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BRITISH POLITICS SINCE 1900

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DISRAELI AND GLADSTONE

ENGLISH THOUGHT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

ETC.

D. C. Somervell

BRITISH POLITICS

SINCE 1900.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

This book was written in 1949-50 and I am taking the opportunity of a new edition to add a sort of ' postcript ' on the course of politics from after the general election of February 1950 to the end of 1952. I would hardly call it history; it is an effort in retrospective journalism. It may be found useful and I hope it will be found inoffensive.

I have also corrected such mistakes of fact, happily very few, as reviewers pointed out in the original book. While running through the file of these reviews supplied by my publisher I am struck by the generous welcome given to my book, but rather distressed that some, and not the least generous, describe my attitude towards most of the characters in my story as " disrespectful ". I never meant to be disrespectful! I am very well aware that the very least among these politicians was a much cleverer man than I am. But it seems to me that party politics makes for comedy as surely as war makes for tragedy. Do not say that I am disrespectful, but allow me from time to time to be respectfully amused.

D. C. S.

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

When I accepted an invitation to write a book entitled *British Politics Since* 1900, I wondered what exactly was expected of me. A Victorian professor once wrote, 'History is past politics: politics is contemporary history.' If that were so, all that was required was an outline of British history in general during the past half century, but this conception did not attract me. I preferred a more limited field. I have written a history of party politics, of the rising and falling of governments and the ups and downs of party political opinion in the country, using only such parts of general history as were necessary for the elucidation of my theme. Hence many matters of importance which could not reasonably be omitted from a general history either find no place in my narrative or appear only as ancillary to some other matter, of less general importance perhaps but more germane to my subject.

Such being my theme the reader may naturally wish to know which of the three parties I support, in order that he may be forewarned against any efforts on my part to mislead him.

My answer must be that I have enjoyed the parliamentary franchise since 1910 and in the course of the past forty years have on different occasions voted for each of the three parties. In the course of this book I have expressed vigorous opinions on various men and measures, though no opinion I have expressed equals in vigour the opinions many of the men have expressed about each other. However, I hope the reader may find that my vigour has been distributed with reasonable impartiality.

One more point—a very small one. I have decided to omit all 'Misters.' The other possibilities were to give everyone a 'Mister' however far into the past they may have receded or to discriminate between the living and the dead, but such collocations as 'Baldwin and Mr. Churchill' seem absurd. So I have written 'Churchill' and 'Attlee' as I would write 'Pitt' and 'Fox'.

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I. 1900: A CLIMAX AND A STARTING POINT

WHERE should one place the high-water mark of the Late Victorian Age, the climax of its simple-minded self-satisfaction? Perhaps we might locate it in the summer of 1897, at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Many writers have remarked on a difference in character and quality between the mood of this Jubilee and that of its predecessor ten years earlier. The much less grandiose festivities of 1887 had been a tribute of admiration and affection to a beloved sovereign who had emerged at last from the obscurity of her incredibly prolonged mourning for her adored Albert. The festivities of 1897, on the other hand, seemed to be primarily a display of national and imperial magnificence. The Jubilee procession itself with its apparently unending succession of military contingents drawn from every quarter of an Empire on which, as orators so often remarked, the sun never set, emphasized this idea. No doubt the Queen was at the central point of the procession, but the jewel seemed dwarfed by the immensity of its setting. And a few days after the London celebrations there came a naval review at Spithead of forces which, it was very reasonably conjectured, could challenge all the other navies of the world at once and beat them. So exultant was the mood that Kipling, who had done as much as anyone in the world of letters to create it, uttered a warning note in his famous Recessional.

Or one might place the high-water mark a year later, in the summer of 1898, when Kitchener entered Khartum, 'avenged Gordon' (whatever exactly that may mean), and secured for the beneficence of British rule the whole length of nearly the longest and certainly the most famous river in the world, whose source had been a mystery to European man from the days of Herodotus onward. Other Englishmen had unveiled that mystery less than half a century before, and it was fitting that Kitchener should annex what Speke and Baker had discovered. The triumph was made all the more piquant by the fact that it was disputed by one of those continental nations of which we had learnt to think so

little. No sooner had Kitchener reached Khartum than he heard that a minute French expedition, which had set out long before from the west coast of French Equatorial Africa, although the British Government had warned it not to do so, had hoisted the tricolor six hundred miles further up the Nile, at Fashoda. That flag, of course, had to be lowered. The French were rather slow in realising what they had got to do. *Punch* published an extremely insulting cartoon. There was even a 'war scare', but nobody much minded war scares in those days, as they never led to wars. The commander of the little French expedition was named Marchand. 'Marchand, marchez!' 'Marchand, clear out!' He cleared out.

Or one might place the high-water mark two years later still, in the summer of 1900, when Mafeking was relieved and Lord Roberts, advancing from Cape Town, entered first one and then the other of the capitals of the two South African Republics which, under the leadership of stubborn and wily old Kruger, had supposed they could expel British rule from South Africa. That had been a long story with unpleasant episodes, Majuba, the Jameson Raid and, only a few months back, the three defeats of 'Black Week', which led some ill-conditioned person to remark that the battle of Colenso was lost on the playing fields of Eton. But that was all over now and might well be forgotten. The leaders of the Unionist government assumed that it would be forgotten and decided to have a general election at once, to cash in on their South African Victory bonds before they depreciated. In those days a parliament could last seven years but practice had long reduced its duration to six. The last election had been in 1895 and the government had a majority of well over a hundred so that there need have been no election until 1901, and the decision to antedate the election in order—if we may vary the metaphor—to make hay while the sun shone was regarded by the Liberal opposition as immoral. They called it the Khaki election, though one may doubt whether the nickname did their opponents any harm, for khaki was a very popular colour just then. As for the charge of immorality, it does not lie. Governments are entitled to order general elections when they please, and oppositions are only too ready to describe as immoral what they find to be inconvenient.

No doubt the Unionist leaders were moved to their decision in favour of an immediate election by a memory of Disraeli's fate

twenty years before. Had Disraeli gone to the country immediately after bringing back ' Peace with honour ' from Berlin in 1878 he might well have won. Instead he waited two years and was beaten.

Before going further it might be well to incorporate in the text what might have been a footnote on the term ' Unionist ' occurring in the previous paragraph. In 1886, when Gladstone introduced his first Irish Home Rule Bill, a section of his party, or rather two sections, had voted with the Conservatives against the Bill and secured its defeat. After nine years of ' third party ' independence as Liberal Unionists, the leaders of these groups accepted office in the government of 1895, which in consequence was not called Conservative but Unionist, partly as a satisfaction to these valued recruits and partly in order to create the impression that this was not merely a one-party Conservative government but, as we should now say, a ' National ' government. These Liberal Unionist recruits to Conservatism constituted, as we have said, not one group but two. There was a group of old fashioned Whigs, led by the Duke of Devonshire, who were in most respects more ' Tory ' than the average Conservative, and a group of imperialist radicals, led by Joseph Chamberlain, who were very much less so.

The Liberals had every reason to dislike the idea of a general election in the summer of 1900. Gladstone had retired in 1894 (he died in 1898) and since that date they had found no one to replace him. Lord Rosebery had succeeded Gladstone as prime minister but he manifestly disliked the rough and tumble of party politics and was temperamentally unfitted for it. He had resigned his leadership. Harcourt, succeeding him, quickly followed his example and early in 1899 the distracted party fell back upon Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Sir Henry was a wealthy Scotsman, aged sixty-three, who had been an inconspicuous member of the last Liberal government. To the public outside political circles his name meant just nothing. On the day when his appointment was announced I remember, as a boy of thirteen, hearing two of my reasonably well educated schoolmasters spell out his eight syllables incredulously, as much as to say ' who the devil is he?' His name was in fact too long and in a very short time he was never called anything but C.-B. partly because it saved time, and partly because he turned out to be a jolly old boy who did not deserve to be buried under eight syllables. In choosing C.-B. as

leader the Liberals did a better stroke of business for themselves than anyone realised at the time.

