from his father and as a practical necessity. In view of the Nihilist terror, the Tsardom seemed more than ever to need the support of the other Emperors; and in Russia, as elsewhere, good monarchists once more turned their faces away from Republican France. So Tsar and Kaiser met at Danzig in September and resolved to make a new start. Again Bismarck bided his time; it was one of his maxims never to seem eager to make a friend, and least of all when he most desired to do so. The Tsar had to take the first step, which he did through the Russian Ambassador in Berlin, but that done, Bismarck pushed the business through and swept aside the objections of the Austrians who preferred a monopoly of German friendship. On June 18, 1881, the League of the Three Emperors was re-established for three years by a new Treaty which contained various novelties and among them a clause declaring the "closing of the Straits" to be a common interest which required the Allies to see that Turkey made no exception in favour of any Power, and that she did not lend "the part of her Empire comprising the Straits" to the war-

like operations of a belligerent Power.¹ Austria, if we may believe Count Julius Andrassy, disliked this provision on the ground that it was obviously pointed at England, whose interests much more nearly coincided with her own than did those of Russia, and whom Austria by no means desired to offend for the *beaux yeux* of Russia. Count Julius gives us to understand that this and other concessions were wrung from the weakness of the Austrian Foreign Minister, Haymerle, who therein departed from the policy of Andrassy.²

All that Bismarck cared for was that the Three Emperors were again under the same roof, and that the spectre of a Franco-Russian coalition was once more laid. But the new Treaty was only for three years, and since this living from hand to mouth, with two of his Emperors in an unceasing state of sizzle and friction, was not at all to his liking, he began casting about for new expedients. It now occurred to him that if France could not be pacified, her energies might be diverted from Europe to Colonial expansion, and from 1878 onwards he is seen urging and inviting her to seize Tunis and offering his services to keep Turkey quiet. He was the more willing to do this since he knew and expected that French action in Tunis would offend Italy and throw her into the arms of the Central Powers. Fomenting quarrels in which Germany might be the *tertius gaudens* had by this time become a regular part of the Bismarckian technique, and the appearance of the British in Egypt gave him yet another opportunity which he used with extraordinary skill and cunning. These transactions need separate and detailed treatment, but they must be noted here as steps in the development of his Alliance system.

The French seizure of Tunis bore the expected fruit. Feeling sore and outwitted, the Italians began to ask themselves where they stood in this shifting scene and came to the conclusion that they too must make their peace with Berlin. Bismarck followed his usual course and waited for Italy to begin, which she did by intimating in Vienna that she desired to come within the German-Austrian circle. Then for a period he expressed scepticism and indifference. The value of Italy as an ally was extremely doubtful; her military power was insignificant, her monarchy was none too secure, and if it was followed by a republic she would gravitate to France. Still, there was no harm talking about it, and he instructed

¹ G.P., III, No. 532, p. 176. It was also agreed that the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia should not be opposed; and in effect Russia was assured of German and Austrian neutrality in the event of a war with England. Pribram, "Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary," Vol. I., p. 37.

² "Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors," p. 84.

Prince Henry VII Reuss, the Ambassador in Vienna, and Baron von Keudall, the Ambassador in Rome, to keep talking with the Austrians and Italians. They did talk interminably, and presently he told them to get on with the business and make an end of their hunt for formulas. It took from October, 1880, to May, 1882, to produce an acceptable draft, and when it was finally put before him he said curtly, while consenting to it, that German diplomacy had no responsibility for its form or contents and that the only thing he cared about was that in case of war it would save Germany's ally, Austria, from the need of worrying about her Italian frontier. Thus was the first Treaty of the Triple Alliance concluded (May 20, 1882).¹

This Treaty has several interesting points. To all appearances Austria came badly out of it. She bound herself to render military aid to Italy in the event of her being attacked by France, and Italy undertook to render the same aid to Germany, if she were attacked by France. But Italy undertook no obligations to Austria unless she were attacked by two or more great Powers. Austria, for example, might be attacked by Russia, and Italy be at liberty to remain benevolently neutral. Further, there was attached to the Treaty, an *erklärung*, on which Italy insisted and the other Powers accepted, putting on record, that their alliance was conservative and defensive and "not aimed at England." It was thus made sufficiently clear from the beginning that Italian support could not be relied upon in any war in which Great Britain was engaged on the other side.

V

Neither Bismarck nor Kalnoky, the Austrian Foreign Minister, was content to stop at the Triple Alliance. Austria had already (in June, 1880) concluded a Treaty with Serbia, who in return for a promise of aid and encouragement in her expansion to the south, had undertaken to make no treaties without the consent of Austria; and steps were now taken to bring Rumania within the fold. Bismarck was content, as usual, to stand by, while Kalnoky did the work, and the more so as his old master, the Kaiser, had another of his pro-Russian fits of conscience and again objected to Russia being mentioned as the Power against whom the Rumanian Treaty was directed. This time Austria gave way, but complained afterwards that she had got much the worst of the bargain, since

¹ For the text see Pribram, Vol. I., p. 65.

to avoid the mention of Russia she had been compelled to undertake the defence of Rumania from any quarter, whereas Rumania was only bound to render assistance to Austria-Hungary if she were attacked in a portion of her territory bordering on Rumania. Bismarck cared for none of these details, so long as Rumania adhered to the Triple Alliance; and in order to guard his own position *vis à vis* Russia, he insisted that the Treaty should be between Austria and Rumania, and Germany should only "adhere" to it. He was always a stickler for these niceties, and seems seriously to have believed that they constituted the difference between loyalty and duplicity. If Russia asked questions it was possible—without a departure from diplomatic truth—to assure her that Germany was not in treaty relations with either Rumania or Serbia.

By this time the League of the Three Emperors was again running out and, in spite of everything, the Tsar wished it renewed. He could scarcely have been ignorant of what had been going on behind his back, but Bismarck again had judged rightly that he would be more alarmed about his own position than offended by the proceedings of his Allies. He did indeed make some effort to improve the position of Russia and not wholly without success, for he obtained the omission from the first article of the words which laid down that "if one of the Allies obtained a more positive support (*concours*) from either of the other two, the obligations of the third should remain in full vigour"—so that it was seriously in doubt from 1884 onwards whether the secret Austro-German Treaty might not come into open conflict with the League of the Three Emperors. He also obtained a modification of the second article in such a way as to require a common accord for changes of the *status quo* in the "Balkan Peninsula," and not merely as in the previous draft in "Turkey in Europe." These changes, so far as they went, were unfavourable to Austria, which was in no mood to await Russian consent for changes in the Balkans; but she had the secret consolation of knowing that, if it came to the worst, she had her Dual Alliance with Germany to fall back upon, and could at a pinch compel Germany to side with her.¹

However, with these alterations the League of the Three Emperors was renewed for three years on March 27, 1884. With this the Bismarckian system was complete. In Bismarck's mind it had but one object—German security—and all else was subsidiary to that supreme purpose. Germany had to be secured against the single or combined attacks of France and Russia; and

¹ For text see Pribram, Vol. I., p. 91.

France had to be isolated by keeping both Russia and Austria within the German circle. Since Austria and Russia had all the time different and conflicting aims, the winning of Russia without alienating Austria, and of Austria without offending Russia, presented serious difficulties, which could scarcely be surmounted without the betrayal of one or the other. Bismarck's solution was to induce Austria to make concessions to Russia, while consoling her with a specially confidential relationship which she construed as a pledge of support against Russia, if she really needed it.

R The result was that from the year 1882 onwards, the League of the Three Emperors, the Dual Alliance between Austria and Germany, the Triple Alliance and its flanking support, the Serbian and Rumanian Treaties were running side by side, creating between them a network of secret, conflicting and almost unintelligible obligations of which no one could foresee the value or even the interpretation, if they became operative. Count Julius Andrássy sums up the situation as it was in the spring of 1884 :

In the event of France attacking Germany, Italy alone must assist the latter ; in the event of France attacking Italy, both Germany and Austria-Hungary would have to go to her aid. In the case of Russian aggression against Germany, Austria-Hungary or Rumania, all three Powers were bound to stand together. A similar obligation existed also in the case of Austria-Hungary and Germany in the event of either of them being attacked by a third Power, if Russia joined the latter or threatened military measures. Should Serbia attack Austria-Hungary, a *casus fœderis* would thus rise for Rumania and Germany. The most effective defence fell to the fortune of Rumania, she being the only State which, in the event of attack, could depend on the support of the two great Powers, Austria-Hungary and Germany. If Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy were attacked by two or more Powers, then these three States were obliged to stand by each other.

Benevolent neutrality and moral support were promised each other by Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia in respect of anti-wars against a Great Power without regard to the question of who was the aggressor. An exception to this, however, was made in the case of a dispute with Turkey, against whom the obligation could apply only if an agreement had previously been concluded by the Powers with regard to the war aims. Austria-Hungary and Serbia promised each other mutual support in all hostilities without exception. A similar obligation obtained in the case of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy if one of them should be attacked by two or more Powers, or if one of them should deem it necessary to declare war on some Power on account of actions menacing their own safety. An exception to this was made in the case of Great Britain, against whom Italy was, by virtue of a special agreement, released from all obligations.

The contracting parties engaged themselves to pursue a common policy in exceptional cases only. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy on the one hand, and Austria-Hungary and Rumania on the other, were bound to discuss

with each other all political and economic questions that might arise, and to support each other's policy in so far as it was compatible with their own interests. A more particular limitation was contained only in the Alliance of the Three Emperors and the Austro-Hungarian-Serbian Treaty for the precise purpose of eliminating antagonisms arising from conflicting interests.¹

The quest of German security by the isolation of France had evidently by this time become a highly complicated business.

¹ "Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors," pp. 93-4.

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1880-1885

CHAPTER V

BISMARCK AND GREAT BRITAIN

Germany and Great Britain—British Ignorance of Bismarck—Bismarck's View of British Statesmen—His Dislike of Gladstone—His Overtures to Disraeli—Their Failure—His Use of the Egyptian Question—Colonies as Counters in Diplomacy—Count Herbert Bismarck and British Ministers—An Interview with Lord Granville—The Penjeh Incident—German Satisfaction—A Service to Russia.

I

WE must pause here to take up the story of Bismarck's relations with Great Britain. That entails some going back on past years, if it is to be made intelligible.

Vitzthum, the Minister for Saxony in London during the eighteen-sixties records in his "Memoirs"¹ that in the year 1862 on one of his rare visits to London, Bismarck met Disraeli at a party at the Russian Embassy, and delivered himself as follows:

I shall soon be compelled to undertake the conduct of the Prussian Government. My first care will be to reorganize the army, with or without the help of the Landtag. . . . As soon as the army shall have been brought into such a condition as to inspire respect, I shall seize the first best pretext to declare war against Austria, dissolve the German Diet, subdue the minor States and give national unity to Germany under Prussian leadership. I have come here to say this to the Queen's Ministers.

"Take care of that man, he means what he says," was, according to Vitzthum, Disraeli's comment, from which it has been inferred that the English statesman took the right measure of Bismarck quite early in the day. The story is nevertheless suspect, and for several reasons. Bismarck undoubtedly persuaded himself in later years that his designs had been continuous from 1860 onwards, but in 1862 Prussia was in intimate relations with Austria, who was to be her ally in the Danish war of 1863-4, and it is altogether improbable that he would have confided either to Disraeli or to the Queen's Ministers that he intended to attack her "on the first

¹ Vol. II., p. 172, cited in the "Life of Disraeli," Vol. IV., p. 341.

best pretext." It is still less likely that if such a communication had been made, these Ministers would have failed to make use of it to drive a wedge between Prussia and Austria in their resourceless diplomacy during the next two years. In the straits to which he was reduced in these years, Palmerston was not the man to forgo the use of so obvious and convenient a weapon, had it been placed in his hands. Bismarck was audacious in his calculated indiscretions, but this one lacks motive, and it seems reasonable to surmise that between Vitzthum and Disraeli some wisdom from after the event filtered back into the supposed statement of 1862.

However this may be, we may search far and wide in the English records without discovering any other mention of Bismarck and his contemporaries in England at this time. So far from understanding what he was doing, even professed students of affairs seem scarcely to have been aware of his existence. Thus in the essays on Foreign Affairs which the late Lord Salisbury wrote between 1861 and 1864, there is no mention of his name, though, as we now know, he was the dictator of Prussian policy, and in the year 1863 had induced the King to suspend the Prussian Parliament in order to quench its opposition to his military schemes. This, one would have supposed, was a sufficiently resounding stroke to be heard across the North Sea, yet in spite of it, we find Lord Salisbury speculating upon the future of the "seething mass of the German population" and declaring it to be "the far likelier issue that the present enthusiasm will exhaust the energies of a people so unpractical, without leading to any definite result, and that Germany will fall back into her old condition, more divided, more stagnant, more impotent than ever and more hopelessly the slave of Russia."¹ The "seething mass," as we now know, was at this very moment in the grip of the formidable Prussian Minister who was about to weld it in blood and iron. In 1865, after the Schleswig-Holstein affair, we find Lord Palmerston arguing that the danger to be apprehended from Prussia was not that she would be too strong, but that she would be too weak to be "honest and independent in her action"—which suggests to him the consoling reflection that after all it was as well that Schleswig and Holstein should have gone to her instead of being added to the "cluster of small bodies politic which encumber Germany and render it of less force than it ought to be in the general balance of power

¹ "Essays" by Robert, Marquess of Salisbury, Vol. II., p. 143. John Murray, 1905. It is also worth noting that Bismarck's name does not appear in the index to Ashley's "Life of Palmerston."

in the world," or than it should be if it was to control "those two ambitions and aggressive Powers, France and Russia, that press upon her East and West."¹

In extenuation it may be said that most other Governments were equally blind. Austria entered unsuspectingly into the affair of the Duchies, being unaware that it was, in Bismarck's words, to be "the bridge" across which the King of Prussia was to be "helped to the point of view of 1866,"² i.e. to the attack on herself which came in that year. Napoleon III too was completely hoodwinked at the Biarritz interview in 1865 at which he supposed that he had obtained liberty to annex Belgium in return for his neutrality in the war against Austria, whereas all he had done was to give his enemy the opportunity of making a disastrous exposure at his expense when the time was ripe to dispose of him. So it went on up to within three weeks of the Franco-Prussian War, when both M. Olivier and Lord Granville were informed by their permanent officials that "foreign affairs had never been in a more tranquil condition." Nothing served Bismarck better in these years than the failure of his opponents to realize who he was and what he was doing and what he stood for.

II

The continental Powers made their reckoning with established facts after the Franco-Prussian War and started their diplomacy again on the old lines from the new base. But except for a characteristic bias in favour of stricken France, Great Britain maintained her reserve, after as before the war, greatly to the annoyance of the now all-powerful Chancellor, who more and more came to regard her as an irritating exception to the nature of things as he understood them. There she stood, outside the European circle, presuming on her inviolable sea, disturbing all calculations, impossible to rule out, difficult to bring in, acting on motives and principles which were unfathomable to her neighbours. It is Bismarck's perpetual complaint that she will not play the game according to the European rules, that her Ministers cannot control a public opinion which carries them gustily from point to point, that they intervene and retire, appear and disappear, regardless of the responsibilities and liabilities which weigh on the continental Governments. Some of these Ministers gave themselves high moral

¹ "Life of Lord Palmerston," by Evelyn Ashley, Vol. II., p. 315.

² Bismarck, "Reflections and Reminiscences," Vol. I., pp. 308-9.

airs which were entirely out of place in the world of real politics—Gladstone, for example, who was perpetually thundering as from Sinai about the iniquities of his neighbours. Bismarck recognized a kindred spirit in Disraeli, but for Gladstone he had a warm personal antipathy. Commenting on a note in which a certain Russian Minister was styled a “humbug and a fanatic,” he writes in the margin, “then he is like Gladstone”—Gladstone, who “would ruin his country and jeopardize the world by his radical domestic policy on the one hand, and his pandering to revolutionary Pan-slavism on the other.” When young Herbert Bismarck came to London in the 'eighties, he wrote back that “it is not worth while to discuss foreign politics with Gladstone; he knows nothing about it”—which was certainly his father's opinion.

If ever two men were at the opposite poles, it was these two. To Gladstone the statesman was the servant of the people working through a Sovereign Parliament; to Bismarck he was the servant of the State embodied in the King, and under an obligation to fight the people in the interests of State or King. To Gladstone the Ten Commandments were absolute in the field of politics, domestic or foreign; to Bismarck all conduct was justified which was necessary to the State. To Bismarck statesmanship was virtuosity and the secret of a few, to Gladstone it was hot-gossiping in the presence of the multitude. If we try to trace Bismarck's thoughts in the critical years of his post-war policy, the years from 1879 to 1887, they seem to be that it was highly desirable to bring England into the circle of the German Alliances, but extremely dangerous to deal with her as he might safely deal with either Austria or Italy, or even Russia. There was no knowing whether a new Ministry might not disown what had been done by its predecessor or whether a British Minister might not by some inconvenient disclosure destroy the dubious and delicate fabric of his relations with other Governments. The conditions for which British Ministers stipulated that Parliament must know all and be a consenting party was fatal to a system which balanced obligations to one partner with secret and conflicting pledges to another partner. That was diplomacy as Bismarck understood it, and manifestly it could not be proclaimed from the housetops.

Nevertheless he seems to have thought that Disraeli might possibly be an exception to the run of English statesmen, and between 1874 and 1880 he made two distinct overtures for a British-German alliance to him and his colleagues. The first made “in the early days” was, according to his own account, summarily

turned down by Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, who advised his colleagues that it "could not for a moment be entertained."¹ The second was in September, 1879, when, profiting by his previous experience, he went over the head of the Foreign Secretary (now Lord Salisbury), and sent Count Münster direct to Lord Beaconsfield himself with a communication in "complete confidence." Beaconsfield was forthcoming, but made the correct and straightforward stipulation that both the Queen and the Foreign Secretary should be informed. He also expressed a doubt whether British opinion could be brought round to favour an alliance which would seem to be aimed at France.² This was the beginning and the end of the matter, and Bismarck seems to have concluded that Beaconsfield was no better than the rest of British statesmen. He too threw up the old obstacles, wanted to communicate secrets to his colleagues and to the Queen, and would no doubt in due course stipulate that Parliament and the public should be informed. All this barred the way to the conclusion with England of any such Treaty as he had just been negotiating with Austria.

III

If this was so with Beaconsfield and a Conservative Government, the case was still more hopeless with Gladstone and a Liberal Government, and for the next five years Bismarck not only refrained from renewing these overtures, but discouraged advances from the British side. Alliance was now a forbidden word. It nevertheless remained of high importance, for the purpose of German security, to keep England within hail and, above all, to prevent her from becoming too intimate with France. Here Bismarck found his opportunity in the Egyptian question in which the Gladstone Government was deeply floundering. Just as he incited the French to seize Tunis with the idea of keeping them occupied and exciting the jealousy of Italy, so now he encouraged Great Britain to occupy Egypt, with the idea of driving a wedge between her and France. He began on this quite early, much to the mystification of British Ministers who failed to divine his motive, and were greatly puzzled by this apparently gratuitous solicitude. "I am surprised," writes Disraeli to Salisbury in November, 1876, "that Bismarck should go

¹ For details of this, see "Life of Disraeli," Vol. VI., pp. 20-22. Derby communicated this overture to Disraeli who seems to have been in favour of a more encouraging reply than Derby gave to it.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. VI., p. 486 *et seq.*

on harping about Egypt. Its occupation by us would embitter France, and I don't see it would at all benefit us if Russia possessed Constantinople; I would sooner we had Asia Minor than Egypt."¹ Whatever may be the relative values to the British Empire of Egypt and Asia Minor, there was a certain naïveté in the implied assumption that the embittering of France would have displeased the German Chancellor. In after years² Bismarck denied a statement of Lord Granville's in the House of Lords (February 22, 1885) that he (Bismarck) had advised the British Government to "take Egypt," and Lord Granville certainly showed less than his usual tact in putting it thus crudely and bluntly. It was at that moment, as later, a cherished part of German policy to stand well with the Turks, and to have it said out loud in the British Parliament that Germany had invited England to "take" a Turkish dependency was extremely vexatious and embarrassing—just what he had always foreseen as the result of talking to British Ministers. But Lord Granville was undoubtedly right. There is among the German documents a dispatch from Count Herbert Bismarck describing a conversation he had with Lord Granville on September 22, 1882, and accompanying it is a memorandum in English containing what no doubt were his instructions from his father.³ The Count said, as both dispatch and memorandum show, that, while his father thought that Great Britain would be well advised to establish her position under the Turkish firman, yet that "if she should prefer to annex Egypt, she would meet with no opposition from the side of Germany." Granville, while disclaiming the intention to annex, said that he was highly gratified by this friendly communication, and considering that it was made to a Government which had every desire to limit, and as quickly as possible to wind up, its commitments in Egypt, he certainly was not much at fault if it lodged in his memory as advice to "take it."

The shilly-shallying of the French which, to their great mortification, left Great Britain in sole occupation of Egypt, offered Bismarck a rich opportunity for the display of his arts and crafts, and he

¹ "Life of Disraeli," Vol. VI., p. 104.

² See Speech in Reichstag, March 2, 1885.

³ G.P., IV, pp. 729-30.

The memorandum is interesting, in view of Bismarck's subsequent conduct about the Straits, for the passage it contains on that subject: "According to my father's opinion the Straits (*Détroits*) can, in the English interest, never be in better hands than in that of a weak Turkish Empire, whose connexion with Egypt would always be under the full control of England as the strongest maritime Power and the master of the Mediterranean." The Treaty renewing the Three Emperors' League in 1881 contained a clause binding all three to hold the Sultan to maintain the neutrality of the Straits in time of war, *i.e.* to close them to warships.

used it without scruple. For all observers who have followed it closely, says Baron de Courcel in a dispatch to M. Duclère in August, 1882, the Egyptian question is a special example of "the lightness of hand and delicacy of bowing which are the most marked characteristics developed in the German Chancellor by a long exercise of power and deeply grounded experience of international relations."¹ Another observer speaks more bluntly and says that "in a manner of speaking, he levied blackmail; played à deux tableaux about Egypt." In August, 1884, we find Baron de Courcel reporting to Jules Ferry from Berlin that the Chancellor was surprised and even disappointed that the French Government was so lukewarm about Egypt.² It did not at all suit him that the Anglo-French pot should cease to boil, and having stoked the fire from the British side, he was ready now to stoke it from the French. Moreover, by this time he was in hot controversy with the British Government about Angra-Pequena and certain West African questions, and an intimation to England that if he did not get his way, he would make trouble for her with France was an obvious move in the game he was playing. In dealing with the French he went far beyond Egypt, and threw out a scheme for a naval coalition, in which France should play the leading part, for the abatement of British naval supremacy. The Ambassador reports him as saying:

What I want is to establish a sort of balance of power on the sea, and if France will adhere to our point of view, she has a great rôle to play in that. People used to speak of the European balance of power. That is a phrase from the eighteenth century; what he wished was "to keep the Mediterranean for French supremacy, and that (he told me) was one of the reasons why he considered it necessary to oppose the Russian invasion of Turkey."³

The French appear to have been flattered for the moment, and Jules Ferry undertook to keep Bismarck informed of all that he was doing in Egypt. But the Franco-German *rapprochement* was only a fleeting dream, and it dissolved rapidly at the end of March in the following year (1885) when Ferry resigned after the Tonquin disaster. A young man named Clemenceau was already a figure of terror to the weak-kneed, and he would have none of this pro-German nonsense. In the Freycinet Cabinet which followed, Boulanger was Minister for War, and the scene was set for another great Franco-German ebullition.

¹ Bourgeois et Pagès, "Origines de la grande Guerre," p. 376.

² *Ibid.*, p. 333.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

IV

The Colonial wrangles between Bismarck and the British had continued unceasingly from 1883 to this moment. The details are sufficiently recorded in Lord Fitzmaurice's "Life of Lord Granville," and in these days are interesting only for the light they throw on the German Chancellor's methods and character. He appears to have — been a late and reluctant convert to German expansion overseas. Germany, he repeated again and again in the first ten years after the Franco-Prussian War, was a sated Power which had enough to do to consolidate her position in Europe without burdening herself with remote territories of doubtful value. During these years he regarded Colonies as a convenient diversion for unsated and restless Powers, especially France, which otherwise might direct their energies against Germany. But Germans were not at all likely to remain disinterested spectators of the race to possess the earth which set in during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. They were challenging the manufacturing supremacy of Great Britain, and making good their claim to be a leading exporting nation. Still more, they had set the example, under Bismarck's own inspiration, of the nationalist system of Protection which was leading all the nations, with the exception of Great Britain, to treat their Colonial possessions as their own mercantile preserves, and to make it as difficult as possible for their neighbours to trade in the territories in which they had hoisted their flags. It might not be true that trade followed the flag—trade left to itself showed a remarkable impartiality between flags—but this policy could make it true, and German merchants and manufacturers said, not without reason, that unless Germany possessed Colonies of her own, she would find herself either shut out of oversea trade, or at the mercy of rivals and competitors who would admit her only on their own terms. It was brought home to Bismarck that his policy of encouraging these rivals and competitors to occupy desirable oversea lands in the hope that they would transfer their ambitions from Europe to safer regions, was not at all in favour with German industrialists. Germany, these said, must have her place in the sun, and she must act the more energetically in that she was a late-comer in this field, and all the more desirable possessions had been occupied before she put in an appearance.

Bismarck yielded to this pressure, and from 1883 onwards we see him on the war-path about Fiji, New Guinea, South-West and Central Africa, and characteristically using these places as counters

in his game with Great Britain. He stormed and threatened and scolded, and perpetually returned to the charge when British Ministers supposed him to have been appeased. These Ministers were, according to his measurement, extraordinarily stupid people. They insisted on arguing each question as if it were to be settled on what was called its merits or for the convenience of some small British Colony thousands of miles away. There was Lord Derby—an old enemy—who corresponded interminably with the Cape Government about Damaraland and Namaqualand; there was Lord Granville who expected statesmen to act on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, and was distressed and puzzled by the plain talk of a practical man. Count Münster, the German Ambassador in London, who seems to have had some sympathy with these Ministers, incurred a sharp rebuke for having softened the communication of his master and so failed to make them appreciate the realities as understood in Berlin:

This instruction (to speak firmly about German interests) is not a commission which can be discharged in one conversation; it is a permanent direction which your Excellency will be good enough to take as the guiding line in all your conversations with influential English statesmen. On that matter I cannot refrain from repeating my conviction that the unsatisfactory condition of our relations with England would never have arisen if your Excellency had presented with the sharpness and pertinacity indicated in my instruction the alternatives for England of a friendly attitude to our Colonial efforts, or the certainty of encountering our hostility in every kind of policy within our reach.¹ (February 3, 1885.)

This dispatch, though signed by Bismarck, is in the handwriting of his son Count Herbert, who went backwards and forwards between Berlin and London in these years and conscientiously strove to make good the deficiencies of the Ambassador in his dealings with British Ministers. The Count saw everyone and reported all conversations, especially those in which these Ministers spoke freely about their colleagues behind their backs. To Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, whom he met in September, 1884, he attributes the following observations among others:

Now that Germany has started on that road, you will soon learn what are the consequences and costs of Colonial undertakings.

It is pure lunacy (*gerade verrückt*) for English Foreign policy to offer gratuitous provocation to Germany with whom we might so easily be friends. For us the whole of South Africa is veritably a burden, and if I had to deal with you I would tell you that we are only too glad that Germany should

¹ G.P., IV, No. 759, p. 100.

establish herself in Africa. What are we to do with this tiresome Cape Colony which is no use to us and only makes difficulties for us? We cannot be a match for the Dutch and natives, against whom the African English are a dwindling minority. If it depended on me, I would say plainly to this thorny Colony, "take care of yourself and declare yourself independent if you want to. We need only Cape Town and its harbour for a coaling-station; if we could get rid of the rest, it would be a gain to us!"

I and my closest associates desire to stand well with Germany and that is quite easy; I gather from what you tell me that your Government is annoyed with us and will try to obtain redress. How incredibly things are managed with us you may judge from the following example. Eighteen months ago, the Cabinet decided to annex the Cameroons on the demand of Englishmen living in that region, as a climatic station for those who suffer from the hot climate. That was our sole reason, for in general we abhor (*perhorreszieren*) all annexations. In spite of the fact that the matter was immediately dealt with by telegram, our dawdling Colonial Office has let it drag on until you have laid your hands upon it. Of course there is nothing to do now but for us to recognize German priority. I don't at all consider that a misfortune, but I do blame our clumsy conduct towards you.¹

Dilke, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, is said to have told Count Herbert that his Chief (Granville) was so jealous that the fact of their having conversed together must on no account be mentioned to him. One can understand why, if the Count is accurate in saying that Dilke "blamed Lord Granville's attitude in the sharpest language," and said, "I cannot tell you how deeply I regret the haggling and clumsiness of our policy towards you on Colonial questions. You had every right to complain of our silly attitude and all the wrong was on our side."² With this encouragement Count Herbert plied Lord Granville with all the sharpness and pertinacity that his father could have desired, and succeeded in reducing that statesman to a condition of great mental agitation. He thus describes an interview which he had with him on March 6, 1885:

My greeting by the English Foreign Minister was as friendly as ever, but in the first minutes of our conversation, he adopted his usual manner to me, and looking sharply at me spoke in a tone of strong fatherly rebuke *de rebus omnibus et quibusdam aliis*. As soon as I had a chance of speaking, I made my tone as rigorous as possible, and so far as his unceasing objections and interruptions permitted, recapitulated the whole tortuous story of the way in which our relations had been disturbed since last summer, and put all our gravamina in the most lurid light.

It is not easy to argue with Lord Granville. In spite of his antagonism to Lord Salisbury in other respects, he has the same manner of speaking to

¹ G.P., IV, No. 753, p. 84.

² *Ibid.*, No. 755, p. 38.

his interlocutor—like the Public Prosecutor to a defendant—in political conversations and one has to labour hard to bring him into a field of discussion in which both sides have equal rights. If Lord Granville was reduced to the necessity of disclaiming responsibility for the disagreeable rôle which was assigned to him by the hostile press, I got even with him by my exposure of the weakness and trickiness of his policy. I remarked to him bluntly that, since the middle of June, when we had had long conversations, he could not and ought not to have been in doubt about our aims, expectations and demands and that—to put it mildly—he had treated us as too light goods. He had shifted too large a part of the responsibility for foreign policy on to the Colonial Minister and had not understood that for us there was only one policy which applied uniformly to Europe, Egypt and Colonial questions.

If he attached more importance to agreement with the Colonial people and with the French press of a certain complexion than to Germany's friendship, let him say so and then we should endeavour to prove to him by deeds how disagreeable we could make ourselves and to put him in a position to judge in a practical way what Germany's friendship or hostility was worth.

We were under the impressions that England desired to embroil us with France and whenever possible with Russia also—that the idea still prevailed here that England was best off when Continental nations were at war with each other, and England profited by her trade.

This expression of opinion drew lively gesticulations and loud cries of indignation combined with vehement protests from Lord Granville. As soon as I could again make myself heard, I explained that I was not responsible for public opinion in Germany, but that when I recalled historical events, I could not consider it altogether incorrect.

Lord Granville seldom let more than five words or a single sentence pass without interrupting with objections or standing up and writing some note at a side-table.

Although in the end I spoke very quickly, I could discover no moment to end the conversation or take my departure—for I could not let his constantly changing assertions pass without contradiction—until the clock struck and I got up saying “my host with whom I am staying (Lord Rosebery) has already sat down to dinner.”¹

Count Herbert was then thirty-six years old and Lord Granville was seventy. If the former had not penned this record himself, we might have hesitated to believe it. Certainly the father could not have complained that his instructions had been extenuated by the son.

It was in the end the despised Mr. Gladstone (with whom it was not worth while talking “because he knew nothing whatever about foreign affairs”) who drove things through. He had his hands more than full just then and saw that Bismarck must be pacified, if it were necessary, as seemed at that moment, to contemplate a possible war with Russia about the Penjdeh incident.

¹ G.P., IV, No. 760, p. 100.

Germany got large concessions in New Guinea, and a compromise in Africa which at the time was thought to be extremely favourable to her,¹ though Bismarck complained that the German negotiators had been outwitted by the British, who knew the maps a great deal better than they did. The German newspapers raised a shout of triumph, but the Austrians, who doubted this way of winning British friendship, commented that a very small joint had been roasted at a very big fire.

V

Bismarck was no doubt convinced that the efficacy of the big stick in dealing with England had once more been proved. At all events he saw no reason to change his attitude, and still less to be grateful for the favours he had received. His rule with Great Britain was to smile on her when he was in trouble with Russia and to put his fist in her face when he was getting on well with Russia. In March and April, 1885, he was getting on very well with Russia and things in general seemed to be working for the special benefit of Germany. She might, as he explained to the Kaiser, be a very cheerful spectator of the war between England and Russia which seemed to threaten in that year. It would keep the two most tiresome and unaccountable of the Powers occupied and diverted, and whichever won would be too exhausted to do anything more for a long time to come. But one thing was essential; the war must be localized and kept to Asia, for its extension to Europe would almost certainly involve Turkey and Austria and revive in a worse form all the troubles with which he had been battling since 1878.

Turkey obviously was the key to this situation. If the Turks joined the British and permitted them to pass through the Dardanelles, or if they merely looked the other way while the British sailed into the Black Sea under benevolent protest, the danger would immediately become acute. Here was the opportunity of doing a service to Russia which was also greatly in the interests of Germany. So on April 8, when M. de Giers inquired what view the German Chancellor took of the clause touching the Straits in the Secret Treaty of the Three Emperors League (renewed in the previous year), he immediately showed himself forthcoming. The clause in question declared the closing of the Straits in time of war to be a binding principle and pledged the three Powers to "take

¹ For details of these transactions see Lord Fitzmaurice's "Life of Lord Granville," Vol. II., p. 430.

care in common that Turkey shall make no exception to this rule in favour of the interests of any Government whatsoever, by lending to warlike operations of a belligerent Power the portion of its Empire constituted by the Straits.”¹ Bismarck immediately took steps to bring Austria into line and to warn the Turks that they would be held to strict neutrality. It was for the Sultan a somewhat ironic position. His old enemy, Mr. Gladstone, was pressing him to aid and abet an attack on Russia whose cause Mr. Gladstone had so vehemently espoused against him only seven years earlier, and Austria, which was then solid with England, was now siding with Russia. He was tempted and he temporized, shrewdly asking the Three Powers what they would do to assist him in defending his neutrality, if England in spite of his protests were to force the Straits. The question seems to have been left unanswered, but Bismarck strongly urged him to take measures to defend himself and sent the German Military Attaché to stir him up. Eventually he promised to act on the advice of the Three Powers, whose Ambassadors announced in London that they were unanimous in holding that the use of the Straits by ships of war would be an unjustifiable invasion of neutrality.

The storm blew over. Penjdeh was neutralized, the Afghan boundary peacefully adjusted, and Russia and England were at peace by the middle of May. What the Sultan, or what the three Powers would have done, if war had followed, can only be guessed, but the German *démarche* and Austrian concurrence in it appear to have been an unpleasant surprise to the British Government. ✓ Sir Augustus Paget, the British Ambassador, is reported by his German colleagues to have said volubly in Vienna that England was without a friend in the world. This was exactly the impression that Bismarck wished to create in the minds of British Governments and their representatives abroad. The sharp alternatives of “being forthcoming to German policy or of being assured of German hostility over the whole field of policy” were now being brought home to them.

¹ Pribram, Vol. I., p. 39.

BISMARCK AND GREAT BRITAIN—*continued*

Lord Salisbury's Letter to Bismarck—A Previous Alleged Overture and its Reception—Lord Randolph Churchill's Intervention—Offer of an Alliance—Another Cool Reception—Churchill Returns to the Attack—Bismarck's Reply—His Indictment of British Methods—Browbeating about Colonies—Buying German Support.

I

IN June, 1885, Mr. Gladstone's Government fell and Lord Salisbury came on the scene for the eight months of his first Government. One of his first acts was to write a personal letter to Bismarck briefly alluding to the fact that "the good understanding between the two countries, which we value as of supreme importance," had "in recent times been slightly clouded" and asking for his good offices in the launching of the nine million Egyptian loan which till then Germany had blocked.¹ In spite of his objection to the "stiff-necked ecclesiastical layman," as he had once called him, who was now Prime Minister, Bismarck was forthcoming, and he promised to do what he could "without encroaching on Parliamentary rights." He had always had a great preference for Conservative Governments in England and had already instructed the Ambassador in London to express his satisfaction on learning that the new Government intended to maintain the "Conservative tradition of good relations with Germany." There were many vicissitudes afterwards but this may be taken as the beginning of a new chapter which Lord Salisbury resumed on his return to office a year later, and carried to its conclusion in the Mediterranean agreement of 1887 and the cession of Heligoland in 1890. During these years German-Russian relations were growing progressively

¹ G.P., IV, No. 782, p. 132. The letter contains a curious allusion to Anglo-Russian relations after the Penjdeh affair. "I do not know what the real intentions of the Russian Cabinet are, but our wish is distinctly for peace. To speak candidly, our railroad towards Candahar will not be finished for two years, and I believe Russia is in precisely the same condition. We have both, therefore, the strongest interest to keep the peace for that time, if no longer; but I hope it may be for much longer."

worse, and in proportion as they did so, Bismarck again turned his face towards England.

To understand the situation when Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister in June, 1885, we must go back a little. Count Julius Andrassy asserts that Mr. Gladstone asked Germany in 1882 whether "she was disposed to conclude an alliance with Great Britain." The sole foundation for this seems to be that the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward) wrote to his brother-in-law, the Crown Prince, in September, 1882,¹ to say that in English political circles irrespective of party, there was a lively desire for a closer and more trustful attitude towards Germany. This the German Crown Prince passed on to Bismarck, who replied that in spite of the strange policy of Her Majesty's present Government, he had tried to avoid giving offence to English public opinion, but that he was obliged to keep positive support of English wishes within rather strict limits for a variety of reasons, of which the chief were the fear of creating hostility in Russia; the objections of Austria who remembered Gladstone's indiscretions; and the general desirability of doing nothing that might expose Germany to the suspicion of manœuvring to detach England from France and so setting the two western Powers by the ears. We may be sure that none of these motives would have deterred Bismarck if he had thought it desirable to win British friendship. Most of them, indeed, were operative three years earlier, when he proposed an alliance to Lord Beaconsfield. But whereas in 1879 he needed England in the situation in which he then was with Russia, in 1882 he concluded that an alliance with her was not worth the risk of offending Russia. What he really wanted at this time was not an open alliance but a secret agreement which would bind England to Germany without becoming known to Russia, or being advertised in the British Parliament, and he continued to fish for something of the kind even when Gladstone was in power.

All through his wrangles with Lord Derby and Lord Granville his attitude had been that German friendship was to be bought, if Great Britain thought it worth buying, and in the last years of the Gladstone Government he had begun talking of Heligoland as an acceptable consideration for Germany. But this Government realized that if any such price was to be paid, it could not be by them. They were already being bitterly reproached for their supposed betrayal of imperial interests in Asia and Africa, and what sort of storm would burst on them if they added the

¹ G.P., IV, Nos. 726 and 728, pp. 31 and 34.

"surrender" of Heligoland to their other iniquities was more than they dared think. Upon this matter at all events Bismarck had the good sense to see that he must bide his time and he forbore to press it.

II

The new British Ministers were apparently unacquainted with the recent course of events and about the same time that Lord Salisbury wrote his letter to Bismarck, Lord Randolph Churchill, then Secretary for India, danced in upon this delicate ground. It was he who, according to his own account, inspired Lord Salisbury to write to Bismarck and, whether with or without the knowledge of his colleagues, he now took the initiative and went straight to the point with Count William Bismarck, who had come to London after his brother's return to Berlin. Could England, he asked, obtain Germany's support against Russia, and, if so, on what terms? Was an alliance possible? The Count temporized till he could obtain instructions from his father, and then answered politely that the political situation in England was too insecure, that Gladstone and Granville might come back, that Germany could not afford to offend Russia on the doubtful chance of securing British support. Churchill persisted that the risks were slight, that the next Government, if it were not Conservative, would be Whig or Coalition, but not Radical, and that in any case the Conservative party would be strong enough to prevent any relapse into an anti-German policy. Count William rejoined that Germany had done her best for England in Egypt and would do anything else she could short of offending Russia. To this Churchill replied that he cared much less about Egypt than about Asia and the Russian-French intrigues in Constantinople. If need be, he would fight for Herat and had no fear of the result. Russia could do nothing against England, whereas England could attack her both at Vladivostok and in the Black Sea. (To this Count William puts a note of exclamation in his report to his father, being no doubt aware, as Churchill was not till later, that the Three Emperors' League was pledged to keep the Straits closed to England.¹)

Churchill got but a dusty answer, but this did not deter him from returning to the attack with the new German Ambassador, Count Hatzfeldt, in the month of December.² The Ambassador was impressed. He reported that Churchill was the "only man

¹ G.P., IV, No. 784.

² *Ibid.*, No. 788.

he had yet seen who looked into the future, who had the real ideas whether right or wrong, and appeared to pursue a decided policy." Churchill wanted an alliance and had expressed lively regrets that it had been declined. "We two," he said, "could rule the world, but you have not wished it." The Ambassador retorted that England was not in a position to pledge her support to anyone for more than the briefest period. "In what sort of position should we have been in," he wanted to know, "if at the time of that correspondence with Lord Salisbury we had concluded an alliance and Mr. Gladstone came back to power at the coming election?" Lord Randolph was equal to this and said enthusiastically that an alliance with Germany would have been a stupendous success for the Conservative party, a success which would have established it in power for years to come, and made Mr. Gladstone impossible. What better guarantee could Germany want? Now things were quite different. Instead of this success, the Conservative Government had to register the fact that Germany had closed the Dardanelles to England, and this failure must damage the Government.

This, reported to Berlin, raised Bismarck's ire. Churchill, he said was simply inventing. No offer had ever been made to him (Bismarck) which he could have declined. It was not true that England and Germany alone could rule the world. A third Power was needed and that was Austria, whom England either would not or could not understand, and had light-heartedly and frivolously estranged. The Ambassador was to say to Churchill that in order to establish a durable alliance with England an Act of Parliament would be necessary—to which it would be difficult to obtain the assent of the English Parliament—and that without that there could be nothing but a Ministerial Alliance, with the result that Germany would serve as a relay horse for just as long as England needed her. You couldn't make alliances with a sort of general proclamation that you were prepared to go through thick and thin with someone else; there must be a common policy defended through changes of Government. The notion of a mere proclamation was a castle in the air, and Germany could not be a party to it without risking a breach with Austria and Russia, whereby French hostility would be encouraged and Germany, in face of a coalition against her, be reduced to playing the part, which Churchill seemed to assign to Austria, of promoting English policy at her own expense. There followed a characteristic outburst:

England's habit of first using Austria and then on a change of Ministry, taking up some Gladstonian programme of understanding with Russia at her

expense, I consider a clumsy kind of finesse with which I can have nothing to do. If England had clear and strong aims and, above all, the courage to avow them publicly, she could find any alliances she needed; but if to her Parliamentary weaknesses she adds indecision and dishonesty and a disposition to use her Allies with a certain selfish rustic cunning (*Bauernfängerei*) then everybody looks out.¹

How much of all this Ambassador reported to Churchill is not stated, but nothing more was heard of his alliance project and in the following years he seems—much to Bismarck's annoyance—to have been active in warning Salisbury against being dragged at Bismarck's coat-tails. Bismarck was always annoyed and puzzled when a flourishing of his big stick failed to bring any dog to heel.

Whether the public sanction of Parliament for which Bismarck stipulated on this occasion would have suited his plans and fitted in with his other European schemes must be judged from the general tenor of his diplomacy. Until now his objections to British policy had been that it was inconveniently public. Thus in a communication to a "highly placed personage"² in 1882 he had written :

The greatest difficulty we encounter in trying to give a practical expression to our sympathies for, and our relations with England, is the absolute impossibility of confidential intercourse in consequence of the indiscretion of English statesmen in their communication to Parliament, and in the absence of security in alliances for which the Crown is not answerable in England, but only the fleeting Cabinets of the day. It is therefore difficult to initiate a reliable understanding with England otherwise than publicly and in the face of all Europe.

Such public negotiations from their initiation and even without arriving at any definite result would be highly detrimental to most of our European relations.

The objection was incontestable, and it applied all along the line. By the year 1885 there was scarcely any part of the Bismarckian system which could have been exposed to publicity without bringing on its author charges of bad faith from one or another and perhaps all his Allies. There was, however, a certain playing of the game according to its rules which was the test of good conduct in Bismarck's eyes; and the lack of straightforwardness (*Mangel an Aufrichtigkeit*) with which he charged British policy was the breach of these rules through the publicity given to Foreign affairs in the British Parliament and the open and avowed changes of British

¹ G.P., IV, No. 789, pp. 141-2.

² Lord Fitzmaurice's "Life of Lord Granville" Vol. II., p. 275.

policy in deference to public opinion. From that point of view the change from Disraeli to Gladstone was a failure in straight conduct on the part of British Governments.

III

The transactions of the next two years (1886-1887) can only be understood if Bismarck's relations with Russia are borne in mind. As these grew progressively worse, he became more civil to the British Government. But all through 1886 and in the early months of 1887 he continued his scoldings and browbeatings. Zanzibar and Samoa were now the bones of contention, and once more he was in despair at the stupidity of British Ministers who could not be made to understand that the principle of *do ut des* governed German policy all over the world. Salisbury and Iddesleigh kept up the old habit, which he had found so objectionable in Granville and Derby, of arguing each question on its merits—arguing it interminably, cabling for information, waiting for the answers of British agents whose conduct had been challenged from Berlin, suggesting that they had obligations to obscure officials which required mature and judicial consideration. Like their predecessors they had to be sharply reminded of the realities.

There was no mincing of words and again the "alternatives" were sharply presented. Count Herbert, now acting as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, took up the congenial task with all his old zest. England, he wrote in March, 1886, to the Ambassador in London, must be reminded that she would have a "heavy reckoning to pay in Egypt and the East for the sins of her officials in Zanzibar and Asia."¹ His father chimed in a little later that though Germany was inclined to make herself agreeable to England in Egypt and elsewhere, she expected a return in Zanzibar and Samoa. He added that, though she had sacrificed her relations with the Boers of South Africa for a good understanding with England, this also and other points would have to be reconsidered, if there was no return from England.² In the following March the Count returned to the attack and announced that unless German aims in Zanzibar and Samoa were loyally supported, instructions would be given to German Ambassadors and agents in the East to put themselves in touch with their French colleagues; and Bismarck himself followed this up by an even blunter intimation, conveyed through his son, that "Germany would oppose England

¹ G.P., IV, No. 790.

² *Ibid.*, No. 797.

where her most important interests were at stake, and that unless he got satisfaction, he would forthwith confer with the French Ambassador about French wishes in Egypt.”¹ The Count dealt the final blow by announcing that unless a certain British Consul were withdrawn from Zanzibar, the German Ambassador at Constantinople would be instructed to throw the whole weight of German influence into the scales against England.²

Salisbury, who was very long-suffering, seems to have struck at this, and he told Count Plessen who conveyed the message, that he could not answer so far-reaching and threatening a communication without further deliberation. Bismarck thereupon withdrew a little and made what he appears to have considered an apology. Count Plessen was to explain that there was no threat and that the Chancellor was merely acting on the principle that “conduct in foreign affairs should be governed, not by feelings, but by interests and reciprocity. It was only in private life that people made themselves obliging without expecting a return.” Salisbury said that he perfectly understood, and promised to transfer the offending consul to another post.

It may be judged that the traditional pro-Germanism of the Conservative party and its leaders was severely tried in these years. But Salisbury too in his way was a realist and by this time the mutual conveniences of both sides were demanding co-operation. Britain wanted support in Egypt and could only get it from Germany and her partners, who still more wished British support in their rising quarrel with Russia about Bulgaria. Once more the fear of a coalition in which Germany and Austria might have to face the united opposition of Britain, France and Russia, and Italy be paralysed for fear of offending Britain, was looming large in Bismarck’s imagination. In his communications to Churchill he had struck an heroic attitude in declaring that fidelity to Austria required him to reject a British alliance, but this was not his motive, and still less was it the wish of Austria. Whatever her past grievances might have been, she desired nothing so much at the present stage as to attach Britain to the Triple Alliance, and she watched with great misgiving every display of German manners in London. Early in 1887 it was agreed between these partners that England must be conciliated, and accordingly when Count Herbert went to London in August of that year, he found no difficulty in disposing of Samoa and Zanzibar.

¹ G.P., IV, No. 810.

² *Ibid.*, No. 813.

1885-1887

CHAPTER VII

A SEA OF TROUBLE

Tsar and Emperor Meet Again—High Festivities—New Clouds Gathering—The Big Bulgaria—Serbia Attacks Bulgaria—Battle of Slivnitza—The Tsar and Prince Alexander—Austrian Intervention—Bismarck's Displeasure—Diplomacy on Two Fronts—Boulangism in France—Agitations in Paris and St. Petersburg—Russia Advised to Break Loose—The Alliances Running Out—Bismarck's Need of England—An Exchange of Notes—Renewal of Triple Alliance—Reinsurance Treaty with Russia—A Calculated Indiscretion—Repaying Austria in her own Coin.

I

WHAT, in the meantime, had been going on in Europe? On August 25, 1885, the Emperors of Austria and Russia met in the Moravian town of Kremsier, and for two days there were high festivities in the course of which the third Emperor bestowed his blessing in a cordial telegram from Berlin. Bismarck looked on with a smiling face, as by all the signs he was well entitled to do. The League of the Three Emperors stood upright before the world, and Germany had buttressed her own position by two secret treaties which seemed to make her secure against all possible combinations, including those of her own allies. The Austrian Emperor, while he embraced the Tsar, had in his pocket a secret assurance of support from Germany in case he were attacked by Russia. The Tsar, though in happy ignorance of this transaction, had the satisfaction of knowing that he had performed an act of filial piety in maintaining friendship with Germany, and was further convinced that the cause of law and order against anarchists and regicides was consecrated anew at this festival.

Then once more the clouds began to gather. On September 25 the Bulgarian Nationalists hoisted their flag at Philippopolis demanding the union of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria, and after a brief hesitation, Alexander of Battenberg, a first cousin of the Tsar, whom the Bulgarians had chosen as their prince, put himself at the head of the movement. This was formally an infringement of the Treaty of Berlin, but it had long been expected, and in the

Three Emperors' Treaty of 1881, Russia had stipulated that it should be "recognized" by Austria and Germany, if it came about "by force of circumstances." The big Bulgaria had been a Russian aim in 1878, and though temporarily thwarted by British opposition was supposed to be still a cherished object of Russian desire in 1885. But then as later, the sympathy of the Powers for their Balkan protégés carried with it the condition that these protégés should accept the tutelage of their patrons, and the Tsar Alexander was in extreme doubt whether Alexander of Battenberg, who was a spirited young man, would comply with this condition. Thus, while as a good Slav he was bound to approve the formation of the big Bulgaria, he, as a private individual, greatly desired to postpone it until Alexander was out of the way. Russia, as Bismarck said to the French Ambassador, "had witnessed the explosion, at a moment when she least expected it, of the mines and torpedoes which she herself had planted," and instead of pressing for the recognition of the accomplished fact, which she was entitled to claim from her partners, she held back and procrastinated, and finally asked the Powers what they proposed to do about the broken Treaty of Berlin.

The Powers, as usual, proposed a Conference to regularize the situation, but when the Ambassadors began to confer at Constantinople, they found themselves blocked by the absolute and altogether unexpected refusal of Lord Salisbury and the British Government to sanction the measure proposed, viz. the restoration of the *status quo*, pending negotiations, and, in case Prince Alexander refused, the granting of free permission to the Turks to restore their authority in Rumelia. Bismarck has been sharply criticized for having taken Lord Salisbury seriously and allowed himself to be held up by the British veto. The truth seems rather to be that he was utterly mystified by it. Only seven years earlier the British Prime Minister, Beaconsfield, had made a serious crisis and all but wrecked the Berlin Congress by insisting not only on the division of the two Bulgarias but on the division in the particular way which would leave the Turkish military power strong in the southern area. Nothing had been more embarrassing to Bismarck at a time when he wished to persuade Russia that the Berlin battle had been drawn in her favour than the shouts of triumph which had gone up from London at this exploit. Now Beaconsfield's colleague and successor, Salisbury, was not only refusing to defend this settlement but had actually at the abortive Conference of Ambassadors placed his veto on a scheme which would have

enabled the Turks, even temporarily, and provisionally, to assert themselves in this area. What could it mean?

The explanation given by Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Lord Salisbury's biographer,¹ is so subtle that even Bismarck may be excused if he failed to follow it. It is roughly that circumstances alter cases. In 1878 Russia was hotly in favour of the big Bulgaria; therefore it was necessary to oppose her. In 1885, in pursuing his quarrel with Prince Alexander, the hero of the reunion, the Tsar had manoeuvred himself into the position of being at least temporarily the opponent of the big Bulgaria; therefore again it was necessary to oppose him. In either case the central object of British policy—the checking of Russia—would be served. The argument illustrates the cool objectivity with which the fates and fortunes of the Balkan peoples were treated by the great Powers in their wrestling with each other, and, if we took it literally, we should have to suppose that Bulgaria was never in British eyes more than a pawn in the game with Russia. To take it literally would, I think, be to do Lord Salisbury an injustice. If we turn again to his biographer, we find ample reason for thinking that he was never more than a lukewarm supporter of the Beaconsfield policy, that he thought the question of the big or little Bulgaria and the pother made it about at the Berlin Congress to have been greatly exaggerated, and that he had a sincere humanitarian objection to recalling Turkish troops and inviting them, in the name of the Powers, to restore what they called “order” in this region.

If so, he was well-justified, but to Bismarck who, as he frankly said, cared nothing at all for the fate of the Balkan peoples, and who on his own assumptions had every reason to expect that the British Government would help him by taking the chestnuts out of this fire, the mental process which led a British statesman to this conclusion was wholly unintelligible; and his failure to understand it threw his own policy into confusion. Before the Powers could come to any agreed conclusion, the hands of all were forced by the appearance on the scene of Serbia vociferously demanding “compensation.” King Milan now rushed into the fray with—as everyone believed—the secret backing of Austria, who in those days was his patron, and was at once overwhelmingly defeated by the Bulgarians under Alexander at Slivnitza. Alexander was for following up his victory by marching on Belgrade, but he was promptly informed by the Austrian envoy, Khevenhüller, who had been sent to parley with him in the name of the Powers, that

¹ “Life of Lord Salisbury,” Vol. III., p. 245 *et seq.*

if he did so, he would be opposed by Austrian forces. The Envoy was painfully explicit. He pointed out that if Austria marched into Serbia, Russia would undoubtedly march into Bulgaria, and that between the two there would be no throne for Alexander. Alexander yielded, and changing his tack, endeavoured to effect a reconciliation with the Tsar. In that he was unsuccessful, and after the singular course of events which included his kidnapping by his own officers, and his triumphal return, he rashly threw himself on the Tsar's mercy and was rewarded by a stinging rebuke which left him no option but to abdicate (September 3, 1886).

For rather obscure personal reasons, Bismarck's dislike of Prince Alexander was only a little less than the Tsar's, but, as he repeatedly said, he cared nothing who was in Belgrade or Sofia or what princelet occupied either throne. Nevertheless, he was furious with Austria, who, not for the first time or the last, had forced the hands of her partner and all but landed the Three Emperors in a devastating struggle. Khevenhüller, he protested, had no authority for an ultimatum which placed the peace of Europe in the keeping of Prince Alexander, and it was monstrous that Austria should have taken that risk without consulting her partner. The dispatches that followed show how acutely the great German was alive to the danger of letting Austrian policy outrun German consent, and his conduct may profitably be compared with that of his successors who twenty-eight years later aided and abetted Austria in a similar adventure.¹ A dispatch to Vienna winds up with a warning which, in the light of subsequent events, has a prophetic ring :

Austria must never break with Russia, relying solely on German support and without a guarantee of the action and attitude of the Western Powers. As things now stand in England and France, we might thereby pave the way for a Russo-Anglo-French coalition, in the face of which the situation of the allied Empires would be difficult, and the trustworthiness of Italy become doubtful.²

Cynical and unscrupulous as Bismarck might be when he had satisfied his conscience that German security required it, he was resolute in his determination not to be rushed by his ally into an enterprise in which he did not see his way clearly ahead. His dispatches of these weeks are classics on that subject, and show the great real-politician at his best and wisest.

¹ G.P., V, Chap. XXX. ; see especially No. 969.

² Cited by Fuller, "Bismarck's Diplomacy at its Zenith," pp. 51-2.

II

If war on two fronts was an object of dread, diplomacy on two fronts presented extraordinary difficulties. During the last week of 1886 and all through the year 1887, Bismarck was either dreading an attack from France, or, as his enemies and critics said, endeavouring to fasten a quarrel on her. Speculation as to which of the two things he was doing is as lively as in the corresponding case of 1875, but on this occasion at all events it must be allowed that he had genuine cause for alarm. Jules Ferry, the one French Minister of these years who was willing to build a bridge between France and Germany, had passed from the scene in Paris, and with him had gone the last chance of a reconciliation with France on the basis of the *status quo*. The new Freycinet Ministry had definitely turned its back on that idea, and its Minister for War was the dashing Boulanger, who was making fiery appeals to the patriotic sentiment of his countrymen, and, to all appearances, preparing the military machine for war. A French attack upon Germany, if Russia and Austria fell to fighting about Bulgaria, was certainly a high probability. Bismarck went to meet the double danger with his customary mixture of skill and daring, using all his resources to keep the peace between Austria and Russia, and, in the meantime, presenting a bold and even aggressive front to France. In April, 1887, the Schnaebele frontier incident¹ led to a furious press campaign, and Bismarck told the Prussian Landtag it was impossible to live at peace with a country so bellicose as France. Swords were rattled, troops were on the march, there were panics on the Bourse both in Paris and Berlin; German newspapers spoke of war as inevitable. The French, meanwhile, were saying it was intolerable that their policy should be dictated from Berlin and the German big stick flourished in their faces at the first sign of independence. They were strong, they were wealthy, they had a population which, properly organized, would enable them to outstrip Germany in a race for armaments, if Germany really wanted one. Why should they submit any longer to be browbeaten, as if they were conquered vassals? *C'est Boulanger qu'il nous faut*. In the meantime the formidable Panslavist Katkoff was saying much the same thing

¹ Schnaebele, a French official at Pagny-sur-Moselle, the last French station on the frontier of the annexed territory of Lorraine, having stepped across the frontier to arrange some official matter with the functionary on the German side, was arrested. The facts were hotly debated and the French persuaded themselves that the incident was a German trap to force a crisis.

to his countrymen in the *Moscow Gazette*, not, we may be sure, without the tacit approval of the Tsar. "What a pitiful rôle," cried the journalist, "our diplomacy has been playing in subordinating Russia to the Ally of our enemy. Germany is closely bound to Austria, and Austria is crowding Russia out of the East and damaging her most vital interests. Austria could never have competed with Russia so boldly, and alas, so successfully, if she had not been supported by Germany." To break loose from this thralldom and strike out boldly for his own hand was the advice which the powerful Moscow editor tendered with increasing emphasis to the Tsar.

It is probable enough that Bismarck would have pursued his campaign with France to the point of compelling her either to sacrifice her War Minister, Boulanger, or to accept war, if he had succeeded in extracting a pledge of neutrality from Russia. He tried his utmost for this, using the friendly Schouvaloff to draft yet another Russo-Germany Treaty which would have given Russia a free hand in Constantinople and the Straits in return for the desired neutrality in "any conflict that might arise between Germany and France."¹ But the Tsar would not give this comprehensive pledge, and when the news that it had been proposed leaked out, it was hotly denounced in Russia as a disreputable bargain, the mere suggestion of which cast doubts upon the sincerity of all Germany's peaceful professions.

Happily for Bismarck, Alexander III had no idea where or how to follow the Moscow editor's advice and strike out boldly for his own hand. In spite of the forced abdication of his cousin, Bulgaria was a more perplexing problem than ever. The Russian General Kaulbars sent to Sofia to protect Russian interests during the interregnum had done nothing but make Russia detested and raise the suspicions of the British Government, which issued a circular dispatch calling upon the Powers to give their earliest attention to the affairs of Bulgaria. For the moment the tangle seemed inextricable and the part of the "honest broker" the most thankless of all. So far, Bismarck had displeased Austria, kindled suspicion in Russia, exasperated the French and made a hero of Boulanger, who was being acclaimed as the appointed man to relieve France from the unceasing mortifications which the German Chancellor was determined to inflict on her.

But given that the Tsar was a weak and indecisive man, the situation might have been designed to display Bismarck's talents,

¹ G.P., V, No. 1063, p. 214.

and he now brought all his virtuosity to bear on it. He persuaded the Austrians that it would be better for everybody and especially for the League of the Three Emperors to let Great Britain take the lead. The British Government, having lost all zeal for the cause of a divided Bulgaria, and finding that Germany would not commit herself to any definite action against Russia, declined the lead; and, left alone with the Bulgarian situation, the Tsar had no idea what to do next. He had been compelled to withdraw the detested Kaulbars, and had in mind the appointment of another general, one Ernroth, to act as Regent, but hesitated to press it in the teeth of Bulgarian and Austrian, and possibly British, opposition. In his distraction he even toyed with the idea of recalling the Battenberg, but the latter refused to move without a formal assurance of Russia's benevolence, and this was more than the Tsar could bring himself to give. While he hesitated, another German princeling, the ambitious and crafty young Ferdinand of Coburg, was busily at work with the backing of Austria (and, as he afterwards asserted, the secret encouragement of Bismarck) and, having got himself elected Prince by the Regents and the Sobranje (July, 1887), presented the accomplished fact to the Powers, most of whom thought it a good riddance of a bad business. In the meantime the French situation had been eased by the fall of the Goblet Cabinet, and the accession to power of M. Rouvier (May 1887), who refused to accept Boulanger as his Minister for War. That hero continued for two years longer to disturb French politics by his appeals to the mob, but in its effect on international affairs, there was all the difference between his personal agitations and his activities as a Minister. The peace was saved, but an aftermath of bitterness and suspicion remained both in France and Russia which was to bear fruit in further complications before the year was out.

III

All through these feverish events Bismarck had constantly to keep his eye on his time-table. His alliances were, as usual, running out, and in the year 1887 both the Triple Alliance and the League of the Three Emperors had to be renewed, if they were not to lapse. These occasions were always full of vexation for the German Chancellor, since Austrians, Italians and Russians insisted on regarding them as opportunities of getting something for themselves at each other's expense, or more awkward still, some pledge from Germany to support them against the others. This involved him

in a web of tiresome, difficult and deceitful diplomacy, the pattern of which became more intricate and bewildering after each of these transactions.

First at the beginning of 1887 came the question of the Triple Alliance, the renewal of which was an urgent necessity since events were boiling up between France and Germany, and if they boiled over in an interval between expiry and renewal, no one could say what anybody would do. But both Italy and Austria refused to be hustled; Austria would not guarantee Italy's Mediterranean interests or ambitions; Italy would not bind herself to engage in a war with Russia for Austria's Balkan interests or ambitions. It seemed deadlock, and Bismarck was in despair. Then suddenly he had one of those inspirations which never seemed to fail him at the supreme moment. The problem might be solved, if only England could be brought in. Let England undertake to act with Italy in the Mediterranean, and the Italians would be able to dispense with Austrian assistance in that sphere—in fact get something much more valuable. On the other hand, Italy would at once become a more eligible partner for Austria if Austria knew that England stood behind her; and then by means of Italy and her own well-known fears of Russian aggression, England might be drawn to the point at which her co-operation with Austria in the Balkans would be a certainty. Everything now depended on England.

Action followed quickly on the thought. Bismarck, acting as the next friend of Italy, opened up the subject with the British Ambassador, Malet, in Berlin on February 1, and when the Ambassador objected that England would be entering into a coalition against France, he at once began to threaten. "If England persists in withdrawing from all participation in European politics, we shall have no further reason to withhold our approval of French desires in Egypt, or those of Russia in the Near East, however far they go."¹ The Ambassador seems to have been impressed, and when the conversation was reported in London, Lord Salisbury agreed that Bismarck had propounded a "desirable grouping of the Powers, including England."² By a skilful prompting of both parties, in which Bismarck was careful not to show his hand more than was necessary, the British and Italian Governments were brought together, and on February 12 exchanged Notes promising one another "in general and to the extent that circumstances shall permit mutual support in the Mediterranean in every difference

¹ G.P., IV, No. 883, p. 300.

² *Ibid.*, No. 884, p. 303.

which may rise between one of them, and a third Power.”¹ When first approached Lord Salisbury had somewhat innocently stipulated that the negotiations should in no respect be directed against Austria, with whom England was united by a common policy. He seems to have had no suspicion that the proposed agreement was precisely what Austria wanted to make Italy an acceptable partner. Austrian consent, as need scarcely be said, was joyfully given and within a week of the exchange of Notes the second Treaty of the Triple Alliance was signed (February 20). That differed in certain respects from the first Treaty of 1882. Austria and Italy agreed that no action tending to modify the *status quo*—including presumably the status of Bosnia-Herzegovina—should be taken without previous agreement between them and compensation to either for advantages obtained by the other; Germany gave the pledge which Italy required of support in a war with France, if one should arise out of the latter’s aggression in Morocco and Tripoli, and engaged to favour Italian claims and acquisitions as a result. Characteristically Bismarck stipulated for the free hand in Egypt, which left himself at liberty to play the British fish with that bait, but in the meantime the British Government—probably unknown to itself—had done him the immense service of enabling him to renew the Triple Alliance. Lady Gwendolen Cecil in her “Life of Lord Salisbury” rightly enlarges upon the later transaction of this year—known to experts as “the Second Mediterranean Agreement”—but this first transaction which laid the foundations of the second, was in its effect upon European policy much the more important.

IV

Next came the League of the Three Emperors, which ran out in the middle of June. Looking back, the wonder is that this League had survived the first Triple Alliance, which was as plainly aimed at Russia in the East, as at France in the West. But this is to exaggerate the knowledge which the three partners had of each other’s proceedings. If in 1887 Bismarck could tell the British Ambassador with an air of imparting something new and confidential that there was “a sort of alliance” with Italy, we need not suppose the Tsar to have been better informed. Nevertheless to approach that potentate as his best friend after weeks of negotiations in which Austria had been induced to accept a renewal of the Triple Alliance (“with England back of Italy”) as a spear-head

¹ G.P., IV, No. 190, p. 31. Pribram, Vol. I., pp. 95-7.

against Russia, must have required some assurance; and the Tsar on his side had sufficient knowledge of what had been going on to decline at the outset any renewal of the combination between him and his Austrian brother. There remained, then, nothing but the possibility of a new agreement, excluding Austria, between Germany and Russia, a project warmly advocated by the never-failing Schouvaloff. But there was a point at which Bismarck stood, and when the Russian emissary produced a draft proposing a mutual pledge of benevolent neutrality in the event of war between either party and a third great Power, he not only declared it to be impossible, but actually read to the Russian the text of the secret Treaty with Austria of 1879 to show why he was obliged to limit the pledge, so far as Germany was concerned, to the case that Austria should be the aggressor. This disclosure, which violated the pledge of secrecy that he had given to Austria, is one of the strangest incidents in Bismarck's career, and the negotiations reeled under the shock of it. Till now Russia had no certain knowledge of the contents of the Treaty of 1879, for though the Tsar had observed his two partners whispering together in that year, he had thought it wiser to accept their explanation that they were merely adjusting their long-standing relations to the new circumstances of the German Empire.

Bismarck committed few indiscretions which were not calculated, and we must suppose him to have believed that Alexander III was more likely to be cowed into submission than disgusted and alienated by the proof of German duplicity thus deliberately put into his hands. If so, he was right. Alexander at this moment was in a deplorable state of mind. All his plans were going wrong in the field of foreign policy and his internal situation was extremely uneasy. For some weeks he had toyed with the idea of joining hands with France, but the French Government was still that same disreputable Republican anarchy with which he had vowed to have no dealings, and its War Minister, Boulanger, was not the kind of man to whom an illustrious potentate could pin his fortunes. But with a French alliance written off, and Austria, Italy and England in intimate, if unascertainable, relations, to quarrel with Germany meant a dreadful isolation which would embroil him with the powerful pro-Germans at his Court, and encourage domestic anarchists to do their worst.

He therefore decided to smother his feelings and get the best terms he could out of Germany. In the end he got a mutual neutrality agreement, but with the proviso that in respect of Austria and France,

e *casus fœderis* was limited to wars in which the contracting parties were on the defensive. Germany was to be benevolently neutral. Austria attacked Russia, and Russia if France attacked Germany, it both were to be free if either Germany or Russia were the attacking parties. The two Powers also pledged each other to take care in common "that Turkey maintained the closing of the Straits¹ and to permit no changes in the territorial *status quo* in the Balkans. Germany further promised to recognize Russia's "preponderant and decisive influence in Bulgaria" and not to consent to the restoration of Alexander of Battenberg. This was the famous Reinsurance Treaty of 1887. It was signed on June 18, the very day that the League of the Three Emperors expired.²

Bismarck to the end of his life protested that this treaty was incompatible with his engagements to Austria. It certainly was not even verbally in accord with the Triple Alliance Treaty or with the agreements between Austria and Italy attached to and sanctioned by the Triple Alliance—these stipulated among other things complete concord between the Allies—and it would need a very subtle casuistry to square it with what Austria supposed to be the effect of the Austro-German Treaty of 1879. So far as Germany was concerned, everything to which she was engaged now hung on the definition of attack and defence, and that, as Schouvaloff had observed in the course of the negotiations, would be in Bismarck's own keeping. The conscience of the two parties may be judged from the fact that they decided that the Treaty must be a profound secret. Austria has now repaid in her own coin,³ for she herself made a similar

¹ Both the "closing of the Straits" and the "opening of the Straits" appear at short intervals in these years as part of Russian policy, and their alternation is somewhat puzzling at first sight. But the "closing of the Straits" meant, as the Russians used these phrases, their closing to the warships of other Powers, and the "opening of the Straits" their opening to her own warships exclusively.

² For text of the Reinsurance Treaty see G.P., V, No. 1092, pp. 253-5.

³ The Austrian view of the Reinsurance Treaty may be judged from Count de Andrassy's observations on it:

"By this agreement Bismarck entered upon untried paths, ways which were in opposition to the obligations he had taken upon himself. The secrecy itself was flagrantly opposed to the Triple Alliance, which provided that it was the duty of the Allies to inform each other of the plans of foreign States with regard to the *status quo* in the Balkans. Germany's obligation of benevolent neutrality towards Russia, if we attacked the latter, was a violation of Article 1 of the Triple Alliance Treaty, in which we swore eternal amity, and declared we would never be privy to any agreement against any one of us. Such an obligation might also have brought him into conflict with another obligation originating in the Triple Alliance, according to which he was bound to display benevolent neutrality towards us in the event of our attacking any Power (including Russia) owing to the Power in question menacing our safety by its behaviour (*vide* Article 4). The friendly contractual relations between us were violated by the very fact that Bismarck engaged to promote Russian schemes in which, as he well knew, we

stipulation in 1879, when the League of the Three Emperors was in full vigour. Just as in 1879 the Emperor William had informed the Tsar that nothing was on foot but an innocent adjustment of formal relations, so now Bismarck contented himself with informing Kalnoky that "despite all his efforts and the communication of the Austro-German Treaty" (of which the Russians appear to have informed the Austrians) Russia had declined to renew the League of the Three Emperors.¹ He added, however, that he intended to "conduct the relations of the Three Empires just as if the Treaty had been renewed," but he did not explain that he had just bound himself to a secret treaty to do this and a little more.

saw great danger, and against which he himself had formed the Alliance of the Mediterranean Powers. The Treaty was unfair for Salisbury too. He—who had joined the Mediterranean Alliance because it had been proposed by Bismarck and because the latter had declared that he would not exercise in Constantinople any influence in a direction objectionable to the Alliance—might rightly have objected, if only he had been aware of it, to Bismarck having undertaken an obligation, at variance with this promise, to support the Russian plan. Salisbury—who signed the Treaty on Bismarck's promise to keep France from intervening, should England get entangled in a war with Russia in consequence of the Treaty—would lose confidence if informed that his friend had wittingly allowed himself to get into a situation in which he would be unable to fulfil his promise. For the English Premier might justly have asked, 'How could Bismarck make a *casus belli* out of France's going to the defence of Russia when the Chancellor himself had adopted and would be compelled to support the Russian attitude?' "

"Bismarck, Andrassy and Their Successors," English translation, p. 149.

¹ G.P., V, No. 1095, p. 259.

1887-1888

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEDITERRANEAN AGREEMENT

A Cancelled Visit—The Tsar and the Bulgarian Letters—The Tsar in Berlin—His Unpleasant Hosts—Bismarck's Letter to Lord Salisbury—Candour and Duplicity—Conclusion of the Mediterranean Agreement—England a Partner in the Triple Alliance—Simultaneous Dealings with Austria—Military Swashbuckling—Anger of the Tsar—A Demonstration at Dunkirk—The Policy of Mutual Deception—Bismarck's Frankness with Himself.

I

IN September, 1887, the diplomatic world was set in a flutter by the report that a meeting between the Tsar and the German Emperor arranged to take place at Stettin had suddenly been cancelled. The German papers were instructed to say that such a visit had never been contemplated, but no one believed them, and the truth seems to be that the Tsar Alexander had, at the last moment, refused to go to Stettin or to meet the German Emperor.

It turned out that since he had accepted the invitation he had received through some subterranean channel copies of letters alleged to have been written by Duke Ferdinand of Coburg to his relative, the Countess of Flanders, asserting that he (the Duke) had the secret support of Bismarck in persevering with his candidature for the Principedom of Bulgaria. Alexander was as unappeasable in his hostility to the Coburger as to the previous candidate for the Principedom of Bulgaria, and he had supposed himself to have obtained a promise from Bismarck to support him in his effort to get his own nominee, the Russian General Ernroth, appointed. The situation was embarrassing to Bismarck, since Austria was supporting Ferdinand and opposing the Russian nominee, but he had shown his usual adroitness over the business, and was endeavouring, as always, to keep his casting vote in hand. Without mentioning the name of any candidate, he had given the Tsar to understand in a general way that he would do what he wished, if he would say what that was; and the Tsar, finding it

much more difficult than he had supposed to force Ernroth on the Bulgarians, had, as Bismarck no doubt foresaw and desired, procrastinated and played for time. It is probable that while the Tsar was making up his mind, Bismarck coquetted with the Ferdinand faction, and that the letters, though in the main forgeries, as he vehemently asserted, were skilfully concocted on a basis of fact. The Tsar believed the letters¹ to be genuine and found confirmation of his suspicions in the course of events. The Austrians had used very firm language to the Turks about the Russian candidate, which they could hardly have done without Bismarck's connivance. The Italian and British consuls were both favouring Ferdinand at Sofia, probably with Bismarck's knowledge. The German press was starting an anti-Russian campaign—quite certainly on the prompting of the German Chancellor. Finally there were widespread (and well-founded) rumours that this indefatigable man was busily at work consolidating the Triple Alliance and trying to bring England in. The Tsar concluded that he was the victim of an all-round conspiracy of fraud and hostility and that the Reinsurance Treaty was already a scrap of paper. He fell into a temper, talked of a general war and forbade Bismarck's name to be mentioned in his presence. "I will not," he said, "be made to go to Canossa."

He had to go, nevertheless, for once more it was pointed out to him that if he definitely broke with Germany, his position would be desperate. So with whatever reluctance he accepted another invitation from the German Emperor, this time to spend a day and a night in Berlin in the month of November, and on the 18th of the month he had personal interviews with both the Kaiser and the Chancellor. The latter, having by this time completely cowed the Tsar and his advisers, thought it a suitable occasion to show his teeth, and between the acceptance of the invitation and the visit he delivered a swingeing blow at Russian credit by forbidding the Reichsbank to accept Russian paper as security for loans. This, the *Vienna Neue Freie Presse* suggested, was a happy way of "conducting Russia into the paths of the Chancellor's peaceful policy," and "bringing home to the powerful Tsar that the Russian monarchy is dependent economically upon Germany." More explicitly, as the same paper said, he "aimed to wound the

¹ For detailed examination of the evidence regarding these letters or "Bulgarian documents," as they came to be called, the reader may be referred to Professor J. V. Fuller's admirable monograph, "Bismarck's Diplomacy at its Zenith" ("Harvard Historical Studies," pp. 294 *et seq.*), to which I am indebted for some details in these chapters.

State economically in order to dominate it politically." When, after this Prussian welcome to the Imperial guest, the interviews took place, the Kaiser had been armed by Bismarck with a long list of querulous complaints and warnings, which he faithfully, if reluctantly, put to his nephew; and, when his own turn came, Bismarck carried the war vigorously into the enemy's camp. The Tsar produced the Bulgarian letters, and Bismarck, having denounced them as impudent forgeries, launched out into complaints against Russian policy, Russian newspapers, the massing of Russian troops on the frontier, and indulged in broad hints of what might happen, if Russia flirted with Germany's enemy, France. The official version of the affair was that Tsar and Chancellor had agreed that all misunderstandings between the two Empires were "traceable to the intemperate language of their respective presses which would thenceforth be restrained by official dissuasion and interference," and at the State Banquet which followed, the Tsar went out of his way to drink Prince Bismarck's health. But when he went home he was more than ever convinced that the Prince had played with him and duped him, and more than ever on the look-out for a means of escape from compulsory politeness to these unpleasant hosts.

Bismarck too appears to have concluded that Russia was a very uncertain friend, and he now sought to buttress the German position by bringing England definitely to the side of the Triple Alliance. The agreement of February was good, so far as it went, and it had served the useful purpose of helping him in his negotiations with Italy and Austria for the renewal of the Triple Alliance, but better still, if it could be embodied in some sort of written convention, assigning England definite duties in his scheme of power.

II

This brings us to the remarkable transaction between Bismarck and Lord Salisbury, which resulted in an Agreement so secret that it was not even to be found in the British archives and was unknown even to subsequent Secretaries of State.¹ Abandoning for once his chronic belief that British parliamentarianism made durable engagements with Great Britain an impossibility, Bismarck set himself seriously to the wooing of Lord Salisbury. But the latter required

¹ Lord Rosebery once told me that though he had been informed of its existence, when he became Foreign Secretary, he had declined to look at it or to treat it as within his knowledge.

to be reassured about certain rather disturbing manifestations of German policy, and on November 22 Bismarck addressed him personally in an elaborate letter (in French), which with Salisbury's reply is published in the German Documents.¹ This correspondence remains one of the central documents for the history of this period.

In it for the first time the future Emperor William II appears upon the scene. Taking as his text, or pretext, certain observations which Lord Salisbury appears to have made about the supposed sentiments of the young Prince William—his preference for Russia, and his anti-British tendencies—Bismarck declares it to be impossible that the Prince's personal leanings should influence the policy of Germany, when he became Emperor. That could not be, in the case either of the Crown Prince (who was supposed to have British leanings) or of his son Prince William (who was credited with the opposite tendencies). The former, if he came to the throne, would not be able to let his policy be inspired by British influences, nor the latter, in like case, by Russian influences. Both would have to follow exactly the same line of conduct, and would be influenced by nothing but the interests of Germany. What this meant was rigorously laid down on lines from which there could be no departure. No war could be entered upon except for clear and grave reasons, which would be endorsed by German public opinion. With an army like the German—a nation in arms representing all the living forces of the country—wars like those of past times, arising out of dynastic sympathies, antipathies and ambitions, were an impossibility. Such an army would spring to arms the moment that the national independence or the integrity of the Empire were threatened in a serious war, but it could not be set in motion by a mere expression of the monarch's will (*par la simple volonté royale*). It followed that the German military machine was first of all a defensive force, and in fact Germany had very little aptitude except for defensive war. For example, the Sultan of Turkey was the friend of Germany and enjoyed German sympathy, but from that to fighting for him was a long step which the German people would not be induced to take.

This on the face of it was not encouraging to Lord Salisbury, who was still at this time thinking of a Russian march to Constantinople, but, having thus guarded himself, Bismarck hastened to supply the corrective. While making these declarations, he must not be supposed to mean that nothing but an attack upon Germany's frontiers would justify a resort to arms. Germany was

¹ G.P., IV, Nos. 930 and 936.

bound to think of possible coalitions against her. If Austria were beaten, weakened or antagonized, Germany would be isolated against Russia or France, and faced with a possible coalition of those Powers. It was her interest to prevent even by force the possibility of such a state of things coming to pass. The existence of Austria as a strong and independent Great Power was a necessity to Germany which could not be affected by the personal sympathies of the sovereign. Austria, like Germany and England, was one of the "sated" nations which had loyally accepted the accomplished fact of the German Empire and had no interest in seeing it weakened, whereas both France and Russia appeared to menace Germany; France in pursuit of her traditional enmity; Russia under the influence of Slav leaders, and the necessity of finding occupation for a large and idle army and satisfying the ambition of its officers, as well as of diverting to foreign affairs the agitation of Liberals who wished to change her constitution. The danger of her peace being broken by France and Russia was therefore a permanent one for Germany, and she must endeavour to secure any available alliance in view of the possibilities. For, though the situation of Germany would not be desperate in a war on two fronts, such a war waged without allies would, even if it turned out as glorious a military exploit as the Seven Years' War, be a calamity for the German people, which, in default of allies, she would endeavour to avoid by making friends with Russia.

The gist of the matter was that so long as Germany was assured that she would not be left in the lurch by Powers having identical interests with herself, no German Emperor could follow any other line than that of defending the independence of friendly Powers satisfied with the existing order and ready to defend their own independence. She would keep out of a war with Russia, if her own honour and safety were not threatened, and the independence of Austria-Hungary, "whose existence as a great Power was a primary necessity to her," was not called in question. But she desired that friendly Powers having interests in the East which were not those of Germany, should be strong enough to deter Russia from making war, or to hold their own, if there should be a war. If there were no German interests at stake, Germany would remain neutral, but there was not the remotest possibility that any German Emperor would give Russia armed support in striking down or enfeebling one of the Powers on whose support Germany counted for preventing a Russian war or helping her to face one. "From this point of view her policy would always

compel the appearance of Germany in the line of battle, if the independence of Austria-Hungary were threatened by a Russian aggression, or if either Italy or England were in danger of being attacked by the Armies of France."

This letter must be interpreted by the context of events. Its date was November 22, 1887, and its object was to answer doubts and hesitations which had been expressed to the German Ambassador, Hatzfeldt, by Lord Salisbury. Among these doubts was whether in adhering to the proposed arrangement England might not be merely playing catpaw to Germany, and find herself involved in a dispute with Russia in which Austria single-handed would be unable to hold her own, and Germany, in reliance on England, refuse to help. On this point Bismarck's assurances seem far from conclusive, and the reader of the documents who has just been following his secret negotiation with Russia can well understand why. But the letter was not all. Bismarck had disclosed the Austro-German Treaty of 1879 to Salisbury as he had previously done to the Tsar. "Your Serene Highness," writes Salisbury in his reply, "has removed my apprehensions by the great frankness with which you have exposed the true situation to me. You have in the first place allowed me to see the Treaty between Austria and Germany which established that under no circumstances could the existence of Austria be imperilled by resistance to illegal Russian enterprises."¹ Impressed as he might be by this mark of confidence, Lord Salisbury would scarcely have dwelt on the "great frankness" of his correspondent, if he had been acquainted with all the facts.

Later knowledge reads irony into this acknowledgment. For while he produced the 1879 Treaty between Germany and Austria, Bismarck withheld the Reinsurance Treaty which he had just concluded with Russia, and so kept Lord Salisbury in ignorance of the fact that a few weeks before his approach to Downing Street he had pledged himself to Russia to give the minimum of force and meaning to his engagements to Austria. A comparison of the neutrality clause of the Reinsurance Treaty with the stipulations of the 1879 Treaty leaves it at least a matter of opinion what the

¹ For text of this correspondence see G.P., IV, Nos. 930 and 936, pp. 376, 386, and 394.

It is interesting to compare this correspondence with the argument with which two years earlier Bismarck had met Churchill's proposal of an alliance (see *supra*, p. 73). On that occasion he had objected that an alliance with Britain would offend Austria whom British statesmen could not or would not understand and had frivolously estranged, now he had to produce the 1879 secret Treaty in order to convince a British Prime Minister that he would come to Austria's support if she were ever attacked by Russia.

attitude of Germany would have been if Austria had proposed to resist what she deemed to be an "illegal Russian enterprise," and raises an extreme doubt as to how Bismarck would have interpreted that phrase. On the other hand there is a certain bluntness in his avowal that he will fight only in German interests—these being interpreted to cover the existence of Austria-Hungary as a great Power—and that he looks to the nations which consider themselves to be interested in the Balkans to take their own chestnuts out of the fire in any war with Russia. But even here there was an unspoken thought, which naturally could not be communicated to Lord Salisbury, but which two years earlier on the occasion of the Penjdeh incident he had confided to his own Emperor:

Germany has no interest in preventing Russia, if she looks for the occupation which is necessary for her army in Asia rather than in Europe. If the Russian army is unoccupied, it becomes a danger to the internal security of the Empire and the dynasty, and if occupation fails in Asia it must necessarily be sought on the west front. . . . It is therefore an aim of German policy to bring about hostile rather than too intimate relations between Russia and England. We have heretofore conscientiously resisted this and done nothing to promote warlike ideas, but if we practise this forbearance from general Christian motives, we are still under an obligation to the German people to avoid everything which could lead to our relieving England of Russian hostility, and bringing that hostility on ourselves.¹

It is scarcely to be supposed that, if he had had the advantage of reading this passage, Lord Salisbury would have wound up his correspondence with the man who wrote it by remarking that the "grouping of the States which has been the work of the last year will be an effective barrier against any possible aggression of Russia in Europe, and the construction of it will not be among the least of the services which your Serene Highness has rendered to the cause of European peace." It was no doubt at least one of the merits of the Austro-British-Italian convention, in Bismarck's eyes, that it would help to keep England and Russia in a state of mutual hostility which would act as a lightning conductor to Germany.²

Lord Salisbury, however, was persuaded, and on December 12, in an exchange of Notes between the British and Austrian Govern-

¹ G.P., IV, No. 777, pp. 124-6.

² Count Julius Andrassy in a passage already quoted says that Lord Salisbury signed the Agreement "on Bismarck's promise to keep France from intervening, should England get entangled in a war with Russia" in consequence of having signed it. This does not appear in the records and Lord Salisbury's biographer lays stress on the fact that in his reply to Bismarck he did not "even distantly allude" to the passage in which Bismarck had spoken of the possibility of England's being attacked by France.

ments, confirmed by Italy, the joint policy adumbrated in the Notes of February was definitely laid down. The Three Powers jointly undertook to maintain the *status quo* in the Orient, based on the Treaties, "to the exclusion of all policy of compensation"; "to maintain the local autonomies established by these same Treaties"; and to uphold "the independence of Turkey, as guardian of important European interests (independence of the Caliphate, the freedom of the Straits, etc.), of all foreign preponderating influence." More specifically it was agreed that Turkey should not cede or delegate her suzerain rights over Bulgaria to any other Power, nor intervene in order to establish a foreign administration there, nor submit to be coerced for that purpose; and similarly that she should not cede any portion of her sovereign rights as guardian of the Straits nor delegate her authority to any other Power in Asia Minor. The Three Powers, it was stated, desired to be associated with Turkey in defence of these principles, but if in their opinion the action of Turkey assumed the character of complicity with or connivance at an illegal enterprise, they would hold themselves justified in proceeding either jointly or separately to the provisional occupation of Turkish territory.¹ Manifestly the agreement was aimed at Russia—both her supposed designs in Bulgaria and her known ambitions in regard to the Straits—and the British Government and its two partners were thus firmly seated on what Lord Salisbury a few years later was to describe as "the wrong horse." Nothing at this time could have suited Bismarck better. It is perhaps not fanciful to suppose that he found a special and secret satisfaction in having won merit from both Russia and England by pledging Germany to uphold the "freedom of the Straits"—a phrase which, as he well knew, they interpreted in opposite senses.

But Germany, it must be observed, was no party to this Agreement. Bismarck had planned it, organized it, negotiated it, but he never had the least intention of putting his own signature to it. His approach to Great Britain had got him out of one of the worst of his difficulties, enabled him to appease Austria, to renew the Triple Alliance, to get even with the Tsar after the unpleasant affair of the forged letters, and to banish the nightmare of a British *rapprochement* with either France or Russia. But at the end of it all he was uncommitted and uncompromised, and if the Tsar was inquisitive, he could be referred to London, Vienna or Rome and be told that the transaction was no concern of Germany's.

¹ For the full text of the Notes see Pribram, Vol. I., pp. 124-30.

There were inquiries and pretty soon. Mr. Labouchere asked in the British House of Commons on February 10, 1888, whether an engagement had been entered into with Italy or any other Foreign Power during the last year, and was told by the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs that there was "no engagement pledging the country to material action which was not known to the House."

The Tsar had his own sources of information and he certainly was not deceived. He was now coming to the end of his adventure in the Balkans, and after weeks of agitation in which sabres were rattled both in Vienna and St. Petersburg, he authorized his Ambassador to tell the Austrians that he had no intention of embarking upon a new war for any interest he might have in Bulgaria. The dispatches of these weeks throw an interesting side-light on Bismarck's activities at the time when he was negotiating the London agreement. We see him alternately egging Austria on to military preparations and shirking the inquiries which came to him from Vienna as to the part which Germany would take in the event of war breaking out. At one moment he all but gets to the point of advising Austria to attack, provided she is sure of the co-operation of England and Italy; at another he defines his own part as that of dealing with France. "If the Russian war is brought about by an Austrian attack on Russia, our course in my opinion would not be to take part in it,¹ but to attack France immediately, conditioning our attitude towards the Russian war on our success in the French." The newspapers, the military attachés and the General Staffs were all engaged in this dangerous clatter, which had the effect, desired by Bismarck, of preparing the ground for a further increase of armaments in both Austria and Germany, but also, and coincidentally another effect which he did not at all desire. That was the embitterment and estrangement of Russia, which naturally concluded the Reinsurance Treaty to be worthless. Once more, as in 1878, the Tsar perceived that in spite of all his blandishments, Bismarck at every critical moment gave his vote to Austria. Alexander submitted, but there was bitterness in his heart.

On October 4 of this year the young Russian Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovitch, arriving at the French port of Dunkirk in the course of a cruise in foreign waters, lost his head under the

¹ He could not have done so without breaking the Reinsurance Treaty. For details of this phase see G.P., VI, Chap. XXXVII.

influence of champagne and let a most alarming cat out of the Russian bag :

France [he said in a speech to his French hosts] is working at preparation for the *revanche*, and she does well in so doing. But she shows good sense in not letting herself be roused by the continual provocations of her neighbours. She should continue her preparations calmly. . . . Russia also is not idle. Our entire House, be it known, loves France. All the endeavours of the Tsar are directed towards diminishing the German influence which at one time was great among our officials. Soon our Government will consist only of men who love France. Until then France should refrain from becoming aroused ; for at the present moment it would be difficult to obtain our effective Alliance in the event of war. But in a short time all obstacles will disappear, and in case of war, I would be the first to enter the ranks of the French army, which I heartily admire. Be sure that my example will be followed by many Russians. (*Figaro*, October 7.)

The young man was hastily recalled, and severely reprimanded for having spoken without the leave of his Sovereign, but his words reported in the French press resounded through Europe, and no one doubted that they reflected the prevailing mood in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg.

IV

There is little temptation to spend sympathy on any of the parties to these transactions. Bismarck had duped each of his Allies in turn, but Austria had been more than willing that Russia should be deceived, and Russia was a party to the hoodwinking of Austria. Both no doubt had a shrewd measure of the man they were dealing with, but neither could afford to quarrel with him, and, so far as they were aware of the facts, each could flatter himself that he had got the best of it in the general game of over-reaching. Bismarck encouraged that belief alternately in Vienna and St. Petersburg, at one moment reminding the Austrians of the formidable weapon which the Triple Alliance with England's co-operation furnished them against Russia, and at another persuading the Russians that he had made great sacrifices and incurred heavy obligations for their interests. To himself and to his own friends he made no secret of the fact that through it all he was pursuing but one thing, the security of Germany through the isolation of France. The methods might vary, but never for a moment was the aim lost sight of, and all else was plastic material to be subdued to the dominant design. The simple solution of the problem as seen from Berlin was that the three Emperors

should stand together and hold the German fort, but if the other two insisted on falling out about matters which were no concern of Germany, the "honest broker" must either appease their quarrels or, failing that, persuade both of them that he was their friend. At the same time, and all the more as the quarrels of these two became dangerous, he must see to it that the other nations were kept occupied and diverted; France egged on to quarrel with Britain and Anglo-Russian dissensions fomented by judicious incitements. Germany would thus everywhere be the *tertius gaudens*, and the hereditary enemy kept within a ringed fence. The documents show the entire lack of scruple, the enormous industry, the cool, calculating telescopic vision, with which all these objects were pursued at the same time, and made subordinate to the supreme aim of German security. The detail is bewildering, and the web of intrigue often past unravelling; but everything was in Bismarck's head, and he was never so concentrated on one thing as to intermit an unceasing vigil over the whole scene.

Then, as a practitioner of real politics, he had the supreme merit of being completely candid with himself. The moralist can make no objection which he does not admit. Like Napoleon he deems it an absurdity to suppose that the morality of statecraft can be that of the domestic hearth. German interests are enough for him, and if these required that other nations should be poisoned against each other or incited to quarrel, he will instil the poison and foment the quarrels. "Christian scruples" may enter in to bar an actual incitement to war, but to appease a quarrel, when it is not in Germany's interest to do so, to refrain from encouraging antagonisms which might otherwise be directed at her would, he boldly claims, be a breach of the obligation which a German statesman owes to the German people. In all these respects we are relieved from the necessity of inferring or deducing Bismarck's principles of conduct, for they are frankly avowed and clearly stated in his own dispatches and Reminiscences, to say nothing of the "Secret Pages" of his creature, Busch.

1879-1888

CHAPTER IX

FRENCH RESENTMENT AND RUSSIAN DISCONTENT

Bismarck and France—Her Presumed Hostility—Germany and Alsace-Lorraine—Colonial Divisions—The Tunisian Pear—French Hesitations—Occupation of Tunis—Italian Mortification—The Desired Reaction—Dream of a Franco-German *Entente*—Failure of German Methods—Count Herbert's Brow-beating—His Interview with the French Ambassador—The Bismarckian Big Stick—Its Results on the French.

I

THROUGH all the shifts and turns of these years the one factor which remained constant in Bismarck's thoughts, and is the ultimate clue through the labyrinth of his diplomacy, was the presumed unappeasable hostility of France and the necessity, therefore, of keeping her powerless and isolated. The facts have been brought out in the foregoing narrative, but the theme is so central and the records throw so much light on its development that a separate examination of it may fitly bring this section to a close.

Out of a mass of material, I have chosen certain documents which illustrate the different phases of Bismarck's attitude towards his former enemy. The first deals with the question of Alsace-Lorraine and belongs to the year 1875. When it was reported to him at the end of that troubled year that M. Thiers had in conversation with a German journalist broached the idea of a retrocession of the two provinces in return for some compensation, he thought it worth while to record his views in a dispatch to the German Ambassador in Paris (Prince von Hohenlohe):

Desirable as the end (a "durable understanding between France and Germany") may be, the means proposed are totally impossible.

The French statesman is labouring under a serious misunderstanding if he thinks that the retention of the Provinces is for Germany a question of *amour propre*.

The same necessity and imperative duty which in spite of all the well-foreseen difficulties of her new possession, compelled Germany to annex Alsace-Lorraine, require that it shall remain permanently in German possession. The possession of it is for Germany the only sure means of defence against a neighbouring nation of such restless disposition and commanding such formidable

armaments as France. Every enlightened German perceives and knows that a situation in which the French army stands in Weissenburg with its point threatening Stuttgart, is at all times intolerable to Germany, and the return of affairs to the old lamentable condition remains to-day and for the future an impossibility for any rational government.

The possession of Strasburg and Metz is for Germany a national necessity, not a question of *amour propre*.

However distasteful it may be to the French, for them to be convinced of this is still the essential condition of the establishment of a friendly agreement between the two nations.¹

The same theme is repeated with many variations in the documents and dispatches of these years. The French, he says again and again, are a restless, glory-loving, aggressive people, who have attacked their German neighbour generation after generation throughout their history, and it would be folly for that neighbour to rely on anything for her security except on her own armaments and the possession of territory which made it impossible or very difficult for her enemy to renew the attack. Fifty years later the successors of Bismarck were to hear exactly the same argument in the mouths of their French opponents, and this time stretched from the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine to a passionate claim to the retention of the Rhineland.

II

My second extract illustrates the next phase, when Bismarck was encouraging the French to find a vent for their ambitions in colonial enterprise. It is generally supposed that Jules Ferry, who was the only French statesman of the first rank to dream of reconciliation with Germany on the basis of the *status quo*, was the author of French colonial expansion, but the documents show Bismarck suggesting and instigating it long before Ferry came on the scene. A dispatch from the Comte de St. Vallier (French Ambassador in Berlin) dated January 5, 1879, gives a lively account of his talk at Friedrichsruh during a visit which the Count had just paid to him, and shows him actively inciting the French to go in and take Tunis:

Now indeed I believe [said Bismarck] that the Tunisian pear is ripe and that the time has come for you to pluck it. The effrontery of the Bey has been like the August sun for this African fruit, which might very well have been spoilt or stolen by someone else if you had let it remain too long on the bough. I don't know whether it tempts you or what you intend to do, but I take the

¹ G.P., I, No. 195, p. 304.

opportunity of repeating what I said in July to M. Waddington, namely, my desire to give you proofs of my good will on questions which concern you and in which there are no German interests in opposition to yours. That is no more than fair, for I appreciate the efforts which you and he have made to assuage passion and establish security and confidence between our two countries. I value peace too much not to realize the importance of this service, and I wish to acknowledge it. Therefore I congratulate myself that the affair of Tunis gives me the opportunity of declaring that I regard M. Waddington in the Government and you here as pledges for peace and understanding, that I know your internal difficulties, and will exert myself, so far as I can, to help you to give your public opinion the satisfaction necessary to a great people which has suffered and wishes to be respected in foreign countries. My own political interests prescribe this course of conduct, for like the Kaiser who desires to die famous and at peace, I too wish never again in my life to have the responsibility of another war. As I have already told you, I want no more annexation; in my opinion we have already had too many. From henceforth I abjure adventures and take my stand on quiet and security to be guaranteed by friendly relations with our neighbours, and above all with you.

It has often been said that I favour a Republic in France, because I see in it a source of weakness for your country; Ambassador Arnim has endeavoured to give currency to this libel. The truth is that a wise and moderate Republic, such as you have at present, furnishes in my eyes a guarantee for peace, since it is under no necessity to "regild itself in the crucible of war," which is the necessary aim of a monarchy without roots like your last. For that reason I desire the stability of the Republic in France, and for that reason I am willing to support you in any of your undertakings which do not run counter to my own interests. I repeat what I have said before, that I consider satisfaction to be due to the *amour propre* of the French people, if it now gives proofs of its great sagacity, and I honestly desire to see it obtain such as it may seek in the basin of the Mediterranean, its natural sphere of expansion. The more success it obtains on this side, the less occasion it will find to throw into the scales against us complaints and grievances the justice of which I do not dispute, but which it is not in our power to redress. I have concerned myself with the question how to heal the wound to your *amour propre* felt in your country after the affair of Cyprus, and have spoken to M. Waddington about Tunis. To-day I return to the subject and find it still more pressing, since it is aggravated by the impudence of a savage little potentate to a great civilized nation.¹

The reference to Von Arnim required some assurance in view of the correspondence between him and Bismarck already quoted,² but this great diplomatist was seldom troubled by scruples about truth. He goes on to say that without waiting for the French Government to approach him, he had spoken in confidence to Vienna and London, and remonstrated with the Governments in both places for having endorsed action by their agents (Consul Wood in the case of Great Britain) which was hostile to the French. He adds that he had approached Lord Beaconsfield

¹ "Documents Diplomatiques Français," I., Series II., pp. 411-16.

² *Supra*, pp. 24-25.

direct, since from the days of the Berlin Congress, he had mistrusted that "obstinate, clumsy lay clergyman called Salisbury, whereas he had been greatly impressed by the far-sightedness of Beaconsfield."¹

Here Bismarck somewhat overreached himself, being apparently unaware that the "pig-headed" Salisbury had at the Congress in Berlin agreed to allow France a free hand in Tunisia in return for French acquiescence in the occupation in Cyprus. His sympathy with the French for their sufferings under that stroke was therefore as gratuitous as his attempt to curry favour by bringing his influence to bear upon Lord Beaconsfield.

The offending consul, the celebrated Sir Richard Wood, alluded to by Bismarck, retired in 1879, but in spite of Bismarck's prompting and the effrontery of the Bey, the French did not move till 1881, when they were spurred to action by the sale of the British railway from Tunis to Goletta to the Italians. Then, under the pretext of chastising certain turbulent tribes, they marched in, and, having occupied the country, compelled the Bey to accept a French Protectorate.

Bismarck himself would have been the last to pretend that disinterested sympathy with France was his only motive in this business. He knew that a French occupation of Tunis would be deeply resented by Italy and undoubtedly counted on this result to help him in bringing Italy into the Triple Alliance. The Italians have a story that at the Congress of Berlin Count Bülow, then supposed to be Bismarck's *alter ego*, suggested to the Italian Plenipotentiary that Italy should take possession of Tunis, with the almost certain consequence that a war between Italy and France would have followed,² and that even later and at the very time when Bismarck was making this suggestion to France, Austria was still making it to Italy. How far Bismarck himself was involved in this double game is uncertain, but no student of his methods can doubt that the idea of setting France against Italy was in his mind, and that, when he gave his vote to France, he expected and intended the inevitable consequence, viz., that a disappointed and mortified Italy would be thrown back into the arms of Germany. The whole incident shows Bismarck at his subtlest in what may be called the middle phase of his dealings with France.

¹ *Je me défie depuis le Congrès de ce clergyman laïque obstiné et maladroit qu'on nomme Salisbury tandis que j'ai conçu une grande idée de la largeur de vues de Lord Beaconsfield.*

² Lecture by Professor Salvemini, King's College, October 9, 1923. *Times* report.

III

With the fall of Ferry in 1885 and the revulsion in France against the idea of reconciliation on a colonial basis, Bismarck entered upon his last phase. "Fifteen years of friendly advances on every ground with the solitary exception of Alsace-Lorraine have wrought neither change nor appeasement," he wrote to Hohenlohe on September 21, 1885. How far his dealings with France in the previous years deserved the description of "friendly advances" must be judged from what has gone before, ~~but~~ it certainly does not apply to anything that followed in his remaining years of power. Neither Government was ready for war, the French because it was extremely uncertain of the results, the German because its hands were too full, but the relations between them were those of rising exasperation, which came to a climax in the refusal of the German Government to take part in the French Exhibition of 1889.

This anticipates events, but the dispatch in which Count Herbert Bismarck, then Foreign Secretary, reported to his father how he communicated this decision to the French Ambassador, Herbertte, may be cited here as a sample of German manners which were chronic during this period. The Count began by saying that Germany would not in any case have taken part in what was intended to be the centenary celebration of the events of 1789, but even if another year had been chosen, the unheard-of incidents which had just taken place in Belfort¹ would compel them to abstain from any sort of official contribution to an exhibition in a French town. The Ambassador protested that his Government greatly regretted that incident, but that too much importance should not be attached to incidents in frontier towns. The Count answered that he quite understood that members of the Government could not be held completely responsible for excesses of this kind, since the fault lay in the French national character which could not be improved by complaints or claims for damages. He was aware that the French Government would do as much as it dared do in view of its public opinion, and had therefore refrained from saying anything about it. He then, according to his own account, addressed the Ambassador in these terms:

You are not in a position to give us any guarantee whatever that harmless Germans in France will not be molested in the same brutal way at the next opportunity. Your Government is too weak for that. Thanks to the systematic

¹ Certain anti-German demonstrations.

whipping up of national passion, France is to-day the most inhospitable of all civilized countries, so far at all events as Germans are concerned. This fact is sufficiently well known, and I am only surprised that countrymen of mine can be found to visit France in spite of it. I hope that the Belfort incident will be a lesson to them and that for the future they will choose other destinations than hostile and ill-disposed France. Those who will not do that take their own hides to market, and I have little pity for people who insist on running into danger. You will however understand, that in such circumstances an official appearance of Germany at the Paris Exhibition must be regarded as out of the question. . . .

I mention these things not to formulate a complaint or to make a reproach; I only register a regrettable phenomenon. Your Government is not in a position to undertake that German exhibitors or their property in Paris shall be protected against damage. It needs only a brainless agitator to step into the Exhibition with ten thousand inhabitants of Belleville on a fine Sunday afternoon, and it will be quite easy for him to start insults to our flag and destruction of any German exhibits there might be. Your Government would then be in the difficult position of having either to offer apologies and make good the damage and thereby suffer the most serious discredit in French public opinion, or through its weakness to knock under to the *vox populi* and endorse what has happened. Since we love peace and do not wish to see our present relations troubled, we do not desire to expose your Government to such an eventuality. . . .

Count Herbert proceeds:

The Ambassador showed signs of a lively impatience and frequently interrupted me with exclamations and phrases which culminated in his saying, "You say that you are pacific, but we are arch-pacifists, and it was in that sense that I thought of Germany's taking part in the Exposition des Beaux Arts. I regret your refusal which I shall report to my Government, but I hope that you will excuse me from explaining to them the reasons that you have just given me. I think that you have put a little temper into it, for if France were truly so inhospitable as you think, there would not be more than 30,000 Germans earning their living in Paris."

I remarked that that was no proof. Before the war there were more than 300,000 Germans living in France, now there were only 100,000, and these figures spoke for themselves. I doubted whether the Germans in Paris felt safe. In consequence of the large increase of German population it was the fate of a certain percentage to seek their living in distant places even though that was accompanied with danger. With this object many went to sea, or to unhealthy tropical climates, although they knew that their lives would be exposed to many dangers. The figures I had quoted showed with absolute clearness that those Germans who did not earn their living on German soil preferred to expose themselves to the danger threatening from the climates and the elements than those that threatened them in France since otherwise there would have been a corresponding increase, and not a reduction of more than two-thirds, in the number of our subjects living in France. A German could move about with greater security in Africa and the South Sea Islands to-day than in France which gave itself such airs about its high civilization, whereas Frenchmen staying in Germany never suffered any molestation.

M. Herbette was painfully affected by my observations, and could think of nothing to reply except that the fact that we were the conquerors and the French the conquered must be taken into account. . . .

The French Ambassador asked me whether at least private persons who were inclined to be represented at the Exhibition might not wish to be helped by advice and information. I replied that I could not lend my hand to that since, according to my conviction, which I had already explained, German exhibitors in Paris incur danger both for their persons and their property. If there are actually Germans who wish to send objects to Paris and who ask my advice, I should be obliged to tell them that I should advise them rather to go to the South of Africa than to risk their skins and their goods in Paris.

As the Ambassador almost jumped from his seat and made an inarticulate noise of protest, I said shrugging my shoulders, "I am very sorry that the facts compel me to speak in this way, but whose fault is it?"¹

In this way did the German Government make to the French Ambassador the rather delicate communication that they were unable to accept the polite invitation of the French Government to take part in the Paris Exhibition. To judge from his marginal comments, Bismarck senior highly approved.

The manners of Bismarck and his son counted for much in the ultimate breakdown of his policy. Nations which might have submitted to his will, if he had spared their feelings, felt wounded in their self-respect when he used his advantage to browbeat and bully, or practised a calculated incivility in place of the politeness which had been a tradition of even the deadliest diplomacy. The Tsar Alexander might swallow affronts in the position in which he found himself in the years 1887 and 1888, and the French, feeling themselves alone and helpless, might decide to bide their time; but the stored up resentments of both were accumulating, and it was being said equally in Paris and St. Petersburg that an unchecked Germany with Bismarck in control would make life intolerable for other nations. Bismarck, according to many witnesses, was an agreeable and friendly man in private life, but in public affairs he had an ineradicable belief in bludgeoning his opponents, and it was so far justified that at the height of his power he could have boasted with truth that there was no one in Europe who dared or thought it expedient to quarrel with him. But it was just at this time that his power was being silently undermined. The French concluded

¹ May 1, 1888. G.P., VI, No. 1282. Count Herbert always took special pleasure in recording the effect of his methods and manners upon those with whom he was conversing. See No. 1271. "At these words M. Herbette jumped vehemently out of his seat and protested in a loud voice against such enormities. He forgot to sit down again and kept walking up and down during the remaining five or six minutes that he was in my room." See also *supra*, p. 66, his interview with Lord Granville in 1885.

that wrangling with Germany was useless, so long as they played a lone hand; the Russians were more and more coming to the conclusion that partnership with Germany meant submission to a German-Austrian hegemony. For the time being each country thought its own thoughts, but inevitably a time was coming when they would think in common. Napoleon had dreamt of a European peace maintained by France, and Bismarck of a European peace maintained by Germany. Neither had thought of a European peace maintained by Europe.



BOOK II
THE GREAT DIVIDE

THE APPEAL TO THE REICHSTAG

The Unrest in Europe—A Gloomy Picture—The Tottering Structure—An Audacious Stroke—Alarms of War—The New German Army Bill—Bismarck's Great Speech—His Treatment of Russia—France and Russia look to Each Other.

I

IN spite of the complete submission of Russia and the unqualified success of German diplomacy in the year 1887, the unrest in Europe continued. No gloomier picture could have been painted than that which the *Neue Freie Presse* presented to its readers on New Year's Day, 1888.

History designates years which may be called prophetic, and among these years will be reckoned the one at whose end we now stand. The peace of the world has been preserved it is true; and life in the several countries is still going on as usual; but no one can be sure any longer that the peaceful day will be followed by an equally peaceful to-morrow. The pulse of the century grows feverish. The political and economic atmosphere has become dull and oppressive. What we are now experiencing is comparable to the cracking of the walls in an unsound house which usually precedes a catastrophe.

The present situation in Europe is based almost entirely upon the historical phenomenon brought about by the war of 1870—upon the establishment of the German Empire. . . . But Germany could not have attained to such greatness without obliging other once proud Powers to descend in the scale; and these must resent the way in which their own politics are affected by the preponderance of the German Empire. France, after contributing two provinces to Germany's establishment must naturally feel the difference between her past and present position all the more painfully for her isolation by German diplomacy. It is almost inevitable that her whole policy should be dominated by the idea of regaining what has been lost. Russia saw her advance in the East brought to a halt by this same German power; for she encountered Germany's ally, Austria, and instead of laying down a victor's law to Turkey, had to submit to the arbitration of Europe at Berlin, which set up a new legal order, by no means consistent with Russia's plans. . . .

It is noteworthy that the year began with the most serious apprehensions of imminent war, and that . . . it closes with similar anxieties. . . . The only distinction is that, while at the beginning of the year the French peril stood

in the foreground, at its close the threat seems to come from Russia. But even this distinction is only apparent; for a glance at the European situation will show that both dangers spring from a common source. What is driving us towards a catastrophe is the endeavour to overthrow the European legal system which Germany has created, protected and firmly imposed on the recalcitrant.¹

There may be some dispute about the propriety of applying the term "legal system" to what the newspaper itself described as an "unsound house" with "cracking walls," but at the beginning of 1888 there was undoubtedly widespread alarm lest this tottering structure should tumble about the ears of its occupants.

Security after seventeen years was as far off as ever. Though he had won every point in his game and left his opponents breathless and divided, the German Chancellor was now about to come to the Reichstag² with a demand for an increase in the German army of more than 700,000 men. In December he had told the Austrians that if they were still anxious with Rumania, Bulgaria, Italy, the Porte, England and Serbia on their side, they must have a bad conscience."³ But whether for the same reason or not he too was in great anxiety, and all through these weeks we may see him preparing the ground for the great new demands he was about to make on the German taxpayer. The air was thick with rumour. Russia was said to be massing troops on the Austrian frontier, and Austria standing in fear of a sudden attack which she was ill-prepared to meet. Germany, in spite of her ardent desire to see the chestnuts taken out of the fire by someone else—by Rumania, Bulgaria, Italy, the Porte, England, Serbia—might in spite of everything be compelled to fight for the existence of her partner. An eminent General startled the Reichstag at the beginning of December, 1887, by saying that "quite possibly a war will be upon us before the next spring manœuvres," and a fortnight later the German Emperor called a military conference to consider the Russian situation. All this produced an excited atmosphere which went a little beyond what was necessary for Bismarck's purpose, and he let it be known that he personally did not expect war within three years, and hoped it would not take place before 1892—the date by which the Powers would have "attained their maximum fighting strength."⁴ Then (February 3) he played a characteristic-

¹ Quoted by Fuller, "Bismarck's Diplomacy at its Zenith," pp. 303-4.

² The previous Reichstag which in January, 1887, had objected to the removal of the military Septennate had been summarily dissolved, and in the new one the Government had a large and assured majority.

³ G.P., VI, No. 1163, p. 24.

⁴ Interview in the *New York Herald* cited by Fuller, p. 306.

ally Bismarckian stroke. He caused to be published simultaneously in Berlin, Vienna and Buda-Pesth, the text of the Austro-German Secret Treaty of 1879. That was rather less daring than was supposed at the time, for, as already recorded, the full text had been communicated to the Tsar in the previous May, and to Lord Salisbury during the London negotiations, but its publication looked to the world like a deliberate flouting of Russia, and even now we may wonder that Alexander III did not retaliate by producing the Reinsurance Treaty. Bismarck, however, claimed to be "absolutely certain" that the Tsar did not want war, and he appears to have banked on this against the risk of reprisals from that quarter.

But what, it may be asked, was the object of this publication? It seems to have had a double motive: (1) to warn the Panslavist agitators of what the Tsar already knew—that if Russia attacked Austria she would have to reckon with Germany, and (2) to persuade Europe that German policy was purely defensive and pacific. The Chancellor was never so vocal in saying that he detested war as when he was going to propose a large increase of German forces, and on this occasion the increase was to be so large that something more than verbal protests was necessary. The publication had a fine air of throwing all the cards on the table and displaying Germany as a peace-loving Power compelled to undertake heavy liabilities for the defence of the peace against a warlike neighbour. The impression, it is true, was a little marred among the uninformed by the seeming duplicity of the transaction which was thus unblushingly revealed, and the pharisaic English commented, as usual, upon this aspect of the transaction. But Bismarck was thinking not of them but of his own Germans, who accepted such things as in the ordinary course of diplomacy, and the impression made on them appears to have been what he expected and desired.

II

The scene being thus set, he proceeded on February 6 to make his great speech on the Army Bill in the Reichstag, the last of the great speeches covering the whole field of policy that he made in that Assembly. He was ill and spoke under great physical strain, remaining seated and being periodically fortified by stimulants. Argumentatively his path was a difficult one. He could not make light of the situation without cutting away the ground for the demand he

was going to make; and he could not paint it too black without reflecting on the policy which for seventeen years he had been pursuing in the name of German security. Walking on this razor edge he presented himself as the good man struggling with adversity in a world of evil. Germany, upright and loyal, had endeavoured to be strictly neutral as between Austria and Russia, and if she had erred at all, it had been in trying to appease Russia, as at the Conference of 1878, where he had sometimes played the part of a "fourth Russian plenipotentiary." Because he could not go the whole length of compelling Austria to accept the Russian view on certain points, he had been rewarded with a campaign of vilification and threats which compelled him to enter into the defensive alliance with Austria. Nevertheless he still had faith in the Tsar's assurances that he was anxious to keep the peace and was willing to recognize a preponderating Russian influence in Bulgaria as in accordance with the intentions of the Berlin Congress. Therefore he would support "diplomatically any diplomatic step" that Russia might devise to regain her influence in that province, provided that she took the initiative. He was encouraged to believe that even if Germany should be involved in war with France, a war with Russia would not necessarily follow, but on the other hand he was obliged to recognize that if there were a war between Germany and Russia, a war with France would be inevitable, since no French Government would be strong enough to prevent it, even if it desired to do so. So while he anticipated no immediate disturbance of the peace, the future must be pronounced uncertain and dangerous. The war on two fronts had to be contemplated as possible, though not probable, and the proposed increase in the army would enable Germany to contemplate it with courage and composure. "I hope our fellow-citizens will take comfort in the thought that if we should be attacked on two sides at once—which I do not at all anticipate, though the events of the last forty years show that all sorts of coalitions are still possible—we could have a million good soldiers for the defence of each of our frontiers; and we can raise besides a half-million or even a million reservists in the interior to send forward where needed." After a passage in which he stigmatized as malicious and baseless the suspicion that Germany would use this great army for a "preventive war," the speaker came to a crashing finale with his famous and long-resounding: "We Germans fear God, but nothing else in the World."

As a rhetorical performance, the speech was Bismarck's master-

piece, and it was so acclaimed by his countrymen. But for all its sounding phrases and dialectical skill, it can only be read in after years as a public confession that his policy—the policy with which he started in 1871—had failed. After seventeen years he was still afraid; and Germany, according to her own avowal, was so little secure that she needed an immediate and enormous increase of her fighting forces to make her safe against enemies threatening to assail her from two sides. The Emperors would not stand together even for the monarchical principle; France, which should have been isolated, was becoming dangerously eligible as an ally; in spite of the alliances and the reinsurances and the treaties within the treaties—or perhaps because of them—nobody knew what anybody else would do if or when the new storm broke. And almost every Government and every statesman in Europe—the friendly as well as the hostile—was either nursing some bruise of the German big stick, or sullenly resenting some discovered duplicity which raised extreme doubt whether or how far Germany herself was a desirable ally.

Indeed, Bismarck himself seemed, at least temporarily, to have lost his cunning. Hitherto when he had thought Russia to be sufficiently chastened he had poured oil into her wounds and endeavoured to draw her back into the path of friendship. Now he persisted in manifestations of his ill-will in apparent defiance of his own previous rules of conduct, and of what in later days he declared to be the proper way of dealing with Russia. He not only gave her no support in her Bulgarian aims, but persisted in keeping the Berlin loan market closed to her, and so sent her to Paris to find the money which she urgently needed. Greatly as he believed in bludgeoning an opponent, Bismarck could scarcely have supposed that the transfer of Russian economic dependence from Germany to France was a desirable result for Germany, nor could he have been so simple as to believe the complacent official assurances given later by the Berlin newspapers that the investment of French money in Russia would have a steadying influence on French policy. All this looks like simple loss of temper. Before the end of 1888 Frenchmen and Russians were assuring each other in private that their mutual support was certain when the hour struck.

1888-1890

CHAPTER XI

LAST DAYS AND FALL OF BISMARCK

Changes in Germany—Bismarck's Final Efforts—An Overture to Lord Salisbury—Its Reception—Herbert Bismarck in London—Lord Salisbury and the British Parliament—"Leaving it on the Table"—Mr. Chamberlain and Heligoland—A Colonial Bargain—The Fall of Bismarck—Bismarckian Diplomacy.

I

DURING the clatter of these times the old Emperor William slipped out of life (March, 1888) and after a few months his son followed him to the grave. The young Emperor William came to the throne (June, 1888) protesting that nothing would be changed. The policy of his sainted grandfather would be pursued as before, and he had unbounded confidence in the aged and illustrious Chancellor who, under imperial guidance, had steered the ship of state so faithfully for so long. This was but a brief phase. Before a year was over, all Europe was talking of the rising quarrel between the young man and the old. As if with a presentiment that his time was short, the old man worked with a fierce activity, defending the perfect work of his own making against the slightest intrusion of new-comers, and showing himself as ruthless and formidable to those who crossed his path as in the days of his prime.

The Bismarckian edifice was still outwardly intact. The Triple Alliance ran side by side with the lately published Treaty with Austria, the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, the secret Treaty with Rumania and various other undisclosed engagements. The Tsar hoped that the new reign would bring a new mood in Berlin and expressed great pleasure when the young Emperor, at Bismarck's prompting, intimated his desire to pay his first visit in state to St. Petersburg, thus manifesting his zeal for the "sacred legacy," as his grandfather had called it, of German-Russian friendship. There was now a reasonable prospect that in the event of a war with France, Russia would stand out, and that Austria and Italy would either lend their active support to Germany or be benevolently

neutral. One thing remained to crown the structure, and that was to bring Great Britain into the Triple Alliance. To this Bismarck devoted himself in the time that now remained to him.

His approach to Lord Salisbury in November, 1887, and the skilful transaction which resulted in the Mediterranean Agreement have already been recorded. England was now at least a naval partner in the Triple Alliance. To carry her a step farther and bring her right in was the obvious next thing to do; and at the beginning of January, 1889, he instructed Count Hatzfeldt, the German Ambassador in London, to propose to Lord Salisbury a treaty between Germany and Great Britain pledging both to take common action against a French attack upon either. This time he asked boldly for an open and public treaty, for though, as he explained, a secret treaty would give both Powers security after the outbreak of war, a public treaty would alone prevent the outbreak of war.

The letter (January 11, 1889) in which Bismarck instructed his Ambassador to launch this proposal is one of the curiosities of bygone diplomacy. The Ambassador was to point out the advantages of the proposed treaty in the event of war, not only between England and France, but between England and the United States—an event to which Germans always looked forward, and which Bismarck thought had been brought sensibly nearer by the Sackville incident and various fisheries disputes in the previous year. He was to argue that, even if war was avoided, the Americans would be likely to behave much more considerately towards Great Britain, if it was plain that they could not rely on French assistance in the event of war, and if they were publicly warned that an attack on Britain by France would bring an army of more than a million Germans into the field against France. Next he was to say that Russia, the only other Power which threatened England, would be much less disposed to go to war, if she was made aware that France would be exposed to German attack if she joined in a war against England. For once in his life the Prince was for the most open diplomacy. He positively desired the proposed treaty to be laid before both the British Parliament and the German Reichstag. At the same time the Ambassador was to put in a friendly warning that England would be well-advised not to carry her policy of non-intervention to such lengths that the Continental Powers, and especially Germany, would be compelled to ensure their future without regard to her interests.¹ Bismarck was always convinced

¹ G.P., IV, No. 943, p. 400.

that friendship would be warmed and encouraged if the alternatives to it were candidly displayed.

The Ambassador reported three days later that he made this communication to Lord Salisbury, who had immediately recognized its high significance, but asked time to consider so far-reaching and important a proposal. At the moment no more could be said than that the English Prime Minister took the matter very seriously, but desired the strictest secrecy to be preserved about it. For the time being he proposed to say nothing about it either to the officials of the Foreign Office or even to Her Majesty the Queen.¹

No more seems to have been said about it for nearly three months. Then at the end of March the Prince sent his son, Count Herbert Bismarck, to London, ostensibly to talk about Samoa and the coming visit of the Emperor to Osborne, but in reality to test the ground again with the British Government. On March 22 Count Herbert reported to his father that he had had a long talk with Lord Salisbury, who entirely agreed that a German-English Alliance would be the best possible prescription for both countries and for European peace. Lord Salisbury said he had discussed the matter with Lord Hartington and his colleagues, who shared his opinion but considered it inopportune to pursue the matter since it would destroy the Government's majority in Parliament, and bring about its downfall. According to Count Herbert, Lord Salisbury added:

We live no longer, alas, in Pitt's time; the aristocracy governed then and we were able to form an active policy, which made England after the Congress of Vienna the richest and most respected Power in Europe. Now democracy is on top, and with it the personal and party system, which reduces every British Government to absolute dependence on the *aura popularis*. This generation can only be taught by events.²

After exchanges of compliments and assurances that each appreciated the intentions of the other, Lord Salisbury said he hoped he might live to see changed conditions which would enable him to treat the proposal as practical politics. "Meanwhile we lay it on the table without saying yes or no; that is unfortunately all I can do at present." Count Herbert then thought it appropriate to suggest to Lord Salisbury that there might one day be a grouping of the Powers in which France would seek German neutrality in order to measure herself with England, and England endeavour to buy off Russian hostility by some form of compensation. If that should

¹ G.P., IV, No. 944, p. 403.

² *Ibid.*, No. 945, p. 404, and Dugdale, Vol. I., p. 374.

happen and Germany be convinced that she could in no circumstances count upon England, then England might find herself isolated and compelled to pay for all breakages (*die pots cassés zu bezahlen*).

This, according to the Count, nearly moved Lord Salisbury to tears. He had been saying this himself, he replied, for a long time and he was the more distressed that parliamentarianism condemned his Government to such impotence. All he could do, meanwhile, was to go hand in hand with the German Government as publicly as possible, and he was very glad to learn that the German Government understood his position and demanded nothing more from him at present.

He did go hand in hand so far as to conclude the Agreement of July, 1890, whereby provisional boundaries were fixed for German and British possessions in Africa, but for the time being the Alliance project faded out against the supposed insuperable obstacle of Parliamentary Government. Not for the first or for the last time in these years did the British Parliament play Jorkins to the Spenlow of the British Foreign Office. Those who remember the British Parliament of the years 1886-92 will not easily believe that it would have rejected any scheme of foreign policy recommended to it by Lord Salisbury and Lord Hartington. We may reasonably conjecture that something else was in Lord Salisbury's mind than despair at the parliamentary regime which "condemned him to such impotence." The circumstances were at the best not very favourable. The quarrel over the grave of the Emperor Frederick had made a painful impression, and there was at this moment little inclination in England for closer relations with Bismarck and the new Emperor.

II

Nevertheless, the German overture was by no means fruitless. A few days after his last interview with Lord Salisbury Count Herbert saw Mr. Joseph Chamberlain (then an independent supporter of the Government), who opened up a new line of country (March 26). Never, reported the Count, had Mr. Chamberlain's friendship for Germany been so strongly expressed as in this interview. He actually said "*sine Germania nulla salus*"—not a very probable form of speech in Mr. Chamberlain's mouth—and enlarged upon the necessity of removing all difficulties which might arise between the two countries in the future. The difficulties, as he saw them, were mainly African and Colonial, and starting with Zanzibar he worked

round to South-West Africa. The Namaqua and Damara territories in that region were not worth a rap to Germany, but in British possession they would enable a railway to be built direct from Walfisch Bay to Bechuanaland.¹ At this point Count Herbert put in that, troublesome as they might be to Germany, prestige forbade that they should be ceded to Great Britain. Mr. Chamberlain rose to the occasion. "Naturally," he said, "we cannot suggest that you should just make a present of those Colonies, however worthless they may be, to England. There must be compensation; what do you think if we gave you Heligoland instead, which is useless for England and perhaps worth having for you, were it but for the prestige?"

Count Herbert reports that he was at pains to conceal the satisfaction he felt on hearing these words. He contented himself for the moment with drawing Chamberlain on, and the latter was soon warming to the idea. The exchange, he declared, would be popular in the country, and he himself would defend it through thick and thin in the House of Commons. To England it would bring relief from trouble in South Africa, to Germany security against French ships lying off Heligoland and coaling there in the event of another Franco-German war. He urged the Count to broach the matter to Lord Salisbury and Lord Hartington, and to tell them that he (Chamberlain) had prompted him to do so.

The Count telegraphed home with glee, and the Emperor was delighted. "His Majesty," wrote Count Berchem, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, "considers Heligoland militarily to be of the greatest importance to us. In the case of a war, the first action of the French would be to secure and provision it. If Germany possessed it, it would be easy to defend the Elbe and the Jade Bay."² His Majesty desired the business to be hurried up so that the agreement might be signed when he visited Osborne in July. But the old Chancellor said "wait." Too much eagerness might show the English what importance Germany attached to the place, and so cause them to draw back. He advised his son not to take the proposed initiative with either Lord Hartington or Lord Salisbury.

The Ambassador had seen Lord Salisbury in the course of ordinary business on April 13, and very adroitly led the talk to a mention of Mr. Chamberlain, whereupon Lord Salisbury asked casually if Mr. Chamberlain had mentioned Heligoland. The

¹ Bismarck's comment, "Is it worth a railway?" G.P., IV, No. 946, p. 406.

² G.P., IV, No. 951, p. 413.

Ambassador, speaking as a private individual, and carefully explaining that he had no instruction from his Government to raise the question, admitted that Mr. Chamberlain had done so. But the proposed exchange was, he said, a delicate matter: there were many German private interests as well as reputed gold mines in South-West Africa, and it was difficult to say whether Heligoland had any great and positive advantage for Germany. At the same time he would be interested to learn how Mr. Chamberlain came to make his surprising proposal (*seinen uberraschenden Antragen*). For his own part the Ambassador could see only one negative advantage in the possession of Heligoland by Germany which was that, if it remained in English hands, the possibility of French warships running to shelter there might embitter Anglo-German relations in the event of a Franco-German war. The Ambassador's dispatch continues:

The Minister broke in with the emphatic remark: "That, at any rate, will never happen." He then developed the theory that our retirement from South Africa would benefit England nominally, but only Cape Colony in fact. He added confidentially with a smile that he personally had no great enthusiasm for the suggestion of granting territorial advantages to Colonies which were more or less independent, for England would receive but little gratitude for them. On the other hand, he was quite unable to see what real advantage Heligoland would offer us. Germany would be forced to lay out large sums of money to make anything of the island, and he believed its existence was not assured for ever, as it was badly undermined by the sea.¹

Count Hatzfeldt's general inference was that Lord Salisbury was not definitely opposed to the idea, but that it was not wise to press him further at the moment, and least of all to "give him the impression that we set great store on possessing the Island." On receiving this dispatch Prince Bismarck again said "wait," and when the Emperor still pressed that the matter should be settled before his Osborne visit Count Herbert wrote strongly urging the inadvisability of this hurry. "If we show excessive eagerness," he said, "we shall raise the price and perhaps destroy the bargain altogether."

In this way the question slipped over the year and was not taken up again seriously until May of the following year (1890) when Bismarck had fallen from power. Then, after much bargaining, Lord Salisbury consented to cede Heligoland in return for the withdrawal of the German and the substitution of a British

¹ G.P., IV, No. 949, p. 412, Dugdale (German Diplomatic Documents, selected and translated by E. T. S. Dugdale in four volumes, Methuen), Vol. I., p. 380.

Protectorate over Zanzibar and Witor. It thus became a feather in the cap not of the old Chancellor but of the young Emperor, who in his "Memoirs" published after his abdication makes loud claims for the foresight with which he recognized the importance of the island and the comparative worthlessness of Zanzibar which was given in exchange for it. He goes to the length of saying that "the German nation has every reason to be thankful to Count Caprivi" (whom *pro forma* he credits with this achievement), "since through the possession of the island the building of its navy and its victory at the Skager Rak¹ were made possible."

This transaction is of great interest for the light that it throws both on the methods of German diplomacy and on the political assumptions current at this time. Whatever may have been in the minds of the Germans, the possibility of a war between England and Germany seems not to have occurred to Lord Salisbury and his colleagues. Whether they were even aware of the project of building the Kiel Canal is uncertain, but, even if they were, the possibility of Germany playing a formidable part as a sea-power was beyond the ambit of English thought in the year 1890. "The English Cabinet," said Count Hatzfeldt as late as June, 1890, "has not the slightest idea what value Heligoland has for us in regard to the Baltic Canal, and it goes without saying that I have most carefully avoided letting any knowledge in this subject leak out."² The English judgment might possibly have been different if the Committee of Imperial Defence had been in existence, but the Admiralty were of opinion that the possession of the island would rather hamper than help the British fleet in war, and that in a war with Germany it could not be defended unless it were heavily fortified and garrisoned by a strong naval detachment. No one seems to have asked what purpose it might serve if it were heavily fortified and Germany had sufficient naval power to defend it in a war against Great Britain.

III

March 18, 1890—the day of Bismarck's fall from power—is rightly regarded as a landmark in European history, for though its full consequences were not to be revealed for several years to come, all the forces were set in motion which sent Germany on her "New Course," when the old Chancellor passed from the

¹ The Battle of Jutland, "My Memoirs," English Translation, p. 55.

² G.P., VIII, No. 1688, p. 24.

scene. Within a few weeks one of the chief pillars of his structure was removed by the failure to renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. The Tsar, who was liable to strong sentimental reactions against the alternative policy of friendship with Republican France, had built high hopes on the new reign in Germany, and he was willing, even anxious, for the renewal, and had sent Schouvaloff to Berlin to carry it through. But he was chilled and mystified when his emissary sent back word that the atmosphere had changed and that the German attitude was doubtful. Not choosing to wait for a rebuff, he was first in refusing to renew, but no one doubted that the act was that of the new regime in Germany. What was its motive? The new Emperor's sudden conviction that Russia was the enemy, honest dislike of the duplicity of the transaction in so far as it concerned Austria, the spite of Holstein, the Permanent Secretary, who, for obscure personal reasons seems to have been consumed with hatred of Bismarck, or mere muddle and indecision which let the favourable moment slip? All these things have been conjectured: we can only say that any specific act which bore the name and stamp of the outgoing Chancellor was unlikely to get cool and impartial consideration if it came up for revision at that moment. Already there was merit to be won by reversing Bismarck's policy.

Caprivi, his successor, posed as a simple soldierly man who was unequal to the subtleties of the Bismarckian system. "A man like you," he said to Bismarck at their famous garden interview, "can play with five balls at once, but other folk will do well to be satisfied with one or two." The new Foreign Secretary, Marschall von Bieberstein, chimed in: "A man as great as Bismarck can work with complicated tools, but I am a simple person, and unable to do so." Holstein was strong on the point of duplicity. What would the world say if the secret Treaty came to light? What a weapon to put into the hands of Russia! Bismarck reserved his special scorn for these "pseudo-moralists." They knew as well as he that what they called duplicity was part of the special technique of the secret treaty. Had he not revealed his Secret Treaty with Austria at the expense of Russia to the Tsar, and had the effect been anything but salutary? Except that the Tsar objected, he would to-morrow reveal the Reinsurance Treaty to the Austrian Emperor. The Emperor would understand perfectly well that the object was one which they both desired—viz., to postpone the *rapprochement* between France and Russia. If he was suspicious, it would be of small consequence. German relations with Austria

were on too broad a foundation to be affected by the fugitive suspicions of the Sovereign.¹ There was, according to this explanation, no real deception, for all the parties to the secret treaties expected to be deceived, were willing to be deceived, and took no offence when they discovered that they had been deceived, provided the deception was skilfully practised, and had an intelligent motive.

¹ "Bismarck," by Emil Ludwig, p. 540.

1890

CHAPTER XII

THE BISMARCKIAN SYSTEM AND ITS RESULTS

- The Kaiser and Bismarck—Bismarck's Policy and Methods—Grouping of Forces—The Seed of Mischief—The Recovery of France—The Rebellion of Russia—Characteristics of the Bismarck Era—Contrast with the "New Course"—The Great Divide.

I

As an example of royal and imperial complacency it would be difficult to match the passage in which the ex-Kaiser William, writing thirty-two years later in exile, repeats what the Tsar Alexander III said to him about his dismissal of Bismarck. "Je comprends parfaitement Ta ligne d'action; le prince avec toute sa grandeur n'était après tout rien d'autre que Ton employé ou fonctionnaire. Le moment où il refusait d'agir selon Tes ordres, il fallait le renvoyer." The ex-Kaiser adds that he "recorded this important conversation immediately it occurred."¹ That the Tsar was amusing himself at the expense of his youthful guest would be an irresistible conclusion if levity had ever been attributed to Alexander III, or if the known facts did not make it actually credible that both these autocratic persons conceived the relations of Emperor and statesman in these terms. It must nevertheless be remembered that in March, 1890, when he received his dismissal, Bismarck, aged seventy-five, was by general consent the most illustrious statesman in the world, whereas the Emperor who discharged him as a disobedient employee was a callow and inexperienced young man of twenty-eight.

The ex-Kaiser has endeavoured to make out that the breach between him and Bismarck was due to a difference of opinion on the Social question, and it may be literally true that this provided the final pretext. That, however, is unimportant. Actually there was no room in the German State for both a young Emperor panting to take the reins himself and a master of statecraft wielding a unique authority in virtue of age, experience and unparalleled

¹ "My Memoirs," pp. 17-18.

achievements. To that extent the passing of Bismarck was a stroke of fate. But with Bismarck also went the Bismarckian system, and the removal of its author revealed at once the inherent weaknesses which made its transmission to his successors impossible. Caprivi and Marschall were quite right when they pleaded their incapacity to handle it. No one but Bismarck could have handled it for so long; his personality and prestige alone kept it in its precarious balance, and when he went, it was doomed.

Bismarck, according to the standard of his time, was a great patriot and disinterested lover of his country. His worst enemies never questioned it. To build up the German Empire from the severed members of the German race had been his consuming ambition for the first part of his career; to win security for it his whole aim and purpose during the second part. But his idea of "security" never went beyond a grouping of forces for the benefit of Germany and the disablement of France. For this he considered all things lawful—open alliances, secret entanglements, professions of friendship, stabs in the back, fomenting of quarrels in which Germany should be spectator and *tertius gaudens*. To set France and Italy by the ears about Tunis at the risk of a war between them, and, when France jumped in first, to play on the disappointment of Italy to draw her into the German camp; to encourage Russia to make trouble for England, and to play on England's fears of Russia to keep her attached to Germany; to assure Austria that she could rely on German assistance and Russia that she need not fear German hostility—all this, in Bismarck's philosophy, was just the legitimate handling of forces which it is the business of statecraft to subdue and control; and the hypocrites were those who pretended to judge him by the standards of domestic morality.

Grouping of forces, balancing of forces, manipulation of forces were his constant preoccupation. In his system military power was the credit in the international clearing-house on which the statesman drew cheques. To overdraw was folly, but to keep on drawing up to the limit and to let no credit be frozen was the way to enhance prestige, to reassure friends, to instil respect into enemies. *Se faire valoir* was the watchword. There could be no footing in this system for internationalism seeking reciprocal advantages and peace without force. Gladstone appealing to the "conscience of the civilized world" merely confused the issue and spoilt the game which might otherwise have been played with Salisbury and Conservative statesmen who understood its rules.

The main weakness of Bismarck's policy lay in its foundations. The idea of finding security for one nation in the permanent subjection and outlawry of another was in the long-run doomed to failure. It kept the passion of revenge at fever heat in the former enemy; it enlisted on her side all the unorganized sympathy in other nations which in the long-run counts for so much; it offered no permanent common ground between Germany and her Allies. We see the Three Emperors' League beginning to crumble as soon as the Emperors recovered from their fright over the Paris Commune. Except under the influence of a common fear, Austria and Russia could not be persuaded to take the German view of German security. Both had aims and ambitions of their own for which they sought to use Germany as she sought to use them. It was a constant irritation to Bismarck that instead of playing the part assigned to them in his scheme, Austria and Russia would persist in quarrelling over territories which he judged to be not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian, and still more that each in turn should look to him for support against the other. Honest broker between them he was willing to be, but the turns and shifts to which he was reduced in his endeavour to play the part without offending either, the secret treaties with each behind the back of the other, accorded ill with the original idea of the great monarchies grouped about Germany in mutual support against a common enemy, and reduced all Europe to a state of irritation, suspicion and anxiety which required an ever-increasing apparatus of armaments, and made the peace precarious even between nominal allies.

But if there were these seeds of mischief in the governing idea of the Bismarckian system, it must still be acknowledged that on its own ground Bismarck's statecraft was incomparable. To the skill of the conjurer he added a deep sagacity which made the practice of power-politics relatively safe in his hands. Through all the vicissitudes of his policy we may trace certain rules from which he seldom or never departed. One was to keep Austrian policy within bounds, so that the risk of a collision between Austria and Russia should be reduced to a minimum. Another was that England was to be cultivated in proportion as Russia became cool, or Russia in proportion as England seemed unfriendly; and that never in any case should the hostility of both be risked at the same time. A third was that France should be permitted to gratify her ambition for Colonial expansion and so be tempted to divert her forces and energies from Europe to overseas regions. A fourth was that England was not to be challenged on the seas. Bismarck, in fact,

while basing himself on power, had a clear sense of the limits of power and sought always to act within them. Lacking this sense the new German Kaiser was to invert every principle of Bismarckian statecraft in the "New Course" on which, as he told the world, he now proposed to sail.

II

It is possible that if Bismarck had remained on the scene, appearances might have been saved for a few months or even for a few years. But in all essentials the game was played out when he departed. Nothing could prevent the recovery of France, and when she reappeared with an army only a little, if at all, inferior to the German, and had apparently at her disposal unlimited resources available at a price for loan-hungry governments, it was useless to keep saying that her Republican institutions and radical politicians made her ineligible as an ally for a self-respecting monarchy. Alexander III, who held pious and primitive views about the Russian autocracy, had many qualms, and it is probable that if the Germans had renewed the Reinsurance Treaty, he might for a short time longer have remained within the German constellation. But long before Bismarck's retirement he was in rebellion against what he considered to be his hostility and duplicity, and was rapidly coming to the conclusion that the continuance of the connexion would mean submission to a German hegemony in Europe. He was, moreover, surrounded by counsellors who, like their opposite numbers in Germany, considered it folly in this world of real politics to let sentiment weigh against an obvious political and military advantage. No one doubted that if Bismarck himself had been a Russian he would have made short work of the dynastic objection the moment it stood in the way of any positive political object, and he had instructed his neighbours so well in the arts and crafts of real politics as to make it all but certain that they would one day practise these German methods on Germany.

The fear that France would become *Bündnisfähig*—a word of doom in Bismarck's vocabulary—had thus become a reality within twenty years of the Treaty of Frankfurt. A great and proud nation which led the world in the arts of living and had for generations held the primacy of Europe, could not for more than a brief space be held in subjection by hostile neighbours treating her as if she were an outlaw and an inferior. The harsh and hectoring diplomacy which was intended to intimidate her kindled a resentment which

was even more dangerous than the wound inflicted by the loss of her provinces. Her recovery under this stimulus defeated all the calculations of her former enemy and placed her on favourable ground to build up a rival combination to the dominant German power. We now see the nations coming up to the "great divide"—the division into the two armed camps which came to their clash in the Great War.

THE FRANCO-RUSSIAN ALLIANCE

German Difficulties in the New Reign—The Recovery of France—An Effort at Conciliation and its Failure—A French Overture to Italy and the Result—Renewal of the Triple Alliance—The Kaiser in London—The French Fleet at Cronstadt—The First Franco-Russian Agreement—The Doubts of the Tsar—Increase of the German Army—German Wooing of Turkey—Isolation of Russia—Visit of the Russian Fleet to Toulon—Conclusion of Franco-Russian Military Convention and Alliance.

I

IN the early months of 1891 all the foundations of German policy seemed to be rocking. Germany was now thrown back on the Triple Alliance for her security, but of her two partners, Italy was always uncertain, and there were even doubts about Austria. A visit which the Austrian heir-apparent paid to St. Petersburg in February, 1891, was watched with anxiety in Berlin and the old rumours of a secret Austro-Russian understanding came to life again. England was still on the whole benevolent to the Triple Alliance, but she already had qualms about her Tripartite Mediterranean Agreement, and the attempt to bind her by a closer tie had definitely failed. France in the meantime was on the road to complete recovery. She had finished the equipment of her army with the Lebel rifle in the last months of 1890, and her munition factories were reported to be working overtime in the production of melinite shells. She now, as her statesmen claimed, had a military establishment which would enable her to meet aggression from any quarter, and the appearance of her army at its manœuvres in the autumn of 1890 had greatly impressed the experts of other countries. Finally the Pope was openly showing favour to the French Republic, and by so doing helping not a little to redeem its disreputable character in the eyes of the Christian monarchs.

All this made an uncomfortable impression in Berlin. France was evidently ripe for an alliance with somebody. Emperor and Chancellor decided that something should be done to appease

the French, and word went out to the newspapers to abate their customary hostilities. At the same time an official invitation was sent to French artists to take part in a coming exhibition at Berlin, and, more daring still, it was decided that the Empress Frederick should pay a visit incognito to Paris, where no member of the House of Hohenzollern had set foot since 1870. The Empress went with the best intentions on February 18, 1891, but her presence placed the French Government in a considerable difficulty, which was only evaded by strictly respecting her incognito. No harm was done, so long as she confined herself to visiting museums and picture-galleries, or the studios of the artists who had consented to exhibit in Berlin, but Deroulède and his League of Patriots were on her track, and when she committed the *bêtise* of visiting Versailles and St. Cloud, where the marks of German shells were still visible, they were with difficulty restrained from public demonstrations of hostility, and the newspapers became clamorous in their protests. It was now said that the Empress was preparing the way for a visit by her son in the following year, and high language was used about that unwelcome (and improbable) event. Extraordinary precautions had to be taken to ensure the Empress's departure without further trouble, and in his reports to his superiors the Ambassador, Münster, was at no pains to conceal his belief that she had outstayed her welcome.

Evidently German blandishments were useless in Paris. The Kaiser was furious, and alarming rumours of his intentions ran through Europe during the next few weeks. Count Münster was persuaded that the trouble was mainly due to "Russian intrigues" to which the Emperor, in a marginal note added "Russian roubles."¹ Undoubtedly the visit had caused much uneasiness in Russia, which now drew the inference—not at all unwelcome to the French—that some advance on their side was advisable if the circumstances were to be turned to their advantage. So President Carnot was invested with the highest Russian decoration and an invitation was issued for a French squadron to visit Cronstadt in the following summer. The German Emperor retorted with a speech at Potsdam in which he said with much vehemence, "Difficult and serious times are before us; I rely on my army and expect the troops stationed on the frontier to keep a keen look-out." Everybody now was talking of war. The Russians and the French believed, or professed to believe, that the Kaiser was going to attack: the Kaiser believed, or professed to believe, that the French were on

¹ G.P., VII, No. 1548, p. 275.

the war-path. Each in turn feared that when the moment came, its opponents would have manœuvred the doubters and neutrals in such a way as to leave it isolated against a hostile combination. With the great manipulator removed, no one trusted the complicated network of secret treaties and obligations by which most of them were nominally bound to stand the strain of any sudden catastrophe. The reservations and ways of escape were too numerous; the conflicts of aim and purpose between even the pledged allies were too well known to those behind the scenes for any confidence on that subject to be possible.

II

The game went on feverishly for the next few months against this background of suspicion and anxiety. The aim of the French was to establish their footing with Russia, and, if possible, to detach Italy from Germany and Austria; the aim of the Germans was to keep Russia and France apart and to hold Italy to the Triple Alliance, which expired in May, 1892. French hopes ran high when the Teutophil Crispi fell at the end of January, 1891, and was succeeded by the Marquis di Rudini who, in opposition, had always advocated a reconciliation with France. Freycinet, the French Prime Minister, at once approached the new Italian Prime Minister with an offer which was a characteristic blend of financial inducements and political stipulations. Italy desired a cessation of the tariff war with France, and she was about to raise a loan. It was put to her that she might have both these things if she would give assurances that the Triple Alliance did not bind her to come to the assistance of Germany in a Franco-German war, and if she would say specifically that, in the event of such a war, she had not arranged for compensations for herself at the expense of France, for example in Tunis. Rudini replied briefly that he could not answer these questions without divulging the contents of the Triple Alliance Treaty—which he was on no account prepared to do—and suggested to the French that they should address their questions to Berlin and Vienna. The French appear afterwards to have addressed them to King Humbert who, with strict constitutional propriety, referred them back to his Prime Minister.

The French Prime Minister, Freycinet, had a last string to his bow. A few weeks later (April 27) Signor Padova, the agent of the House of Rothschild in Rome, presented himself to Rudini bearing a letter in which that House, with the express concurrence

of the French Foreign Minister, Ribot, offered to finance the Italian loan, in spite of the renewal of the Triple Alliance, if Italy would oblige the French Government in only one respect. This was that she should communicate to them in a written document, to be kept secret, if desired, the circumstances and conditions on which she would take part in a war of Germany against France. Rudini was, or professed to be, greatly incensed at this proposal. He answered that he deeply regretted to see before him an Italian who could impute such unworthy conduct to the Government of his country; and when Signor Padova, in real or feigned indignation at this undeserved reproach, replied that he considered himself to be behaving as a patriot who desired to extricate his country from a difficult situation, Rudini cut him short by saying that it was impossible to discuss the matter with a man who had no right feelings, and forbade him ever to mention the subject again. In reporting the incident to the King, Rudini added that his first impulse had been "to take the dirty Jew by the neck and kick him downstairs," but that he had restrained his indignation with the thought that "this would not have been becoming in a Marquis di Rudini."¹

Just so, and with a similar burst of indignation, ended the German bid for British neutrality made twenty-three years later to Sir Edward Grey on the eve of the Great War. In actual fact Rudini was but a lukewarm partisan of the Triple Alliance, and when he succeeded Crispi, he had greatly desired to carry out the policy which he had pursued in Opposition of improving Italian relations with France. What chiefly decided him was not love of Germany, and still less of Austria, but fear of offending Great Britain which, at that moment, was in hot dispute with France about Egypt, and leaning heavily on her *entente* with the Triple Alliance. Professor Langer, who has written an admirable study of this phase of European politics, goes to the length of saying that Lord Salisbury "would have regarded the defection of Italy [from the Triple Alliance] as downright treason."² This is perhaps to overstate it, but after the Mediterranean Agreement no British Government could have regarded the secession of Italy from the German to the French side without serious uneasiness, and it was then and later a cardinal point in Italian policy—a point which survived all the vicissitudes of the coming years—that she should on no account come into conflict with Great Britain.

¹ G.P., VII, No. 1418, p. 92.

² "The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894," by Professor W. L. Langer, Harvard Historical Studies, p. 153.

III

Thus with the help of England, Germany temporarily recovered her lost ground, and the renewal of the Triple Alliance a few months before its time (May 6, 1891) followed quickly on the failure of the French effort to detach Italy. This was a decisive fact for the French. Once more they saw themselves completely isolated; and with England in close touch with the Central Powers and pursuing a policy which checked French ambition and wounded French pride, it seemed hopeless to look for support in the German camp. For the next few weeks things went from bad to worse for the French. The Kaiser came to London on a State visit at the beginning of July, 1891, and in an exuberant speech at the Guildhall declared his intention to preserve the historic friendship between Germany and Great Britain, "two nations which had so often stood side by side in the cause of freedom and justice."

From London he went on to visit Lord Salisbury at Hatfield, where, for once, he appears to have let most of the talking be done by his Foreign Secretary, Baron von Marschall, who accompanied him. Marschall reported Salisbury to be still anxious about the designs of Russia. He was sure that Russia "still hoped to possess Constantinople and the Straits," and that "her present attitude of waiting for the re-arming of her forces showed that she hoped that the next General Election in England would provide a change of Ministry, and a less determined attitude in foreign policy." The two men discussed intimately the precise way in which the Russians would attempt to effect their object, and the conversation must have been somewhat embarrassing to the German if he was aware of the assurances which his Government had given the Russians in past years on the subject of the Straits. Lord Salisbury was vehement about the intentions of his Government if the Russians attempted any *coup de main* upon Constantinople. "You may count on us, so long as the present Government is in power. We shall be there on time." He could not predict, however, what another Government might do. He knew one man who assuredly would not continue his policy, and that was Gladstone. But he was broken in health, and no longer fit to lead a Government. Harcourt's opinions were unknown to him, but Lord Rosebery would act exactly as he, Salisbury, would. Next, Lord Salisbury was anxious to know the German view about Franco-Russian relations, and expressed his own opinion that the Tsar's lethargy was a guarantee for peace. To which Marschall observed that

there was also a security for peace in the Tsar's belief that he was the chosen of Providence to spread abroad the Orthodox faith, however sad the consequences might be for the heterodox who were affected. There was also "a point on which one might safely stake in certain circumstances," and that was the Tsar's feeling for monarchy—an observation which Salisbury confirmed by saying that the Tsar had recently shown a very decided interest in the maintenance of the Portuguese monarchy.¹

The Tsar was a very sick man, and in the previous six months he had shown a wavering mind, alternately snubbing and encouraging the French, who on their side played a skilful game with the strong card of finance. With famine threatening, the Russians were urgently in need of money, and since Berlin either would not or could not help, Paris was their only hope, and Paris drew back or came forward, according as the Tsar's mood changed. But while Salisbury and Marschall were talking, the Tsar's mind was being made up for him by events, of which the Emperor's visit to London was by no means the least important. With Italy again firmly attached to Germany and Austria, with the Triple Alliance renewed, and with England a party to a Mediterranean Agreement which was commonly believed to embrace the question of the Straits, the isolation of Russia seemed, in Russian eyes, to be as complete as that of France. Both Powers saw themselves balked of their dearest ambitions, France the recovery of her lost provinces, Russia of her access to the warm water. Each considered itself liable to sudden attack by a group of enemies against whom it would have no allies. More than ever, each thought of the other as its necessary partner in a common adversity.

So when the French fleet visited Cronstadt on July 23, there were high festivities, prolonged far beyond the call of formal politeness and accompanied by tremendous popular demonstrations. Alexander himself stifled his feelings about the disreputable Republic and stood bareheaded while a Russian band played the battle-hymn of the French Revolution. The day after the French squadron arrived in Russian waters the French Ambassador handed the draft of an Agreement to M. de Giers, who accepted it as a basis for negotiations. There was hard bargaining for the next three weeks and neither party got exactly what it wanted. But substantially the two Powers agreed to act together in case either was threatened by an aggressive action on the part of the other Powers, though exactly what action they should take was left vague.

¹ G.P., IX, No. 2111, p. 63.

An Agreement to this effect was signed before the end of August, and the French accepted it as heightening their prestige for the time being and at the same time providing a basis for continued negotiations.

IV

Having with some reluctance signed this Agreement, Alexander III had one of his cold fits, and for the next eighteen months he seemed to be feeling his way back to the old friendly relations with Germany. In June, 1892, he paid a visit to the German Emperor at Kiel, and having spent twelve hours on board the Imperial yacht, came away with a better impression of his host. Before the end of the year the French became involved in the great Panama scandal which, though the Russians were scarcely in a position to be censorious about corruption, lowered their prestige and made them temporarily less eligible as an Ally. In January, 1893, the Tsarevitch Nicholas visited Berlin to attend the wedding of the Emperor's sister, and was received with the most flattering attentions, which appear to have been reciprocated. The Kaiser discoursed on the utter corruption and complete rottenness of the French Government and painted a lurid picture of the spread of anarchy and the consequent menace to the social order in Europe and the monarchical system; the Tsarevitch spoke of his father's disillusionment and anger, and said that a military dictatorship was probable in France which would require a Coalition like that of 1813 to combat it. The Kaiser replied that this was precisely the idea of the Triple Alliance, the purpose of which was to guarantee the territorial possessions of its members, to safeguard the interests of the monarchies against Radicalism, Socialism and Nihilism, and by an economic policy which would create common material interests to establish a common interest in peace. Its special economic aim was, he said, to bind the nations of Europe together by commercial treaties which would enable them to resist the Pan-American ambitions of the United States, which were extremely threatening to European spheres of interest. The Triple might be a Quadruple or a Quintuple Alliance, since there was room in it for all States that had the same aim, and it was absolutely untrue that it had any hostile intention towards Russia.¹

The Tsarevitch appears to have been greatly impressed by the Kaiser's eloquence, and he returned to St. Petersburg armed with

¹ G.P., VII, No. 1526, p. 243.

a Memorandum, drawn up by the Kaiser himself, which he promised at once to lay before his father.¹ Presumably he did so, but the Kaiser waited in vain for the expected response. 'We can only guess at Alexander's feelings on receiving the novel and singular account of the Triple Alliance which had so much impressed his son. Susceptible as he might be to the offer of a new Holy Alliance for the defence of the monarchy, it was a little too much to expect him, within sixteen months of his *entente* with the Revolutionary Republic, to walk over to the camp of its avowed enemies. As for the economic inducements, it soon appeared that he was much less interested in presenting a common front to the assumed designs of the United States of America than in getting a good commercial treaty with Germany, and for the next few months he devoted himself to that, but with so little success that the negotiations collapsed before the end of June, and a tariff war began between the two countries. So much for the Economic Conventions which were to establish a community of material interests.

More important still, the German Government now decided on another large increase and reorganization of their army, and all through the autumn and winter of 1892-3 were engaged in breaking the resistance of the Reichstag to this project. The recalcitrant Reichstag was dissolved, and the new one passed the Bill, but the agitation kept Europe in a ferment and caused special uneasiness to France and Russia, both of whom thought the measure to be aimed at themselves. Not without reason, if we may judge from a communication made by the German Chancellor to a Committee of the Reichstag :

Conditions in France, he pointed out, were drifting towards a dictatorship, and this would probably make for war. The Russian and German Governments were on good terms, but public opinion in the two countries was hostile. The Russian tradition demanded the advance to the Straits and Constantinople,

¹ The Memorandum (in French) was as follows :

So far from having aggressive tendencies the Triple Alliance has on the contrary an eminently pacific and defensive object; it is dictated solely by the instinct of self-preservation on the part of the signatory Powers.

Before forming this Alliance, the three Powers took note of the grave dangers threatening the Monarchies from the French Republic and the advocates of revolutionary doctrine widespread under different names. Since this community of monarchical interests forms one of the basic principles of the Alliance, it is open to any Power having identical interests to join it.

The domain of policy is, however, not the only one on which the Allied Powers have a common interest. It aims also at creating a community of material interests by means of economic conventions, with the double object of diminishing the dangers of armed conflict in Europe and of resisting the aims of the Great Republic across the seas which envisage the complete exclusion of European commerce from the whole of America. (G.P., VII, No. 1527.)

even if the road were through Berlin. Under the circumstances the German Government felt obliged to preserve the position of Austria as a great Power. "We cannot sacrifice Austria to gain temporary concessions from Russia. In these circumstances we must be prepared for a war on two fronts. We do not know what engagements exist between France and Russia, but in all probability arrangements have been made in view of military operations both by land and sea. Nor must we omit Denmark from our calculations, notwithstanding the personal friendliness of King Christian."¹

Professor Langer, who cites this passage, proceeds to argue that the tension between Russians and British in the Pamirs and between French and British in Siam and Egypt, were from this point onwards the determining causes in the march of events which converted the Franco-Russian *entente* of August, 1891, into the Alliance of January, 1894. This is a plausible reconstruction from the documents, but, having followed those incidents somewhat closely on the British side, I cannot think it to be a correct statement of the facts. The Siamese incident is, indeed, of extreme interest, since the documents show that, if war had resulted, the Powers of the Triple Alliance would almost certainly have aligned themselves with Britain against France and Russia (if she had joined in) though they were anxious not to show their hands, until the British had fired the first shot. The Kaiser, who at the critical moment (July 30, 1893) was at Cowes, was thrown into a state of extreme excitement by a private communication from Lord Rosebery through the Queen that war was likely to follow in a few hours, and his boiling imagination leapt forward to a great encounter in which France would be disposed of and Great Britain compelled finally to join her fortunes to those of the Triple Alliance.² But the Siamese incident turned out to be merely the *bêtise* of a junior officer which was ended by a suitable apology from his commanding officer; and the British Government, of which Mr. Gladstone was still Prime Minister, certainly had none of the designs attributed to it by its continental neighbours, and was genuinely astonished to learn that it was supposed to have behaved with pusillanimity in declining a French challenge.

Friction about Egypt was no doubt chronic between England and France, and it is also on record that Lord Rosebery,³ who was then Foreign Secretary, thought it necessary to warn his colleagues in August of the same year that the autumn and winter might be stormy. But the story which seems to have impressed him of an

¹ Langer, "The Franco-German Alliance," p. 303.

² G.P., VIII, Nos. 1752-4. Eulenburg, pp. 84-7.

³ "Life of Campbell-Bannerman," Vol. I., p. 140.

impending incursion of the Russian fleet from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean is unsupported by any evidence since available and is intrinsically improbable in the light of what we now know of French and Russian relations in that year. Alexander III was still in doubt whether to go forward or to go back in his approaches to the French, and the French on their side were not at all likely to abandon their traditional policy against the opening of the Straits without a very substantial *quid pro quo* from Russia. Then and for years later it appears to have been the French view that if Russia was not to be relied upon to aid France in the recovery of her lost provinces, France could not be expected to help Russia in any aggressive ambitions in the Near East. As for Anglo-Russian relations, the Pamirs were never more than a minor incident, and the fact that a Liberal Government was in power with the Russophil Gladstone at its head cannot have been other than reassuring to the Tsar.

V

There was much obscure manœuvring in these months, and French statesmen played skilfully on Alexander's fears and suspicions, to say nothing of his pecuniary necessities, in their endeavours to bring him to the point. But the main inducement to Russia is sufficiently revealed in the German Chancellor's definitions of policy in his speech to the Reichstag already quoted. "The Russian tradition demanded the advance to the Straits and Constantinople even if the road were through Berlin. In the circumstances the German Government felt obliged to preserve the position of Austria as a great Power. We cannot sacrifice Austria to gain temporary concessions from Russia. In these circumstances we must be prepared for a war on two fronts." The words sound prophetic, and it may almost be said that the die was cast for Germany when they were spoken. The obligation to support Austria was all the greater, because by this time Germany had entered upon her policy of friendship with Turkey, which a little later was to develop into the ambitious project of driving a German trade route from "Berlin to Baghdad," and thence to the Persian Gulf. This policy could not be pursued without blocking Russian ambitions and it required the co-operation of Austria, which was only to be had by furthering her policy in the Balkans. If the road to Constantinople lay from henceforth through Berlin, it was by Germany's own choice, and if she was obliged to stand by Austria, when the latter

threatened or was threatened by Russia, that also was her own doing.

The Kaiser's wooing of Turkey, which had started with his ostentatious visit to Constantinople in 1889, was too open to have been missed by the Russians, and his interest in Turkish railway concessions was by this time notorious. With the Reinsurance Treaty gone, the Triple Alliance renewed, the German army strengthened, Germany siding with the Turk and closing her doors upon Russian commercial and financial necessities, it may well have seemed to Alexander that there would be no check to German ambitions unless he stifled his sentimental objections and made common cause with France. The little civilities with which the Germans sought to temper the facts were only what Bismarck would have called a policy of *trinkgelt* compared with these great issues.

The choice had to be made and with no great delay. As the French saw the situation, the agreement of August, 1891, if it stood by itself, placed them in a position of great danger. It exposed them to reprisals from both Germany and England without any sure promise of support from Russia. That no agreement was more than a flourish unless followed up by military conversations paving the way to concerted action in face of attack, was, then, as later, the opinion of the French, who immediately after the return visit of the Russian fleet to Toulon (October, 1893) began to press for the conclusion of the Military Convention provisionally agreed upon by the French and Russian Chiefs of Staff in the previous August. The Tsar appears to have improved the occasion with a little homily addressed to the French Ambassador :

I often hear speak of revenge which exists in your country and which is said to be a menace, but I see no justification for this statement. You would not be Frenchmen if you did not cherish the belief that the day would come when you might regain possession of your lost provinces ; but between this very natural sentiment and the idea of a provocation to effect its realization, the idea of *revanche*, in a word, there is a great difference, and you have frequently proved, you have just shown again, that you desire peace above all and that you will know how to wait with dignity.¹

The limit placed upon the use of the proposed Convention might have damped some ardours, if it had been generally known in Paris, but the French by this time were willing to take what they could get, and there was no doubt whatever that the Alliance, as it now came to be called, gave them both a new standing in

¹ Langer, "Franco-Russian Alliance," p. 354. French *Livre Jaune*, No. 90.

the diplomatic world and substantial security against a German attack.

Notes were exchanged between the two Governments at the end of December, 1893, and the ratifications were completed by January 4, 1894. The Convention in its final form ran thus:

1. If France is attacked by Germany or by Italy supported by Germany, Russia shall employ all her available forces to attack Germany.

If Russia is attacked by Germany or by Austria supported by Germany, France shall employ all her available forces to combat Germany.

2. In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or of one of the Powers composing it, should mobilize, France and Russia, at the first news of the event and without the necessity of any previous concert, shall mobilize immediately and simultaneously all their forces and shall move them as close as possible to their frontiers.

3. The available forces to be employed against Germany shall be, on the part of France 1,300,000 men, on the part of Russia 700,000 or 800,000.

These forces shall engage to the full with all speed, in order that Germany may have to fight at the same time on the East and on the West.¹

In addition there were clauses providing for the co-operation of the two General Staffs in time of peace, and three articles providing (1) that France and Russia should not conclude a separate peace, (2) that the Convention should have the same duration as the Triple Alliance, and (3) that all the clauses should be kept rigorously secret.

The document was of momentous importance, but it will be observed that there was a certain ambiguity, if not actual contradiction, in it. France was bound to mobilize if Austria alone mobilized against Russia, but not to fight unless Austria was supported by Germany. Similarly Russia was bound to mobilize if Italy mobilized against France, but not to fight unless Italy was supported by Germany. The sole case in which both were bound to fight was if either were attacked by Germany. The assumption apparently was still that mobilization was possible without war; but whether the framers of this Convention took it seriously, or counted on the effect of setting armies in motion in precipitating war can only be guessed. The ruling idea of all such provisions on either side was to be prompt in striking the first blow.

The continental Powers had now chosen their sides but for them all there still remained a momentous question—what would Great Britain do?

¹ *Livre Jaune*, Nos. 56, 57. Pribram, Vol. II., p. 215.

BOOK III
THE BRITISH CASTING VOTE

CHAPTER XIV

THE SEA-POWER OF GREAT BRITAIN

Britain between 1894 and 1904—The End of "Splendid Isolation"—British Powers and its Special Characteristics—The Continental View—Misunderstanding and Mystification—The Awakening to Sea-Power—Two Possible Policies for the Continental Groups—The German Choice—Its Consequences.

I

THE period on which we now enter—roughly from 1894 to 1904—is of special importance to the British reader as that in which British policy was shaped in the form in which it remained fixed up to the Great War. The other Powers having now ranged themselves into the two camps of Dual and Triple Alliance, the British casting vote became of supreme importance to both. Great Britain still hugged her "splendid isolation," but the policy, which was its logical correlative, of standing aloof from her neighbours' affairs became in these years more and more difficult. Her position in the Mediterranean, her guardianship of the road to India, her traditional policy in regard to Constantinople and the Straits, made her an interested party in all their disputes in the Near East; and when the scene was shifted to the Far East there too she had immense stakes which compelled her to play her part. Nearer home the rise of a new naval Power across the North Sea awakened all her latent anxieties about her own safety, and the position in which she would be if a dominant European Power commanding a great fleet or a coalition of fleets were in a position to challenge her. At the beginning of this period we see her resisting all overtures for a definite alliance, but willing to make short term agreements and decidedly inclining to the German group. At the end she had definitely, in the eyes of Europe, though scarcely as yet in her own, taken her decision for France and Russia. Cumulative circumstances, of which the rising sea-power of Germany was the most important, led gradually to this result; and British statesmen took the decisive step with so little apprehension of its consequences

and implications that they might almost be said to have acted, as Seeley said of their predecessors, in absence of mind.

We become conscious, in reading the records of these years, of a growing irritation with British policy and British statesmen in both European groups. European statesmen and the military experts who advised them measured power in units of land forces and were puzzled and mystified by the strength of the Island Empire. It was ubiquitous, imponderable, contrary to the nature of things, as they understood it. But its range of action was immense, and, as it seemed to them, out of all proportion to any military resources which the country possessed. With a military force altogether insignificant when compared with the least of theirs, Great Britain yet held sway over a quarter of the globe, and none of them could challenge her authority or limit her pretensions. A German writer dwelt on the absurdity of her claim to rule the 300 millions of India with an army of 70,000 men, and said that the facts had only to be known for the British idol to tumble from its pedestal. They were known, and it did not tumble. To the German militarist it seemed as if the law of gravitation were suspended in favour of Great Britain, and the fact filled him with uneasiness. He drew comfort from the thought that in Europe at all events this British magic would not work, and flattered himself that at no point could Great Britain seriously interfere with his plans of campaign. But even on these terms the spectre could not be laid, and either to bring Britain under German influence or, failing that, to prevent her from joining the opposing group became capital objects of German policy from the beginning of the twentieth century. Correspondingly to obtain the support of Great Britain became a necessary purpose of French policy.