But in 1900 C.-B. counted for very little and the party was split on the issue of the South African war. On the right wing were the Liberal Imperialists, Asquith, Haldane and Grey, who despised C.-B. and still hankered after Rosebery. Without exonerating from blame the policy of Chamberlain in England and Milner as High Commissioner in South Africa, which had led up to the war, they held that in the final stage the war had been forced on us by Kruger's ultimatum forbidding us to reinforce our garrisons in South Africa, and that, hostilities having begun, the opposition should support the government's war measures. On the left were the 'pro-Boers', a rump of old Gladstonians, Morley, Courtney and others, who soon found themselves quite eclipsed by the young Welsh Nationalist, Lloyd George, who now caught the public eye for the first time. To the Gladstonians and to Lloyd George the Boers were simply a 'people rightly struggling to be free.' A white-washed Kruger was fashioned into a hefty cudgel for belabouring the wicked British Imperialists. Between these factions C.-B. appeared to balance or fail to balance himself, starting from Asquith's premises and reaching Lloyd George's conclusions.

In these circumstances a sweeping Unionist victory might have been expected. There was no live issue before the electors except a vote of confidence in the government which had won, or appeared to have already won, a war which, however trivial it may appear to us today, was, measured by its cost, very much the biggest colonial war in history. A Unionist candidate named Wanklyn, afterwards notable as a House of Commons buffoon, produced the slogan, 'a vote for the Liberals is a vote for the Boers'. The result was sufficient but not sensational. The Unionists had started the previous parliament with a majority of 152. This had been reduced by by-elections to 128. The 1900 general election raised again to 134. If one treats the United Kingdom as a single constituency one finds that nearly two and a half million voted for the Unionists while a little over two million voted against them —for the Boers according to Wanklyn.* But such figures were

* It must be remembered that the majority of British Unionists over British Liberals was much greater than these figures imply, for the opposition included 81 Irish Nationalists whose only interest in British Liberalism was to extract from it the liberation of their own country.
One of the new M.Ps. of this election was Winston Churchill, elected as a Conservative at Oldham. Politically he begins where we begin.

beside the point. What counted was that the Unionists were safe in office, barring accidents, for another six years, eleven years in all; and it is worth noting that no political party had enjoyed such a triumphant ' follow on ' since the passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832. The Unionists had done wisely to cash in on the Mafeking-Pretoria mood. It marked the climax of the late Victorian Imperialism, which we must now subject to a rather closer scrutiny.

What was this Imperialism which so captured the national mind in the last years of the old century and which has been so frequently condemned, often ignorantly and unfairly condemned, in the following generation, by thinkers deeming themselves more virtuous and enlightened? The thing arose so naturally and spontaneously that it is difficult to locate its beginnings and analyse its causes. It was not a movement created by its prophets. The prophets found it already there inchoate, and provided it with arguments and policies. It is sometimes dated from Disraeli's Crystal Palace speech of 1872, but Disraeli, whose philosophic pose overlaid a very shrewd political instinct, smelt Imperialism in the air and offered it a welcome in the Conservative party.

This Imperialism was, first and foremost, a realisation that we had a very fine Empire and might as well make the most of it, expand it, and, to use Disraeli's word, consolidate it; draw together the miscellaneous and sprawling affair and make a business proposition of it, for purposes of trade, for purposes of defence, and for the outflow of our surplus population. In mid-Victorian days it had been assumed that the granting of self-governing institutions to the ' colonies ' as they were then called, Canada, Australia and the rest, would prove but a prelude to their independence. They would go the way of the United States though—in this more enlightened age—without a ' war of independence '. But these ' colonies ' had preferred to remain within the Empire—and how very gratifying that was!

Then Africa had begun to be opened up, and with very little trouble and expense we succeeded in painting a very large part of that Dark Continent red—again how very gratifying! Some one calculated in 1896 that 2,600,000 square miles, mostly in Africa, had been added to the area of the British Empire in the previous twelve years, twenty-four times the area of Great Britain. In the Far East it looked as if China was ' breaking up '. Would China

go the way of India? Would Hong-Kong and the Chinese treaty ports, in whose trade we held a lion's share, prove the foundation stones of an imperial domain comparable with that which had had its foundation stones in the eighteenth century 'factories' of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta?—a wild but not altogether absurd speculation, certainly no more absurd than that of a writer of a long and learned treatise who forecast that by the end of the twentieth century there would be nearly two hundred million inhabitants of Australia.*

It is difficult to say how far the imperialist movement was promoted by a consideration of the change that had come over the continent of Europe since the rise of Bismarck, for the British people outside professional and foreign office circles paid very little attention to continental affairs. We prided ourselves on our 'splendid isolation'; we did not want to interfere with them and we assumed that, apart from occasional and essentially harmless collisions at remote outposts, they would not want to interfere with us. But in so far as we contemplated as potential enemies the organised militarism of the new Germany or the restless aggressiveness of Russia, now eastwards towards Manchuria, now south-east towards Afghanistan, and now south towards Constantinople, we might console ourselves with the reflection that, though our 'little island' was too small to compete with them, our 'mighty Empire', suitably enlarged, consolidated and all the rest of it, would prove a match for any force that any enemy could put into the field.

Historians seem to agree that the voting strength of imperialism was markedly increased by the enlargement of the electorate from middle class to democratic dimension by the Reform Bills of 1867 and 1885. That must seem strange to the younger generation of today who have been taught to regard imperialism as a form of wickedness peculiar to capitalists, a disease from which 'Labour' is immune. But the French masses gave enthusiastic support to Napoleon in his day and the German masses to Hitler in ours, and the British people, whatever their differences from the French and the Germans, are members of the same species which is so oddly called *homo sapiens*. It was not only greedy millionaires and shareholders in the gold mines of the Rand who enjoyed themselves on Mafeking night.

* D. A. Wells (1890) quoted by Halévy, *History of the English People, 1895-1905*, p. 11.

There was no natural and inevitable affinity between the imperialist mood and the Conservative party. Had the mood come thirty years earlier, when Peel was the leader of the Conservative party and Palmerston the predominant influence among the Whigs, one may well suppose that it would have been the Whigs who would have piped to the imperialist dance. Disraeli, always acutely aware of his followers' need of education, gave them their first lessons in imperialism, but the imperialistic ventures of his 1874-80 government were not, apart from the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, much to the taste of a still sober and stolid and primly moral mid-Victorian electorate. That electorate was less thrilled by Disraelian imperialism than by Gladstone's Midlothian denunciation of it. What turned the country decisively in the imperialist direction was the awful example of Midlothian in action, the fruits of anti-imperialism as exhibited by Gladstone's second and third governments, 1880-86.

Gladstone retired and died some years before the story told in this book is supposed to begin, but he was the most extraordinary figure in the whole range of British politics, more extraordinary than any of the remarkable men that we shall in due course encounter, and we cannot keep him out of the book; for imperialism is most adequately comprehended as the opposite of Gladstonism.

Gladstone, like Nurse Cavell, held that 'patriotism is not enough'. Nurse Cavell, an English nurse in Belgium during the German occupation of 1914-18, shot by the Germans for giving Christian comfort indiscriminately to distressed belligerents on either side, became a popular heroine in her day, but these last words of hers were so little to the popular taste that, when an astonishingly bad monument was set up in her honour near Charing Cross station, the words chosen for inscription below her statue were *Pro Patria*, which was exactly what she had said was not enough. Only after a protest had been raised were her own words added on a less conspicuous part of the monument.

Gladstone regarded the major problems of politics from the standpoint not of an Englishman but of a European. Theologians tell us that pride is the deadliest of the seven deadly sins, and Gladstone regarded national pride and competitiveness as the deadly sin of politics. He believed that there was a law of God, and that national states could and must be taught to obey it; he

dramatized politics as an unending struggle between violence and justice for the allegiance of men's minds and wills. He thought that a country showed its greatness not in the pursuit of wealth and power but in the setting of a noble example.

We first see this aspect of Gladstone's mind in his public protest against the treatment of political prisoners by the King of Naples in 1851, a treatment which he described as ' a negation of God erected into a system of government '. It is amusing to notice that an Oxford don of our own day has called this an ' unnecessarily pompous phrase ', for it expresses simply and exactly just what Gladstone meant. He condemned the cruelty of the King of Naples not because it offended some modern sentiment of humanitarianism but because it was contrary to the teaching of the Christian religion, on which, as he held, the civilization of our European society is and must be based.

It was all very well for Gladstone to support Italian revolutionists against Italian despots, quite another thing to support peoples ' rightly struggling to be free ' from the beneficent control of the British Empire, and that from 1880 onwards seemed to be the main purpose of his unduly prolonged career. He gave up Afghanistan—' a policy of scuttle ' said Disraeli in his last parliamentary speech ; he restored independence to the Transvaal after meekly accepting an easily avenged defeat at Majuba ; much worse, he abandoned Khartum and General Gordon to the savagery of the Dervishes ; and, worst of all, he proposed to surrender what was undoubtedly the oldest, though hardly perhaps the brightest, jewel in the British crown by means of a Home Rule Bill enabling the wretched Irish to mismanage their own affairs in their own way. After six years of this sort of thing the average Englishman was prepared to say, ' If this is the alternative to imperialism, give me imperialism every time ', and he voted to that effect in the general election following the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill.

But the leaders of the Conservative government of 1886-92 were scarcely imperialists. Lord Salisbury was a massive aristocrat who combined a devout but undemonstrative high churchmanship with a rather cynical outlook on human activities and an addiction to the novel applications of physical science as a private hobby. He would no more have thought of encouraging and making party capital out of what Burke called the ' epidemical

phrensies ' of the populace than would his Elizabethan ancestor. He was his own foreign secretary and much preferred that office to the premiership ; indeed his indifference to the premiership was so marked that he had difficulty, it is said, in remembering the names and faces of his less conspicuous Cabinet colleagues. As a director of foreign policy he found himself called upon to take part in the ' scramble for Africa ' and annexed large slices of that continent, but he annexed without enthusiasm, declaring his conviction that Africa had been invented to plague the Foreign Office. One day a Chinese statesman laid before him a project involving British intervention in northern China. Salisbury refused to consider it ; the risks were too great. ' I understand ', replied the Chinaman with gentle sarcasm ; ' we govern, you and I, two empires on the decline '. Lord Salisbury was delighted, and often repeated the story to his friends.

As for Arthur Balfour, the premier's nephew, who rapidly rose to pre-eminence in the House of Commons, it is impossible to think of that fascinating and enigmatic person as a hot-gospelier of imperialism or any other ' ism '. His conservatism was unadulterated ; he held that the duty of government was simply to govern, and to repair and patch the mechanism wherever repairs or patches were proved to be absolutely necessary. So the Conservative government of 1886-92, though avoiding the pitfalls of Gladstonism, was scarcely imperialistic. The man who injected the virus, if it is a virus, of imperialism into the party was not a Conservative at all but the formidable recruit from the left wing of the Liberal party who, after the brief and abortive Liberal interlude of 1892-5, chose for himself the post of colonial secretary in the Unionist government of 1895. Joseph Chamberlain was not only the most powerful and popular figure in that government ; he was the only British statesman between the retirement of Gladstone and the rise of Lloyd George to excite the interest and rouse the enthusiasm of the masses. One called him ' Joe ' ; and the cartoonists never tired of his long sharp nose, his monocle, and the orchid in the buttonhole of his immaculate frock-coat.

Chamberlain was close on his sixtieth birthday when he joined the Unionist government and a long and diversified career lay behind him. While still in his teens he was sent by his father, a London manufacturer, to look after the family interests in a

Birmingham firm of screw makers, and after only twenty years of bold and successful business enterprise he retired with a large fortune. Meanwhile he had interested himself in the affairs of the city's municipal government, secured control of the corrupt and inefficient concern and converted Birmingham into the best governed city in the country, a model for the imitation of others. This was perhaps the most completely satisfactory part of his career, and Birmingham repaid him with life-long loyalty. So long as Chamberlain was a Liberal and a Gladstonian all the Birmingham constituencies returned Liberals. When Chamberlain broke with his leader and became Unionist all Birmingham went Unionist. Finally, in the catastrophic Unionist debacle of 1906, when all the other great provincial centres went Liberal or Labour, the eight Birmingham seats still stood steadfastly Unionist.* No other British statesman has ever enjoyed so remarkable a local ascendancy unless it be the ascendancy subsequently enjoyed by Lloyd George in the Caernarvon Burghs; but the Caernarvon Burghs are by comparison a small command.

In 1876, already a great power in the land and an extra-parliamentary influence in the agitation which had produced the famous Education Act of 1870, Chamberlain entered the House of Commons. It was at once observed that he was 'not a gentleman'. Standards of gentility in those days were very high and there were no keener connoisseurs of this sub-species of humanity than Disraeli and Gladstone. Disraeli, by that time Earl of Beaconsfield, paid a last visit to the House of Commons during the brief interval between his defeat in 1880 and his death in 1881 and saw sitting on the Treasury bench 'Chamberlain, who looked and spoke like a cheesemonger, and other dreadful beings'. It did not much matter what Disraeli thought, but what Gladstone thought was a matter of much more importance, for it was one of the many oddities of Gladstone's political philosophy that the more strongly he inclined to the complete democratization of the electorate the more obstinately attached did he remain to the notion that Cabinet office should be reserved for the gentry. When he began to form his 1880 government, while cluttering up

* The Chamberlain hold on Birmingham, prolonged by the careers of the two Chamberlains of the next generation, lasted on until it was abruptly terminated by the election of 1945. In no other great city did Labour make so big a gain—25 per cent. of the votes—the reason being that in no other city was there so much scope for gain.

his ministry with mediocre noblemen and near-noblemen, he intended to exclude Chamberlain from the Cabinet. Only after a threat that the 'Radical' or left wing group might assume an attitude of independence did he reluctantly offer him the then very subordinate office of President of the Board of Trade. It was a bad beginning; Chamberlain's only consolation was that Gladstone was already seventy. Tedious and obsolete he seemed already to Chamberlain, and as the Man from Birmingham surveyed his Liberal colleagues he could hardly help feeling as he had felt when, fifteen years earlier, he first forced his entry into the governing body of his city and surveyed the local worthies there assembled. In his own mind he could feel little doubt who would be the next Liberal Leader. But one possibility did not occur to him. Suppose Gladstone was not going to retire. Suppose he were to go on, roughly speaking, for ever! Chamberlain had not thought of that.

At the Board of Trade Chamberlain got through parliament some useful practical reforms and established in his office a new and alarmingly high standard of industry. But he was uncomfortable. These were years when the Irish problem looked darker than usual. Chamberlain thought that Gladstone made a mess of it and pursued an independent Irish policy of his own. When the general election of January, 1886, came he launched an 'unauthorised programme' with an advanced social policy, almost socialistic by Victorian standards. For the first time in British history a front bench politician directed the scorn and the envy of the masses against the idle rich, who must be made to pay ransome' for their unearned and undeserved privileges. It was the policy of the famous Lloyd George budget twenty-four years ante-dated. This programme, far more than anything offered by Gladstone, secured a Liberal majority, dependent it is true on Irish support, from an electorate that had just been doubled by the Reform Bill of 1885.

And then Gladstone declared for Irish Home Rule. Chamberlain also had his ideas about Irish self-government and it is impossible to say how far it was differences between their rival schemes and how far personal antipathy which decided Chamberlain's course of action. No doubt personal antipathies play a larger part in moulding the actions of politicians than one would gather from their political speeches. However that may be, he

persuaded his little group of Radicals to join the Whig Unionists and the Conservatives in voting against the bill, thus securing the defeat in the House of Commons of a measure that would in any case have been rejected by the House of Lords.

Nine years passed before he entered the Unionist government of 1895. In the meantime he had visited America and Canada and got ideas about the Empire. It was the great subject of the day. Whoever handled it would be in the centre of the political picture and that was where Chamberlain wanted to be ; and it was no use expecting to be allowed to go on with the ' ransome ' business from inside the Conservative party. As for the Conservatives they realised that he would prove a restless and uncomfortable colleague, but they felt that his power made him worth the trouble entailed. They may have been right. Certainly it was Chamberlainism rather than anything strictly Conservative that won the khaki election of 1900, the election that marked the climax of imperialism.

On the last two days of February, 1900, a date exactly coinciding with the relief of Ladysmith, there occurred a very different event, much less noticed at the time but perhaps in retrospect more important. A conference was held in London of delegates from the Trade Union Congress and three socialist organisations, the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society, to ' devise ways and means for securing an increased number of Labour members in the next parliament '. This conference established a permanent body of twelve members, seven representing the trade unions and five divided between the socialist organisations, entitled the Labour Representation Committee, which appointed as its secretary, by a curious chance, a young Scottish socialist named Ramsay MacDonald, who had unsuccessfully contested Southampton in the general election of 1895. The work of the committee was to be financed by such trade unions as thought good to make a very modest contribution for the purpose, and in the upshot trade unions representing about a quarter of the 1,200,000 trade unionists of that date accepted the scheme. The objective of the committee was to establish ' a distinct Labour Group in parliament, who shall have their own whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which for the time being may be

engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of Labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency'. It will be noticed that the word 'socialism' is not used; at that date it would have frightened off most of the trade unions. Nor is the Labour Group, though it is to be 'distinct', called a 'party' The most that was envisaged was a group of a few dozen members who could throw their support from side to side, much as the Irish Nationalists had done for a long time past, and in favourable circumstances, when the parties were of nearly equal numbers, hold the balance between them.