But for both France and Germany the wooing of Britain was largely thwarted in these years by popular passions and antipathies which prevented statesmen from taking an objective view of their longer interests. Passion was inflamed against Germany in England by the Kaiser's telegram to Kruger in 1895; against England in France by the Fashoda crisis of 1898; and in the following years against France in England by the Dreyfus affair. Then came the South African War which brought a stream of denunciation upon England from both Germans and French, and for a time the talk was only of possible combined action to restrain her. In these years she seemed to be without a friend in the world, and the only question was whether anti-British feeling was stronger in Berlin or in Paris or St. Petersburg.

But these years also left the other nations more than ever impressed with the strength and invulnerability of the Island Empire. They might rage, but they could do nothing. When it came to the point, every scheme or dream of action broke down against the evident fact that they were all helpless against British sea-power. They might talk of flying squadrons or plan expeditions to Delagoa Bay, but their squadrons would be at the mercy of more powerful British squadrons, and their expeditions be sunk or captured by a British fleet before they were through the Mediterranean or round the Cape. Under the teaching of concrete events there came a sudden realization of the meaning of sea-power, about which there had hitherto been little reflection, and Great Britain found herself under scrutiny as the possessor of an omnipotent and ubiquitous weapon with which the other nations had either wilfully or blindly neglected to provide themselves. The writings of Captain Mahan, the American historian of sea-power, became universal reading in these years and were translated into all languages.

Two morals might be drawn from this experience. One that England's rivals and competitors should provide themselves with a fleet comparable to hers which would enable them eventually to challenge her at sea; the other that Great Britain was more than ever desirable as an ally, and that the utmost effort should be made to draw her into partnership. On the whole the Germans drew the first and the French the second of these conclusions. The qualification is necessary, since for a considerable time the Germans appear to have cherished the idea that they could both build a fleet which was evidently intended to challenge the British fleet and yet make friends with Great Britain. It was a characteristic part of their political doctrine that to inspire a neighbour with fear was the most certain and effective way of making him a friend. Faced with a powerful German fleet, England, the Kaiser and Tirpitz kept saying, would for the first time respect Germany and seek her friendship. This proved to be a radical misunderstanding of the British temperament and character. Again and again in the coming years efforts at conciliation between Britain and Germany were to break down against German persistence in the construction of her great fleet. Whenever it came to a choice between the two, the Germans invariably chose the latter. The German Emperor, as he angrily instructed the German Ambassador in London, would not, for the sake of any friendship with England, forgo his right to build whatever ships he chose. Nor would he accept any over-

ture from England which prevented him from exploiting the anti-English feeling among his subjects which provided steam for his naval agitations.

This was the permanent fact which finally determined British relations and drove British statesmen to find their security with the Dual Alliance. But in judging between British and German in these years, the unique character of sea-power needs always to be borne in mind. In German eyes the British claim to the "command of the seas" was as arrogant and intolerable as in British eyes the thought of a German hegemony on land. What, asked the Germans, would the British have said if they had claimed "the command of the land," and why should Great Britain assert a power over the sea which no nation would have ventured to assert over the land? The answer of the British was that they could not help themselves, that sea-power differed from land-power in that only a supreme fleet could serve their purpose, and that without such a fleet their Empire, their trade, the food of their people, their very existence as a nation must have been in peril. An inferior fleet, a challengeable fleet, a fleet open to attack by a combination of other fleets, left them exposed not merely to defeat but to annihilation. On the sea, as Sir John Fisher kept repeating, it was all or nothing. Unless you had the supreme fleet, you might as well have no fleet. Let Britain be defeated at sea and she was lost.

Further, the British protested that they used their power moderately and benevolently. They policed, lit and charted the seas for everybody; they admitted all nations to the trade which they opened up; they had no military force with which they could invade their neighbours as their neighbours might invade them, if they were defeated at sea. Their Liberal Empire stood for peace, free trade and tolerance all over the world. It was on the whole a well-founded claim, but in the eyes of Germans it did not weigh against the patent fact that Great Britain had all the seven seas at her mercy, that she commanded the ways into them and the ways out, that she could, if she so willed, put her veto on German trade, seize German colonies, blockade and starve the German people. All these apprehensions, in fact, proved well founded in the Great War, and the fact that they were possibilities rankled and smouldered in the German mind in the years before the war. The Germans seemed to themselves to be living, trading and expanding on sufferance, and their statesmen complained that their policy and their claim to their place in the sun was constantly checked and limited by the fear of a collision with British sea-power. For a

nation which was making a bold bid for trade supremacy, which was rapidly increasing in population and wealth, which was second to none in its organizing power and application of science to industry, this was said to be an intolerable position. In Germany, as in England, all the world believed that trade followed the flag, but, if so, the flag had to be invulnerable and sea-power in proportion to over-sea commerce. This was the British doctrine, and why not also the German?

An Englishman who tries to judge fairly must make allowance for these feelings, but if it is regarded as a problem of statesmanship, it must be said again that there were only two ways out of this situation. One was to live at peace with Great Britain, and the other to outbuild her and substitute German for British supremacy on the sea. Germany, in the end, fell between the two stools. The command of the sea was the greater necessity for the Island Power, and it was fated that for every new ship Germany built Britain should build two, and that the evident intention to challenge her where she could least afford to be challenged should throw her more and more into the arms of the anti-German Powers which had no such intention. Bülow at one time spoke with pride of his skill in managing Great Britain while Germany was passing through the "danger zone" in which she was preparing a fleet which would "compel the respect" of the British. He was profoundly mistaken; the danger zone could never be passed so long as Great Britain was ready to reply with "two keels to one" to the German effort, and the unconcealed design sharpened antagonisms and thwarted all efforts to reconcile German and British. From the beginning of the new century to the Great War the German fleet is the *leit-motiv* of British policy. Again and again British statesmen are seen returning to the subject and retiring baffled against the obduracy of Emperor, Chancellor or Admiral, all vehemently protesting their right to build what fleet they chose, and unable or unwilling to see that this right could not be exercised without destroying their peaceful relations with Great Britain.

As the story goes forward the scene shifts rapidly from Africa to Europe, from Near East to Far East, and back again from Far East to Near East, but always the main contention is that of the European groups, seeking to assert their power, testing each other's strength, advancing or retiring according as they are ready or unready to fight. Through it all the methods of British statesmen are the same—to avoid or postpone conflict if they could, to mediate whenever possible, but when that failed and a definite

challenge was offered, to stand firm to the group to which they had pledged their support. A deep-rooted instinct told British statesmen that in this world of organized force, they could not afford to be left to settle accounts single-handed with a victorious Power dominating Europe, and quite probably having at its disposal a combination of fleets. Not to be in this position and therefore to throw her weight into the scale against the dominance of any one Power or group of Powers which might threaten her existence, had for centuries been the traditional policy of Great Britain; and, however much she might reserve her own right to decide the final question of peace or war, this, on the road that Europe was now going, was bound to be her policy still. The great contention between Germany and Britain on sea-power was therefore not a side-issue of European politics or an undesigned entanglement of Britain in the European quarrel; it was from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards to the outbreak of the war one of the fundamental schisms between the nations. Many continental and American critics of British policy have gone astray by missing or undervaluing this essential factor and seeking far-fetched explanations of the conduct of British Ministers, as if they were manœuvring on the same ground as the continental land Powers. This has produced a vast deal of learned research on points which were in reality quite simple from the British point of view, and led to the writing of history in a manner which is remote from the memories of Englishmen who lived through this period.

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STRATAGEMS AND MASSACRES

German Ignorance of the Franco-Russian Alliance—An Explanation from Paris—The Kaiser and the Mission of Russia—The Kaiser's Ideas of German Policy—The Armenian Massacres—Lord Salisbury's View—The Partition of Turkey—A British Trap—The Powers at Constantinople—Their Attitude towards Reform.

I

THE tendencies described in the previous chapter took several years to develop and in the meantime the European groups engaged in what, as revealed by the documents, appears to have been an intricate game of blind-man's-buff.

The reader who knows the contents of the Franco-Russian Treaty might naturally suppose that its conclusion in January, 1894, was recognized by the other Governments as an event of the highest importance. The truth is—and it needs constantly to be borne in mind in any effort to understand the sequence of events in these years—the other Governments were totally unaware not only of the contents of the Treaty, but even of the fact that such a Treaty had been signed. Even now it needs some research to trace the course of events which led from the *Entente* after the Cronstadt visit in August, 1891 to the Military Convention which three years later gave it alliance value. In January, 1894, neither the Germans nor anyone else in Europe knew that anything out of the common had happened.

Indeed for many years longer it continued to be the German theory that nothing of importance had happened, and that the Franco-Russian demonstrations were mere moves in a game which was being played as before. Berlin, it is true, became a little anxious when French and Russian squadrons met in Danish waters and went, so to speak, arm in arm to the festivities in the opening of the Kiel Canal, to which they had been invited separately by the German Emperor. This seemed rather pointed on a purely

hospitable occasion. But Count Münster, the German Ambassador in Paris, was ready with explanations :

Paris, June 20, 1895.

Whether the relationship between France and Russia is called a Franco-Russian *Entente* or Franco-Russian Alliance is of no importance. I am convinced that the relationship between the two States is unchanged in any essentials. It is still a runaway match which lacks the formal sanction of the Tsar.

Ribot's Cabinet is tottering. Its domestic and foreign policy lends itself to many attacks. Confidence in Russia is markedly declining. . . .

Something had to happen to revive the Frenchman's waning confidence in the foreign policy of his own Government and towards Russia.

That was achieved for the moment by the word "Alliance."

For Ribot and Hanotaux this, though an untrue word, was a lifebuoy.

Russia could and would not give a denial to the French Ministers; she is seeking a free hand in respect of the other Powers, but France will not let her go and will continue to exploit her for financial profit.

There is no direct admission of the existence of the Alliance from the Russian side. Instead, by the bestowal of a Russian order on the President, and by the comedy played by the two Admirals in the much talked of meeting of their ships in Danish waters and their joint journey to Kiel, dust is thrown in the eyes of the French and the conviction established that an Alliance actually exists. An unworthy game on Russia's part!

The agitation against the Kiel festivals has little success; the demonstration before the pedestal of the Strasbourg statue has lamentably miscarried.

All this only shows how weak the present Government is and how easily public opinion here lets itself be excited on the one side and as easily appeased on the other.

The mere word "alliance," and the Russian-French comedy of the journey to Kiel satisfy the majority of Frenchmen who believe that they have won a moral victory, and that France intimately allied with Russia may rule the world.¹

Believing that the Russians were only throwing dust in the eyes of the French—just manœuvring to show their independence of other Powers—the German Emperor and his Ministers went their way as before. But just as Bismarck had recognized the desirability of keeping France occupied in distant regions of the world, so now they had the same thought about Russia.

In April, 1895, the German Kaiser wrote to his friend Nicholas, who had succeeded his father Alexander III on the Russian throne, assuring him of his warm support in the discharge of the Mission providentially assigned to Russia of "defending Europe from the inroads of the great Yellow race," and promising his aid in the "annexation of portions of territory for Russia" in pursuance of

¹ G.P., IX, No. 2316, p. 355.

this Mission on the sole condition that he (Nicholas) would "kindly see" that Germany also acquired "a port somewhere where it does not *gêne* you." In the same year Germany joined France and Russia in the intervention which had deprived Japan of most of the fruits of her victory in her war with China, but whereas both France and Russia had taken ample compensation from China, Germany was still waiting and had two years still to wait before she helped herself to her portion at Kiao-Chow. The Kaiser, nevertheless, had no doubts about the desirability in German interests of keeping Russia occupied with the Yellow races, and at the end of July, 1895, he communicated his views to the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who passed them on for the information of the Ambassadors:

His Majesty made the following remarks to me to-day about our policy towards Russia and England:

"We must endeavour to nail Russia down in East Asia so that she may busy herself less with Europe and the European Near-East. By turning to account the power of the Orthodox Church and the Moscow circle, Russia must be pushed forward as the Champion of Orthodox Christianity and the Cross, as the bulwark of civilization against the threatening danger of a Chinese assault set in motion by Japan. Prince Bismarck himself pursued a policy of that kind. If Russia were engaged in Asia His Majesty would, if she wished, be ready to cover her rear in Europe in return for corresponding concessions. Such a concession and preliminary conditions would, he thinks, be first of all a considerable reduction in the German troops on the Russian frontier, since this in itself, owing to the discontent of the regiments and the strain of watching the frontier, makes a decided danger of war."

When I raised the question of concessions in China, His Majesty said he had written some time ago to the Tsar that when Russia next made territorial demands in China, Germany also would desire to establish herself there at least to the acquisition of a coaling-station. The Tsar in his answer had indicated that he considered this demand perfectly natural. His Majesty is of opinion that Count Lobanof knows nothing of this.

The Emperor thinks that Russia will now make difficulties for England in Egypt, and that she has raised the Abyssinian question for this purpose. Our policy in this respect must be one of complete reserve. If England needs us she will come forward of her own accord, and we can then make our support dependent on concessions (Zanzibar, etc.). Generally speaking, Germany was now in the favourable position of being able to look on and wait, since no one in Europe could achieve anything without her assistance.¹

II

The unembarrassed candour with which the Kaiser expounded the principles of German diplomacy for the benefit of his sub-

¹ G.P., IX, No. 2318, p. 358.

ordinates disarms criticism. To him it is obvious common sense to keep the Tsar busy with the championship of the Cross in a distant part of the world; and a clear-sighted instinct for reality leads him to perceive that this religious mission may be combined with the annexation of territory for Russia and the acquisition of a coaling-station for Germany.

But by this time the scene was shifting back to Europe, where Sultan Abdul Hamid's misgovernment and the horrible massacres of the Armenians had again raised the Turkish question in its acutest form. Public opinion in England was deeply stirred, and Lord Salisbury, who had returned to power and the Foreign Office in June, 1895, seemed to share the general emotion, and spoke of the traditional policy of his party in supporting Turkey as a "backing of the wrong horse." He now appeared to contemplate the dissolution of the Turkish Empire as a near event and set himself to explore the possibilities of a peaceful partition.

The dispatches which passed between the statesmen and Ambassadors of the other Powers show the attitude of these real politicians on what the British people thought to be a moral issue. They considered the British agitation most untimely, and were unable to believe that Lord Salisbury was actuated by disinterested humanitarian motives. "The way in which Lord Salisbury speaks of the break-up and partition of Turkey makes us suspect at once and not for the first time," writes the German Under-Secretary to the Ambassador in London, "that this British statesman would like to hasten the process in the hope that England might be able to hold aloof from the struggles of the Continent resulting from it, or, as she did in the early Napoleonic Wars, control the situation and conditions, *i.e.* dictate the conditions of her co-operation, but not begin them."¹ Baron Holstein it need hardly be said abounded in the same sense:

The one object of all the British Ministers' present proposals is, in my opinion, to relieve the unpleasant position in which England finds herself with France and Russia about Egypt, by producing complications in Asia Minor and the Balkans into which all continental Powers, including ourselves, would be dragged, rather than England.

A tremendous and acute British need alone can explain why Lord Salisbury, who usually pays the greatest consideration to Austria and does not like Italy, should now be ready to offer Albania to the Italians, which would deal Austria a heavy blow and probably smash the Triple Alliance. For Germany it is chiefly important that Turkey should not collapse.²

¹ G.P., X, No. 2373, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, No. 2377, p. 19, and Dugdale, Vol. II., p. 335.

The German Emperor was now visiting his grandmother, Queen Victoria, at Cowes, and these views were communicated by telegraph to Kiderlen Waechter, who was acting as Minister in attendance. The latter was able to report the following day (August 5) that His Majesty was in full agreement. He had described Lord Salisbury's plan as "truly English," and said he would have nothing to do with it.

Lord Salisbury, meanwhile, had seen the Kaiser at Osborne, but, being primed with Holstein's views, the Kaiser desired a second interview and invited him by telephone to come on board the *Hohenzollern*. According to his own account he waited two or three hours and Lord Salisbury failed to appear. The explanation given by Lord Salisbury was that at the hour proposed by the Kaiser he had been commanded to an audience with the Queen, and that when this was over, it was too late for him to go on board the *Hohenzollern*. On his return to London he wrote an apology, in which he said he had not the slightest idea that the Kaiser had wished to talk to him and that he had supposed the appointment, of which he had had only a quarter of an hour's notice, to be merely an act of politeness which had been annulled by the length of his audience with the Queen. Evidently there was a failure of staff work somewhere, and the Kaiser was greatly annoyed. Within a few days the tale was heavily embroidered. It was said that Salisbury had visited the *Hohenzollern* and come away in high dudgeon after an altercation which left behind it a deep and lasting mutual dislike.¹ This was plainly not the case, but there was more plausibility in the story that Lord Salisbury had broached a scheme for the partition of Turkey in his first conversation and received a rebuff which made him glad of an excuse for avoiding any further talk.

III

It was, anyhow, the "scheme of partition"² attributed to Lord Salisbury and not the martyrdom of the Armenians which now filled the minds of the Governments. Russia and France no less than Germany suspected a trap. It seemed incredible to the Russians that the British Conservative Prime Minister should suddenly reverse the secular policy of his party and positively invite them

¹ Eckardstein, "Ten Years at the Court of St. James's," p. 57.

² The scheme seems to have been no more than a "feeler" of a possible way to prevent a general war in the event, which seemed to him highly probable, of the break-up of the Turkish Empire.

to come to Constantinople, as he seemed to be doing, unless he had some deep ulterior motive. Russia, commented the German Chancellor, "is too clever to be caught in the British trap," and the Kaiser was keen that St. Petersburg should be advised to keep a sharp look-out on English action. England must not be allowed to "get rid of her two rivals by inducing Russia to protect the Christians against the Mohammedans and embroil them with each other."¹ The Kaiser had impulsive moments in which he too seemed to be horrified by the reports of Armenian massacres, and now and again he said that the Sultan must go. But he swung back quickly to the realities as understood in Berlin. Towards the end of October he unburdened himself to Colonel Swaine, the British Military Attaché in Berlin, and said heatedly that the British press and its influence on public opinion was to blame for the "purposeless scandal of the Armenian question. It displeased the Russians above all. *Hinc illae lacrimae.*" The Kaiser adds that "the colonel agreed and spoke very bitterly of Argyll, Westminster and Mr. Gladstone who had conjured up the whole thing."

In this atmosphere of mutual suspicion and irritation, the Powers clutched at the Sultan's promises of reform only to see them stultified in a few weeks by renewed and worse massacres. Left to himself Baron von Saurma, the German Ambassador at Constantinople, appears to have had the natural humanitarian instincts, and he reported faithfully upon the wickedness and savagery of the Hamidian regime. But by this time Russia had become firmly convinced of the theory of the British trap and was definitely supporting the Sultan against the British demands. Baron von Saurma paints a vivid little picture of the scene behind the scenes in the diplomatic circle at Constantinople in mid-December, 1895 :

Sir Philip Currie continues to urge that the Sultan must be publicly unmasked, and the Powers be thus enabled to prevent him from causing further mischief.

The miscreant, who has already slaughtered nearly 100,000 people and is not yet sated, must be rendered innocuous for reasons of general humanity.

M. de Nelidoff, however, rejects all suggestions aimed at a direct attack on the Sultan or the use of forcible constraint in his Government administration.

Both colleagues tried privately to win me over to their side.

Nelidoff admitted that his positive instructions were to support the Sultan, and in all cases to refuse participation in unfriendly steps taken against him jointly by his colleagues.

Sir Philip Currie pointed to the growing dissatisfaction in public opinion in England and the resulting probability that his Government will soon be forced

¹ G.P., X, No. 2437, p. 77.

to act against the Sultan, the author of such endless misery. Even the other Powers could not, in order to please Russia, allow the whole of Turkey to fall into complete anarchy through the guilt of Abdul Hamid.

According to instructions, I carefully kept up my reserve with both Ambassadors, and merely said how desirable it appeared to me to remain united, if only to be able to report calmly and objectively to our Governments and avoid the risk of their forming divergent judgments on the situation here.

From the French Ambassador's attitude, it appears that his Government—though it follows Russia in general—is not so kindly disposed towards the Sultan and his deeds as is the case in St. Petersburg, and would scarcely take Abdul Hamid's side, if England one day became impatient and felt moved to take direct action.

That subtle observer, the Sultan, has long ago realized the change in the policy of the Powers who used to be firmly united against him, and is evidently beginning to count on Russia's support if he gets into a scrape.

It is clear that this will not help much to restore order in Asia Minor; but perhaps it is to the political interest of Russia also to keep conditions there in a more and more rotten state.¹ (December 16, 1895.)

So the Ambassadors sat watching one another while the "endless human misery" went on, and that subtle observer, the Sultan, snapped his fingers at them all. Stifling his feelings the German continued to report "calmly and objectively" to his Government, and the risk of "divergent judgments" leading to a conflict in action was again by a hair's breadth avoided. The Champion of the Cross being sufficiently occupied in annexing territory in the Far East now threw his shield over the Crescent in the Near East, and Germany came out of the affair in good odour with the blood-stained Sultan who was to be one of her principal protégés during the next few years. England, meanwhile, received another sharp lesson about the unseasonableness of humanitarian ideas which conflicted with the aims of either of the European groups. Both said it was intolerable that she should remain outside and yet presume to advise them about their moral duties.

Mr. Gladstone came out of his retreat in September, 1896, to thunder once more and for the last time on his old theme of Turkish misrule.* Lord Rosebery, who knew more of what was going on behind the scenes in Europe, declined to follow his lead, and resigned the leadership of the Liberal party. Abdul Hamid was safe on his throne for another twelve years, and the great monarchies had decreed that the Turkish Empire should linger unreformed in Europe until its downfall involved them all in its ruin.

¹ G.P., X, No. 2479, p.⁵127.

GERMANY AND SOUTH AFRICA

The Kaiser and the Boers—A British Ambassador and the word "War"—Lord Salisbury's Explanation—Making Capital for the Navy—The Kruger Telegram—A Suppressed Ultimatum—Tirpitz's Moral—"World Power Requires Sea-Power."

I

THE British quarrel with the Boers in the Transvaal, which came to its first climax in December, 1895, had consequences which extended far beyond South Africa, and from the beginning of 1895 onwards contributed powerfully to the tendencies which were driving Britain and Germany apart. President Kruger's struggle with the British in the Transvaal, the Jameson Raid and the South African War were all momentous in their European consequences.

On January 27, 1895, the birthday of William II, President Kruger was entertained by the German Club at Pretoria, and in a toast to the Kaiser spoke of Germany as a "grown-up Power that would stop England from kicking the child Republic." These words gave great offence to Lord Kimberley, who was then Foreign Secretary, and he instructed Sir Edward Malet, the British Ambassador in Berlin, to enter a remonstrance against the German encouragement to Boer agitation which he detected behind them. The Ambassador was not well primed for this intervention, and when Marschall von Bieberstein asked for facts to support it, he fell back on generalities which the German countered by a vigorous attack on the aggressive policy of Cecil Rhodes. The occasion rankled, and in October, when Sir Edward was leaving Berlin for the last time, there appears to have been something like a scene between him and Marschall. The Kaiser asserted in a conversation with the British Military Attaché that "the Ambassador had gone so far as to mention the astounding word 'war'"; that "for a few square miles full of niggers and palm trees, England had threatened her one true friend, the German Emperor, grandson of Her Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, with war."

According to his own account the Kaiser improved the occasion to issue certain "clear warnings." England's attitude, he said, was "forcing him to make common cause with France and Russia, each of whom had a million men ready to pour in over his frontier, whilst England had not a good word for him." England "could only escape from her present complete isolation into which her policy of selfishness and bullying had plunged her, by a frank and outspoken attitude either for or against the Triple Alliance. The first alternative demanded a formula, such as was customary between Continental Powers, *i.e.* a sealed and signed guarantee."¹

"The colonel," says the Kaiser, "seemed deeply moved and shaken," and he naturally reported this conversation to London whence the answer came back that Lord Salisbury was as astonished as the Kaiser, and that he had given no instructions to Malet to utter the ominous word. According to Hatzfeldt, the German Ambassador in London, Salisbury "said finally that he could only explain Sir Edward's action, which he had not sanctioned, by the fact that it corresponded with a former instruction of Lord Kimberley's." It is difficult to believe that Lord Salisbury said anything of the kind, but this reported to the German Foreign Office drew a characteristic comment from the Kaiser:

"Ach so! a little *désaveu* perhaps, which Salisbury allowed to stand—by an oversight?—it makes no difference. We must make all the capital we can out of this story, perhaps for a demand for an increase of the Navy, to protect our growing trade."² (October 25, 1895.) Whereupon Marschall telegraphed to Hatzfeldt:

His Majesty, who regards certain expressions used by Sir Edward Malet about the Transvaal practically as an ultimatum, was of opinion, even after your telegram of October 25 arrived, that we must take the opportunity offered by this occurrence to strengthen our navy, for Lord Salisbury's attempt to lay the blame on Rosebery [*sic*] did not appear credible.

Making capital for the navy was from this time one of the principal preoccupations of the German Emperor and his advisers, and South Africa was to play a large part in it.

II

There followed in this already heated atmosphere the disastrous folly of the Jameson Raid. The Kaiser in his "Memoirs" has been at much pains to show that he was only very reluctantly pushed by

¹ G.P., XI, No. 2579, p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, No. 2580, p. 12, and Dugdale, Vol. II., p. 369.

his advisers into signing his famous telegram¹ of congratulation to President Kruger. This is in flat contradiction with other versions which represent him as having with difficulty been retrieved from making an even stronger demonstration,² but the point is of very little importance. The records show the Kaiser in a state of high agitation, if in some doubt as to the manner in which the situation could best be exploited for Germany. On January 2 he telegraphed to the Tsar: "Never will I suffer the English to oppress the Transvaal," and three days later he told the French Ambassador that the English fleet was not ready and that "if all the European States had joined hands with us, we might have done something important." More serious still, he had sanctioned the following dispatch from the Foreign Secretary to Count Hatzfeldt, the German Ambassador in London, on the last day of December 1895:

His Majesty the Emperor instructs you to ask at once in the proper official quarter whether the British Government approves the crossing of the frontier of the Transvaal State by the Chartered Company's troops.

If you have the impression that this infraction of International law is approved, you will ask for your passports.

If this inroad into the Transvaal is disapproved, you will ask by what means the British Government intends to repair the breach of law.³

The Ambassador had the good sense while asking the question to keep this dispatch in his pocket. There was no difficulty about the disclaimer or a promise to deal faithfully with the Raiders when the facts had been ascertained. Hatzfeldt, therefore, "spoke no word to Lord Salisbury which could be construed as a threat," and three days later on receipt of the news that the Raiders had been surrounded and made prisoners, he recalled and got back unopened another menacing communication which he had been instructed to forward to Lord Salisbury.⁴

Thus, thanks to the good sense of the German representative in London, the danger passed for the moment, and a cold fit soon supervened on the hot fit in Berlin. It now appeared that all unwittingly the German Emperor had done the British Government an enormous service. Up to this moment the mass of people in

¹ "I express my sincere congratulations that, supported by your people, without appealing for the help of friendly Powers, you have succeeded by your own energetic action against armed bands which invaded your country as disturbers of the peace, and have thus been enabled to restore peace and safeguard the independence of the country against attacks from outside." (January 3, 1896.)

² Ludwig, "Kaiser Wilhelm," pp. 172-6.

³ G.P., XI, No. 2590, p. 19, and Dugdale, Vol. II., p. 377.

⁴ This also is printed in G.P., (XI, No. 2600): "In obedience to instructions given to me I have to declare that the Imperial Government protests against this action and is not minded to accept any alteration in the legal position of the South African Republic, as secured by Treaty."

England had seen only the fiasco which had blighted the imperialist cause and brought discredit on the British name. Then suddenly the blast from Germany had turned all this wrath into a new channel and appeared to justify the Rhodesians, who had long been hinting at German intrigues and the necessity of prompt action to get in front of them. Kruger, instead of being the injured innocent, was now said to be displayed in his true colours, that is in intimate relations with the German Emperor, and with his encouragement, defying the British power in South Africa. Self-respect was restored, a flying squadron was mobilized, and immense numbers of Englishmen now believed that the Raid was merely an unfortunate episode in a perfectly well-justified endeavour to protect British interests against Boer and German conspirators.¹

This was disconcerting enough to the Kaiser and his friends in Berlin, but there were even more disturbing thoughts. What in any case could they have done, if the Ambassador had asked for his passports and the word "war" had been uttered? Mobilization of Marine Infantry, troops for the Transvaal, a landing in Delagoa Bay, pressure on the Portuguese who held the port of entry? Yes, but supposing they had met the British fleet on the way, what then? The military gentlemen who had worked out excellent schemes for advancing from the coast to the Transvaal appear to have overlooked this part of the problem, and their discomfiture offered the richest opportunity for their naval colleagues to drive home the moral. The indefatigable young Tirpitz, student of Mahan, champion of sea-power, who for the last three years had been knocking at the door in vain, reported with glee to his superior, Stosch, on February 13, 1896, that he had had "an opportunity of vindicating in the highest quarter your Excellency's views on the necessary expansion of the Navy, and there is hope that the thread will be taken up once more where it was dropped in 1883." His theme was that "world-policy requires sea-power"; that excursions into over-sea affairs, like the Kruger telegram, could lead to nothing but mortification unless they had behind them the sanction of a fleet, that now was the time to bring this moral home to the German people. He concluded a long letter to Stosch in which he reported his reception "in the highest quarter" with these words:

This incident may, however, have its good side, and I should think that a much bigger row would have been actually useful to us, in the sense that

¹ "Life, Journalism and Politics," by J. A. Spender, Vol. I., pp. 78-9.

it would have opened the eyes of our Parliament; firstly, to put a definite stop to the Anglomania of certain circles, and secondly *to arouse our nation to build a fleet* on the lines of Memorandum IX. This estimate is actually to be included in the next Budget. The Government and the leaders of the Reichstag, to be sure, see no prospect of success. By representing unreservedly the military and political value of our present fleet, the Admiralty has at least discharged its obligation, and history will have to call other people to account.

My view is therefore to create within the next twelve years a fleet which is in keeping with the requirements of the same, and whose strength shall not be far removed in essentials from that laid down in your Excellency's first memorandum of 1872. . . .¹

To this he adds: "The outbreak of hatred, envy and rage which the Kruger telegram let loose in England against Germany contributed more than anything else to open the eyes of large sections of the German people to our economic position and the necessity for a fleet."

¹ Tirpitz, "My Memoirs," Vol. I., p. 65, English translation.

HOLSTEIN'S PLAN

Baron Holstein's Plan—European Joint Action against Britain—An Overture to France—Its Discouraging Reception—The Attitude of Italy—And of Russia—Tirpitz Repeats his Moral.

I

WHILE Kaiser and Chancellor were nursing their discomfiture over the course of events in South Africa, Baron Holstein had a thought. How would it be if after her Transvaal experience Germany were temporarily to go over to the Franco-Russian group and take with her Italy and Austria? Triple and Dual Alliance together could make themselves extremely disagreeable to England. There were all sorts of things they wanted in Africa and the Far East—Congo, Corea, coaling-stations and trade advantages—which they might help each other to get at England's expense, if they worked together for only a short time. Then England would see that if she wished to keep India, Egypt and her position in Persia without having to fight for them, she would have to come back to the Triple Alliance. She would only recognize this necessity if—as was the object of the proposed plan—she learnt from experience that the Triple Alliance would not in all circumstances play the part of her camp-follower.¹

The idea appealed to the Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, who asked the Ambassador in Paris, Count Münster, to broach it cautiously to President Faure—without of course mentioning its final object. The President had afforded an opening by observing to Count Münster that he had seen a considerable change for the better in the feelings of Frenchmen towards Germany, and the Count was instructed to follow this up by enlarging upon the advantages which might accrue to both Powers, if they acted together on various extra-European questions. He was to observe how persistently and deliberately England had pursued her aims in the conviction that the two continental groups were so completely

¹ G.P., XI, No. 2640, p. 67.

hypnotized by their mutual distrust as to have neither the time nor the means to react against her expansion over-seas. She presumed on the undoubted fact that the destruction of the British Empire would not be in the interests of Germany, but between destruction and tolerance of her aggrandizement *ad infinitum*, there was ample room for political considerations and combinations, and Germany felt that she could no longer refrain from these.

The ulterior object (of winning England to the Triple Alliance) made the ground somewhat delicate. Count Münster was instructed to say nothing definite to President Faure about the subject-matter of the proposed combination in his first conversation; and he was warned that in no circumstances would it embrace Mediterranean, near-Eastern or Indian questions. He was, however, permitted to mention the Transvaal question, provided he did it in a natural way which would not suggest that Germany was in such difficulties as to require the support of other Powers. (January 1, 1896.)

II

Four years later Holstein put on record that no answer had ever been received to this overture. But a conversation on the lines indicated took place in Berlin between the Foreign Secretary Marschall and the French Ambassador, Herbette, with results that were extremely discouraging to the Germans. The Frenchman immediately seized upon the fact that Egypt was excluded from the proposed combination. "I can't see," he said, "what use it would be to us to join you in checking England in matters in which your essential interests are at stake without being able to count on your support where our interests are more important than yours." It soon appeared that the French were much more inclined to take advantage of the Anglo-German quarrel about the Transvaal to join England against Germany than to enter into a German combination against England.¹ Rumours of the German *démarche* which leaked out in Paris brought an immediate remonstrance from the press. The Transvaal, said the *Temps*, was not a suitable subject to divert the thoughts of France from Alsace-Lorraine. There must be "no unnatural alliance."

If Münster got no direct answer, the reports which he sent a

¹ The French appear to have thrown out the idea of mobilizing a squadron of their own, if Germany mobilized one of hers in reply to the British Flying Squadron; but the Germans by no means welcomed the suggestion. They seem to have been uncertain whether the French demonstration would not have been a counter-demonstration to theirs instead of a joint demonstration with them against England.

fortnight later on the state of French feeling were shattering to the Holstein plan. There was obviously no chance of using the situation to the advantage of Germany, if Paris were in the mood in which he reported it to be. But he had a crumb of comfort to offer his Government, which by this time was much disturbed by the mobilization of the British Flying Squadron :

British naval armaments are eventually directed against America, although the danger in that quarter is no longer as great as it appeared to be a short time ago. We are, it is to be hoped, only the pretext. When opinion calms down and the French and the Russians see the true object of these armaments, the hopes and speculations about an Alliance entertained by politicians on both sides will soon disappear. We ought nevertheless not to underrate the dangers which lurk in the whole situation as it is now developing and we must keep our eyes open.¹

The Emperor chimed in with an enthusiastic marginal comment, "Very good, I am wholly of Münster's opinion. . . . Instead of abusing me, the English ought to be very grateful to me for giving them an excuse for strengthening themselves in the Mediterranean." The belief in an inevitable conflict between England and America—which would cure England of her inveterate meddling in European affairs—was an article of faith among German statesmen in these years, and it had been greatly encouraged by the exchange of incivilities between President Cleveland and Lord Salisbury on the Venezuela question in December, 1895. Then, as later, the European Foreign Offices failed to take account of the tacit understanding between the "Anglo-Saxons" which on both sides placed a limit to their quarrels. It was nevertheless a consolation for the moment to believe that England would presently have other things to think about than exploiting to her own advantage the eternal conflict between Germany and France.

III

Consoling as this thought might be, the Holstein *démarche* provided a very uncomfortable reminder that, in spite of everything, the lost provinces remained an insuperable barrier to any combined action by the European groups to resent their grievances, real or fancied, against the Island Power. Feelers thrown out in Rome and St. Petersburg only confirmed this conclusion. The Italian Foreign Secretary, Baron Blanc, was willing to consider the Holstein plan provided he was assured that the proposed com-

¹ G.P., XI, No. 2650, p. 81.

bination was only a passing phase which would succeed in its object of bringing the *perfide* Albion to reason and ensuring her closer co-operation with the Triple Alliance hereafter. Crispi, though greatly annoyed by what he considered to be the failure of the English to support him in Abyssinia, where Italian arms had suffered a shattering reverse, was bluntly of opinion that an isolated and irritated England might do even more mischief to Italy than she had recently done, and thought it more likely that the proposed plan would throw her into the arms of France and Russia than attach her to Germany and the Triple Alliance. Moreover, what was offered to Italy was altogether inadequate.

Nothing remained to be done in St. Petersburg except to regret that France was so impracticable. The German Ambassador was to say to the Russian Foreign Secretary that France might have been expected to give a theoretical support to German remonstrances about Lorenço Marques, in which, as one of the outlets for exports from Madagascar, she was at least as interested as Germany, but instead of this her newspapers had raised a clamour about "an unnatural alliance." Germany therefore had to draw the conclusion that she must look out for herself in any pending or future differences between herself and England. England would be more than ever encouraged to direct her policy on the assumption that the continental Powers were too much occupied with their family feuds to pay attention to what she was doing in the rest of the world. "We may regret this position of world affairs," wrote the German Foreign Secretary to the Ambassador, Radolin, "but we can do nothing at present to prevent it. There remains nothing for us but, in accordance with the old Prussian [*sic*] motto, '*toujours en vedette*,' to remain watchfully on the defensive."¹

Radolin faithfully reported all this to Count Lobanof, the Russian Foreign Secretary, who "listened to it with more than his usual attention and appeared to take it in." Lobanof suggested to the Ambassador, however, that he should not pay too much attention to the "sensational" French press, and assured him that the French Government would be found quite moderate and sensible. In the meantime Count Bülow had sent from Rome the report of a conversation which an Italian friend had had with a French Minister :

We can no more forget Alsace-Lorraine, said the Minister, than we wish to make war about it. Events will restore it to us and all our foreign policy must be subordinate to that end. We can therefore arrange nothing with you, so long as you are the allies of Germany.²

¹ G.P., XI, No. 2651, p. 82.

² *Ibid.*, No. 2657, p. 89.

The sensational French press had, after all, it seemed, not greatly exaggerated the feelings of its Government. Before February, 1896, was over, the Holstein plan of the "Continental League against England," as it is called in the German Documents, was dead and buried.

IV

All this was grist to Tirpitz's mill. It was exactly what he had told them. The shoutings of the Emperor, the wiles of Holstein, the reasoned remonstrances of Chancellor, Foreign Secretary and Ambassador—all were useless against the unconscionable and intangible sea-power, unless Germany had a fleet. She must from henceforth "go the way of renunciation," let her people stream abroad and settle under foreign flags, let her foreign interests go to wrack and ruin, and leave the field to the "Anglo-Saxons and the sons of Jehovah," who would cry halt to her commerce as soon as it suited their convenience—or she must have a fleet. Without a fleet to protect him "the irksome but impotent German competitor would be struck down at the first convenient opportunity."¹ Without a fleet German diplomacy would be throttled and no protection could be guaranteed to Powers which feared the retaliation of Britain by sea, if they sided with Germany against her. Tirpitz notes the "unexpected demonstration on the part of the British navy" in January, 1896, as marking the point which "added an English front to the French one," by which he means that the German plan was from that time forward to contemplate a war at sea with England as well as a war on land with France.

If he was right, it was for both countries a momentous date.

¹ "My Memoirs," Vol. I., p. 67.

1897-1899

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST HAGUE CONFERENCE AND ITS PRELUDE

The Game of Grab in the Far East—The Fashoda Crisis—The Kaiser's Excitement—A Snub from the Tsar—The Naval Moral Again—The First Hague Conference—A Suspected Trap—Wrecking through English Objections—Attitude of the Powers—Germany and Private Property at Sea.

I

THE disaster which befell the Greeks in the spring of 1897 as the result of their rash and premature attempt to force the annexation of Crete and their consequent war with the Turks, whose strength they had entirely miscalculated, showed the great Powers still manœuvring for position in the Near East. Great Britain was only a reluctant follower in measures concerted to restrain the Greeks and stood out as long as possible for a free constitution for Crete. But the Kaiser was by now a committed partisan of the Turk and, in spite of his relationship with the Greek royal family, resolute against measures to soften their disaster. Then, as later, most of the European royalties were greatly concerned about the fate of the Greek dynasty, and thought the Kaiser's attitude surprising and unnatural. The Empress Frederick, in natural concern for her daughter, the wife of the Greek Crown Prince Constantine, wrote imploring letters to Queen Victoria—"Alas, William's personal hatred to Greece and enmity to the King and the whole Royal family is well known everywhere"¹—and the Queen would have helped if she could, but could do nothing but pass on the letters to Lord Salisbury. His brief answer was, "what the Empress asks for [intervention of Great Britain] impossible and unattainable unless her son consents." Her son would not consent; he was by now well launched on his "New Course," to which friendship with Turkey was essential. If this, as Lord Salisbury was now saying, was "the wrong horse," the Kaiser was firmly mounted on it.

But the scene was now shifting again from Near East to Far East,

¹ Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, Vol. III., p. 150.

and the Balkan problem was to remain in suspense for several years, while the great Powers transferred their rivalries to the other side of the world, and displayed there all the qualities which distinguished their operations nearer home.

In a moment of irritation Mr. Chamberlain said à propos of the British Government's dealing with Russia, that, if you supped with the devil you needed a long spoon. Most of the Governments needed to be similarly equipped in their dealings with one another at this period. It has been related in a previous chapter how the German Emperor promised to support the Tsar in his Providential Mission to uphold the Cross against the Yellow, heathendom in China and Japan, but had expressed a hope that in return Russian aid would be forthcoming to provide Germany with a coaling-station in the China seas. This was in April, 1895. The Tsar appears to have made a civil but rather vague reply, and on the strength of this, the Emperor claimed in the following year to have received his consent to the occupation of Kiao-Chow, which, after quiet investigation of the possible alternatives, the German Admirals had decided to be the most desirable anchorage for a modern fleet. The correspondence shows that the Germans were by no means easy in their minds about the Russian consent, for they hesitated for eighteen months and seriously weighed the possibility that their action might lead to war. But in the end they came to the conclusion that (as the Kaiser said) "*a fait accompli* is always more respected by other countries than previous recriminations," and in November, 1897, they seized the place, accompanying the act with many graceful acknowledgments of the Tsar's friendliness in abetting their proceedings. The immediate pretext was the murder of the two German missionaries which was said to require this satisfaction from China.

Nov. 1897.

The Tsar thought it decidedly sharp practice, but he had a better idea than to declare war on Germany. He announced that the Russian fleet would winter in Port Arthur, which was a much more important place than Kiao-Chow, and in March, 1898, made a peremptory demand on China for a lease both of the port and of the adjoining anchorage of Talien-Wan. Incidentally he requested that two British cruisers which were then anchored at Port Arthur should be withdrawn "in order to avoid friction in the Russian sphere of influence." There was great excitement in London, and for a time even talk of war between Britain and Russia. But the British Government also thought it more profitable to follow the example set by their neighbours and found compensation for

Treaty of
St. Petersburg

themselves by obtaining a lease of Wei-Hai-Wei. The Chinese were helpless, but since Germany and Russia had come in, they were not unwilling that Great Britain should be on the spot to relieve the pressure of the other two. The German Emperor had remarked with some bitterness that whenever anyone else made a small annexation of territory the British made a big one,¹ but on this occasion Russia had the best of the deal, and British opinion was much incensed at the supposed mortification of the withdrawal of the cruisers on a Russian demand. All three Powers, meanwhile, had stored up for themselves the fund of Chinese resentment which was to find vent in the Boxer rebellion of 1900.

II

The theory entertained by the continental Powers of an inevitable war between Britain and the United States received a severe shock in the spring of 1898 when the Spanish-American War broke out. The British Government, it now appeared, though willing to join with others in any offer of mediation which was acceptable to the American Government, would have nothing to do with schemes for saving the Spanish Monarchy from the consequences of its misdoings in Cuba and the Philippines. The Kaiser, with his accustomed zeal for monarchies threatened by Republics, had been hot on this scent, and was with difficulty restrained by von Bülow, now Foreign Secretary, who pointed out that Germany could do nothing except with the co-operation of England and France, and would merely inflame American opinion against herself without helping Spain, if she indulged in empty protests. In the meantime, though the British Government had been studiously correct in its neutrality, British opinion had been strongly on the side of the United States, and a significant manifestation of sympathy—also within the limits of neutrality—had been reported on the part of the British fleet. To keep both Russia and Britain occupied with remote ambitions and anxieties which would draw them out of Europe had been a favourite idea of German theorists, but evidently, so far as Britain and the United States were concerned, it would not work, if there was to be this fraternizing. Berlin watched the development with misgiving.

The year 1898 was full of trouble. All through the autumn and winter France and Britain seemed to be on the verge of war about the appearance of Marchand at Fashoda on the Upper Nile

¹ G.P., XIV (1), No. 3648, p. 12, footnote.

laying claim on behalf of France to territory which, according to the British contention, was indisputably part of the Sudan and therefore the property of Egypt. France had been warned off this ground by a previous British Government, and the Salisbury Cabinet stood firm for unconditional evacuation. The Kaiser was on an Eastern journey when this crisis flared up, but he watched it with growing excitement and telegraphed from Jaffa to the Tsar to know what he was going to do :

I have received news from London and Paris that both countries are mobilizing their fleets. Paris seems to be preparing for a *coup d'état*. In case a collision between the two countries should occur your position *vis-à-vis* to them would be of the greatest value to me. How do you look at the situation? ¹—WILLY. (October 28, 1898.)

The answer was a polite snub :

I have no knowledge of an impending conflict between France and England. Mouravieff, who has just returned from Paris, reported that Delcassé had, on the contrary, told him he had no reason to think Fashoda incident could bring France and England to a serious misunderstanding. I think one might in this case await events before taking any decision, the more so, as it is always awkward to interfere without being asked with others' business.² (November 3, 1898.)

But the Kaiser was not to be put off :

BAALBECK,
10th November.

With best thanks for your telegram of the third just received I hasten to answer it. The reports that reached me yesterday announced that not only the British fleet but also in the last few days the British land forces are being quietly prepared for war. This leaves no doubt that the retreat from Fashoda has in no way satisfied the British aspirations. The Ministers in London are said to have stated that England means to prepare for war unostentatiously and when ready suddenly to *regler les comptes* with France on the whole globe at once. It was added with a sneer that Russia could not help France, being short of money and therefore incapable of making war ; and that in the winter Russia's fleet was frozen up. The German fleet not being worth talking of, France would be wholly at their mercy. You will own that the situation is rather dangerous. I don't dream of interfering, but as I see a storm brewing I am bound to take my precautions and want to conform my politics as far as possible to yours in case difficulties should arise.³—WILLY.

This lively spectator who swallowed every tall story and informed his brother-monarch of what was being said about him behind his back reduced his Ministers to despair. They were persuaded that

¹ G.P., XIV, Vol. II., No. 3900, p. 382.

² *Ibid.*, No. 3905, p. 385.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 3913, p. 394.

every word that he had telegraphed to Livadia would be passed on to England and learnt with dismay that he was instructing Ambassadors to follow up his lead with oral communications, and had even declared himself ready at any moment to break his holiday and go in person to talk to the Tsar. These ardours, however, were cooled by the reports which came from the Ambassadors in Paris and St. Petersburg alike that neither France nor Russia had any serious intention of engaging in the conflict which the Kaiser anticipated.

Such lack of spirit in great and powerful nations served more than ever to point the familiar moral—great Powers reduced to impotence for lack of sea-power, Germany compelled to look on while Great Britain decided far-reaching issues by the mere existence, let alone the use, of her commanding fleet. The Kaiser relieved his feelings by scribbling in the margins of a dispatch in which Münster described the unhappy plight of the French: "Poor France! She acknowledges herself beaten without a shot having been fired! That is abdication on the sea. They have not read Mahan!" When the Ambassador said that in case of war the French would avoid battle and use their fleet to defend their coast, the Kaiser commented "That would be the end of them! We shall only escape from this incredibly foolish principle by the aid of our Navy law!"¹ When the Ambassador said that the English were disturbed by the idea of a coalition between other sea-powers which were becoming stronger, the Kaiser said "Right. It is a matter of life and death" for the French to build.

III

This was scarcely a favourable atmosphere for the disarmament scheme which the Tsar had launched in August of this year. That had caused astonishment and perplexity in all the Foreign Offices. Where could the Tsar have picked up such an idea? It was inconceivable that he could really entertain the naïvely humanitarian ideas which he professed. When the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg reported him to have said he hoped the world would perceive how peacefully disposed he was, the Kaiser wrote in the margin "He has chosen a very peculiar way!" and when the Tsar claimed to have taken a formidable weapon out of the hands of the Social Democrats the Kaiser wrote again: "On the contrary, he has put a splendid weapon for agitation into their hands."

¹ G.P., XIV, No. 3926, p. 407.

Everyone suspected a trap and all decided to walk warily. The Kaiser wrote a masterpiece (in English) to his brother monarch :

BERLIN, 29. August 1898.

Prince Radolin has communicated to me, by Your commands, the Memoire about the proposal for an international Conference to bring about a general disarmament. This suggestion once more places in a vivid light the pure and lofty motives by which your counsels are ruled and will earn you the applause of all peoples. The question itself—theoretically as a principle seemingly simple—is in practice, I am afraid, eminently difficult, considering the great delicacy of the relations and dispositions of the different nations to each other, as well as with respect to the most varied development of their respective histories. Could we for instance figure to ourselves a Monarch holding personal command of his Army, dissolving his regiments sacred with a hundred years of history and relegating their glorious colours to the walls of the armouries and museums (and handing over his towns to Anarchists and Democracy). However that is only *en passant*. The main point is the love of mankind which fills your warm heart and which prompts you to this proposal, the most interesting and surprising of this century! Honour will henceforth be lavished upon you by the whole world; even should the practical part fail through the difficulties of the detail. My Government shall give the matter its most serious attention.¹

WILLY.

At the same time Count Bülow wrote his instructions to the German Ambassador in London :

It would be an advantage to Germany if this Peace and Disarmament idea, which under its ideal outward form, makes a real danger of war, were wrecked on England's objections, without our having to appear in the foreground. Will you therefore speak to Mr. Balfour to-morrow on the question and tell him that the Tsar of Russia has in the most pressing manner expressed the wish to our most gracious Sovereign that he should show himself favourable to the advancement of his philanthropic plan. Our most gracious Sovereign, however, does not intend to do anything which might make difficulties for the British Government at a moment when an important agreement between it and the German Government² is coming to a friendly conclusion. He wishes, therefore, to know as soon as possible the attitude of England to the two ideas which are combined in the scheme for a Conference, the limitation of all armaments, and the examination of all pending questions with the object of avoiding the danger of war.

I venture, with the utmost confidence, to rely on your Excellency's well-tried dexterity to guide the exchange of views into channels profitable to Germany's interests.³ (August 26, 1898.)

¹ G.P., XV, No. 4222, p. 151.

² Presumably the Anglo-German agreement about the Portuguese African Colonies concluded on August 30, 1898. See on this subject G.P., XIV, Vol. I., Chap. XLII.

³ G.P., XV, No. 4217, p. 146.

The Ambassador justified the confidence reposed in him, and in his conversation with Mr. Balfour induced him to say that, while he saw no reason why England should not take part in a disarmament Conference, she could never consent to submit to any Conference such a question as that of her position in Egypt. It was Mr. Balfour's opinion that there need be no hurry and that probably several months would pass before the preliminary questions about the agenda of the Conference could be satisfactorily settled.

Many months did pass, and it was not till the end of the following January (January 26, 1899) that the Ambassador was able to communicate Lord Salisbury's views. These also (given in strict confidence) corresponded to the Kaiser's wishes. The British Prime Minister was "very sceptical" about the Russian programme and in general considered it "*pas sérieux*." Even if agreement were reached about a reduction of naval and military armaments, it would be impossible to control its applications by the separate Powers. As for arbitration, no Power would consent to submit questions of honour and vital interests to the decision of a third party, but it might be possible in this way to settle minor differences which had no political importance.

Such in general was the attitude of the great Powers. All were sceptical, all attributed some hidden motive to Russia, none of them wished to offend the Tsar, each hoped that someone else would give the untimely project its *coup de grâce*. To the German mind proposals of this kind not only did not promote peace, but actually increased the danger of war. "The establishment of the so-called Arbitration Court," wrote Holstein,¹ "can have no other result than by defining the various interests to facilitate the formation of groups for war or for subjugating the weaker parties. Small uninterested States as the subjects, small questions as the objects of arbitral procedure are thinkable; great States and great questions are not. For the State—and the bigger the State the more is this true—regards itself as its own object, not as a means of achieving higher objects lying outside itself. For the State there is no higher object than the guarding of its own interests. In the case of the Great Powers these are not necessarily identical with the maintenance of the Peace, but rather with the subjugation of its enemy and rivals by means of a firmly welded superior group. Therefore we must entertain the suspicion that in the mind of Russian diplomacy, supposing it to be taking its stand on the ground of reality, the proposed Areopagus of the Great Powers serves rather

¹ G.P., XV, No. 4255, p. 188.

a means to power than as a means to peace. In the next stage Russia is likely to make the Areopagus a reality as a continental group against England, and later perhaps against other Powers, either in Russian or in French interests."¹ Holstein was perhaps the most suspicious man living, but for once he expressed the universal suspicion.

The Powers proceeded to blanket the Conference by excluding questions of political importance and left their experts to work their will on the projects which still remained on the agenda, for the non-augmentation of forces and military Budgets for a term of years, for the prohibition of new weapons and explosives, and of aerial bombardments and submarines and rams. The Conference met at the Hague in May, 1899, and sat till the end of July. It was not wholly a failure, for it set up the first Arbitral Court on the understanding that recourse to it should be purely optional—an innovation which the Germans thought dangerous, "a net full of large holes, but in which one can get entangled nevertheless"²—and it also made a few modifications in the Brussels Convention and applied the Geneva Convention to naval warfare. But in general the experts were devastating in their criticisms, some of them with little regard to the instructions of their Governments. The famous Captain Mahan, who came as a delegate for the U.S.A., was afterwards said by the American Ambassador to have had "very little, if any, sympathy with the main purposes of the Conference," and "not to have hesitated to express his disbelief in some of the measures which the delegation were specially instructed to press." Sir John Fisher was supposed to have been equally outspoken about his personal views; and the German Naval delegate seems to have been specially on guard against proposals which might take the steam out of the big-navy agitation in Germany. For this reason he was opposed to the immunity of private property at sea:

If private property at sea were declared inviolable, voices would at once be heard in the land demanding a diminution of naval war material, particularly of cruisers, since the protection of trade would cease to be one of the fleet's duties; it would be said that in future only battleships would be needed.

The growth of this feeling in the country must in all circumstances be combated, for it would be the greatest mistake to diminish the cruiser fleet. It is by these alone that England is able to maintain her character as the strongest Power all over the world and holds the position she requires.³

¹ G.P., XV, No. 4255, p. 188.

² Count Münster to the Chancellor, G.P., XV, No. 4349, p. 345.

³ G.P., XV, No. 4274, p. 227.

Those who remember the effect of the blockade on Germany in the Great War may consider this a classic example of sacrificing the cause to the agitation, at all events from the German point of view.

So far as land armaments were concerned the *coup de grâce* was given by the German military delegate who dwelt on the impossibility of defining the term "armaments." He pointed out that while the proposed limitation would prevent Germany from increasing her army, it would not prevent Russia from building new railways. Since the main difficulty of Russia was not in finding men, but in mobilizing them, she would remain free to develop her military power in the manner which she most required, while Germany would be brought to a standstill. There was general agreement among the experts that their German colleagues had discovered the true motive of the Russian project. The supposition that the Tsar could be honest was beyond the range of military and diplomatic thought in the year 1899.

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BRITISH OVERTURES AND THEIR RESULT

British Doubts and Fears—Joseph Chamberlain Proposes a German Alliance—His Argument with the German Ambassador—A Cool Reception—Lord Salisbury's Objections—The Kaiser Tells the Tsar—The Kaiser's Thoughts—The Powers in the Pacific—The Kaiser and Lord Salisbury—Queen Victoria's Remonstrance—Chamberlain's Return Blow—American Action—Count Bülow at Windsor—The Alliance Project Revived—Encouragement to Chamberlain—The Leicester Speech—Bülow's Retreat—A Last Effort—The Draft Convention—The Kaiser and King Edward—Adjournment *sine die*.

I

THE German Ambassador in London reported to his Government at the beginning of the year 1898 that the British Government were beginning to waver in their attachment to the policy of splendid isolation. Undoubtedly he was right. The incessant friction with France, Germany, Russia, simultaneously or successively, had frayed the nerves of several important Ministers, and led them to ask whether they could go on for ever without being able to rely on any sure support from either of the European camps. All over the world—in Egypt, China, West Africa, South Africa, Persia, or on the Indian frontier—there was always some trouble with somebody, and no one could be certain that even a small dispute might not kindle a great fire. A Two-Power standard had been laid down for the fleet but the nightmare of a naval coalition which would require an indefinitely increasing effort, which in the end would exhaust the British people, was never far away.

At the beginning of 1898 the traditional policy of leaning towards the Triple Alliance, when a choice had to be made between the European groups, still stood; and if an Alliance had to be sought, there was no idea of going anywhere else for it. But, whereas Lord Salisbury and the majority of his colleagues were still opposed to giving this favourable inclination any more formal expression, one very important member of the Cabinet, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, who was now Colonial Secretary, was in favour of

going the whole length of an Alliance with Germany on terms which would have made Great Britain to all intents and purposes a partner in the Triple Alliance. With Mr. Chamberlain to think was to act, and at the end of March, apparently on his own initiative, he opened up conversations on the subject with the German Ambassador under Mr. Alfred Rothschild's hospitable roof. The first meeting was followed by a second and a third, and between-times the Ambassador sounded Mr. Balfour to discover how far he was privy to Mr. Chamberlain's ideas. After each conversation the Ambassador reported everything either to the Foreign Secretary or the Chancellor, who, after conferring with the Kaiser, sent back long instructions as to the attitude to be taken up at the next encounter. The record of these transactions occupies 62 pages in the German Documents,¹ and affords one of the most interesting studies available in the methods of German diplomacy.

Mr. Chamberlain was careful to explain that he spoke as a private person and not as Colonial Secretary or Cabinet Minister. But he said boldly that he was quite convinced that the political situation had taken a turn which made it impossible for England to maintain her traditional policy of isolation. The English Government was under the necessity of coming to far-reaching decisions and could only rely on carrying public opinion with it if it abandoned this policy, and sought an alliance which would facilitate what it most desired, namely, the maintenance of peace. The situation was critical not only in China, where a decision had to be taken almost at once, but also in West Africa where serious developments with France were to be feared. So far there was no basis for an understanding and he (Chamberlain) was determined to make no further concessions to the French.

He then declared his opinion that England and Germany had substantially the same interests and that there would be no difficulty in settling the small colonial questions which came between them, if at the same time they came to an understanding about their larger political interests. British opposition to the German occupation of Kiao-Chow had been mainly because it was foreseen that France and Russia would follow the German example on a larger scale, and so cause serious difficulties. In itself the German move threatened no British interests, and if there were friendly relations and a corresponding political understanding between the two countries, England would not only not oppose Germany in China, but support her there with her entire forces.*

¹ G.P., XIV (1), pp. 193-255.

The Ambassador (according to his own account) was cool about China. He said that Germany had done her business in that country on her own initiative and without foreign help, and, so far as he knew, she owed no one thanks or anything else. In choosing Kiao-Chow in preference to points farther south she had shown a friendly regard for England, and it was not in England's interests to make difficulties for her, since that would drive her to take sides with Russia.

Undeterred by this Mr. Chamberlain repeated that important decisions would have to be made within the next few days, and, now apparently speaking for the Government, said that it wished to abandon its policy of isolation and to come to an understanding with Germany and her friends. In other words, if Germany was willing to stand on the side of England, England, in case Germany was attacked, would stand on the side of Germany. This would be the equivalent of England's adhesion to the Triple Alliance and would be established by a Treaty for which Germany would have to formulate her conditions.

This was the main point; but there was also much fencing between Mr. Chamberlain and the Ambassador about British intentions in China, and the Ambassador elicited the valuable information that the occupation of Wei-Hai-Wei was pending, and that the British Government anticipated difficulties with Russia. The Ambassador said something blunt about England's habit of sending other people into the fire and holding back herself, but Mr. Chamberlain took it good-humouredly; and in his report to his superiors the Ambassador laid stress on the urgency of the proposal and the necessity of strict secrecy.

Mr. Chamberlain was apparently unaware of the overtures which the German Government had made to Lord Salisbury nine years previously in the same sense and of the answer which they had received. Lord Salisbury had in effect declared that the British Parliamentary system made an Alliance of the continental type impossible to Great Britain, and Count Bülow had only to look up the record of that transaction to find an answer to his hand. "The weak point of an Anglo-German Treaty," he said in a dispatch to the Ambassador, "would be that it would only bind the British Government for the time being. A vote in Parliament or a change of Government would enable England at any time to escape by a back door, if Germany were attacked. That being the case, no German statesman looking to the future would be likely to take responsibility for the consequences of an Anglo-German Treaty."

Moreover, time was running against England. In ten years' time, when the Siberian Railway was finished and Russian preparations had been pushed forward on the Indian frontier, the Tsar might be much more disposed to take part in a war between England and France.

The Ambassador communicated the first part of this answer to Mr. Chamberlain who combated it with great energy. The idea, he said, of England leaving an ally in the lurch was baseless. So far as he knew, history afforded no example of England having failed to fulfil conscientiously an obligation once undertaken. What he had in mind, however, was not a secret treaty between Governments, but an agreement ratified by Parliament, and he had not the slightest doubt that it would be readily accepted by Parliament and public opinion. This, he added, would not exclude the possibility of one or several secret articles. In regard to the object of the Treaty he suggested that it should not deal with the advantages which Russia had already secured in China, but look to the future of China and aim at preventing an exclusive Russian policy of expansion which would injure the interests of other nations in that country.

Mr. Chamberlain evidently had shifted his ground. He now proposed to accept what had happened in China, and to limit the proposed treaty to the future.

The Ambassador then skilfully led Mr. Chamberlain into a discussion of future possible wars between (1) England and France alone and (2) England and France supported by Russia, and induced him to say that while he had no fear at all of an Anglo-French duel, a fight between England and France joined with Russia would be quite a different matter. England could only undertake a policy which might result in a war with both Powers, if she were supported by a powerful alliance, such as the German. When asked about the expected announcement in Parliament on Chinese policy (about which he had spoken in the previous interview) Mr. Chamberlain said with "remarkable frankness" that the Cabinet itself even now had no idea which road to take or what to say to the House of Commons. That would depend entirely on whether they could depend on an alliance for the further handling of the subject or not.

These not very skilful admissions gave the Germans their opportunity. The English, Count Bülow pointed out, had had the chance of an all-round alliance with Germany and her partners, and had shown no disposition to accept it. Now when they were

in trouble in China they came and asked Germany to help them. Germany was to take the risk of Russian hostility for the sake of these Chinese affairs, without any guarantee that England would help her if Russia retorted in Europe. ~~In that case England would probably fall back on her traditional rôle of spectator and arbiter.~~ So while it might be useful to keep Mr. Chamberlain expectant and friendly, it was impossible to give the British Government any assurance. For the moment no German interest was threatened in China; later it might be different and then, if at all, would be the time to consider joint action.

The Kaiser was quick with his marginal comment :

Hatzfeldt has handled the matter very cleverly. The gist of the matter is that by occupying Wei-Hai-Wei in a fit of temper and shaking her fist at Russia's nose, England has made a very uncomfortable situation for herself. For the moment Russia has not struck at the fist; she is keeping that for later on. That is beginning to dawn on John Bull, and he wants someone to help him out of his fix. I certainly will not do that merely on the strength of Chamberlain's promises. What may happen later we will see when the time comes.

II

It appears that Mr. Chamberlain had no authority from the Prime Minister or Cabinet for this overture. When the Ambassador sounded Mr. Balfour, he found him "unexpectedly ready" to admit the weight of the German objections to the "sudden and far-reaching" proposal of his colleague. He agreed with the Ambassador that, if such a treaty were proposed and failed to pass the British Parliament, the almost inevitable result would be an attack on Germany by France and Russia. Mr. Balfour observed that Mr. Chamberlain "sometimes wished to advance too quickly" and left on the Ambassador the impression that he was not altogether displeased at his colleague's ill-success. In the meantime Lord Salisbury, who had been out of England during these conversations, had returned and the Ambassador quickly formed the conclusion that he had not instigated and did not approve of Mr. Chamberlain's ideas. He was still on the old ground of splendid isolation, with a cautious eye to the reactions which might follow, not only in Europe, but in the United States, from British entanglements in continental affairs. Lord Salisbury appears to have expressed the opinion that, if Mr. Chamberlain had been Foreign Secretary instead of Colonial Secretary, he would have handled the affair somewhat differently. For the time being the Chamberlain *démarche* faded out with polite expressions on both sides of a desire to remain

on friendly terms, and to seize any opportunity which might reasonably offer of acting together.

But in the German mind there was scarcely any transaction which, if skilfully used, could not be turned to German advantage, and this one had evident possibilities. In spite of the Ambassador's earnest request that Mr. Chamberlain's communications should be handled with strict discretion "since any disclosure of it, especially in St. Petersburg, would destroy the confidence of the English Minister," the Kaiser appears to have communicated the whole of it to the Tsar, who replied in a letter overflowing with gratitude:

May 22d, 1898.

June 3d.

DEAREST WILLY,

I thank you heartily for your interesting and long letter, the contents of which greatly surprised me.

I am very grateful to you for the loyal and frank manner in which, as usual, before deciding a question you would like to know my opinion about it.

Three months ago, in the midst of our negotiations with China, England handed us over a memorandum containing many tempting proposals trying to induce us to come to a full agreement upon all the points in which our interests collided with hers. These proposals were of such a new character, that I must say, we were quite amazed and yet—their very nature seemed suspicious to us, never before had England made such offers to Russia. That showed us clearly that England needed our friendship at that time, to be able to check our development, in a masked way, in the Far East. Without thinking twice over it, their proposals were refused. Two weeks later Port Arthur was ours. As you know we have arrived at an understanding with Japan upon Corea, and we have been since a long time on the best of terms with North America.

I really do not see any reason, why the latter should suddenly turn against old friends—only for the *beaux yeux* of England's?

It is very difficult for me, if not quite impossible, to answer your question whether it is useful or not for Germany to accept these often repeated English proposals, as I have not got the slightest knowledge of their value.

You must of course decide what is best and most necessary for your country.

Germany and Russia have lived in peace since old times, as good neighbours, and God grant! they may continue so, in close and loyal friendship.

Our countries have luckily no political frictions and nowhere do our interests come into collision.

The story of Kiaotschau is a good example of what I have just said and I am perfectly sure, so will it be also in the future. You know my ideas and convictions, and you can therefore rely fully on my country's peaceful and quiet attitude.

I thank you once again for writing to me at such a grave moment for you. God bless you my dearest Willy.

Believe me ever your loving cousin and trusting friend.¹

NICKY.

¹ G.P., XIV (1), No. 3803, pp. 250-1.

Then, and later, it was one of the principal difficulties of negotiations with Germany that the most confidential communications were liable to be used in this way. It was always a toss-up whether an overture to her would be accepted, or its rejection used to curry favour with another Power.

Among the documents of these months is a memorandum by the Kaiser which reveals his inner thoughts:

The British proposal arises from anxiety about the consequences of our Navy Law. At the beginning of the next century we shall dispose of a battle-fleet which in combination with others will threaten real danger to England in spite of her increased strength. Hence the idea either to force us to an alliance or, as she did formerly to Holland, to destroy us before we have become strong enough to defend ourselves.

If England were acting in good faith, an agreement with her would be indicated, and our colossal trade would be assured. How long the French and Russians would keep the peace from fear (*aus Angst Frieden halten werden*) in the presence of such a combination is always doubtful, but still not impossible. On the other hand, if we refuse England and succeed in making a strong combination with Russia—which is the preliminary conditions for refusing England—England may eventually detach France, and with her overwhelm us and destroy the whole of our trade since it is still defenceless and Russia cannot help us to protect it. As a retort to this on land we should be able to throw the whole of our military power, strengthened eventually by Russia, destructively against France and so save our Empire.¹

The door therefore was not to be absolutely closed. It was dangerous to quarrel with England, unless there were a firm understanding with Russia—Bismarckian wisdom which was to be forgotten in the next century. But in the last resort the Kaiser's thoughts return to his Naval Law, and the danger with which it will presently threaten the intractable Island Empire.

III

There was now an interlude in which British and German relations were again tested on the colonial ground, and this time the United States came into the picture.

The Treaty which wound up the Spanish-American War at the beginning of 1899 left the United States in possession of the Philippines, and, like the other Powers putting in claims for positions of vantage in the Far East, President McKinley had sent a warship to Tientsin and provided a guard for the American Embassy in Pekin—significant steps in European eyes. Germany saw in them a possible shift of the balance of power in the Far

¹ G.P., XIV (1), No. 3799, p. 239.

East, and sent a cruiser and squadron to the Philippines to "protect the lives and property of Germans settled there," and also to be at hand in case opportunity offered for timely annexations in the Pacific.

Her next step was the secret purchase from Spain for 16 million marks of the Caroline, Pellew and Marianne Islands (March, 1899). In the meantime trouble had been brewing in the Samoan Islands, where the death of King Malietoa led to a struggle for the succession, in which British and Americans took one side and Germans the other. The dispute had endless ramifications, and the Germans proposed to settle it by abolishing the joint control established by the "Act" of 1889 and partitioning the islands between the three Powers, their own share to include Apia and Upolu. To this Australia and New Zealand took strong objection, and for months the British and American Governments stood by the Act of 1889 and proposed a joint settlement by Commissions to be appointed by the three Powers. A good many guns went off, and both British and American ships bombarded the rebels, the Americans incidentally hitting the house of the German Consul. The affair got to the point when there was talk in Berlin, if not of war, at all events of breaking off diplomatic relations.¹

This remote island in the Pacific, consecrated to the English as the home of "Tusitala," became in this way the testing ground of German and British, and German and American relations during a large part of the year 1899. "The name Samoa," said Count Bülow, "has meant for Germany the birth of our Colonial aspirations," and "instead of compliance England has shown us harsh and open hostility," England who had so much and need surely not have grudged them that little. The Kaiser wrought himself up into a high state of indignation and went to the length of writing a private letter to Queen Victoria complaining bitterly of Lord Salisbury. "This way of treating Germany's feelings and interests," he said, "has come upon the people like an electric shock . . . the feeling has arisen that Germany is despised by his [Lord Salisbury's] Government and this has stung my subjects to the quick. A pleasure trip to Cowes, after all that has happened and with respect to the temperature of public opinion here, is utterly impossible now." The Queen replied (June 12, 1899):

Your letter, I must say, has greatly astonished me. The tone in which you write about Lord Salisbury I can only attribute to a temporary irritation on

¹ G.P., XIV, pp. 590 *et seq.*; G. and T., Vol. I., Chap. III.

your part, as I do not think you would otherwise have written in such a manner. And I doubt whether any Sovereign ever wrote in such terms to another Sovereign, and that Sovereign his own Grand Mother, about her Prime Minister. I never should do such a thing, and I never personally attacked or complained of Prince Bismarck, though I knew well what a bitter enemy he was to England, and all the harm he did.

I naturally at once communicated your complaints against him to Lord Salisbury, and I now enclose a Memorandum which he has written for my information, which entirely refutes the accusations and which will show you that you are under a misapprehension.

Your visit to *Osborne*, not to *Cowes*, I looked upon as a visit for my birthday, as I was not able to receive you on the day itself. I can only repeat that if you are able to come, I shall be happy to receive you at the end of August.¹

In the course of his conversations with Count Hatzfeldt in the previous year, Mr. Chamberlain had hinted that if his overtures were declined Germany must not count on any assistance from him on colonial questions. He appears to have been as good as his word on the Samoan question, and it was he rather than Lord Salisbury who had taken up the unyielding attitude of which the Germans complained. Hatzfeldt reports him as having said, "Last year we offered you everything, now it is too late." But by the autumn of 1899 the Germans had him at a disadvantage, for his hands and those of the British Government were now full with the war which was to break out in South Africa. Baron von Eckardstein had angry words with him on September 20, 1899. He "explained" to Mr. Chamberlain "in clear terms the state of German opinion and indicated that if England did not finally show more accommodation in this matter and consider his very moderate proposals, a change in Germany's foreign policy was inevitable, since the German Government, which had hitherto always shown itself loyal to England and tried to maintain friendly relations, would be driven in another direction by public opinion; and he then inquired whether it was understood here what that would mean for England." "This exposition," said Count Hatzfeldt in his report to the German Foreign Office, "seemed to affect Mr. Chamberlain unpleasantly; his calmness fell from him for the moment, and he complained bitterly that Germany wanted to make capital out of England's embarrassments in South Africa."² Baron Eckardstein was equal to the occasion. He "sharply rejected this insinuation," describing it as ridiculous, since the German proposals had been made weeks before, when war with the Transvaal was considered wholly improbable, "whereupon Mr. Chamberlain

¹ G.P., XIV (2), No. 4074; Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, Vol. III., p. 381.

² G.P., XIV (2), No. 4089, p. 637.

became calmer, and said he recognized that good relations with Germany were worth more than these islands in the Pacific." Count Bülow, the German Foreign Secretary, appears to have thought that Eckardstein had gone a little too far, for he telegraphed a warning the next day "not to let it appear as though we desire to exploit for ourselves the difficulties of the British, whether actual or presumed." "As a matter of fact, however," he added, "we should be blamed for lack of diplomatic skill if we did not now obtain a satisfactory settlement of several of the questions outstanding between ourselves and England—especially that of Samoa." In short, do it, but don't let it appear.

The corner was turned for the time being by appointing the King of Norway and Sweden as arbitrator. A year later the British quitted the scene in return for compensation in another part of the world, leaving the islands to be divided between Germany and the United States. But as it proceeded, and especially when Germany received a check, the affair served to point the now familiar moral. "What has happened in Samoa," wrote Count Bülow to the Kaiser, "is a fresh proof that an over-seas policy can only be carried out with a sufficiently powerful navy. The duty of the moment appears to me to state all this emphatically in the press, and also to maintain our prestige in the world intact, despite all our present difficulties." "What I have been preaching for ten years to those oxen in the Reichstag," was the Kaiser's marginal comment.

IV

By the middle of October the Kaiser was sufficiently pacified to fix a date for his deferred visit to Queen Victoria. The South African War had now broken out, and a storm of pro-Boer sympathy was sweeping over Germany, as over most continental countries. In the circumstances, he showed courage in coming to England, and it had to be carefully explained to his subjects that his visit was a strictly family one paid in courtesy to his grandmother. It nevertheless gave rise to events which, if not the actual parting of the ways between Britain and Germany, revealed the profound differences which were to drive them apart.

While they were at Windsor both the Kaiser and Count Bülow, who accompanied him, saw and had long talks with British Ministers and especially with Mr. Chamberlain, who appears to have been undismayed by his recent experience. For once again he pleaded with energy and persuasiveness for the "general understanding"

with Germany which he believed to be in the highest interests of both countries. The Power, he said, which England most feared was Russia. He saw with anxiety how well in comparison with the English, the Russians knew how to assimilate Asiatics. A time might come when hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Tartars, armed with Russian weapons and drilled and led by Russian officers, would be added to the Russian army. England had nothing in the way of a land army to set against this, and she would have to turn to Germany and America for support. This led him on to tell Count Bülow that the United States was the other Power with whom he most desired a *rapprochement* and to express the opinion that England would be able to use her influence to prevent friction between Germany and America. In talking to the Kaiser he added a wish that British capitalists might have a share in the Anatolian railway, and curiously inverting subsequent ideas on the subject, threw out the suggestion that the Germans might maintain themselves on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, provided they left Tangier to England.¹

In his dispatch describing these conversations, Count Bülow represents himself as having received these overtures with decided coolness, and this is the version which, in order to clear himself of the charge of duplicity, he continued to maintain in after years. But there is no doubt that he encouraged Chamberlain to give open expression to his ideas,² as he now proceeded to do in his famous speech at Leicester on November 29, 1899. In that he declared that England could no longer remain isolated on the Continent and expressed his opinion that "the most natural alliance is that between us and the German Empire." From this he leapt forward to the thought of adding the United States to the combination and so forming a new Triple Alliance which would be "a still more momentous factor in the future of the world."

If the object was to test public opinion, there was no doubt as to the result, at all events in Germany. "Frantic was the answering cry," says Ludwig. "The bloodhound of the Transvaal is upon us; he would fain tear the Triple Alliance in pieces, and

¹ G.P., XV, No. 4398, p. 413.

² "What he [Count Bülow] did not mention in his dispatch was that he had encouraged Chamberlain to give unambiguous expression in public to his ideas so that it could be seen how it was received by public opinion." "Brandenburg," p. 116.

See also Eckardstein, "Ten Years at the Court of St. James's," Chap. VIII., pp. 132 *et seq.*

Ludwig, "Kaiser Wilhelm," p. 217: "Finally Bülow expressed the desire that Chamberlain would make a public speech on the subject of their mutual interests."

exploit German friendship in Paris." It was Holstein, as usual, who fed the press, Holstein with his everlasting suspicion of motives, his ineradicable view that the way to friendship was to bite the hand that offered it. Moreover, there was, as always, an impending Navy Bill to be thought of, and what could be greater folly than to take the steam out of it and waste the splendid fuel providentially offered by German wrath at the treatment of the Boers by making up to England at this moment?

Count Bülow bowed to the storm, and whatever encouragement he may have given to Chamberlain at Windsor a fortnight earlier, there was no trace of it in the speech supporting the Navy Bill which he made in the Reichstag on December 9. He now spoke with deliberate coolness of British and German relations and was all amiability to France and Russia. He even suggested that it was proper to use England's difficulties to create German security for the future. At the same time he sent a private intimation to Chamberlain that his motives in making this speech were "tactical," and that his desire for an understanding remained as before. This could scarcely be acceptable to Chamberlain, who had made his overture in public on what he believed to be the encouragement of the German Foreign Secretary.

"I will not," wrote Chamberlain, "express myself about the way in which Bülow has let me down. Anyhow I must abandon all further negotiations in the matter of the alliance. . . . It really grieves me very much indeed. . . . Everything was going well; even Lord Salisbury was quite amicably inclined again and of one mind with us with reference to the future relations of England with Germany. But alas! once more it was not to be."¹

There was nevertheless a kind of St. Martin's summer in British-German relations when the Kaiser came to England in January, 1901, to pay a last visit to his grandmother, as she lay dying. Once more, during the days of mourning, Chamberlain pressed his views and again gave warning that the period of splendid isolation was passing. "It is true," he said, "that there are voices in the Cabinet in favour of joining the Dual Alliance, but the rest of us are on the German side."² The moment was an emotional one, and there was talk of a reconciliation over the old Queen's death-bed. Lord Salisbury, while remaining Prime Minister, had now quitted the Foreign Office, and his successor, Lord Lansdowne made a last effort to give practical expression to the general benevolence. This time a draft convention was actually drawn up at the Foreign

¹ Eckardstein, Vol. II., p. 236.

² G.P., XVII, No. 4979.

Office to the effect (1) that if England was attacked by two Powers, say France and Russia, Germany, Austria and Italy should come to her assistance, and (2) conversely, that if either Germany, Austria or Italy were attacked by two Powers, France and Russia, or France and Spain, England should come to her assistance.¹ Lord Salisbury, to whom it was submitted, observed that even if all the Powers were despotic and could promise anything they pleased, the bargain would still be a bad one for England, since the liability of having to defend German and Austrian frontiers against Russia and France was decidedly heavier than that of having to defend the British Isles against France. In Lord Salisbury's view, splendid isolation was still the safer policy, and its dangers were greatly exaggerated.²

Lord Salisbury, having thus applied the brake, the initiative passed back to Germany. There was a moment when the Kaiser was hot for an alliance, and in August he asked impatiently why the negotiations made so little progress in London. But he insisted on a "definite binding treaty bringing England into the Triple Alliance," and when King Edward visited him at Wilhelmshöhe at the end of the month, he used hectoring language about British diplomacy, and said flatly that vague and general phrases would not do. He wanted a firm agreement paragraph by paragraph, laid before Parliament and ratified before all the world and communicated to his Allies, "without whom he did nothing."³

In his conversation with King Edward, the Kaiser appears to have drawn a somewhat lurid picture of what awaited Great Britain if she were unwise enough to hug her splendid isolation. He saw in the future not only a hostile France and Russia, but an intimacy between Russia and the United States which boded no good for the Island Empire. The "general impression" which he gained from his conversation with the King was that "the recent visit of the Tsar to France together with his expressed wish to see the German Chancellor has caused an extraordinary impression on the part of England." It is improbable that King Edward lent himself to any of these fantasies. He knew, if his nephew did not, that what England was thinking of at this moment was not of hypothetical danger in a remote future, but of the South African War and the storm of anti-English feeling which was passing over Germany. The Kaiser had a grievance on this subject. He had turned ex-President Kruger away from Berlin and forbidden him to agitate in Germany. He had put his veto, or so he claimed, on

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., No. 85, p. 66.

² *Ibid.*, No. 86, p. 68.

³ G.P., XVII, No. 5023, p. 98.

the project of a continental coalition against England on which the Russians had been so busy in the previous year. For these high services he had received no acknowledgment from the British Government or people. The unhappy truth was that by this time no one in England knew exactly what he meant or how far his assurances were to be taken at their face value. Rightly or wrongly the conclusion was drawn in Whitehall that he either could control the excesses of the German press and did not, in which case these assurances were of little value; or that he genuinely could not, in which case it was useless to pursue the project of an alliance in the teeth of a hostile public opinion in both countries.

The King and the Kaiser continued to exchange compliments, and in January, 1902, the Prince of Wales paid a visit to Berlin, but the finale came in the intervening weeks, when Mr. Chamberlain and Count Bülow had an angry bout about the comparative humanity of British soldiers in South Africa and Prussian soldiers in the Franco-Prussian War.¹ Discussion of the Treaty was politely adjourned at the end of the year on the plea that British Ministers were taking holiday. The curtain thus rang down on the final effort to link the fortunes of Great Britain with those of Germany and the Triple Alliance.

APPENDIX

GERMANY AND INTERVENTION DURING THE BOER WAR

In attempts to ascertain the part played by Germany during the Boer War, it is necessary to distinguish carefully her action after the Jameson Raid in 1896 and her action after the outbreak of war in 1899 and 1900. In 1896 she sounded France, Russia and Italy as to the possibility of a "Continental League" against Great Britain as proposed by Baron Holstein, but abandoned this idea on finding the other Powers unwilling. In 1900 she took the opposite line of rejecting a proposal for mediation which came from Russia but used the anti-British feeling in Germany as a means of promoting the Navy Bill then before the Reichstag.

In the famous *Daily Telegraph* interview of 1908 the Kaiser claimed to have "refused the request of the Governments of France and Russia to join with them in saving the Boer Republic and

¹ For details of this and its effect on the relations of King and Kaiser see Lee's "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., pp. 131-40.

humiliating England to the dust," and he also said that he had worked out with one of his officers a plan of campaign for England which "as a matter of curious coincidence" was on much the same lines as that successfully adopted by Lord Roberts. There is some doubt as to the nature of the proposal made to him by Russia and France, but there is no doubt that he declined it. On March 3 he wrote to Lascelles, the British Ambassador in Berlin :

MY DEAR SIR FRANK,

I have just received to my utmost astonishment the invitation from the Imper. Russian Government to take part with them and France in a collective intervention for the Boers to bring England to make peace. *I have refused.* Intimating in my answer that I must leave it to the generous instigator of the European Peace Conference to kindly inform himself in London whether [*sic*] the British Government and People were in any mood to lend an ear to the Imperial proposals in the name of the Dual Alliance, I for my person had serious doubts and was unable to second the movement, as I was quite sure of the nature of the answer!—*Privately!* the British Government would be a set of unmitigated noodles if they cared a farthing! Private information says that they expect a refusal at Petersburg, and that they will *do nothing* as an answer to it.

A similar letter to the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward) appears in the King's "Life" (Vol. I., p. 769).

In his general report on Germany 1906 (G. and T., Vol. III., p. 437) Lascelles, after mentioning the letter quoted above, suggests that "documentary evidence exists at the Foreign Office which has given rise to the belief that the Emperor had himself instigated intervention on behalf of the Boers." I can discover no confirmation of this, but in King Edward's "Life" extracts are quoted from Russian documents placed at the disposal of the biographer which suggest that the Kaiser's refusal of the Russian initiative was qualified by a lively sympathy for any other plans which Russia might have for the embarrassment of Great Britain; and that he even went to the length of promising to mount guard in Europe if the Tsar would order his armies against India.

The German evidence on the subject is presented in G.P., XV, Chap. 103, and from this it appears that the suggestion of action against Great Britain during the Boer War came from the Tsar or Muravieff and was communicated to the German Foreign Secretary, Count Bülow, by Count Osten-Sacken, the Russian Military Attaché, on March 3, 1900. The Kaiser, to whom it was at once communicated, is thus presented as having received it, refused it, and reported his refusal to Lascelles and his royal relatives in London on the same day. The Prince of Wales wrote back on

March 7 thanking the Kaiser warmly for "the loyal friendship which you manifest towards us on every occasion" (G.P., XV, p. 523; "Life of King Edward," Vol. I., p. 770), and at the same time Count Bülow improved the occasion in a dispatch to the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg which contains the following passage :

As a matter of general principle I would observe that German policy must carefully avoid the possibility of entanglements with other Great Powers and especially with other sea-powers, so long as we have no certainty about the attitude of our neighbour, France. This certainty could only be offered by an agreement by which the contracting Powers would guarantee each other's *status quo* for a long period of years. Such an agreement is the necessary preliminary to our considering whether we could enter new and far-reaching combinations.

The French, to whom this was conveyed, appear next to have improved the occasion by informing London that Germany had suggested a new and far-reaching combination against Great Britain. In the meantime the Kaiser himself still further improved the occasion to point his familiar moral that Germany was helpless without sea-power. In a letter to the Queen of Holland (March 27, 1900) after explaining the many reasons which made it impossible for him to be of service to the Boers he winds up :

"Vengeance is mine and I will repay, saith the Lord." Still one must look to the future and strive to make one's country strong and unassailable, so as to be armed for all events in case one should one day be called by the Lord to take up arms. For that end, it is an interest of world peace as well as of the Netherland-Frisian races that there should be a mighty fleet on the sea. Let that be there, and then, as in old times, the Orange and Brandenburg banners will float side by side on all waters, and the cry be heard again, "En toch Orange bove."

Till then silence and work. (G.P., XV, No. 4494, p. 539.)

All parties having thus improved the occasion, the intervention project appears to have faded away rapidly after British arms had reasserted themselves in South Africa, and French and Russians were loud in their protestations that they had never contemplated anything but a friendly offer of mediation. In February, 1902, the Kaiser expressed the opinion that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was "a not altogether undeserved punishment for the flirtation of the Russians with England, for their passivity during the South African War, their coyness towards us, their irresponsiveness to his own well-meant hints." (See *infra*, p. 209.)

1899-1902

CHAPTER XX

THE PASSING OF SPLENDID ISOLATION

Responsibilities for the Breakdown—Effects of the South African War—Lord Salisbury's Objection—A Memorable Document—His Major Premiss—A New Fact—Count Bülow on British Characteristics—The European Opinion—Causes of Anglo-German Estrangement—The "New Course" and the Great Fleet—The Kaiser's Boastfulness—The "Danger Zone" for Germany—Bismarck's Principles and the Neglect of Them—Parliament and Foreign Policy—An Unnecessary Avowal.

I

*R*THE responsibilities for the breakdown of the British-German Alliance project are not easily distributed, and a study of the evidence suggests that those Germans who have placed the blame entirely on their own Government have run a little ahead of the facts. It is true that in dealing with the English, the methods of Holstein,¹ who appears to have been the principal influence behind the scenes, were calculated to wreck the most promising negotiations. His innate suspiciousness, his fear of parting with anything except at the top of the market, his rooted belief that the way to ingratiate himself with a friend was to back when he advanced and to throw cold water in his face when he came forward, irritated and mystified simpler people who played the game by other rules. Holstein, the Kaiser and Bülow were a trio of incomprehensibles to British statesmen: Holstein burrowing like a mole, Bülow performing on a tight-rope, the Kaiser dancing about between the two, now currying favour with us as our best friend, now stabbing us in the back, and always improving the occasion to point the eternal moral that Germany was helpless without a big fleet. The diplomatist who observed that England was well out of it since it would have been impossible for her to live with such people, reflected the opinion of most of the old hands in Whitehall at the end of the year 1901.

¹ Holstein's responsibility is fully discussed in Eugen Fischer's "Holsteins Grosses Nein," Berlin, 1925.

Apart from all intrinsic difficulties, the circumstances of the last overtures were highly unfavourable. If it is not the whole truth, there is at least a measure of truth in the belief that the South African War was the parting of the ways between England and Germany. Parting of the ways at least in this sense that the war and incidents arising out of it gave a strong impetus to the naval ambitions of the German people and set them finally on the one road on which reconciliation was impossible. The Kaiser throughout was in two minds as to whether an understanding with Great Britain was worth the sacrifice of the splendid material which the stream of anti-British opinion in Germany provided for his naval agitation and, when understanding failed, it was quite certain that he would exploit this material to the utmost. Up to this time there is little evidence that British statesmen had grasped the significance of the German fleet movement and except for a passing observation by Mr. Chamberlain that it was "not very pleasing" to the British people, it seems not to have entered at all into the negotiations. But at this point nothing less than a firm understanding between the two peoples which would have led Germans to respect British susceptibilities on the subject of sea-power would have averted what followed, and, looking back, the main regret for the lost opportunity is that it closed the door on this possibility.

Mr. Chamberlain told Count Hatzfeldt that a majority of the Cabinet was in favour of a German, and a minority of a French Alliance, but there is no sign to the end that Lord Salisbury himself was of either school. The memorandum in which he criticized the draft of the proposed British-German Alliance remains a classic on the subject of splendid isolation, and the special difficulties which beset a British Government in departing from it :

Count Hatzfeldt speaks of our "isolation" as constituting a serious danger for us. *Have we ever felt that danger practically?* If we had succumbed in the Revolutionary War, our fall would not have been due to our isolation. We had many Allies, but they would not have saved us if the French Emperor had been able to command the Channel. Except during his reign we have never even been in danger; and therefore it is impossible for us to judge whether the "isolation" under which we are supposed to suffer, does or does not contain in it any elements of peril. It would hardly be wise to incur novel and most onerous obligations, in order to guard against a *danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing.*

But though the proposed arrangement, even from this point of view, does not seem to me admissible, these are not by any means the weightiest objections that can be urged against it. The fatal circumstance is that neither we nor the Germans are competent to make the suggested promises. The British Government cannot undertake to declare war, for any purpose, unless

it is a purpose of which the electors of this country would approve. If the Government promised to declare war for an object which did not commend itself to public opinion, the promise would be repudiated, and the Government would be turned out. I do not see how, in common honesty, we could invite other nations to rely upon our aid in a struggle, which must be formidable and probably supreme, when we have no means whatever of knowing what may be the humour of our people in circumstances which cannot be foreseen. We might, to some extent, divest ourselves of the full responsibility of such a step, by *laying our Agreement with the Triple Alliance before Parliament* as soon as it is concluded. But there are very grave objections to such a course, and I do not understand it to be recommended by the German Ambassador.

The impropriety of attempting to determine by a *secret contract* the future conduct of a Representative Assembly upon an issue of peace or war would apply to German policy as much as to English, only that the German Parliament would probably pay more deference to the opinion of their Executive than would be done by the English Parliament. But a *promise of defensive alliance with England would excite bitter murmurs in every rank of German society*—if we may trust the indications of German sentiment, which we have had an opportunity of witnessing during the last two years.

It would not be safe to stake any important national interest upon the fidelity with which, in case of national exigency, either country could be trusted to fulfil the obligations of the Alliance, if the Agreement had been concluded without the assent of its Parliament.

Several times during the last sixteen years Count Hatzfeldt has tried to elicit from me, in conversations, some opinion as to the probable conduct of England, if Germany or Italy were involved in war with France. I have always replied that no English Minister could venture on such a forecast. The course of the English Government in such a crisis must depend on the view taken by public opinion in this country, and public opinion would be largely, if not exclusively, governed by the nature of the *casus belli*.¹

In the entire series of British documents there is none which cuts deeper into the fundamentals of British policy. In a short space it raises all the whole problem of reconciling the freedom of Parliament with engagements between Governments which was still in debate on the eve of the Great War. Could we be both bond and free? Were we *Bündnisfähig*—eligible for Alliances as understood by continental Powers—if we insisted on attaching to our Alliances, *Ententes* and Conventions the condition that Parliament must decide when the time came whether they should be enforced to the point of war? The question was not answered in August, 1914; it was superseded by another question on which the answer of the British Government and Parliament was never in serious doubt. It is to be observed, however, that Lord Salisbury's argument implies a major premiss which was valid in the year 1901, but which became increasingly doubtful in the subsequent years.

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., No. 86, p. 68.

This was that the British fleet would be strong enough, acting by itself, to defend the country and keep its sea-communications open, against any enemy or combination of enemies that had to be reckoned with.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century there was no reasonable doubt that the "two-Power standard" of naval strength was sufficient for this purpose; and while it remained so, the balance of argument was undoubtedly in favour of isolation. England, girt with the inviolable sea, had no occasion to seek allies or to concern herself more than she chose with the doings of her neighbours. So soon, however, as it became a question whether the British fleet could be made equal to possible hostile combinations without the assistance of an ally, the scales began to be weighted against isolation. It was more and more in these times becoming part of the code of international morals that no nation with great possessions had a right to consideration from its neighbours except in so far as it was in a position to defend them. Possession in peace, like blockade in war, had in this sense to be effective. What weighed with Lord Salisbury's younger colleagues and with subsequent Governments was the increasing doubt whether the British fleet alone would be equal to the German Coalition if it were armed with the great fleet which Germany was now building. In 1898 she had introduced the first part of her long series of Navy Laws, and in spite of her assurance that the "firmest intention" existed to "observe the limits therein laid down," she followed it up within two years by the law of June 14, 1900, which disclosed a large and ambitious scheme of naval construction. Between the two dates the South African War had intervened, and the "outrage" of the seizure of certain German ships by the British Admiralty had given the Kaiser and Admiral Tirpitz a rich opportunity of exploiting the prevailing Anglophobia for their naval projects. These projects had necessarily the double effect of preventing an understanding between British and German and at the same time making the policy of isolation less feasible to British statesmen.

II

In a memorandum which he wrote at Windsor in November, 1899, Count Bülow summed up his impressions of British politics and politicians at this time:

British politicians know little of the Continent. They do not know much more of continental conditions than we do of those in Peru or Siam. To our

ideas they are rather naïve.¹ They are naïve in their candid self-seeking, and again in the easy way in which they give their confidence. They believe with difficulty that others have bad motives. ~~They are very calm, very easy-going (pomadig), very optimistic.~~ The South African War excites the Berliners more than it does political circles here. It is only mentioned when someone's relation has been shot. Not a soul doubts that England will come well out of the affair. Everyone agrees that the Government must be supported until the situation in Africa is cleared up. If after great British successes, the Government strung up the Boers, even the most liberal Englishmen would give it their approval. Yet if after further failures, in order to avoid excessive sacrifice and expense, the Government concluded a barely honourable peace with the South African Republic, even the jingoes would not oppose it. ~~They will accept anything which promises a practical solution.~~ The country breathes wealth, comfort, contentment, and confidence in its own strength and future. One observes that the people have never seen an enemy in their land, and do not believe that anything could ever really go wrong, either at home or abroad. With the exception of a few "leading men," they work little and give themselves plenty of holiday. ~~Both physically and morally, it is a very healthy country. Balfour is attracted by science and philosophy; he reminds one of the German statesmen in the fifties; he impresses one as being benevolent and honourable. Chamberlain, the modern merchant, very~~ decided, very shy, very scrupulous, very much aware of his own advantage, and yet sincere, for he knows that without sincerity there can be no big business. The Duke of Devonshire is a typically calm and distinguished *grand seigneur*, to whom his sport and his horses are more important than any political question; these, however, he deals with with *bon sens*, but always with the assumption that England is superior to all other Powers, and has nothing serious to fear. Mr. Goschen² has the intelligent industry of a German official; he ought to do more for the navy than any of his predecessors. He models himself naturally on the thoroughbred Englishman, but expresses, nevertheless, a strong wish for good relations with Germany. There is no doubt that feeling in England generally is far less anti-German than German feeling is anti-British. Therefore the most dangerous Englishmen for us are those, who, like Chiröl and Saunders,³ know from personal observation how sharp and deep is the German dislike of England. If the British public realized the feeling reigning just now in Germany, it would cause a great change in their view of the relationship between England and that country.⁴

This must be read in its context of contemporary events—the wave of anti-British feeling which was passing over Germany on the outbreak of the South African War, the fervent nationalism ~~✱~~ which was being preached by German philosophers, historians and teachers, the jealousy of Britain as a commercial and Imperial Power, the sense that she had got an unfair start over a competitor

¹ A favourite word of Holstein's. Cf. Eckardstein, "Ten Years at the Court of St. James's," p. 108.

² At that time First Lord of the Admiralty.

³ *Times* correspondents in Berlin.

⁴ G.P., XV, No. 4398; Dugdale, Vol. III., p. 113.

who had come late into the field. All these emotions and grievances, gathering in flood at the end of the century made a high tide of circumstance unfavourable to German-British friendship, and fatal to any binding contract between the two peoples.

But Count Bülow's estimate of the British people and their politicians was by no means merely the German judgment. The idea that British statesmen were amateurs at the great game as it was played in Europe, that they had rules of their own and other unfathomable characteristics which made it impossible to predict how they would act or what they would feel and think in any given situation—this idea was as strong in Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg as in Berlin. Count Bülow was undoubtedly right in his observation that feeling in England in the autumn of 1899 was far less anti-German than German feeling was anti-British, but he went astray when he added that discovery of the truth about German feeling would have caused Englishmen to change their view of their relationship to Germany. The vast majority of Englishmen would have learnt with complete composure and perhaps even with a little secret amusement that the dislike of them in Berlin was sharp and deep. Had other circumstances led to an *entente* with Germany, the animosities kindled by the Boer War would no more have prevented it than the French invective on the same occasion prevented the *entente* with France. The utmost emotion that John Bull felt about his neighbours when their wrath was kindled against him was a passing annoyance which quickly subsided when the occasion for it was gone.

Differences of temperament were to count for a good deal in unnecessary friction and cross-purposes between London and Berlin in the coming years, but the causes which were driving England and Germany apart at the beginning of the twentieth century lay far deeper than any question of manners and comportment. By this time Germany was irrevocably set on the "New Course" which had been so loudly advertised when the Kaiser came to the throne. She was no longer the "sated Power" of the Bismarckian tradition. She had large and vague ambitions of driving a German trade-route from Berlin to Baghdad and thence to the Persian Gulf and making the vast region through which her railway was to run a great German commercial sphere of interest. To that end she was constituting herself the patron and defender of Turkey with all that it involved in Balkan policy, and in her relations with Great Britain, Russia and Austria. When the "New Course" was set, it could no longer be said that the Balkans were not worth

the bones of one Pomeranian; to stand by Austria at almost any cost became with every year that passed a more and more urgent necessity.

III

But in the end, so far as Britain was concerned, almost everything came back to the question of sea-power. Beyond the seas Germany was claiming her place in the sun in lively competition with Britain, France, Russia and the United States, and from every check she drew the moral that a great fleet was essential to world-power. Urgency was marked over it all. As an Empire, she had come late into a world in which all the most desirable territory was in the possession of others and she must be foremost in the race for the little that remained. Nothing from henceforth, the Kaiser proclaimed, must be settled in the world without the German Emperor of due consideration of his claim to compensation when others obtained advantages. In the early days of his reign, the Kaiser's extravagances had been dismissed with a shrug or a smile as the exuberance of a young man who would presently find his bearings and be sobered by experience. But as the years passed and the Imperial orator abated none of his rhetoric, but was visibly translating it into action by the construction of a great fleet, it was impossible not to take him seriously.

Prince Bülow has related how he rebuked the Kaiser for a speech made at Kiel during the visit of King Edward in June, 1904. "When as a little boy," the Kaiser had said, "I was allowed to visit Plymouth and Portsmouth, hand in hand with kind aunts and friendly Admirals, I admired the proud English ships in those two superb harbours. Then there awoke in me the wish to build ships of my own like these some day, and when I was grown up to possess as fine a navy as the English." On which the Prince observed: "If you describe our fleet, constructed with such heavy cost, sometimes with danger, so sentimentally, as the outcome of your own personal inclinations and juvenile memories, it will not be easy to obtain further millions for naval construction from the Reichstag." To which (according to Bülow) the Kaiser replied: "Ach, that damned Reichstag!"¹

If Bülow really spoke thus, he put his finger on one of the Kaiser's most dangerous idiosyncrasies. It is impossible to read the records without realizing for how much his personal inclinations, if not his juvenile memories, counted on this side of German

¹ Bülow, "Memoirs, 1903-1909," p. 30. (Translation.)

policy. Beginning as his toy, the fleet became his passion, even his infatuation. Merely to suggest limitation became in the end an offence to him personally, an act of *lèse majesté* to be resented as next door to an ultimatum. To discuss the political bearings of the German big navy, to bring any cool sense to bear upon the obvious consequences, as one Navy Bill succeeded another, was year by year more difficult in the atmosphere of glamour and sentiment with which he had invested the subject. Disarmament, in his eyes, even by mutual consent, was not merely a futile dream, but an actual invasion of the right of self-determination of the German people.

IV

This was the doctrine which during the next fourteen years was preached to all departments in Germany, the Kaiser and Tirpitz leading, Bülow and his successor, Bethmann Hollweg, following with occasional repentances and injunctions to prudence until the "danger-zone" was passed. The danger-zone, in fact perpetually receded, for as Germany armed, so Britain armed, and it was always doubtful if, after the poisoning of their relations by the incessant controversy which attended their efforts, the relative position of the two Powers had been substantially altered. But to the naval and military mind the doctrine of the relativity of armaments seemed at this time to be as complete a mystery as its counterpart in physical science is to the ordinary man to-day.

Tirpitz has related how he visited Bismarck after his retirement in the hope of enlisting his support for the infant navy movement and returned with the minimum of encouragement. Whatever his other defects might be, that great master of power-politics had always an acute sense of the limitations of power, and one of his imperatives in the conduct of German policy was never to be wrong with Great Britain unless he was quite sure of being right with Russia, or wrong with Russia unless he was right with Britain. It is impossible to believe that, if he had been on the scene at the beginning of this century, he would have let this elementary maxim be flouted as it was in the subsequent years. The signs were clear for the simplest to read. The Franco-Russian Alliance was now notorious, and Europe was definitely divided into two camps with the consequent threat to Germany of a war on two fronts. Britain was still undecided and, to all appearances, still inclined to hug her splendid isolation, with a bias, if any, towards the German group.

But she held the casting vote, and how she gave it was evidently of vital importance to Germany. Her adhesion to the anti-German group meant not only a most formidable reinforcement of the possible enemies of Germany, but in all probability, as German statesmen had been repeatedly warned, the defection of Italy. If the game of power-politics was to be played with even elementary skill and foresight, it might be supposed that nothing would have been clearer to German statesmen at this moment than that any policy on the part of Germany which drove Britain into the arms of France and Russia was to be avoided at almost any sacrifice.

If German statesmen were blind, it must be said also that British statesmen had little apprehension of the aggregate and final results of the policy which they were pursuing in these years. A letter from Sir Thomas Sanderson, the then permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, dated January 21, 1902, concludes with the following passage:

It has happened not infrequently in the last years that Count Hatzfeldt has come to me and complained "Voilà une chose que j'ai causé avec Lord Salisbury et que le diable me prenne si je comprends la politique de votre Gouvernement." To which I used to reply that he ought to know that we had not got a policy and worked from hand to mouth. I once repeated one of these outbursts to Lord Salisbury who laughed and said, "I had no idea that our conversation had such far-reaching objects, yet you might tell Hatzfeldt that with a Parliamentary regime like ours, it is impossible to pledge the Government as to the course it will take in case of some future emergency."

What conclusions Count Hatzfeldt may have drawn or reported to Berlin after such interviews, I of course have no means of conjecturing.¹

Lord Salisbury's habit of blaming it on Parliament was perhaps a little overdone. Extreme docility in accepting from a Foreign Minister what he declared to be in the national interest had for a hundred years been an almost invariable characteristic of the British Parliament. The existence of Parliament was certainly not in this country a valid excuse for the failure of statesmen to think out the consequences of the action they were pursuing. But Sir Thomas Sanderson's dictum that "we had not got a-policy" in these years needs one serious qualification. There was still in the minds of British statesmen an instinctive dread of seeing Europe dominated by one overwhelming Power, and it was a practical certainty that, with whatever naïveté or blundering, they would seek, as almost invariably in their history, to redress the European balance, when that threatened.

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., No. 98, p. 88.

1901-1902

CHAPTER XXI

THE FIRST BRITISH ALLIANCE

The Yellow Peril and the Boxer Rebellion—"Behave Like Huns"—Britain and Japan—Two Isolated Powers—Alternative Policies for Japan—Trial of Both Simultaneously—Baron Hayashi and Marquis Ito—Conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance—Results in Germany—France and Russia—Unforeseen Consequences of the Alliance—Germany and Russia—German Second Thoughts—The Kaiser's Disappointment with the Tsar.

I

FROM 1898 onwards for the next four years the unrest in the Far East remained a constant background to European diplomacy. The Powers which had intervened "on behalf of China" at the end of the Chinese-Japanese War in 1895 had rewarded themselves handsomely for their pains, Russia being in possession of Port Arthur and the greater part of Manchuria, Germany having seized Kiao-Chow, and France obtained substantial concessions in Yunnan and on the Yangtse. Britain, having taken the modest compensation of Wei-Hai-Wei for her non-intervention, remained aloof and isolated, and Japan waited resentfully for the moment when she could avenge herself on the Powers which had despoiled her of the fruits of her victory. All the time the German Emperor was working himself into a passion about the "Yellow peril." In 1895 he had sent the Tsar as a Christmas offering a picture painted to order by his Court-painter, which he called "my picture," depicting Buddha as an idol presiding over a holocaust of Christians, with Russia and Germany standing on guard for the true faith in the Far East. This apostleship, as we have seen, went with a worldly appreciation of the advantages to be gained by combining it with the acquisition of coaling-stations and other places of vantage in the China seas, and in 1900 when Chinese resentment at this sequel broke out into the Boxer Rebellion, and the killing of German missionaries, the Kaiser leapt at the opportunity. He was late in the field on that occasion, for the Rebellion had been quenched and the Peking legations saved before he had

made his preparations, but he was determined that there should be an expedition and that it should be under German command.¹ The speech which he made to the Marines before they embarked on this occasion rang through Europe, and inflicted on his unfortunate countrymen the appellation of "Huns" which was to dog them for the next twenty years. "You are about to meet a crafty, well-armed, cruel foe! Meet him and beat him! Give no quarter! Take no prisoners! Kill him, when he falls into your hands! Even as, a thousand years ago, the Huns under their King Attila made such a name for themselves as still resounds in terror through legend and fable, so may the name of German resound through Chinese history a thousand years from now, and may you so conduct yourselves that no Chinaman will ever again so much as dare to look crooked at a German." It was said all over Europe, that the Kaiser was mentally unbalanced.

In 1901 the international troops were still in the country, and the Germans were plunging about, conducting punitive expeditions on trivial pretexts, demanding preposterous indemnities and concessions, and behaving as might be expected after the injunctions of their Emperor. The Ambassadors of other Powers reported that China, under this treatment, was falling rapidly into a state of disintegration, and a dangerous scramble for her territory seemed a high probability in the near future. British Ministers now saw themselves in a position of considerable difficulty, if not actually of danger. They had dissociated themselves from the other Powers in 1895; they were very reluctant participants in the International Expedition; they had no certain knowledge of the intentions of Japan. To bolster up China single-handed, was beyond their power; to be isolated in the struggle which now seemed to threaten was extremely undesirable. Lord Lansdowne looked with much concern on this legacy of trouble when he succeeded Lord Salisbury as Foreign Minister in 1901.

The natural solution was to make common cause with Japan, which presumably remembered that Great Britain had not joined in the movement against her in 1895. But Japan was for long in two minds. As she saw the situation, there were two courses open to her. One was to stifle her resentment and come to terms with

¹ The troops of all Europe under a German Field-Marshal—that was his dream, and when the Tsar, urgently consulted about Waldersee, wired his acquiescence, the Kaiser proclaimed to London that the Tsar had offered the supreme command to Waldersee. Whereupon the Tsar said to the German Ambassador that it was "only out of fraternal feeling for the Emperor" that he did not disavow this representation. Ludwig, p. 242.

L. H. 182-183

11 See Lord Newton: 'Biography of Lord Lansdowne
for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902.
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Russia on the basis of annexing Korea and leaving Manchuria to Russia, who was now in practical possession of that Province; the other was to obtain an alliance with a European Power which would enable her at a favourable moment to renew the struggle with Russia without being hindered by other European Powers. During the year 1901 the Japanese Government tried both policies simultaneously, entrusting the overtures for a British Alliance to Baron Hayashi, the Japanese Minister in London, and the feelers for a Russian understanding to the Marquis Ito, a distinguished elder statesman, who journeyed through the United States in October and came to Paris on his way to St. Petersburg early in November (having avoided England).

A very delicate situation resulted. Negotiations between Lord Lansdowne and Baron Hayashi had been going on since April, and had been brought very nearly to the final point when the Marquis reached Paris. The Baron rushed to Paris to inform the Marquis of the negotiations in London; the Marquis was unpleasantly surprised to find that they had proceeded so far and was with difficulty persuaded to promise his support "in principle" to an Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹ In any case he insisted on carrying out his original plan of going to St. Petersburg, and there was nearly persuaded to revert to his original idea of a Russo-Japanese understanding. Baron Hayashi, meanwhile, was labouring to explain the circumstances to Lord Lansdowne, who was surprised to learn that the Marquis, being in bad health, had betaken himself to the particularly insalubrious city of St. Petersburg to avoid the London fogs. The British Foreign Secretary now inquired sharply at Tokio whether the Japanese Government meant business. The answer came that they did, and the Marquis Ito received instructions to quit St. Petersburg and repair to London. He reached London at the beginning of January, 1902, and Lord Lansdowne invited him to his country house, where the two men had searching conversations. The negotiations now came rapidly to a conclusion and the Agreement was signed on January 30. Lord Salisbury, who was still Prime Minister, had apparently for this occasion waived his objections to foreign entanglements.

Lord Lansdowne described the Agreement in a covering dispatch as "purely a measure of precaution, to be invoked should occasion arise, in defence of important British interests," a measure which "in no way threatened the present position or legitimate interests of other Powers." It covered British interests in China, and Japanese interests

¹ "Life of Lord Lansdowne," p. 223.

both in China and in Corea—a country in which Japan was said to have “in a peculiar degree” political as well as commercial and industrial interests. But only in the event of either being attacked by more than one Power did it engage the other to come to her assistance. In all other events the observance of a strict neutrality and “efforts to prevent other Powers from joining in hostilities against its ally” were the limit of what was pledged, though the two Powers undertook to “communicate with one another fully and frankly” when the interests of either were in jeopardy, and not to make arrangements with other Powers “to the prejudice of their agreement without consulting one another.”¹

II

Explanations of this kind were common form in Europe, and no one attached importance to them. A glance at the French documents shows the extraordinary commotion that the news caused in Europe. Montebello, the French Ambassador in St. Petersburg, reports that Lamsdorff, the Russian Foreign Minister, was in a high state of perturbation at this “absolutely unexpected news.” Only a few weeks before the Marquis Ito had been in St. Petersburg apparently paving the way for a Russo-Japanese Agreement. It now turned out that the Japanese Government had for weeks been negotiating with the British Government, and yet not a whisper had reached the other Governments. All the European Ministers in Tokio had been caught out: not one of them had sent a word to their Governments. The Japanese Minister in St. Petersburg was apparently in the same state of ignorance, and his position was most painful. He explained mournfully to his French colleague that he had accepted this appointment on the express condition that he was to seek a friendly understanding on all questions which might trouble the peace of Japan and Russia, and he was at a loss to know what had happened in Tokio. He said that the Marquis Ito had only “been informed indirectly” of what had happened when he got to London² and that he strongly disapproved of the action of his Government and had remonstrated in Japan. The Minister gave it to be understood

¹ For the terms of the Agreement and the various drafts see G. and T., Vol. III., pp. 116-20. The Agreement became technically an offensive and defensive Alliance in 1905 when its scope was extended to India and eastern Asia generally and the two Powers pledged one another to “maintain the integrity and independence of China and the open door for all nations in that country.”

² This was not the case. He was informed in Paris before he went to St. Petersburg.

that, if he saw any possibility, he would reverse the course of events and resume the conversations for a direct understanding with Russia.

No one, Montebello wrote to Delcassé, had any idea what the Treaty meant. It had the appearance if not of an offensive at least of a "defensive arrangement against Russia and France." Cambon in London professed himself equally puzzled. He believed that the principal if not the only reason for "this useless convention" was that the British Government needed a "*succès d'amour propre*" after the check to its designs in China—something to convince the British public that the rôle of Great Britain in the Far East had not been altogether eclipsed. The Berlin judgment was that it was another instance of British duplicity. Britain, Japan, and the United States were known to be working together against the attempt of Russia to conclude a treaty with China giving her exclusive rights in China, and the treaty with Japan was probably only a crafty move in that game. Berlin was scarcely at that moment in a mood to take a favourable view of British action. The French Ambassador reported on February 5 that he had been dining that day with one of the "grand dignitaries of the Court" and that just as they were leaving the table a little boy rushed in waving a newspaper bearing the news of a great Boer victory and the capture of Lord Methuen—which was received with rapturous applause by the whole company. He adds that the "exuberance of joy" manifested on this occasion was a little complicated by the fact that the British Ambassador was among the guests.¹

A week later the French Minister in Tokio reported fêtes and high rejoicings in that city and added that all Japan was greatly flattered by England's departure from splendid isolation in her favour and by her own admission on equal terms to the Concert of Nations. But he too saw little political significance in the event and felt sure that the main object of the Treaty, so far as Japan was concerned, was to secure a loan.

If to all these clever and presumably expert diplomatists the Anglo-Japanese move seemed mystifying and politically unimportant, it was because they were unable to conceive the possibility of Japan either challenging or taking up a challenge from Russia, if the latter were seriously bent on pursuing her ambitions in China. The Japanese might, according to Eastern standards, be a spirited and enterprising race, but that they would have the hardihood to try conclusions with one of the great European Powers, or that,

¹ De Noailles to Delcassé, February 5, 1902.

if they did, they could escape complete disaster, was beyond the ambit of European thought at this time. The single-handed duel which, at the worst, would be the outcome of the British-Japanese Alliance was regarded by them all with complete composure. Supposing the Japanese had the audacity to try it, Russia would be kept busy for a time—no great disadvantage for Europe—but nothing that need disturb the equanimity of other nations or affect their balance of power would have happened. It is possible that Count Lamsdorff may have had other thoughts and that these accounted for his extreme agitation; but if (as Montebello reported) he had told the Marquis Ito that Russia “could not permit Korea to fall into the hands of Japan or any other Power,” and that Russia required a “free road for herself from Vladivostok to Port Arthur,” and if the Marquis reported this to his Government, it is more than probable that Lamsdorff himself provided the final argument for the Anglo-Japanese Treaty. Agreement with a Power which stood in Manchuria, cried hands off in Korea, and required a free road from Vladivostok to Port Arthur was, as Japan saw her future, just the one impossible thing.

III

The root of the matter may be found in a dispatch from Lord Lansdowne to the British Chargé d’Affaires at Tokio at the end of July, 1901.¹ Lord Lansdowne is describing a conversation with the Japanese Minister:

We then discussed the situation in regard to Manchuria.

Baron Hayashi told me that the Japanese had a strong sentimental dislike to the retention by Russia of that Province, from which they had at one time been themselves expelled.

But Japan’s real concern was for Corea. Corea could not possibly stand alone, its people were far too unintelligent, and sooner or later it would have to be decided whether the country was to fall to Russia or not. The Japanese Government could not possibly accept the former of these alternatives. They would certainly fight in order to prevent it, and it must be the object of their diplomacy to isolate Russia.

The really momentous consequence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was not that it provided security for British and Japanese interests in China, but that, by isolating Russia, it prepared the way for the single-handed duel between her and Japan which was to send Russia back from the Far East to the Near East, and once

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., p. 91.

more to divert her ambitions from Asia to Europe. It is at least conceivable that, if there had been no Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Russia would have been developing Manchuria and engaged in a partition of China, instead of espousing the cause of Serbia, in 1914.

It is not to be supposed that these consequences were visible in Europe at the time, but to Russia, France and Germany the Agreement was an act of high policy, which threw an entirely new light on the intentions of the British Foreign Office. To Russia it was the definite choice once more by Britain of the anti-Russian side. Confident as Russia might be of her capacity to deal with Japan single-handed, it was nevertheless an uncomfortable thought that Britain stood between her and the help which the German Emperor had seemed to promise, or which she might naturally claim from her ally, France; and that, if or when the day came, the British fleet would be near at hand, requiring a strict observance of neutrality, and forbidding access to bases and coaling-stations in the possession of other Powers which might otherwise have been open to the Russian fleet. To France the Treaty was only less a mortification than to Russia, and in view of its possible results to her ally, she interpreted it as a check to herself.

IV

Count Lamsdorff, the Russian Foreign Minister, was very angry, and during the next few weeks he made a strong effort to induce Germany to join in a counter-demonstration of the other Powers. But on second thoughts the Germans had come to the conclusion that the Treaty was by no means all to the bad from their point of view. Cautiously handled, it offered Germany the opportunity of playing her favourite part of *tertius gaudens*. Anything which kept Russia occupied in the Far East and required her to assign a larger proportion of her armaments to that region was, according to the Bismarckian tradition, a favourable point for Germany. Next to this, anything which kept Russia and England apart was wholly to the good; and anything which kept Russia reminded that she was dependent on German good-will was grist to the German mill. "For us just now," wrote Bülow to the German Ambassador in London, "by far the most important fact is the circumstances which you rightly mention that the Agreement with Japan will put an end to the attempts at a *rapprochement* between England and Russia." But the thing had to be handled cautiously so as to extract the utmost profit from it

while avoiding the obvious pitfalls. The "*Aufzeichnung*" sent by the Chancellor to the Ambassador and Staff in St. Petersburg is one of Bülow's masterpieces:

His Majesty wishes that no doubt should exist in St. Petersburg about the loyalty of our attitude. This he thinks specially important because our relations with Russia depend essentially upon the confidence which the Tsar feels in His Majesty. The Russians must not entertain the slightest suspicion that we either prompted or were silent partners in the Anglo-Japanese Agreement.

That Count Lamsdorff takes this agreement "very seriously" gives His Majesty great satisfaction, and still more so that it suggests to the Russian Minister the idea of the "combination of other Powers."

Incidentally His Majesty observed that the Agreement was a hard but not altogether undeserved punishment for the flirtation of the Russians with England, for their passivity during the South African War, their coyness (*Sprodigkeit*) towards us, their irresponsiveness to the well-meant hints of His Majesty. It appears that Russia too, and especially in the Far East, has many Achilles' heels.

His Majesty quite agrees that Count Alvensleben should with his usual tact await a suitable opportunity to express himself to Count Lamsdorff about the Anglo-Japanese Agreement.¹

Count Alvensleben's tact no doubt enabled him to veil the fact that the Kaiser who now reproached the Russians with their "passivity during the South African War" had claimed credit with the English for having vetoed a Coalition against them during that war. At all events when the Count made his first communication, the Russian Minister declared himself greatly touched by it, and earnestly pleaded for his project of a combination of the other Powers against England and Japan. He felt sure that if Germany gave the signal, Austria and Italy would follow, and he believed he could reckon on the support of France.

This was a great deal more than Count Bülow had bargained for when he expressed the Emperor's satisfaction at Count Lamsdorff's amiable thoughts. He wrote at length to the Ambassador instructing him to pull back. Germany's interests in the Far East were purely commercial, and for her to be associated with Russia in a public *démarche* against Japan might react disastrously on her trade and play into the hands of the Anglo-Saxons, both British and American. Of course they wished to be as civil as possible to Russia, but, after all, the fact had to be reckoned with that there was a strong and rising anti-Russian feeling all over the world and for Germany to get involved in it would be folly.

All the Ambassador's tact failed to make this communication

¹ G.P., XVII, No. 5048, p. 156.

agreeable to Count Lamsdorff. He was in fact greatly annoyed and complained bitterly that his project of a combined *démarche* had been turned down without the bare civility of a pretence to discuss it. Holstein thought his wrath to be simulated, and characteristically inferred from the whole business that the Russians were up to some new mischief against Germany. He was sure that they were wise not to have walked into the Russian trap.

In the end Count Lamsdorff had to content himself with a joint note of the two Allies, Russia and France, which in vague and rather grandiose language intimated that in certain circumstances not specified they might think it necessary to concert measures in common. It made little impression, for no one supposed that the French had the slightest intention of risking their fleet against England and Japan for any Russian adventure in the Far East. It was a gesture which Russia had a right to expect from her Ally, but it had no significance in the weighing of forces.

V

The Kaiser's feeling about the yellow races seems to have been an honest obsession. He returns to it so often and in such odd places and contexts that it is impossible to suppose it put on. But except for the brief incursions of the Kiao-Chow adventure and the Boxer Rebellion, his own part in it consisted mainly in inciting the Tsar to go to all lengths against Japan and promising to cover his rear in Europe, if he did so. As the tension between Japan and Russia became more acute, Willy "the Admiral of the Atlantic" becomes more urgent that Nicky "the Admiral of the Pacific" shall not yield. Even when Nicky has recognized in an official note that the preponderating interests in Corea must be Japanese, he insists that that country is vital to Russia:

Everybody here understands perfectly that Russia following the laws of expansion must try to get at the sea for an ice-less outlet for its commerce. By this law it is entitled to a strip of coast where such harbours are situated (Wladir, Port Arthur), their Hinterland must be your Power so as to allow your building the railways which are to carry the goods to the ports (Mandschuria). Between the two ports is a tongue of land which may—in one's adversary's hand—become a new sort of Dardanelles. That is impossible for you to allow. These "Dardanelles" (Corea) must not threaten your communications thereby hampering your commerce. That is already on the Black Sea, and that is not what you went to the Far East for. Therefore it is evident to every unbiased mind that Corea must and will be Russian. When and how, that is your affair and concerns only you in your country. That is

the opinion of our People here at home and therefore there is no excitement or "emballement" or war rumours or anything of that sort *here*. The sure end that Corea will once be yours is a foregone conclusion here like the occupation of Mandschuria, hence nobody troubles themselves about it here. (The Kaiser to the Tsar, February 3, 1904.)

When, in spite of these exhortations, the Tsar seemed to be holding back, the Kaiser was almost in despair. Bülow has put his mood on record:

The Kaiser told me this morning that he was deeply disappointed by the Tsar's answer to his letter. He had hoped that its warmth would induce the Tsar to turn all his forces against Japan. Instead of this, the Emperor Nicholas's attitude was still a poor-spirited one; he seemed not to want to fight, and it was not-impossible that he would end by letting the Japanese have Manchuria without a blow or only after weak resistance. Such a turn of events must be prevented under all circumstances. I replied that the surest means of making the Russians conclude a hasty and empty peace with Japan would be by rash German suggestions addressed to the Tsar. If the Tsar saw that His Majesty wanted him to get his teeth well into Japan, it would be enough to make him break it off on the spot.

His Majesty replied that from the point of view of a statesman I might be right. But he felt as a Sovereign, and it pained him to see the harm the Emperor Nicholas was doing himself by his flabby way of going on. The Tsar was compromising all great Sovereigns. . . .¹ (February 14, 1904.)

Whether Bülow actually discoursed to his Sovereign in the manner of a wise nurse to a wilful child may perhaps be doubted, but there is sense in the observation with which he concluded this memorandum that if the Tsar was really espousing the cause of the Christian peoples against the yellow races, he might reasonably look for armed support from the Christian people of Germany. Possibly if the Tsar had not been so supremely confident of his capacity to settle the Japanese business in his own way, he might have improved the occasion to point the same moral.

The reasons which made Russia desire to dominate Manchuria and Corea were reasons which made it seem vital to Japan to resist her. To have a strong European Power instead of a weak China dominating the Sea of Japan was more than she could think tolerable, and if Russia persisted there could in the Japanese view be none but a fighting solution. In February, 1904, the Japanese declared war, and in the next eighteen months the Russians suffered the series of disasters which made an end of their ambitions in Manchuria and compelled them to accept the Treaty of Portsmouth (August, 1905).

¹ G.P., XIX, Vol. I., No. 5961, p. 62; Dugdale, Vol. III., pp. 180-1.

1902-1904

CHAPTER XXII

THE ANGLO-FRENCH ENTENTE

The Movement Towards France—Mr. Chamberlain's Initiative—Preparation of the Ground—King Edward in Paris—Sounding Lord Lansdowne—A Friendly Answer—Beginning of Negotiations—The Secrecy of Delcassé—A Critical Moment—Agreement Reached—The Secret Clauses—Baron Holstein's View—Germany has No Objection—British Naïveté—Sir Eyre Crowe's Memorandum.

I

ONE of the results of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was to suggest to the European Governments that British isolation might not be so impenetrable as they had supposed. This thought was more and more in the minds of French statesmen from now onwards and they saw their opportunity in the growing coolness between Britain and Germany.

The British Documents begin the story of the Anglo-French *Entente* with a dispatch of May 19, 1903,¹ but there is a hint of it in the German many months earlier. On January 30, 1902, Count Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, told his Government that he had learnt in the strictest confidence that negotiations were proceeding between Mr. Chamberlain, then Colonial Secretary, and M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, for an all-round settlement of Colonial questions between France and Great Britain. Newfoundland, the Niger, the New Hebrides, commercial Treaties and extra-territorial rights in Madagascar and Zanzibar were mentioned as the subject of these negotiations which appear to have covered the whole of the ground in the domain of the Colonial Office. Cambon was said also to have raised the question of Morocco, and to have inferred that the British Government was not disinclined to come to a compromise upon that too.²

Chamberlain till the end of 1901 had been the leading advocate of an alliance with Germany, and he had persevered in face of rebuffs which a less persistent man would have regarded as final.

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., Chap. XV., pp. 352-420.

² G.P., XVII, No. 5186, p. 342.

But he had warned the Germans that, if he failed with them, he would look elsewhere for a British Alliance, and the course of the South African War appears to have left him more than ever persuaded that splendid isolation had ceased to be a safe or practicable policy for the British Empire. To start straight away on the opposite tack when he found that his previous course led nowhere was highly characteristic of Mr. Chamberlain, and he appears to have lost no time in turning about when the last Anglo-German flirtation broke down in a renewal of recriminations. Now he was acting with authority as Minister responsible for Colonial questions.

On February 3, 1902, the German Ambassador reported to his Government that Lord Lansdowne had formally denied to him that any agreement had been reached with France about these old Colonial questions.¹ The *démenti* was no doubt strictly accurate, and it may even be true that Lord Lansdowne was unaware of the activities of Mr. Chamberlain who, as Lord Salisbury had remarked to a previous German Ambassador, was in the habit of running ahead of his colleagues in these matters. But it became evident in the next few months that something was on foot. The bitter attacks on England in which the French press had vied with and even surpassed the German during the South African War died down, and the idea that France and England had a common destiny and perils that they would have to face in common began cautiously to be suggested. Chambers of Commerce passed resolutions in favour of an Arbitration Treaty between France and England; a group was formed in the French Chamber to advance this project, and 200 Deputies promised their support. Before the end of the year there was talk of King Edward's visiting Paris, and the idea was received with warm approval by the Paris newspapers.

Evidently the French Foreign Office was preparing the ground for something, and by this time the British too was on the look-out for a favourable moment. At the beginning of March, 1903, Lord Lansdowne intimated to the French Government that King Edward proposed making a cruise in the Mediterranean and that on his return journey it would give him much pleasure to meet the President (M. Loubet) on French soil. The President received this intimation "with unmistakable delight." He said, as the British Ambassador in Paris reported, that "a visit from the King would, in the present temper of France, do an amount of good which

¹ G.P., XVII, p. 343, note.

was probably not realized in England. He hoped, indeed, that H.M. Government were already aware of the extent to which cordiality to England had increased in France, but probably the public at large were not to the same extent informed as to the growth of that sentiment in Paris and throughout the country. His Majesty while Prince of Wales had acquired an exceptional popularity in France, and his many old friends would be overjoyed to see him again; but this statement was not confined to his old friends and was general among all classes."¹

The King went to Paris on May 1, and his visit was, in the French phrase, a *succès fou*. A friend writing to Lord Lansdowne reported a violent Anglophobe as having said: "I can't think what has come over the people of Paris. The first day they behaved well; the second they merely displayed an interest, but the third day *c'était attristant—ils ont acclamé le Roi!*" It was, undoubtedly a very remarkable personal triumph for the King and had all and more than all the results that the President had predicted for it. Undoubtedly it helped to make a favourable atmosphere in France, and incidentally it led the Germans to believe that King Edward was taking a special and personal part in the policy which they afterwards described as the encirclement of Germany.

II

The ground being thus prepared, the statesmen set to work. A spring-board was provided by the proposed Arbitration Treaty. That was the kind of thing which up to this time Foreign Secretaries and diplomats had dismissed as the patter of visionaries and it was sponsored by men like Baron d'Estournelles, Mr. W. T. Stead, and Sir Thomas Barclay, whom they regarded as impracticable zealots. But M. Delcassé suddenly discovered that he would have to say something about it in the French Chamber, and M. Cambon thereupon visited Lord Lansdowne to find out whether he could safely say that it was being discussed with the British Government, and that both Governments were friendly to it. Lord Lansdowne was not discouraging, though characteristically cautious. Provided the proposal was carefully limited so as to exclude "questions which no self-respecting country would submit to arbitration," he saw no harm in it and even some possibilities of good. He would of course have to consult his colleagues, but in the mean-

¹ "Life of Lord Lansdowne," p. 275.

time the French Minister would be on perfectly safe ground in returning a friendly answer to any question that might be put to him in the Chamber and assuming British reciprocity.¹

In the meantime arrangements were going forward for the return visit of the French President, who came to London at the beginning of July accompanied by the French Foreign Minister, M. Delcassé. Under the old diplomacy the fact that a Foreign Minister accompanied a Sovereign or President on his visits stamped the occasion as one of political importance, and on this occasion the reality corresponded with the appearance. On July 7 Lord Lansdowne and M. Delcassé had a long and searching conversation covering the whole range of questions affecting France and Great Britain. The Arbitration Treaty now faded out of sight, and there came up instead the idea of an understanding which should cover not only the old Colonial questions but Morocco and even Egypt as well.

Negotiations were now regularly on foot, and they lasted for the greater part of a year with many vicissitudes on both sides. It was comparatively easy for us to give the French what they wanted in Siam and Sokoto and even in Morocco, provided in the last case we could do so without treating Spain unfairly—a point on which the French Government seemed to be less solicitous than we were. But the New Hebrides question raised difficulties with the Dominions, and in Egypt we wanted a good deal more than the French at first were willing to give. At every turn the question of “compensations” cropped up, “compensations” which the Minister could plausibly present to his Parliament as justifying the concessions and sacrifices which he was supposed to be making. M. Delcassé had on his flank the French Colonial group which took heated views about alleged sacrifices of French interests; Lord Lansdowne had to consider Dominion susceptibilities and the views of the Admiralty, which was very firm about the strategical importance of the coast of Morocco. His strongest backing came from Lord Cromer, who knew from experience the inconveniences and possible dangers of French opposition in Egypt and was urgent that the opportunity of settlement should not be lost in haggling and pottering over small points. The favourable atmosphere, he kept saying, might pass, if this bargaining was too much prolonged; and if there was a breakdown, everything in the end would be worse than before.²

¹ G. and T., Vol. II., No. 352, p. 289.

² *Ibid.*, No. 387, p. 339.

Lord Lansdowne had a sharp shock when he discovered that as late as the beginning of March, 1904, M. Delcassé had communicated none of these proceedings to the French Cabinet. For this "almost incredible omission," as Lord Lansdowne's biographer calls it, he pleaded the necessity of secrecy, but it also appeared that the French Minister was extremely nervous about the effect of his disclosure upon his colleagues. In the next fortnight he reopened questions thought to have been settled and proposed a new formula about Egypt which suggested that he was still clinging to the idea of a time limit for the British occupation. Lord Lansdowne was reduced to saying that the negotiations would have to be abandoned if these demands were persisted in, and this appears to have had the desired effect. On April 7, 1904, the Agreement was signed.

About the Colonial settlement it is only necessary to say that it worked well in practice and was loyally observed by both parties. For European purposes the importance of the Convention lay in its last article in which the two Governments "agreed to afford one another their diplomatic support in order to obtain the execution of the clauses of the present Declaration regarding Egypt and Morocco." This it was which in the subsequent decade made Morocco the storm centre of European politics. The critics of secret diplomacy made much in after years of the four secret articles which were supposed to have prepared the way for a partition of Morocco between France and Spain with the connivance of Great Britain. These articles have now been published, and it is difficult to read into them any sinister meaning. They provide for separate spheres of interest for France and Spain respectively in the event of the State of Morocco disintegrating, and though that event was thought unlikely at the moment, a precaution against a collision between those two countries, if it should take place, was not unwise or unnecessary. It has been suggested that Secret Article I, which declares that other specified Articles (IV, VI and VII) would remain intact "in the event of either Government finding itself constrained by circumstances to modify its policy," put the British Government under compulsion to support the French in adventures not contemplated in the Convention, but the three articles specified relate only to Newfoundland, Central and West Africa and have no bearing on British support in the supposed case. There is on the face of them nothing in the secret articles which enlarges or strengthens the promise of "diplomatic support" in the published Article IX. Lord Grey's

view that the secret part of the Treaty of the Convention was of little importance in subsequent years seems to be borne out by the facts.¹

III

It had been one of Baron Holstein's most cherished beliefs that the possibility of an understanding between England and France was too remote to need serious consideration from German statesmen. Germany, he thought, had only to bide her time to purchase English friendship at her own moment and on her own terms, and in the meantime not to seem to be eager, and even to step back, when England appeared to advance, was the way to strike a good bargain and to win the respect of the nation of shopkeepers. By adopting and acting on these ideas, in the teeth of the advice given them by their own representatives in London, Kaiser and Chancellor, as they now discovered, had missed their market and left the door open to an Anglo-French *rapprochement*.

But it is the way of diplomats, when they have suffered a rebuff, to pretend that nothing of importance has happened, and in May, 1904, the Germans professed to regard the arrangement between France and England as a purely local and Colonial event which not only caused them no displeasure but even afforded them a reasonable satisfaction. Count Bülow told the Reichstag that Germany could have no objection to the policy embodied in this *Entente*, and need feel no uneasiness about her interests in Morocco. In her practical way she set about obtaining the same commercial privileges for herself in Egypt as France had obtained under the Convention, but this was expected and no offence was taken. In England the minimizing view of the Convention was generally accepted and represented the honest opinion of the vast majority. People rejoiced at the removal of causes of friction with a neighbour with whom they wished to be on friendly terms, and not one in a million dreamt of any large commitment on the field of European policy. The Government itself appeared to be of the same mind. Hardly a word had been said in the course of the negotiations about any but Colonial and overseas affairs; Lord Lansdowne claimed none of the triumph attaching to a great stroke of policy, speakers in the House of Commons laid stress on the fact that the new friendship excluded no other friendship; only one voice, and that not a very important one, was raised in warning of the possible

¹ "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., p. 29.

remoter consequences. Among eminent men Lord Rosebery alone professed his misgivings.

Once more we perceive what the other nations regarded as the naïveté of British statesmanship. Everybody, except apparently the men in Downing Street, knew what Germany was feeling, whatever she might be saying. For years the casting vote of England had been the great prize of Europe, and how she would bestow it and whether she would bestow it at all had been one of the central problems of both the great groups. Now apparently it had gone to France for the asking, gone, as the Englishmen wished the world to believe, without their even knowing what had been done. Cambon said on the eve of the Great War that he would be content if one Corporal's guard were sent to France, for he would know that the rest would follow. Delcassé's thought was perhaps not very different at that moment. The Islanders might believe that in pledging themselves to diplomatic support on certain specified questions which at that moment were of no great importance, they were paying an easy price for ridding themselves of the chronic trouble and friction with France in Egypt and elsewhere, but the European statesman who knew the moves of the game as played by the great Alliances certainly did not limit his outlook to so short a view.

Three years later, when the brief period of compliments had passed and Germany had shown her hand both in Paris and London, Sir Eyre Crowe wrote a memorandum¹ defending the British Foreign Office from the imputation of sinister motive which by this time was current in Germany. This document deals with many subjects but those parts which refer to the origins of the *Entente* belong to this place and may be considered here. The writer set himself to combat the belief, which, after the first Morocco crisis had become widely prevalent in Germany, that the Anglo-French *Entente* was a deliberately hostile act to that country—the first step in fact in the “encirclement” policy which the English people were supposed to be pursuing against the German, under the leadership of King Edward, who, in his turn, was believed to be actuated by feelings of jealousy and animosity towards his nephew, the Kaiser. This idea played so large a part in embittering the relations of the two countries in the subsequent years that it needs careful examination, however inherently absurd an Englishman may think it to be.

Sir Eyre describes the *Entente* as “the outcome of the honest

¹ G. and T., Vol. III., pp. 398–420.

and ardent desire, freely expressed among all classes and parties of the two countries, that an earnest effort should be made to compose, as far as possible, the many differences which had been a source of perpetual friction between them." In England "the wish for improved relations with France was primarily," he says, "but a fresh manifestation of the general tendency of British Governments to take advantage of every opportunity to approach more closely to the ideal condition of living in honourable peace with all other States." The movement, according to this view, was spontaneous and simultaneous on both sides, but in another passage he seems to claim the initiative for England, for he speaks of "M. Delcassé's sagacity and public spirit" in deciding to "grasp the hand which the British Government held out to him."

Sir Eyre then proceeds to deal with the idea which was firmly fixed in the German mind and which even now is not disposed of, that the *Entente*, though local and Colonial in form, was definitely related to the general course of events in world affairs. This idea, briefly stated, was that France had been reduced to a state of such dangerous isolation by the disasters which had befallen her partner, Russia, in the Far East, that she was compelled to look elsewhere for an ally. To this Sir Eyre replies by a simple appeal to dates. He points out that the Russo-Japanese War only began in February, 1904, *i.e.* only two months before the *Entente* was concluded, and that at that time no one, and least of all M. Delcassé, imagined that Russia would be defeated. On the contrary, the charge commonly brought against M. Delcassé by his own countrymen was that he had both failed to foresee the Russo-Japanese War, and that, when it took place, he continued almost to the last to believe in Russia's ultimate success. There was, therefore, no ground at all for supposing that M. Delcassé was thinking of the position of France in Europe when he concluded the agreement with Great Britain.

But, Sir Eyre goes on, "even if the weakening of the Franco-Russian Alliance had been the principal and avowed reason why France sought an understanding with England, this would not justify the charge that the conclusion of such an understanding constituted a provocation and deliberate menace to Germany." No one had ever seriously ascribed to the Franco-Russian Alliance the "character of a combination conceived in a spirit of bellicose aggression." How, then, could any competent student of contemporary history have honestly believed that "the association of so peace-loving a nation as England with France and Russia, or

still less that the substitution of England for Russia in the association with France, would have the effect of turning an admittedly defensive organization into an offensive alliance aimed directly at Germany?" Yet this accusation had actually been made against M. Delcassé, and, incidentally, against Lord Lansdowne, in 1905. It was only necessary to state the facts for the absurdity of this charge to be self-evident.

I myself was witness to the last stages of the Anglo-French negotiations and can attest, if evidence is needed, that this memorandum is an honest and accurate account of the state of mind of Lord Lansdowne and the British Government. The opportunity offered of getting rid of the interminable vexations—not to say more dangerous possibilities—in Anglo-French relations and how should it be rejected? How could it be other than a good stroke for peace? So thought Lord Lansdowne and his colleagues; so said all England, and Liberal and pacifist England no less than Conservative and Imperialist England.

And yet, after one has read the other diplomatic documents of these years, it may well seem astonishing that either Lord Lansdowne or his able and experienced adviser, Sir Eyre Crowe, could have thought this account of the matter to be exhaustive. If we could conceive the circumstances reversed and Baron Holstein or Prince Bülow writing an account of a transaction in which they had secured the friendship of the one uncommitted great Power, how differently it would have been framed! What credit they would have claimed for themselves for having weighed all the wider considerations which the British Permanent Secretary rules out, what far-reaching consequences they would have foreseen from at least neutralizing if not actually annexing another great Power to their group! How little, at all events in their private communications, they would have troubled about the feelings of the other group, except perhaps to rejoice that it was alarmed by the appearance of a new enemy in the opposite camp. In their public utterances they might use the pious phrases of non-aggression—declare their own group to be so notoriously pacific that no sane man could think it otherwise—but between themselves in a memorandum for private circulation among colleagues who would waste time on such sentimentalities?

Sir Eyre Crowe's analysis was, in fact, incomplete. The absorption of Russia in her Far-Eastern adventure—not to speak of the Tsar's increasing intimacy with the Kaiser—had for many years been a cause of uneasiness to the French, and whether she

won or lost in her struggle with Japan, and perhaps even more if she won than if she lost, they saw her more and more drawn out of Europe and away from the problems which most interested them. If she won, her resources in men and money would be dedicated perhaps permanently to her newly conquered territory, and the break-up of the military concentration on her Western front which the Kaiser so ardently desired would surely follow. If she lost, she would be crippled and out of action as a partner in Europe for probably years to come. It was impossible that these thoughts should not have been in the minds of French statesmen, who knew the rules of the European game, when they decided to change their course in the year 1904. To them, as to the Germans, the *Entente* was bound to have European implications.

That England had, knowingly or unknowingly, plunged into the heart of the European contention, and that the French knew it, was, in any case, the judgment of the Germans and of most other Europeans in 1904. They judged that the English casting vote had been given to the French group.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE UNITED STATES AND WORLD POLITICS

Europe and the United States—The European Attitude—Americans and Germans in the Pacific—American Sea-Power—Cleveland and Salisbury—The Venezuela Incident—American Imperialism—The Spanish War—Anglo-American Fraternizing—Theodore Roosevelt—Hands Off to Germany—"How I Took Panama"—The Alaska Boundary—Roosevelt and the Kaiser—Making Peace between Japan and Russia—Intervening in Morocco—His Last Set-Piece—Taft and Dollar Diplomacy—Woodrow Wilson's Idealism—The Freedom of the Seas—Nationalism in the U.S.A.—A European Grievance.

I

GREAT BRITAIN was not the only Power which was breaking new ground in these years. The United States also was coming out of her isolation and entering an appearance as an Imperialist world Power. She too, in spite of her vast territory and unexploited resources, felt the urge to be up and doing in the general bid for oversea territory and economic expansion. This American movement was only less important in its final results than the new departure of Great Britain, and the closing chapter of this section may properly be devoted to it.

Until comparatively late in the nineteenth century, it was the view of most European Governments that the Americans were a raw and primitive people to whom the conventions of diplomacy did not apply. On the few occasions on which it was necessary to address them, they were talked to in language which it was supposed they would understand, but which no European Government would have dreamt of addressing to another European Government. In 1850, when a British subject, one McLeod, was arrested and put on trial for murder in New York for having set on fire and driven over the Falls of Niagara an American steamer engaged in carrying arms to Canadian rebels—on the face of it a pretty high-handed proceeding—Palmerston knew exactly what ought to be done. "The President," he wrote to the British Minister at Washington, "should understand this—that the British

nation will never permit a British subject to be dealt with as the people of New York propose to deal with McLeod, without taking a signal vengeance on the offenders. McLeod's execution would produce war, war immediate and frightful in its character, because it would be a war of retaliation and vengeance." Whether this communication overawed the American jury which acquitted McLeod can only be guessed, but Palmerston's biographer commends it as a model for British statesmen who may have to deal with a similar emergency. That, in the popular phrase, was "the stuff to give them."

Europeans watched the American Civil War with a rather invidious interest and almost total incomprehension of the things at stake in that conflict. The *Alabama* incident reminded the English that there were ugly possibilities latent in it, but these, in their opinion, did not rise to the dignity of serious International disputes. The European great Powers began first to take the United States seriously as a factor in world politics during the first term of President Cleveland, who entered the field against Germany in the Samoan business of 1887 and 1888. He had little success in that particular affair, but the dispatches which passed from Washington to Berlin and London were a hint to Europe that the United States also must be reckoned among the Powers demanding their place in the sun. The American Minister was instructed to explain to Bismarck that his Government was displeased at the rapid absorption of Pacific Islands by European Powers and that it was "determined not only to preserve the independence of Samoa but to maintain such rights as it still held among islands not yet appropriated."¹ More important still, their ill-success in Samoa led the American Administration to draw the conclusion, which was simultaneously being drawn by Germany, that a vigorous over-sea policy needed to be sustained by a powerful navy. From this time onwards the German Emperor began to talk hopefully of an impending and inevitable struggle between Great Britain and the United States, and to use whatever influence he possessed to persuade each in turn that the other was the enemy.

The next mile-post was the Pan-American Congress which assembled at Washington in 1889. This was watched with some misgiving in Europe where it was interpreted as an effort to extend the Monroe doctrine by making the United States arbiter and referee in disputes between the Latin American States, if not actual suzerain of these States. Alarms on this subject were greatly

¹ L. M. Sears, "American Foreign Relations," p. 396.

exaggerated, but there was undoubtedly in these years a gradual development of the famous doctrine in the direction of claiming for the United States what Blaine called a "natural protectorate" over Central and Southern America. This tendency showed itself in more or less forcible interventions in Brazilian and Nicaraguan internal affairs and produced a serious crisis with Great Britain on the Venezuela boundary question in December, 1895. Lord Salisbury, who was little acquainted with American affairs, was unfeignedly astonished when the President of the United States claimed to butt in upon an insignificant dispute over a few miles of swamp and jungle between a Central American State and a Colony held by Great Britain before the Monroe doctrine was heard of, and said so in polite, if rather magisterial, language. To his still greater surprise he received an answer which was little short of an ultimatum. "It will in my opinion," said President Cleveland in a message to Congress, "be the duty of the United States to resist by every means in its power as a wilful aggression upon its rights and interests the appropriation by Great Britain of any lands, or the exercise of governmental jurisdiction over any territory which after investigation we have determined of right belongs to Venezuela. In making these recommendations I am fully alive to the responsibility incurred and keenly realize all the consequences that may follow."

Had such language been used by a European Power to Great Britain, it would have been difficult to avert the consequences glanced at in this message. But the British saw chiefly the absurdity of two great Powers starting a great war on a matter which neither of them cared two straws about, and fell back on their old theory that American manners should not be judged by European standards. Mr. Olney, the State Secretary, whose dispatches were high models of incivility, was judged specially to possess this claim to indulgence; and after a few weeks the whole affair was buried under the much greater sensation of the Jameson Raid and the German Emperor's telegram to President Kruger. That, by British standards, was real British business; the other just the kind of annoyance which a man may feel at having poked a stick into an unsuspected wasp-nest.

I remember the earnest endeavours which were made to explain to Lord Salisbury, after he had read the Olney dispatch and the Cleveland message to Congress forwards and backwards and backwards and forwards again, what the American point of view really was, and I doubt if he ever got near it. But he was induced to say that the United States had "the same sort of interest in the Caribbean

Sea as we had in the Channel ports of Belgium and the Netherlands," and remote as that was from the real American meaning, it tided the matter over until it was finally settled by an Arbitration Court sitting in Paris, before which the self-appointed American Boundary Commission gave evidence. The affair left the impression on the European Foreign Offices that there was something mysterious and dangerous in the American mentality which had better in future be handled with caution. But Europe certainly opened its eyes very wide when the American State Secretary was heard saying that "the United States is practically sovereign on this Continent and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition." What next?

II

Europe comforted itself with the reflection that if the United States had this vast sphere of influence all to itself, it would at least leave other nations alone. But here too there was a rude awakening. Within three years the United States had annexed Hawaii in the teeth of Japanese opposition, made war on Spain, driven her out of Cuba and annexed the Philippines. American Imperialism was now of the same pattern as British, and the forward school in both countries hailed the American writer, Mahan, biographer of Nelson and exponent of the virtues of sea-power, as their leader and prophet. Under the common inspiration the British and American navies became at this time all but a band of brothers, and when the German Admiral, von Dietrichs, took up a threatening attitude to the American Admiral Dewey at the battle of Manila Bay, the British commander led the German to suppose that if he fought the American, he would have to fight the British also. Whether either German or British Admirals had any authority from their Governments is a doubtful point, but there was no doubt that the action of the British was popular with his countrymen.

From this time onwards the United States was plainly, and even aggressively, on the map as an imperialist Power. She let it be known that she expected to be consulted and remembered whenever the other Powers were hoisting their flags, pushing their trade, opening or shutting doors. She had special interests in China, a policy of her own for Japan, religious missions everywhere, which kept her people informed and interested about what was going on in the Far East and the Near East, in Turkey, Egypt and India. Britain during these years had a staunch friend at Washington in

John Hay, formerly Ambassador in London, who by his share in negotiating the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, removed one of the chief stumbling blocks to British-American friendship and prepared the way for the construction of the Panama Canal under American auspices. But now and for the next seven years the typical man of the American movement was Theodore Roosevelt who succeeded as President after the assassination of President McKinley in November, 1901.

Something of the British Palmerston, a little of the German Kaiser, and a good deal of the shorter catechist went to Roosevelt's make-up. He was exuberantly patriotic and fervently moral; radical and jingo as the occasion demanded; cow-boy, rough-rider, nature-lover, shrewd politician, equally apt with the big stick and the square deal. He was neither a pacifist nor an isolationist; he held the European Tory view about the right way of governing coloured and inferior races, among whom he classed all "dagoes" and Central Americans, and (though his language was more discreet about these) most of the non-nordic dwellers in the South American Continent.

For exhibitions of the will to power, Roosevelt's first term challenges any similar period in the European record. His own lively account—published during the Great War—of how he brought the Germans to heel in the second Venezuelan affair of 1903 has been rather destructively analysed by his latest biographer,¹ Mr. H. F. Pringle, and he was apparently not quite so peremptory as he made out. But he certainly did leave the impression at the time and later that he had scared the Kaiser into accepting arbitration by the unheard of threat of sending American warships to shell German gunboats, and he claimed not unjustly to have established the principle that European nations should not send warships to collect debts in American waters. Europe muttered that, if the United States denied the European creditor this forcible remedy, it should at least undertake the business of debt-collecting itself, but that was the last thing Roosevelt intended to do. What he intended was to let Europeans know that they engaged in commercial enterprises in the United States sphere of interest at their own risk and peril. The American Government might intervene on behalf of American creditors, but no other Government was to enter an appearance on that scene.

The story of "how I took Panama," which belongs to the same period, is pure American and far too long to be repeated

¹ Henry F. Pringle, "Theodore Roosevelt," pp. 282-9.

here. For that the reader must be referred to Mr. Pringle's book, where it is told with a wealth of lively detail.¹ Briefly, Roosevelt appears to have done to Colombia very much what Mr. Chamberlain was charged with having attempted to do to the Transvaal Republic at the time of the Jameson Raid, *i.e.* fomented the revolution which detached Panama from Colombia, and ensured its success by sending an American warship to prevent the landing of Colombian troops dispatched to put it down. Colombia had objected to ratifying the Hay-Herran Treaty for the construction of the Panama Canal, and Roosevelt was not disposed to wait. "I simply lifted my foot," he explained to his Cabinet. "Oh, Mr. President," said Attorney-General Knox, "do not let so great an achievement suffer from any taint of legality." Senator-F. Hoare refused to be consoled. "I hope," he said, "I may never live to see the day when the interests of my country are placed above its honour," and, so saying, walked out of the White House. But by this time Roosevelt had persuaded himself that the Colombians were contemptible little creatures, "foolish and homicidal corruptionists," and that he was acting according to "the highest, finest, and nicest standards of public and governmental ethics" in removing their obstruction to the great American project of the Panama Canal.

To the same period belongs the Alaska Boundary controversy in which he once more produced his big stick. He would consent to the appointment of a Boundary Commission provided he was assured that its award would confirm the American claim, but not otherwise. "I wish it distinctly understood," he wrote in a letter intended for Mr. Chamberlain's eye (July 25, 1903), "that if there is a disagreement on the Commission, not only will there be no arbitration in the matter but that in my message to Congress I shall take a position which will prevent any possibility of arbitration hereafter; a position, I am inclined to believe, which will render it necessary for Congress to give me authority to run the line as we claim it by our own people without any further regard to the attitude of England and Canada." Once more he was prepared to go to all lengths to make the United States view of its rights prevail. Trouble was avoided because, when it came to the point, Lord Alverstone, the British Commissioner, took the United States view of the dispute; but what would have happened, if he had not, can only be guessed.

¹ "Theodore Roosevelt," Chapter VI., pp. 315-38.

III

Roosevelt occasionally spoke, like other Americans, of the "traditional abstention of the United States from European entanglements," but each separate entanglement found him ready, even eager, to play a part. Looking out on European affairs, he saw a kindred spirit in the German Kaiser, and in spite of the snub which he claimed to have administered to him in the Venezuelan business of 1903, he contrived during the next three years to establish intimate relations with him. The two men used the same sort of arguments and fronted the world with the same sort of defiance, when the claims or interests of other nations conflicted with those of their own. Both felt that they were new-comers on the scene of world-politics, and shouted through the same loud-speakers to attract attention. "The only man I understand and who understands me is the Kaiser," said Roosevelt to the German Ambassador at Washington in September, 1904; and many similar communications appear to have passed in the subsequent months. This led naturally to the suggestion that the American President should, as the one impartial personage in the world, undertake mediation between the Russians and the Japanese, and so put an end to a conflict which all the European Powers believed to have passed beyond the limits of prudence and safety for either belligerents or neutrals.

The rôle was entirely congenial to Roosevelt, and he took it up and carried it through with great energy and skill. The formal overture came from Japan, who herself was ready for peace after the battle of Tshushima; but after her resounding victories it needed much persuasion and diplomacy to induce her to consent to the moderate peace—the peace without indemnities and annexations—which alone the Tsar could have accepted without risking his throne. Throughout the negotiations Roosevelt and the Kaiser were in constant communication, and the latter showed tact and good sense in the part assigned to him of persuading the Tsar to accept the inevitable. The signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, after many days of perilous steering, was a high personal triumph for Roosevelt, and a signal success for the United States, which now took her place on an equal footing with the great European Powers and shared their responsibility for world affairs.¹

This service was not the less honourable because Roosevelt, like

¹ For the details of the negotiations see G.P., XIX, Chap. 139, pp. 531 *et seq.*

the Kaiser, had reasons of his own for not wishing the further aggrandisement of Japan, which would probably have followed from a continuance of war. Americans had watched with uneasiness the growth of the new and formidable Japanese naval power in the Pacific, and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had certainly not reassured them. Roosevelt's lively imagination leapt ahead to a possible Japanese invasion which would find Americans unprepared, and, like Lord Roberts in the parallel case of an invasion of England, he deplored the reluctance of Americans to accept military training, and received the condolences of the Kaiser on that subject. His general idea at this time seems to have been that a combination of Germany, Britain and the United States was the "natural" method of checking the ambitions of Japan, and solving most other problems that threatened the peace of the world. But this encountered two considerable obstacles, (1) that Britain was the ally of Japan, and (2) that the German Kaiser was already speculating on an inevitable conflict between the British and the now rapidly increasing American fleet as the proper way of checking Great Britain.

Had Roosevelt had a third term of office, or successors of the same disposition as himself, it is probable that little more would have been heard of American isolation from Europe. One thing led on to another. When at the end of the Russo-Japanese negotiations his friend the Kaiser asked him to use his influence with the French to induce them to consent to a conference on the dangerous Morocco-question, he was scarcely in a position to refuse. He did apparently use his influence to some effect in the desired direction, but when the French consented to the Conference, he declared his opinion that the Germans had won a diplomatic triumph of the first magnitude with which they ought to be content. This was a good deal less than the Kaiser expected, and he was greatly disappointed when, after the Conference had assembled, his American friend opposed the German plan of carving Morocco into spheres of interest. Roosevelt was now supposed to be pro-French, and his efforts behind the scenes were certainly in the main directed to inducing the Germans not to resist the French point of view to the point of breaking the Conference. For this reason his telegram to the Kaiser at the end of the Conference offering "heartfelt congratulations on this epoch-making success at Algeciras," and declaring "His Majesty's policy in the Morocco question to have been masterly from beginning to end"¹ was coldly received by

¹ G.P., XXI, No. 7121, p. 311.

that Sovereign, who, to do him justice, held no such opinion about his own performances.

In 1906 and 1907 there was trouble with the Japanese in California, both on the immigration question and on the question of the education of Japanese children in the schools. Roosevelt settled it by an intervention which was both wise and fair, but at the end he seems to have thought, like many of his countrymen, that the Japanese needed an object-lesson in the power and majesty of the United States. This led him to his last great set-piece—the dispatch of the American battle-fleet round the world. This, as he said repeatedly, was entirely his own idea; and in his *Autobiography* he describes it “as the most important service that I rendered to peace.” What exactly he meant by this is by no means clear. He told Tirpitz, when he visited Germany in after years, that “though he did not actually anticipate a war with Japan, he believed that a swift transfer of the fleet from Atlantic to Pacific waters would mean the gain of three months’ time if war were declared.” He also told his biographer that “except the digging of the Panama Canal this voyage impressed Europe with a feeling of friendly respect for the United States more than anything that had occurred since the Civil War.”¹ Probably he exaggerated the results in both respects. The European judgment was that if war had really been expected, the exposure of a battle-fleet in far-distant waters, where it had neither base nor repairing stations, would have been an extremely hazardous stroke. But it was the kind of gesture that Roosevelt loved and it put him at once on an equality with the European Governments which had long practised this method of inspiring “feelings of friendly respect.”

IV

Mr. Taft, who succeeded Roosevelt, was no more capable of emulating these efforts than Caprivi, the German Chancellor, was of following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Bismarck. Under his guidance the United States fell back on the “dollar diplomacy,” which aimed at the peaceful penetration of the Central American States and the extrusion, as far as possible, of new commercial enterprises on the part of Europeans. But an effort by Japanese speculators to acquire a tract of land in Mexican territory on the lower Californian Gulf furnished occasion for a further development of the Monroe doctrine. Senator Lodge surmised that

¹ Sears, “American Foreign Relations,” p. 490.

behind this seemingly commercial enterprise there was or might be the intention of establishing a coaling-station or point of vantage for a Japanese expedition, and he declared that the Administration had not only the right but the duty to guard against it, though the territory in question lay outside its own boundaries. The Senate heartily took the same view and the project was stillborn—a notification to the world that the United States claimed to supervise all commercial enterprises on American soil in which it suspected political or military consequences inconvenient to itself.

With the advent of Woodrow Wilson Imperialism passed into the background, and in its place came American idealism and Liberalism. The new President behaved honestly and courageously in calling upon his countrymen to honour their engagement to Great Britain in the matter of the Panama tolls, and by so doing removed a formidable stone of stumbling from British-American friendship. In one Presidential message after another he preached the highest doctrine of peace, forbearance and honourable dealing in international affairs. But he was often in great difficulties and especially with the insurgent Mexican Presidents, who would neither accept his teaching nor profit by his rebukes, and who more than once landed him in a position from which only the kind of forcible action that he abhorred seemed to offer the way out. A determination not to make war and a certain ingenuity in finding alternatives when there seemed to be no other way, carried him through and kept his hands free for the still greater emergency in which his own vows and preferences proved finally helpless against the driving force of events.

Although it had a much longer ancestry, the characteristic American doctrine of “the freedom of the seas” was especially developed during Wilson’s regime. It embodied the view of sea-power which was natural to a nation that habitually thought of itself as a neutral in the struggles of other nations, and in that respect it was a logical adjunct to the non-intervention doctrine of the fathers of the Constitution. The great neutral desired the sea to remain open to its commerce and its right of trading with all nations to remain unimpaired, though these nations might be fighting with one another. President Wilson was entirely sincere in claiming mercy and humanity as on the side of this doctrine, but it was also the natural expression of American policy and interest on the assumption that she would not intervene in the quarrels of her neighbours, and it was liable to rather sudden modification when she found herself a belligerent.

There is a belief in the United States that the nations of Europe are rent by feuds and animosities, and are subject to passions, appetites and ambitions from which the American people are free. The elders who forbade entanglements in European affairs thought of Americans as a simpler and manlier people who had sought a new home across the ocean to escape from the monarchs, tyrants, aristocrats and militarists who held the old world in their grip. The thought persists after a century and a half, and in America to-day one may hear militarism and imperialism spoken of as especially European vices. Yet when exposed to the same temptations, the American people and their Government seem to have behaved not very differently from Europeans. They too have their seasons of ardent nationalism—hundred per cent. Americanism—they too have brandished their big stick and cried hands off to the foreigner. Having one Government over their forty-eight States they are mercifully spared the internecine conflicts which have raged over a similar area in Europe, but their endeavour in the name of the Monroe doctrine to bring all the Americas into their sphere of influence is no less ambitious a policy than that of France, Germany or Great Britain, and is based eventually, like the imperialisms of the European countries, upon the possession of power. In the years before the war it was one of the complaints of Europe against Great Britain that she was in league with the other "Anglo-Saxons" to rail off the immense area of North and South America from the colonizing and commercial activities of the other nations and that this had helped to sharpen their competition for the few remaining exploitable areas. To Germans and Italians especially the fact that the large number of their fellow-citizens who had migrated to the American continent were doomed for ever to live under a foreign flag was always a whispered grievance; and in the Kaiser's thoughts the Germans in South and even in North America figured as a kind of Germania Irredenta which some turn of the wheel might restore to its rightful allegiance.

These may seem fanciful ideas, but in passing judgment on Europe, Americans may be asked to make some allowance for the intensification of the European struggle for places in the sun which has resulted from the Monroe doctrine.

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BOOK IV
REPRISALS AND REHEARSALS

THE WELDING OF THE ENTENTE

Conclusion of the Final Grouping—Driving the Wedge—Unexpected Results—British and German Rivalry—The Atmosphere of the Time—Prosperity and Grandiosity—The Armaments Competition—The Popular Press and its Results on Policy—The French in Morocco—The Russian Disaster in the Far East—A German Opportunity—The Kaiser's Visit to Tangier—His Reluctance—His Subsequent Explanations—Alarm in Paris—Fall of Delcassé—Continued German Pressure—Cementing the *Entente*.

I

By the year 1904 the grouping of the nations had been established on the lines which persisted up to the Great War. The Franco-Russian Alliance, completed in 1894, had ranged the continental nations into their two groups, and Great Britain, at all events in the eyes of Europe, if not yet in her own eyes, had given her casting vote to France and Russia against the Central Powers. There followed a period which may be called that of Reprisals and Rehearsals, reprisals in the main of the German upon the Franco-Russian group, leading to crises and military plans and preparations which more and more were rehearsals for the final struggle. The refusal of Great Britain to do more than pledge her "diplomatic support" to her friends in Europe and her endeavour to reserve the decision of peace and war to her own Parliament, if or when the occasion arose, left an open question which irritated and perplexed both groups. Their system of the equilibrium of forces required certainties to make it work, and British Ministers, hugging their traditional principle that Parliament must decide, could not be subdued to it. The Germans regarded this British attitude as an open invitation to drive a wedge between Great Britain and France, and under one form or another their efforts were directed to this end from now onwards.

But their methods, as the event was to prove, were calculated to have exactly the opposite results of what they presumably intended. The Kaiser and his advisers, and especially Tirpitz, the

leading advocate of German sea-power, were persuaded that the right way to win Great Britain was to increase her alarm about their rapidly growing fleet. This, the Kaiser kept saying, was the right way to treat the English. They would respect Germany and become friendly to her only if they were convinced that she would be a formidable enemy. Let the alternative to friendship be made plain to her, and she would become docile and accommodating. This, as we have seen, was a characteristic German thought, the thought of Bismarck, of Holstein, and a long line of real politicians who assumed that all their neighbours thought as they did, and would consider it mere common sense to bow to superior force when sufficiently displayed. It was not, however, the thought of the English, who regarded sea-power as their one security, and took the challenge to it as a sign of hostility to be met at once and at all costs by outbuilding the Germans, whatever they might build.

All through these years the Kaiser and Tirpitz persisted in thinking that the Anglo-German estrangement was due not to the German fleet but to British jealousy of German trade rivalry. They had only to go on building, said these two, and the result in winning British friendship would be assured. Thus thinking, they attributed every British overture to the respect inspired by their naval effort. Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, knew better, and he constantly warned his superiors in Berlin that the truth was exactly the opposite of what they supposed. An Englishman, as Metternich explained, might feel touched in his pride at the loss of the trade monopoly which he had enjoyed for the greater part of a century, but he found much consolation in the fact, which he soon discovered, that a prosperous Germany was one of the best of British customers. Moreover, the rapid expansion of trade at the end of the nineteenth century had provided such ample opportunities for both that there never was at any moment the sense of pressure and necessity which alone makes wars for trade.

It may nevertheless be admitted that the course of events afforded a certain excuse for German misunderstanding. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's agitation for Imperial Preference and Protection ran coincidentally with the naval agitation, and a large part of its material consisted of comparisons with the German competitor and alarming statistics to prove that he was rapidly gaining over his British rival. With Germany constantly presented as challenging both the sea-power and the commerce of Great Britain, and the

same military language used in both connexions, it is likely enough that war and peace became confused in some minds and that the distinction which the British drew between commercial competition and military operations was less apparent to the Germans. The view that trade followed the flag and that powerful forces carrying flags prepared the way for trade expansion was no doubt held strongly by Germans, but it was not in these years more than a rhetorical flourish in England, which boasted that her merchants knew how to trade everywhere. So far as the British were concerned, the utmost that need be said is that the commercial rivalry slightly sharpened the atmosphere in which the two nations approached one another on the naval and political ground. Certainly it never entered the heads of the business men who were competing with Germany that their business interests would be promoted by war.

II

It is not easy to recapture the atmosphere of these years, but in general we are aware of a certain grandiosity invading the thought and the action of all the nations. All records were being broken in the race for material wealth; everywhere the demand was for the unparalleled and the colossal. Immense fortunes, enormous industrial combinations, vast newspaper circulations, everything that could claim for itself size and quantity, excited wonder and envy. The prevailing spirit infected Governments and their military and naval advisers, who now set themselves to produce the largest armies, the most formidable battleships, the fastest destroyers, the most powerful guns and most destructive projectiles. The highest scientific knowledge and engineering skill were enlisted in this effort, and inventive brains worked with such rapidity that every ship began to go out of date the moment it was launched, and every gun to be obsolescent as soon as it was fired. The necessity of keeping ahead of the competition of possible enemies was urged by each Government in turn, and in the circumstances generally with good reason; but the process developed a collective zeal in the competition, which carried it forward with a momentum that no Government could control. To beat competitors became not only a condition of security but an end in itself, enlisting professional pride and zeal in the engineers and designers of the weapons of destruction. The perfect battleship, the latest submarine, the irresistible shell, the deadliest bomb, the newest aeroplane, were

regarded by their producers with the same approval and self-satisfaction as works of art by artists and craftsmen. All these producers were telling their respective Governments that, if only they were provided with money, they would create something which would outdistance all competitors; none of them seem to have rightly gauged the capacity of their competitors to do as much or more.