Behind this event there obviously lies a long history, which must now be surveyed. Three topics present themselves, the beginnings of British socialism, the beginnings of working-class membership of the House of Commons and the relationship of the trade unions to both these developments; but it will be best to begin with some more general considerations.

When one surveys the whole stretch of the nineteenth century from a social and economic standpoint, it falls easily in three parts. There was the early period of acute distress, from the outbreak of peace after the Napoleonic wars to the hungry forties, the period of Peterloo and the Chartists. This we must leave alone, except to say that it witnessed the legalization of trade unions and their development on a small scale among skilled craftsmen; the demand for parliamentary democracy; the invention of the term socialism', and the adumbration of many of the ideas now associated with that term along with others that have been discarded. This period was cut off from the period with which we are concerned by the outbreak of the great mid-Victorian prosperity, which lasted from the late forties to the middle seventies, a period in which every one's lot seemed to be slowly improving and a general contentment such as is now difficult to believe in pervaded, if not all sections of the wage-earning classes, at any rate all sections that were in a position to make their voices heard. Writing near the end of that period Walter Bagehot described the English as a 'deferential nation'. The lower classes were content to be voteless and to leave the franchise to their betters; the middle class voters were content to elect upper class M.Ps. and the upper class M.Ps. to accept aristocratic cabinets.

And then, just when people had begun to assume that it would

go on for ever, this mid-Victorian prosperity came to an end. Bad times, a series of slumps with their accompanying wage reductions and unemployment, set in during the seventies and continued off and on through the eighties. We must be excused from examining the causes of this period of distress since a book about the first half of the twentieth century is only concerned with its results. Prosperity returned with the nineties and continued to increase with a few minor setbacks down to the first great war, but during that grim interval new beginnings were made which did not terminate with returning prosperity. The reactions were many and various, deep and lasting. The social conscience of large sections of the more fortunate classes was aroused; fundamental discontents with the existing social order became articulate among the wage earners. We have already seen Chamberlain setting about making Birmingham a city fit for the masses of its inhabitants to live in, and his unauthorised programme secured for him a democratic following which in the vagaries of his subsequent career he never forfeited.

At the beginning of the seventies people in general were inclined to reflect on how much had been done to put us ahead of any society conceived or conceivable in earlier ages. The franchise had been extended to a considerable section of the wage-earning classes, and would obviously be extended further. Elementary education had been made nearly universal and nearly free. A series of statutes had protected the workers in factories and mines from the grosser forms of exploitation. Population had grown more rapidly than ever before and wealth per head had grown faster still. But by the beginning of the eighties it was apparent to all who gave the matter serious consideration that these things were not enough. 'Capitalism', as it was beginning to be called, had done wonders; it had created an amazing body of wealth for the fortunate, but how large a part of the population were they? In 1886, Charles Booth, a wealthy shipowner, undertook at his own expense a statistical examination of 'Life and Labour in London'. The results were published in a series of volumes with that title during the ensuing fifteen years and they revealed the astonishing but undeniable fact that thirty per cent. of the population of the greatest and richest city in the world, as London then was, were living 'below the poverty line', living on incomes less than sufficient to provide the barest necessities of a healthy life.

What was to be done about it? For something could and must be done about it. Was it a fact that government by the rich could not possibly understand and therefore could not solve the problems of the poor? Such a line of thought pointed to the conquest of parliament by the masses, through the election of members of their own class. Was there something fundamentally wrong about capitalism itself? Was there some other method of organising an industrialised society, a method of organisation in which the state, representing the whole community, would own the means of production and arrange that the product was more equitably distributed? That pointed to socialism, a subject on which large and unreadable treatises but also short, snappy, fervid and violent little pamphlets were already in circulation.

Having got thus far in general terms we may proceed to examine each in turn of the four organizations which sent delegates to the Conference of February, 1900, and accepted representation on the Labour Representation Committee, and we will begin with the least important of them.

The Social Democratic Federation was founded in 1881 by an old Etonian named Hyndman who had swallowed and digested the whole of the doctrines of Karl Marx, whose creed the world had not yet learnt to call communism. Marx was still alive though near his end, living obscurely in Hampstead, and his daughter was among the conspicuous members of the S.D.F., if any member of an organization so obscure can properly be described as conspicuous. The history of the S.D.F. proved that whatever else the discontended British working man might want he did not want Marxism, with its incomprehensible economics, its blatant materialism, and its objective of revolution. H. G. Wells, himself a youthful socialist in the eighties writes. ' Those were the days when our socialists marched round and round the walls of the capitalist Jericho blowing their own trumpets—and the walls did not fall down '. The trumpets did not even achieve harmony, and the main events in the history of the S.D.F. were the quarrels and expulsions of its conflicting champions. By 1900 it was already a spent force with no future ahead of it. At the February Conference its proposal to include class war and a revolutionary socialist objective among the agenda of the Labour Representation Committee was turned down by all the other delegates. Hyndman himself was a disinterested fanatic who never stepped outside the

sartorial conventions of his own class; he was known as 'the socialist in the top hat'.

The writer who did most to popularize the name of socialism (whatever the thing itself might be) in the latter years of the nineteenth century was a man extremely unlike Karl Marx—Robert Blatchford, ex-soldier, cricketer, sturdy British patriot, editor of the *Clarion* and author of *Merrie England*. Blatchford knew nothing and cared less about the science of economics. He just saw that the present arrangement of society was not fair to the poor, and said so again and again in the simplest and most compelling terms. His socialism was simply a demand for distributive justice, a fairer sharing between rich and poor; and the gulf between the wealth of the wealthy and the poverty of the poor at the end of the nineteenth century was such as the present generation cannot easily imagine. Blatchford had other popular strings to his bow. He was rather like Edward Lear's 'Derry-down-Derry, who loved to see little folks merry'. He attacked the rigid Sabbatarianism which an already declining middle-class nonconformity still imposed on the life of great cities. He encouraged his younger readers—and perhaps most of them were fairly young—to organize Sunday games, to get on to their bicycles, still an entrancing novelty, and go out and enjoy exercise and fresh air in the country. They did so, and came to feel that, if socialism meant or at any rate included not going to church, there was a great deal to be said for it.

If Robert Blatchford was at the opposite pole from Karl Marx the Fabians were at the opposite pole from both of them—which illustrates the inadequacy of metaphors. The Fabian Society owes its curious name to a Roman commander—even socialists seem to have known their Classics in those days—who won his campaign by avoiding pitched battles. Founded in 1884 by some young Londoners of the professional class who enjoyed debating and writing papers on social questions, it very early submitted to the leadership of two young men of extraordinary ability, Sidney Webb and Bernard Shaw, of whom the former supplied the penny plain and the latter the twopence coloured element in the society's propaganda. Between 1887 and 1893 the society circulated three quarters of a million copies of its tracts and in 1889 it published a more substantial volume entitled *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, with contributions from Webb, Shaw, and five others, nearly all

of whom either were or soon became persons of considerable importance.

The Fabian Society took some time to ' find its length ' as they say in cricket, and it would be easy to point to things in its early publications inconsistent with what ultimately came to be accepted as the essential Fabian idea. That idea may be stated as follows.* ' Socialism is not a Utopian state, to be achieved if at all by means of a bloody revolution. It is a process which is already going on around us, though it is going on much too slowly, haphazard and hand to mouth, and without any sense of direction. Right back in the middle of the century, before the anarchy of industrial capitalism grew to its full stature, it became apparent that some of its more flagrant manifestations must be controlled by the state acting in the interests of the community. First came the Factory Acts, then the national endowment of compulsory education, and now, under the impetus of Chamberlain, the principle of the liability of employers for accidents incurred by their workmen, even though the employer was not to blame for the accident and the workman was. The list could be indefinitely extended. Liberal and Conservative governments have contributed almost equally to the process and they will continue to do so because it is in the logic of social development. Some people call such legislation collectivism. Collectivism is a name for the process, socialism is a name for the objective or end, state control of all the economic activities of the community in the interests of the community as a whole ; but since the ' end ' will never be reached in any foreseeable future, the terms are really interchangeable. We can call it collectivism for those who fight shy of the ' end ' and socialism for those who are inspired by such a conception. What is needed is a bureau of scientific research which will work out the practical collectivist measures which are required today and will be required tomorrow. Liberal and Conservative statesmen are a lazy lot, and in any case they are condemned to a kind of life that is of its nature inimical to the production of constructive ideas. The two most serious impediments to the production of constructive ideas are distraction and routine. Front bench politicians lead lives of alternating routine and distraction, so what can be expected of them?† They want ideas, and they won't get them

* What follows is my own interpretation and not a quotation from any Fabian text.

† I have stolen this particular idea from Bagehot and presented it to the Fabians.

from their hide-bound civil servants. We will supply them with all the ideas they want, and more. They will come and eat out of our hands.

'That being so, the intrusion into parliamentary politics of a third *soi-disant* socialist party is quite unnecessary and would do more harm than good, for it would frighten the old established parties, who will hold majorities for a long time to come, into anti-socialism. We shall do very well as we are. 'The inevitability of gradualness', (a description of Fabian tactics coined by Sidney Webb at a much later date) must be our motto.'

In 1892 Sidney Webb married Beatrice Potter and from that date onwards Fabianism was essentially 'the Webbs'. Mrs. Webb, one of the most remarkable women of her generation, was the daughter of a leading industrial magnate who held that women are superior to men and did his best to prove the fact by begetting his nine daughters. The Potters belonged to that upper stratum of industrialists who moved at ease in the highest political and social circles. The other eight 'Potter girls' all made more or less distinguished marriages in their own class, and one of them was the mother of Sir Stafford Cripps. Beatrice was already on easy terms of dinner table acquaintance with Chamberlain and Balfour before she made her *mésalliance*, as most of her family and friends regarded it, with Sidney Webb.

It was one of the happiest marriages and a most fruitful partnership, productive not of babies but of books, big historical books exploring untilled fields of research in the history of trade unionism and local government. For the Webbs had the historical sense; they realised that the way to understand what is lies through finding out what it has been. But the partnership was productive of something more than books, though how much more it is still rather difficult to say. At one end of the scale is the Webb myth, which represents the Webbs as the invisible pair of spiders at the centre of the political web,* and all the politicians of either party concerned with social legislation between 1895 and 1909—for those years mark the heyday of Webbism—as more or less conscious executants of Fabian policy. At the other end of the scale is the anti-Webb myth which presents a well-meaning but tiresomely persistent couple claiming credit for things which would have happened just the same if they had not been there. No doubt

* I do not see how this pun can be avoided.

the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. Certain it is that, in spite of her mésalliance, Mrs. Webb had no difficulty in rallying to her new home all that she valued in her old family circle. Haldane, perhaps the best brain among the rising generation of Liberals, and Arthur Balfour himself were among her intimate friends, and friendship with Mrs. Webb was no idle holiday; it was always friendship with a purpose, a Fabian purpose.

The couple had complementary gifts. Sidney Webb's was essentially a simple nature, with an extraordinary facility in the handling of documents and the production of lucid expositions. An example of his methods may illustrate Fabianism in action. A portentous royal commission with, perhaps, a Duke in the chair would be appointed to investigate some social problem. Of course a trade unionist would be made a member of the commission to satisfy the requirements of the working classes. When the time for writing the report drew near the simple minded trade unionist, utterly befogged with the mass of evidence accumulated, wanting to present in a minority report the working class point of view and utterly incapable of doing so, would come along to the Webbs. ' Give me the record of the evidence ' says Webb, ' and I'll produce a report for you by next Thursday.' Some time later : 'It's obvious you did not write this report yourself ' says the ducal chairman, somewhat nettled by its alarming cogency. 'No ', says the trade unionist, ready with the retort that Sidney had suggested for use in case of emergencies ; ' nor will you write yours, but you'll have to pay someone to write your report while I've been clever enough to get mine done for nothing.'

Mrs. Webb, on the other hand, was a complex and passionate creature, recurrently troubled by the need for a religion which she could not find. She held that science could tell us how to get what we wanted but only prayer could tell us what we ought to want. Her genius lay in the direction of personal contacts with all sorts and conditions of men—with women her touch was less assured. When she wanted to understand the working of borough councils she visited a selected list of boroughs and got to know the councillors. She was a connoisseur of personality and her voluminous diaries are full of sharply etched portraits, proving that Mrs. Webb possessed literary gifts, a fact one would not have guessed from the partnership's historical works. Take for example this on Chamberlain at the height of his powers, just before the

launching of the ' unauthorised programme ' written by Beatrice Potter at the age of twenty-five, seven years before her marriage.

' The political creed is the whole man, the outcome of his peculiar physical and mental temperament. He is neither a reasoner nor an observer in the scientific sense . . . He aims at being the organ to express the desires—or what he considers the desires—of the majority of his countrymen . . . By temperament he is an enthusiast and a despot. A deep sympathy with the misery and incompleteness of most men's lives and an earnest desire to right them transforms political action into a religious crusade ; but alongside this genuine enthusiasm is a passionate desire to crush opposition to his will, a longing to feel his foot on the necks of others.'*

It was undoubtedly Beatrice rather than Sidney who injected into the Fabian philosophy its distrust of working-class politicians. She distrusted them because she knew them, and the more she knew them the less she liked them. John Burns, Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, each was worse than the last. They were ridiculously conceited, absurdly jealous of each other, deplorably ignorant and satisfied to remain ignorant, believing apparently that the problems of society could be solved by ' the gift of the gab.' It was natural enough. ' Nouveaux riches ' are traditionally unpleasant, and working class politicians are a species of ' nouveaux riches ' though their rise in the world is not measured in money and is due to a different set of aptitudes.† Mrs. Webb's diaries are full of variations on this theme :—

' Judging from our knowledge of the Labour movement we can expect no leading from the working class. Our hope lies in permeating the young middle class man.'§

' The I.L.P. wants to make ignorant people join socialist societies. We want to make thoughtful people think socialistically.'§

On John Burns in the days of his celebrity—' Like most untrained enthusiasts, experience of affairs has unhinged his faith and dulled his enthusiasm.'§

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* Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, p. 124. This volume and its sequel, *Our Partnership, 1892-1911*, consist for the greater part of excerpts from the author's diaries. They are fascinating books.

† There have been and are many wholly admirable working class politicians to whom Mrs. Webb's strictures cannot be applied, but so also have there been many wholly admirable ' self-made ' men of the ' nouveaux riches ' order of capitalists.

§ B. Webb, *Our Partnership*, pp. 125, 132, 189.

Such being its outlook the Fabian Society would not be much interested in the Conference of February, 1900, and the Labour Representation Committee. They sent a representative, but the subject finds no mention in the published selection of Mrs. Webb's Diaries.

Perhaps we may be excused if, having gone so far with the Webbs, we follow them through to the end of their story before embarking on our next item, the Independent Labour Party. On the eve of its resignation in 1905 the Unionist government set up a Royal Commission on the Poor Law, and Mrs. Webb became a member of it. The offer must surely have been the idea of Balfour himself for he was at this time on terms of close friendship with her and he assured her that the chairman of the commission, one of his former Cabinet colleagues, was 'not such a fool as he looks'. It worked out rather unfortunately. Mrs. Webb became altogether too excited about this Poor Law business and her minority report. A distressing note of shrillness, unheard hitherto, becomes audible in her diaries. In 1909, after the publication of the reports, the Webbs launched a democratic propaganda campaign for the 'break up of the Poor Law' with a technique quite alien to the Fabian methods of permeation. It fell very flat, being submerged by the agitation over the Lloyd George budget and the Parliament Bill. Then Lloyd George set about breaking up the Poor Law himself with his Insurance Acts, but his way was not the Webb way and they had not a good word to say for him. He had never been one of their set.* They departed, one might almost say in dudgeon, to have a look at Japan, China and India.