The inspired warfare of the newspaper has often come into the picture in the previous years, but the rise of the popular press and the consequent development of publicity and propaganda were special features of this time, and presented statesmen with a new problem which most of them were slow to understand. The machinery for working on popular emotions was now greatly enlarged and the dangers of kindling that fire were correspondingly increased. It cannot truthfully be said that the picture of newspaper activities presented in post-war revelations is a pleasing or reassuring one. A few great journalists appear at different times testifying courageously in the public interest; and a few great European journals stand above suspicion, but the sinister influences which were at work in a considerable part of the European press are only too clear in the records. Busch's "Secret Pages" show the complete unscrupulousness with which Bismarck used or suborned a large part of the German press for the making of mischief and the pursuit of his private vendettas at home and abroad, and these methods were now practised over a wider field.

The Bolshevik Documents show Isvolsky calling for money and more money to influence French newspapers for Russian policy, and we cannot flatter ourselves that he was alone in this field. It is not, I think, true that international finance played the deliberately sinister part that has been attributed to it by some writers, but certain great interests and especially the iron and steel industry, and the armament firms allied with them, undoubtedly used the press to promote their own interests, which very often were not the interests of peace or good relations between Governments. In many countries the leading newspapers were always at the disposal of Governments to promote official policies, or to start the press campaigns which became a regular part of the machinery of diplomacy; and very few could be relied upon to resist any appeal to popular passion or prejudice which found favour with their readers. In these days the part of independent watch-dog and critic which in theory was assigned to the press fell largely into abeyance, and newspapers tended more and more to reflect popular opinions and

prejudices, and in so doing to give them echoes and reverberations which greatly magnified their importance. In this process the press had more masters than could be avowed, and the operations of these masters were largely responsible for the disrepute which in so many countries made it the easy victim of the post-war dictators.

An Englishman may take some pride in the fact that, whatever may be said about the wisdom or competence of the British press, no post-war revelations have cast any shadow on its claim to be incorruptible. It was not the paid servant of any but its own legitimate masters, and it was not knowingly pursuing any aims or interests which were undisclosed to its readers. The same may no doubt be said of many European newspapers. All sweeping judgments would be unfair. But even assuming its complete honesty, the existence of this vast machine for playing upon the emotions of the crowd was bound to render more difficult the always difficult task of keeping popular and patriotic excitement within bounds. There has been much talk since the war of the evils of secret diplomacy, but the dangers of a rash and inexperienced handling of publicity are written just as large in the records. In their private talks statesmen and Ambassadors are frequently seen deploring the excesses of a press which they themselves have incited to take a high line at some critical moment. These protestations are by no means always insincere, for the statesman who gets the press behind him in a rash, experimental or bluffing policy may easily find himself in danger of being swept away by it, if he wishes to reverse the engine. There was a core of wisdom in the old statesmanship which only took the press into its confidence when it had decided to burn its boats, but that was more and more to be forgotten in the conflict between the great Alliances. Every collision between them was from this time onwards attended by a press chorus of increasing volume in all countries.

Such was the general atmosphere in which the European groups were to pursue their rivalries in the next nine years.

III

In the phase which is now coming we have to think of the two series of events taking place simultaneously in the Far East and in Europe; in the Far East the war between Russia and Japan which began in February, 1904, and lasted till October, 1905, when it ended disastrously for Russia; in Europe the conclusion of the

Anglo-French *Entente* and the opening of the German diplomatic offensive against it. The connexion between the two things was never out of the minds of either French or Germans. To the French the diversion of Russian aims and resources from Europe to the Far East meant a sharp decline in the value to them of the Franco-Russian Alliance; to the Germans it offered an opportunity of asserting themselves against the French without risking a war on two fronts. The fact that Russia was out of action undoubtedly counted for much with the Germans in the year 1905, when they opened the first of their reprisals against the French for their *Entente* with Great Britain and chose Morocco for their ground.

Morocco had long been an object of desire to the French. Looking at the map they saw in their mind's eye a vast African Empire extending unbroken from their West African possessions along the south Mediterranean coast to the borders of Tripoli. Control over, or at least paramount influence in, Morocco was necessary to give effect to this dream, and from the beginning of the twentieth century they went discreetly to work to prepare the way with Italy, Spain and Britain, the only other Powers which, as they thought at the time, were likely to block their way. In December, 1900, they arranged to give Italy a free hand in Tripoli in exchange for the French free hand in Morocco, and in 1904 they composed their quarrel with Britain about Egypt on similar terms. Spain was more difficult, and in 1902 she declined to sign an agreement which would have given her the reversion to the northern part of Morocco, including Tangier and Fez, if the Sultan should be deposed and partition follow, but a sufficient, if rather uneasy, understanding with her was reached in a convention which was concluded in October, 1904.

By this time the internal affairs of Morocco had given the French the opportunity of developing their policy. The pear, as Bismarck had said about Tunis, was ripening, if not yet ripe. The young Sultan Abdul-Aziz, having roused the fanaticism of his people by his reforming zeal, was challenged by a local Sherif, Mulai Ahmed el-Raisuli, who gained possession of the district round Tangier and even held foreigners to ransom. The French now offered the Sultan money and other help in reorganizing his army, and, when that failed, proposed a system of pacific penetration and administrative, economic and military reforms under their own guidance but, as they asserted, without impairing the sovereignty of the Sultan or the independence of his country. The Sultan, however, took a different view of these reforms, and from the

beginning of 1905 was in open or veiled rebellion against his French patrons.

So far Germany had not come into the picture. In April, 1904, a few days after the Anglo-French Convention was signed, Count Bülow told the Reichstag that there was no ground to apprehend that German interests, which he described as "essentially economic," would be disregarded, and he seemed to go out of his way to suggest that Germany had no political interest in Morocco.

But a great many things which Bülow did not foresee happened in the next few months. Complete disaster befell the Tsar in the Far East, and from the beginning of 1905 it became more and more evident that he would be helpless for all European purposes, even if he escaped with his throne. The Kaiser was astonished and shocked at the audacious efficiency of the yellow race in its first encounter with a European Power, and after the solemn pledge he had given the Tsar to cover his rear in Europe, he may be supposed to have had some qualms about profiting by his misfortunes to make a crisis with his European ally. But Bülow and Holstein were clear that the opportunity was too good to be neglected. It now appeared that they had only been biding their time for a favourable moment to get even with France for her *entente* with England, and no moment, they decided, could be more favourable than when her ally was staggering from defeat to defeat on the other side of the world, and would be unable, even if willing, to render her any assistance in a European struggle. In this, if we may believe Herr Nowak, whose books are supposed to convey the views of the ex-Kaiser, they were strongly backed by Count Schlieffen, the German Chief of Staff, and author of the plan for the invasion of Belgium, who "was in favour of the earliest possible thorough clearing up with France at arms. No waiting ten or twenty years for a world war, but so thorough a settlement that thereafter there should be no fear of a world war. France should be provoked until she had no course left but to take up arms."¹

For this purpose there could be no better challenging ground than Morocco. It touched a policy on which the French had set their hearts; and in virtue of the fact that on this ground the British had pledged their diplomatic support, it provided a test of the new Anglo-French Convention. The Chief of Staff was convinced that, even if the British did send 100,000 men to assist the French in a war with Germany, as Delcassé believed, this small

¹ Nowak, "Germany's Road to Ruin," English translation, p. 302.

number would make no difference. Apparently he knew or cared nothing about the possibilities of British sea-power. If we may believe Nowak, Bülow had prepared the way for his challenge by rejecting an offer of Delcassé's conveyed through the German Ambassador in Rome, to let Germany have Casablanca and another port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, and by pledging himself to the Sultan to back him in resisting the French. He and Holstein now decided that the Kaiser, who was planning a yachting tour in the Mediterranean, should make a spectacular landing at Tangier, and assure the Sultan of Morocco of the support of Germany against all threats to his sovereignty and independency. This, they told the Kaiser, "will embarrass M. Delcassé, traverse his schemes and further our business interests," to which the Kaiser replied "*tant mieux.*"¹

IV

Nevertheless, when the moment came the Kaiser showed a curious reluctance to go through with this scheme. For one thing, Tangier was inconveniently near to Gibraltar, where he had intended to call and make himself agreeable to Queen Alexandra, who also was yachting in the Mediterranean and happened to be in harbour. When the day came (March 31), the sea was rough and the Counsellor of Legation, Baron Kühlmann, who came to meet him, was thrown against the ship's side, and barely scrambled on board drenched to the skin. The Emperor vowed he would not go, but the sea went down and he suddenly changed his mind and somehow got ashore.

The Sultan did not come himself to meet his imperial guest; he sent his aged uncle, to whom on the landing stage the prepared oration had to be made. He sent also a white Arab horse, mounted on which the All-Highest proceeded in ragged procession through the town to the German Legation. The horse shied violently at a *feu de joie*, and nearly threw his august rider. There were Spanish anarchists in the crowd who needed to be dogged by detectives, and the Kaiser was scarcely reassured on learning that the Sultan had given orders that "all were to be exterminated" if any gave trouble. It seems to have been an uncomfortable and vexatious occasion, and when the Kaiser got back hot and flustered to his yacht, he evidently had the feeling that he had made himself ridiculous. To add to his mortification, he found, when he went

¹ G.P., XX, No. 6563, p. 262.

to Gibraltar, that Queen Alexandra had put to sea again, without leaving any message for him. Possibly by this time she had learnt what he had been doing at Tangier. In her absence, as he records, "the British Admirals and Generals stood coldly and stiffly to receive him, without a single word more than was necessary"; whereas when he had come a year earlier, he had been "received with all the attention and geniality which Englishmen show to welcome guests."

However, consolation awaited him when he got back to Berlin. According to his own account ~~he found~~ the Chancellor "trembling with emotion and showing in every word and gesture his devotion and affection for his ruler, and the relief he felt at last from long-suppressed anxieties. . . ." "I shook with fear," he told the Kaiser, abandoning all reserve, "and when the news reached me that Your Majesty had come away alive out of Tangier, I broke down and sat weeping at my desk while I uttered a thanksgiving to Heaven."¹

"But why did you send me there?" asked the Kaiser. "It is all incomprehensible to me." "It was necessary for my policy," was the answer. "Through Your Majesty I threw down a gauntlet in challenge to the French. I wanted to see whether they would mobilize."

V

In the Nowak narrative, twenty-seven years after the event, the Kaiser is anxious to prove himself the innocent victim of the scheming Chancellor. He wanted peace, he tells us, "nothing but peace—no complications, and certainly none with France," whereas Bülow's proceedings were "a deep and deliberate provocation" to that country. As so often, his own handwriting is fatal to this afterthought, for, as just recorded, he had scribbled "*tant mieux*" on the margin when Bülow had written that his visit to Tangier would "embarrass M. Delcassé and traverse his schemes." Moreover, the long letter which he wrote to Bülow at the end of the year (December 30) describing a talk with Mr. Beit, shows nothing but complete and complacent satisfaction over the whole business.² About Bülow the Kaiser is undoubtedly right. There is abundant evidence that Bülow with the aid of von Kühlmann, the Counsellor of Legation, who had been sent as an advance guard to Tangier,

¹ Nowak, p. 298. Bülow records that Holstein was so upset that he "suffered a hæmorrhage of the stomach." ("Memoirs, 1903-9," p. 107. English translation.)

² Bülow, "Memoirs," p. 183.

had so prepared the ground by articles in the press and otherwise, as to ensure that the visit should be, as the Kaiser alleges him to have said, the throwing of a challenge to France. Moreover, Bülow's conduct during the next few weeks, as revealed in the records, undoubtedly justifies the Kaiser's description of it as "a deep and deliberate provocation," although, it must be added, the Kaiser himself was, up to the last moment, an active and enthusiastic participant.

The scene having been set by the landing at Tangier, Bülow proceeded to brandish the big stick in the face of the French. The inspired press used high language about the offence supposed to have been offered by France in laying her hands on Morocco; the German Ambassadors in foreign capitals spoke gravely and warningly about trouble impending; the story went abroad that France was about to conclude a defensive and offensive alliance with Great Britain, and that if she ventured to do this, Germany would declare war. Before the end of April, 1905, the French Chamber and the Prime Minister, M. Rouvier, were greatly disturbed and seriously doubting the wisdom of the Foreign Secretary, M. Delcassé, who, while politely offering to furnish any explanation that the Germans might desire of what seemed to be an inexplicable misunderstanding, yet stood firm against the Conference on the Morocco question which the Germans were now proposing. On April 22 M. Delcassé sent in his resignation, but withdrew it at the request of the President and Prime Minister.

But the Germans were determined to be rid of Delcassé, whom they had marked down as their special enemy, and they maintained and increased their pressure. M. Paléologue, who was then a high official at the Foreign Office, was sent on a private mission to Berlin to ascertain the true state of the case, and reported on his return that Germany would go as far as war to enforce her views. The Cipher Department of the French Foreign Office was in the habit of tapping the communications which passed over the wires from Berlin to the German Ambassador in Paris, and again and again it produced dispatches which proved that Bülow and Holstein were instructing the Ambassador to take the stiffest attitude possible. It is conceivable that the Germans were aware that the French engaged in the nefarious practice of tapping their wires and took advantage of it to give verisimilitude to their threats, but M. Rouvier and his colleagues and the majority of the Deputies were by this time in a state of genuine alarm, and something like panic set in when the Sultan of Morocco himself rejected the French scheme

of internal reform, and—obviously at German instigation—invited the Powers to a Conference about the future of his country (June 3). Delcassé was for keeping a bold front and calling what he still believed to be the German bluff. His colleagues, however, were not of this mind, and when the word came sharply from Berlin that “the Chancellor of the German Empire does not wish to have any further dealings with M. Delcassé,”¹ they accepted his resignation with a sigh of relief. (June 6.)

But if M. Rouvier imagined that this would be the end of the matter, he was quickly undeceived. Four days later, if M. Paléologue may be believed, he had a scene with the German Ambassador, whom he had expected to be all smiles at their next meeting. The Ambassador, Prince Radolin, now “absolutely insisted” on a Conference and ended the interview by saying: “It is even my duty to declare to you, M. le President, that if France were to attempt to change in any way whatsoever the Moroccan status, Germany would stand behind Abd-El-Aziz with all her forces.” Rouvier, the same witness tells us, was beside himself with anger, but France, according to the military judgment, was unready for war, and after three months more of bitter and petty wrangling, he signed an agreement accepting the Conference and its basis as proposed by the Germans. This was on September 28, but even then the tension was not relaxed. All through the autumn and winter the Germans continued their threats. The Kaiser (according to his own account the innocent victim of these transactions) rewarded Bülow for the fall of Delcassé by making him a Prince, and at the unveiling of a statue to Moltke at the end of October, broke out into his most lurid rhetoric. “You have seen in what position we found ourselves a few months ago before the eyes of the world. Therefore, hurrah for dry powder and well-sharpened swords.” The Conference was now fixed for the end of January at Algeciras, but all through November and December it remained in doubt whether Germany would not break it up by making impossible demands and then proceed to war.

“The fall of Delcassé is disgusting, and has sent the *Entente* down any number of points in the market,” wrote Lord Lansdowne to a friend at the beginning of June.² It was indeed at the moment, as Lord Lansdowne’s biographer says, one of the most humiliating incidents that had occurred in France for many years, and since it

¹ For Bülow’s instructions to the German Ambassador in Paris regarding Delcassé see G.P., XX (2), No. 6669, p. 388. For other details, see Paléologue, “Un Prélude à l’Invasion de la Belgique,” pp. 116 *et seq.*

² “Life of Lord Lansdowne,” p. 341.

was an open secret that she had suffered this humiliation for having ventured to make friends with us, it was in only a lesser degree a blow to us. The meaning of these transactions, however, dawned only very slowly on British statesmen and were almost completely veiled from the British public; and if the Germans had been content to stop when they had procured the fall of Delcassé, and still more if they had taken advantage of the favourable moment to conciliate M. Rouvier, they might have arrested the development of the Anglo-French *Entente* at that point and limited it to the friendly Colonial agreement which British Ministers intended it to be. But German diplomacy never could stop at the favourable moment, and before the end of the year the continuance of German pressure and threats had thrown British and French closer together and given the *Entente* the weight and significance in European high politics which it was to have until the outbreak of the Great War.

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THE WELDING OF THE ENTENTE—*continued*

German Policy in 1905—Kaiser and Tsar at Bjorköe—The Proposed Russo-German Treaty—An Emotional Interview—Bülow's Objections and Lamsdorff's—What Bülow Intended—The Prevailing Political Morality—King Edward and the Kaiser—"Relations at their Worst"—The "Encirclement" Policy—Duel between King and Kaiser—Effects on the *Entente*—Count Schlieffen's Opinion.

I

To understand the events of 1905, three dates need to be related—the Kaiser's visit to Tangier on March 31, the resignation of M. Delcassé on June 6, and the meeting of the Kaiser and the Tsar at Bjorköe on July 24. The last has generally been treated as if it were an isolated incident due to the Kaiser's impetuosity, but there can, I think, be no doubt that it was an integral part of the German scheme of policy for these months.

That scheme evidently had two parts, first the intimidation of France, while Russia was out of action, and second, an endeavour to use the occasion of her defeat to draw Russia back into the German constellation and compel France to follow her. Bülow and Holstein having to all appearances accomplished the first of these objects, it fell to the Kaiser to complete the second.

We must go back a little to understand the course of events. From the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War, the Kaiser had held a watching brief for Germany, with a special eye to any points which might be used to advantage against France or Britain. In October, 1904, he incited the Tsar to bring his Black Sea fleet through the Straits to join up with his Baltic fleet and snap his fingers at British protests. "It is a sound military plan," he said, "and will ensure victory. The Sultan—as we both know for certain—will not offer a shadow of resistance. Once you are out we shall all quietly accept the *fait accompli*. I have not the slightest doubt that England will accept it too, though the press may fume and rage and their squadrons steam about a little."¹ Considering the

¹ "Briefe Wilhelms II an der Zaren," ed. W. Goetz, p. 345.

relations in which England stood to Japan, there could scarcely have been more reckless advice, as the Russians discovered when they took soundings in London.¹ The question of neutrality offered an even more tempting opportunity. Quite early in the day Lord Lansdowne had warned the German Ambassador that if Japan became involved in war with Germany through breaches of neutrality the *casus fœderis* of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty would arise. In October the Kaiser informed the Tsar that he was being threatened by the British that if he permitted German coal to be sent to the Baltic fleet on its way out to the Far East, he would have to reckon with British opposition. "This new danger," he said, "would have to be faced in community by Russia and Germany together, who would both have to remind your ally, France, of the obligations she has taken over in the Treaty of Dual Alliance with you, the *casus fœderis*. It is out of the question that on such an invitation France would try to shirk her implicit duty towards her ally. Though Delcassé is an Anglophil *enragé*, he will be wise enough to understand that the British fleet is utterly unable to save Paris! In this way a powerful combination of three of the strongest continental Powers would be formed, to attack whom the Anglo-Japanese group would think twice before acting [*sic*]." ²

This interchange of views and compliments came on top of the Dogger Bank incident which the British people, thinking it, as Lord Rosebery said, to be an "unspeakable outrage," were in the mood to make a fighting business without waiting for other causes. About that the Tsar behaved sensibly and was ready with apologies for what he described and what turned out to be a "regrettable misunderstanding." Possibly he reflected that if the British fleet was unable to save Paris, the German army would be equally unable to save the Russian fleet. None the less he was extremely sore, and the Kaiser's sympathy came at a timely moment. "It is certainly," he replied, "high time to put a stop to this. The only way, as you say, would be that Germany, Russia and France should at once unite upon arrangements to abolish England and Japanese arrogance and insolence. Would you like to frame the outlines of such a treaty and let me know it? As soon as it is accepted by us, France is bound to join her Ally. This combination has often come to my mind; it will mean peace for the rest of the world." ³

With the aid of Bülow and Holstein, who were up to the neck

¹ G.P., XIX (1), No. 6074.

² *Ibid.*, No. 6119, p. 305.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 6118, p. 304.

in this business, the draft treaty was dispatched the next day (October 30, 1904):

1. In case one of the two Empires is attacked by a European Power, its Ally will aid it with all its forces on sea and land. The two Allies, in case of need, will also act in concert to remind France of her obligations under the Franco-Russian Treaty.

2. The two high contracting Powers pledge themselves not to conclude a separate peace with any enemy they have in common.

3. The promise of help includes the case in which acts of one of the two high contracting parties during the war, such as the delivery of coal to a belligerent, should give rise after the war to complaints by a third Power alleging them to be violations of the rights of neutrals.¹

The Tsar began to have doubts the moment he received the draft. He wanted a clause added binding Germany to defend the conquests which Russia might make in the Far East; more serious still he wanted the Treaty shown to the French before it was signed, which the Kaiser thought "absolutely dangerous." France must be presented with the accomplished fact. Otherwise she would tell England, and the result would be an immediate attack by England and Japan on Germany in Europe as well as in Asia with ruinous consequences to "my small fleet." Evidently the Treaty had no value for the Kaiser unless France were compelled to come in, and to use the Tsar for this purpose was now his master-idea.

In the subsequent months the Treaty passed into the background while the Germans occupied themselves with Delcassé and Morocco. At the end of the year 1904 Russia renewed her appeal for the coaling of her fleet and this time gave a firm promise to support Germany, if she fell into a quarrel with England about it, but the Germans apparently thought it too risky to be seen in that business officially, and left the coaling to be done, if it could be, by the Hamburg-Amerika line at its own risk. The idea nevertheless remained fixed in the Kaiser's mind, and came to life again in July of the following year (1905) when the disasters which by this time had befallen the Tsar made him even more susceptible to German sympathy, and when the German victory over Delcassé raised a stronger presumption that France, if faced with the accomplished fact, would submit.

The Kaiser has himself told the story of what followed in a letter² to Bülow (dated Wisby, July 25, 1905) which is so compounded of guile, piety and sentimentality as to be an easy prey to his more satirical biographers. It was arranged that the two

¹ G.P., XIX (1), No. 6119, p. 308.

² G.P., XIX (2), No. 6220, pp. 458 *et seq.*

Emperors, both of whom happened to be cruising in the Baltic in their yachts, should meet off Bjorköe, a small island in Finnish waters, and the Kaiser relates how, after consulting the scriptures, he put "the Treaty" in his pocket and went to breakfast with the Tsar on board his yacht on the morning of July 24. Then having poured out his sympathy with the Tsar about his misfortunes in the Far East and encouraged him to speak freely about the behaviour of his friends the French, who had left him in the lurch, and intimated that these friends were making a "little agreement" with the English behind his back, he very adroitly suggested that another "little agreement" between Russia and Germany would frustrate these knavish tricks—such, in fact, as had been proposed before but "had come to nothing on account of Delcassé and friction with France." But "all that sort of thing was over now," since Delcassé had gone, and Germany was going to be friends with France.

The Tsar said he remembered it well, but had forgotten the contents. "What a pity I haven't got it here." "I have got a copy," said the Kaiser as quick as lightning, "which quite by accident I happen to have in my pocket." The Kaiser's own words must be quoted for what followed:

The Tsar seized me by my arm and led me out of the saloon into his father's cabin, and at once locked all the doors himself.

"Show it me, please," and his dreamer's eyes lit up. I drew the envelope out of my pocket, unfolded the document on Alexander III's writing-table in front of the Empress Dowager's portrait and among the many photographs of Fredensborg and Copenhagen, and spread it out before the Tsar. He read the text I have already sent you, once, twice, three times. I breathed a silent prayer to God that He might be with us now and guide the young ruler aright. It was still as death; only the sea rippled and the sunshine fell brightly and cheerfully into the cosy cabin, and straight in front of me lay the *Hohenzollern* in gleaming white, and high overhead the Imperial standard fluttered in the morning breeze. I was just spelling out the letters "Gott mit uns" on its black cross, when I heard the Tsar's voice at my side saying:

"That is quite excellent. I quite agree."

My heart was beating so loudly that I could hear its beat; I pulled myself together and said quite casually: "Should you like to sign it? It would be a nice souvenir of our *entrevue*" [*sic*]. He glanced through the paper again. "Yes, I will," he then said.

I opened the inkstand, handed him the pen, and he wrote "Nikolas" with a firm hand; then he handed the pen to me, and I signed. When I stood up he clasped me in his arms and said with emotion: "I thank God and I thank you. It will have the most beneficial consequences for my country and for yours. You are Russia's only real friend in the whole world. I have felt that through the whole war, and I know it."

Bright tears of joy stood in my eyes—true, I was streaming from my forehead and spine as well—and I thought of Fried(rich) W(ilhelm) III and of

Queen Louise, of Grandfather, and of Nicolas I, they must surely have been near me at that hour. In any case, they were looking on, and they all will have been glad.

The Kaiser then suggested that they ought perhaps to have counter-signatures to their signatures "since that was customary in documents of such importance." The Tsar agreed and sent for his Admiral off the bridge while the Kaiser sent for the "loyal Tschirschky" from his yacht. The monarchs informed both of the "existence" (but not apparently of the contents) of the Treaty and they dutifully appended their signatures, the old Russian sea-dog taking the Kaiser's hand between both his own and kissing it reverently.

The Treaty, which was to come into force as soon as peace had been concluded between Russia and Japan, contained three principal clauses:

In case one of the two Empires should be attacked by a European Power its Ally will come to its aid in Europe with all its forces on land or sea.

The high contracting parties pledge themselves not to make a separate peace with any common enemy.

The Emperor of all the Russias will, after this Treaty comes into force, take the necessary steps to inform France of this agreement and to pledge her to associate France with it as an Ally.

In comparison with the transaction of the previous October, it will be seen that the Kaiser had gained his chief point. France was only to be informed after the Treaty was an accomplished fact.

In reporting this affair to the Chancellor the Kaiser appears to have had not the slightest doubt that he would hail it as a magnificent coup. Great, therefore, was his mortification, when Bülow replied in very cool terms and expressed grave anxiety about the limiting words "in Europe" which the Kaiser on his own authority introduced into the first article. Within three weeks Bülow was tendering his resignation, and the Kaiser threatening to kill himself if he persisted in it. "The morning after the receipt of your resignation would fail to find the Kaiser alive. Think of my poor wife and children." This extreme consequence was avoided, for during these days the Treaty was being examined on the Russian side, and Lamsdorff, the Russian Foreign Secretary, was as little pleased with it as the German Chancellor, though for different reasons. He did not believe that the French would submit when

faced with the *fait accompli* of a Russo-German Treaty; he believed on the contrary that they would consider themselves to have been deceived and betrayed, and that Russia, having lost her one friend, would once more be under the German yoke. Count Witte, who visited Germany on his way back from the conclusion of the peace with Japan, appears almost to have been persuaded by the Kaiser, but on returning to Russia he too was converted to Lamsdorff's view, and the Grand Duke Nicholas expressed himself forcibly to the same effect. Under their influence the Tsar yielded and the Treaty fell dead. The Kaiser continued to argue about it till the end of the year, but by this time the Russians were firm that there could be no treaty until Germany, Russia and France were agreed, which meant never.

The incident, nevertheless, is of great historical importance and the details deserve careful examination. Clearly it cannot be dismissed as a personal aberration of the Kaiser. The Treaty which the Kaiser took with him in his pocket on his visit to the Tsar was that which Bülow and Holstein had themselves drafted in the previous year, and the only material alteration in it was the addition of the words "in Europe" to the clause in which the two Empires promised each other assistance. It was this addition to his handiwork which incensed Bülow and the argument about it reveals his intention. His idea was that in the event of England attacking or joining in an attack on Germany the Russians should help by invading India.¹ If this was excluded, the Treaty was of little or no value. "Since the English—whether rightly or wrongly does not matter in this case—dread nothing more than a Russian advance on India, there seems to me to be no doubt," he wrote to the Kaiser on July 30, "that a Russo-German Treaty from which the possibility of a Russian advance in Asia is expressly excluded is less calculated to forestall an English attack on Germany than a treaty without such a restriction." Four days later he had come to the conclusion that the Treaty with the limiting phrase was not only useless but positively dangerous. "It is to be feared that such an arrangement would only incite the English. A strong bullet stops a man; a small bullet irritates him. The Treaty in its original form was a strong bullet: with the words 'in Europe' added, it becomes, I both believe and fear, a small bullet."²

The Treaty in fact was intended by Bülow and Holstein to hit

¹ The Kaiser himself had suggested in the previous year to the Tsar that in order to quiet "the hot-headed jingoes in London" he should make a demonstration on the Perso-Afghan frontier.

² Bülow, "Memoirs," letter to the Kaiser, p. 134.

England as well as France, and they had no use for it if it did not serve both purposes. France, cowed and stunned by the Morocco crisis, was to be faced with the accomplished fact of a Russo-German Treaty which would put her to the choice of joining a European anti-British combination or losing her one Ally in Europe. England was to be taught that making friends with the enemy of Germany was a perilous pastime, and, incidentally perhaps, Austria reminded that Germany had other friends than herself. Austria seems rather strangely to have been left out of the account, since on the face of it the Treaty raised substantially the same question as the Reinsurance Treaty of Bismarck which the Kaiser had dropped as an act of duplicity to her. She too, if she attacked Russia, was to find Germany on the side of her enemy. If it could have been carried through in its original form, the Björköe Treaty would have been the Reinsurance Treaty enlarged to include France, and thus to save Germany, so far as diplomacy could effect that object, from the nightmare of the war on two fronts.

That this dream flitted through the minds of Bülow and Holstein can scarcely be doubted, and in their exultation over the fall of Delcassé, they may have thought it realizable. But a reading of the correspondence and still more of Bülow's account of it in his "Memoirs" leaves a sense of something unfathomed in this transaction. Bülow's hammering of the limiting words "in Europe" seems strained and exaggerated, and when the Kaiser argues that even with the offending words in, a treaty which neutralizes Russia in the event of an attack on Germany by France or England has real value, he seems to be talking sense from the German point of view. Holstein himself was inclined to that view for several days, and was only brought round to the opposite by the Chancellor's vehemence. It seems as if from the beginning of August onwards Bülow was determined that the Treaty should not go through, and that the blame for its failure should fall on the Kaiser. He had many private wires to St. Petersburg and Paris, and it is conceivable that by this time he had satisfied himself that the intrigue had failed, and that in spite of the solemn secrecy to which all parties were pledged, the Francophil Russians had communicated it to the French, who by this time were recovering from their shock, and were in no mood to accept submissively what Tsar and Kaiser were planning for them. This is conjectural, but that Bülow was up to the neck in the original scheme and that his reasons for backing out are strained and casuistical can hardly fail to suggest itself to any student of these transactions.

Fraud, cunning, duplicity, are words which rise to the lips of the unsophisticated reader as he reads the documents of these times and notes the avowals of their motives and intentions which the principal actors on this scene make without shame to one another. But these were words of little meaning to the practitioners of power politics in 1905. To exploit the defeat of Russia for the benefit of Germany, to catch the Tsar off his guard and seduce him from his pledges to his French Ally, to intimidate one Government, and flatter another, to do anything which promised to break up the threatened combination of England and France, or to prevent an understanding between England and Russia was not merely within the rules of the game, but to the Kaiser and his Ministers a positive duty which they owed to their country. In writing to Bülow the Kaiser has no scruple at all about the lengths to which Germany must go if she finds herself in what Bethmann Hollweg nine years later called a state of necessity :

If England should declare, or in any other way embark on, war against us, two Notes must be dispatched at once on behalf of your Serenity to Brussels and Paris, summoning them to give a declaration within six hours whether they are for us or against us.

We must invade Belgium at once whatever declaration it may make. (Telegram to Bülow, July 30, 1905.)¹

II

It was principally during these months that King Edward earned himself the reputation in Germany of being the author of the "encirclement policy," and the leader in Europe of the anti-German movement. Both Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Balfour have left it on record that the *Entente* with France was the act of the Government, and that the King, though heartily approving, in no way stepped out of his part as Constitutional Sovereign to prompt or initiate it. Nor on general grounds is there any reason to suppose that up to this point he was in any special sense the partisan of France. Undoubtedly he liked Paris and had many friends there, and the Parisians considered him an agreeable exception to the long-faced official English. But so far as he entered into affairs, as Prince of Wales, he appears to have fallen in with the traditional policy, favoured by Queen Victoria and most British Governments, of leaning towards Germany and the Triple Alliance ; and even after he came to the throne he made conscientious efforts

¹ G.P., XIX, No. 6229, p. 479.

to put himself right with his nephew the Kaiser, who had more than once given him legitimate ground for offence. Thus in March, 1904, he proposed that he should visit the Kaiser in Berlin, and when this idea proved unacceptable, made no difficulties about accepting the Kaiser's invitation to Kiel in the following June, and taking part in a high naval festival with warm interchanges of compliments on both sides.

But in 1905 he appears to have been greatly annoyed by what he thought to be the dangerous antics of his nephew at Tangier, and from now onwards to the end of this year, he went out of his way to advertise his feelings. Having planned a Mediterranean tour for himself during the month of April he stopped in Paris both on his way out and on his way back, and on the latter twice saw M. Delcassé, and "strongly supported his views." Not only so, but he saw Prince Radolin, the German Ambassador in Paris, at a dinner at the Elysée, and to him also he "frankly spoke of the dangerous situation which his nephew was provoking." To leave no doubt of his meaning he refused to meet the Kaiser on either his outward or his homeward journey, when he went to Marienbad for his cure in August, and found an excuse for declining an invitation from the Kaiser to the Prince of Wales to visit Berlin; a compliment which the Kaiser promptly returned by refusing to let the Crown Prince accept an invitation from the King to visit him at Windsor. "Relations between the two Monarchs," says King Edward's biographer, "were now at their worst."¹

Trivialities—but, according to the recognized ritual of the time, of high significance. How these royal personages treated one another; what invitations they accepted and what they declined, and their supposed demeanour to each other were indications of the political weather, from which all the Chancelleries drew important conclusions. King Edward's quarrel with his nephew was in these critical months a subject of agitating gossip behind the scenes, and the things they were supposed to have said about each other went round the whispering gallery of Europe, gathering volume and incident as they went, and were repeated with gusto by faithful courtiers to uncle and nephew in turn. To the Kaiser it was represented that the King was determined to thwart him in the task which he had specially set himself as his next work in life—that of winning over the French (after their chastening on the Morocco question) by the grace and charm of his personality—

¹ "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., p. 342.

and that the King had as his ulterior object the detachment not only of France but of Russia from German influence. To the King it was sufficient that only a part of what the Kaiser permitted himself to say about his uncle's disposition and methods should be repeated by confidants in Copenhagen,¹ St. Petersburg and Rome.

Thus King Edward and his machinations became one of the chief themes in the Bjorköe conversations between Kaiser and Tsar, and in the Willy-Nickie correspondence of these months. Nickie too had his grievances. Had not the Anglo-Japanese Alliance—also attributed to King Edward—covered the flank of his enemy in the Far East? Who but the King could have prompted his rough handling over the Dogger Bank incident? The two nephews capped each other's stories about the iniquities of the "arch-mischief-maker," their uncle, and for a brief season revelled in the thought of the great combination which was to dish his schemes and leave the author of the "encirclement" policy encircled. It was all over in a few weeks, but it left the legend of King Edward "the encircler" deeply fixed in the German mind, and no explanations of the Constitutional character of the British Monarchy and its limitations in the sphere of policy ever removed it. To the statesmen of the European monarchies the British Constitutional doctrine was a compound of sophistry and paradox deliberately invented to conceal the truth.

All this must be borne in mind before we dismiss the continental view of King Edward as a mere myth. In the year 1905 it was a myth with a very substantial foundation. With all his Constitutional limitations, the King had a unique power of stressing and punctuating any feature of British policy which had won his special approval, and in the year 1905 he used it with great skill and apparent deliberation to give meaning and prominence to the Anglo-French *Entente*. The attack from Berlin brought the King to the rescue; the King's intervention made the Kaiser more obdurate; behind the scenes, if not actually on the boards, the affair was seen as a duel between King and Kaiser in which neither could afford to accept defeat. The net result was that before the end of the year, the *Entente* had acquired an importance in the great game of European politics of which its authors had never dreamt in the previous year; and under the German hammer-strokes French and

¹ Copenhagen, where Russian and English royal personages were accustomed to forgather under the roof of their relative, the King of Denmark, was considered in these years to be the central exchange of European gossip. The Kaiser and his Ministers often expressed their apprehension lest their confidential communications to Russia should pass by the "Danish route" to England.

British found themselves being welded into a *bloc* which at any critical moment might, and indeed must, become a military alliance. Under the threat of war which hung over Europe from the end of March 1905 to the March of the following year, it became a necessary precaution for French and British to consider the hypothesis of military action in common, and from that moment it was brought home to British statesmen that the "diplomatic support" which the two countries had promised each other under the Convention might lead automatically to war. Diplomatic support had no value in the eyes of the statesmen of these times unless there was at least a presumption that in the last resort it would be backed by military force. Armaments were the bullion in the bank on which diplomacy drew cheques, and to draw up to the limits of their credit, even at the risk of over-drawing, was the habit of many European Governments.

III

According to the strict principles of power-politics, Count Schlieffen had much to say for his contention that 1905 was the favourable moment "for a clearing up with France at arms"—"no waiting ten or twenty years for a world war." With Russia out of action, Germany would have been free to throw practically the whole of her army upon France; and though the Schlieffen plan, which contemplated the invasion of Belgium, would have compelled British intervention, even if the *Entente* did not, there was no British force available which could save France from defeat on land. That, at all events, was the confident calculation of the German General Staff. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the British fleet would quite certainly capture all German colonies and sweep all German commerce from the seas, but against this it was believed that by holding the French capital and French territory in pawn, Germany, aided by French pressure, would be able to compel Britain to make peace and restore her colonies. There was an undoubted element of gambling in this calculation, since no one could say for certain how the French or British national spirit might have developed in the course of such a struggle, but the chances for "a clearing-up with France at arms" were certainly, as Count Schlieffen predicted, more favourable for Germany than they proved ten years later, when Russia had recovered and Britain had organized her Expeditionary Army.

As in 1875 so in 1905, we are left guessing whether the Germans

actually intended to seize this favourable moment when they started on their "deliberate provocation," and were deterred by the fear of British intervention as the affair went forward; or whether they merely intended to shake the British-French *Entente* by a demonstration of their displeasure. Probably the truth is that the Kaiser, Bülow and Holstein had no settled plan if their threats failed. Though willing to go three-fourths of the way with the convinced militarists who had no scruples about preventive wars, they had, when it came to the point, certain civilian inhibitions which prevented them from going all lengths. It is not for nothing that German soldiers are found perpetually complaining that their plans are spoilt by civilian statesmen. The fatality for the civilians was not that they drew back, but that they founded their policy on military assumptions which led in logic and would one day lead in fact to military conclusions. Statesmen who accepted Clausewitz's definition of war as "the continuation of policy" were only too likely to pursue a policy from which war was bound to follow.

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1905-1906

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MILITARY CONVERSATIONS

An Unpleasant Surprise for the British—The Military Conversations—The British Engagement and its Extension—European Opinion—The Importance of Military Conventions—The Algeciras Conference and its Results.

THE British people knew little of what had been going on behind the scenes in the year 1905, and it was an unpleasant discovery for the Liberal Government, which came into office at the beginning of December, that they had succeeded to what most other European Governments considered to be a crisis of the first order. The French at that moment were still in a state of high alarm and were not comforted by the change of Ministers in England, which they considered to be from known and tried friends to unknown and probably pacifist successors. They were now in the same mood as in the first months after their *rapprochement* with Russia in 1891. They reflected that if their new friendship were only Platonic, and if in the last resort they could rely on nothing more than "diplomatic support," it would increase the danger of their position by embittering the traditional enemy without strengthening their position against him. It, therefore, in their opinion, became urgent and imperative for them to discover whether they could rely on British support in arms under the new as under the former regime, if Germany should break up the Algeciras Conference and find a pretext for attacking them.

British Ministers were up to their eyes in electioneering and it was difficult to catch their attention. But on January 10 M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, went to Sir Edward Grey, the new Foreign Secretary, and uttered the ominous word "war." "M. Cambon said he did not believe that the German Emperor desired war, but that His Majesty was pursuing a very dangerous policy. He had succeeded in inciting public opinion and military opinion in Germany, and there was a risk that matters might be brought to a point at which a pacific issue would be difficult." Some months earlier Lord Lansdowne had expressed the opinion that the

British and French Governments should discuss "any eventualities that might seem possible," and a memorandum had been communicated to M. Delcassé to that effect. "It had not been considered necessary at the time to discuss the eventuality of war, but it now seemed desirable," said M. Cambon, "that this eventuality should also be considered"; and "it was of great importance that the French Government should know beforehand whether, in the event of aggression against France by Germany, Great Britain would be prepared to render to France armed assistance."

With the knowledge we now have of the history of these months, it is impossible to say that M. Cambon's apprehensions were unfounded. At the end of December, Bülow had impressed on the German Ambassador in Paris to let there be no illusion about the seriousness of the situation, and to seize every opportunity to destroy the idea that Germany was bluffing or that she would shrink from "drawing the consequences of a situation enforced upon her, rather than submit to demands injurious to German honour or prestige."¹ Prince Radolin was not the man to soften these intimations and by this time there was the usual talk of military preparations and of warlike speeches which the Kaiser was supposed to have made to his General Staff. But M. Cambon can scarcely have expected an answer to his question from the new British Government at that moment. It was not even certain that the Government would be in power at the end of the month, and until the elections were over, neither Prime Minister nor Foreign Secretary was in a position to speak with authority for the country. Sir Edward confined himself to expressing his "personal opinion" that "if France were attacked by Germany, in consequence of an agreement which our predecessors had recently concluded with the French Government, public opinion in England would be strongly moved in favour of France." If he could say no more to the French he had said as much to the Germans in an interview with Count Metternich the previous week, for he sensibly concluded that he was free to give a warning to Germany, though he was not free to give an assurance to France.²

The British engagement was in any case only to give "diplomatic support," but in the circumstances it was unlikely that this would be of much value unless there was behind it at least the

¹ G.P., XXI (1), No. 6916, p. 31.

² The documents for the exchange of views in January, 1906, between Sir Edward Grey and the French Ambassador, M. Cambon, have been published both in the "Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman" and in Lord Grey's "Twenty-Five Years," and are to be found in G. and T., Vol. III., pp. 160 *et seq.*

possibility of armed support. But if so, the logic of the case was inexorable. If the possibility of war had to be contemplated, no Minister could decline to permit the military authorities of the two countries, which *ex hypothesi* would be Allies, to consult together about the measures which they would have to take in common, if it came. Far remoter contingencies were habitually considered by General Staffs and War Offices; as between soldier and soldier, to have a plan of campaign against your next-door neighbour was not thought a hostile or even an unfriendly act. Everybody did it, and everybody knew that everyone else was doing it. In the present case the contingency feared was a question not even of months but of weeks, and M. Cambon said very cogently that if it arose and there were no concerted plan between British and French, the British effort would be too late to be of assistance to France, however "strongly moved in favour of France" British opinion might be.

Sir Edward Grey, accordingly, after consulting the Prime Minister, the War Secretary and one or two intimate colleagues, gave permission for the naval conversations begun under the previous Government to be continued, and for the military conversations hitherto conducted between the French and an official British intermediary to take a direct and official form. At the same time he strongly laid down that these exchanges of views were not to be regarded as committing the British Government. Complaints were made in after days by certain members of the Cabinet that they were not officially informed of these proceedings, but it has never been seriously suggested that anything else could have been done, unless the new Cabinet were prepared to go back on the policy of their predecessors, and tell the French plainly that they could in no circumstances look for material support from this country. That would in effect have been a return to the policy of splendid isolation in far more dangerous and difficult circumstances than when it had been discarded. This certainly was not the intention of British Ministers, for the new Prime Minister had announced, as soon as he came into power, that he was in agreement with the main lines of the policy followed by Lord Lansdowne.

But though the decision to continue and give official sanction to the military and naval conversations followed logically from what went before and was at that point imperative, it was undoubtedly a momentous act. It meant that successive British Governments, representing all parties in the State, had not merely given their adhesion to one of the two European groups, but faced

the possibility of engaging in war on its behalf. It meant the recognition, under stress of the facts, that in the world of power-politics a promise of diplomatic support had little or no value, unless there was at least a presumption that it would be backed by support in arms. The full consequences were not realized at the time by either statesmen or public, which still relied on the limiting condition that the British Government and Parliament were free to decide for or against entry into a war when the time came. That was, indeed, of high value, in so far as it intimated to the probable Ally that the cause must be one that appealed to the British people or warned the probable enemy that aggressive action on his part would probably bring them in. But it became certain from this time onwards that Great Britain would be not merely a spectator but an interested party in every dispute between the European Alliances, that her sympathies would be strongly engaged against deserting a friend who might seem to be the victim of aggression, and that she would see her own position as one of great peril, if her friend went down and she were left alone to meet the next attack.

More than this, she had once again taken a step which had greater significance in the eyes of the European Governments than in her own. To them *ententes* or agreements between Powers became of importance precisely as they were or were not accompanied by military conventions. In the first stages of the Franco-Russian *rapprochement*, the Germans were, or professed themselves to be, unconcerned because there were no military obligations on either side, and the French correspondingly were in a state of apprehension because the Russians appeared to be shirking such obligations. The knowledge in Europe that French and British military and naval authorities were consulting together invested the Franco-British *Entente* with a sudden new importance, raising hopes on one side and fears and suspicions on the other. Europe pricked up its ears; statesmen, politicians, journalists recognized a new fact. British statesmen became a little alarmed at these manifestations; the Prime Minister counselled discretion and a constant reminder that the Government was not committed. But military fraternization when once started is not easily kept in bounds. The officers of the two countries already saw themselves comrades in arms; they glowed with professional pride over their plans, communicated them freely to their juniors, lectured on them to Staff colleges. All this went buzzing round Europe and made an atmosphere which was not favourable to a friendly

diplomacy with the other European group. It might be the cue of the British Government to make the least of it, but it was obviously the interest of the French that it should be known and magnified. Britain from 1906 was recognized as in the lists.

The long and tedious process by which the German demand for equality for all in Morocco was reconciled with the French demand for special privileges at the Algeciras Conference has little interest now, and need not be recalled in detail. The French made good their special position on the Moroccan-Algerian frontier, and shared with Spain the control and supervision, through French and Spanish instructors, of the Moorish police. The general verdict was that France had come out of it well, thanks to the support of Great Britain, and that Germany had received a sharp check in her effort to drive a wedge between French and British. It was clear throughout that the delegates were thinking much more of the great European duel than of reforms in Morocco. Austria, which had but a small interest, played "brilliant second" to Germany; Russia, which was even less concerned, lined up with France; Italy, to the annoyance of Germany, claimed that her engagements to the Triple Alliance did not cover Morocco, and found and seemed even to seek an opportunity of displaying her independence. Sir Edward Grey, though sometimes worried by the stiffness of the French, had no doubt that they must be supported to the end. Another watcher on the scene who developed a great and lively interest in the European duel was President Roosevelt, whose activities have been examined in a previous chapter. It has already been recorded that, when the Conference ended, he congratulated the Kaiser on his "masterly policy" and "epoch-making success"; and in passing on this compliment the German Ambassador at Washington assured His Majesty that though it "did not appear to agree with the facts" it "came entirely from the President's heart."¹ In one respect at all events the American President was not far wrong. The policy of the Emperor and his advisers between the landing at Tangier and the Algeciras Conference had marked an epoch, for it had clinched the Anglo-French *Entente* and given it a significance which its English authors had neither foreseen nor intended.

¹ G.P., XXI, p. 311.

1906-1907

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SECOND HAGUE CONFERENCE

Metternich on British Opinion after Algeciras—Anglo-German Bridge-building—Naval Preparations—The Anglo-Russian Agreement—Campbell-Bannerman's Pronouncement on Disarmament—Its Unexpected Result—The Double Misunderstanding—The Second Hague Conference—Universal Cynicism—Turning the Tables on Britain—The Naval Competition Resumed.

I

IN a letter to Bülow at the beginning of May Count Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, described the situation, as he saw it, at the end of the Algeciras Conference. "Algeciras," he said, "has cleared the air, though the picture which we see dimly behind the clouds is not a pleasing one. One of the consequences is that the *Entente Cordiale* has stood its diplomatic tests of fire and come out stronger from the negotiations. After, as before, the corner-stone of British policy is fidelity to France. Events in the course of the year have led to the conclusion that England no longer looks to the Triple Alliance to ensure her existence. Instead, she has become afraid that the growing power of Germany which—thanks to the Japanese War—is no longer held in check by France and Russia, endangers the position of England. Hence the *Entente* with France and the wistful desire for an agreement with Russia. Whether or how Germany can adjust herself to this new conjunction is not at the moment at all clear. Austria, and especially Italy, are still useful points of contact between England and us."¹

Count Metternich develops the theme in further dispatches, which accurately describe the wishes and fears of different sections of British opinion. The great mass of the public and especially the supporters of the Liberal Government have, he reports, no ill-will towards Germany, and are much disturbed at the unrestful state of Europe and the friction between British and Germans. There is rivalry in trade circles, but no political animosity. Ministers almost without exception, but especially the Prime Minister and Mr.

¹ G.P., XXI (2), No. 7180, p. 426.

Haldane, are anxious to seize any opportunity to get back to friendly relations with Germany, but their difficulty is that there is nowhere any tangible cause of trouble which can be faced and cleared up, as in the Convention with France. The causes of estrangement are vague, imponderable, ubiquitous. And all the time the French are extremely nervous and almost morbidly on the look-out for signs that the British may be slipping away from them under the impression that they have done what was expected of them, and may resume their old freedom and isolation. Metternich probably knew that one of the great difficulties of making advances to his Government was that even the smallest overture was liable to be magnified and exploited to play on the nerves of the French.

Well-meaning private persons set to work to build bridges. There were visits to England of German burgomasters and German journalists, followed by return visits to Germany of British municipal magnates and British journalists. All went off splendidly. German and English toasted each other; vows of friendship were exchanged, solemn promises made that each in his own country would do his utmost to stop mischief-making and quarrelling. The Kaiser in Berlin went out of his way to bestow favours and intimacies upon the British visitors which King Edward had scarcely bestowed upon the German visitors in London. All went home saying that the British-German quarrel was a "misunderstanding." Prince Bülow, the Imperial Chancellor, was especially strong in this sense.

II

Before the year 1906 was far advanced, there were sharp reminders of the realities behind the scenes. The German Navy League was now in full agitation, and pointing to Algeciras in confirmation of its theory that German diplomatic defeats were the result of German weakness in sea-power. The launching in February of the first British Dreadnought—proclaimed as a new type which would revolutionize sea-warfare—was further grist to the mill, and Sir John Fisher, the author of the innovation, was at no pains to disguise its importance. His indiscretions of tongue and pen and his undisguised belief that Germany was the enemy, and that the day of reckoning with her was at hand, were the subject of wide-spread gossip which lost nothing when it reached Berlin. In April, 1906, a new German Naval Law was introduced,

which provided for the widening of the Kiel Canal and a considerable increase in the 1900 programme. In July, the British Liberal Government, honestly bent on peace and economy, announced its intention to cut down battleship construction by 25 per cent., destroyer construction by 60 per cent. and submarine construction by 33 per cent., but the creation before the end of the year of the new Home Fleet to be concentrated in the North Sea somewhat offset this pacific intention and brought home to the publics of both countries that the potential enemy most feared by Great Britain was Germany.

The Tsar had now swung the whole way back to the French side and was in a mood to make friends with the friends of France. All through the last months of 1906 and on into the summer of 1907 British and Russians were working at an Asiatic agreement on parallel lines with the Anglo-French Convention. Foreign Office and India Office co-operated, and no one worked more heartily than the Liberal and pacifist Secretary of State for India, Mr. Morley.¹ He and his colleagues in the Government were as innocent of sinister intention as their predecessors had been in concluding the Anglo-French Convention; they looked at the proposals on their merits, and welcomed the prospect of relief from the interminable friction and trouble with Russia in Persia and on the Indian frontier. But the Germans watched this *rapprochement* with deep suspicion; and though there was nothing in the Agreement, when it was finally concluded, which gave them any ground for open objection, they nevertheless considered it to be part of the policy of encircling and isolating Germany of which King Edward was supposed to be the instigator. It cannot be said that Europe in general accepted the local and minimizing view of the Anglo-Russian any more than of the Anglo-French *Entente*. The French made no secret of their satisfaction or of their opinion that Great Britain had advanced a step further into their camp.

At the beginning of March, 1907, the British Prime Minister published his famous article in the *Nation* pointing out that British sea-power was recognized universally as non-aggressive, offering to reduce armaments still further if other nations would do the same, and urging strongly that the subject should not be excluded from the coming Hague Conference. At the same time a communication on these lines was sent officially to all the Naval Powers. The intention was entirely pacific, but the result was extremely dis-

¹ "Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman," Vol. II., p. 362.

concerting. Within a few days of the appearance of the article, I myself received a telegram asking me to write articles for German newspapers explaining that the Prime Minister's communication was not intended as a threat. Campbell-Bannerman was unfeignedly astonished that so outlandish a thought could have occurred to any human being, but on the assumptions of power-politics he and his Government had provided the Germans with a plausible case. The Dreadnought had been launched with a great flourish of trumpets in the previous year; a concentration in the North Sea was in progress, and by an unlucky coincidence Mr. Haldane was at work on a great scheme of military reform which had the undisguised purpose of providing Great Britain with a fully-equipped army to operate on the Continent of Europe. To the German mind an intimation from the Supreme Naval Power that it desired the naval competition to cease at the moment of its own greatest preponderance—the moment when it had invented a new type of battleship which it claimed to be vastly superior to any possessed by its rivals—seemed the reverse of conciliatory. The German General Staff could not imagine such a proposal being made unless the Government making it was prepared to enforce it, and it was seriously argued in Berlin that this *démarche*, coinciding as it did with a great scheme for reorganizing the British army, was the climax of a plan concerted with France and Russia to force the issue with Germany before she became too strong at sea.¹

III

It was an extraordinary—even a grotesque—turn of events which produced this result after fifteen months of a Liberal Government which desired nothing so much as to get back to a friendly footing with Germany and to reduce armaments. But at this point we see Britain and Germany involved in two parallel misunderstandings which never were and never could be cleared up: on the British side the failure to understand that in German eyes (and indeed according to the accepted continental standards) the British Conventions with France and Russia were not merely an innocent settlement of Colonial and Asiatic differences, but an act of adhesion to the Franco-Russian group which effected a momentous change in the balance of European power; on the German side the failure

¹ The editors of the "*Grosse Politik*" have quoted apparently with approval a paragraph which I wrote in the "*Life of Campbell-Bannerman*," explaining the German attitude at this time in these terms. See G.P., XXIII (1), p. 44.

to understand that the building of a great German fleet, however legitimate or necessary it might seem from the German point of view, was bound to be regarded by Great Britain as a threat to her safety and even to her existence. British statesmen, standing aloof from the continental tradition and being without the continental mind, were puzzled and mystified by the seemingly gratuitous jealousy of their relations with France and Russia; Germans, having no touch with the insular mind, thought it an unwarranted interference with their liberties that Great Britain should presume to suggest and even to dictate what ships Germans should build. The continental Powers had never behaved to each other in this way about their land forces; even Bismarck at the height of his power had not ventured to propose to France that she should disarm, much as he desired it; and had he done so, it would have been taken as a sure sign that he was on the war-path. Why, then, should any different measure be applied to a British Prime Minister, who proposed that Germany should limit her sea-power while Britain retained her unchallengeable supremacy?

The argument is richly developed in the correspondence preceding the second Hague Conference, which was now pending, and so far as the limitations of armaments were concerned, it is clear that the project was still-born from the beginning. All eminent persons in all the camps appear to have agreed that disarmament was the fantasy of a few idealogues in England and America, and that, if it were permitted to materialize in any form, it would be positively dangerous. The Kaiser, after seeing King Edward at Friedrichshof, in August, 1905, reported him to be extremely sceptical, and a little later found the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Frank Lascelles, abounding in the same sense :

Yesterday I had an opportunity of talking to Sir Frank Lascelles about the Hague Conference, which he devoutly hoped would not take place. We were agreed that it might be a most dangerous source of trouble and friction. I explained to him that my instructions to my Ministers remained the same as for the first Conference; in case the disarmament question came up in any form whatever German participation was to cease, for I as well as my people would never tolerate the regulation of our navy by foreign demands of any kind. Sir Frank replied: "I perfectly understand and quite agree with you that that is quite out of the question and impossible. It is exactly the same with us."¹ (August 15, 1906.)

In January, 1907, the Kaiser repeated to President Roosevelt that King Edward had taken the initiative in telling him that he

¹ G.P., XXIII (1), No. 7815, pp. 84-6.

"entirely disapproved of the Conference and considered it humbug"; and the President, who had the idea that it might discuss the limitation of the displacement of warships, replied that he too had "very little trust in it" since this idea had had to be abandoned.¹ It goes without saying that the military and naval attachés in all the camps thought all these ideas to be nonsensical, but, more serious, scarcely anyone in the whole official world gave the British Government credit for even honest intentions. "The Prime Minister knows," wrote Baron von Stumm from London in April, 1907, "that this plan with which he is trying to please the little-Englanders will not be accepted. Possibly it may get a Platonic support from Spain and the United States; all the other Powers will be against it. Germany is fully justified in distrusting these English peace efforts, while England at the same time explains that she must in all circumstances, whether with or without disarmament, have the command of the sea. The English delegates have evidently received instructions to deliver England over to the laughter of the world at the Hague."²

The pursuit of peace and disarmament in these years was evidently a dangerous and might even, with a little excess of zeal, become a fighting business. That the question could not be seriously pursued was now the opinion of French and Russians as well as of Germans, and when the Hague Conference took place, in July and August, 1907, reduction of armaments was relegated to a pious resolution declaring it to be "highly desirable," which was carried, in the absence of the German delegates, at the fag-end of the proceedings. But this was not all. Apart from disarmament the only subject on the agenda which had any interest for the public was the immunity of private property at sea, which was proposed by the United States and stiffly resisted by the British Admiralty. By supporting the American proposal and taking her Allies with her, Germany now manœuvred the British into a position in which they seemed all but single-handed to be holding out for the largest belligerent rights for the greatest fleet against the humane opinion of the rest of the world. Civilian British delegates were in despair at the obduracy of naval British experts, but the latter were immovable. The wheel had now come full circle. The cranks and zealots of disarmament were routed and British hypocrisy was exposed. The diplomats exchanged scoffs and gibes; Marschall von Bieberstein, the leader of the German

¹ G.P., XXIII (1), No. 7824, pp. 92-3.

² *Ibid.*, No. 7786, p. 51.

Delegation, wrote long letters home explaining the consummate skill with which he had outmanœuvred the British and turned the situation to German account. He said that everybody had congratulated him, and especially the Americans. Beyond doubt he had won the round, and the road was now clear for new German Navy Laws and the great competition in Dreadnoughts. Whether he had done a good day's work for his country was a question to which the answer was deferred.

IV

The autumn of 1907 was a period of royal and imperial fraternizing. The Kaiser met the Tsar at Swinemünde in the Baltic, and greatly impressed and rather frightened his host by trailing the whole German fleet after him. King Edward visited the Kaiser at the Palace of Wilhelmshöhe on his way to Marienbad, and it fell to Sir Charles Hardinge, who accompanied the King, to communicate to Prince Bülow the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Convention. Bülow professed to be sincerely pleased, as pleased as he had been on hearing of the Anglo-French *Entente*. It appears that the Kaiser, at his meeting with the Tsar, had made a last but unsuccessful attempt to detach him from Great Britain. King Edward next visited the Emperor of Austria at Ischl, and the Germans started the theory that he was endeavouring to detach his imperial host from the Triple Alliance. Nothing is less probable. It was not King Edward's way to plunge into these deep waters with a brother sovereign. But, as his biographer remarks, "the two monarchs had much in common, and both mistrusted the Kaiser, of whom they often spoke."¹

Finally, in November, the Kaiser visited King Edward at Windsor. In spite of a perilous last moment in which he had cried off this engagement, pleading a sudden indisposition,² that too passed off well. He visited the City and said in a speech at the Guildhall that blood was thicker than water, and that "the main prop and base for the peace of the world was the maintenance of good relations between England and Germany." The thorny question of the Baghdad Railway seemed to have been all but settled in a talk between him and Mr. Haldane. But then he went to Highcliffe to stay with Colonel Stuart Wortley and said other

¹ "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., p. 550.

² For details of this see Bülow's "Memoirs, 1903-6," p. 296. English translation.

things which, when reported the following year, caused convulsions in both England and Germany. On his return to Germany, the Baghdad Railway settlement was found to be unacceptable, and another amendment to the Navy Law was introduced, still further reducing the period for the replacement of ships and increasing the annual construction.

THE QUARRELS OF THE GROUPS

Russia's Return to Europe—The Final Grouping of the Powers—Its Effect on Policy—The Naval Question Again—A New Development—King Edward at Cronberg—The Kaiser and Sir Charles Hardinge—Imperial Wrath.

I

It was now nearly three years since the end of the Russo-Japanese War, and Russia, having for the time being suppressed her revolutionaries and made her peace with Britain, was coming back into the European arena. Once more she had been headed off in her age-long attempt to get to the warm water, but she was still convinced that this was a necessity to her existence and that, if the desired outlet could not be found in Asia, it must be sought, as before, in Europe.

The course of events since the beginning of the century must be briefly recalled. German policy in these years stands revealed as an endeavour first to divert Russia to the Far East, and next, when that failed, and she turned her face again towards Europe, to wean her from the French and draw her back into the German combination. The Kaiser had surpassed himself in the zeal and enthusiasm which he had shown for the Tsar's sacred mission to defend the cause of Christianity and Civilization against the Yellow Peril; and when this mission proved to be a catastrophe, he had all but succeeded in persuading him that German and not French or British friendship opened the road to recovery. There followed a sharp struggle in St. Petersburg between the pro-German and pro-French and pro-British factions, but the evident impossibility of bringing the French into any German combination and the old fear that Russia, standing alone, would become a mere satellite of Germany decided the issue. In the Morocco crisis Russia gave her vote definitely to France, and during the next year concluded the agreement with Great Britain which fortified the Dual Alliance with the Triple *Entente*. Ostensibly this agreement was concerned

with spheres of interest in Persia and on the Indian frontier, but Germans and Austrians insisted on interpreting it in terms of European policy, and saw Russia released from anxieties in the farther East, and enabled to concentrate her energies and resources in the Near East, where they least desired her to renew her activities.

The history of the next seven years is mainly that of the diplomatic conflict which led up to the final struggle between the now established groups of Triple Alliance and Triple *Entente*. In this all manner of unrelated subjects are seen gradually becoming classified into causes for which—irrespective of their merits—the two groups were committed to stand. England had little or no interest in furthering Russian as against Austrian designs in the Near East, but she was compelled in the last resort to do so or find herself exposed to the hostility of both groups. Austria had positive reasons for favouring British policy and desiring the friendship of Great Britain, but she was bound in honour to give her vote for Germany when British and German interests clashed. Italy was dragged reluctantly into giving a nominal support to an Austrian policy which threatened her interests in the Adriatic, and to a German policy which exposed her to the hostility of Great Britain. The impending break-up of the Ottoman Empire raised innumerable questions which could only be settled wisely or safely if the best minds of both groups were concentrated on their merits. But in Europe as now constituted, the merits of problems, the rights and wrongs as they affected the peoples concerned, the probability of settlements being permanent and pacific, counted for almost nothing against the play of forces.—Great Britain alone, being relatively disinterested, is seen pleading for the merits, and often to the embarrassment of her friends who smile indulgently at her naïveté. Europe, as they understood it, was an intricate and perilously balanced parallelogram of forces which might be laid in ruin by any experiment with its stresses. Writers in subsequent years have called it the “European anarchy.” It was never that in the eyes of its artificers. It was, as they believed, a delicate, ingenious, highly organized mechanism which needed the utmost skill and technical knowledge for its handling; and their complaint against British statesmen was incessantly that they were without this skill and knowledge.

II

In March, 1908, the Kaiser wrote a private letter to Lord Tweedmouth, the British First Lord of the Admiralty, declaring it to be "absolutely nonsensical and untrue" that the German navy was meant as a challenge to British naval supremacy, and characterizing the opinion expressed in a letter to the newspapers by Lord Esher that "every German from the Emperor down to the last man wished for the downfall of Sir John Fisher" as "a piece of unmitigated balderdash." This impetuous and unconventional proceeding had the opposite effect of what was intended. It leaked into the newspapers; it became the subject of a heated parliamentary debate; it offended King Edward. The Kaiser, Prince Bülow tells us in his "Memoirs,"¹ had "childishly" sent with his letter a "whole set of false statistics which the English promptly recognized as such." The incident suggested that the Kaiser was endeavouring to influence and mislead in German interests the British Minister responsible for the British navy. Once more the German Ambassador explained to his superiors that for Germany to protest the innocence of her intentions was worse than useless, since what counted with the British was not the intentions which might vary with any turn of the political wheel, but the facts which compelled them to take counter-measures. The facts seemed more disquieting than ever when, less than two months after the Tweedmouth letter (April 6, 1908), yet another new Navy Bill, reducing the replacement period and increasing the annual programme to four capital ships, was tabled in the German Reichstag.

As Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had discovered in the previous year, friendly communications between Britain and Germany on the subject of the fleet had by this time become all but impossible. It was one of the established conventions of military Europe that no Power should question another Power about its land armaments, and the Kaiser insisted that the same tabu should apply to naval armaments. Regarding the German fleet as in a special sense his own creation, he rapidly got to the point of resenting British inquiries as an invasion of his sovereign rights and even as a personal affront to himself. Russia and France would never venture to speak to Germany about her army; why, then, should Britain presume to talk to her about her navy? To the British this attitude was incomprehensible, and they continued to talk in their Parliament and on their platforms, all the while pro-

¹ Bülow, 1903-9, p. 315.

testing their good intentions but by the same process hardening the German resolve to continue building.

III

At the end of May, 1908, the Kaiser made a blustering speech on the parade ground at Doberitz, denouncing the conspiracy to "encircle" Germany, and striking, as Bülow says, "a warlike and threatening note"¹—all this within earshot of Russian and Japanese military attachés, who were under no obligation to keep it secret. A visit which King Edward paid to the Tsar at Reval in the following week added fuel to these flames, and during the next few weeks the Kaiser's comments on dispatches from London rose to a high pitch of indignation and excitement. The King was accompanied to Reval by Admiral Sir John Fisher and General French, in addition to Sir Charles Hardinge and Sir Arthur Nicolson, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg; and special attention had been called to the occasion by the action of a group of Labour and Liberal members in moving to reduce the Foreign Office vote as a protest against a visit being paid by the British Sovereign to the potentate of a country where large numbers of political prisoners had recently been executed, imprisoned or sent into exile. It was certainly a well-advertised and highly official occasion, and though his biographer tells us that the King spoke no word of politics to the Tsar, he did talk for an hour to M. Stolypin, and other official conversations covered a wide range of subjects including the projected reforms in Macedonia. Isvolsky now for the first time appears on the scene, trying hard but without success to make the cautious Sir Charles Hardinge "commit himself beyond the limits of his authority."² The Germans, as usual, professed to know all about it, and saw the foundations being laid for combined Russian and British action against Austrian and German interests in the Balkans—a further development of King Edward's encirclement policy.³ Eavesdroppers improved the occasion by reporting to Germany that the King was "full of spite and envy of his Imperial nephew,"⁴ and the Kaiser went to the length of alleging that the Young Turkish Revolution, which had taken place soon after the Reval meeting, had been engineered by the King and Tsar.⁵

¹ Bülow, "Memoirs, 1903-9," p. 308.

² "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., p. 592.

³ Otto Hammann, "Um den Kaiser," p. 49.

⁴ Bülow, p. 309.

⁵ G. and T., Vol. VI., p. 177.

The British Foreign Office knew little of these developments, and when the King proposed to spend a day with the Kaiser at Cronberg on the Taunus, on August 11, it prepared a memorandum, covering among other things the explosive subject of naval armaments, for his use if the talk with his nephew should stray in that direction. The King, knowing perhaps a little more than his Ministers of his nephew's disposition and temper, prudently decided to leave all controversial subjects to Sir Charles Hardinge, the permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who accompanied him on this expedition. Of what followed, when Sir Charles raised the subject at Cronberg, we have voluminous accounts from both sides,¹ but the Kaiser's (which was conveyed in a cipher telegram to Bülow) is the more picturesque:

HE (Hardinge): Can't you put a stop to your building? or build fewer ships?

I: Germany determines the proportion of her naval armaments according to her own interests and alliances;² it is defensive and is aimed at no nation, certainly not England. It is not a threat against you who are all just now scared of bogies.

HE: But an arrangement ought to be found for diminishing the construction. You must stop or build slower.

I: Then we shall fight, for it is a question of national honour and dignity.

Then I looked him straight in the eye; Sir Charles became scarlet, made me a bow, begged pardon for his words and urged me expressly to forgive and forget and treat them as remarks inadvertently made in private conversation. . . . I resumed the conversation with him in the evening, when he was quite another man, pleasant, cheerful, telling anecdotes. . . . When after dinner, with the King's permission, I conferred on him the order of the Red Eagle, First Class, he was ready to eat out of my hand. He said his grandfather had been detached from Wellington's staff to serve under Blücher, and had lost his arm near Ligny, and for this Frederick William III had honoured him with the order of the Red Eagle. The insignia were kept in his house as a sacred possession. My frank words when I showed him my teeth had not failed in their effect. You must always treat Englishmen thus.

It is not to be believed that, on this occasion alone in his career, Sir Charles Hardinge failed in either courtly or diplomatic discretion, and his own account, though less dramatic, is the more probable:

(The Kaiser said) he failed to see any reason for nervousness in England, or for any increase in the British fleet on account of the German naval programme. This programme was not a new one; it had been passed by law; and it had become a point of national honour that it should be completed.

¹ G. and T., Vol. VI., pp. 183-90; G.P., XXIV, Nos. 8225-6, pp. 125 *et seq.*

² A possible mistake in deciphering for "necessities."

No discussion with a foreign Government could be tolerated ; such a proposal would be contrary to the national dignity, and would give rise to internal troubles, if the Government were to accept it. He would rather go to war than submit to such dictation.

I at once pointed out to the Emperor that, in suggesting a possible friendly discussion between the two Governments there had been no question of dictation, and that my words could hardly bear that interpretation, to which His Majesty assented.

The Kaiser, nevertheless, was so elated with his masterly handling of this occasion that he repeated his version at the top of his voice ; and accompanied by its moral " You must always treat Englishmen thus," it flew from mouth to mouth in Vienna, Rome and St. Petersburg as well as Berlin.

The navy question thus passed into another stage. It was now, for the Germans, not merely a question of building ships, but a question of national honour and dignity, the mere raising of which was an affront, and the pursuance of which would be resented to the point of war. In the minds of the other Governments, the Cronberg interview was a crucial fact which determined the relations not only of Britain and Germany but of all the Powers. With Germany taking this line, adhesion to the Triple *Entente* was more than ever a necessity to Britain, and there was a high probability that, if she were compelled to choose, Italy would make the same choice. Germany, therefore, was thrown back on Austrian friendship and in a position in which she might have to buy that friendship by dangerous concessions to Austrian ambitions.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PERSONNEL OF EUROPE

The Three Emperors—German Ministers: Bülow, Holstein, Bethmann Hollweg, Tirpitz—The Austrians: The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Aehrenthal, Berchtold, Conrad von Hötzendorf—The Russians: Isvolsky, Sazonoff—The French: Clemenceau, Briand, Poincaré—The Ambassadors: The Brothers Cambon, Metternich and Others—The British: Lansdowne and Grey—The Typical Statesman of the Period.

I

I PAUSE at this point to devote a few pages to the characters and personalities of the men who held the fate of the nations in their hands in these years. This chapter will run ahead of the course of events, but it may help to explain what comes after.

There were first the three Emperors: William II, King of Prussia and German Emperor; Nicholas II, Emperor of all the Russias; and Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria, King of Bohemia and Apostolic King of Hungary.

Memory takes me back to a day at Potsdam in the early summer of 1907: the Kaiser's birthday, the review of the Guards, like a scene out of an opera, kindling a real emotion with—to an English eye—a touch of absurdity, goose-step, mitred soldiers, etc., but all jollity and glitter under a brilliant sun. Then lunch on the invitation of the All-Highest in the Orangery of the Palace, and after lunch the arrival on the green sward outside of the All-Highest himself in white uniform with towering helmet and golden eagle perched on top of it, mounted on an immense horse and surrounded by his staff, also mounted and in blazing uniforms. Next a summons to the presence and half an hour standing alone by the stirrup while the Imperial rider poured out his grievances against the English, their disregard of things German, the small number of them that visited his country and the still smaller number that came to Berlin—all this winding up with exhortations to go back and tell them to come, tell the Government people to come, tell Sir Edward Grey to come.

There was a certain bathos in it. Just so might a rich new-comer who had bought a big house and park in the English country complain that "the county" did not call on him. But also there was something simple and honest, which was rather attractive. He did not deal in the compliments and platitudes expected of royal personages on such an occasion; he was alive, he was human, he spoke with emphasis and energy, said what occurred to him without reserve or discretion, and incidentally revealed something which it was important to know. If he was old among Kings, he was new among Emperors, and the need to assert himself, to resent slights to his dignity, and to claim his place in the Sun and his equality of status was a strong urge explaining much that seemed mere bluster in his own attitude and the policy of his country. Especially he seemed to resent the supposed neglect of him by the English, which was perhaps the more galling because they on their side evidently cared so little about foreign Emperors, whether German, Austrian or Russian.

Undoubtedly he had a touch of genius and a flair for publicity which Mr. Hearst or Lord Northcliffe might have envied. For thirty years he gave his country an advertisement of far wider range than is commonly expected of Heads of States, whether Royal or Republican. He was the supreme drummer of German trade; he felt or affected an interest in art, science, literature, the drama, theology; and no courtly convention prevented him from bringing interesting and successful men of all classes and origins into his circle. He flattered with his attentions the commercial magnates and captains of industry, and had none of the prejudices against Jews which afflicted so many of his countrymen. His voluble talk and emphatic opinions on subjects which specialists reckon as their own rang through his Court and were quoted outside with reverence, laughter or tears, according to the disposition of those who retailed them. More important, his constant insistence on the unique qualities of the German people and his evident belief that he had a special mission to lead them to a glorious future, kindled a strong national feeling in a people which was comparatively new to national discipline and specially liable, as their statesmen complained, to fall back into particularist ways.

In all this the Kaiser seemed to be an open-minded, modern sort of man with an even vulgarly modern flair for *réclame* and publicity. This was one side of him; the other was pure mediæval and stuffed with romantic ideas about mailed fists and shining armour and the divine right of kings. The two in combination

made a ferment in his brain, and led to explosive manifestations which frightened the world and caused even his own entourage at times to doubt whether he was quite sane. On this side of him he has all the characteristics of a gifted and wayward child. He loves big and striking words; his quick fancy is caught by all sorts of glittering objects, whether they are tinsel or precious metal; whatever occurs to him at the moment he says with complete disregard to whether he said something different yesterday or will say something different to-morrow. Taken seriously he seems treacherous and inconstant, dealing in flattery one day and stabs the next, or even both on the same day, to the face and behind the back. And yet so completely does he live in the moment and his desire to please is so unaffected that it seems doubtful whether he is conscious of the seeming duplicity or his own changing moods.

There is something frightening in his personality as revealed in the documents. The irresponsibility, the vanity, the lack of mental stability, of consideration for the feelings of others, of good manners, of dignity and reserve, which are displayed in his marginal comments, are lapses which might be condoned in a schoolboy but scarcely in a great Emperor and war-lord.

The prudent King Edward let most of the dispatches presented to him pass without comment. His infrequent annotations are so sparse and jejune—"a satisfactory dispatch," and so forth—that so far as the written words show, his contributions to policy might be altogether negligible. His nephew could let nothing pass without scoring the margin with interjections, ejaculations, remonstrances, impromptu observations serious or satiric. "Ha, ha! the scoundrel." . . . "Didn't I always say so?"—"The donkey is being imposed upon," etc. etc. A whole anthology of these flowers of speech may be culled from almost any volume of the German documents. It is, no doubt, hard measure for a man to be judged by the momentary ebullitions which he has been rash enough to commit to paper over a period of thirty years. And let it be admitted that there are not a few flashes of wit and wisdom in the Emperor's comments. But make what allowance we will for the circumstances, they remain an indelible record, which historians cannot ignore, of the wavering mind, the hot fits, the cold fits, the persistence in folly against warning, the lack of foresight and any clear sense of the limits of power, which characterized the man who chiefly controlled the ship of state in Germany during these years.

Let us glance next at the Tsar of all the Russias, the second

of the three Emperors who controlled the tremendous engine of power. His tragic fate softens judgment, and he had many of the qualities that endear in private life—good manners, parental affection, piety, excellent intentions. He had none of the vanity and bluster of his German brother; he shrank from crowds and publicity; the few glimpses we have of him show him hastily retiring from a scene on which he has made a reluctant appearance. His character is in a perpetual dissolution in which we look in vain for any clear outline. The German Kaiser hypnotizes him; he admires the splashing ways of his German brother, his imposing appearance and complete self-confidence in the art of being an Emperor; he accepts all that the Kaiser tells him about his divine mission to counter the Yellow Peril, falls back into the Kaiser's arms when the mission comes to disaster, and vows him eternal friendship at the expense of all other friends. For evidence of simplicity and gullibility there is nothing in any public records quite like the Willy-Nicky correspondence. We see "Nicky" involved in a web of deceit both at home and abroad, but his behaviour is so artless and unconsidered that he can scarcely be charged with conscious falsity.

He is at the mercy of everyone, his wife, his mother, the Grand Dukes, the rascal priest Rasputin, any friend or counsellor who has gained his ear. His Ministers come and go for no intelligible reason; he sets up the Duma, and knocks it down; he is pledged to the French Alliance, but is perpetually doing something which cuts across it; he cannot make up his mind whether the destiny of his country is in the Far East or the Near East, and invites ruin in both by squandering his resources between the two. And yet through it all we somehow have to think of him as an honest man struggling with adversity, compelled by Providence and circumstances to play a part for which he was totally unfitted, but from which there was no escape except through the final tragedy.

Then in Vienna was the third Emperor, Francis Joseph, stiff with age, petrified with court routine and official ceremonial, nursing the memories of past failures, living an ascetic life in the splendours of the Schönbrunn, rising from his camp-bed at four, reading and signing, signing and reading all day, receiving endless reports and passing them on, hoping nothing better than that the deluge will be deferred until he has passed away, firm, so long as his will persisted, that nothing should be done to provoke it meanwhile, but evidently passing into a senility in which this saving obstinacy will flicker out with his other faculties. His family life was a tragic

failure; his wife was assassinated, his son committed suicide, his nephew and heir came as an interloper into his family scheme and committed the enormity of making a morganatic marriage. His Hapsburg mind saw the finger of Providence avenging this outrage in the stroke which fell on man and wife at Serajevo. We get glimpses of him occasionally as a human being in the company of the lady who solaced his last years, and they suggest that in suitable circumstances he might have been an amiable man of domestic habits and ordinary intelligence; but dressed up as a Hapsburg and an Emperor, and called upon in extreme old age to play pilot in the European storm he evokes pity and sympathy, which must be extended to his subjects whose destinies he controlled.

These were the three men in whose hands more than any other the fate of Europe and the world rested in the twenty-four years from the fall of Bismarck to the outbreak of the Great War. Others came and went largely at the whim or will of these three, but these three were there all the time—All-Highest, Emperor and Apostolic Monarch, Tsar of all the Russias, each claiming the last word in their respective countries.

II

Let us consider next some of the men who served the Great Three during these years. Among the Germans four figures specially project themselves from the crowd—Bülow, Holstein, Bethmann Hollweg, Tirpitz. Of all four I have vivid personal memories.

It is difficult to resist a revulsion of feeling in the Kaiser's favour when reading the "Memoirs" of Prince Bülow. The four volumes of these "Memoirs" will probably survive as the most brilliant and searching narrative of this period of German history, yet at the end they leave the impression that their author was false and ill-natured, that he sought at all critical moments to save himself rather than help his imperial master, that he was almost totally lacking in the serious and loyal candour which might have saved that master from his worst mistakes and Germany from disaster. His ingratiating personality was during these years the most baffling, and to a foreigner the most misleading factor in German policy. He gave you his time ungrudgingly; he disarmed you by his charming manners; he was ready with plausible explanations of all untoward circumstances; he claimed the credit for everything when affairs seemed to be prospering, he was responsible for nothing

when they went wrong. In all his voluminous pages there is scarcely a good word for a colleague who fell on evil times, and one leaves his record with the feeling that the errors of his successors in office and his own alleged warnings of the Nemesis which was to overtake them afforded him much consolation for the misfortunes of his country.

It is difficult to think of Bülow as a German. His subtlety and his suavity, his literary airs, his perfect diplomatic manners made Rome or Paris seem much more his spiritual home than Berlin. Among Germans he had no equal in the art of flattery, or in the use of the stiletto, when occasion required it. His letters to the unhappy Eulenburg are as unpleasing as his unctuous airs when his friend had fallen into disgrace. His special strokes of policy—the Kaiser's landing at Tangier, the baiting of Delcassé, the bullying of Rouvier—were both petty and dangerous. Germany in all this had nothing to gain commensurate with the risk he ran. His notion of statecraft was a skilful fencing before an admiring world and he was right in his complaints that his German colleagues were unequal to their parts in these performances. Kiderlen Waechter's big stick and burly manner were more in their tradition.

Behind Bülow stood Holstein, a very different sort of man—ubiquitous, furtive, invisible, who stayed on interminably and seemed to have a mysterious hold upon everything and everybody. Dr. Gooch has painted a masterly portrait of him in a memorable essay which leaves nothing untold that research can reveal, but in the end he remains an enigma. What was the real cause of his smouldering hatred of his former master, Bismarck?¹ How did he inspire the fear which compelled so many eminent people to retain him and tolerate him, when they had such excellent reasons for wishing to be rid of him? What kink in his character led to the life-long embitterment which caused him to quench all smoking flax and suspect every generous impulse or friendly advance? For the fifteen years after Bismarck's departure his influence was deep and sinister. Chancellors might come and go, but he remained, working in his burrow at the Foreign Office, shunning the light, declining all the amenities of his position, hugging the thought of his secret power.

I saw him but once, on Bülow's introduction, and he im-

¹ It was said that he never forgave Bismarck for the part which he compelled him to play as spy and informer in the proceedings against Count von Arnim, and the social ostracism with which he was visited in consequence.

mediately challenged me on an article I had written several years before and totally forgotten, but which had apparently given him deep offence, and which he had stored up in his memory. Bülow's intervention stopped the dispute which was rising rapidly, and adroitly changed the subject to English literature on which Holstein discoursed with easy familiarity. The impression he left on me was that of an angry gnome whom it was better to leave undisturbed, but he was, by all accounts, a man of extraordinary accomplishments and prodigious, if vindictive, memory. He spoke English perfectly and French equally well; his knowledge of documents and precedents was immense, he remembered everything that everybody had done amiss, and believed friend and foe alike to be plotting mischief, and most of all when they professed or proffered friendship.