On their return they found the country in such a state, with gigantic strikes and the absurd embroilment of the Liberal and Conservative parties in the Irish feud, that they reversed their policy and decided that they had better put their money on a Socialist Labour party after all. In 1918 Sidney Webb drafted, anonymously as usual, its new constitution and appeal to the country, entitled *Labour and the New Social Order*. He served as a Cabinet minister in both the dismal little Labour governments of the inter-war years, but he had entered the House of Commons too old to find his feet there. The Labour catastrophe of 1931 upset the balance of the Webbs' minds as it upset the balance of

* Seeing that practically all the other leading Liberal ministers pop in and out of the Webb diaries the absence of Lloyd George's name from them is rather striking.

the minds of so many lesser folk and Russia caught them on the rebound. As their biographer, Mrs. Hamilton, puts it, ' the smash compelled their minds to face the revealed weaknesses of the British form of representative democracy and stimulated them to interrogate its alternative '. So they made a pilgrimage to this most dubious of ' alternatives ', were fascinated with it and wrote the last of their vast books in its praise. It is all rather sad, seeing what Soviet Russia really is. They were well over seventy at the time and must be excused on the ground that they were too old to know any better.

There were other children of the Webbs that were neither books nor statutes, the London School of Economics and the *New Statesman*. When, soon after the first war, the Labour *New Statesman* swallowed its rival, the Liberal *Nation*, the act of cannibalism was the Fleet Street equivalent of what was happening at Westminster. Perhaps it was a pity that the Westminster operation could not show as clean a plate. The *Nation* ' went down ' in one mouthful ; the Liberal party has had to suffer a prolonged ' nibbling ' and the meal is not finished yet.

The history of the Independent Labour party is so closely bound up with the history of trade unionism that the two subjects must be treated together.

It seems at first sight a curious fact that none of the seven authors of the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889) display any interest in the trade unions. It seems curious because we have become for the past fifty years so accustomed to the close connexion between socialistic policy and trade unionism. The trade unions have in fact from their enormous funds provided the greater part of the financial support required by a parliamentary party consisting in the main of working class candidates and advocating socialist policies. Actually the lack of interest displayed by the Fabian essayists is not surprising, for they did not project a new political party of working-class M.Ps. but trusted to achieve their socialism by other means. Those, however, who desired a socialist ' Labour ' party could not but cast envious eyes on those great and wealthy organizations. Parliamentary parties cannot live without money and where else except from the trade unions was the money to come from?

But the trade unions of the eighties were a long way from socialism. They were scarcely even democratic, for the unions

were organizations of skilled craftsmen and their battle was a battle on two fronts. On the one hand they set themselves by a system of pressure which seldom involved strikes to secure by better wages a larger share of the profits of the industries in which they were employed. On the other hand they set themselves to maintain a scarcity value for their labour by insisting upon rules of apprenticeship to protect their ' mysteries ' (to employ the medieval term) against the competition of the vast unorganized hordes of unskilled labour outside. A Trade Union Congress had been established in 1868, the year after the enfranchisement of the class to which these skilled workers largely belonged, to agitate for certain clearly defined reforms in the legal status of the unions. These reforms had been secured in the course of the next eight years and thereafter the Congress, while maintaining its annual meetings, relapsed into routine and quiescence. Twice in the early eighties it rejected motions in favour of manhood suffrage by large majorities.

From 1874 onwards certain constituencies, mostly those in which miners were a predominant element, returned candidates of working class origin to the House of Commons, but these ' Labour ' members were quite content to be accepted as members of the Liberal party—' Lib-Labs ' as they came to be called at a later date by those who regarded them as inadequate representatives of their class.

The founder of the Independent Labour Party was a Scottish miner named James Keir Hardie who entered the mine at the age of eight—in spite of the Mines Act of 1842 this seems to have been possible as late as 1864—and had never been to school. In 1887 he launched a proposal at the trade union congress for the financing through trade union funds of socialist parliamentary candidates. It was heavily defeated. Undeterred, he stood as a socialist at a Scottish by-election in the following year and polled a few hundred votes. His zeal made him a leader, and within a year he had organized a sufficient number of small groups to unite them in a body which assumed the proud title of the Scottish Labour Party. Similar groups were formed in England and in the general election of 1892 Keir Hardie and two others were returned to parliament as independents, without Liberal support. Keir Hardie's constituency was West Ham ; one of the other independent candidates was John Burns, the hero of the dock strike, also

elected by a London constituency. Hardie's entry on to the stage of his parliamentary duties is historic. He arrived in his cloth cap and workaday clothes, accompanied by a little brass band. A picture of it can be found in the appropriate issue of the *Illustrated London News*.

In the next year, 1893, the Independent Labour party was founded. The term Independent was chosen to distinguish its adherents from the 'Lib-Labs', in preference to the term Socialist which, it was thought, would lose more support than it would gain. None the less socialism was avowed by the party's adherents, a socialism that owed little to Marx and less to the Fabians but a good deal to Robert Blatchford; much also to Henry George, an American writer whose *Progress and Poverty* was a great influence at that time. George was hardly an orthodox socialist for he held that the whole social problem could be solved by the nationalization of the land. It was due to George that 'the land' and the so called 'single tax' on land assumed such a prominent place in early British socialist programmes.

The I.L.P. failed to win a single seat in the general election of 1895 when the tide of opinion moved strongly towards conservatism but that did not discourage it nor interrupt its progress as a popular movement in industrial areas. Among those caught up in the movement from the start was a young Yorkshireman from a working class home named Philip Snowden, who was at a loose end because he had had to give up his job in the civil service owing to an accident which rendered him lame for life. Snowden became an indefatigable lecturer and propagandist for the I.L.P., first locally and afterwards all over the country. In his autobiography he gives a pleasing picture of some of the activities of the young enthusiasists of the I.L.P.

'The movement was something new in politics . . . Vocal unions were formed which accompanied cycling corps into the country at week-ends and audiences were gathered on village greens by the singing of choirs; then short and simple addresses on socialism were given. On their country jaunts the cyclists distributed leaflets, pasted slips on gates and sometimes stuck them on cows, bearing such slogans as 'Socialism the Hope of the World' or 'Workers of the World Unite'.'*

But three years before Keir Hardie's election to the House of

* Snowden, P. *Autobiography*, p. 71.

Commons, four years before the founding of the I.L.P., something had happened to the trade unions. In 1889 the London dockers, one of the worst paid classes of casual labourers, launched a strike for a wage of sixpence an hour, 'the docker's tanner', under the leadership of Burns and Mann, well paid skilled craftsmen of the engineering union who had become socialists and thereby acquired a sense of obligation to the masses outside their own privileged order. This dock strike roused far more interest and sympathy than any strike had ever done before. It made a peculiarly strong appeal to that social conscience which had been awakened during the years of distress which followed the mid-Victorian prosperity. What more concerns us here is that it led to a rapid extension of trade unionism into the lower ranks of labour. Genuinely democratic unions, aiming at the inclusion of all workers, skilled and unskilled alike, in a particular industry, developed with surprising rapidity. The trade union congress became, what it had not been before, a democratic institution with a national rather than a professional outlook. At the same time more and more socialists of the type of Burns and Mann,* many of them members of the I.L.P., secured key positions in the various unions. Annual meetings of the trade union congress began to adopt by large majorities surprisingly socialistic resolutions. The resolution of the congress of 1899 issuing invitations to the socialist societies for the conference of the following February was no more than what, in the circumstances, one would have expected. For the past ten years what some people call the logic of events had been pointing in that direction.

The 'khaki election', coming barely six months after the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee, took that infant organization unawares and at a disadvantage. Of its thirteen candidates only two were elected. But that proved a matter of no more permanent importance than the defeat of the I.L.P. men in 1895. The new departure had been made. Its subsequent fortunes belong to the next chapter.

* Burns and Mann ultimately turned out to be men of very different type. Both had long lives before them. Mann moved further and further to the left and ended up a communist. Burns moved further and further to the right: we shall encounter him again.

II. THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM, 1900-05

AFTER the khaki election Mrs. Webb wrote in her diary :— ' In voting for " the strong man " the electors have shown common sense. Who could trust a party with a lay figure as its ostensible leader and as the real leaders of its sections men who hate each other and each other's ideas? And there seems little hope for the Liberals in the near future. To win back the large towns they have to give up Home Rule, local veto* and disestablishment ; they have to become imperialist and develop some kind of social programme. In giving up old policies they alienate the Celtic fringes and all the provincial Liberal politicians. In imperialism they cannot outbid the Tories ; in all social questions they lack knowledge or conviction, and fear to lose their remaining rich men. So they will fall back on the Rosebery plan of ' no policy ', hoping they may be accepted as the only alternative to a government gone stale. That may bring the adhesion of those who become in course of time offended with the present government or who belong to interests threatened by the expenditure and innovations of Tory democracy, but it will not bring back to their ranks the great mass of town workers who want some strong lead, something blatant and positive in return for their votes.'† A shrewd analysis, but how much easier it is to analyse convincingly than to forecast correctly.

Five years and a few months after the khaki election the Conservatives suffered such a defeat and the Liberals achieved such a victory as had never occurred before in the long record of general elections. The Labour party also leapt into existence. We have in this chapter to examine the events which, one after another, contributed to this result.

First of all there was the war itself. The khaki election had been intended to celebrate its conclusion, but it refused to conclude ; it dragged on for another eighteen months, and there can be little

* The right of local areas to impose their own controls on the sale of alcoholic drinks over and above the controls established by parliament, an item in the official Liberal programme.

† B. Webb. *Our Partnership*, p. 201.

doubt that if the Conservatives of 1900 had been as simple-minded in their electoral tactics as Disraeli had been in 1878 and allowed the sitting parliament to sit out its natural term, it would have been a very small majority, if any, that they would have garnered in 1901. For the war in its later stages was of a kind that could yield no gratification to the inevitable victors and it involved methods of warfare which, however abstractly justifiable as the only possible response to the tactics of the enemy, offended the humanitarian sentiments of the most humane nation in the world and made many sick and sorry that we had ever embarked on the wretched business.

Kitchener, who was left in command after Roberts had occupied Pretoria and returned home, had to deal with an elusive enemy playing hide and seek in small parties all over hundreds of miles of velt, an enemy who fought without uniform, an apparently peaceful farmer one moment and a belligerent guerilla the next. To meet this situation Kitchener proceeded to denude the country of its farms and stock, gathering the non-combatants into concentration camps. These camps were often mismanaged, not for the reasons which the sinister term suggests today but on account of the natural incompetence of the sub-average military officer—for it would not be the best officers who would be left in charge of the camps—to handle organizations that he had never been trained to deal with. In some of the camps the death roll rose to an appalling figure. C.-B. denounced the concentration camps as 'methods of barbarism', and the phrase, which caught on and became famous as the phrases of politicians sometimes do, expressed the feelings of many who had entirely approved of the war in its inception. The phrase went further afield. It went halfway round the world and reached Jan Smuts, one of the youngest of the Boer leaders, and when C.-B. became prime minister it was remembered.

When the war ended at last, in May, 1902, there was an attempt to celebrate in the Mafeking style, but it proved a ghostly echo of those loud noises which, in retrospect, seemed disproportionate to their occasion.

But even that was not the end. With the issue in the following year of the report of the royal commission on the conduct of the war it rose from its grave to plague the Unionist government afresh. English people expect their wars to be conducted, in their

early stages at any rate, in a fairly incompetent manner; it is a tribute to our amiability and a proof that the war in question was not our fault. But the incompetence revealed in this report was too much; tragic in its consequence of lives unnecessarily lost, it was also positively funny. It made us laugh, and that was all right; it made foreigners laugh, and that was not all right at all. The War Office became a music hall joke. Lord Lansdowne, one of those great noblemen who owed their cabinet rank to their great nobility, had been at the war office in the early days of the war, and had long since been prudently moved on—to the foreign office: for men of the greatness of Lord Lansdowne, if they fall at all, fall upwards. Brodrick, now at the war office, had to set to work to reform it, and the British army too. He produced a scheme which was laughed out of court, and someone else was still busy with another scheme when the Unionist government came to an end.

Cynics assert that under a democratic system a government is as likely to suffer electorally for its good deeds as for its bad ones, and it would certainly seem possible to extract from our history a list of bad deeds that have won votes and of good deeds that have lost them. Among the latter might be placed the Education Act of 1902.

There was a complex of educational problems arising out of the extraordinarily haphazard and piecemeal manner in which our system, if it can be called a system, of state-supported* schools had grown up. First there was the absence of any recognized provision for secondary education. No civilized country at that date spent so little public money on education beyond the elementary stage. Switzerland spent annually more than a shilling per head of population on secondary education; Britain less than a penny. Behind the splendid facade of the public schools was a vast vacuity sprinkled with private establishments, a few of them excellent but most of them inefficient and even sordid affairs of which the school described in *Vice Versa* may, on the word of its author, be regarded as a fair sample. Such was the vacuum, and so strongly does nature abhor vacuums, that the state system of elementary and technical schools had irregularly intruded into

* I use the term 'state' to cover support from local rates as well as national taxes, the term 'public schools' having been annexed by certain other institutions

the secondary sphere, thereby adding to education but increasing administrative confusion.

Then there was the problem of the church schools. The education of the poor had been begun not by the state but by the churches. The state had stepped in later and filled the gaps. The church schools remained but, with the increasing cost of educational equipment, the churches were finding it more and more difficult to meet requirements. Should the church schools be starved out and replaced by state schools or should they be supported from the rates? When we say church schools we mean Church of England and Roman Catholic schools. The non-conformist churches were satisfied with the undogmatic 'simple Bible teaching' provided in the state schools as established by the famous Education Act of 1870.

Lastly there was the question of the local authority for education purposes. Now that County Councils had been created (by an Act of 1888) there was a great deal to be said for entrusting all varieties of state education to the County Councils and abolishing the School Boards which had hitherto looked after elementary education.

No one realises more acutely than the writer the inadequacy of the three foregoing paragraphs as an account of a group of problems at once complex and unattractive, but it must suffice for our purpose. The subject was very much to the taste of Sidney Webb who since 1892 had been a member of the London County Council and had made London education his special province. A really comprehensive Education Act providing a solution of all these problems would kill several birds with one stone; it would increase state control, it would produce order out of chaos and, most important of all, it would make the next generation better educated than its predecessor, and better education would, on a Fabian forecast, mean more socialists. In 1901 he produced Fabian Tract No. 106—*The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, of which the political head of the education department of the Privy Council (there was at that date no Minister of Education, so called) at once secured fifty copies for office use. But the real author of the Act of 1902 was not Webb but Robert Morant, at that time no more than a subordinate official in the education department and now about to become one of the greatest civil servants of his day. If history were as tidy an affair as those who

write history must often wish, we should find that Morant derived his ideas from Webb, but in fact he appears to have arrived at them independently, though he became one of the Webb circle at a later stage.

Morant designed the main outlines of the bill which established the county secondary school system as we know it today and saved the church elementary schools by subsidising them from the rates, to the vast annoyance of the nonconformists. But it is one thing to design a bill, another thing to get it through parliament. The political head of the education department in the Unionist government was Sir John Gorst, a clever but cantankerous and irritating old man. He had never outgrown the habits he had exploited twenty years before when he was a member of Lord Randolph Churchill's little group of Conservative *enfants terribles* who called themselves the Fourth Party. Experience had proved that any measure introduced by Gorst generated so much heat that it was reduced to ashes before it reached the statute book. So Morant secured, through a personal friendship, a country-house introduction to no less a person than Balfour, now about to succeed Lord Salisbury as prime minister.

Balfour was always ready to allow himself to be bored ; it was one of his many charming characteristics. Yes ; he would listen patiently to what this education person had to say. At an early stage of the exposition, we are told, he woke up and fixed a piercing eye on the young civil servant. He was interested, a rare experience with him where politics was concerned. Yes ; he would take charge of the bill himself and see it through. It would mean a lot of hard parliamentary work, more than he had done for years, but it would be worth while. The scheme was a really good scheme and it would annoy all those elements in the Liberal party that he most delighted to annoy.

And so the bill went through, Balfour in charge with Morant busily briefing him at every turn of the long drawn out debates. The secondary schools part of the bill, which we see today as one of the great constructive measures of the present century, interested only those who were interested in education and passed through parliament so quietly that many failed to notice what had happened until the new secondary schools began to become a feature of urban architecture. What raised all the

rumpus was the subsidizing of the church schools. The nonconformists lashed themselves into a fury and persuaded themselves that this was the worst thing that had happened to them since Archbishop Laud put puritans into the pillory. The Liberal party had for generations lived and thriven on the nonconformist vote, and most of its leaders felt constrained to assume, with more or less sincerity, the attitudes that would satisfy their constituents. One leading Liberal, Haldane, a Webbite and like Balfour, a metaphysician, had the courage to support the bill.