I have a pleasant memory of Bethmann Hollweg who, when I saw him, was still Minister of the Interior. He spoke with enthusiasm of his plans for social reform, and gave me many interesting details of the German sickness insurance scheme. He was, I should say, a most competent and benevolent official, and it would have been well for him if he had been left to pursue the work he liked best. Bülow has painted an ill-natured portrait of him as Imperial Chancellor, but he is probably right in suggesting that his ignorance of foreign affairs was a positive qualification in the eyes of the Kaiser, who wished to be his own Foreign Secretary. From the departure of Bülow onwards to the war, the Kaiser and Tirpitz governed German policy, and between them it is difficult to trace any important influence exerted by Bethmann Hollweg.

Tirpitz remains a calamitous example of the expert invading policy. Nothing could persuade him that, as he added to the German navy, so Great Britain would add to hers; and to the end he remained stubbornly blind to the patent fact that his successive Navy Laws were driving the British into the arms of France. Like Holstein, he believed that the way to friendship was to inspire fear. Let Germany be strong at sea, and the English would be at her feet. As a man he was bluff, genial, and quite straightforward; with his upright figure, broad chest and immense beard he looked like a sea-captain of the old school. On the only occasion I talked to him he spoke of his immense admiration for the British fleet, and said we ought to be the last to blame him for wishing to follow our example.

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III

Turn now to Vienna. There, as revealed by the Documents, the principal men behind the Emperor were his nephew and Heir-apparent, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand; the two Foreign Secretaries, Count Aehrenthal and Count Berchtold, and Field-Marshal Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Chief of the General Staff, whose "Memoirs" are among the most important sources of Austrian history for these years.

The murder of the Archduke and his wife at Serajevo on June 28, 1914, has left him in the minds of most people a tragic symbolic figure, whose past is veiled in the smoke of that catastrophe. Yet he counted for much in the previous years. His character, as we see it in the records, eludes any simple definition. He is Hapsburg to the marrow, yet defies the strongest Hapsburg tradition by insisting on marrying outside the royal circle, and pays the price by signing away the rights of his sons to the succession. To revoke this signature and obtain recognition for his wife appears to have been his consuming private ambition—a thing embittering his life and running as a morbid streak through all his political action. He was clearly a man of strong will and a certain originality of character, and it stands to his credit that he was one of the very few of his clan who realized the need of radical changes, if the Austro-Hungarian Empire was to survive. But except in one respect, which was an unceasing antipathy to the Magyars, in whose power and claims he saw a menace to the Empire and the Monarchy, his ideas were vague and varying. At one moment he saw salvation in Federalism; at another in Trialism, *i.e.* in adding a third autonomous Slav unit to the Hungarian and Austrian units under the monarchy; at another in converting the "Delegations"¹ into a central Parliament with the three units in subordinate relations to it. Which, if any, of these plans he would have pursued if he had come to the throne is beyond guessing, but he was at least right in perceiving that the lack of a strong central authority was a fatal weakness in the Empire.

He was by all accounts an aloof and arrogant man, holding ideas about the divine right of kings and the submission of subjects which did not inspire affection in any of the races. Like most Hapsburgs he seemed to regard the Empire as a family hereditament to be administered and conserved in the interests of the family.

¹ The Delegations consisted of 60 members chosen by the Austrian and Hungarian Parliaments to whom the common Minister for Foreign Affairs was responsible.

His antipathy to the Magyars made him comparatively sympathetic to the Serbs, but, like Conrad, he was ready to go all lengths to force them also into submission, if they seemed to threaten the Monarchy. Like Conrad too he disliked and distrusted Italians, and was supposed to be behind a good many of the wild schemes for settling accounts with them and other supposed enemies of the Monarchy, which broke down against the resistance of the Emperor. He found a kindred spirit in the German Kaiser who took great pains to cultivate him and gave him special pleasure by granting royal honours to his wife. In general he gives the impression of a restless and dissatisfied man, with something romantic in his character and with ability rather above the average, but doomed to incessant fruitless activities which soured his disposition and left him in the air between the Court, the politicians and the soldiers. The Court half ostracized him and the soldiers and the politicians used him, but he never obtained any popularity or independent standing with the public which could make him a power against either.

Aehrenthal was a man of Jewish descent whose forbears had intermarried with the higher Austrian and Hungarian nobility. According to Bülow's description of him, he had the sharpness of the one race combined with the arrogance of the others. "Your Excellency does not love the truth," said a British Ambassador to him in a moment of exasperation, and so said Isvolsky, the Russian, whom he outmanœuvred and outwitted at their famous interview at the Buchlau villa. His one daring and dangerous stroke was the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and after it we find him the advocate of caution and prudence, as is often the way with those who cherish the memory of one brilliant success.

Conrad appears as the most consistent and conscientious fire-eater on the European scene. He is as confident about his political judgment as about his military; force is his solution for all problems; he is as ready to fight Italy as Russia or Serbia, and seems at times almost indifferent against whom he fights so long as he gets a war. If Austrian policy requires, he will set the world on fire. He played in Vienna the same part on the military side as Tirpitz in Berlin on the naval side. His faith in the efficiency of the mailed fist and the futility of all other means of appeasing discontent or inspiring respect was almost a religion. To all the enemies of the Monarchy—and he saw enemies everywhere—he would put the simple alternative, "be my brother or I will slay thee." He lived for war, was infinitely fertile and ingenious in making schemes

for war, and, as so often happens with men of this disposition, was ineffective and unsuccessful in the test of war. The wild face and burning eyes of his portraits exactly correspond with his disposition. "No one," says Aristotle, "chooses to make war for the sake of war, for anyone who turned his friends into his enemies in order to have battles and slaughter would seem to be altogether blood-guilty (*μυαιφόνος*)."¹ It is difficult to read Conrad's threatenings and slaughters against even his own supposed friends without recalling these words.

Berchtold, the successor of Aehrenthal, who handled the last phase of Austrian diplomacy, is one of the men of whom the Tacitean "*capax imperii nisi imperasset*" may be written with a measure of truth. He was by no means the mere *flâneur* and fribbler of saloons and race-courses that some contemporary opinion held him to be. He had had great success in the earlier part of his career, as Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg, and may be credited with honest intentions when he lent his villa at Buchlau to the unhappy interview between Aehrenthal and Isvolsky, which led up to the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Up to that point the policy which he had impressed upon his Government was that of a settlement with Russia by give-and-take in the Balkan Peninsula. Its failure after the annexation drove him along the opposite road, but he knew the difficulties and was only with great reluctance persuaded to accept the Foreign Secretaryship on Aehrenthal's retirement. His mind still wavered. He spurred forward with Conrad, and pulled back when the Emperor cried halt, and between the two was reduced for weeks together to a distracted indecision which, as somebody said, left Austrian policy at the mercy of the hall-porter at the Ballplatz. Such a man was fated to be finally at the mercy of the war-makers, and from the summer of 1913 onwards we see him more and more inclining to what Conrad called "the great solution," and finally, after Serajevo, pressing forward with the rashness of the weak who have burned their boats. But he was not, so far as the Documents reveal him, the arch-conspirator at the centre of the plot. He was honestly and deeply perplexed, as he well might have been, by the situation of Austria-Hungary, and had neither the authority nor the knowledge and patience that would have been needed for the slow changes and reforms which alone could have saved the peace. His experience of foreign policy was as Ambassador at a foreign Court—generally a very inadequate training for a Foreign Secretary

¹ "Ethics," X., 7.

who had to deal with all countries on an even footing, but specially inadequate for an Austrian Minister, to whom a complete understanding of the internal conditions in his own country was indispensable at this time.

IV

Among the Russians, Isvolsky holds a special, if inglorious, position, and he is undoubtedly one of the few who may be written down as a war-maker. It may not be true, as reported at the time, that he said in 1914 "it is my war," but the boast would have been in keeping with his reckless vanity. From 1908 onwards, he was in the dangerous mood of a man with a grievance who was determined to get even with those who had deceived him. He was beyond doubt abominably treated by Aehrenthal after their Buchlau interview, but his interminable telling of that story, and his habit of relating all politics to that personal affair marked him as scarcely sane in his later years. How far his influence prevailed with his Government is difficult to ascertain precisely; at the end he seems to have been in a panic about its failure and the prospect of his recall from his position as Ambassador in Paris. But the records show him stoking up his Government whenever it seemed to be flagging, plying it with the argument that its French friends would be disappointed unless it showed more spirit, appealing for funds to kindle the martial spirit on the French side. He certainly was not a man of peace.

I saw him when he came to London in November, 1908, on his forlorn attempt to retrieve his catastrophe by obtaining British consent to the opening of the Straits, and he took much trouble to enlist me in that cause. My memory of him is that of a large blond man visibly agitated and at no pains to conceal the embarrassing circumstances in which he was placed. As a diplomatist he struck me as far from adroit, for he seemed honestly unprepared for the obvious British answer that the opening of the Straits to Russian warships to come out would require their opening to other warships to go in. The point flurried him and he was reduced to saying that the circumstances in the two cases were different without trying to explain why. It added to his exasperation in these years that he was constantly threatened by the Austrians with the publication of his correspondence with Aehrenthal before the Buchlau interview, a correspondence in which he was supposed to have given away Russian pledges to the Balkan Slavs and other

things which were afterwards said to be vital interests of Russia. The embitterment of Isvolsky must certainly be counted among the untoward consequences of Aehrenthal's stroke in 1908, but the other consequences were so formidable that I cannot think that it ranks high among the causes of the war.

Sazonoff, the Russian Foreign Secretary, to whom fell the handling of the final crisis, appears first on the St. Petersburg scene (after an apprenticeship in foreign Embassies) as the coadjutor of Isvolsky. He was even in these early days a special favourite of the Tsar, who made him Foreign Secretary when Isvolsky went as Ambassador to Paris. He has, like most Russian statesmen of his time, an inner and an outer record, the outer being generally that of a man who worked honestly for peace, and especially desired conciliation with Germany; the inner made up of rather tricky dealings which earned him the reputation of not being a straightforward man. French and British were suspicious of the Potsdam interview which he arranged between the Tsar and the Kaiser in November, 1910, and of the negotiation behind their backs on the Baghdad Railway which took place on this occasion; Poincaré more than hints that he tricked him over the Balkan League and the part played by Russia in its formation; and he certainly cannot be acquitted of at least mental reserves on that subject when on the eve of the Balkan War he invoked the Powers to keep the peace and went on pilgrimage to Germany, France and England for that purpose. Like Isvolsky he was hot for the opening of the Straits, and, having failed in a secret deal with the Turks, he altogether lost his temper at the proposal to place the German officer, Liman von Sanders in control of the Turkish army. He was judged to be a friendly and agreeable man when he came to England in 1912, but British statesmen in those days were mostly unaware of the strength and intensity in the Russian mind of the often balked ambition to reach Constantinople and free the Straits. That was only revealed to them in full measure after the war had broken out.

Sazonoff's memorandum on the Freedom of the Straits and the decision on that subject of the Council which the Tsar assembled in February, 1914, will be dealt with in their proper place, but in general it may be said here that the evidence points away from the conclusion that he was driving the Tsar into the war in 1914. He was, however, no more likely and no better equipped than Berchtold to engage on equal terms with military men declaring mobilization to be imperative for the national safety.

V

Clemenceau, Briand and Poincaré are the French figures who most stand out during these years. Many others played prominent parts—Hanotaux, Millerand, Pichon, and in the last years after his appointment as Ambassador to St. Petersburg, Delcassé. Through all the vicissitudes of French politics there seemed to be a persistent, brooding anonymous spirit at the Quai d'Orsay watching over the whole scene, tuning newspapers and politicians, and keeping French policy true to an unalterable guide-line. In this France was distinguishable from all other nations and it made her greatly their superior in all long-term policies. But among the instruments of this abiding French will, the men who did its bidding on the public stage, Clemenceau, Briand and Poincaré may be taken as the characteristic Frenchmen.

Though he was known as the "Tiger," Clemenceau in those days was by no means always Tigerish. He had a cautious and prudent side which was often uppermost in the middle years of the Anglo-French *Entente*. I visited him in 1907 to receive a long, and to me rather surprising, lecture on the danger to France of the understanding with Great Britain. A war with Germany, he said, was a far more serious possibility for France than for us. We should win an easy victory at sea, while she would be invaded and her territory be devastated. We must therefore not presume that France would follow us blindly into a war with Germany on the naval issue. It was for years his theme that Britain would only be a safe ally for France if she armed herself with a conscript army on the continental pattern, and accepted all the liabilities of war on land as well as on sea. Otherwise all the return blows of the Anglo-German quarrel would fall on France. Again and again he reverted to this theme, and all through these years he seemed to regard the *Entente* as a strictly experimental and rather dangerous *mariage de convenance*, which was to be judged solely from the point of view of French interests and French security.

Briand courted the reputation of *bon garçon* and liked it to be supposed that he took his duties lightly. Certainly he enjoyed the good things of life, and in talk he was the agreeable man of the world. But the oratory with which he swayed the Chamber had the high finish and polish which are achieved only by toil, and in his working hours he had a concentration and tenacity which made him a formidable man. It was never wise to take him at his own disarming valuation, still less to suppose that because he

had been a Socialist he would bring Liberal, pacifist, or sentimental ideas to French foreign policy. These he reserved till after the war. Before it, he was, like the rest, an unswerving adherent of the established line, and his special achievement as a pre-war Prime Minister was the passing of the three years' military service law of 1913.

Poincaré is, in German eyes, the villain of the French piece, but no one who has seen him can believe him to be any sort of villain. Being from Lorraine, he may have felt more deeply than his colleagues the smouldering resentment which all of them felt over the lost Provinces, but his mind was that of the lawyer busily pursuing legal assumptions to their logical conclusions. He believed in these years, as all French politicians did, that security once lay in the Alliance with Russia, and therefore in fulfilling every obligation in the Treaty with her to the last letter. Having a very orderly mind he was often puzzled and vexed by the vagueness and lack of precision in Russian policy and wanted to put it in precise terms, very alien to the Russian habit of mind, but he stood and what precisely was expected of him. When the alternative had once been laid down, he was for pursuing it to the end with a tenacity and even a fanaticism which made him sometimes a dangerous and in after years an impracticable man. The idea that he had a special forward policy of his own is not, I think, borne out by the evidence, but he followed the established path with a concentration and narrowness of vision which made him extremely formidable among the practitioners of power-politics in his time. He was a realist, but with a lawyer's

when we were on intimate terms with them. He always said the same things with the same unruffled composure and courtesy, the courtesy being slightly emphasized in moments of strain. He remained friendly when his instructions were hostile; he was careful not to force the pace when friendship was established. He refused to talk and professed not to understand English, but he had an almost uncanny appreciation of the English temper and English ways of thinking, and he never caused the irritation which even the best meaning Frenchmen at times provoke in the English. I only once saw him agitated, and that was at the last when there seemed to be a doubt about British intervention in the war, but even then he was careful to say that he uttered no reproaches and had no formal ground of complaint. He could not more eloquently have conveyed the other reproaches he had in his mind.

Of the others in London, no man has a cleaner record of documents than Metternich, the German Ambassador. He was a little dour to us, and, contrary to the belief of his superiors in Berlin, he never on any occasion softened his instructions to curry favour in London. He may even at times have added a little asperity, knowing that he lay under that sword. But he told those superiors the truth as he saw it with rare candour and honesty, and in the end sacrificed his own career rather than abate his warnings of the dangers that he saw ahead. Time turned him into the most formidable enemy of his policy, and left him unreturned to procure his recall, but a fine sense of honour prevented him from ever letting his English friends know of the struggle he was fighting behind the scenes. He was fighting a battle which would have wished us to understand, not in our interests but in German interests. With the knowledge now available it is possible not to think of him with deep respect and a certain sympathy. The tangled circumstances made it impossible for him to win. No man ever fought a more solitary battle against despotism.

He and a few others stand out as great characters in a world of human figures in a world of diplomatic personages. The officials faithfully carrying out instructions, the purveyors of power they only half understood, telling their superiors what they thought they to be told, passing on the gossip of the Courts, floating in the tide of fashionable life, and sustaining what was called the decorum of their sovereigns in foreign capitals. To the amiability and competence of this diplomatic world must be ascribed not a little of the profound misunderstanding under which many of the elements laboured of each other's intentions and points of view.

Some of these Governments would have been better served by a few honest and competent journalists accustomed to collect voices and measure opinion. Diplomacy in general continued to live on its eighteenth-century traditions in this tremendous and rapidly changing modern world.

VII

British statesmen do not need the same explanation to English readers, but it is interesting to glance at them in their relation to the Europeans.

There is a long tradition that Bismarck admired Disraeli. So far as the records go it rests on the doubtful story of Vitzthum, already quoted, and his reported observation at the Berlin Congress, "the old Jew, he is the man," which stands in rather striking contrast with Salisbury's testimony about his Chief on the same occasion: "what with deafness, ignorance of French, and Bismarck's extraordinary mode of speech, Beaconsfield has the dimmest idea of what is going on—understands everything crossways—and imagines a perpetual conspiracy."¹ But there was a certain affinity between the two men. Disraeli at all events was not the usual insular Englishman. He had partly a continental mind and took a romantic zest in the great game as played on the chess-board of Europe. Bismarck probably found him easier and more amusing to talk to than the other Englishmen, certainly than Salisbury, whom in the following year he described as an "obstinate, clumsy, lay clergyman." But Salisbury was better than Gladstone, who in Bismarck's eyes was a little better than a dangerous lunatic rushing in where the European angels or devils feared to tread, and making havoc of statecraft, as they understood it. Count Herbert Bismarck, visiting London in the 'eighties and then aged about thirty, told his father that Gladstone was so grossly ignorant of foreign affairs that it wasn't worth while to talk to him.

Salisbury, too, irritated by the doubts and scruples—more proper to a clergyman—which he developed at awkward moments, but he was a Conservative, and the Conservatives, in Bismarck's eyes, had at least some inkling of what Europeans understood by statesmanship. It was possible to correspond with Salisbury and to be reasonably sure that he would not, like Gladstone or Granville, spoil everything and endanger the peace by blurting out secrets in the British Parliament. The Tripartite Mediterranean Agreement

¹ "Life of Lord Salisbury," Vol. II., p. 287.

was thus carried through by personal correspondence between the two men, and the world knew no more about it than about the Triple Alliance or the Bismarckian secret treaties with Austria and Russia. This encouraged Bismarck to go on and propose a complete Alliance, but at this point Salisbury fell back, and in the last scene of all both are left lamenting the unhappy embargo laid on wise statesmanship by British parliamentary institutions. On this subject Bismarck's sympathy was deep and genuine.

Lansdowne, who succeeded Salisbury at the British Foreign Office, had French blood in him, and he too was acknowledged to have partly a continental mind. Behind the scenes all the experts gave him the credit of having carried through the Japanese Alliance and the Anglo-French *Entente* with the same skill and adroitness as if he were one of themselves. The annoyance of French, Russians and Germans at the Japanese *coup* is heightened by their surprise that an Englishman should have been capable of playing these games and catching them all out. From this time we see the opinion growing in Europe that British statecraft was far deeper, cleverer and more cunning than the continental experts had supposed.

By a peculiar irony this idea was fastened on to Sir Edward Grey, who was in fact one of the simplest of English statesmen. He succeeded to a policy which, according to the English interpretation of it, was Liberal and conciliatory—the policy of friendship with a friendly neighbour. His leading idea was to fulfil honourably all obligations entered into with France and above all to stand by her if she were exposed to retaliation or bullying for her friendship with us. Very simple, almost sentimental ideas reflecting the English public school spirit. There could hardly have been a worse subject for the reprisals by which the Germans sought to weaken the Anglo-French *Entente*. Every stroke of that kind made Grey a firmer friend of the French, and correspondingly every overture from the Germans offering concessions, if he would withdraw his support from the French, repelled and froze him. He was always ready, as he kept saying, for friendship with Germany, but never on the condition that he should desert his other friend.

One after another Ambassadors in London kept telling their Governments that Grey was honest and sincere, that he was doing nothing but what he professed to be doing, and that the methods these Governments were employing against him would only confirm him in his course. But in Berlin and Vienna they always

knew better. They knew that he was the real Machiavelli of Europe, King Edward's special instrument in the encirclement of Germany. When he protested in the name of public law against the unauthorized annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they thought it impossible that he should have this disinterested concern for legality, and spread the story that he was trying to work up a European war. When, at the request of his colleagues, he entered into a correspondence with M. Cambon which should define precisely the terms and limits of British obligations to France, they were sure that he was up to his old tricks and had given a new and secret extension to the *Entente*. There is a considerable literature on the subject of his supposed machinations which to Englishmen who knew Grey and his methods is for the most part a tissue of absurdities. British policy, as he and Asquith conducted it in these years, is no doubt open to a variety of criticisms from the continental point of view, but this particular line is wider of the mark than almost any directed against any statesman since the war. Grey is one of the few men of whom it can be said with truth that there was no guile in him. His own officials thought there was too little, and were always warning him against the traps and snares which they saw, or thought they saw, being set for him by his opponents in Europe.

VIII

If one tried in the end to get an idea of the typical European statesman of this period, one would, I think, describe him briefly as a patriotic materialist. He may be a religious man, even, like Bismarck, a piously evangelical man, but he regards religion as an affair of the private life with which statesmanship is not concerned. To him the God of Nations is the God of Battles, who has no mercy on weaklings pleading for the Christian virtues in the dealings of nations. This typical statesman prides himself on being above all things a realist, a "real-politician" who abjures sentiment, recognizes in a clear-sighted way that the world is ruled by force, and treats all facts and situations "objectively," and with a single eye to their effect on his nation or the group of nations with which it is associated. He exchanges views with the statesmen of other countries; he attends conferences and congresses, but the object he sets before himself is not the settlement of questions according to what in other relations would be called their merits or their rights and wrongs, but to make sure that they are not settled in

any way which diminishes the power of his own country or enhances that of a rival. This method he applies consistently over the whole field, Far East, Near East, Morocco, Egypt, Central Africa, and it leaves him eventually with an accumulation of unsolved problems for which there is no remedy but war. That was not against his principles or even against his intention, for the world hitherto had been carried along by the periodical clean-up of war, and he saw no other way.

What follows is in large measure the test of this idea of statesmanship, and the story may one day be the theme of a tragic poet. In the end, there was also a realism of right and wrong which was to come into the account—pent-up passions and emotions with their equivalents in physical force which constantly thwarted the efforts of the real politicians to ignore them or keep them down. In the end it seemed as if Mr. Gladstone appealing to the ten commandments had had something to say for himself. For the problem of the subject races of the Turk, which if the Powers had been willing, might have been settled in his day by a small body of competent administrators seeking peace and justice, was now to gather volume and explosive force which worked havoc with them all.

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THE ANNEXATION OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Austria and Russia in the Near East—Demands of Conrad von Hötzendorf and the Austrian General Staff—Isvolsky and Aehrenthal—The Buchlau Conversations—Isvolsky Outwitted—Great Britain and the Straits—A Proposed Conference—The French View—Clemenceau and King Edward—The "Ignorance of English Public Men"—Germany "in Shining Armour"—The Humiliation of Russia.

I

THE recovery of Russia and her resumption of her old European policy were by no means welcome to the Central Powers which for several years past had built up their policy on the confident assumption that she would for generations to come have her hands full in the Far East. In proportion as she became committed to this distant adventure, her competition with Austria in the Balkans had died down, and from 1897 to 1903 a relative quiet had been secured by a gentleman's agreement between the two, the main object of which appears to have been to check the unwelcome intrusions of Great Britain, who remained unappeasable about massacres in Macedonia. Together Austria and Russia resisted the more drastic proposals for dealing with this scandal made by Lord Salisbury and Lord Lansdowne and substituted for them the Mürzteg programme devised by themselves which provided for a mixed gendarmerie with Austrian and Russian civil agents assisting the Turkish Inspector-General. That prevented any serious question arising between the Powers but, since one of its clauses provided that as soon as Macedonia was pacified the Turkish administrative districts would be delimited anew so that their area might coincide as closely as possible with their ethnographical character, it had the unintended effect of setting Bulgars, Greeks, and Serbs by the ears in their endeavours to prove their claims to the administrative district in question.¹ The Turks had looked on complacently, and Lord Lansdowne protested ineffectively while these races waged an internecine guerrilla war. Whatever else they might differ about, all the other Powers were agreed

¹ Steed, "Through Thirty Years," Vol. I., pp. 209-10.

that British humanitarian interventions in the Balkans were inconvenient and inopportune.

But though the Balkan unrest was kept under in this way, there were strong parties in Austria-Hungary which were by no means willing that Germany alone should reap the benefit of Russia's disablement. While the German Kaiser was landing in Morocco and Bülow challenging Delcassé, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, backed by Conrad von Hötzendorf, then Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, was urging that an advance should be made from Bosnia-Herzegovina through the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar into the Balkans, and it was even said that war with Italy was part of their plan. Conrad was, as usual, for war; it was his settled conviction that nothing but war would bring the Serbs and other disgruntled nationalities to their senses, and save the Austro-Hungarian Empire from destruction. But Goluchowski, who was Foreign Minister at this time, had no belief in the success of these military adventures; and the aged Francis Joseph, who was superstitiously convinced that ill-luck dogged him on the battlefield, supported his Foreign Minister and vetoed these schemes. Thus, when the Russo-Japanese War ended, Austria and Russia were still on amicable terms and during the next two years the idea seems gradually to have developed between them that they might help each other to obtain the objects which they now most ardently desired—the opening of the Straits to her warships desired by Russia, and the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina desired by Austria-Hungary. Formidable treaty rights stood in the way of both, but the two Powers appear to have assumed, not without reason, that, if they could report themselves agreed, the other Powers, however reluctant they might be, would not press their objections, and that the Turks, at whose expense these operations would be carried through, would be unable to resist.

Goluchowski passed from the scene and his place was taken by Aehrenthal, who at this time was hand in glove with Conrad and the Austrian Military Staff. Having been Ambassador in St. Petersburg, he was well acquainted with Isvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, and had discovered that his dearest ambition in life was to signalize his term of office by the opening of the Straits.¹ To obtain the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by playing on this ambition seemed to Aehrenthal a natural and promising way

¹ The terminology of the Straits question is always a little puzzling. The Russian demand is at different times described as for the "closing" and for the "opening" of the Straits. It was throughout for the opening to Russian warships entering or coming from the Black Sea and their closing to the warships of all other Powers.

THE BALKAN STATES 1914

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of going to work. Which of them made the first suggestion, whether Isvolsky began by tempting Aehrenthal with the lure of the annexation, or Aehrenthal began by suggesting the opening of the Straits to Isvolsky, became afterwards the subject of hot contention between them, but the point is not very important. There was nothing surprising in the discussion of the annexation question by the two Powers. Their Reichstadt Agreement of 1876 covered the occupation of the two provinces, and ten years later at the Conference of Skiemiwice it had been agreed between them that Austria-Hungary might on certain conditions convert her occupation into annexation. The conditions had been left vague, but they were no doubt that Russia should obtain some equivalent advantage, and that the consent of the other Powers should be asked to any revision of treaties that might be required by their proposals. The project was one which might naturally have suggested itself to both men, but for its neat execution, and, above all, for the synchronizing of its two parts, Russian and Austrian, candour, patience and good faith were essential on both sides, and these were not qualities in which either Aehrenthal or Isvolsky excelled.

II

Isvolsky should have been warned, for it was scarcely a year since Aehrenthal had grossly deceived him. In the previous September he had visited him in Vienna, and come away with an agreed draft of judicial reforms in Macedonia. Proceeding from Vienna to Livadia, he had reported this exploit to the Tsar, who thereupon produced a secret dispatch from Constantinople, which stated that Aehrenthal had promised Turkey to drop the judicial reforms entirely if Austria-Hungary were given a concession to build a railway through the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar into Macedonia. Isvolsky declared it to be incredible, and the Tsar put the dispatch into the fire. Nevertheless, when the Conference of Ambassadors met to consider the scheme of judicial reforms, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador joined his German colleagues in obstructing it, and at the end of January Aehrenthal publicly announced that he was about to obtain the concession for the Sanjak railway, which he described as "constituting a new and important route from Central Europe to Egypt and India."¹ The Sultan, on German advice,

¹ Steed, "Through Thirty Years," Vol. I., p. 269. The importance of the Sanjak was that its occupation by Austria kept Serbia and Montenegro divided and that a railway through it would have provided an all-Austrian route to the Aegean and the East.

granted the concession, seeing in it a welcome opportunity of setting Austria-Hungary and Russia by the ears, and at the same time getting rid of the judicial reforms.¹ Whether Aehrenthal ever seriously intended that the railway should be built is extremely doubtful, but the concession was a useful counter in the game which he was about to play with Isvolsky.

The Russian was now more than ever determined to push on with the opening of the Straits, and, stifling whatever resentment he may have felt, he continued his *pourparlers* through the summer of 1908. By the end of August he had received, or supposed himself to have received, enough encouragement to cause him to accept an invitation to meet Aehrenthal at Buchlau, the country house in Bohemia of Berchtold, the Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg, on September 15. Exactly what happened there was for long the subject of recriminations between the two men and of gossip in Europe. All manner of versions have found currency, but we now have among the published documents the versions of both men, Aehrenthal's in a long undated memorandum published in the Austrian Documents; ² Isvolsky's in a memorandum handed to Sir Francis Bertie, the British Ambassador in Paris, on October 4, and in the report of a conversation with Sir Francis the same day, both published in the British Documents.³

A comparison of these leaves little doubt as to the truth. Both accounts are misleading in so far as they suggest that the two men were discussing propositions which had not previously been explored. Isvolsky was not hearing of the annexation for the first time, nor proposing the opening of the Straits on the spur of the moment. On the contrary, he brought with him a formula whereby Austrian consent was to be obtained to the opening of the Straits:

L'Autriche-Hongrie donne l'assurance d'observer une attitude bienveillante et amicale dans le cas où la Russie se verrait amenée par ses intérêts à faire des démarches pour obtenir le libre passage à travers les Dardanelles de bateaux de guerre Russes isolés. Il est bien entendu que cette modification des droits existants ne doit pas porter atteinte à l'indépendance et à la sécurité de la Capitale Ottomane et que cette même facilité ne pourrait être refusée aux autres Etats riverains de la Mer Noire.

On the other hand it is as certain as anything can be that Isvolsky did not, as Aehrenthal suggests, accept the evacuation of the Sanjak and the abandonment of the railway, which Aehrenthal now proposed, as sufficient compensation for Russia, but on the contrary

¹ Austrian Documents, I., No. 74.

² *Ibid.*

³ G. and T., Vol. V., Nos. 292-3.

proposed the annexation and the opening of the Straits as part and counterpart of the same bargain and to be executed at the same time. Aehrenthal endeavours to prove that he warned Isvolsky that Austria, being in a state of necessity (*Zwangelage*), might be compelled to take a sudden decision, but according to his own account he agreed to wait until he had received from Isvolsky a written summary of the conclusions arrived at in their conversation, and in any case to give him notification in good time (*rechtzeitige Verständigung*), if he was compelled to act.

If he had any reason to suppose that the Austrian Minister contemplated immediate action, Isvolsky behaved with extraordinary imprudence in leaving Buchlau without a definite understanding as to the dates on which the joint policy should be announced. But the whole of his subsequent action bears out his assertion that Aehrenthal spoke of the annexation as still in a future for which no date was fixed or even definite decision taken.¹ What he evidently hoped or expected was that he would be given time to prepare the way with the other Governments for the opening of the Straits, and then on his return to St. Petersburg about the middle of October that an announcement would be made by the two Governments simultaneously of the proposals which they intended jointly to lay before the Powers.

Accordingly, soon after leaving Buchlau he started on a pilgrimage round Europe to seek the acquiescence of the Powers to his part of the programme. He went first to Italy where he saw Signor Tittoni, the Italian Foreign Secretary, and then proceeded to Paris. At Paris, on October 3, he received a telegram from Aehrenthal briefly intimating that circumstances compelled him to proceed with his part of the scheme. On October 5 came Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria's proclamation of Independence, which undoubtedly had been concerted² with Austria and served to give her the appearance of having had her hands forced to the next step—the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was announced in a proclamation by the Emperor Francis Joseph, the following day (October 6). Aehrenthal had thus jumped his own claim and left his partner in the lurch. Isvolsky's predicament was painful and even ridiculous. He was left wandering about

¹ "Celui-ci me dit que certain circonstances pourraient déterminer l'Autriche à annexer la Bosnie et l'Herzégovine, sans pourtant me parler d'une décision définitive ni d'une date rapprochée."—Memorandum to Bertie.

² See G. and T., Vol. V., No. 29. Aehrenthal's prevarication on this subject brought down on him subsequently a deserved rebuke from Sir Edward Goschen: "That is the truth, but you, my dear Minister, do not love the truth." Steed, "Through Thirty Years," Vol. I., p. 293.

Europe with a vague project which was now all but hopeless. The other Powers might have consented to a joint-deal at the expense of Turkey for the sake of a settlement between Austria and Russia, but to make this important concession merely to get Isvolsky out of a scrape into which he had got himself in a not very reputable intrigue with Austria behind the backs of the other Powers was too much to ask. When he came on to London he was more like a bruised and battered man seeking charitable assistance than a powerful Minister starting negotiations on behalf of his country.

The announcement of the annexation raised a storm in Europe. The Russian public, which knew nothing about the steps which had led up to it, was furious. The Serbians raised a wild protest at being cut off from their brothers in the annexed States, and, according to the established practice of these times, immediately demanded compensation, and appealed to Russia to help them in getting it. The Young Turks declared it to be an outrage and started an organized boycott of Austrian goods in Turkey. Germany, as the Kaiser foresaw, found herself deposed from her privileged position in Constantinople, and Britain for a brief moment was hoisted on to the vacant pedestal and acclaimed the friend and Protectress of the young and Liberal nationality against the despotic oppressor in Europe. Marschall von Bieberstein reported to Berlin that his laborious work over years had been destroyed at one stroke. Most of the traditional rôles were now reversed, and the Turk stood before the world as the innocent victim of European lawlessness.

III

All eyes were now on Great Britain, and she, willy-nilly, found herself at the centre of the storm. It had been Aehrenthal's calculation that Germany was bound to support Austria, and that, if the two stood together, Russia and France would submit. France had only a remote interest in this Balkan affair, and Russia after her recent defeat was notoriously unready for war. But both Austrians and Germans were aware that, if Britain took a strong line, these two might be spurred to action, and then the situation would immediately become dangerous. The British view, as it turned out, differed from that of any of the other parties, and was in various ways displeasing to them all. Sir Edward Grey earnestly believed that the action of Austria in presenting Europe

with the accomplished fact was a blow to good faith and treaty obligations which must be retrieved by an orderly regularizing of the situation through a Conference of the Powers. He also held that the annexation was an untimely and unmerited blow to the Turks, who, as it then seemed, were struggling gallantly to set their house in order. Accordingly he called for a Conference of the Powers and, if the annexation were sanctioned, for reasonable compensation for the Turk.

The other Powers cared for none of these things. Germans and Austrians held that a "state of necessity," such as Austria pleaded, justified the violation of any treaty. Russia was thinking much less of the legalities than of the attainment of her principal object, the opening of the Straits. France thought the moment unfavourable for any high line, and wished only to get through the crisis without trouble. As things stood, the easiest way out seemed to her that Isvolsky should obtain British sanction to the opening of the Straits, and be able to present himself, on his return to St. Petersburg, as having obtained ample compensation for Russia—the rôle he originally intended. It was, therefore, a serious check to all these ideas when Isvolsky on reaching London found Grey and Asquith resolute about summoning a Conference, and strongly opposed to the opening of the Straits except on terms which were unacceptable to Russia. The British point of view was that if Russia's warships were permitted to come out of the Black Sea, other warships should be permitted to go into it, which was not at all what Russia wanted. In any case Grey thought it untimely and unfair to the Turks to add to the Austrian *coup* a demand for the opening of the Straits.

Most of the other Governments found it extremely difficult to understand these views and still more to think them honest. England, they said, could not be so quixotic as to attach this inordinate importance to legalizing a situation which could not be changed, and though she might have sound business reasons for currying favour with the Turks, her high-flown sympathy with their Liberal Revolution was too transparent to be taken at its face value. Aehrenthal and Tittoni, the Italian Foreign Minister, confided to each other that they found English policy totally unintelligible, and the Austrian Ambassador in Paris reported that the French too were mystified and troubled.

On the German and Austrian side the conclusion was quickly drawn that England was up to her old game of making mischief on the Continent. Khevenhüller, the Austrian Ambassador in

Paris, reported to his Government that he had learnt "from a highly confidential source" that she was giving very destructive advice in Paris:

She wished to drive France into war. Clemenceau and Pichon had been told that the moment for the *Revanche* had come, and that so favourable an opportunity would never recur. Austria-Hungary being engaged on the Balkan front could give Germany little help as an ally. Germany now stood alone against Russia, France and England. A way would be found for Italy to get out of her pledge to the Triple Alliance. I believe, indeed, that in spite of these incitements and the prospect of help held out to her, France shrinks from entering on war-like action against Germany. She thinks, and I agree, that however such an adventure might turn out, it would be the end of the present regime in France.¹ (November 11, 1908.)

A few weeks later (December 15) Aehrenthal wrote to the Austrian Ambassador in Berlin an even more circumstantial story about English machinations:

I learn from a trustworthy source that an intimate friend of Herr Clemenceau's residing in Vienna reports that in the past two months King Edward has made every effort to induce Clemenceau to give the English-French *Entente* an aggressive edge against Germany. Clemenceau, he said, was greatly incensed by that, and had made it clear that he could not follow English policy along that road, and must consider the way best calculated to divest the English-French *Entente* of the war-like tendency which King Edward was so anxious to give it. Clemenceau had gone to the length of contemplating a complete breach with England in case King Edward persisted in wanting to use French co-operation for the satisfaction of his warlike velleities (*Velleitäten*) against Germany. Although possibly this interpretation of Clemenceau's views was not to be taken literally, it afforded just ground for the suspicion that in the course of the recent negotiations, the French Prime Minister had met the persistent pressure of King Edward with this threat.²

Since the editors of the Austrian Documents have drawn special attention to these passages as throwing a new light on the history of the Bosnian Crisis, it is perhaps necessary to repeat Lord Grey's specific denial that British policy had any such tendency as is here imputed to it.³ The suggestion is intrinsically absurd. As the British documents show, Sir Edward Grey, while adhering firmly to his ideas of a fair and legal settlement, used his influence with both Serbians and Turks to moderate their demands for compensation, and was indefatigable in his search for formulas which would enable a Conference to be held without lowering the pride of either Russia or Austria. If other witnesses are needed, there is the loyal testimony of Mensdorff, the Austrian Ambassador in

¹ Austrian Documents, I., pp. 419-20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 603.

³ "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., pp. 189-90.

London, who constantly endeavoured, though apparently without success, to persuade his Government that Grey sincerely desired peace, and had none of the motives and intentions that European gossip imputed to him.

IV

But though British good faith was never for a moment in doubt, a right understanding of this phase is of great importance in the history of the Anglo-French *Entente*. All through 1907 and 1908 Clemenceau, then Prime Minister, had expressed himself as greatly concerned at the inequality of risks in the relations of Britain and France. I have recorded in a previous chapter that in an interview I had with him in 1907 he spoke strongly about his fear that France would have to bear the brunt of the rising quarrel between British and Germans on the naval question, and on August 26, 1908, just before the Bosnian crisis, when he visited King Edward at Carlsbad in company with Isvolsky, he appears to have discoursed in the same strain. He "spoke with considerable apprehension of the international outlook and appeared to think a conflict probable, a conflict that would be brought about by some imprudence on the part of English public men, or, some untimely movement of English public opinion." "Although," he went on to say, "there is much talk of the invasion of England by Germany, no one seriously believes it possible, and confidence in the power of the British fleet to destroy the German fleet in case of need has not been seriously impaired. But for France the danger of invasion is very real. We know that on the morrow of the outbreak of war between Germany and England, the German armies will invade France by way of Belgium, and that Germany will seek in France an indemnity for the losses likely to be suffered on sea at the hands of England. What can England do to help us? Destroy the German fleet? *L'Angleterre ferait aussi un beau trou dans l'eau?* In 1870 there was no German fleet, but the Prussians entered Paris all the same." ¹

The mood is precisely the same as that which overtook the French in 1901 after they had concluded their first preliminary agreement with Russia and before they had converted it into an Alliance with a Military Convention. They had exposed themselves to the wrath of Germany and yet had no guarantee that they would have military assistance from Russia, if they were attacked by

¹ "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., pp. 628-9.

Germany. Clemenceau drew the same moral as his predecessors. The English must have a conscript army like the French, and at once. "It is difficult," he told the King, "to get Englishmen to look at things from our point of view, or to understand the exigencies of our situation. Some of your public men are appallingly ignorant. The fact is that England cannot maintain her position in Europe or the world, nor can her friendship with France be secure against surprises, unless she has an adequate army. *Ce n'est pas à Trafalgar, qui était une bien brillante victoire navale, mais à Waterloo, qui était une bien petite bataille, que l'Angleterre a cassé le cou à Napoleon.*" Substantially during these months it was M. Clemenceau's view that England, without an army, as he reckoned armies, had no right to take the lead in any European policy which might end in war, and he looked with uneasiness, not to say alarm, at the resolute way in which a British Government was challenging Austria and Germany upon what was rapidly becoming for both of them a point of honour.

There is no evidence that King Edward had any further conversation with Clemenceau, but the Marienbad interview was enough. All Europe was now buzzing with the things which King Edward said or was supposed to have said in his talks with the French, Russian and other notabilities to whom he had unburdened himself during his cure at Marienbad; and gossips at the Austrian Court added to them certain frank observations which he was alleged to have made about the Emperor William and German policy at his subsequent visit to the Emperor Francis Joseph at Ischl. His biographer records that he came away "sorely disappointed,"¹ and the net result of his summer activities was to reinforce the legend that he was energetically at work on his policy of encircling Germany and getting even with his nephew, the German Emperor. What handles King Edward may have given to the malicious is judged best by those who knew him, but Clemenceau was not a man who measured his words; and in his state of irritation at British policy he may well have confided to "an intimate friend" that the French were less zealous than the British about the need of vindicating public law in the affair of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This by-play within the groups becomes of increasing importance as we go forward. Europe was playing the dangerous game of the balance of power without any rules to govern the conduct of allies and friends, let alone the conduct of the opposing groups.

¹ "Life of King Edward," Vol. II., p. 626.

The most intimate contact between the members of each group, and the most careful measurement of the forces controlled by each were necessary, if the game was to be played with even relative safety, yet whenever the curtain is raised, friends and allies are seen acting independently of each other and even forcing each other's hands, while neither of the groups made any serious attempt to weigh the probable result if they came into collision with one another. The English had two answers to Clemenceau's insistence that they should provide themselves with a conscript army; first that they had a rooted objection to the conscript system as part of their normal apparatus and in addition to the immense effort they were making in naval preparations; and next that the visible preparation of such an army would almost certainly precipitate a German attack before it could be ready for action. But in general their meaning was that they had no desire to extend their liabilities and least of all to convert the *Entente* into a fighting Alliance in Europe. To France, they said in effect, "You can have our help on these terms within the limits of the *Entente*, but beyond that we are not prepared to go."

The French saw it otherwise. If British power was thus limited, if there was to be no British army commensurate with the armies of Europe, British policy in their view must be limited accordingly. The British Foreign Secretary must not take a line which disturbed the European equilibrium, for, if he did, the consequences would fall, first of all and most destructively, on France, which would then pay the penalty for British friendship. Undoubtedly the French had reason, and in a perfectly organized world of power-politics a British Government must have made its choice. But this clear-cut French logic was alien from British statesmanship. British Ministers were neither prepared for an abdication, which would have been inconsistent with British interests, nor for a complete plunge into the European vortex. They believed that they could act as a steadying force in Europe—play the part which Montesquieu assigned to them of *Puissance Médiatrice*—and the better so if they were known not to be committed unconditionally in all circumstances to the support of one side.

V

The Bosnia-Herzegovina story must now be carried to its conclusion. Sir Edward Grey held his ground in insisting on an eventual conference, but he was willing to accept the Austrian

stipulations that the annexation should be accepted without further discussion by the Powers in Conference, provided that in the meantime they came to a settlement with Turkey. This they did after much hard bargaining on the basis of money compensation to the Turks and the situation was to that extent relieved.

But after six months, during which Austrian and Russian troops stood facing each other on the frontier, Isvolsky was still on his high horse, demanding that the Conference should discuss everything, and to all appearances backing the Serbs in their agitation and demands for compensation, which Grey was endeavouring to keep within moderate limits. The battle had now become a duel between Isvolsky and Aehrenthal, the former vociferating his charge of duplicity and treachery and the latter retaliating by threatening to publish their correspondence before the Buchlau interview. Isvolsky was more than ever incensed by this threat, which appeared greatly to alarm him. It is to be presumed that in his zeal to procure the opening of the Straits he had at this stage shown much less concern for Serb and Slav interests than he developed as the controversy proceeded. The threat appears to have been the last straw, and, though Isvolsky repeated that Aehrenthal was no gentleman, he knew well that Russia was not in a position to go to war and had discovered by this time that no one else wanted to fight.

But to find a dignified way down for Isvolsky from his high horse was by no means easy, and for some time the military chiefs in Vienna stoutly resisted the idea of composing the quarrel. Conrad insisted, as usual, that now was the time for a final settlement with Serbia; and Moltke, the German Chief of Staff, assured him that he was wholly of the same opinion.¹ The same two men were to be seen performing the same parts six years later. But by this time Aehrenthal was for prudence, having pondered over the racial complications which threatened for the monarchy and the unlikelihood of recovering the costs of a war, though it marched to the most successful conclusion. At this point Bülow represents himself as having played the part of "honest broker" on the solicitation of the Russian Ambassador in Berlin, and he would have us believe that he acted in the friendliest and most conciliatory manner. What he actually did, as the documents show, was to instruct the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg to inform the Russian Government that Germany was ready to advise Austria to

¹ Conrad, "Lebenserinnerungen," Vol. I., p. 39.

seek the formal consent of the Powers to the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, provided Russia would signify her consent to the latest Austrian Note (requiring her among other things to refrain from supporting Serbia) and would agree without any condition whatever to the necessary change in the Treaty of Berlin. The answer was to be yes or no, any argument of qualification to count as no. If the answer was no, Germany would stand aside and let things take their course,¹ i.e. raise no objection to an Austrian attack on Serbia. Isvolsky answered that he must seek the instructions of the Tsar, and on the same day (March 22) the Tsar telegraphed to the Kaiser saying yes. He "rejoiced that Germany had discovered this possibility of a friendly settlement and would instruct Isvolsky to accept it," though "at the same time earnestly requesting the Kaiser to prevent a warlike attack upon Serbia in all circumstances."

However wrapped up, it was an ultimatum. Isvolsky gnashed his teeth; there was wrath and consternation in Russia, but as he was not prepared to fight, the Tsar could do nothing but accept. Bülow stigmatizes as "a lie" spread by Isvolsky the statement that "Germany had brought Russia to heel by threats, by a thrust of the mailed fist." If it was a lie, it was repeated a year later by the German Emperor, who said in a speech at Vienna that if the peace of Europe had been kept, it was because he, William II, had stood shoulder to shoulder with Austria-Hungary, and "confronted the world in shining armour." This flourish is said to have caused great annoyance to the Emperor Francis Joseph, who desired to appear before the world as having carried the affair through with his own unaided right arm, but undoubtedly it corresponded to what Russia believed to have been the truth, and this was the main fact for the future. The Tsar had suffered a serious blow to his prestige, and it was from this time forward extremely improbable that he would submit peacefully to any similar stroke on the part of Germany and Austria.

VI

It may be asked after the lapse of years why the conversion of the Austrian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina into annexation should have caused this turmoil. The Austrians were in posses-

¹ G.P., XXVI (1), No. 9460, p. 693. Dispatch from Bülow to Pourtalès, German Ambassador in St. Petersburg.

sion; no one at the time thought of disturbing them; their administration had on the whole been successful and was acknowledged to be a great improvement on the previous Turkish rule. Why all this trouble about turning the *de facto* into a *de jure* position?

Austria pretended to think that the Young Turks after their successful revolution in Constantinople would endeavour to revive the dormant claims of Turkey to the two provinces, and that it was necessary to get in front of this by annexing them. But this danger was extremely remote and all Europe would have been against the Turks, if they had attempted anything so foolish. The truth belongs to the psychology of the old Europe, and Grey was undoubtedly right in perceiving that the Austrian stroke was an act of self-assertion which would have far-reaching consequences if the other Powers condoned it. To maintain the theory, even though it had become a fiction, of the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire was still a matter of high importance for the peace of the world. It kept at a distance the dangerous struggle which all foresaw, so soon as the dissolution of this Empire became a gross and acknowledged fact; it acted as a shelter under which the Powers could work their will upon the tottering fabric without imperilling the precarious peace with one another; it saved the face and salved the pride of the Turk, who could, if he chose, still indulge dreams of asserting his shadowy suzerainty. All had paid homage to the formula—Austria in occupying Bosnia-Herzegovina, Britain in occupying Egypt and Cyprus, Bulgaria in making herself a self-governing Principality.

But if anyone broke the spell, the universal instinct said that all were threatened. It would be known to the whole world that Turkey really was in dissolution. It was certain that Austria could do nothing without setting Bulgaria in motion and starting agitations in Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece for "compensation" which, though at the expense of the Turk, would raise serious questions between the Powers. There was scarcely one of these Powers which by now had not vital interests in the partition, whenever it came. Germany, committed to the Baghdad Railway and evidently attempting to procure an economic ascendancy over Turkey, could no longer say that Balkan disputes were not worth the bones of one Pomeranian. Russia had never abandoned her dream of possessing Constantinople and controlling the Straits, and believed her leadership of the Slavs to be vital to her prestige and bound up with the existence of her monarchy. Italy was deeply

interested in anything that befell on the Adriatic coast, and Great Britain had by no means revoked her traditional idea that her position in the Mediterranean might be seriously prejudiced by any considerable change in the *status quo*. All felt that this *status quo* was doomed when Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A YEAR OF TROUBLE

Did Germany Know?—The Kaiser's Anger—Bülow's Advice—A German Necessity—Austria's "Absolute Certainty" and the Reason for it—Two Aggravating Events—The Kaiser's *Daily Telegraph* Interview—Bülow's Action and Explanations—A Kaiser Crisis—The Casablanca Incident—The Austrian Emperor's Intervention.

I

DID Germany know of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina? Was it concerted with her in advance? The question is of real importance, for it has an obvious bearing on the larger question of Germany's responsibility for events in the Balkans, which from this time onwards were more and more to determine the fate of the European Alliances.

It is certain that the Kaiser did not know. Bülow's testimony on that point is decisive and it is confirmed by the Kaiser's marginal comments on the dispatches of these days. He was greatly stirred by the insult to his favourites, the Turks; he was also very angry at the fact that Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria should have arrogated to himself the title of "Majesty" without having first consulted him. Walking with Bülow in the garden of the Imperial Chancellery on the day after the annexation had been announced, "His Majesty in a perfect torrent of words, proposed a complete change in German foreign policy." Instant demands were to be made in Vienna for the withdrawal of the edict of annexation and the retirement of Aehrenthal. Never should the presumptuous Bulgar be granted the title of Majesty,¹ etc. To fill the cup of his wrath, the Kaiser was also extremely annoyed at the series of accidents, all of which can scarcely have been accidental, which prevented his Austrian brother's letter announcing the annexation from reaching him until after the fact had been reported in the newspapers.

Bülow represents himself as having immediately quenched these ardours, and as having succeeded, after an hour and a half

¹ Bülow, "Memoirs, 1903-9," pp. 331-2.

discussion in "completely converting the Kaiser" to the view that Austria must on no account be denied German support, though she must be restrained from dragging Germany into war. But how much Bülow himself knew is not to be discovered either from his own account or from the published correspondence. It was his habit not to know things which he did not want to know, and he may have deemed this to have been an occasion for discreet nescience. But on the face of it Aehrenthal seems to have been nearly as tricky in his dealings with him as with Isvolsky. For on September 26, ten days before the annexation was announced, he wrote him a letter of which the natural interpretation was that Austria had secured the consent of Russia. "Russia put the annexation of the two Provinces *sur le tapis* right at the beginning of the negotiations. At Buchlau, after I had laid before him a detailed statement of our motives, Isvolsky declared himself agreed in principle to the method of advance which I had in view and assured me of a friendly attitude on the part of Russia."¹ The letter, indeed, is so skilfully constructed that its main object might seem to be to prepare the German Chancellor for the raising of the question of the Straits, and to assure him that in such encouragement as he had given to Isvolsky on this subject, he had been careful to guard the interests of Germany.

Whether he saw through it or not, Bülow acted on the assumption that Russian consent had been obtained, and his main argument in conveying this letter to the Kaiser was that, this being so, Germany could not possibly be less forthcoming to Austria than Russia had been:

The intended annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary will possibly be the signal for a declaration of independence by Bulgaria and for the Union of Crete with Greece. However, *after Baron Aehrenthal has secured the consent of Russia* [italics mine], and in the present situation in Europe, we cannot oppose the wishes of Austria. Our position would become a truly serious one, if Austria lost faith in us and swung away from us. So long as we both stand together, we form a block, like the old German Bund for fifty years, which no one will easily outweigh. Especially in the great questions of the East ought we not to place ourselves in opposition to Austria-Hungary, which has nearer and more important interests in the Balkan Peninsula than we have. Austria-Hungary would never forgive us a refusal or a merely procrastinating and grudging attitude on the question of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. His Majesty the Emperor Francis Joseph, and with him official Austria, sees in the possession of these two Provinces compensation for the loss of the Italian Provinces and of his former position in Germany.²

¹ G.P., XXVI (1), No. 8934, p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, No. 8937, p. 46.

If, as Bülow says, the Kaiser's conversion to this view was complete, it was also extremely reluctant, and his marginal comments on Aehrenthal's letter rise to a high pitch of excitement and irritation. "It is an act of piracy on Turkey"; "I personally am deeply wounded in my feelings as an ally"; "Our whole position in Turkey, achieved by twenty years of friendly policy is imperilled by Austria, as well as our relations with Greece"; "Bulgaria is now nothing but Russia's advance-guard" (a curious misreading of the future), etc. etc. In the end he was induced to say that he agreed that his Austrian brother was under the necessity of taking this step, but he still expressed his lively displeasure that others, including the French President, had been apprised of it earlier than he had, and that he, "the Emperor William, the faithful ally of his Imperial, Royal and Apostolic Majesty had been left to learn of it first from the newspapers."¹ This was said to the Austrian Ambassador, Szogyeny, on October 6. On the same day, the Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, on the instructions of the Chancellor, told all the Ambassadors, including Herr Flotow, the Austrian Chargé d'Affaires, that Austria had acted entirely on her own initiative, and that the position of Germany in view of her specially good relations, not only with Austria-Hungary but with Turkey, was not an easy one. Germany, however, in view of her thirty years' friendly Alliance with Austria-Hungary which for all this time had secured the peace of Europe, would stand by her side, considering the maintenance of this Alliance, to be the guiding-line of her policy.² Germany, too, like Austria, was evidently acting under necessity.

What this necessity was we shall learn more precisely if we now turn to the Austrian Documents. On August 19, 1908, Aehrenthal presided over a Council of Austrian and Hungarian Ministers, with the Chief of the General Staff (Conrad von Hötzendorf) in attendance, and explained to them his plan for the forthcoming annexation. When asked about the probable attitude of the Powers, he replied that they could be "absolutely sure (*unbedingt sicher*) of Germany, since she was now thrown back on (*angewiesen*) Austria alone, especially after Kaiser William's rejection at Cronberg of King Edward's proposal to limit the legally established German Naval Programme."³ Kaiser William, it seems, had joyfully communicated this news to Vienna without perceiving the inference that would be drawn from it or the use which would be made of

¹ Austrian Documents, Szogyeny to Aehrenthal, I., p. 156.

² *Ibid.*, I., p. 138.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

it. The British-German naval contention was thus a material factor in the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, on the rejection of the latest British overture, Austria felt free to go ahead with the "absolute certainty" that Germany must follow. Aehrenthal was justified by the event, and he knew in advance the arguments which Bülow would and must put to the Kaiser. The Kaiser might pour out his torrent of words, and cry aloud at the destruction of his hard-won position in Turkey, but he had decided that and much more when he lost his temper with Sir Charles Hardinge at Cronberg. The refusal to heal the breach with England had delivered German policy into the hands of Austria.

II

Right in the middle of the Bosnian crisis came two incidents which greatly increased the turmoil and created further bad blood between the groups. The first was the publication in the *Daily Telegraph* of October 29, 1908, of the famous interview with the Kaiser; the second the Casablanca incident, which seemed at one moment to threaten another serious crisis between the French and Germans on the subject of Morocco.

Of the interview it can only be said that if some ingenious person had set himself to pack into a few thousand words all the things most calculated to set Germans and English by the ears he could hardly have done better. The Kaiser said that he took "as a personal insult" the "distortions and misrepresentations" of his "repeated offers of friendship to England" by a considerable section of the English press and added that his own position in seeking friendship with England was the more difficult because only a minority of his countrymen—though it was true an influential minority—shared his feelings. Then came what Bülow in his "Memoirs" calls the "three enormities." First the Kaiser claimed to have refused the request of the Governments of France and Russia to join with them in saving the Boer Republic, and "humiliating England to the dust"; next he declared that in the darkest days of the South African War he had worked out with one of his officers a plan of campaign for England which was "among the State papers at Windsor Castle awaiting the serenely impartial verdict of history"—a plan which, "as a matter of curious coincidence" was on much the same lines as that adopted by Lord Roberts and by him successfully carried out; and third, Germany

was not building her fleet against England but to be ready for eventualities in the Far East—a glancing side-shot at England's ally, Japan.

The English thought it great impertinence, but for the most part laughed, as is their wont. The Germans were furiously angry, both at the picture of them which the Kaiser had presented to the English, and at his apparent claim to be the real conqueror of the Boers, with whom they had a lively sympathy. The Kaiser, it afterwards appeared, had evened matters out in another interview with an American journalist, in which he warned Americans against English trickery and hostility, and advised them to seek German protection against the perfidious Albion, whose unwearying friend he had professed to be in the English interview. This was intercepted and suppressed in the nick of time, but the one interview was enough. It caused an immediate crisis in Germany, and at one moment it even seemed possible that the Kaiser would have to abdicate. He had in any case to submit to a mortifying debate in the Reichstag and a defence by Bülow which deeply wounded his pride and led to an estrangement between him and Bülow, which ended a year later in the latter's downfall.

Bülow has given an elaborate account¹ of his part in this affair, and he would have us believe that he, who, according to his own account, lived in constant apprehension of the Kaiser's indiscretions, let pass through his hands without reading it, a "manuscript" which the Kaiser desired to have published in an English newspaper. It was badly written;² he was very busy; it did not occur to him that there was anything unusual in the Kaiser's communicating with an English newspaper. And one high official after another, whom he asked to read it, certified that there was nothing to object to in it, and nothing to correct beyond a few trifles such as the name of a German official! After the mine had exploded, he issued what he thought an extremely generous *communiqué*, taking the blame on himself, in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*:

A considerable section of the home and foreign press has directed severe criticism against the person of His Majesty the Emperor, in connexion with a recent article, published in the English *Daily Telegraph*, on the false supposition that the Emperor had permitted its publication without foreknowledge of those responsible for the Foreign Policy of the Empire. This belief is altogether unfounded. A private citizen of England had submitted to His Majesty an article in which were summed up a series of conversations our Emperor had

¹ Bülow's "Memoirs, 1903-9," Chapters XXII.-XXIV.

² It was neatly type-written, with the Kaiser's notes in the margin.

had, at different times, with various other persons in England. The intention behind the request was to make these observations of His Majesty known to as wide a circle of English readers as possible, thus furthering the cause of good Anglo-German understanding. His Majesty forwarded the article to the Chancellor, who submitted it to our Foreign Office with the request that it should be carefully read through. Since no objection was raised in the report returned by the Foreign Office permission to publish was given, and it appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. When the Imperial Chancellor learned of its publication and contents he informed His Majesty that he, personally, had never seen the draft of the article, and that, had he seen it, he would have advised against its publication, but that he considered himself solely responsible for what had occurred, and absolved the officials and departments under him. At the same time the Imperial Chancellor tendered his resignation to His Majesty, which the Emperor refused to accept, but consented to Prince Bülow's proposal that the latter, by making public the above statement of facts, should be enabled finally to dispose of any criticism directed against the person of our Emperor.

If one competent witness may be believed, this "statement of facts" was, if not a direct falsehood, a prevarication from beginning to end. Sir Rennell Rodd relates that Bülow's private secretary, Freiherr von Müller, finding himself charged with not having carried out instructions to report on the contents of the manuscript document, left on record, in the form of a letter to Bülow, a full statement of the facts. According to this, what actually took place was as follows :

The manuscript recording the interview between William II and Gen. Stuart Wortley, his host at Highcliffe, was brought to Bülow in the country by the Emperor's equerry with a direct order from the Sovereign not to let it pass out of his hands, and on no account to forward it to the German Foreign Office at Berlin. He nevertheless directed Müller to dispatch it forthwith to the Foreign Office without instructing him to read it or report on it. When it returned from Berlin, a reply to the Emperor was dictated to Müller by the Chancellor, who signed the fair copy himself.¹

His intimates, Bülow tells us, considered that he took more blame than was due to him, but he was willing to sacrifice himself to "keep the Crown well out of the firing line." In the same lofty spirit he made a speech in the Reichstag in which the Kaiser figured as an *enfant terrible* for whom his guardian, the Chancellor, had magnanimously undertaken to go bail on his promise to behave better in the future. Bülow in fact desires us to believe that he played a brave and chivalrous part in an affair in which everyone was to blame but himself.

The story strains credulity. No one was more skilful than

¹ Article by Sir Rennell Rodd in *John o' London's Weekly*, May 7, 1932.

Bülow in not knowing what he did not want to know, and, even if we discard the malicious suggestion that he thought to increase his own power by letting the Kaiser blunder into this scrape, it remains probable that he deliberately turned the blind eye to the fatal "packet" when it reached him at his country house at Nordeney. Correcting the Kaiser in his wilful moods had by this time become an uncomfortable business to be passed on, if possible, to underlings, who in this case seem to have passed it back, with only such observations as would have been pleasing to the All-Highest, if they had met his eye. In any case and even on the best construction it was an enormous risk which the Chancellor appears to have taken with his eyes open, and the complacent pages in which he records his own conduct and emotions leave us not for the first time in his narrative with a certain sympathy for the impetuous monarch who was so ill-served by his Minister.

III

The Casablanca incident which had boiled up simultaneously with the Kaiser crisis was a trivial affair arising out of the conduct of a German Consul in harbouring German deserters from the French Foreign Legion in Morocco. It might easily have been composed by a civil exchange of Notes, but it was stoked up in Berlin, as if to provide a diversion from the internal turmoil, and for a fortnight or more it seemed as if Germany was going to overlay the Bosnian crisis, which by this time was threatening war on another front, with a dangerous altercation with France. The Austrians, bent on their own affair and anxious above everything to keep the favour of the French, thought it most untimely, and the Emperor Francis Joseph, whom the German Emperor happened to be visiting about this time, intervened personally with a strong plea for peace. In this he was successful, but the result nevertheless was to stiffen the backs of Pichon and Clemenceau. Seeing the drift of events, the Austrian Ambassador in Paris sought to remind French Ministers of the service which his royal and Imperial master had rendered to France, but from this time forward with little result.

THE NAVAL AGITATION

A *Détente*—The Racconigi Agreement—Renewal of British-German Naval Agitation—Metternich and the Kaiser—A Conference in Berlin—The German Danger-Zone—The Kaiser's New Thoughts—His Conditions for Peace with England.

I

THE last months of the year 1909 were outwardly a period of *détente*. Bulgaria and Turkey were reconciled with the aid of Russia, which paid the difference in money compensation between what the Turks demanded and what the Bulgarians were willing or able to pay for the assertion of their independence. A Bulgarian delegation visited London to lay wreaths on the tomb of Gladstone, their champion and liberator, and Gladstone celebrations were held in Sofia. Tsar Ferdinand next paid a visit to King Milan in Belgrade as if to testify that the two Balkan Sovereigns were ready to make common cause in whatever might come next. More encouraging still, the Young Turks deposed Abdul Hamid, and to all appearance set seriously to work at reforming the Turkish administration. Finally, the Morocco question seemed at length to be disposed of by a Franco-German agreement in which Germany recognized the special interests of France, and France promised fair and equal treatment of German commercial interests in Morocco. In the following year the Tsar visited Potsdam and made a special arrangement of his own with the Kaiser about the Baghdad Railway, which caused much apprehension to France and England. Both feared that he had had one of those revulsions of feeling which more than once had all but thrown him back into the arms of Germany.

Nevertheless, the old quarrels persisted below the surface, and some of them were taking new turns. Italy, in particular, was nursing a new grievance. In her view the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was in flat defiance of Article VII of the Treaty of the Triple Alliance, which stipulated that "if Austria-Hungary or

Italy should find themselves under the necessity of modifying the *status quo* by a temporary or permanent occupation on their part, this occupation shall take place only after a previous agreement between the two Powers, based upon the principle of a reciprocal compensation for every advantage, territorial or other, which each of them might obtain beyond the present *status quo*.”¹ To treat Austria as she had treated Italy was now the thought of the Italian Foreign Minister, Tittoni, and he found his opportunity when the Tsar visited the King of Italy at Racconigi, near Turin, bringing with him Isvolsky who, needless to say, was well disposed to this idea. There followed the Racconigi Agreement which, but for the excuse that Italy was repaying Austria in her own coin, would have to be branded as an act of duplicity comparable with Bismarck’s secret treaties, with Austria behind the back of Russia and Russia behind the back of Austria, while the League of the Three Emperors was still in being. In this agreement Russia and Italy pledged each other (1) that they would make no new agreement “concerning the European East” with a third Power except with the participation of the other, and (2) that they would “regard with benevolence, the one Russia’s interest on the question of the Straits, the other Italian interests in Tripoli and Cyrenaica.” It seems that the Italian Foreign Secretary was at the very same time negotiating a similar Treaty in almost the same words with Austria, and did in fact conclude it a few days later. He thus pledged himself separately to both Austria and Russia, and to each without the knowledge of the other, that he would not make an agreement concerning the Balkans with a third State, without their knowledge. A fine casuistry may just reconcile the words of these various pledges, but the Italian must have known that their value to both Russia and Austria lay in the fact that each supposed the pledge to her to be aimed at the other.²

¹ Pribram, Vol. I., p. 225. The Italian Ambassador in London assured me in November, 1908, that the Italian Government had no foreknowledge of the annexation, and there certainly was no agreement such as the Treaty contemplated.

² The details of this transaction are given in full by Professor Fay, “The Origins of the World War,” Vol. I., pp. 406-14. Italy was, in Bismarckian phraseology, “re-insured” with France also. In 1902 Prinetti, the Italian Foreign Secretary, exchanged Notes with Barrère, the French Ambassador in Rome, in which it was mutually agreed that both Powers should remain neutral if either was the object of a “direct or indirect aggression,” or if either “as the result of a direct provocation should find herself compelled, in defence of her honour or her security, to take the initiative of a declaration of war.” These phrases were verbally in accord with the stipulations of the Triple Alliance which bound Italy to assist Germany only in case Germany was attacked by France “without direct provocation”; and the Italians have always argued that these Notes were not in conflict with but a “counterpart” to the Triple Alliance. But it can hardly be denied that the phrases used in them left Italian allegiance on a fine edge. *Ibid.*, I., p. 147.

The transactions of these months bring out again one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Alliance system, namely, that none of the Allies could trust their partners not to go behind their backs and embarrass or betray them by secret dealings with the other camp or by separate action in the teeth of the supposed joint policy. There were certain performers on the European stage at this time who seem to have delighted in all opportunities of showing their virtuosity in this form of double-dealing. Yet on the main issue the attitude of Italy looks clear and straightforward. She never left her partners in the Triple Alliance in the slightest doubt that she could not afford any policy which brought her into conflict with the sea-power of Great Britain. Her warnings on this subject are so clear and based on such obvious reasons, that the fault cannot be imputed to her if they were disregarded. But the methods of her Foreign Office were often such as to play into the hands of the Austrian statesmen and soldiers who charged her with plotting behind their backs, as indeed they were plotting behind hers.

The Tsar ostentatiously avoided Austrian territory on his journey to Italy, and Aehrenthal tried in vain to negotiate a new Treaty with Russia. The Cretan movement for Union with Greece persisted in defiance of the Powers, most of whom thought it very untimely; and the formation of the Military League in Greece gave point to the rumour that a fighting alliance between the Balkan States was the subject of secret negotiations between Athens, Sofia and Belgrade. More than ever it was believed that the Turkish Empire was on the eve of dissolution and the many claimants for the succession were evidently watching for the hour.

II

As between the Western Powers the chief development of this time was the sharpening of the Anglo-German naval competition. In the autumn of 1908 the Sea-Lords of the British Admiralty reported that according to the programme laid down in the new German Navy Law, the margin of safety for Great Britain would rapidly diminish, and by the year 1914 be almost wiped out, unless immediate steps were taken to increase the number of capital ships under construction. These calculations were hotly contested by pacifists and economists, and the struggle over them came near to breaking the Asquith Government. In the end the Admiralty had its way, and, by a queer turn of the wheel, got even more ships

than it asked for. But the finding of the money precipitated the great Budget controversy in which for the first time in two hundred and fifty years the Peers challenged the control of finance by the House of Commons, and paid for their temerity by the Parliament Act of 1911. By the time this struggle was over the Kaiser and Admiral Tirpitz might have boasted that they had profoundly modified the British Constitution.

More serious still from the world point of view, this controversy greatly embittered British-German relations. The inflated estimates now necessary in Great Britain could only be justified to a Parliament predominantly Liberal and pacifist by the proved necessity of meeting a specific challenge. That challenge came only from Germany, and there could be no pretence about it, but it was impossible that Germany should day after day be presented to Parliament and public as the potential enemy, and the comparisons between German and British fighting strength be scanned daily by millions of anxious eyes without the hypothesis of war between the two countries coming visibly nearer. Ministers might use evasive phrases, or apologize for the technical necessity of making these comparisons, but the facts spoke, and in these months the idea of an inevitable struggle between the two peoples became deeply implanted in the minds of both. There was much debate about the accuracy of the statistics of naval strength presented by one side or the other, but the exact figures were of little consequence. On the assumption that war was probable, British preparations, as the event proved, were by no means excessive.

There was still a gleam of hope that the commotion in England might bring home to the Germans that, unless they set bounds to their naval ambitions, there could be no lasting peace between them and the English. Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, had risked place and reputation to tell his superiors in Berlin the truth on this matter; but their persistent belief that they knew the English better than he did combined with the Kaiser's passion for his fleet as an object in itself frustrated these efforts.

III

Indeed, the Kaiser's attitude reached the high-water mark of folly and obstinacy during these months. A dispatch of Metternich's (August 1, 1908) relating a conversation he had had with Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Lloyd George, who argued mildly for reduction by mutual consent, is bespattered with angry exclamations.

Against a suggestion of the Englishmen that a reduction might be effected by an exchange of Notes, he writes: "My reply would be shells" (*die wurde ich mit granaten beantworten*); against another quite tentative proposal for official action: "that would be a declaration of war." In a final note the imperial wrath is poured out on the Ambassador:

The Ambassador has overlooked the fact that it is not his business to agree even in an unofficial and private capacity to the impertinent suggestions of the British Minister to make their goodwill depend on the diminution of our strength at sea. In doing that he has started down a steep slope! I am sorry for him. He must be informed that I do not desire good relations with England at the sacrifice of the German fleet. For England only to offer us her hand in friendship with an intimation that we must reduce our fleet is a boundless impertinence, and a deep insult to the German people and their Kaiser which must be rejected *in limine* by the Ambassador. France and Russia might just as well demand a reduction of our land armaments. The moment foreign States are permitted under any pretext whatever to interfere with one's own armaments, one abdicates like Spain or Portugal. The German fleet is built against no one, and therefore, not against England; it is built according to our own necessities. That is clearly laid down in our Navy Law and has remained unchallenged for eleven years. This will be carried out to the letter, whether it suits the English or not is all one to us. If they want war let them begin it. We are not afraid of it.¹

The Ambassador, nevertheless, continued his warning that, if this line were persisted in, it would not merely stiffen the backs of Conservatives and jingoes in England, but alienate the Liberals, who were anxious for friendship with Germany but were completely unable to understand why their favourite idea of a mutual reduction of armaments should kindle these angry passions. Metternich's expostulations combined with the evident fact that the debates in Parliament had dangerously heated the atmosphere seem to have had some effect, for on June 3, 1909, there was a Conference of Ministers in Berlin which at least started from the assumption that mutual reduction might be effected without the dire consequences to German sovereignty or deep insult to the German people and their ruler which the Kaiser saw in it. The Chancellor, Bülow, presided; Metternich was summoned from London to attend it, and the others present were Bethmann Hollweg, the State Secretary for Home Affairs; Admiral von Tirpitz, the Head of the Naval Department; General von Moltke, the Chief of the General Staff; Vice-Admiral von Müller, the Chief of the

¹ G.P., XXIV, No. 8217, pp. 103-4 (Kaiser's annotation to Dispatch), p. 99. For other rebukes to Metternich see XXIV, No. 8219, pp. 115-16; XXVIII, No. 10267, p. 102.

Naval Cabinet; and Freiherr von Schön, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

To those who read with the knowledge of after events there is an almost Thucydidean irony in the report of this Conference.¹ In spite of the disapproval of the Kaiser, which had once more been strongly conveyed to him, Metternich put his case firmly and courageously. He said that twenty years previously feeling in England had been favourable to Germany and the Triple Alliance, and that though it had been disturbed by the Kruger telegram and the German attitude in the Boer War, it had only become deeply and seriously overcast (*verdüstert*) since German naval construction, and the agitation accompanying it, had "brought Englishmen a strong and ever-increasing conviction that the German fleet meant a threat to their country, for which absolute security and supremacy in sea-power was a matter of life and death." It was not German competition in the world market, inconvenient as this might be to the English, but German naval policy pure and simple which had produced this profound disagreement.

Bülow was on the whole in agreement, showing for the first time a reaction towards good sense, but Tirpitz knew better. He was persuaded that it was trade jealousy and not fear of the fleet which was the cause of the trouble. Like the Kaiser, he knew the right way to treat the English, and was sure that they would become more civil as the German fleet became stronger. He was for doing nothing until England herself came forward with definite proposals and then only for "ample military reciprocity."

Metternich complained that although he had received definite instructions from the Kaiser to tell the English that there was no intention to exceed the existing programme,² he had learnt since he came to Berlin that a supplementary programme was in preparation for 1911 or 1912. Tirpitz maintained that "it must have been generally known, and therefore to the English also, that the year 1911 would be a critical one in which a new law was to be expected."

The question arose would Germany be safe if she persisted in refusing accommodation about the Navy?

General von Moltke expressed the opinion that Germany had no chance of carrying a war with England to a successful conclusion. It, therefore, seemed to him worth while to try

¹ G.P., XXVIII, No. 10006, pp. 168-78.

² See letter from Sir Edward Grey, March 27, 1909, putting on record the German assurance to this effect. G.P., XXVIII, p. 130.

for an honourable understanding on the basis of slowing down construction.

The Chancellor also again called attention to the danger of the situation. The only black cloud at present was that which brooded over the North Sea, but that was heavy with thunder. The argument came thus to its climax :

ADMIRAL VON TIRPITZ : " In my opinion the danger-zone in our relations with England will be passed in from five to six years, say in 1915, after the widening of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal and the completion of the fortifications of Heligoland. Even in two years, the danger will be considerably less."

THE CHANCELLOR (Prince Bülow) : " That is all very fine, but the question is still, how are we to get over the dangers of that period? " ¹

The question remained unanswered.

IV

The Admiral's idea of a concession, supposing always England came forward with a definite proposal, was a ratio of 3 : 4 (which he must have known would be unacceptable) with the corresponding reduction in British naval construction. All were agreed that " reciprocity was an absolute condition," and the Chancellor added that " England must give a political assurance " in addition to the technical and military satisfaction. What was meant by a " political assurance " was gradually to be discovered during the next three years.

Herr Brandenburg, the German historian, has expressed his surprise that the Kaiser, Bülow and Tirpitz could have seriously believed that the " danger-zone " would be passed so soon as a certain German programme was completed. It was, as he says, an obvious delusion, since it assumed that the British would remain passive while the Germans built. The " danger-zone," in fact, was constantly moving forward. It had been 1904-6; it was now 1914. But it never seemed to occur to Tirpitz that Britain would build as Germany built, and that whether in 1906, 1911, or 1915 the two countries, after enormous effort, expenditure and friction, would be relatively to each other in the same position as before; and that, in the meantime, each demand for new expenditure with the attendant explanations and recriminations must drive them

¹ G.P., XXVIII, No. 10306, p. 176. A full translation of the minutes of the discussion at this Conference will be found in Dugdale, Vol. III., pp. 352 *et seq.*

farther and farther apart and throw the British more and more into the arms of the French. The thing seems obvious on looking back, but the naval mind has always been slow to grasp the principle of the relativity of armaments, and Fisher on the British side had made the same miscalculation when he imagined that the new Dreadnought type would throw his German competitor out of the race, instead of merely, as it did, increasing the pace and cost of the competition. Blindness on this subject was one of the great fatalities of pre-war Europe, but it would be flattering the Admiralties of the post-war world to suppose that even now the lesson has been learnt.

V

The Conference of German Ministers appears to have had some effect, for the Kaiser was prevailed upon to let the new Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, tell the British Ambassador in Berlin that the German Government was "prepared to propose a naval agreement to England."¹ Sir Edward Grey replied quickly that the news "had made the most favourable impression upon him and His Majesty's Government." But England was in the throes of her Constitutional crisis, and the Kaiser, not without reason, thought it better to let the negotiations rest until calm was restored. When they were resumed, the idea of "political assurances" in addition to "military reciprocity," which Bülow had thrown out at the Berlin Conference, had taken shape on the German side, and now began to overshadow the technical part of the controversy. The Kaiser was at length in a more amenable mood about a possible limitation of ship-building, and even about the exchange of information through visits to each other's shipyards, which Grey suggested, but his ideas of the political equivalent were enlarged to cover the entire grouping of the Powers in Europe. At the end of July, 1910, Sir Edward Grey submitted a memorandum couched in conciliatory terms but intimating politely that there would be "difficulty in accepting any formula which would give the impression of an understanding different in kind from that which exists between His Majesty's Government and any other European Power, and might therefore affect adversely the relations between His Majesty's Government and certain other Powers, unless these Powers could also be made parties to it."² This started the Kaiser on a new train of thought,

¹ G.P., XXVIII, No. 10331, p. 222.

² G. and T., Vol. VI., p. 502.

and he appended a minute to it of which the following are the salient passages :

Agreement with England very welcome.

Political agreement more important and to be concluded first.

England wishes the political agreement to be so framed that the Powers with whom she is on *Entente* relations may be included in it, which means that they are to be reassured by being informed of it at once ! Here we demand reciprocity.

The Franco-Russian Alliance is a military combination with plans in detail for concerted action directly against us on the pretext of a threatened German attack. England in 1904-5 adhered to this anti-German hostile coalition—definitely known as such—with an offer to France of military aid on the Continent. And yet England declares that she intended no hostility to us in her *Entente* with the anti-German Powers, and that she had no evil designs towards us. That is self-deception. The mere fact of England's adhesion to the Franco-Russian Alliance is from the German point of view an "unfriendly act" (English in the original) at the very start. Arrangements in this or that direction are no good.

Thus, if England wishes to inform other Powers of our projected *Entente*, we demand first to be admitted to her *Entente* with Russia and France, the terms of which were not communicated to us beforehand.

Basis for the *Entente* with us : policy on parallel lines in the world (English in the original). Above all, action in common for the open door. This has caught on in commercial circles of all kinds in England and especially in the City, and is also popular with us.

Possibly later there may be discussions of a guarantee of India, since the anxiety about India is very great in England. In return a guarantee of Alsace-Lorraine and a promise to cover our rear with naval assistance in certain circumstances may be considered.¹

Substantially this meant that there could be no abatement of the naval competition between Britain and Germany unless the British abandoned their *Ententes* with France and Russia and entered into a combination of which Germany was to be a party. Insistence on this condition was to wreck all efforts for a naval understanding from now onwards to the outbreak of the Great War.

¹ G.P., XXVIII, No. 10401, p. 353. Dugdale, Vol. III., p. 416.

Renewed Trouble in Morocco—The French March to Fez—The German Demand for Compensation—The *Panther* at Agadir—Jules Cambon and Kiderlen Waechter—The Kaiser's Agitation—German Silence in London—Mr. Lloyd George's Speech—Anger in Germany—Hard Bargaining—Explanations and Judgments—General Results—King George and His Guests at Balmoral—The King and the State of Europe—More Material for Naval Propaganda.

I

WHEN it was announced in February, 1909, that France and Germany had reached a "final" agreement about Morocco, all Europe heaved a sigh of relief. One cause of friction at all events was out of the way. The Kaiser was supposed to have said that if the French chose to involve themselves deeper in the affairs of that turbulent and ungovernable country, so much the worse for them. Germany had better things to do.

This satisfaction was short-lived. There was unending trouble in Morocco; there was ambiguity in the agreement. The French construed it as giving them a free hand and superseding the Act of Algeciras; the Germans had mental reserves about the free hand, and kept the Act of Algeciras up their sleeve. Before many months had passed Mulai Hafid, the new Sultan, was in the usual trouble with rebels, and early in 1911 it was reported that a pretender was advancing on Fez and threatening to make him a prisoner in his capital. The French thereupon declared it to be their duty to march to Fez both to relieve the Sultan and to ensure the safety of the handful of Europeans, mainly French, who were in that city. They acted correctly in so far as they informed the Germans of their intention, and the Germans on their side acted correctly in "neither objecting to their action nor encouraging it." M. Jules Cambon, the French Ambassador in Berlin, reminded the German Foreign Secretary, Herr von Kiderlen Waechter, of the odium which had fallen on a British Government when it failed to rescue General Gordon, and was sure that no German Government would

be willing to take the responsibility of vetoing or delaying the necessary action. Herr von Kiderlen Waechter was not willing, but he was sceptical about the necessity, and he felt that he would be doing less than his duty if he did not somehow turn the situation to the advantage of his country. As a beginning, he fell back on the Act of Algeciras, and intimated that it would of course be null and void and an entirely fresh deal become necessary between France and Germany, if the French should occupy Fez or impair the sovereignty of the Sultan. M. Cambon disclaimed either intention, but he knew at once that the Foreign Secretary had put in a claim for compensation, and on the spur of the moment, and unofficially, he uttered the word "Congo."

Whatever might be the urgency, the march to Fez was an awkward move. It stirred sleeping dogs all over Europe, and put Madrid as well as Berlin and London in a ferment. The Spaniards, jealous for their sphere, claimed liberty to move as the French moved, and this liberty being eventually accorded to them, were tempted to start on the forward policy which in after years brought disaster on the Spanish monarchy. For the next few weeks an obscure triangular game went on between France, Germany and Spain, with Great Britain watching uneasily but endeavouring, so far as she could, to play the part of honest broker. Hard bargaining, meanwhile, was going on at Kissingen, where both Jules Cambon and Kiderlen Waechter were taking a cure, but at the end of June the former supposed himself to have made reasonable progress and decided to visit Paris to consult with his Government about the next step.

On reaching Paris he bought a newspaper and learnt from it that the Germans had sent a warship to Agadir, a Moroccan port on the Atlantic coast. The *Panther*, as the Germans afterwards explained, was only a very little ship, but it carried the German flag, and its appearance without warning in the middle of peaceful negotiations was like the sudden planting of a fist in the eye both of French and British. Both were mystified and disturbed. The French saw themselves once more, as in 1905, given the choice between humiliation and war; the British interpreted as a special challenge to themselves the appearance of a German warship seemingly pegging out a claim to this Atlantic port. The reason alleged—that German nationals and German trading firms were in danger—was manifestly untrue; Agadir was not a commercial port, and there were no Germans in the neighbourhood. The intention was obviously to apply political pressure, and the method

was unmistakably aggressive. Sir Edward Grey immediately notified the German Ambassador that he considered the situation "new and important," and that the British Government could not remain passive spectators. (July 3, 1911.)

II

The dispatch of the ship seems to have been Herr Kiderlen Waechter's own idea. This German Foreign Secretary was a Prussian of the old type who believed in the big stick, and he repeatedly said that the French would be encouraged and the negotiations brought swiftly to a conclusion by this stroke. He had caught the Kaiser in an interval of yachting at Kiel and obtained his rather reluctant consent on an assurance that the result was certain and the risk negligible. In the next few days he was rudely undeceived. News came from London that Sir Edward Grey took a most serious view of this development, and when M. Jules Cambon returned to Berlin, he was not more but much less amenable. Kiderlen Waechter has himself described their interview. "He (Cambon) came with a face like a corpse and answered my inquiry after his health with a grunt." After he had sat down and declined a cigarette, a long silence followed. Then:

CAMBON: "Eh, bien?"

KIDERLEN: "Vous avez du neuf?"

CAMBON: "Vous avez à me dire quelque chose."

KIDERLEN: "Non, mon cher Ambassadeur."

CAMBON: "Moi non plus."

After another interval of silence Cambon intimated that public opinion in France would never stand the acquisition of territory by Germany in Morocco, to which Kiderlen Waechter replied that nothing so far had happened which indicated any such intention on the part of Germany. The German then returned to the idea of giving France a free hand in Morocco in return for substantial compensation elsewhere. Would French opinion stand that? Cambon thought yes, and suggested that M. Caillaux, who was now in power, would be the right man to carry it through.¹ On the whole, Cambon was relieved.

The report of this interview both incensed and alarmed the Kaiser. They were no nearer coming to terms, as he impatiently pointed out, than a month ago, before the *Panther* was sent to

¹ G.P., XXIX, No. 10598, p. 174.

Agadir. It was "pure farce and what the devil was to happen now?" The Imperial note grew shriller in the next few days, and especially when the Chancellor reported Kiderlen as having said that "we must continue to act very strongly, if we are to get a good result." "I must return home at once," he telegraphed, "for I can't let my Government go on like this, without being on the spot and in a position to supervise the consequences and take them into my own hands. That would be unpardonable and altogether too Parliamentary (*zu parlamentarisch*). Le Roi s'amuse. And in the meantime we are steering towards mobilization. That must not take place without me. Our allies must be informed first.¹ That will bring them into sympathy with us. . . . The Gauls have got over their first fright and found time to obtain advice in Petersburg and London, the thing I always feared owing to the incredibly slow pace of the negotiations." The official in attendance on the Kaiser, Herr von Treutler, telegraphed to the Chancellor that it would be very difficult to obtain the Kaiser's consent to "any steps which he thought might lead to war." Kiderlen felt the Imperial displeasure so keenly that he offered to resign, but the Chancellor dissuaded him and telegraphed to the Kaiser that there was no occasion for him to cut short his yachting, and that no threat had till now been made to the French. Apparently in Bethmann Hollweg's view the dispatch of the *Panther* signified nothing.

London, meanwhile, was waiting for an answer to Sir Edward Grey's communication and growing more and more restive as the days passed and none came. The truth seems to have been that no one in Berlin knew what to say. The French were at Fez and the *Panther* was at Agadir, and neither could be withdrawn without a loss of prestige and lowering of flags which would have been disastrous to one or the other. Inquiry had proved that there were no Germans near Agadir, and the plea of nationals or national interests in peril from Moroccan unrest could scarcely be repeated. But the Kaiser had no serious intention of going to war about Morocco and he shrank back in alarm when the Foreign Secretary

¹ Austria-Hungary was informed on July 1. See dispatch from Szogyeny, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin, Austrian Documents, III., p. 265. Szogyeny was told that the *Panther* had only been sent temporarily and that a bigger ship would be sent later. The explanation given was that this was done at the urgent request of German firms which feared that the unrest would spread to this part of Morocco, but it was added that the question was one of prestige for Germany which saw the Act of Algeciras violated by the proceedings of France and Spain. During the next few months the *Panther* was joined or relieved by two other German war-ships, the cruiser *Berlin* and the gunboat *Eber* (see G. and T., Vol. VII., p. 846).

wanted to persist in "acting very strongly." Kiderlen frankly confessed his plight in a letter to Bethmann Hollweg on July 17:

The negotiations will go on for some time longer. The French are much afraid of their own public opinion; moreover they have the advantage that, if the compensation scheme comes to nothing, we can hardly make demands which will not bring us into conflict with other Powers.

If we demand the *status quo ante*, we must also demand evacuation of Casablanca, and we shall never get support for that.

Occupation of the South of Morocco would bring us into direct conflict with England as well as France; and I do not know how we are to find the means for such a proceeding.

So the only course is to get something out of the compensation question by brusque negotiation; for that is the only way we can hope to avoid intervention from outside.¹

It might have been supposed that the Foreign Secretary and Chancellor between them would have thought of these very obvious considerations before they decided to send the *Panther* to Agadir. Their problem now was how to get out of the very difficult position in which they had landed themselves by their ill-considered stroke.

III

London knew nothing of all this and when nearly three weeks had passed and no sign had come from Germany and the German Ambassador was apparently without instructions, anxiety and mystification increased. Lord Grey has described what happened next.² On the afternoon of July 21, Mr. Lloyd George came over to the Foreign Office, and on learning that no communication had come from Germany took a paper from his pocket and read out a passage on the subject which he proposed to deliver in a speech that he was making at the Mansion House that evening. Grey "cordially agreed," and Lloyd George spoke as he had proposed that evening:

But I am also bound to say this—that I believe it is essential in the highest interests, not merely of this country, but of the world, that Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and her prestige amongst the Great Powers of the world. Her potent influence has many a time been in the past, and

¹ G.P., XXIX, No. 10610, p. 189; and Dugdale, Vol. IV., p. 12.

It may be added that there is no trace in the German Documents of the intrigue which Sir Eyre Crowe in a memorandum printed in the British Documents (G. and T., Vol. VII., Appendix III.) attributes to M. Caillaux, the French Prime Minister. Apart from his own specific denial, it is altogether improbable that the Germans would have failed to make use of the weapon placed in their hands, if M. Caillaux had committed himself in the manner which Sir Eyre Crowe suspected.

² "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., pp. 224-5.

may yet be in the future, invaluable to the cause of human liberty. It has more than once in the past redeemed continental nations, who are sometimes too apt to forget that service, from overwhelming disaster, and even from national extinction. I would make great sacrifices to preserve peace. I conceive that nothing would justify a disturbance of international good-will except questions of the gravest national moment. But if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated, where her interests were vitally affected, as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure. National honour is no party question. The security of our great international trade is no party question. The peace of the world is much more likely to be secured if all nations realize fairly what the conditions of peace must be. And it is because I have the conviction that nations are beginning to understand each other better, to appreciate each other's points of view more thoroughly, to be more ready to discuss calmly and dispassionately their differences, that I feel assured that nothing will happen between now and next year which will render it difficult for the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this place to respond to the toast proposed by you, my Lord Mayor, of the continued prosperity of the public purse.

These were resounding words and their reverberation was all the greater because they were spoken by the man who was supposed to be the leader of the pro-German and pacifist section of the Cabinet. When such a man spoke in this strain, there could be no doubt that Great Britain was on the move. That made it a crisis of the first order.

Four days later (July 25) Count Metternich came to the Foreign Office and read a written communication from his Government complaining of Mr. Lloyd George's speech "as having a tone of provocation towards Germany," and intimating that, if negotiations with France broke down, "Germany must demand that the Treaty of Algeciras be kept and the *status quo ante* be restored, whether that were agreeable to France or not. . . . If after the many provocations from the side of France and her free and easy manner in Morocco, as if neither Germany nor a Treaty existed, France should repel the hand that was offered her by Germany, German dignity as a great Power would make it necessary to secure by all means, and if necessary also alone, full respect by France for German Treaty rights."¹ There followed a conversation which the Ambassador described in his report to his Government as "very strong but within the bounds of diplomatic etiquette."² According to Mr. Churchill,³ Sir Edward Grey said to him the same afternoon:

¹ G. and T., Vol. VII., pp. 397-8.

² G.P., XXIX, No. 10626, p. 213.

³ "World Crisis, 1911-1915," p. 48.

"I have just received a communication from the German Ambassador so stiff that the fleet might be attacked at any moment. I have sent to Mr. McKenna to warn him." Warning orders were accordingly sent to the British fleet, a precaution thought to be the more necessary since the German fleet happened to be mobilized for manœuvres.

The crisis continued right up to the middle of October, and for all that time the military and naval forces of the three nations and their allies stood on guard. The struggle on the Parliament Bill held the attention of the British people, but the Government which was conducting it could not say from day to day whether it might not be plunged suddenly into a European war. In the middle of August, Metternich told me he thought war highly probable before the week was out. In the middle of September, Grey warned the Admiralty that negotiations with Germany "might at any moment take an unfavourable turn," and if they did, the Germans "might act very quickly—even suddenly." All the time there was hard bargaining behind the scenes, the Germans demanding so big a slice of the French Congo that no French Government could have consented to it, the French resisting and each in turn yielding a little until agreement was reached through the addition of a slice of the French Congo to the German Cameroons in return for the free hand in Morocco. Though British influence was used to induce the French to make the utmost concession they reasonably could, British support was promised if the Germans proved unappeasable. Up to the end there were difficulties, each side putting in new claims or suggesting qualifications of what had apparently been agreed to. The agreement was signed and published on November 4 and the *Panther* withdrawn at the end of the month.

IV

An English writer can add nothing to the judgment which German critics have passed on the handling of this affair by their own Government. Prince Bülow calls it "deplorable." "Like a damp squib, it startled, then amused the world, and ended by making us look ridiculous. After the leap of the *Panther* on Agadir, there was a fanfare which, on Lloyd George's speech, died down in the most inglorious charade." Herr Brandenburg calls it "an ill-considered act inspired by the mere craving for prestige and the desire to wipe out the reverse of Algeciras. Kiderlen's conduct

was in the bad old tradition of Holstein. The danger of the general position in which we found ourselves was undoubtedly aggravated by it; where the utmost prudence was indicated, a frivolous stroke was made which cost us more in prestige than it brought in. It is true that the heedless French enterprise was somewhat provocative, but it would assuredly have been cleverer not to let ourselves be provoked, as a sound instinct told the Kaiser at the beginning."¹ Kiderlen himself appears to have admitted failure, but blamed the Kaiser who, as Bülow reports him (Kiderlen) to have said, "throughout the whole diplomatic campaign, veered from absurd threats and demands to utter discouragement and pessimism leading on to unnecessary concessions."²

It was beyond question an outrageously bad stroke unless the intention was to follow it up by warlike action. It was the kind of bluff from which there was no way back, if it were called. But the documents leave on one the impression that Kiderlen Waechter and Bethmann Hollweg seriously believed that it would speed the lagging negotiations with the French and have no other untoward consequences. Sir E. Goschen reports Herr Zimmermann, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, as having said that "the whole trouble arose from the fact that it was not recognized in England that the dispatch of a ship to Agadir, which had been the Emperor's idea" (a rather doubtful point) "was really meant to make it easier for the French Government to defend any compensation they might be ready to give, and which they had expressed readiness to give, before the French Parliament." The Ambassador replied that he "could scarcely fancy a French Minister for Foreign Affairs standing up in the French Parliament and saying that he had had to yield to German demands for compensation because Germany, as a hint that she meant business, had sent a warship to a closed Moroccan port." Besides, he added, he thought the *Panther* had been sent to protect the lives and property of the employees of certain Hamburg merchants. "Ah," said Zimmermann, "that was the primary reason, and the reason for the urgency which prevented us from informing the Powers of our intention. But it was thought, all the same, that it would have a good effect on the negotiations in the way I have just stated."³

Sir Edward Goschen reported that even Herr Zimmermann

¹ Brandenburg, "Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege," p. 330.

² Bülow, "Memoirs, 1909-19," p. 87, translation.

³ G. and T., Vol. VII., No. 518, p. 487.

smiled when the Hamburg merchants were mentioned. But Herr Zimmermann appears to have thrown out the suggestion that the *Panther* would have "a good effect on the negotiations" without a smile. That the Germans could even pretend to believe such a thing seemed at the time like a bad joke covering much more sinister intentions. But we have already noted many examples of this kind of humour, if it was humour, in the records of German diplomacy. Holstein seems sincerely to have believed that a hesitating friend might be converted into a staunch one by a timely slap in the face. Bülow protested to the end of his life that he had done Isvolsky a friendly service in the Bosnia-Herzegovina affair when he showed him the way down from his high horse by threatening to let Austria loose on Serbia. Tirpitz fervently believed that the way to win the friendship of England was to show her the teeth of the big German navy. It is even now the complaint of many German writers that Great Britain failed to induce sobriety in German statesmanship by a timelier threat of intervention in the Great War. To the power-politicians of Berlin the display of the mailed fist was part of the technique of diplomacy at which no sensible person would take offence.

Whatever the explanation, the affair became of necessity a test of the *Entente*, and nothing could be as before when it was over. Once more, as in 1908, the Germans asserted that the British had played the part of mischief-makers and stood between them and the easy and favourable bargain which they would have struck with France but for this interference. In fact the British Government had at all stages urged moderation on the French, and if the Germans seemed to have made a bad bargain, it was mainly because they had pitched their claims far beyond what they could have expected to receive. But undoubtedly the known fact that Great Britain stood behind France—stood even more firmly than Russia, which more than once in these weeks showed signs of wavering—prevented Germany from obtaining the "big mouthful" which the Kaiser had declared to be his terms for giving France the free hand in Morocco. This was enough to throw a blight over all hopes of abating the British-German naval competition, and to set Tirpitz and his Navy League in agitation for a new Navy Law. Once more the old moral was drawn—Germany must have more ships to be even with the Island Power.

In England also weapons were sharpened. All through the weeks of crisis military and naval conversations had been going on

between British and French, and had revealed certain weaknesses in their hypothetical plans. In particular it was discovered that the British War Office and Admiralty were not agreed about the transport of the Expeditionary Force, and after a sharp encounter between the experts of the two Departments Mr. Churchill went to the Admiralty with a mandate to co-ordinate their plans. For Army and Navy alike Agadir was a grand rehearsal of plans which were to take effect three years later.

V

In the last week of September, 1911, King George entertained a succession of guests at Balmoral, including among others Metternich, the German, and Mensdorff, the Austrian Ambassadors. Both wrote full accounts to their Chiefs of their conversations with the King. Metternich reports him as having criticized the French for their march to Fez, and the Germans for having resented it by the dispatch of their warship, since "Morocco was not worth a war." The King, according to Metternich, deplored the effect of Mr. Lloyd George's speech in Germany, and said that Mr. Lloyd George, who also had lately been a visitor at Balmoral, had assured him that he had had no intention of wounding German feelings. The Ambassador also recorded his impression that the King was disturbed about the present grouping of the European Powers, that he was not in sympathy with any forward policy on England's part, and, if it were possible, would greatly prefer the old English way of being a disinterested spectator of European affairs.¹

Mensdorff's account is fuller and livelier. The King, he said, had heard that the Kaiser had told the King of Sweden that before he left London he had spoken to him (King George) about the dispatch of the ship to Agadir, and received his consent and that of his Government to that step. "It is true," said the King, "that just before he left London, he told us he would like to say a word about Morocco, and I replied that that would interest me very much. Whereupon he said that if the French remained in Fez, he would have conversations with the French Government, to which I assented. I will not deny that he possibly said something about a ship, though I do not remember it . . . in any case he did not mention Agadir—a closed port—and I certainly did not

¹ G.P., XXIX, No. 10650, p. 244.

express my consent or that of my Government to any such step." The King continued: ¹

It is a sort of fatality that every time the Kaiser comes here, something or other happens. He had a grand reception here; opinion was favourable, the *délente* with Germany had made great progress, and immediately afterwards comes the *coup* of Agadir! It is just as if he had taken away the impression from here that he would in no circumstances meet with opposition from us, and that we would leave Germany an entirely free hand against France even when she acts brutally and violently. I am quite convinced that the Kaiser, who professes the desire to be the guardian and protector of peace, honestly and seriously means it, and that he did everything in his power to calm things down and to prevent the clumsy stroke of Herr Kiderlen Waechter leading to war. But will the Kaiser be in a position to guarantee the peace permanently? He has been strongly attacked in his own country and publicly called a coward. Will he put up with it? Nobody likes to be called a coward.

The King went on to complain that though his Government had done everything in its power to prevent a conflict between France and Germany, and he himself had prevented French and English ships from being sent to Agadir to be alongside the German ship, the wrath of Germany was falling not upon France, but upon England. Referring to his recent conversation with Metternich, the King said he had told him that, unless the present grouping of the Powers changed, it would lead inevitably to a war between the Triple Alliance and the Triple *Entente*. Metternich had complained that whereas Russia had acted with great reserve England had taken up a hostile attitude. "That," said the King, "was because Russia being allied to France was *ipso facto* and as a matter of course bound to go with her in a war with Germany." Mensdorff said he doubted this, but the King said he knew it.

The conversation roamed over the whole field of foreign policy. The King said he had always been in favour of a *rapprochement* with Russia. "Tsar Nicholas is my best friend, and I know his English sympathies. We are friends with France because we cannot be friends with Germany." "Why not?" asked Mensdorff. "Because," answered the King, "Germany would then dictate to us with whom we are to be on a good footing. We could not be on a good footing with Russia and still less with France." The King also spoke of the Near East and the need of a Conference of the Powers to deal with the whole subject. In passing on these observations the Ambassador said that the King spoke on the spur

¹ Austrian Documents, III., pp. 266-9.

For the Kaiser's habit of claiming consent for doubtful strokes of policy, see *infra*, p. 364, note.

of the moment, and may not have intended all of them to be taken seriously.¹ However they were intended, they contained a great deal of the truth about the situation in September 1911, and were only too well justified by the sequel. "His Majesty," added Mensdorff, "appeared to me to be in a state of resigned despair about improving the relations between London and Berlin."

VI

The Kaiser might, as King George conceded, honestly desire to keep the peace, but could he, as the King asked, continue to do so if these strokes were repeated? Each of them had left someone saying "Never again." Russia had said it after the "shining armour" speech; France said it when peace at length was reached after the *comp* of Agadir. And the Kaiser himself was now in a position in which to venture another such stroke might be the final disaster. The King was right when he said that the Kaiser had been called a coward in Germany. The Morocco affair had been so handled that what would otherwise have been thought a reasonably good bargain seemed in German eyes a mortifying retreat before the challenge of the *Entente*. When the agreement had finally been signed there was a heated debate in the Reichstag (November 9-11) in which the leader of the Conservative party declared Mr. Lloyd George's Mansion House speech to have been "a menace, a challenge, a humiliating challenge," which had been treated far too weakly by the Government. England was held by the German people to be responsible for everything—England who was supposed to have incited the French to resist the reasonable demands of Germany. There was no arguing with this mood, but it destroyed the last chance of accommodation on the naval issue. The new Naval Law for 1912 on which Tirpitz had set his heart was now a certainty, and the German Navy League had rich material for its propaganda. In the meantime the everlasting conflict was being opened from another side.

¹ Austrian Documents, III., pp. 266-8.

BOOK V

FINALE

TRIPOLI AND THE BALKAN LEAGUE

- An Austro-Hungarian Balance-sheet—Turkey in Dissolution—The Expectant Heirs—Italy and Tripoli—The Kaiser's Objections—Conrad on the War-path—Aehrenthal's "No"—Russia on the Move—Sponsoring the Balkan Alliance.

I

AN Austrian foreign policy was debated in the Delegations inember, 1910, the Czech leader, Kramarz, drew up a profit and account of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He said Austria-Hungary had destroyed the agreement with Russia and had kept the peace in the Balkans from 1897 to 1908; that she had been compelled to pay 300 million kronin to the Turks, who nevertheless persisted in their boycott; and that she had lost the Serbian market for Austrian industry. Her gain was only the doubtful one of having asserted a theoretical sovereignty over an area of which she was already in effective occupation, and for this she was branded before the world as having violated an International Treaty.

If the account could have been squared thus, Aehrenthal would probably have claimed that the balance of profit was still on his side. Austria-Hungary had asserted her power, and, as it seemed at the time, given a sharp check to Russian ambitions, and to the plottings of Serbs and others who relied on Russian support to make trouble for her in the Balkans. But there were various imponderables on the debit side, and not least among them the example set to other Powers who were waiting their chance to seize their share of the crumbling Turkish Empire. That they must act quickly or others would get in front of them was from this time onwards the judgment of most of the expectant heirs.

Italy was first in the field. Tunis had gone irretrievably to France, and Morocco also after the Agadir crisis must be reckoned a French possession. Tripoli was all that remained for Italy, and if she waited longer, she might wait for ever. From July, 1911, onwards

Italian public opinion became more and more excited about Turkish misrule in Tripoli and the dangers and hardships alleged to be inflicted thereby on Italian subjects and interests. With every week that passed action and immediate action was more urgently demanded by Italian newspapers. By July the Italian Government had all its plans laid, but it was as ambiguous in its communications to its Allies as Austria-Hungary had been in the affair of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sir Edward Grey was told at the end of July, the Russians at the end of August, but Austria-Hungary and Germany, Italy's partners in the Triple Alliance, not till the end of September, when she said briefly that she had presented an ultimatum to Turkey demanding with twenty-four hours' notice the occupation of Tripoli. Once more the German Kaiser was the last to be told, and the Minister in attendance reported that the news fell like a bomb on a pleasant evening at Rominten, and caused the great consternation and excitement. His Majesty's lively imagination was quickly at work upon the possible consequences of the Italian attack on Turkey; "fall of the Turkish Ministry, revolution in Constantinople, massacre of foreigners, unrest in Albania, Bulgaria, Serbians, Greeks and Cretans taking advantage of Turkey's fortunes, the Dardanelles question reopened, a British occupation of Arabia, the lighting of a world conflagration with all its horrors." Once more Imperial Majesty saw the sinister hand of England. Italy would never have dared to take this action, unless England had encouraged her.¹ Without waiting a moment he telegraphed to the Foreign Secretary, Kiderlen-Waechter, to get into touch with the French and arrange with them for common action and mutual support.

His Ministers poured a little water into this wine. With all deference they submitted that it was extremely improbable that France would join Germany in a demonstration directed against Great Britain, and they said it was notorious in Europe—and confirmed in their own Archives—that France had pledged herself to Italy not to oppose her occupation of Tripoli in return for Italian acquiescence in her own occupation of Morocco. Italy, moreover, was still the Ally of Germany, and it would be awkward for one Ally to take the field against another. Once more the Kaiser's dream of the Continental Bund against England faded out of the picture. In the meantime, the familiar figure of Isvolsky was seen hovering in the background with his darling project for the opening of the Straits. He, too, thought the moment favourable, and if he

¹ G.P., XXX (1), No. 10843, p. 65.

could only persuade the Turks, he was willing to guarantee them against attack by the Balkan States. Again, as in 1908, he started his "soundings" in London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna. Paris was lukewarm; London again thought the moment unfavourable, and raised the old objections about Treaty rights. Kiderlen Waechter was rather taken with the idea and saw in it a possibility of building a bridge towards Russia, but when he proposed it to Marschall von Bieberstein, the Ambassador in Constantinople, the latter broke out into vehement remonstrances. It would, he declared, be a deadly menace to Austria and the ruin of Germany's twenty-years' work in Constantinople. If England consented to it, there would no longer be any doubt that the Triple *Entente* was an aggressive Alliance with the object of being the sole arbiter of Europe and European interests. Aehrenthal was less vehement, but he too feared the strengthening of the naval power of the *Entente* by the emergence of the Russia Black Sea Fleet into the Mediterranean—a curious inversion of former opinions. Once more Isvolsky was balked.¹

It has been suggested that Sir Edward Grey and the British Government ought to have taken the same high line about the invasion and annexation of Tripoli by the Italians as they had previously taken about the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria; and caustic observations have been made about their failure to do so. There is, however, no parallel between the two cases. The status of Bosnia-Herzegovina was determined by the Treaty of Berlin, and could not legally be altered without the consent of the Powers who were signatories of that Treaty. Its annexation by one of the Powers without the consent of the others was an invasion of Treaty rights which gave any or all of the other Powers a *locus standi* to intervene. There was neither law nor treaty which gave any of them such a standing if Italy chose to declare war on Turkey, and acquire Tripoli by right of conquest. They might approve or disapprove, but the action of Italy did not affect their Treaty rights. It was for all of them a question of policy and expediency.

In point of fact, as an examination of the archives must have shown, nearly all of them had promised Italy a benevolent neutrality if she took this step, though with certain reserves about the choice of time and opportunity. France had given her to understand that she would consider it fair compensation for her own proceedings in Tunis and Morocco; Great Britain had taken the same line

¹ G.P., XXX (1), Chap. 236.

when she occupied Egypt; Russia had promised "benevolence" in the Racconigi agreement of 1909; Germany and Austria had promised their active support to Italian policy in North Africa.¹ The moment chosen might be untimely, but it had been a convenience to them all, and in strict accordance with the doctrine of "compensations" that Italy should be appeased in this way. Sir Edward Grey had had little enough encouragement when he intervened on legal ground in 1908, but he would certainly have had none at all if he had ignored the assurances given by his predecessors and made a political *démarche* in a matter in which Italy was within her legal rights and in a position to claim, if not the support, at least the benevolent neutrality of nearly all the other Powers.²

II

In Vienna the irrepressible Conrad thought, as usual, that the occasion pointed to the necessity of immediate military preparations. He saw behind the mask of the Tripoli expedition an ambitious Italy energetically developing her military power, and pursuing a national policy of which the principal aim was to obtain possession of the Italian Provinces of the Dual Monarchy. She was clever enough to keep her ultimate aims in the background while she pursued her immediate design, and would seek the friendly neutrality and even the support of the Powers with which she must come into conflict in her final aims. The Monarchy had therefore to decide whether or not it would prevent Italy from reaching her goal by successive steps, or whether it would choose the moment when she was entangled in Tripoli for a reckoning with her and thus put an end to her designs on the Italian Provinces of the Monarchy and her ambition to dominate the Adriatic and the situation in the Balkans. In either case it was necessary to prepare so as not to be caught out by her at the beginning of a war. So far as could be foreseen, all coming wars would take the form of a surprise by the attacking party, and it was therefore imperative to make counter-preparations for every preparation made by the Italians. Conrad had no patience with those who said that the occupation of Tripoli would drain the resources and weaken the military strength of Italy. He was sure, on the contrary, that it would make her stronger, as Algiers had made France, Alsace-

¹ Third Treaty of the Triple Alliance, Article IX., Pribram, Vol. I., p. 157.

² The history of Tripoli is an interesting by-path. How many people are aware that the United States of America was twice at war with Tripoli in the nineteenth century?

Lorraine Germany, and Bosnia-Herzegovina Austria. He was therefore strongly of opinion that the Monarchy should consider the possibility of using Italy's engagement in Tripoli to challenge her on other ground on which her hostility was inevitable in the future.¹

Aehrenthal annotated this document with "nein, nein, nein." He and the German Chancellor were engaged at that moment in *pourparlers* for the renewal of the Triple Alliance, and so far as Italy was concerned, it was well understood that acquiescence in her Tripoli adventure was indispensable for that purpose. To the civilian statesmen of both Austria-Hungary and Germany it was extremely embarrassing that the Chief of the Austrian General Staff should be perpetually shouting about the necessity of a preventive war against the partner whom they were trying to conciliate. Things leaked out, and this strident voice had a peculiarly penetrating quality. Conrad was sharply reminded that military measures must conform to policy, not policy to military measures. It was observed too that after the exhausting effort of 1908-9, the Austrian Treasury was in no condition to stand another military drain. Like the other Powers, Austria-Hungary decided to look on and await events. Aehrenthal contented himself with requesting Italy not to interfere with Austrian designs in the Balkans, and, as a sign of good-will, to withdraw her fleet from the Albanian coast. Conrad, thereupon, resigned his post as Chief of the General Staff.

But while the Austrian hotheads were thus prevented from taking advantage of the preoccupation of Italy, a great many others saw their opportunity in the plight of the Turks. As Italy fought her not very glorious campaign, the Balkans seethed with preparations to take advantage of the moment, now visibly approaching, when an exhausted and bankrupt Turkey would be more than ever at the mercy of her enemies. All the Balkan packs were now closing in on her in a merciless resolve to do their business finally this time, and the Powers looked on in a growing anxiety lest they should be forestalled at the death. The documents of these months show an intricate maze of intrigue in which it is difficult to follow any single path, but certain facts are reasonably clear.

Russia, whose trade had been severely damaged by the closing of the Dardanelles at the instance of the Turks in the Italian War, was more than ever determined on the opening of the Straits. But she dallied with alternative methods of reaching this end. One was to bring about a Balkan Alliance under Russian leadership

¹ Austrian Documents, III., pp. 347-8.

and take possession of Constantinople as Protector of the Slav peoples. The other was to bring Turkey herself into a Balkan Alliance and guarantee her against further encroachments on her territory on condition that she opened the Straits and in other respects did the will of Russia. The second plan was launched unofficially by Tchariof, the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople, but the Turks would have none of it, and the Ambassador had to be recalled. (March, 1912.)

There remained only the alternative of sponsoring a Balkan Alliance against Turkey. There were stubborn difficulties, especially the objection of the Bulgarians to conceding the claims of Greeks and Serbs, but Hartwig, the Russian Minister in Belgrade, and Venizelos, the Greek Prime Minister, worked indefatigably, and the opportunity came when the Russophil Gueshoff Cabinet succeeded to power in Bulgaria. A secret Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty was now concluded, aimed directly at Turkey, but also indirectly at Austria, since it provided for a joint attack upon her if she reoccupied the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar.¹ Hartwig, like many Russian emissaries, may have run a little ahead of his instructions, but there is no doubt that his Government was up to the neck in this business. The Treaty provided that Russia was to be informed, if or when the two States were of opinion that military measures needed to be taken. The Tsar was to arbitrate in any differences of opinion between them and any final delimitation of territory was to be submitted to him. At the same time Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria concluded a Treaty with Greece and procured her adhesion to the Balkan Alliance. By the end of March, 1912, the Alliance was complete.

Though the Russians had decided to lead this movement and to turn it to their own advantage, they were extremely uneasy about its consequences. They were not ready for war and did not want a war; they were aware that Bulgaria aspired to the possession of Constantinople, and they by no means intended that prize to fall to a little Balkan State. Bulgarians and Greeks were told that the Maritza Valley was to be the new boundary of Turkey and that Adrianople must remain in the possession of the Turks.² Russia in these months did her utmost to postpone a conflict, and Tsar Ferdinand paid a visit to Vienna and persuaded the old Emperor and the Austrians that he was still, as always, their faithful friend. But the mine was laid, and it was extremely improbable that Russia would be able, even if she wished, to do more than defer the explosion.

¹ Pribram, "Austrian Foreign Policy," p. 36.

² Brandenburg, p. 359.

THE POWERS AND THE BALKAN WARS

The Pall of Suspicion—Instructions to Kühlmann—The Powers and the Balkan Wars—The Unexpected and Embarrassing Victory—The Kaiser's Warning to Austria—Conrad's Essays—Alternative Policies for Austria-Hungary—Conrad Reappointed—The London Conference—Praise for Great Britain—Confusion in Vienna.

I

A GLANCE at the documents shows the dense pall of mutual suspicion which hung over the diplomatic world at this time. German Ambassadors and representatives in London—Metternich, Kühlmann, Lichnowsky—begged their Governments to believe that British policy was honest and that Sir Edward Grey earnestly desired to build a bridge towards Germany, if only the Germans would let him and not make it a condition that he should break with France. But now as always they knew better in Berlin. The Kaiser annotated the dispatches of these Anglophils with derisive comments; the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary warned them against the German simplicity which took at their face-value the disarming explanations of British Machiavellis. When Kühlmann reported (October 15, 1912) that Grey thought the Balkan crisis "peculiarly appropriate for intimate co-operation by the two diplomacies, since British and German interests appeared to him completely identical," he received a very cool answer from Berlin :

You will say quite clearly to Sir Edward Grey [wrote Kiderlen Waechter, the Foreign Secretary] that we are perfectly willing to go hand in hand with England. But we must make two stipulations; first that the discussions are absolutely confidential and not made use of outside with semi-indications. The smaller the circle of initiated parties, the easier it will be to attain the object. Then, if we are to reach an agreement, we must insist that our agreement is not treated as something to be ashamed of, but is explained to the other Powers.

Finally, in the course of the negotiations there must be an agreement that neither Power fights against the other on foreign territory, especially where its own vital interests are not concerned, simply to serve a third Power. The more accommodating England is on this point, the further can we go in our understanding about the settlement on the present crisis.¹

¹ G.P., XXXIII, No. 12287, p. 237; and Dugdale, Vol. IV., p. 118.

The plain meaning of this, as it seemed to British statesmen, was that on the immediate and urgent question of the Balkans, Germany would only consent to act with England if their joint action might be advertised as the result of a special agreement between the two, to which France and Russia had not been made party; and further that, before even this could be considered, England must promise in no circumstances to render help to France on French soil. It apparently did not occur to Kiderlen Waechter that, in the relation in which she stood to France and Russia, England could not honourably concede either of his two points, or that, if she did, any successful negotiation about the Balkans would be frustrated by the offence given to France and Russia. Here once more we see the persistent idea of the Wilhelmstrasse that German good-will, even in a sphere of admitted identic interest, must be bought by concessions in an entirely different and unrelated sphere.

But the other Powers were now thoroughly alarmed, and Russia seemed, more than ever, to shrink from the consequences of her own action. In the middle of September the Russian Prime Minister, Sazonoff, started on a round of visits to European capitals in an endeavour to stir them into joint action to maintain the *status quo* in the Balkans while bringing pressure on the Turks to execute the long-promised but perpetually postponed reforms. Though Conrad kept saying that the *status quo* was nonsense, Berchtold, who had now succeeded Aehrenthal as Foreign Secretary, fell in with the general view that joint-intervention should be tried, and Poincaré went the length of vetoing a projected Bulgarian loan in Paris. Joint notes were issued by the Powers urging the Turks to make concessions and warning the Balkan States that they would get nothing by fighting. But on the day on which these intimations were conveyed (October 8, 1912) King Nicholas of Montenegro fired the powder-magazine by declaring war and attacking the Turks.

By the end of October, 1912, the Powers had to reckon with the fact, surprising to most of them and embarrassing to them all, that the Turks had been defeated by the Balkan Allies on every front and were falling back on the Chataldja lines for the defence of Constantinople. On December 3 an armistice was concluded, and delegates from the different States met in London to settle the peace terms. In England alone was the victory of the Allies completely popular. Austria, who had hoped that the struggle would be at least sufficiently long and exhausting to quench the warlike

ardour of the Serbs, saw with alarm their speedy and complete victory and corresponding elation. Russia, who in theory should have rejoiced in the triumph of the Slav cause, was gravely disturbed lest Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, being now so near, should take it into his head to push on to Constantinople and get crowned in Ste. Sophia—which all the world knew to be his secret ambition.¹ Germany saw her Turkish policy in ruins and herself in serious danger of being drawn into an Austro-Serbian quarrel which would almost certainly develop into a world war. Italy was nearly as displeased as Austria at the prospect of Serbia laying claim to a port on the Adriatic.

The Kaiser had one of his cold fits when he heard that Serbia was about to make this claim and that Austria was determined to resist it at the cost of war. He wrote to Kiderlen Waechter on November 7, 1912:

If I wished to see the *casus fœderis* avoided for the sake of the Serbs in the Sanjak and Uskub, and did in fact avoid it, when war broke out, I am still less minded to let it happen for the sake of the Serbs at Durazzo or in Albania. So far-reaching an engagement is not in the spirit of the Triple Alliance, which was intended to guarantee the continuance of actual possessions; and the genuine needs and conditions of the Austrian Monarchy ought not to demand it. I admit that there are many changes in the Balkans caused by the war, which are very awkward and unwelcome to Vienna, but none are so desperate that we should be exposed to the risk of war complications for her sake; I could not be responsible for that either to my people or to my own conscience. In 1908 it was altogether different, as it affected territory which had been genuinely attached to Austria for a long time.²

The Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, appears to have been alarmed about the effect of this language if reported to Vienna, and induced the Kaiser to propose the constitution of Albania as an independent buffer State under a Serb Prince with leave to Serbia to use an Albanian port. The Kaiser nevertheless stood by his main proposition: "I shall not march against Paris and Moscow for the sake of Albania and Durazzo."

II

In Vienna, during these weeks, Conrad, now temporarily reduced from Chief of the General Staff to Army Inspector, was writing "essays" on the position of the Dual Monarchy. One dated

¹ Sazonoff told Poincaré that, if the Bulgarians occupied Constantinople the whole Russian Black Sea Fleet "would appear before the Turkish capital." See Fay, "Origins of the World War," Vol. I., p. 338.

² G.P., XXXIII, p. 295.

October 28, 1912, threw out the idea that Austria should lead the movement which she had failed to control, and, putting aside all prejudices and animosities, constitute herself head of the Balkan League and champion of the Slav cause. For a few hours Conrad's lively imagination glowed with this theme. He saw a great family of self-governing nations under the benevolent protection of Austria-Hungary, keeping the peace and developing a great commerce, without fear of internal disorder or foreign aggression. He saw the 69 Austrian battalions then immobilized in Bosnia-Herzegovina and all the reserves behind them set free for a war with either Italy or Russia. (So long as there was a war he seemed not to mind much which enemy was chosen.) He saw the Monarchy in an immensely powerful position which would enable it to ignore the jealous objections of other Powers. The material advantages were so great and so obvious that he could not imagine the Balkan States rejecting them. Serbia under this plan would be in the same relation to Austria as Bavaria to the German Reich—a position of rare distinction in the great family of nations.

This vision faded rapidly in the next three weeks. Victorious Serbia was too evidently not in the mood to play Bavaria to an Austrian Reich. In his next "essay," written on November 19, Conrad swings to the opposite pole. "The attitude of Serbia," he now writes, "has taken a turn which not only appears to exclude such an agreement as I had in mind but is calculated gravely to prejudice the prestige of the Monarchy and its political and economic influence. The Monarchy is therefore compelled to contemplate an appeal to arms." Having made the necessary preparations Austria-Hungary was, therefore, to issue a note to the Powers of which the concluding sentences were to be:

If till now the Monarchy has watched the development of events with studied calm and cool deliberation it is wholly and solely because it is conscious that warlike action on its part against Serbia would in all probability lead to other warlike developments which would involve the whole of Europe.

Having in mind the fearful misery which would thereby be inflicted on Europe, the enormous economic injury which would result from this as well as the advantage which would be gained by the extra-European States, the Monarchy is clear that in entering upon warlike action, she is taking a decision not only for herself but for all Europe.

If nevertheless Serbia persists in her challenging attitude, if she ignores the interests of the Monarchy and denies it satisfaction for her lawless encroachments, the Monarchy will be driven in the last resort to have recourse to war, be the result what it may.¹

¹ "Aus Meiner Dienstzeit," Vol. II., pp. 314-24.

It is greatly to be regretted, added the essayist, that the Monarchy, "too irresolute to take the initiative and begin an inevitable war at its own chosen moment, should have waited to be driven to take this action now. Had my urgent advice been followed in the years 1908-9 to wage the war for which preparations had been made against Serbia in that year, the situation would have been different to-day."

At the top of this effusion Conrad has quoted a saying of the great Moltke: "*erst wägen, dann wagen*," first think, then dare. To this, he says, "I would add 'really dare,' no looking back, no delay, no half-measures."

It was ominous for the peace of nations that this ardent essayist who was willing to set the world on fire for the Austro-Serbian quarrel, and who was determined to have a war with somebody, even if there was peace in the Balkans, was reinstated in his position as Chief of the General Staff at the beginning of December this year (1912), and from this time forward became the intimate counsellor of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Berchtold, the Austrian Foreign Secretary.

III

Conrad was later to lament that another opportunity had been lost, for again the old Emperor held back and Berchtold lacked the nerve to force the issue. This time nobody but the militarists of Vienna wanted a war. Russia's enthusiasm for the Balkan Slavs had cooled off when it seemed likely that their victory would compromise her claim to Constantinople and the Straits. The French thought the whole situation tiresome and dangerous; Great Britain had no interest except to keep the peace. The German Kaiser still shrank from the idea of a world-war to enable Austria to get even with Serbia, and outlined a policy for the Monarchy which was curiously in line with Conrad's first thought that Austria should support the idea of a United States of the Balkans. If she would do so, she would find that these States would soon be in opposition to Russia, and thus be drawn of their own accord to the side of Austria and the Triple Alliance, for which they would be a very desirable addition of strength and an offensive flank against Russia. If they were clever they would make a *post pugnam* Alliance with Turkey. In this way German policy could act in line with Austrian, and nobody need be disturbed if Tsar Ferdinand went to Stamboul.¹ Quite good sense from the German and

¹ G.P., XXXIII, p. 276 (marginal comment).

Austrian point of view, and, if there had been no second or third Balkan War, a feasible policy—bar Ferdinand in Constantinople—for Europe in general.

Not wanting war and being by this time acutely conscious of the dangers of the situation, the Powers came into line and accepted Sir Edward Grey's proposal for a Conference. This time the Germans not only waived their conditions and objections but joined cordially with Grey in the part of honest broker. The Conference, which consisted of the Ambassadors of the six Powers, met in London at the beginning of December, 1912, and sat till August, 1913, when without flourish or finale it just ceased to sit. It was the most informal, the least self-important and the most successful of all pre-war Conferences. It consisted simply of friendly men dealing with a situation which changed from week to week before their eyes, and, as they went along, improvising means of keeping the peace. There were certain fixed points. Austria was determined that neither Serbia nor Montenegro should set foot within the boundaries of the Turkish province of Albania, and those rather uncertain boundaries had somehow to be determined. The King of Montenegro's persistence in occupying Scutari raised the tiresome question of how to get him out by any measures to which both Austria and Russia would consent, but, as Lord Grey records, "a blend of the threat of coercion and the offer of money compensation settled the matter to the satisfaction of Austria, perhaps also to the satisfaction of the King of Montenegro, and this danger to European peace was laid to rest."¹ Other questions were either discreetly shelved or settled provisionally to the extent that the very fluid conditions permitted.

Sir Edward Grey won golden opinions for his conduct of this Conference, and there seemed at length a disposition to believe that British policy was both honest and peaceful. The tension between the Alliances appeared now to be relaxed and the foundation to have been laid for a final effort to settle outstanding questions between Great Britain and Germany. "In 1912-13," says Lord Grey, "the current of European affairs was setting towards war. Austria and Russia were drifting with it, and dragging the other Powers in the same fatal direction. In agreeing to a Conference and forming one in 1912, it was as if we all put out anchors to prevent ourselves from being swept away. Then the current seemed to slacken and the anchors were pulled up. The Conference was allowed to dissolve. We seemed to be safe. In reality it was

¹ "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., p. 271.

not so; the set of the current was the same, and in a year's time we were all swept into the cataract of war."

While the Conference was sitting the Balkan War had come to its unhappy conclusion. In January, 1913, the Turks had a convulsive last movement. Enver Bey, heading a military deputation, rushed into the Chamber in Constantinople where the Council was sitting, denounced the proposal to surrender Adrianople, deposed the Grand Vizier, and shot Nazim Pasha, the Turkish Commander-in-Chief. The Peace Conference which was sitting in London thereupon broke up, and the war was renewed and continued until March 26, when Adrianople fell. The Balkan Allies now accepted the mediation of the Powers, and on May 30 signed the Treaty of London in which, under extreme pressure, Serbia accepted her exclusion from Albania. This led to new complications. Serbia had set her heart on a port in the Adriatic, and she now sought compensation by a revision of the boundaries provisionally agreed upon between herself and Bulgaria. The Tsar offered his services as mediator, but before he could act, the Bulgarians made a treacherous attack upon the Serbs and descended in a rush upon Salonica which had been awarded to Greece. The Rumanians, who till then had held aloof, now crossed the Danube and made common cause with the Serbs and Greece, and, before the Powers had time even to realize what was happening, crushed Bulgaria and compelled her to accept the dictated Peace of Bucharest, which not only robbed her of the fruits of her earlier victories but transferred a large slice of the Dobruja to Rumania, and gave Kavala—the Ægean port on which the Bulgarians had relied to develop their Mediterranean trade—to Greece. In the meantime the Turks profited by the helplessness of the Bulgarians and the divisions of the great Powers to retake Adrianople. Austria, more than ever alarmed at the further aggrandisement of Serbia, urged in vain that the Treaty of Bucharest should be submitted to the Powers for revision. King Carol of Rumania firmly resisted the idea and was backed by his relative, the Kaiser, who more than shared the dislike, common to European Sovereigns, of Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria. On August 6 the Treaty of Bucharest was signed and at the end of September the Bulgarians made their peace with the Turks, ceding not only Adrianople but Kirk-Killisseh also.

IV

If the crisis passed in 1913, it was because Germany restrained Austria, while Russia kept Serbia in check, and the London Conference offered the means of stopping the drift which would otherwise have carried all the parties into an unwanted but alleged inevitable war. But during the whole of this time confusion and agitation continued in Vienna, the different schools of policy fighting with each other and reducing the Foreign Secretary, Berchtold, to a pitiable state of indecision and distraction.¹ Within the Foreign Office there was neither unity nor system; everyone offered advice, officials went their own way issuing contradictory or inconsistent instructions, and when a decision was arrived at, it was often impossible to ascertain who was responsible for it. A wit said in 1914 that the porter at the Ball-platz was probably the man who made the war. Berchtold wavered between the two themes of Conrad's essays; he was for peace at one moment and for war the next; Slavophil in the morning and breathing fire and slaughter against Serbia in the evening. Conrad meanwhile went behind his back to the old Emperor and wrung out of him an order for mobilization on the Serbian frontier which was followed by a corresponding mobilization on the Russian side. The war-fever raged furiously both in Vienna and Belgrade, and Conrad and the soldiers seemed to have cared nothing for the Ambassadors in London. Left to themselves they would have blown the Conference sky-high by marching against Serbia and Montenegro. But once more it was intimated to Vienna that the Germans would not fight to keep the Serbs out of Durazzo, and to Belgrade that the Russians would not fight to put them there. This temporarily kept Austrian Chauvinism within bounds and cooled the hotspurs of Belgrade. But Austria had some consolation, for when in October the Serbs flouted the London decisions of the Powers by crossing into Albania, burning Albanian villages, and massacring Albanians, Berchtold on his own responsibility issued a sharp note which stopped these proceedings and brought upon Serbia a warning from all the Powers that she must respect their decisions.

It was not the least of the complications of these months that the Triple Alliance was again running out, and that delicate negotiations for its renewal were going on between Rome, Vienna and Berlin, while Conrad was on the war-path. It was somehow renewed, but faith in it, though it still survived in Germany, was

¹ Szilassy, "Der Untergang der Donau-Monarchie," Chap. VIII.

rapidly waning both in Austria and Italy.¹ The best that the Austrians seem to have hoped from its renewal was that it would make the secession of Italy more difficult in the event of war and perhaps prevent it altogether, if the war was not prolonged. But the Austrians' fear of Italian policy undoubtedly counted for much in their desire to force the issue. A quick success for German and Austrian arms would, they calculated, keep Italy within their combination, whereas the present drift, if unchecked, would inevitably take her into the camp of their enemies.

In May of this year, 1913, there took place one of those occasions which are marked in the pre-war diary as "for the last time." King George and the Tsar went to Berlin as the guests of the Kaiser for the wedding of his daughter to Duke Ernest of Cumberland on May 25, an event which was supposed to signify the burial of the long-standing feud between the Houses of Hohenzollern and Hanover. Echoes of the talk of the three Sovereigns may be found in the subsequent records, and the Kaiser appears to have unburdened himself freely to Englishmen who were in Berlin at the time. He could not understand, he said, how the English could wish to join the Latin races in preference to the Teutons. Our promise to support the French at the time of the Morocco crises had been perfectly well known to them and that was what made them so sore. "I am a man of peace, but now I have to arm my country so that whatever falls on me I can crush, and

¹ For the details of the various renewals of the Triple Alliance the reader may be referred to the second volume of Professor Pribram's "Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary," where the negotiations on each occasion are carefully examined. The first Treaty was signed on May 20, 1882, and it was renewed with sundry modifications on February 20, 1887, on May 6, 1891, on June 28, 1902, and on December 5, 1912. On two occasions, 1896 and 1907, it was "tacitly" renewed, *i.e.* continued for another period of six years in default of denunciation. The main difficulties on each occasion were to reconcile Italian and Austrian policies in the Balkans, and to ensure Italy the support that she desired for her interests in the Mediterranean, and her ambition to possess Tripoli. In 1902 Italy obtained a written promise from Austria to take no steps "which might hinder Italian action in Tripoli or in Cyrenaica in the event that the existing *status quo* in this region should, as the result of particular circumstances, undergo a change, and Italy were to find herself forced to resort to such measures as her own interests might dictate." (Pribram, Vol. II., p. 130.) The Kaiser seems to have been unaware of this promise when he protested against Italian action in Tripoli in 1911. The 1912 negotiations presented peculiar difficulties. The views of the Vienna war-party were well known to Italians, and Italy on her side was supposed to be maintaining a latent claim to "compensation" (*e.g.* the Trentino) for the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The negotiations were long and sometimes heated, but under pressure from Germany, and in apprehension of the dangerous course of events in the Balkan Wars, the Austrians conceded what Italy chiefly wanted, *viz.*, that the definition of the *status quo* in the Treaty of 1902 should include her sovereignty over Tripolitana and Cyrenaica. In all the negotiations Italy seems to have been quite explicit in objecting to any stipulations which might bring her into hostile relations with Great Britain.

crush them I will. You talk a good deal about the balance, and that to maintain it you joined the *Entente*. But Germany holds the balance of power." The Kaiser asserted that there was no ill-will between Russia and Germany. He had told the Tsar that if Austria was attacked, he was absolutely bound to help her; the aged Emperor with his past defeats and sorrows could not be left to stand alone. The Tsar quite recognized this. The Kaiser further said he knew for certain that Japan was working against Great Britain, yet we had withdrawn our ships from the Pacific in order to have them in the North Sea because Germany was going to attack us—the absurdest nonsense he ever heard of. As if he, the grandson of Queen Victoria, would ever contemplate such folly. We let France, Italy, Austria, Russia build ships but tried to prevent Germany because we imagined she was going to attack us. We must try not to be like Nero, who, whenever he saw people laughing in the streets was sure they were laughing at him.

The memories of this occasion are in accord with the other records in so far as they suggest that in the summer of 1913 the Kaiser was against any forcing policy in the Near East. He would support Austria, if she were attacked, he was confident of being able to crush his enemies if they attacked; he was sure that Germany had the balance of power. What he would do, if Austria insisted on settling accounts with Serbia and Russia or if he was advised that the balance of power was slipping out of Germany's hands, were questions which had not yet become urgent in his thoughts.

In the subsequent months the Kaiser claimed to have obtained the consent of both the Tsar and King George to the much-disputed appointment of the German General, Liman von Sanders, to be Inspector-General of the Turkish army. In point of fact the Kaiser merely said in the most general terms that the three Powers should do everything possible to bolster up Turkey, and to that end should help her by lending her officers, civilian administrators, financiers, etc. No mention was made of any General, German or otherwise, for a particular post.

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THE TURNING-POINT

- Watching by the Death-bed—The Prospect of East and West—Germany and Austria in the Balkans—Conrad's Categorical Questions—German Hesitations—A Rapid Change—The Coming Struggle between East and West—Conrad's Talk with the Kaiser—The Kaiser in Vienna—A Momentous Interview—*Carte Blanche* to Vienna.

I

THE student of the last year before the war feels himself to be watching by the bedside of a dying man. There are alternations of hope and fear, moments of recovery when the watchers shake each other by the hand and rejoice in a blessed relief, followed by renewed crises and relapses in which they lose hope and prepare themselves for the worst. When the London Conference ended, British and French said hopefully that the peace was better secured between them and Germany than at any time in recent years. But the tension was never for a moment relaxed in the Near East. Austrians watched wrathfully while Rumania, which had profited greatly from the Peace of Bucharest, made common cause with Serbia; Germans grew alarmed at the alleged preparations of Russia; Russians were in a fever about their prestige in the Balkans and their access to the Mediterranean; and all the Governments engaged in a stubborn conflict about the appointment of a German supervisor, Liman von Sanders, to the Turkish army, which only did not become dangerous because Sir Edward Grey and British Ministers refused to take the stiff attitude that France and Russia desired. Whatever came up, all suspected their neighbours of hostile intentions; and an ever-increasing number were saying behind the scenes that the situation was intolerable and impossible, and that any war would be better than this peace. Everywhere General Staffs were planning campaigns, and muttering reproaches against civilians who, as they constantly alleged, were cheating them of their "favourable moments."

The defeat and discomfiture of Bulgaria in the last phase of

the Balkan War was watched with mixed feelings in Berlin and Vienna. In so far as it broke the Balkan *bloc*, it brought relief to both, but when it came to a concerted policy, there were sharp differences between the two partners. Austria wanted the strongest possible Bulgaria to play off against the Serbs. The German Kaiser disliked and distrusted Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria, and wished nothing done which would embarrass his kinsman, King Carol of Rumania. During July and August every proposal from Vienna met with a warning from Berlin that for Austria to show her hand prematurely would be to throw Rumania into the arms of Russia. Vienna replied that this was done already. The Rumanians had taken unwarranted offence at the Austrian effort to induce them to spare Bulgaria, and already an agitation was being started in Bucharest for the "liberation" of the Rumanians in Hungary from the domination of the Magyars. Such a situation required immediate strong measures or the trouble would spread to all the races of the Dual Monarchy. Dangerous movements were already on foot in Galicia and Bohemia as well as among the Slavs of the Monarchy. The irrepressible Conrad, as usual, wanted the straight question put to everybody. To the Serbs—either you join up with the Monarchy or we treat you as enemies now immediately; to the Rumanians—either you renew your pledge to the Triple Alliance or reckon at once with our hostility. Berlin and Rome would have none of this. Both gave the sage counsel that Austria, like other nations, must reckon with established facts. A greater Serbia was no doubt an inconvenience to the Monarchy, but matters would not be improved by trying to knock her on the head or pursuing a policy of pin-pricks and irritation.¹ Conrad listened impatiently but again Berchtold lacked the nerve to force the issue. So far, the constantly repeated plea of the Austrians that action on their part would be purely defensive, in fact "forced upon them" by the truculence of their Balkan neighbours, had been coldly received by both their Allies.² It was evident that neither Italy nor (up to this time) Germany would recognize any warlike action by Austria alone as a *casus fœderis*.

The question of the Turkish islands which remained in the

¹ Austrian Documents, VI., pp. 920-1. Conversation with the Kaiser reported by the Marchese San Giuliano to the Austrian Ambassador in Rome.

² According to a statement made by Signor Giolitti to the Italian Chamber on December 5, 1914, Austria at the beginning of August, 1913, communicated both to Italy and Germany her intention of attacking Serbia, and in the hope of invoking the *casus fœderis* of the Triple Alliance described this as a defensive movement. Italy repudiated this idea and Germany discouraged it, and the plan was abandoned for the time being.

possession of the Greeks placed the German Kaiser in a peculiar difficulty. He had a villa at Corfu and his brother-in-law was King of Greece; he was, and wished to remain, the special friend of the Turk, and the appointment of Liman von Sanders as supervisor of the Turkish army had given Germany the predominant position at Constantinople. But to be the friend of Greece without falling out with Turkey became increasingly difficult. Talaat, the Turkish Grand Vizier, went to visit the Tsar at Livadia and complained that the Kaiser was flirting with Greece at the expense of Turkey. The Austrians, too, looked askance at this by-play. An ally which disliked Bulgaria, would do nothing against Rumania, and had a sentimental weakness for Greece, the friend of Austria's mortal enemy, Serbia, seemed a very broken reed to Austrian statesmen and soldiers in the summer and autumn of 1913. If this goes on, they said, everybody will be against us.

II

It did not go on. The change came rapidly at the beginning of September, 1913. During the first eight months of the year the civilians on the whole had the best of it in the unceasing debate between them and the soldiers both in Berlin and Vienna. On April 27 Conrad reported the German military attaché, Count Kagenack, as having said that the Kaiser was not for war, but that the German Military Staff was convinced that it was inevitable and were counting on it and on a war with Russia as well.¹ Both Kaiser and Chancellor appear to have stood their ground till the end of August, but from that time onwards the constant pressure of the two General Staffs declaring that the sands were running out for Austria against Serbia and for Germany against Russia seem to have worn them down. By the beginning of September the Kaiser had his eye on the "coming struggle between East and West," and had seemingly forgotten his own attitude in the spring and the advice which his Government had given to its Allies during the summer.

Conrad was now again in full eruption, and a dispatch which he addressed to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand on September 6, 1913, shows all his ideas seething together in a general ferment. There were, he said, two policies and only two; either to bring Serbia into a loyal Anschluss with Austria in which her relations to the Monarchy would be those of Bavaria to the German Reich—the now familiar illustration—or, to treat her immediately as an enemy.

¹ Conrad, Vol. III., p. 275.

"*Entweder an Serbien mit diesen grossen Gedanken heranzutreten oder mit Serbien als feind zu rechnen.*"¹ In the event of the Anschluss policy succeeding it would next be necessary to bring Bulgaria and Greece in on the side of the Monarchy, but this, if Serbia had been secured, would, he thought, be easy.

Try this, he says, and even if we fail we shall at least know where we stand and be able to direct our policy and military measures accordingly. But what if the effort to convert Serbia into an Austrian Bavaria not merely failed, but led, as it probably would, to a war in which all the Balkan States, bar Bulgaria, would be on the Serbian side, and be supported by Russia? Conrad poses the question and answers frankly that the military strength of the Monarchy is not equal to dealing with Russia, Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania at the same time. For such a war Germany would have to be brought in.

The day after he had delivered this dispatch Conrad attended the German autumn manoeuvres which were being held within a day's journey of Vienna, and had a conversation with the Kaiser which he records in his characteristic style :

CONRAD : "In the year 1909 we failed to strike at Serbia. I was left in the lurch with my plan."

KAISER : "I did not hold your soldiers back. I have made it clear that Germany will stand wholly on your side."

CONRAD : "In this year too we have let slip another opportunity of taking the initiative against Serbia."

KAISER : "Why didn't you? No one hindered you."

CONRAD : "That was all the fault of the London Conference. The matter was placed in the hands of England and Russia."

Conrad next asked that German influence should be used to steady Rumania and Greece, and the Kaiser agreed. He was sanguine about Greece :

KAISER : "We shall have Greece on our side."

CONRAD : "That would be very agreeable; but public opinion there is for France, not Germany."

KAISER : "After the victory, the King can do what he likes in his own country. He will carry out the policy that he wills."¹

III

Six weeks later the Kaiser visited the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at his villa at Konopischt, and then went on to Vienna. There, at

¹ Conrad, Vol. II., pp. 420-2.

the German Embassy, on October 26, the Austrian Foreign Minister, Berchtold, had an interview with him, the account of which by Berchtold himself, is one of the most illuminating documents in the Austrian record.

The Kaiser opened the conversation by asking what was to be done to prevent further encroachments on the part of Serbia, to which Berchtold replied that Austro-Hungarian policy was directed to playing off the Balkan States against one another. Steps, he said, must be taken to prevent Serbia and Bulgaria coming together, but the difficulty was to attach Bulgaria without offending Rumania, and in that German assistance would be welcome. The Kaiser agreed and promised to instruct the German Ambassador at Bucharest accordingly.

The Kaiser then entered into the whole question of the future position of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, and "in eloquent language developed the idea that it was not a question of passing manifestations created and fashioned by diplomatic action, but of a world historic process in the category of the migrations of peoples, in this case a mighty impulse of Slavdom," though not altogether according to the wishes of the Panславists, since Panславism, and Russia with it, was bankrupt in the Balkans. The strengthening of the Balkan Slav States was a serious matter for Austria and Germany. War between East and West was in the long-run inevitable, and if Austria were exposed on her flank to the invasion of a considerable military power, it might be big with fate for the result of the struggle of the peoples. He (the Kaiser) had gathered from his talks with members of the high nobility during his recent visit to Konopischt that the preponderance of the Slav nationalists in the monarchy was quite intolerable. "The Slavs were born to serve, and not to rule, and this must be brought home to them; and if they thought that salvation was to be expected from Belgrade, they must be undeceived." No other orientation in the Balkans could be imagined than the predominance of the Monarchy over all the States there.

The Kaiser then suggested a plan for attaching Serbia to the Monarchy, by money—from the King downwards, all were to be had for money—by developing her army, and by trade facilities, but always on condition that she placed her troops at the disposal of Austria-Hungary. On Berchtold objecting that the "inextinguishable animosity" of the Serbs would make any military convention impossible, the Kaiser said that Austria need not ask very much—only that Serbia should place her army at the disposal

of Austria, make it, so to speak, subordinate to the Austrian, in return for protection against foreign attack.

But, again asked Berchtold, what if she refused? The Kaiser answered:

Force would have to be employed, for "if His Majesty Francis Joseph demands something, the Serbian Government must yield, and if she does not, then Belgrade will be bombarded and occupied until the will of His Majesty is fulfilled. You may rest assured that I stand behind you and am ready to draw the sword whenever your initiative (*Vorgehen*) makes it necessary." (His Majesty accompanied these words with a motion of his hand towards his sword.)

The conversation then passed to the question of the future of Turkey, and the Kaiser said he had taken advantage of his meeting with the Monarchs of England and Russia at the Cumberland wedding festivities to sound them about their intentions in the squaring of accounts with the Turks. Both had said that they were in favour of Constantinople remaining Turkish "since the Porte was the best watchman of the Dardanelles." Incidentally the Kaiser asserted that on the same occasion he had mentioned the question of "the further development of the Turkish Army through German instructors," and that neither the Tsar nor King George had raised any objection.¹ What he had in mind, he said, was again to make clear to the Russians that his desire was to fortify Constantinople for the Turks.

After drawing a lively picture of the three Sovereigns chaffing together about Tsar Ferdinand of Bulgaria and his presumption in claiming the Island of Samothrace and in "offering" Constantinople to the Tsar, the Kaiser delivered himself on the subject of Russia. Berchtold's narrative thus winds up:

So far as Russia was concerned, the Kaiser considered a return to the traditions of the Holy Alliance and to the Drei-Kaiserbund as impossible. He had been brought up in these traditions, but he had to realize that since the time of Alexander III we had to reckon with another Russia, with a Power hostile to us and going out for our destruction, in which quite other elements than the Tsar controlled the Government. For the present Russia did not inspire the Kaiser with anxiety; for the next six years they could be safe on

¹ To mention things casually in conversation with other Sovereigns and afterwards claim their consent was a regular part of the Kaiser's tactics. Thus he claimed to have secured the Tsar's consent to the occupation of Kiao-Chow in 1898, and King George's consent to the dispatch of the warship in 1911, though neither had any memory of his having spoken of these things. Similarly he claimed with very doubtful warrant that the Tsar had suggested the appointment of a German Commander-in-Chief to the International Force which dealt with the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

that side. He had come to know this last March, since a German from the Baltic Provinces who was personally known to him had repeated to him an observation of the Tsar's after a war council held in Tsarskoe Selo: "God be praised, we shall not go to war, for the next six years it is impossible" (in French). Till then the army was not ready, and close at hand was the haunting spectre of Revolution. On my remarking that Revolution would also have to be reckoned with at the end of six years, and perhaps more then than now, but that this was a double-edged weapon since the Monarchical principle might suffer a serious shock from it, the Kaiser said vehemently that, if it came to the last extremity, such considerations were so much snuff to him (*ganz schnuppe*), for then it would be a struggle to the death in which we should both stand together against a common enemy, and it was all one to him in what way the enemy went down. The skin remained always nearer than the shirt!

As often as opportunity offered during our hour and a quarter's talk to touch upon our relations as Allies, His Majesty ostentatiously used the occasion to assure me that we could count absolutely and completely upon him. This was the red thread which ran through the utterances of the illustrious Sovereign, and when I laid stress on this on taking my departure and thanked him as I left, His Majesty did me the honour to say that whatever came from the Vienna Foreign Office was a command for him.¹ (*Was immer vom Wiener Auswärtigen Amte komme, für Ihn befehl sei.*)

Thus on October 26, 1913, the Kaiser formally committed himself to the forcing policy which all through the previous year he had resisted. In the whole series of documents there is none which may more justly be called fatal. If there was any moment when the restraining influence of a wise friend was urgently needed, it was just then, in October, 1913, when the confused thoughts of fevered brains were rushing the Dual Monarchy to its catastrophe. Yet at this moment the Kaiser appears on the scene throwing the reins to the runaway horse, announcing that whatever issues from the distracted Ball-platz will be to him a command. No advice could have been more congenial to the die-hards of Vienna—the Serbs to be bribed or coerced into submission, the imperial will to be asserted, the Austrian Kaiser to bombard and occupy Belgrade, the German Kaiser to stand behind him with drawn sword, the Tsar to look on, since his army would not be ready for six years—all the false judgments, miscalculations and follies which ten months later were to be exploded on Europe. Beside the German Kaiser's exhortations, Berchtold's craftier idea of playing off the Balkan peoples against one another must almost be accounted wisdom.

Both, reckoned as statesmanship, were bankrupt. There was from now onwards but one chance of keeping the peace in the

¹ Austrian Documents, Vol. VII., pp. 512-15.

Balkans. This was that Austria-Hungary should make terms with the new facts, and come to an understanding with Russia about the bounds which should be set to them. It was difficult but not impossible. Whatever his motives may have been, whether fear of Revolution or unreadiness, the Tsar was still in a peaceful mood. The Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg reported that he was ready for a deal while urgent in warning that he could not look on at an Austrian attack on Serbia without forfeiting his throne. But, as usual, they knew better in Vienna. They knew that the Panslavist movement was on the wane and that for all the tall talk, the Tsar would do nothing when the time came. Or if he did, there could be no more favourable moment for striking at him than now when his army was unready and the essential strategic railways had yet to be built. The Kaiser's belief in the inevitable war between East and West coupled with the supposition that the East would not be in fighting trim for six years led to dangerous thoughts in the military mind. Conrad was more than ever convinced that the time was ripe for his war.

At the beginning of December, 1913, Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador in London, wrote a dispatch recording a conversation he had had with Lord Haldane, and reported the latter as having said that Great Britain would in no circumstances permit the destruction of France. On this the Kaiser made the following comment :

Haldane's conversation with Lichnowsky strips British policy of all the pretences of insecurity. England will support France and Russia against us unconditionally from envy and hate. The eventual war for existence which the Germans in Europe (Austria, Germany) have to fight against the Slavs (Russia) supported by the Romans (Gauls) will find the Anglo-Saxons on the side of the Slavs. Reason: envy, fear of our becoming too great! A desirable explanation which from henceforth must be the basis of our policy. We must come to a military agreement with Bulgaria and Turkey, and also with Rumania. We must also conclude a similar agreement with Japan. Any Power we can get is good enough to help us. It is a question of life and death for Germany.¹

¹ G.P., XXXIX, No. 15613, pp. 123-4.

FRENCH AND RUSSIAN RESPONSIBILITY

France and Russia—The Alleged Conspiracy—French Anxieties about Russia—
 Isvolsky in Paris—His Dispatches to his Government—His Grievances—
 French Diplomacy—Its Skill and Precision—Contemporary German Opinion
 —Russian "Aggressiveness"—Bethmann Hollweg's View—How Far True
 —Russia and the "Warm Water"—The Tsar and the Kaiser.

I

THE last few chapters have been concerned mainly with events in Germany, Austria and the Near East. The parallel developments on the French and Russian side need now to be considered.

By a careful selection of passages from the Russian documents¹ the theory has been built up that Russia and France were at this time pursuing a joint policy in the Balkans with the deliberate object of forcing a war in which the one should win Constantinople and the Straits, and the other recover Alsace-Lorraine. In view of our knowledge of what was going forward in Vienna and Berlin, it might seem superfluous to seek other causes for the drift into war which was gaining impetus in these months, but since this alleged Franco-Russian conspiracy has been the theme of many writers, it must find a place in any attempt to elucidate the facts. The literature of the subject is voluminous and I can do no more in this chapter than set out certain conclusions which seem to me fair.

To draw a sharp distinction between Russians and French on the one side and Germans and Austrians on the other, and to treat the first as passive victims of the militarism of the second, would be a historical absurdity. Both had policies which at times threatened the peace; neither had shrunk from the risk of war in pursuing them. Russia had a "historic mission" to get to the warm water, the fulfilment of which she considered necessary to her well-being, if not to her existence. Austria had a crumbling Empire to which,

¹ For these see de Siebert's "Entente Diplomacy," Stieve's "Isvolsky and the World War," the "Livre Noir," etc.

in her opinion, the success of the Russian mission would be the death-blow. Behind Russia and Austria respectively stood France and Germany with deep-seated antagonisms and ambitions awaiting their opportunity. It was certain that, if war came, they would all fight for all their aims, Russia for the Straits, France for the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine, Austria to evict Russia from the Balkans, Germany to establish her power in the world and to dispose of the Russian threat. Each looking into the future saw a point at which they would be prepared to fight rather than yield, but there were differences in their views of the nearness or remoteness of this point. All the evidence, I think, goes to show that at the beginning of the year 1914, France and Russia were still anxious to avoid the struggle, while Germany and Austria were more and more coming to the conclusion that their interests required it to be forced.

But there was frequent friction between the partners on both sides, and in the picture presented by the documents France and Russia were as often out of step in the last years before the war as Germany and Austria. Thus, during the summer of 1912, French statesmen made frequent complaints that they were being kept in the dark by their Russian ally, and they were not reassured when M. Sazonoff replied that he himself had learnt of the Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty, which was the prelude to the Balkan War, for the first time at the beginning of May, 1912, when it was communicated to him and the Tsar at Livadia by M. Daneff, the President of the Bulgarian Sobranje. M. Poincaré, the French Prime Minister, was shown the text of this Treaty when he visited Russia in the following August, and, according to his own account written down at the time,¹ he immediately pointed out that it "in no way corresponded to the description of it which had been given to me" (presumably between May and August) and "that it was in matter of fact a war agreement, and that it not only revealed *arrières pensées* on the part of both the Serbs and Bulgarians, but that it was to be feared their hopes appeared to have been encouraged by Russia, and that the eventual partition proposed had been used as a bait for their covetousness." M. Sazonoff endeavoured to reassure him by saying that since both Serbia and Bulgaria had pledged themselves not to declare war and even not to mobilize without the approval of Russia, "the latter would be able to exercise a right of veto which would assure the maintenance of peace, which she would not fail to do."

M. Poincaré nevertheless was seriously alarmed, and his Govern-

¹ Poincaré, "Origins of the War," p. 115.

ment took the practical step of refusing Bulgaria a loan which might have been used for war. When, in spite of M. Sazonoff's assurances—assurances which he had repeated to the British Government on his visit to England—war broke out, France in common with Great Britain and Germany worked loyally through the Ambassadors' Conference to localize and limit the conflict.

So far, the records suggest nothing but loyal and straightforward action on the part of France. But the dispatches of M. Isvolsky from Paris have been used to suggest that from the end of the year 1912 onwards, in fact while the Ambassadors' Conference was sitting, the rôles of Russia and France began to be reversed, and that France was pushing for war, while Russia was holding back. On December 18 Isvolsky wrote to his Government "there is astonishment and unconcealed dismay at our indifference to Austrian mobilization. . . . French officers and French Ministers have been told that we not only regard Austria's arming as a purely defensive measure, but that Russia would not strike even in the entirely improbable event of an Austrian attack on Serbia. At this information Poincaré and all the Ministers were utterly astonished." He goes on :

According to all the news arriving here, Austria is at present on the point of completing the mobilization of ten army corps. Some of these are obviously directed against Russia. This mobilization is a heavy burden for Austria's finances, which are already in a deplorable condition. A critical move by the Austrian Cabinet may therefore be expected any day. Such a move, it is considered here, might involve a Russian defensive move, which in turn would inevitably and automatically drag first Germany and then France into the war. The French Government views this possibility with perfect calmness, aware of its obligations under the Alliance and firmly resolved to act up to them. It has taken all necessary steps; mobilization on the Eastern frontier has been examined, war material is in readiness, and so on. And at this of all moments France seems to be faced with an entirely different attitude on the part of her Ally, and that in regard to a situation in which it might have been supposed that her Ally is chiefly interested. The conclusion drawn is that either we do not fully appreciate Austria's warlike intentions or for some special reason we have been unwilling at the moment to take France into our confidence. Both suppositions are most prejudicial to us, and despite all my efforts to combat them it is becoming more and more difficult to preserve here a desirable attitude towards us. . . .

To secure this attitude I am at present doing my utmost to influence the Press. In this certain substantial results have been attained, thanks to the timely adoption of the needed measures. As you know, I am taking no direct part in the distribution of subsidies. But this distribution, in which French Ministers (the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance) are concerned, appears to be effectual in every case, and has already produced the needed result.¹

¹ Stieve, "Isvolsky and the World War," p. 123.

On the same day the Russian Military Attaché (Ignatyev) had a conversation with M. Millerand, the French Minister for War, who (according to the Attaché) put the question to him very straight :

MILLERAND : " Do you not regard an occupation of Serbia as in itself a direct provocation of war ? "

IGNATYEV : " I cannot answer that question, but I know that we have no desire to bring about a European war or to take any steps which might start a European conflagration. "

MILLERAND : " In that case you will have to abandon Serbia to her fate. That, of course, is your affair ; all we want is that we must be clear that we are not to blame for it ; we are prepared, and that fact must be borne in mind. But can you not at least say what is the Russian view on the Balkan question generally ? "

IGNATYEV : " We are still deeply interested in the Slav question, but I need hardly say that history has taught us to think first of the interests of our own State, and not to sacrifice them to abstract ideas. "

MILLERAND : " But surely you understand, Colonel, that the present is not a question of Albania or the Serbs or Durazzo, but of the hegemony of Austria over the whole Balkan Peninsula ? Surely you are doing something on the military side ? " ¹

The coincidence of the dates between these two communications is somewhat suspicious. The Russian Ambassador and the Military Attaché had apparently arranged to address the same argument to their Government on the same day.

II

If we were distributing responsibility among individuals, Isvolsky undoubtedly would rank high among the war-makers. He was a vain and ambitious man who suffered from a chronic sense of grievance. He had never forgotten the trick played upon him by Achrenthal after their Buchlau meeting in 1908, and the idea of getting even with Austria-Hungary and winning the prize—viz., the opening of the Straits—of which he supposed himself to have been balked in that year, became an obsession with him in later years. Undoubtedly he used his influence, when he became Ambassador in Paris, to stir up his Government when it seemed to be flagging ; and it was a regular part of his method to suggest that French statesmen were dismayed at its lack of spirit. We have only his word and that of the Military Attaché that these statesmen used the language attributed to them, and, so far as it

¹ Stieve, " Isvolsky and the World War," p. 124. The authority for this is an article by E. Adamov in the *Izvestiya*, July 29, 1924.

implies warlike intention, it seems to me more probable that the two Russians either put into their mouths what they wished them to say or at least added the colouring matter which gave legitimate inquiries the appearance of an incitement. They are at all events a very flimsy foundation for the intrinsically improbable idea that French statesmen desired to make a world war out of the Balkan entanglement.

All the facts and all other documentary evidence, including the latest series of French Documents, point to the opposite conclusion. During the eight months after the communications of the two Russians, the French continued to support the efforts of British and Germans at the Ambassadors' Conference in London to keep the peace in the Balkans. For most of this time, and later, they were in a ferment of anxiety at the growing disproportion between the German army and their own, and they had every reason to suppose that the measure they took to strengthen their forces in March, 1913—the substitution of three for two years' service—would throw their military machine out of gear for a considerable period, while the necessary new organization was being built up. At this time they had no assurance of British support, and they were often in despair at the unpreparedness of Russia and at the confusion and corruption which were revealed whenever the veil was lifted on the Russian War Departments. Even if we attach no importance to the emphatic denials of French statesmen, the supposition that in these circumstances they desired or were working for a world war would, I think, be extremely far-fetched.

But they were undoubtedly very much troubled at the seeming instability of Russian policy, and what Isvolsky reported to them on that subject was not at all calculated to reassure them. They had been mystified and alarmed, as we have just seen, by the part which Russia played in the formation of the Balkan League and her apparent blindness to its consequences and her own liabilities. As an ally, they shared these liabilities, and were well entitled to ask where she stood and what she meant. If she did not consider it a vital interest to resist an Austrian attack in the Balkans, let her say so and shape her policy accordingly. But let her not drift into a position which she would consider disastrous, and then call for French support when it would be too late to give it effectively. There can be no doubt that questions of this kind were put from Paris to St. Petersburg frequently during the years 1912 and 1913; and those who have read the analysis of Austrian policy during this period in a previous chapter, will perhaps conclude that the

French were better informed than the Russians about the aims of this policy, supposing always that Isvolsky was right in what he reported about his Government.

But let it be said again that any picture which presented the French as innocent pacifists in the grip of German militarism would be as much out of drawing as that which depicts them as scheming for war. The French did not, like the Germans, let the military hob-nailed boot intrude upon their domestic politics or subdue their essentially civilian culture, but they played the game of power-politics with a peculiar skill and pertinacity, and from the time of the Russian Alliance onwards they had seized every opening to improve their position in the world, and, as they maintained, to increase their security. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the French were the cleverest, the most clear-sighted and the wisest in their generation of all the diplomatists of this period. But just as they were logical and precise themselves, so they expected logic and precision in others; and the wavering mind of the Tsar, with its Liberal velleities and autocratic reactions, its rapid transitions between pacifism and Panslavism, and the consequent hesitations, delays and inconsequences of Russian diplomacy, were a perpetual irritation to them. They believed the Russian Alliance to be the corner-stone of French security, and held themselves bound at all costs to fulfil their obligations as an ally, but we need not at all disbelieve them when they tell us that they were greatly troubled in these months at the prospect of being drawn into a war which their ally had failed to foresee, and for which she was very insufficiently prepared.

If French policy was thus continuous and precise, and by a peculiar discipline, of which the French alone seemed to hold the secret, had survived all the vicissitudes of domestic politics and been imposed on all Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries, this is by no means to say that there were no opposing currents in France. Isvolsky was right when he told his Government in December, 1912, that there was a strong pacifist element in the country—the element which he thought it imperative to combat by the unseemly operations which, according to his own account, he practised on certain Paris newspapers. While the men in office, Poincaré, Millerand, Pichon, and Delcassé, held firmly to the Russian Alliance, a powerful radical group, including men like Caillaux and Cruppi, were credited with the desire to break with Russia and take the risk of a policy of isolation. And though the public as a whole rose to the increase of the period of military

service, this proposal encountered violent opposition from Socialists and pacifists under Jaurès's powerful leadership. If in the end it was carried through without serious friction, the growing fear of Germany was mainly to thank. French official circles attached high importance to the fact that the Germans had raised a capital levy of £50,000,000 to finance the last increases in their army. This they regarded as the extremest measure possible in time of peace, and concluded from it that war was in sight. But to suppose that they wanted war because they so interpreted the signs would, I think, be to invert the facts.

Much stress has been laid on the recall of M. Georges Louis and the appointment of M. Delcassé as French Ambassador in St. Petersburg in January, 1913, and a spirited defence of Louis has been made by his friend and biographer, Ernest Judet. That he was a very honest man and that Sazonoff treated him badly is, I think, beyond question, but in the circumstances of friction which had arisen between him and the Russian Foreign Secretary, almost any Foreign Office would have thought it expedient to recall an Ambassador and appoint as his successor a man who was *persona grata* to the Government to which he was accredited. The appointment of Delcassé certainly meant that the French had gone out of their way to find a man of exceptional distinction and experience to fill this difficult place, but this seemed natural in the circumstances, and it was not regarded at the time as of sinister import. Delcassé certainly was no pacifist, and on the Morocco question he had offended the Germans and frightened some of his own countrymen by his defiant attitude to the German challenge, but on other occasions, and notably in his handling of the Fashoda crisis, he had shown both skill and moderation.

III

The documentary evidence is still incomplete and further disclosures are possible which may require us to modify judgment. Nations are capable of great self-delusion about their military power, and disclaimers after the event do not necessarily dispose of the idea that France and Russia thought themselves equal to a struggle with Germany and Austria in 1914. But this was certainly not the opinion of the Austrian and German military Staffs. Both had persuaded themselves that neither Russia nor France was in a favourable position to wage war at this time. Von Moltke wrote

to Conrad on March 13, 1914, "all the news we have from Russia points away from a deliberately aggressive attitude at the present time. I do not believe that she will in the near future seek or afford an occasion for war with Austria, or, what is the same thing, with us." The best, he said, she could do with the money she had was to improve the miserable accommodation of the existing army, and there would be none to spare for the building of the barracks which would be necessary for new formations. Still less, he went on to say, was an aggressive attitude to be expected from the French. France was at the moment in a very unfavourable military position. The carrying out of the three years' military period and the training of the two batches of recruits in one short period had encountered all sorts of difficulties which could not easily be overcome. It was true that France was doing everything possible to strengthen her ally, but she herself was not in a position to go to war with the Triple Alliance in any time that could be foreseen.¹

The pacific view of the Dual Alliance was confirmed by the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg, who told his Government that the Tsar was peacefully inclined, and thereby drew down on his own head the usual rebuke from the All-Highest.² The Tsar himself told the Austrian Ambassador in the spring of 1913 that if Germany and Austria insisted on a war they would have one, but before it was ended, all three Emperors would be tottering on their thrones. There is no reason to suppose that he reconsidered this well-justified presentiment in the coming weeks.

The martial spirit of France was certainly no whit inferior to that of its neighbours, and it was raised to a high pitch in the armament competition of the year 1913. As in Germany, so in France, the greater sacrifices demanded from the mass of the people required the stimulus of appeals to patriotism and the kindling of fears for the national security. Frenchmen have assured us that the recovery of the lost Provinces was not a leading motive in the minds of Frenchmen in these days. Not to make aggressive war for that purpose had for many years been the accepted policy of successive French Governments. But there never was a question that, if for any cause war did come about, this object would immediately come to life and give fire and impulse to the fighting spirit. In so far as the Alsace-Lorraine motive came into the upper consciousness of Frenchmen in these months, it was largely due to the Zabern incident and the obstinate endorsement by the German Government

¹ Conrad, Vol. III., p. 6111.

² See *infra*; Chapter xxxix., p. 394.

of high-handed military action which deeply wounded the pride and the humane sentiments of the French people.

IV

The case of Russia requires further examination, for it is in a peculiar sense the test of the Alliance system and of the fears and ambitions on which it was founded. Bethmann Hollweg, in his "Reflections on the World War," claims that the policy of Germany was defensive, whereas that of her opponents, and especially Russia, was aggressive. Germany sought nothing except to keep what she had and to save herself from "encirclement"; Russia sought to break out of her boundaries and to acquire new territory and dominion. This needs to be qualified by adding that Germany was committed to an Austrian policy which, while it claimed to be defensive, did in fact aim at a large extension of Austrian territory and power, and that she herself had economic if not territorial ambitions in the Near East which made it imperative for her to join hands with Austria-Hungary. But with these qualifications Bethmann Hollweg's plea may be conceded. Russian policy had for a long period of time been aggressive, if by that is meant that it aimed at an extension of territory and power.

Englishmen should be the last to deny it. They fought Russia in the Crimea to prevent her encroachment on Turkey; they threatened her with war when, thirty-three years later, she stood at the gates of Constantinople; they sent her an ultimatum when she appeared on the borders of Afghanistan, and for generations they regarded her supposed designs on India to be the chief threat to their Empire; they stood behind Japan when the latter challenged her advance in the Far East. The change of opinion which in a few years banished all these fears and alarms and made Great Britain the friend and supporter, instead of the principal rival and opponent, of Russia, may well seem hereafter to have been one of the strangest results of the Alliance system. Great Britain crosses the line between one group and another, and causes of estrangement, said to be rooted on history and ineluctable fact, fade into space. It is now found possible for heavily armed neighbours, pursuing what were supposed to be incompatible policies, to live in peace and support each other. The fact encourages the hope that other supposed eternal incompatibilities may be similarly dissolved. But Russia was destined to be the bogey of one or other of her neighbours, and in proportion as Britain was relieved, Germany became

oppressed by the Russian peril; and the argument, so familiar to a previous generation of Englishmen, about the restless ambitions and illimitable resources of the Eastern Power, was now poured out upon the German people.

But Russia too was convinced that the achievement of what her neighbours term her restless ambitions was (in the common terminology of all the Powers) "necessary to her existence." To have no ports which were not frozen for a considerable period of the year and no access to the warm water which was not at the mercy of her neighbours seemed to her a condition at once dangerous and humiliating. The tragic procession of her ships from Libau to their doom at Tsushima had sunk deep into her memory, and she was persuaded that, if she had been permitted to join her Black Sea Fleet to her Home Fleet, she would have been spared that humiliation. In after years the Bolshevist Trotsky spoke the thoughts of the old Russia carried forward into the new when he said:

We must cry aloud that we need Constantinople and the Straits. A country such as ours cannot suffocate for the caprice or the interests of anyone. That is why Bessarabia is indispensable to us. It constitutes the first step on the road to Constantinople. Be persuaded of it, the Straits will belong to us sooner or later, even if England and France, forgetting the promise made during the war, wish to prevent us from obtaining them.¹

So said Sazonoff and Isvolsky and the powerful group of soldiers and Imperialists who governed Russia in the years before the war.

The Tsar said it too in the end, but not until after many waverings and heart-searchings. He had hoped to reach the unfrozen seas in the Far East, and, when that failed, had all but thrown himself into the arms of the German Kaiser. The almost hypnotic influence which the German Sovereign exerted over his Russian cousin may be traced in the singular correspondence in which we see "Nickie" alternately resisting and succumbing to the persuasive eloquence and affectionate blandishment of "Willy." Admiration for the gifted and glittering personality of the German Kaiser, wistful longings for the traditional friendship of their respective grandfathers, dislike of French Republicanism, fear of revolution in his own country, the old suspicions of England—all these and many other sentimental reactions appear in these letters and in the accompanying documents, together with occasional bursts of impatience on the part of Nicholas at being taught his

¹ Trotsky in 1924, quoted by Dr. Harry N. Howard, "Partition of Turkey," University of Oklahoma Press, and cited in *Journal of Central Asian Society*, April, 1932.

business by the self-confident German instructor in the art of being an Emperor. The Tsar was wax in the hands of so many, his wife, Rasputin, the Grand Dukes, Ministers, and soldiers, who told him more and more insistently that he would lose his throne if he submitted again to the dictates of Vienna and Berlin, or let the leadership of the Slavs be snatched from his hands by the German Powers. That the road to Constantinople lay through Berlin and that it would be irretrievably blocked if Austria and Germany worked their will over the Balkan States and made Turkey their footstool, was doctrine which was more and more poured into his ears from the beginning of 1912 onwards to the end. Serbia in his eyes and in the eyes of those who surrounded him was no less a test case for Russian honour and chivalry than Belgium became afterwards for Great Britain.

V

The reader who wishes to form his own opinion about the intentions of Russia in the last months before the war can hardly do better than read carefully M. Sazonoff's Memorandum on Russian preparations presented to the Tsar on December 13, 1913, and the minutes of the Conference which considered this report and discussed the whole subject on January 13, 1914. The first is published in the Bolshevik "Livre Noir" (Vol. II., pp. 363-72), and the second in Stieve's "Isvolsky and the World War" (English translation, pp. 219-29), and both are conveniently and impartially summarized by Professor Fay in his "Origins of the World War" (Vol. I., pp. 524-36). The general conclusion from these records is that Russia would have considered any action which threatened finally to bar her road to Constantinople and the Straits a *casus belli*, but that she desired so long as possible to preserve peace and the *status quo*. The Navy department expressed the opinion that the preparations proposed by Sazonoff would take several years; the Ministers present agreed that "in principle a war with Germany would be undesirable," and though the Military authorities "declared categorically the complete readiness of Russia for a duel with Germany, not to mention Austria," there is an ambiguity about the word "duel" which seems to me to make it hazardous to infer that they had the same confidence about a world war. There were undoubtedly Russian statesmen who were willing to play for high stakes on this basis, and Isvolsky was in a mood to take any gambler's chance. But there are a

good many signs that his power was waning in these months, and if it is possible to speak of Russia having one mind, that mind was in 1914 to keep the peace and prolong the *status quo* as long as possible.

On the main issue of her Eastern policy, Russia undoubtedly by this time had the pledged support of France. To French statesmen the Russian alliance was pivotal and essential. Where Russia finally stood, France, in their opinion, was bound to stand too. This was how the Alliance system worked in both camps. That France for any French interest would wish to promote war on any Eastern issue was always improbable; that, if a war did occur, she would seek to be revenged on her old enemy and to recover her lost provinces was certain.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE RÔLE OF GREAT BRITAIN

Great Britain in the Last Years—The Naval Question—Last Efforts at Settlement—The Haldane Mission—German Demand for a Political Equivalent—Its Rejection—The Proposed "Naval Holiday"—Winston Churchill and the Kaiser—Britain draws nearer to France—British and French Naval Dispositions—A Momentous Agreement—Reason Against British Neutrality—German Misconstruction of British Motives and Character.

I

WHAT in the same period had been happening between Britain and Germany? That also comes into the final account, and must be considered in some detail.

Before the year 1911 was over, Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, had warned his Government that the appearance of a new German Navy Bill in the year 1912 would have a blighting effect upon Anglo-German relations. He justly said that apart from what this law might contain, the mere fact of its being proposed after and in spite of the assurances which he had given—and as he thought with the authority of his Government—that Germany would not exceed her previous plans, was bound to revive British suspicions. It was now more than ever believed in England that in building this great fleet Germany had in view the destruction of British sea-power, and against such a threat the firm maintenance of the Triple *Entente* and the building of ships seemed to Englishmen the only security.

But the British Government were willing, in the familiar phrase, to explore all avenues which might lead to a less dangerous solution; and in January, 1912, when an intimation reached them from two well-meaning private intermediaries, Herr Ballin and Sir Ernest Cassel, that the Germans were willing to talk to any accredited British emissary, they decided to send Lord Haldane to Berlin. Haldane spoke German and was supposed to be on friendly terms with the Kaiser, and if good intentions and conciliatory manners could have effected anything at that moment, he was

undoubtedly the man for this mission. The conversations in Berlin were amicable, and professions of good-will were abundant, but Haldane brought back with him a draft of the proposed new law (three new battleships, the creation of a third battle squadron and an increase of personnel mounting up by the year 1920 to 15,000 fresh naval recruits) which led the British Admiralty to say that it was worse than anything they had expected. All that the Germans offered appeared to be retardation of their programme, but even if this was effected, the new law would, according to the calculation of the Admiralty, require an additional expenditure of £12,000,000 on the British side during the next five years.

Once more, and for the last time before his departure from London, Metternich brought his influence to bear on his Government, and during the next few weeks conversations took place between Haldane and the Ambassador which half opened the seemingly closed door. But at this point the Germans insisted on a political equivalent for any concessions on their part. This, as the British Government interpreted it, was nothing less than the detachment of Great Britain from the Triple *Entente*. As a basis of negotiations they had given Haldane a formula to submit to the British Cabinet :

1. The High Contracting Powers assure each other mutually of their desire for peace and friendship.

2. They will not, either of them, make any combination, or join any combination, which is directed against the other. They expressly declare that they are not bound by any such combination.

3. If either of the High Contracting Parties become entangled in a war with one or more other Powers, the other of the High Contracting Parties will at least observe toward the Power so entangled a benevolent neutrality, and use its utmost endeavour for the localization of the conflict.

4. The duty of neutrality which arises from the preceding article has no application in so far as it may not be reconcilable with existing agreements which the High Contracting Parties have already made. The making of new agreements which make it impossible for either of the Contracting Parties to observe neutrality toward the other beyond what is provided by the preceding limitations is excluded in conformity with the provisions contained in Article 2.

It was assumed at the time that the Germans were asking a great deal more than they expected to get, and the British Government replied with a counter-proposition :

The High Contracting Parties assure each other mutually of their desire for peace and friendship. England will neither make nor join in any unprovoked attack on Germany and pursue no aggressive policy towards her. Aggression

on Germany is not the subject and forms no part of any treaty, understanding or combination to which England is now a party, nor will she become a party to anything that has such an object.

The Germans intimated that they would accept this, if the British Government would consent to an additional clause: "England will therefore observe at least a benevolent neutrality should war be forced upon Germany," or "England will therefore as a matter of course remain neutral, if war is forced upon Germany." The acceptance of this would plainly have been fatal to the *Entente*, but Asquith observed that "if there had been no *Entente* at all, Great Britain would have been bound even in her own interests alone, to refuse it." It would, for instance, "have precluded us from coming to the help of France, should Germany on any pretext attack her and aim at getting possession of the Channel ports."¹ It was, in fact, impossible to attach serious importance to a belligerent's definition of a war as having been "forced upon him." The Germans had never admitted that any war had been other than forced upon them, and they would undoubtedly have claimed, as indeed they did in 1914, that an attack on France, if she had come to the aid of Russia in pursuance of the Franco-Russian Alliance, came within this definition.

II

At the Berlin Conference of Ministers in June, 1909, Tirpitz had expressed the view that only for this political equivalent and for nothing short of it was a naval agreement to be contemplated with Great Britain, and this remained to the end the dominant thought of even well-meaning Germans like Bethmann Hollweg. England must be brought back to the German constellation, or the fleet must be used to keep her in order on the diplomatic field, and, if it came to war, to make her position perilous. The Kaiser was still, according to the account he gave in after years,² on the high horse of his Sovereign rights, and while he thought it politic to appear friendly, he yet remained keenly on guard to prevent the Haldane Mission from developing into "a foreign assault upon our right of self-determination"—the plea on which he had broken all efforts for reduction of armaments in recent years. He now took special credit to himself for having seen and frustrated another British trap, and retailed a cock-and-bull story from London about

¹ "Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith," Vol. II., p. 68.

² "My Memoirs," p. 148.

a scene which was supposed to have taken place in the British Cabinet—Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Churchill tumbling over each other for the honour of being appointed to this Mission, the Cabinet deciding that Mr. Churchill should not have it, and that Sir Edward Grey should be reserved for the “fireworks at the end,” while the preliminary negotiations were undertaken by someone who, like Lord Haldane, was in Grey’s and Asquith’s pocket. Trivialities, but alarming as an indication of the almost unlimited absurdity which attended the Kaiser’s judgment of foreign statesmen and Governments.

As a last effort the British Government proposed a “naval holiday,” *i.e.* a truce for a year from naval construction on both sides, but this too was regarded by the Germans as a British trap. The Kaiser called it “mere humbug,”¹ a “speculation on the stupidity or hoped-for weakness of the German Government.” The German naval experts placed it under the microscope and vied with each other in producing reasons to show that it would help England and hurt Germany. Every time it was examined, someone discovered a new and sinister motive behind the innocent appearance of the British proposal. Finally in February, 1914, the Kaiser gave it the *coup de grâce* in a note to the Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg. “I wish,” he said, “to see the whole endless and dangerous subject of the limitation of armaments rolled up and put away for good. What it comes to finally is that England is protesting against my right to decide on the sea-power required by Germany, in fact an attempt to break down the Naval Law. . . . As regards the naval holiday, I agree with Your Excellency that it is not realizable in practice, and Your Excellency must understand that it is out of the question for me to consider it. I leave it to you to devise the form of refusal.”²

III

The sharp edge of a positive refusal was avoided, and for the time being the success of the Ambassadors’ Conference on the Balkan question eased the strain between the British and German Governments. Permanent peace was now for a season the talk on both sides; and changing the venue, British Ministers began to explore the possibility of an amicable deal with Germans on Colonial territory, and the removal of that long-standing rock of offence, the quarrel about the Baghdad Railway. In this they

¹ G.P., XXXIX, No. 15573, p. 46, footnote.

² *Ibid.*, No. 15579, p. 78.

were encouraged by the new German Ambassador, Lichnowsky, and the German Minister in London, Baron von Kühlmann; and it was hoped that success on this ground would automatically improve the situation on the other ground. Almost complete agreement was reached, but technical completion and publication was held up by a hitch¹ at the last moment, and the war came before it was legally valid.

Chiming in with the more pacific mood, British Ministers made speeches which they thought would be welcome in Berlin, and early in October, Mr. Churchill, addressing the Women's Liberal Association at Dundee, paid the Germans the high compliment of adopting their favourite thesis on armaments and security. Defending the Admiralty estimates against the attacks of the pacifists, he said that fortunately the measures taken for maintaining and strengthening British sea-power had not reacted unfavourably on England's relations with any other of the great Powers of Europe. On the contrary, in spite of the developments in the British navy, England's relations with the powerful German Empire had continued to improve, and to-day these relations rested on a thoroughly peaceful basis. "It was rather," he said, "the feeling of insufficient security and not calm confidence in their own strength which gave rise to irritation between the nations of the earth. If men knew they were secure against any risk of attack, a feeling of calm security spread through the country and it caused freer and better relations with other nations."

This speech, telegraphed to Berlin, threw the Kaiser into a transport of delighted self-approval. Here was his favourite thesis come back to him from England. Where Mr. Churchill spoke of the British fleet he interpolated, "and the German"; and against the last paragraph he wrote "word for word the Risiko paragraph of the German Navy Law accepted *in extenso*."² What a triumph for Tirpitz! Best thanks for the compliment, Winston Churchill. At last the Fisher-McKenna era of lies is disavowed and done with! Also Haldane and the building holiday." Then in a closing note he once more and for the last time developed his favourite theory of the right way to treat the English:

The British First Lord of the Admiralty thus implicitly recognizes the German Navy Law fully and entirely. Especially its "risk paragraphs!"

¹ For the causes of this hitch see Grey's "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., p. 303, footnote.

² The paragraph which stated that the object of the Navy Law was to create a fleet strong enough to prevent the strongest Naval Power from attacking it except at the risk of its own supremacy.

For me, and all who with me framed and extended the Navy Law and have defended it with all our might against all attempts from without and still more from within to weaken and break it down, no more brilliant justification could be imagined or expected. A magnificent triumph for Admiral Tirpitz before all the world; he has well deserved it and it will give him a commanding position in the world. A fresh proof of the old theory I have so often maintained that only ruthless, manly and unaffrighted maintenance of our own interests impresses the English and is at length compelling them to seek a *rapprochement* with us; never the so-called accommodation which they only and invariably take for flabbiness and cowardice. I shall therefore go on ruthlessly and implacably with the execution of the Navy Law down to the smallest detail in spite of all opposition at home, and, in case of necessity, extend it. England comes to us not in spite of but because of my Imperial navy!! *Avis au lecteur!!*¹ (October 10, 1913.)

It could never have passed through Mr. Churchill's mind that his observations to the Liberal women of Dundee would kindle these emotions in the German Emperor, but once more we see the incurable belief in the efficacy of the big stick as applied to Great Britain leading to a radical misinterpretation of the situation at one of its most critical moments.

So far from its having the effect which the Kaiser anticipated, the failure of the Haldane Mission compelled the British Government to take the one decision which more than any other gave form and substance to the nebulous matter of the Anglo-French *Entente*, i.e. to leave the guardianship of the Mediterranean to the French while accepting for themselves the responsibility of defending the northern waters, and incidentally the French Channel ports, against a German attack. If there is one link in the long chain of fate or circumstance compelling British and French to stand together upon which we can lay our finger and say that here the decision was taken, it is this. Other assurances might be vague and conditional, but this entailed a positive obligation which, if France were attacked, must to that extent align Great Britain with her, and would, probably, apart from all other circumstances, compel British participation in the war. To those who, like the Kaiser, were weighing the situation in the scales of war and strategy this was, or should have been, a significant fact, and it was their own choice. They had made the guardianship of the Mediterranean which, in the world of organized power, was essential to the British Empire, impossible without the assistance of an ally, and this ally could only be France.

¹ G.P., XXXIX, No. 15577, pp. 51-2; Dugdale, Vol. IV., p. 299.

IV

Asquith has left it on record¹ that in the final crisis before the war he started with five leading ideas on policy: (1) we have no obligation of any kind either to France or Russia to give them military or naval help; (2) we must not forget the ties created by our long-standing and intimate friendship with France; (3) it is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a great Power; (4) we cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base; (5) we have obligations to Belgium to prevent its being utilized and absorbed by Germany.

These were characteristic British ideas which, *mutatis mutandis*, may be traced back over two centuries of European history, and which found continuous expression in the policy of Asquith's Government before the war. To keep the final decision of war and peace in the hands of the British Parliament and to enter into no obligations which could make it the compulsory result of a "foreign entanglement" or a *casus fœderis* arising from circumstances beyond their control, had been the firm resolve of a long line of British Ministers; and it had been proof equally against German overtures for a binding Alliance to a Conservative Government, and French overtures for military commitments to a Liberal Government. It was one of the ironies of the situation that the exchange of letters between Sir Edward Grey and M. Cambon, undertaken in 1912 at the desire of pacifist members of the Cabinet and with the express object of making clear to the French the limitations of British commitments, should have been interpreted in Europe as a renewal and extension of these commitments.² The intention of this correspondence was to place definitely on record as between British and French that the question of British intervention in any possible war could only be decided when the time came by the British Parliament. Lord Salisbury had told the Germans in 1886 that the attempt to conclude a binding Alliance with Germany would wreck his Government, and in 1912 it was certain that any attempt to conclude a similar Alliance with France

¹ "Memories and Reflections," Vol. II., p. 9.

² See Brandenburg, "von Bismarck Zum Weltkrieg," pp. 376-7. Herr Brandenburg suggests that M. Poincaré procured this exchange of letters to allay his anxiety about a possible British-German *rapprochement*, and he describes the letters as a "new moral tie" between France and Great Britain which was in doubtful accord with the negotiations then going on for a Colonial agreement between Great Britain and Germany. Professor Prætorius adopts the same explanation in his *Ford Lectures*, p. 140.

For the actual circumstances see Grey, "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., pp. 96-8.

would wreck Asquith's Government. The French were assured that the "long-standing and intimate friendship with France" was a consideration of great weight which would certainly tell in the final decision, but they were warned that it was not a commitment compelling British support in all circumstances. It is sometimes argued that this reservation was an empty formality. It never was that in the minds of British Ministers. They regarded it as offering a guarantee that France and Russia would not rush ahead into enterprises unlikely to be approved by the British people or sanctioned by their Parliament, and they held it to be an essential part of any sound British policy that the decision for war or peace should be the free judgment of their own people. Only so was national unity likely to be secured in war.

So much for the formal and legal side of the British *Entente* with France. Great Britain informed her partner that she would act up to her pledge to give diplomatic support in the circumstances defined in the Convention of 1904, but that she could not go beyond it and pledge military support in advance of the occasion arising. But at this point the instincts and traditions which for generations had governed British policy in Europe came into play. Great Britain saw grave danger for herself if France were extinguished as a great Power, and a dominant Germany, without counterpoise in Europe, obtained control of Belgium and the Channel ports. Belgian neutrality she considered to be one of her special interests; the old saying that Antwerp in the hands of a hostile Power would be a "pistol aimed at the heart of England" was still in her memory. But it was a neutrality, she insisted, which must be respected by all parties, and when French soldiers presented schemes (said to be required by the German Schlieffen plan) which would, or might, have made them the first to enter Belgian territory, she warned them off that ground. She would not, she told them, be a party to the violation of Belgium by anyone. Marshal Joffre records in his "Memoirs" that on November 27, 1912, he was obliged definitely to abandon a plan which on all military grounds he would greatly have preferred, because he was warned by a "communication of the highest importance" that the English would not stand it.¹

To prevent France from being extinguished as a great Power,

¹ Joffre, "Memoirs," Vol. I., p. 126.

Marshal Joffre seems to have presumed that this plan would have the consent of Belgium, but to presume on that consent and to build up a scheme which could with difficulty be abandoned at the last moment, if that consent were withheld, seemed, in the opinion of British soldiers, far too hazardous.

to maintain the integrity of Belgium, to see that no dominant hostile Power became possessed either of that country or of the Channel ports, were thus the postulates of British policy. They were so simple, so obvious, so entirely in line with traditional British conduct in Europe, that it seems strange, on looking back, that the Germans should have failed to understand them.¹ According to their own principles of power-politics, the principles which at that moment governed all Europe, the British moves were absolutely correct, and the only ones open to Great Britain if she was not finally to be checkmated in the terrible game of chess which was now going forward. To Asquith and Grey, as they said of the final German bid for neutrality before the war, there was dishonour in the thought of buying an advantage for themselves by the desertion of their friends, but even if this were deemed a too fastidious morality for practical statesmen, it should, one would have thought, have been evident to the Germans that in Europe as it was organized in these years, policy equally with honour required its rejection.

V

It will no doubt be debated to the end of time whether British statesmen could have done anything in these months to stay the course of events, and in a very moving passage of his narrative Lord Grey has told us how again and again in the after years he searched his conscience for an answer to this question and found none. The two sharp alternatives which have been suggested by critics after the event—withdrawal from the *Entente* and public notification that they would fight on the side of France and Russia—seemed equally forbidden to British statesmen at the time. To leave France to the tender mercies of Germany and to do so suddenly and without provocation in these last days would have been repugnant to the British sense of loyalty; and the isolation which would have followed would have been far less splendid and far more dangerous than ten years earlier. On the other hand, to turn the *Entente* into a fighting alliance would have been a stroke possible only to a dictator who could have defied Parliament, and some of those who have since urged it as the right course would

¹ A high German authority assures me that the Germans did not misunderstand them. They knew that the invasion of Belgium would bring Great Britain into the war, but if they made war at all, there was no other possible way of making it, given that the war would be on two fronts, and they relied on being able to defeat France before British intervention could be effective.

probably have been the first to object to it at the time.¹ But even assuming that these courses were possible, those who have made the closest study of the German and Austrian records of this period will not, I think, feel the least assurance that either of them would have kept the peace. Who can say that a sudden and sensational change in the British military system would not have precipitated war? Who can say with any certainty that the abandonment of France would not have provided the "favourable moment" for the Austrian and German war-makers, or that a firm declaration in favour of France and Russia would not have incited these nations to a more war-like attitude? Who, after the experience of the war, can think it probable that, when the continental nations were at grips, Great Britain could have remained neutral?

Questions of this kind are natural after the event, but they were not asked at the time. In 1913 the British Foreign Secretary earned great applause by his conduct of the London Conference of Ambassadors, and he seemed to have done a signal service in mediating between the European groups. To preserve intact the rôle of Great Britain as the mediating Power, and to be ready to perform the same service again when occasion offered, seemed from this time onwards to be the part specially assigned to him and his colleagues, and incidentally the part specially appropriate to men professing Liberal principles.

From this point of view the criticism which I think may fairly be made of British diplomacy in these months is that it lost touch with Austria and the Near East when the Ambassadors' Conference ended in August, 1913. The British Foreign Office shared the common opinion in those days that Germany was so much the predominant partner in the Triple Alliance that it was sufficient to address Vienna through Berlin. It had seen Austria following, with more or less reluctance, the German lead at the Ambassadors' Conference and assumed that she was under German control. The urge towards war on the Austrian side and the enormous pressure which was being applied to Germany by Austrian statesmen and soldiers were largely unknown to the rest of the world,

¹ It has been suggested that Sir Edward Grey might at an early stage of the negotiations of July, 1914, have obtained the unanimous consent of his colleagues to an intimation to Germany that Great Britain would regard the invasion of Belgium as a *casus belli*. An examination of the Cabinet records ("Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith," Vol. II., Chapters xxxv.-vi.) shows that this idea is groundless. In the earlier Cabinets there was much diversity of opinion about the nature of the guarantee of Belgian neutrality, and on the afternoon of Sunday, August 2, when it was clear that the Germans were advancing on Belgium, a powerful group of Ministers were still in doubt whether British intervention was obligatory. For these the issue was only decided by the appeal of Belgium for help.

and are even now scarcely realized by English writers on this period. More accurate knowledge at the time might have enabled British statesmen to apply a direct pressure of warning and remonstrance to Austria and to carry on continuously the mediating part which Sir Edward Grey had filled so successfully at the Ambassadors' Conference. It was one of the fatalities of this time that Conrad and the militarists of Vienna laid their plans in almost complete ignorance of British policy and the nature of British power, while British statesmen conceived of Austrian policy as indistinguishable from and subordinate to German.

This, I think, is a fair comment on British policy and incidentally the explanation of the unfair and unhistorical judgment which, during and after the war, attributed the responsibility and the "guilt" to Germany alone. But looking back in the light of our present knowledge, we may well get the impression that the political circumstances of Europe in the year 1914 were as much beyond the control of one Government or one statesman as were its economic circumstances in the years after the war. The scene of action was too vast and the conflict of wills too stubborn for the commanding voices which had stilled tumults in the classical days of statecraft to obtain a hearing. The stage which Europe had reached was that of a semi-internationalism which organized the nations into two groups but provided no bridge between them. There could scarcely have been worse conditions for either peace or war. The equilibrium was so delicate that a puff of wind might destroy it, and the immense forces on either side were so evenly balanced that a struggle between them was bound to be stupendous. The very success of the balance of power was in this respect its nemesis.

1913-1914

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FINAL ARMS COMPETITION

The Armaments Competition—Last Phase—Arming the Turk—A Dangerous Quarrel—Bethmann Hollweg on Armaments—War Said to be Inevitable—The Triple Alliance and the Balance of Power—The German-Russian Press Campaign—Sazonoff's Advice—The Kaiser and Russia—The "No-man's Land" between Civil and Military.

I

At the beginning of 1913 the last phase of the competition in armaments was furiously on foot. Having passed their Navy Bill, the Germans now proceeded to make a large increase in their army, adding 4,000 officers, 15,000 non-commissioned officers, and 117,000 corporals and privates to their peace strength, which was thus brought up to 870,000, giving a total fighting strength with reserves which was expected to mount up to 5,000,000 men of all arms. A special levy on property of £53,000,000 was imposed to meet the "non-recurring expenditure required by this scheme." The French also were on the move. At the beginning of March a meeting of the Supreme War-Council was held in Paris and decided that the period of compulsory service must be raised from two years to three to meet the German peril. There has been a debate as to which of these two schemes was prior to the other, and the judgment depends on an elaborate comparison of the dates of their inception and the dates on which they were passed into law. Research on this point is of little consequence, for by this time both Governments were persuaded that they were threatened by the other, and considered it an imperative duty not to be caught unawares.

In July a secret session of the Russian Duma decided on an extension of military service from three to three and a half years, thus keeping about 300,000 men on active service for six months longer and at the same time facilitating mobilization between September and April, hitherto the slackest period for the Russian army. Large loans, meanwhile, were being raised in France on

Russian account and there was no question that they were intended for military purposes. Austria-Hungary had strained her resources in prolonged mobilizations and additions to her army during recent months, but she too added another 30,000 to her peace strength in the following October. The Powers, meanwhile, were competing with each other in providing new armaments and military and naval instructors to the exhausted Turk, and a dangerous quarrel blew up at one moment about the distribution of these favours and appointments. Russia, as we have already seen, looked with specially unfavourable eyes on the appointment of the German General, Liman von Sanders, to be Inspector-General of the Turkish army, and both she and France were seriously displeased when the British Government seemed indisposed to back their protest. But a British officer held an analogous position in the Turkish navy, and it was difficult to find arguments which would apply to the German position in respect of the Turkish army, and not react upon the British position in respect of the Turkish navy. Faces were saved for the time being by a change in Liman von Sanders's titular position, but he remained in effective control of the Turkish forces.

In proposing the various increases to their military strength all the Powers earnestly protested that they were seeking peace and security. Bethmann Hollweg told the Reichstag that no great Power desired war, but no one could know whether war might not break out at any moment. The German Army Bill was presented "not because Germany wanted war but because she wanted peace, and because, if war came, she wanted to win." "Nobody," he added, "could conceive the dimensions of the world conflagration which threatened, and the misery and trouble it would bring on the nations. All previous wars would probably be as child's play, and no responsible statesman would be disposed lightly to set the match to the powder." But what was one to do? The power of public opinion had increased and the driving force of the noisiest part of it tended in excited times to consist not of majorities but of minorities. The French indulged in dangerous hopes, and "already by illusion had won the day in a future war with Germany." Russia presented the spectacle of the most marvellous economic development in her giant empire with its inexhaustible natural resources, and she had reorganized her army as never before. The special plea on which the Chancellor declared the German increase to be necessary was that the Balkan States had shown "extraordinary vitality" in their war with Turkey, and

thus provided a reinforcement to the Slav cause, in the event of a collision between Slavs and Germans, against which Germany was bound to provide.

No sooner was this provision made than it was neutralized by the French three years' service scheme and the additional preparations of Russia. In this way the balance of power was for ever being unbalanced, rebalanced, and unbalanced again. As one bout succeeded another, the military results became increasingly doubtful, and the moral consequences immeasurably bad. Everywhere the increases were resisted by Liberals and Socialists, and had to be defended by appeals to fear and passion and imputation of sinister motives to the hypothetical enemy. From now onwards to the end, military demonstrations, sabre-rattling, spy-incidents, newspaper recriminations came thick and fast from all the camps. Everybody said that somebody else had begun it, but by this time all that mattered was the thing itself—the spread, infecting the calmest, of fear and panic, and the all too evident absence of any controlling force.

II

"The Kaiser is profoundly pacific," wrote Baron Beyens, the Belgian Minister, from Berlin on March 8, 1913, "but the spirit of the governing classes is very different . . . hostility and pride make them consider war with France a necessary evil, inevitable to assure their supremacy and to break the obstacles by which France seeks to hinder Germany's development."¹ "Profoundly pacific" is an expression which does not easily suggest itself as appropriate to the Kaiser at any time, but it is undoubtedly true, as we have seen, that during the first seven months of 1913 he used his influence to restrain the Austrian Hotspurs who would otherwise have rushed into war. But even during these months the conviction was gaining ground in the minds of German as well as of Austrian soldiers that the balance of power was tipping dangerously against the Triple Alliance, and that immediate steps must be taken to redress it, or it would grow progressively worse. Turkey, upon whom they had relied as a barrier against Russian ambitions, had been decisively beaten; Italy by all the signs was falling away from the German group; Great Britain had been estranged by the naval competition, and in any conflict which touched sea-power was likely to be on the side of the enemies of

¹ Beyens, "l'Allemagne avant la guerre," p. 245.

Germany. Russia, in the meantime, was making vast preparations and more and more coming to the conclusion that the road to Constantinople and the Straits lay through Berlin. At least so said the Germans.

Hence the theory, gaining an increasing hold upon the Kaiser and his subjects from the summer of 1913 onwards, of an "inevitable war between East and West"—between Slav and German, Russia and the Central Powers. Official and military Germany looking eastward regarded the future with genuine alarm. Where would Germany be, if Russia with her immense population and enormous natural resources became, like Germany herself, an efficient military power? Professor Schiemann, eloquent historian, very near to the Kaiser and indefatigable in propaganda, painted the picture in the gloomiest colours. He saw an avalanche of semi-barbarians coming from the East, new strategic railways being planned, mobilization expedited, munitions being secretly accumulated in order that Russia might at her chosen moment fall upon Germany. Was Germany to sit quiet and wait until this destruction fell upon her? Would any other country in its senses do nothing while this menace at its doors grew to irresistible proportions? With every month, the same question came more persistently from Vienna. "For us, the Triple Alliance," said Conrad to the German Military Attaché, "there are only the two alternatives, either to strike at once, or to strengthen our armaments correspondingly, and of the two the former is from the military point of view by far the most correct."¹ (March 14, 1914.)

III

These thoughts for the most part ran underground, but they found partial expression in the press campaign which raged between Germany and Russia during the early months of 1914, and came to its climax in an article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* which set out the thesis of a Russian invasion in three years when the Russian reorganization had been completed. The moral was left unspoken, but the article was interpreted in Russia as a threat, and the *Bourse Gazette* replied in defiant tones: "Russia wishes for peace but is ready for war. The army is not only large but excellently equipped. Russia has always fought on foreign soil and has always been victorious. Russia is no longer on the defensive, Russia is ready."

Both articles were supposed to be officially inspired, and probably

¹ G.P., XXXIX, No. 15853, p. 566.

with good reason. It is at all events certain that the *Bourse Gazette* would not have spoken as it did without official sanction. From this beginning the controversy spread to a wider circle of newspapers, and presently the Paris press and the English press joined in. In the middle of all this came King George's visit to Paris and the report that Great Britain had concluded a naval convention with Russia. Lord Grey has explained frankly what truth there was in this.¹ There was no convention, there was merely a permission granted for Russian naval officers to engage in "conversations" with British naval officers, but it came at a most untoward moment, and added to the fund of suspicion and bitterness. Officials and Ministers tried in vain to stop the mischief which some at least of them had started. The best thing one could do, Sazonoff told Pourtalès, the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg, was not to read the newspapers. It was a counsel of perfection, as the latter observed, since both in Germany and Russia most people knew nothing about foreign affairs except what they got from the newspapers. The unhappy truth was that the newspapers were only too well informed about the thoughts, fears and ambitions of the official world. Sazonoff was insistent that the newspapers would not influence the Government. "We will discuss the matter again in six months' time," he said as he parted from Pourtalès on February 25, 1914. On the dispatch retailing this conversation the Kaiser wrote "Russian-Prussian relations are for ever dead. We have become enemies." A week later Count Pourtalès wrote another dispatch in which, while expressing the opinion that though dangerously weak the Russian Government was honest in disclaiming any intention of attacking Germany in its military preparations, he modestly disclaimed the gift of looking into the future. "This gift," the Kaiser wrote in the margin, "does occur. It is found oftenest in Sovereigns, seldom in statesmen, and in diplomatists almost never." (*Diese Gabe Kommt vor! Bei Souverainen öfter, bei Staatsmännern selten, bei Diplomaten fast nie!*²) It is merciful to suppose that the Sovereign did not exercise this gift in March, 1914. But he has a still more devastating comment:

The dear Pourtalès (Pourcel) had far better have left this dispatch unwritten. Knowing nothing of Russia and being of weak and anxious disposition he makes total confusion by his exposition. Also he is not in the least convincing, since in his second part he destroys everything that he has written in his first part. We find ourselves in the no-man's land between the military and the

¹ "Twenty-Five Years," Vol. I., pp. 286-95.

² G.P., XXXIX, No. 158444, pp. 550-4.

political—treacherous and obscure ground on which the diplomat most of all goes astray. I, as military, do not entertain the smallest doubt, on my information, that Russia is systematically preparing war against us, and I shall govern my policy accordingly.

The Kaiser struck one of the deep truths of the situation when he spoke of the no-man's land (*grenzgebiet*) between the military and the political. It was on this treacherous ground that most of the Governments were now moving, and the soldiers were more and more drawing them to their side of the uncertain boundary. On their assumption that policy was helpless to avert war, German and Austrian soldiers were undoubtedly right in their warnings against delay. On that assumption Germany's position was dangerous now, and likely to become more dangerous in the future. According to all the signs she was never likely to be stronger, relatively to her probable opponents than in 1914. If she despaired of peace, now was her time to strike. Sound military logic on the assumption that statesmanship was bankrupt.

ON THE VERGE OF WAR

Conrad and Moltke—Their Last Meeting—The Schlieffen Plan—Instructions to Austria—The Kaiser's Last Visit to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand—Conversations at the Villa—Forcing the Issue from Vienna—Rumania or Serbia—Alternative Plans Before and After the Murder of the Archduke—Austria-Hungary Bent on War.

I

ON May 12, 1914, Conrad visited von Moltke, the Chief of the German General Staff, at Carlsbad, where the latter was taking a cure. It was their last meeting before the war, and the last, as it turned out, in their life-time. Conrad has left his record of their conversation :

We spoke then about the probability of a war. General von Moltke expressed the opinion that every delay meant a lessening of our chances; it was impossible to compete with Russia in numbers. He said further: "Unfortunately our people expect a declaration from England that she will not take part. This declaration England will never give."

CONRAD: "The attitude of Germany in past years has caused us to let the favourable opportunities go by. In the year 1908 it was a great blunder on our part not to let go against Serbia."

MOLTKE: "Why didn't you?"

CONRAD: "At the last moment His Majesty was against it."

The talk then passed to the question of Italian loyalty, about which the Austrian was sceptical and the German optimistic. Von Moltke then declared the Turkish army to be worthless. It lacked everything; and the wives of the officers were begging in the streets. The Turks, nevertheless, were writing to Berlin asking for money to enable them to become a sea-power. The conversation closed thus :

Before I went I asked General Moltke again how long in his opinion the joint war against Russia and France would last—i.e. how long before Germany would be able to turn against Russia with strong forces.

MOLTKE: "We hope in six weeks after the beginning of operations to have finished with France, or at least so far as to enable us to direct our principal forces against the East."

CONRAD: "So for at least six weeks we must maintain our rear against Russia."

Von Moltke added that Germany would have large new reserves in ten years.

CONRAD: "That is a long time."

VON MOLTKE: "Yes, but it will get better from year to year."¹

Thus on May 12, 1914, the Chiefs of the German and Austrian General Staffs were at one in thinking that further delays would lessen their chances, and were contemplating a war—the war of the Schlieffen plan with the invasion of Belgium as part of it—in which they would have "finished with France" after six weeks. On this line of thought it was improbable that they would seek to keep the peace if a colourable opportunity for making war offered. Soldiers who thought on these lines were very unlikely to wait for ten years, if the chance came to them to fight earlier.

II

On June 12 the Kaiser again visited his friend, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, at his villa at Konopischt in Bohemia, and in view of the talk to which the frequent meetings of the two men were giving rise, it was thought necessary to explain that his object was to see the rose gardens for which the villa was famous. It was observed, however, that the Kaiser had taken Admiral von Tirpitz in his suite, and it seemed improbable that he would have chosen just this companion to share with him the delights of the Konopischt roses.

It was the last meeting between the Kaiser and the Archduke, and a mountain of gossip has been raised about it. It has even been suggested that the two planned together the offensive against Serbia which was undertaken after the murder of the Archduke. This is to read back into the story events which, happily for their peace of mind, were hidden from both host and guest in these early June days at the Bohemian villa. It is safer and wiser to keep to the records, which consist (1) of a memorandum of the conversations dictated by the Kaiser to Herr von Treutler, the Court official who accompanied him,² and (2) a dispatch from Herr von Tschirschky, the German Ambassador in Vienna, who says briefly that the Archduke "discussed every possible question with His Majesty and established complete agreement in their views."³

¹ Conrad, "Aus Meiner Dienstzeit," Vol. III., p. 673.

² G.P., XXXIX, No. 15736, pp. 365 *et seq.*

³ *Ibid.*, No. 15737, p. 369.

In the dictated memorandum the Kaiser relates that he showed the Archduke a telegram he had just received from Athens reporting that the disagreement between Greece and Turkey about the Islands had taken a threatening turn, and suggested that the King of Rumania should be asked what steps he proposed to take to guard the Treaty of Bucharest and prevent a breach of the peace. The Archduke agreed, and it was arranged that the Kaiser should instruct the German Foreign Office accordingly, while the Archduke promised to move Count Berchtold to make a similar *démarche* in Bucharest. The two royal personages then found themselves agreed in a common personal antipathy to the King of Bulgaria, and the Kaiser mentioned that, according to information which had just reached him, the King was aware of their feelings, but wished to make a serious effort to win them over.

This was before dinner on June 13. After it, according to the Kaiser's note, the Archduke took up the question of Italy, whom he accused of bad faith in her proceedings in Albania. On this point the Kaiser tried to mollify his host. Too much, he said, must not be made of boundary incidents in which subordinate officials made mistakes that were apt to make mischief in wider circles. So far as the King of Italy was concerned, he must often in the last year have had to put a check upon himself, and at his recent meeting with him (the Kaiser) at Venice he put himself in the way of a friendlier relationship. The King had probably learnt much, and the new conditions brought about by the Tripoli War had shown the Italians, and especially the King, that France was the real enemy, and this had led him to a more correct estimate of the Triple Alliance. In view of the forthcoming meeting of the Archduke and the King at the German manœuvres, the Kaiser said he had taken special pains to overcome the latter's distrust of the Archduke.

The Archduke passed next to the subject of Hungary, and poured out his grievances against the Magyars, and especially the Hungarian Prime Minister, Tisza, whom he accused of alienating Rumania by his oppression of the Rumanian population in Hungary. The Kaiser was an admirer of Tisza's, and Treutler represents him as having advised the Archduke not to make him an enemy, but to "keep him under an iron fist and then make use of his valuable gifts." He promised, however, to instruct the German Ambassador to keep on saying to Tisza, "Sir, remember the Rumanians," and with this the Archduke professed himself to be satisfied.

The rest of the conversation, according to this account, was

occupied with a tactless interview given by Count Czerna, the newly appointed Austrian Minister to Bucharest, to a Hungarian newspaper, and the breakdown of the effort to make peace between Czechs and Germans at a recent conference of the Bohemian Germans at Prague. The Archduke insisted on the necessity of protecting the Germans and said that the settlement must come from Vienna, since it could not be obtained by the party (presumably the German party).

The Archduke was of opinion that Russia was not to be feared. Her internal difficulties were too great to permit her to engage in an aggressive foreign policy.

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This is all there is in the German record. Since there were no witnesses of the conversations, it is of course possible to say that the Kaiser, in dictating, omitted other and more dangerous matter, but this is pure conjecture. The records present the Kaiser in one of his quiescent moods and the Archduke as chiefly concerned to air his well-known grievances against the Magyars. There is, however, an interesting hint of what was in his mind in another source. Herr Nikitsch-Boulles, author of a volume of Recollections of the Archduke,¹ says that if he had not been headed off by the Kaiser's advocacy of Italy, he would have brought up for consideration at this Konopisch meeting the large question "whether it was not indicated to the two neighbouring Empires to give the *coup de grâce* to the desperately ailing Triple Alliance, and set up again the Alliance of the Three Emperors which had been so well tested in the difficult days of necessity." That thought had crossed the minds of all the partners of this combination during these weeks, but they differed in their views as to which partner should be cut adrift. If Italy was in the Archduke's mind, Austria-Hungary herself was in other minds. Tschirschky had written from Vienna on May 22 :

I constantly wonder whether it really pays us to bind ourselves so tightly to this phantasm of a State which is cracking in every direction, and to toil any further at dragging it along with us. But I still see no other political constellation, which could replace the extra power we still obtain from the alliance with the Powers of Central Europe. For if we had not this alliance, our policy would be forced to aim at a partition of the Monarchy. It is doubtful whether England would give us *carte blanche* for this, even if she

¹ "Erinnerungen an Erzherzog-Thronfolger Franz Ferdinand," p. 82, quoted in G.P., XXXIX, p. 367, footnote.

could have been brought into really steady relations with us, also whether it would be a good thing for us in the long run for the German provinces to be joined to the German Empire. I think the fruit must ripen a bit more. Time will show whether anyone can succeed in firmly reuniting the heterogeneous forces of the lands under the Monarchy. If the attempt fails, dissolution will certainly be a very rapid process, and we shall have to shape our policy to meet it.¹

III

If in his talk with the Kaiser the Archduke said no more than is revealed in the German records, we must presume him to have been unaware of the dangerous schemes which at this very moment were being hatched by Berchtold and the politicians of Vienna. We have clear evidence of these in two Memoranda published in the Austrian Documents, one, written before June 24, which was to have been sent to the German Kaiser soon after his conversations with the Archduke;² the other, a revised version of the first, which actually was sent with a covering letter from the Emperor Francis Joseph, after the murder of the Archduke (July 2, 1914).³ These are, beyond question, the most important documents on the German-Austrian side in the last few weeks before the war, and they deserve very careful consideration.

Both versions review the Balkan situation in almost identical terms, and the first has one point of contact with the Kaiser's account of the Konopischt conversations in that it treats Rumania as the object of the next *démarche*. The Austrian writer, who may be taken as Berchtold, begins by asserting that the Balkan Wars have upset the balance of power in the Peninsula to the disadvantage of Austria-Hungary, and therefore of the Triple Alliance, though the quarrel between the other Balkan nations and Bulgaria, which has been "awakened from her Russian hypnosis," and the still doubtful attitude of Greece might be set on the credit side of the account. The patent facts were that Turkey had been all but driven out of Europe and suffered a serious blow to her position as a great Power, while Serbia, whose policy had for years past been governed by hostility to Austria-Hungary and was wholly under Russian influence, had obtained an increase of population and territory far exceeding her own expectations; and she hoped still further to enlarge her power by a union with Montenegro.

¹ G.P., XXXIX, p. 364; Dugdale, Vol. IV, p. 369.

² Austrian Documents, VIII., pp. 186 *et seq.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 250 *et seq.*

Finally, Rumania had been compelled by events to co-operate with Serbia, and this had resulted in a lasting, though limited, Serbo-Rumanian solidarity. In the meantime, Russian and French diplomacy had entered upon a united and carefully planned course of action to exploit the advantages already obtained, and to modify certain tendencies which were still unfavourable to them. Russia and France were now trying their utmost (1) to heal the breach between Bulgaria on the one side and Greece and Serbia on the other, (2) to find a basis on which Rumania could be brought into the camp of the Dual Alliance and enter into a political combination with Bulgaria, and (3) if possible, to settle the question of the Islands between Greece and Turkey so as to effect the *rapprochement* or adhesion of Turkey to the Balkan States. All these efforts could be directed only against one opponent, viz., Austria-Hungary, and the projected alliance of these States could only be brought into existence on the basis of leading all the partners to expect extensions of territory through a gradual displacement of existing boundaries from east to west at the expense of the territorial integrity of the Monarchy. By skilfully playing on the supposed partition plans of other Powers in Asia Minor, the Dual Alliance had already succeeded to some extent in diverting Turkish mistrust from itself and led Turkish statesmen to consider seriously the possibility of a *rapprochement* with France and Russia. Though Bulgaria had so far given no sign, Russia was fully justified in believing that, if she were completely isolated, she would have to abandon her present policy and penitently accept the conditions which Russia required to take her again under her protection.

With this preliminary the Memorandum now comes to the case of Rumania. It insists again that France and Russia were making strenuous efforts to seduce Rumania from the Triple Alliance and skilfully playing upon the idea of the "great Rumania"—always glimmering just below the horizon—in order to stir up opinion against the Monarchy. Though the King was loyal and prudent, wide circles in the army, the intelligentsia, and the people, had been won over to a new direction of Rumanian policy which had for its object "the liberation of the brethren beyond the Carpathians." Signs multiplied that, in spite of King Carol, Rumanian foreign policy would not be able to resist the influence of these popular nationalist streams of opinion. Though King Carol had assured the Austrian Ambassador that, so long as he lived, the Rumanian army would not take the field against Austria-

Hungary, he could not single-handed make a policy in the teeth of Rumanian public opinion as it was to-day, and action on his part on the side of Austria-Hungary in the event of a Russian attack was unthinkable, in spite of the existing Alliance. The Rumanian Minister for Foreign Affairs had gone a step farther—very significantly just after the Tsar's visit to Constanza—by saying publicly in an interview that a *rapprochement* between Russia and Rumania had been arrived at and that a community of interests existed between the two States.

Austria-Hungary therefore was in the unfavourable position of not being able to rely on the neutrality, let alone the assistance, of Rumania, and yet being prevented by her nominal alliance from taking the military measures which would be necessary if Rumania were hostile. The Austro-Hungarian Government, therefore, proposed that Rumania should be asked to define her position, and King Carol or his Government be required to renounce the stipulation of secrecy hitherto attaching to her relations as a partner of the Triple Alliance, and make that relationship public without equivocation. In the event of Bucharest being unable to decide on a public manifestation of her adhesion to the Triple Alliance, it should be made clear to her that Austria-Hungary would "effectively and immediately draw the conclusions both of a political and of a military character which would have been indicated at Bucharest." At the same time an effort must be made to effect an alliance between Bulgaria and Turkey, to which both States were favourably inclined until a short time ago. Simultaneously with this policy the Monarchy must without delay take military measures for the defence of her frontier against Rumania in the event of a European war.

The Memorandum then emphasizes the immense importance to Germany as well as to Austria of clearing up the Rumanian position by concerted action, and winds up with a highly coloured passage about the Russian peril and the threat to Germany as well as to Austria of Russia's immense population, enormous armaments and military preparations, and the political and economic supremacy at which she was alleged to be aiming.

This is the Memorandum which, if nothing had interrupted the course of events, would have been sent to the German Kaiser after the Konopischt conversations. It clearly shows that at this date—before the murder of the Archduke—the Austro-Hungarian Government had decided on a forcing policy in the Balkans, which, if Germany had consented, would have taken the form of an

ultimatum to Rumania, requiring her to make a public choice between Triple and Dual Alliance.¹

The greater part of this Memorandum was actually sent to the Kaiser, with a covering letter from the Emperor, after the murder of the Archduke, but what may be called its substantive parts were so altered as to change its direction and objective. The paragraphs proposing an immediate *démarche* against Rumania were now taken out and the following substituted:

The question now becomes urgent whether Austria-Hungary can mend her relations with Rumania by an open facing of the issue (*Auseinandersetzung*) in which she would present Rumania with the choice either of breaking all the bridges to the Triple Alliance or—through some sort of public announcement of her adhesion to the Triple Alliance—give adequate security that the pledges arising out of the Alliance will be wholly and completely fulfilled by her as by others. Such a solution of the question, which would revive the traditional policy of the last thirteen years, would undoubtedly be most in accord with the wishes of Austria-Hungary. It is, however, unfortunately not at all probable in the existing conditions that King Carol or any Rumanian Government would, in defiance of the prevailing public opinion, be prepared to place the country openly in the position of a partner of the Triple Alliance, even in exchange for an extension of the Treaty of Alliance. A categorical "either—or" on the part of the Monarchy might therefore lead to an open breach. Whether by making serious and emphatic representations combined with the offers suggested above, the German Cabinet would succeed in causing Rumania to take up a position which might be regarded as a reliable guarantee for her complete and lasting loyalty to the Alliance, cannot be easily judged from Vienna but appears equally doubtful.

The passage about the Russian peril in the first Memorandum is retained in the revised version but with some added touches specially calculated to appeal to Germany. France is brought in, and said to be striving to weaken the Monarchy in pursuance of her *revanche* efforts. It is pointed out that the extraordinary armaments and warlike preparations of Russia and the construction of strategic railways in the west were even more aimed at Germany than at Austria. Russia recognized that her policy, which sprang from her inner necessity, threatened important German interests first of all and in the highest degree, and must encounter Germany's unflinching opposition. For this reason the leaders of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy were convinced that in the present phase of the Balkan crisis it was a common interest of Germany no less than of the Monarchy to present a prompt and energetic opposition

¹ A reference to Bethmann Hollweg's statement prepared for the German Committee of Inquiry into the responsibility for the War (October, 1919) will show that he adopted substantially the whole of this argument. Official German Documents relating to the World War, Carnegie Endowment Translation, Vol. I., pp. 12-23.

to a development carefully planned and promoted by Russia, which it would probably be impossible to repel at a later date.

The Memorandum now winds up :

The foregoing Memorandum had been prepared when the terrible events of Serajevo intervened.

To-day it is scarcely possible to miss the significance of the whole range of events signified by this reckless deed of murder. In any case, we have been given indubitable proof, if it was still necessary, of the irreconcilable nature of the opposition between the Monarchy and Serbia, and of the danger and intensity of the big-Serbia agitation which shrinks at nothing.

Austria-Hungary has not failed in good-will and friendly efforts to procure a tolerable relationship with Serbia. It has, however, once more been shown that these efforts are entirely useless and that the Monarchy will have to reckon in the future with the stubborn, irreconcilable, and aggressive hostility of Serbia.

It is thus the more imperative necessity for the Monarchy to break with resolute hand the threads which her enemies wish to weave into a net about her head.

Thus what before the Archduke's murder was to have been a diplomatic offensive against Rumania, leading, in all probability, as the second Memorandum admits, to "an open breach," is now diverted to Serbia. In any event Austria, in the summer of 1914, was preparing a stroke which almost certainly would have led to a European war, but whereas before the murder of the Archduke the point of entry was to have been Rumania, after it, the point of entry was Serbia. The same preamble serves for both cases, and in both alike there is scarcely an effort to disguise that the real objective, and that which the Austrians believed most to appeal to their German Ally, was Russia. In the covering letter (probably written by Berchtold) in which the Emperor Francis Joseph conveyed the final draft to the Kaiser, a not very skilful attempt is made to combine the two themes. The Emperor summarizes the argument about Rumania and the necessity of re-establishing German-Austrian power in the Balkans, but winds up by saying that "this will only be possible if Serbia, which at present constitutes the pivot of the Pan Slavist policy, is disposed of as a power-factor in the Balkans." "You will be convinced," he adds, "after the recent fearful event in Bosnia that a reconciliation of the difference which divides us from Serbia is not to be thought of, and that maintenance of the peaceful policy of all European sovereigns will be threatened if this hotbed of criminal agitation in Belgrade goes unpunished."

To Berchtold, Conrad, and the Vienna politicians, it was by

this time all one whether the war began with Serbia, Rumania or even Italy, so long as they had a war. But they knew that from the German point of view there was a considerable difference between the case of Rumania and that of Serbia. As the final draft of the Memorandum recognizes, there would have been great difficulty in obtaining German consent to the proposed *démarche* against Rumania. King Carol of Rumania was a Hohenzollern and a kinsman of the Kaiser, who had always been most reluctant to take any step which would add to his difficulties or make his kingdom the storm-centre in the Balkans. But the Kaiser had no such scruples about Serbia. In his interview with Berchtold in the previous October he had pledged himself to go all lengths with Austria-Hungary in any steps which she might think necessary to take against Serbia, and, if then, how much more so now in the new and doubly exasperating circumstances—the Kaiser's intimate friend foully murdered, an unspeakable crime perpetrated against the Royal Imperial house, all monarchs threatened, if this crime were not avenged? The Austrians exhausted themselves in painting these enormities in the appropriate colours, but it is not uncharitable to surmise that they were thinking less of their own domestic affliction—which, from the Emperor downward, they had borne with much fortitude—than of the opportunity which it offered of overcoming German opposition and holding the Kaiser to his pledges to stand behind them in the projected attack on Serbia, and its clearly foreseen consequences of war with Russia and the Dual Alliance. The Kaiser's heated incitements—revealed in the Kautsky documents—to Austria to go all lengths against Serbia after the Serajevo murders must necessarily in the circumstances have seemed more than an emotional reaction from the horror of that crime, and have been interpreted as a renewal of these pledges.

THE TIDE OF EVENTS

July, 1914—Two Dying Empires—Weakening of the Triple Alliance—The Fears of Austria—Her Chaotic Condition—Her Argument to Germany and German Resistance—Change of Opinion in Germany—Her Fear of Russia—Conrad's Logic—His "Favourable Moment"—Influence of British Policy and the Anglo-German Quarrel.

I

GREAT events do not spring from little causes, and when we have examined all the transactions which led to the Great War, we are still conscious of a tide of affairs which gathers force and carries all before it. Europe in the summer of 1914 was witnessing the death-throes of two historic Empires, the Austro-Hungarian and the Turkish; and though the consequences and even the nature of the event were hidden from the watchers at the time, it may well seem to those who come after that so vast a catastrophe could not have taken place without shaking the world to its foundations. When all the judgments that are possible have been passed upon individuals and Governments for their conduct in this matter or that, the least imaginative must feel a certain awe at the great insurgent volume of events of which they were both the agents and the victims.

The disintegrating process which brought the ruin of 1914 may be traced far back into the previous century, but if we wished to assign a date to its last phase, that date would be October, 1908, when the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Secretary played his great stroke of annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina. This destroyed the last hope of re-establishing the Turkish Empire under a reformed constitution, and set on foot the series of wars, the Tripoli War, the Balkan Wars, and finally the Great War, which, starting as bids and scrambles for the European heritage of the Turk, spread outwards until they became the supreme test of the great Alliances. All the Powers were now grouped on one side or the other; all were pledged to act with their groups in any dispute anywhere;

all knew that whichever won would be master of the other. France or Great Britain might cry "to Hell with Serbia," but their fate was indissolubly linked with that of their partner who supported Serbia. None could afford to be defeated in the great trial of strength which was now looming ahead.

Given the Alliance system and its cardinal principle, the balance of power, the course of events between October, 1908, and July, 1914, justified the profoundest misgivings of all the parties to it. Though they were more than any others responsible for the final disastrous impulse, and their action at most critical moments was febrile and convulsive, Austro-Hungarian statesmen were undoubtedly right in judging the victory of the Balkan States over the Turks and the consequent impulse given to Pan Slavist, big-Serbian, big-Rumanian, and generally Russophil ideas to be a menace to their Empire. That Empire was already seething with internal discontent; its German and Magyar elements were at constant feud both with one another and with Slavs, Czechs, Croats, and other non-German or non-Magyar races within their areas of Government; Parliamentary Government had been brought to a standstill by scenes of violence and uproar in the Diets and Assemblies; the dominant races clung to power and blocked the solutions which might have given autonomy to the unprivileged races or mitigated the coercion of minorities. The unpacified peoples of the Monarchy now drew new hope from the success of their brethren beyond the frontier, and joined hands from within with far-reaching schemes for their liberation. These, pursued by agitation, propaganda and the skilful operations of Secret Societies, undoubtedly, as Berchtold and Conrad asserted, threatened the existence of Austria-Hungary. For her there were only two solutions, either so to reform her internal government as to bring peace and contentment to her disaffected races, or forcibly to suppress the big Serbia and Pan Slav movement in the Balkans and bring the outside States under the control of the Monarchy. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand had dreamt of the first solution, but it was beyond the capacity of the statesmen who advised the Monarchy in these years. After the victory of the Balkan States over the Turks, they thought of nothing but what they called the "great solution"—the solution by force and the preparation of the ground for that by a skilful exploitation of the quarrel between Bulgaria and Serbia which had arisen out of the last phase of the Balkan War. •

This, as we have seen, they urged with greater and greater

persistence upon Germany in the last eighteen months before the war. She was not easily persuaded that any German interest required her to risk a great war for the defence of Austrian interests in the Balkans. The saying of Bismarck that the Balkans were not worth the bones of one Pomeranian still lingered in her memory. But the Austrians had many plausible and some weighty arguments. They pointed out that since Bismarck's day Germany had constituted herself the friend and protector of Turkey, and that she had committed herself to vast enterprises in Turkish territories, which must be wrecked if Slav and Russian influence prevailed in Constantinople. They said that what was at stake was the existence not only of Austria-Hungary, but of the whole Germanic power in Europe and the world. Unless something was done, the Triple Alliance would cease to count. Italy was plainly falling away; Rumania was flirting with Russia; the formation of the Great Balkan League through the pacification of Bulgaria and Serbia and with Turkey brought in, for which France and Russia were alleged to be working, would destroy the entire balance of power, and reduce Germany and Austria to a subordinate position in the world—make them in fact vassals of Russia and France. The conclusion formed in Germany appears to have been that though a war should not be forced, no colourable opportunity which offered a chance of defeating Russia, while there was yet time, should be neglected. The probability that a war arising out of a Balkan issue would bring Russia in was not—in the eyes of the German General Staff in 1914—a reason for drawing back but a reason for going forward.

II

The Kaiser and Bethmann Hollweg for long resisted the Austrian argument. They said the mistrust of Italy was exaggerated; they believed that German influence was still strong in Rumania; the Kaiser had great faith in his power of influencing the monarchs of both countries, and keeping them in the straight path. But from the end of the Ambassadors' Conference in August, 1913, a rapid change set in, and before October was out, he had given Conrad and Berchtold *carte blanche* to force the issue. What was the reason for this change? Beyond doubt the alarm about Russia, which, fanned and stoked for their own purposes by Austrian statesmen, ran through Germany in the last nine months before the war. The argument on that subject was dangerous precisely because the supposed peril lay in the future. It was the belief held

in common by Germans and Austrians that Russia, as the Archduke Franz Ferdinand told the Kaiser in their Konopischt talk, was too much occupied with her internal affairs to be an object of fear at the moment. So said von Moltke, the Chief of the German, and Conrad, the Chief of the Austrian, General Staff, at their final interview before the war. But they said also that in a few years' time, if nothing happened in the interval, Russia with her new strategic railways and quicker mobilization would be irresistible; and that the chances of the Triple Alliance in a war with her, though good now, would decline with every year of waiting. Conrad, who had no scruple about preventive wars, drew the inference unhesitatingly; the Germans, who perhaps remembered Bismarck's caution on this subject, seem to have contented themselves with the conclusion that a policy which incurred the risk of an early war with Russia might be a gift of Providence. That was enough for Conrad and Berchtold.

The ordinary conception of Austria-Hungary as the junior partner in the Alliance who followed obediently the instructions of her senior in Berlin, is largely reversed in the picture presented in the documents. From 1908 onwards Austria is seen forcing the hands of Germany, presenting her with accomplished facts, about which she had not been consulted; cunningly suggesting that she must follow on pain of being isolated in the world, and manifestly pursuing a policy which was bound to offend Italy and Rumania, the other members of the Triple Alliance. There were occasional rebellions in Berlin; Tschirschky, the German Ambassador in Vienna, "constantly wonders whether it really pays us to bind ourselves so tightly to this phantom of a State which is cracking in every direction, and to toil any further at dragging it along with us." But then comes in the old argument, "there is no other constellation which could replace the extra power we still obtain from the Alliance." Even so, Tschirschky's metaphor is faulty. Germany was not "dragging the phantom State along with her," she was being dragged by it into a position in which she could be compelled to do its bidding.

Reckless and disastrous as their proceedings proved when measured by their results, Berchtold and Conrad were men of stronger will and purpose than the Kaiser and his Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg. The apology of the two Austrians would, I suppose, be the familiar one that necessity drove them. The position of their country, rapidly becoming ungovernable within and threatened with strangulation from without, required a desperate

remedy. Conrad, to the end of his life, protested that, if his advice had been taken sooner and one of the many preventive wars that he recommended had been waged at his "favourable moment," the situation would have been saved. That is pure speculation, and it is possible, even probable, that Conrad would have been as wrong about his "favourable moment" in 1911, 1912 or 1913 as he was in 1914. But granted that his judgment was good, Conrad's argument is difficult to rebut. Pushed to its logical conclusion—and Conrad was nothing if not logical—the principle of power-politics justifies and even requires the preventive war. If the gaining and keeping of power is the end of policy, and if it is to be presumed that an armed neighbour is of necessity an enemy who will fall on you and destroy you so soon as he is in a position to do so, it is folly to wait while he is visibly increasing his power. The liability to make mistakes about both the intentions and the power of the armed neighbour had kept this doctrine within bounds, but as a whole-hearted believer in it who was confident of his judgment on all doubtful points, Conrad was on logical ground when he complained that Germany had robbed him of his "favourable moments."

But, in spite of all that has been said about her militarism, Germany was only a half-believer in this doctrine. Powerful as her military caste was, it yet had to reckon on a public opinion which could not be relied upon to follow it blindly. Notwithstanding his shining armour and mailed fist, the Kaiser was an irresolute man who preferred posturing on the edge of a precipice to plunging down it. His principal adviser in the last days was a man of peaceable and domestic disposition, with no aptitude for great affairs. Men of this quality were the least likely to take the firm and steady line which alone in these years would have checked the drift to war, and in their hands Germany lost control of her own policy and threw the reins to Vienna. On the road on which she was now going, it was certain that any sudden and sensational event like the murder of Serajevo would precipitate the catastrophe.

III

The Anglo-German contention about sea-power comes into this record as a play within a play, but still an integral part of the great drama or tragedy which was moving to its climax. The refusal of Germany to make terms with the British on the subject

of the naval competition had two results, both of which were vital in the last stages. It not only threw Britain into the arms of France, but it compelled Germany more than ever to rely on Austria as her sole support and the one friend whose bidding she could not afford to reject. Italy had frankly avowed that she could not afford to expose herself to the hostility of the great sea-power, and if Britain could not be drawn into the German constellation, an Italian secession was all but a foregone conclusion. British policy, therefore, was vital to both Germany and Austria throughout this period, but though they paid lip-service to the sea-power of Great Britain and considered it an enviable prize, the Germans never really understood it, and the Austrians were scarcely aware of its existence. The fundamental reasons which distinguished British naval necessities from German naval ambitions, and which made it imperative for Great Britain not merely to take up the German challenge, but in the event of war to range herself with the Powers which could guarantee her against a hostile coalition at sea, escaped not only the statesmen but the professional soldiers of the Central Powers. The fact that it was even more vital for Britain to keep the command of the sea than for France to recover Alsace-Lorraine or Russia to obtain control of the Straits, seems never to have crossed the minds either of strategists planning the next war or of the real-politicians who weighed the forces in Berlin and Vienna. The profound misconception which has led some historians to treat the British part as a side-issue or mere entanglement in the main European plot was the undoing of the Central Powers. It was from the beginning of the century one of the leading parts, influencing the conduct of all other actors on the scene in a hundred ways, some of them too subtle to be perceived at the time, but in the end too gross to be ignored.

IV

Looking back over the whole period, what may chiefly strike us is the influence of fear in the policies of all the Powers. All, under the Alliance system, lived in fear that the opposing group would be stronger than their group, and nearly all were driven to subordinate their traditional policies and interests to this dominant motive. Autocratic Russia quits the League of the Three Emperors and joins hands with democratic France for fear of the overweening power of Germany; Britain suspends her quarrel with Russia, supposed to be her hereditary rival and predestined enemy, and

makes common cause with France against Austria and Germany, the two Powers upon whom in the early years she had chiefly relied to keep France and Russia in check. Serbia, the protégée of Austria at the beginning, becomes her mortal enemy at the end; Bulgaria, the spoilt child of Russia at the beginning, becomes her enemy when war has broken out. Italy wavers between the two camps and makes her final choice against her former allies. The choice made by a particular Power is often remote from its interests. Germany had no sufficient interests to induce her to stake her all on Austrian policy in the Balkans; so far as Great Britain had interests in that region, they were, according to her traditional policy, to oppose the Russian ambition to dominate Turkey and "open the Straits." So far as the French had interests, they stood to lose rather than to gain by admitting Russia to the Mediterranean, and they certainly had nothing at stake which made it imperative for them to resist Austrian policy in the Balkans. But the grinding logic of the Alliance system presented all in the end with the simple choice of standing by their friends or sharing their downfall, and whatever sacrifice of traditional interests or policies might be required for this purpose had to be made lest a worse thing befell. There could hardly be a worse motive for ordering the affairs of a civilized world, but under the Alliance system in a world organized for war, it was irresistible. Historians seeking for the causes of the war waste their ink when they look for it in any one series of transactions. Behind each contention were the massed nations in arms seeing in it a test of their power in which they could not afford to be worsted.

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LAST WORDS

- The Last Days—Pressure of Militarism on Diplomacy—The Impatience of the Soldiers—Their Demand for Rapid Movement—Influence of the Schlieffen Plan—British Action—The Complaint of its Uncertainty—How Far Justified—An Unknown Quantity in the Equation—The Balance too Well-Balanced—The Idea of War-Guilt—An Inappropriate Standard—Criticism of the System—Ignoring Moral Issues—A Mechanical Conception and its Defects—The New Kind of Warfare and the Old Philosophy of War—Hopes for the Future—The Restoration of the Moral Forces.
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I

IN the condition in which the world was in the summer of 1914, it would be difficult to imagine an event more likely to destroy the last hope of peace than the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Serajevo on June 28. It kindled a deep and honest emotion; it seemed, or served, to confirm all that the Austrians had said about the insolence and hostility of Serbs and Slavs; it afforded an obvious opening for the policy of forcing the issue which they had now for months been advocating; it put the Kaiser under a positive obligation to fulfil his pledge to support Austria in her next move against Serbia.

The story of the last days before the war has been told from every point of view, and so far as the facts are concerned I could add nothing to it. But the preceding chapters would have failed in their purpose if they did not lead to the conclusion that this phase is mainly significant as the climax and epitome of what went before. The growing uncertainty about the foundations of armed power on which the Nations of Europe had based their policies and sought their security; the strivings of all to make their armaments equal to their claims, and to carry their claims up to the limit of their armaments; the sense of insecurity which led to the pooling of military resources in rival groups; the still greater insecurity when either of the groups supposed that the other was getting in advance of it; the fear on all hands that the

man-power and the money resources on which the structure was based would become exhausted, and sooner on one side than the other—all this and the increasing strain and friction accompanying it were fraught with disaster; and it is scarcely to be supposed that, without a radical alteration of the whole system, the end could have been postponed for more than a brief period, even if a wiser diplomacy had steered a more peaceful course after the Serajevo murders.

But if in this last phase there is one single cause to which the breakdown of the negotiations may be ascribed, it is undoubtedly the military pressure which forced the hands of civilian statesmen and prevented them from responding to Sir Edward Grey's appeal to "press the button for peace." It would be possible, I think, to write the history of the last six years before the war in such a way as to show year by year the increasing power of the soldiers and the diminishing power of the statesmen. As we get near the end the reports of the Military Attachés grow more voluminous; and the General Staffs become more insistent that, if their advice is disregarded, they cannot, in their familiar phrase, be answerable for the consequences. Each crisis produced a fresh crop of military schemes, all said to be infallible ways of beating the enemy, if only they were not spoilt by the procrastination or nervelessness of civilian statesmen who still dreamt of peace. The military records make it plain that neither Austrian nor German contemplated a prolonged struggle. Both were thinking in terms of Sadowa and Sedan—of swift manœuvres and crushing blows falling upon an enemy taken by surprise and unprepared. Time was the essence of these plans. The enemy was to be caught out before his preparations were complete; the period of warning between the threat of war and the declaration of war was to be of the shortest; there was to be no more lingering as in the old days, when mobilized armies, Austrian and Russian, sat watching each other across the frontier and nothing happened; mobilization was to be war, the beginning of the planned and concerted action which was to destroy the enemy.

All these in 1914 were approved maxims of the modern schools of strategy, and on the assumption that war was inevitable, no fault can be found with them. But on the assumption that war could and ought to be avoided, they were wholly disastrous. They created an atmosphere of urgency and emergency in which statesmen on one side were under strong temptation to find pretexts for the struggle which soldiers thought inevitable, and statesmen on the

other lived in a nervous apprehension lest they should be taken by surprise if they stopped to parley with the expected enemy. The Schlieffen plan which hung over Europe in the last years before the war was peculiarly calculated to produce this result. Its details were conjectural, but it was known to depend on crushing the French before the Russians could mobilize, and to defeat it by speeding up Russian mobilization became necessarily an object with Russian soldiers when war came in sight. This too was militarily sound, but fatal to the political forbearance and patience which might have saved the situation at a critical moment.

One final scene as described by Conrad is typical of the whole process.¹ On July 31, 1914, there was still a faint chance of peace. Sir Edward Grey had proposed direct negotiations between Austria and Russia, and the Kaiser and Bethmann Hollweg had for a moment seemed disposed to agree, but on the morning of that day Moltke in Berlin telegraphed to Conrad in Vienna, "Austria must at once mobilize against Russia, Germany will mobilize." On the same morning the Austrian Military Attaché also wired from Berlin: "Moltke says the situation is critical unless Austria mobilizes at once against Russia. Refuse England's new peace offer. For Austria-Hungary it is the only way of preventing the European War. Germany unconditionally with you." And again in the afternoon Moltke telegraphed, "Will Austria leave Germany in the lurch?" All this was apparently unknown to the German Chancellor who was nominally in charge of the negotiations, and who protested afterwards that he was absolutely honest in supporting the British proposal to restore the wires between Vienna and St. Petersburg. "Who is in command?" asked Berchtold, the Austrian Minister, who was hot for war, but he appears to have had no difficulty in concluding that "with these satisfactory assurances from the highest military authority in Germany," he was at liberty to go his own way and refuse England's new peace offer. So ended the last chance of peace.

II

Whatever the historic judgment may be, we may be certain that it will not be confined to the final negotiations before the war. More and more the issues between the nations appear, even to the present generation, as an immense account stretching back over many years and containing innumerable items for which no

¹ Conrad, "Aus Meiner Dienstzeit," Vol. IV., pp. 152-4.

one Government or one group of statesmen can be charged with the sole responsibility. Indeed, in passing any judgment at all, we are faced with a preliminary question to which the answers are often very confused. Are we judging statesmen or Governments as almost everywhere they were judged before the war, and asking only whether they were acting wisely or unwisely, or are we reading back into these times the post-war conception of "war-guilt" and seeking to brand with criminality all those who made war or threatened war in pursuit of their policies or interests? If the latter, sentence must be passed on all the belligerents, for all by this test are more or less guilty. The idea embodied in the Kellogg Pact that war is not a legitimate instrument of policy is repeated in these days as if it were a self-evident truth. It is on the contrary a daring, if most welcome, innovation in the thought of the world. If we may judge from their practice, not one of the nations which engaged in the Great War could have subscribed to it. All of them without exception had made war or threatened war for the advancement of their policies or their interests—Great Britain certainly not least, who, as the other nations were fond of pointing out, had waged more wars, and more often threatened war than any of her continental neighbours in the previous forty years. Had the Kellogg Pact been in force—and by being in force I mean sincerely accepted and acted upon—in the forty years before the war, an immense number of the dispatches that appear in the records—and nearly all at critical moments—must either have remained unwritten or have been written quite differently. This applies equally to all the nations.

But though we leave the judgment of "guilt" to a more impartial tribunal, we are not debarred from expressing opinions about the parts played by the principal nations. Looking back over the whole period, I believe certain things to be broadly true :

1. Bismarck and the Germans of his generation were the principal authors of the Alliance system of these years and of the diplomatic methods accompanying it. Their endeavour after the Franco-Prussian War to isolate France by means of a group of Powers pledged to render her powerless, led inevitably to the reaction which produced the armed and hostile Alliances.

2. In the final forcing of the issue between the two Alliances in the year 1914, Germany and Austria, and Austria even more than Germany, played the principal parts.

All the evidence goes to prove that from August, 1913, onwards

Austria was determined to try conclusions with the Balkan States, and therefore almost certainly with Russia, and that the Germans with more or less reluctance had consented to join them. It was the opinion of the military advisers of both that the power of the Triple Alliance was declining, and that they would be in a position of extreme danger if Russia were given time to complete her strategic railways and reorganize her mobilization.

But all the nations had on so many occasions been willing to take the risk of war in pursuit of their respective policies, that any judgment passed by the others on those who in the end took the risk (and came to disaster) must be on their folly, or wisdom, rather than their guilt or innocence. Nearly all had causes for which they were willing to risk war, and some had dates before which they would not, and after which they would, take the risk of war.

3. The Governments and statesmen of pre-war Europe (and their newspapers and publicists) were as unaware of the collective result of their policies and their armaments as the Governments and statesmen of post-war Europe have been of the collective results of their economic operations. Most of them worked on the assumption that war was not only a legitimate instrument of policy, but on the whole the best way of clearing up the knots and tangles which had defeated statesmanship. The wars which they had in mind were the Danish War, the Six-Weeks War, the Franco-Prussian War, by which Bismarck had established the German Empire and which had effected their purpose without excessive sacrifices or any general derangement of European life. The diplomacy they practised, with its adoption of the ethics of war, was suited to this limited kind of war, but was altogether unsuited to the enormous hazards of a modern great war, and its effects on the social and economic life. It is, therefore, the most urgent question for the world to-day whether this chapter of history may be regarded as closed, or whether it is liable to be reopened and repeated to the same or a worse conclusion.

III

If there is one reflection more than another which recurs to me at the end of these studies, it is the fallibility of those who specially prided themselves on their realism, that is, on their capacity to measure facts and forces, regardless of sentiment, emotion, prejudice and even of what in other relations of life would be

called justice and right and wrong. In the end it was found that the excluded sentiments and moralities had a realism of their own which was ruinous to the schemes of those who disregarded them. These real-politicians, as they liked to be called, had no presentiment of the uprush of feeling which brought Great Britain unanimously into the war when the military plan for the invasion of Belgium was put into operation; they had no measure of the immense subterranean forces that were to be unloosed in Russia; they altogether failed to reckon with the cumulative results upon their own power and capacity to make war of the unsolved problems and unredressed grievances of the Balkan peoples and Slav subjects of the Austrian Empire. Bismarck derided Gladstone when he thundered against the iniquities of the Turks, but it is highly probable that, if the imaginary concert of Europe to which he appealed had indeed existed and had set itself to procure peace and good government for the Christian subjects of the Sultan, the three great Empires which shared the ruin of the Turkish would have been standing to-day. Who, indeed, can read the records of the years in which Russia, Austria and Germany played off against each other the miseries of these unhappy people, vetoing or obstructing schemes of reform which conflicted with their ambitions, flattering or cajoling the blood-stained Sultan to win commercial favours or sphere of interest, without feeling that a sentence of doom was written over it all?

It is difficult to think of any period in history which is so definitely rounded off as the expression of one governing idea as the period dealt with in this book. In its endeavour to balance power against power, to find security in an equilibrium of power, to solve all problems by reference to power, to exclude the common morality, and what in common parlance are called the rights and wrongs, from the sphere of power—in all this it seems to me unique in history. Other nations have at other times and for a longer or shorter period acted on these principles, but never did groups of nations practise them with the same consistency and continuity as in the forty years before the war. Never was there so complete and candid an avowal that the private and the public morality are of a different order, and that the public morality which repudiates the private has the superior claim. I think it may be said without cant that among the mass of documents the British strike their own note in their appeals to the common ideas of right and wrong, and their observance of the candour and rectitude which would be expected in the dealings of private indi-

viduals, and an Englishman may reasonably take some pride in that. But to the rest of the world this was either hypocrisy or mere unacquaintance, to be expected from the Islanders, with the technique of European diplomacy.

IV.

At the end of it all an Englishman still dwells chiefly on the part played by his own country. Was it honourable, was it necessary, could a wiser statesmanship have avoided it?

About the honesty and chivalry of the motive which impelled the great mass of the British people to support their Government in entering the war, I cannot conceive a doubt. The call of Belgium stirred millions as no argument from policy or interest would have stirred them. But it is no reflection on this motive to acknowledge that far more was at stake for Great Britain and the British Empire than the defence of Belgian neutrality. I believe that the more the history of this period is studied, the less real or probable will seem the hypothesis that the British Empire could have stood aloof from a conflict in which all other great Powers were involved. I have tried in previous chapters to trace the reasons which led British statesmen to the conclusion that a policy of isolation was no longer possible for the British Empire, but the question cannot be settled by a reference to this transaction or that. The answer belongs to the whole tendency of events which before, as after, the war was drawing the nations into inextricable mutual relations whether for peace or war. Then, as now, they could not live apart; then, as now, their intense nationalism made it difficult or impossible for them to live together. Some day the whole process may be seen as a prolonged struggle of the nations to find unity in their diversity, a struggle persisting through the successive phases of physical and economic war. President Wilson said after the war that there could be no neutrals in another war. He was right, but the saying was true also of the war itself. As the nations were organized, the localizing of conflicts between great Powers had become an impossibility before it broke out. The great complex of policies and interests which science had made of the modern world could not be stirred at one part and other parts remain at peace.

The idea of unity was never out of the picture even at the tensest moments of pre-war Europe. But the unity which most had in mind was one which would be imposed by the stronger

nation or group of nations on the weaker—a peace of submission. Disclaim it as they might, this idea meant the ascendancy or hegemony of the one over the other, and when each group charged the other with that design, both in a sense were right. On whatever issue the war was fought there could have been no victory of either group which did not carry with it at least a temporary ascendancy over the other group. Step by step, as we look back, we see the merits of the questions debated between the Governments becoming subordinate to the struggle for power, and in the end it becomes no paradox to say that, if Germany had been as incontestably in the right on the Belgian or any other issue as most Englishmen thought her to be in the wrong, the position of Great Britain and the British Empire would have been just as perilous in the event of her victory as on the contrary hypothesis.

The idea of the Sovereign State exploiting its power to the utmost for its own advantage or that of its group—a thing which had become almost a religion in the hands of Treitschke, Bernhardi and the German theorists—led logically to this conclusion. According to this theory, the possession of territory required, like blockade in a war, to be backed by the possession of corresponding military power, and those who had more territory than their military power warranted had no claim to be respected. If I may repeat a metaphor which I have used in a previous chapter, to treat power as the merchant treats his credit in the bank, to draw on it to the utmost limit of safety and beyond, to let no credit be frozen and to have no mercy on those whose credit was low, had been the habitual practice of the military nations in the period before the war. *Se faire valoir* was the watchword, preferably by the pressure and veiled threats of diplomacy, but, if these failed, without shrinking from war. I cannot think it probable that in a world thus organized Great Britain could have saved her Empire if she had been unwilling to fight for it, or that it would have remained unmolested, if a victorious continental Power, controlling larger forces, had been in a position to molest it.

Those who think that Empire worth saving need, therefore, not torture themselves by the thought that the sacrifice was vain, or look back on the British part as a blind stumble into the European morass. More and more, as one looks back, it seems an idle thought that a great Power in the position of Great Britain could have remained a spectator, while this stupendous battle, big with fate for her as for all others, was being fought out between her

neighbours. The world in 1914 had passed the stage when Great Britain could find peace or security in isolation.

But these speculations are only useful in so far as they bring home to us the true nature of the system by which the nations dealt with each other in these years, and its total incompatibility with the good life desired by the vast majority of human beings. Montesquieu said that monarchs should so make war as to have done each other the least possible damage when peace came, but the group warfare of the armed Alliances was bound to inflict the maximum of damage upon all the belligerents. In their search for security against perils of their own making, the nations had created a semi-internationalism which increased all the dangers and immeasurably extended the sphere of war. There were optimists who hoped that a real Concert of Europe might be established by building a bridge between the two dominant Alliances, and that Great Britain might play the part of bridge-builder—the part of the *Puissance Médiatrice* so often assigned to her by the theorists of history. This result did not follow. Instead, the nationalist passions remained unquenched, and being transferred from the nation to the group acquired a destructive force unimagined in any previous time. Napoleon, carrying his open warfare with a small number of troops from one part of Europe to another, did relatively little damage in all the years of his wars compared with that inflicted by the massed and entrenched armies of the two Alliances in the four years of their struggle.

The world has now been in a continuous state of war, physical and economic, since the year 1914, with devastating results upon the wealth of nations, the forms of government, and the happiness of men and women. Even if it is supposed that Great Britain could have stood out of the earlier stages of this struggle, it is certain that she must have been an active participant in the latter. Our old method of reserving our liberty to weigh in or stand out, as Parliament may decide at the critical moment, will not serve under the new conditions. League Covenants, Locarno Treaties, Kellogg Pacts, Economic Agreements will, let us hope, take the place of fighting alliances, but they will have to be accepted as binding obligations over long spaces of time. Over the whole sphere the problem is broadly to give the moral forces the place which was denied to them in the struggle for power of the previous period, to make mutual helpfulness and the settlement of the world's problems on their merits rather than the will-to-power the standard of public

action. The British people have no cause to be ashamed of the part they played in the past; they played it as straightly and cleanly as the imperative need of self-preservation in a fighting world permitted, but their character and their traditions specially qualify them to give the lead on the new course which is the need of the world to-day.

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