The most vigorous and persistent opponent of the bill was a back bench member, Lloyd George, the Welsh nationalist, and certainly the church clauses of the bill bore more hardly on Wales than on England ; Scotland and Ireland were not involved. The Welsh were mostly nonconformists and the schools in country districts—' single school areas '—were mostly church schools. Poor little Welsh nonconformists had to go to the only school available, where the church catechism was shoved down their little throats.

When the measure came into force a number of nonconformists illustrated their martyrdom by refusing to pay their rates and some of them were sent to prison. A large section of the Liberal party had been presented with a grievance, and they contrived to nurse it and keep it alive until the next election. Even Lord Rosebery was galvanised once again into party-political activity. The picture of this noble expert in race-horses urging obscure chapel-goers to disobey the law is more amusing than edifying.

The later career of Morant contains so curious an illustration of the ways of ' British politics ' that it may be recorded here though it lies outside the subject of this chapter. He became in due course head of the civil service of the education department and in 1911, by sheer inadvertence as it seems, he passed for printing and general circulation a report from his chief inspector, E. G. A. Holmes, which contained a passage all too true, no doubt, but unsuitable for general circulation. In this passage the Holmes circular, as it came to be called, remarked that the progress of elementary education was being strangled by an inspectorate of elderly half-educated ex-elementary schoolmasters who knew nothing about education except what they had themselves taught in their youth. He suggested that it would be better to recruit the inspectorate from Oxford and Cambridge graduates who,

though they might never have taught in elementary schools, were in touch with modern ideas.

A young Conservative M.P. named Samuel Hoare got hold of this circular and saw its possibilities as party-political ammunition. Was it true, he asked with the circular in his hand, that the Liberal government, at the very moment when it was seeking to cripple the House of Lords, was proposing to set up a kind of House of Lords to control the activities of our admirable and devoted elementary school teachers? Under our system the Liberal government was, of course, ' responsible ' for the Holmes circular though it actually knew no more about it than the man in the moon. It does not matter how the then minister of education extricated himself from the toils of Hoare's question. What mattered was that the National Union of Teachers was aroused. The N.U.T., like all trade unions, was more interested in the careers of its members than in the quality of the service they gave to the community. Just as the candlestick makers' union is more concerned that the makers of candlesticks should wax fat than that the rest of us should get good cheap candlesticks, so the N.U.T. was more concerned that as many as possible of its members should rise to the inspectorate than that the schools should have the best inspectorate available. Morant, so long the friend, was now pictured as the enemy of ' education '. He had to go.

Happily, at this very moment Lloyd George was pushing his Health Insurance Bill through parliament. Six months later would come the ' appointed day ' when the Act came into operation, and only a really first class organiser could get the thing ready in time. He knew Morant of old. He had been his arch-enemy in the days of the Balfour Education Act, and he realised his quality. So Morant was asked to take charge of the uncreated insurance department. He started from scratch, got a staff together, pushed everyone about, including the slightly disconcerted Lloyd George himself, and all was ready for action on the ' appointed day '. But if Hoare had not asked his awkward question about the Holmes' circular in 1911 he might have had material for other awkward questions about the ' insurance muddle ' in 1912.

Chamberlain, himself a nonconformist, had disliked the

controversial parts of his colleague's Education Act. He may also have been somewhat irritated by that same colleague's easy and apparently inevitable succession to the premiership, for was not he himself a far greater force in the country? He had always been restlessly ambitious and yet, since he had left Birmingham for Westminster, nothing he had undertaken had quite come off according to plan. Since 1895 he had made imperialism his chosen theme, yet what—apart from the tarnished glories of the South African war and a number of administrative improvements all over the empire, which no ordinary person took any notice of—had his imperialist policy amounted to? What had been achieved in the direction of Disraeli's ideal of the ' consolidation ' of the empire? Nothing. When Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule bill Lord Randolph called him ' an old man in a hurry '. Chamberlain in 1903 was nine years younger than Gladstone had been in 1886, but he had in fact fewer years of active life ahead of him. He must have felt, like Tennyson's Ulysses, that ' some work of noble note may yet be done ', but there was not much time left to do it. He also was an old man in a hurry. In 1903 he startled his colleagues and the whole country by launching what came to be known as the tariff reform campaign, a campaign for the abandonment of our free trade system.

The primary motive was imperial, to consolidate the empire. At an Imperial Conference in the previous year the premiers of the Dominions had recommended a system of mutual imperial preference. All the Dominions already had protective systems and expressed their readiness to lower their tariffs in favour of goods from the mother country. The mother country could not return the compliment unless she first established protective duties against the foreigner. As a man who owed his position to success in business Chamberlain naturally thought of imperial consolidation in terms of a mutually profitable business arrangement.

But there were other arguments for the proposed new departure. It had become a familiar theme of chancellors of the exchequer that we had about reached the limits of revenue available under the existing ' Gladstonian ' scheme of taxation. But Chamberlain had never formally abandoned the social reforms he had promised in his Liberal days, old age pensions for example. Lloyd George happened at this time to taunt him with having broken his

promises to the aged poor. Chamberlain replied that the money required could not be raised within the present system of taxation but he added, ' I do not think that the question of old age pensions is dead ; but to find the funds will involve a review of our fiscal system which I have indicated as necessary and desirable at an early date '.

Then there was the question of protection as a thing needful in itself, the protection of home industries against foreign competition. Our unique supremacy as the ' workshop of the world ' had for the past twenty years been gradually and inevitably slipping away from us. Was it a fact that Cobdenite free trade, so profitable in its day, was appropriate only to a passing phase of the national economy? When Chamberlain launched his programme in 1903 industry was passing through a mild slump. It was electorally unfortunate for the tariff reformers that trade rapidly revived and continued to boom right up to the first great war. The present writer offers no opinion whether the adoption of Chamberlain's proposals in the early years of the century would have been what school books call, or are said to call, ' a good thing '. The country went over to protection in 1932 and, in spite of the outcry then raised by an old guard of free-traders, no political party would today venture to return to free trade ; but what was good in 1932 would not necessarily have been good in 1903. Here we will concern ourselves only with the electoral consequences of the tariff reform propaganda.

For the Conservative party the result was disunion and embarrassment. Balfour found himself in the position Campbell-Bannerman had occupied only a few years before, a leader balancing uneasily between two hostile factions, tariff reformers and free-traders, and he really hardly knew which faction he most disliked, the quack doctors of the new patent medicines or the Blimps who, having never lived under any system but free trade, could not imagine any other system being an improvement on it. Chamberlain left the government in order to convert the country while Balfour held the fort at Westminster until the process of conversion was completed. Chamberlain having gone he demonstrated his approval with his ex-colleague's crusade by appointing his son Austen Chancellor of the Exchequer and also by somewhat rudely extruding from his cabinet three colleagues who declared their unalterable faith in free trade.

There was a fourth free trader whom he wished to retain, the old Duke of Devonshire, Leader of the Whig Unionists, who had acquired an extraordinary reputation for sagacity by reason of his immense wealth, his habit of disapproving of every novelty until it had ceased to be new and his practice of going to sleep during the transaction of business. But the old Duke woke up, noticed that the other free-traders had gone and followed their example. As an exposition of his own views Balfour published an acutely reasoned little pamphlet called *Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade* which would have done credit to any sceptically minded professor of economics. The pamphlet created the impression that the subject was much more difficult than most people supposed, that complete free trade was probably no longer tenable but that it would be as easy to fare worse as to fare better. The policy actually recommended was a system of 'retaliatory duties' designed to force down the protective duties of other countries—a good idea perhaps but outside Chamberlain's scheme. In the House of Commons he treated the subject as irrelevant; it was a matter for the next election, and the next election would be when, within the six years limit, the government chose to hold it.

To the Liberals on the other hand the new departure was a godsend; it enabled them to display to the fullest advantage their natural conservatism. There had been an almost religious element about the preaching of free trade in the days of Cobden and Bright; it was advocated not merely as a set of sound precepts from the gospel of Mammon, which would make us all richer, but as a kind of economic footnote to the Christian message of peace and goodwill among men. Tariffs, it was said, led to wars; free trade would prove a step towards an internationalism in which war would be no more. These dreams had not come true, but the old fervour still smouldered and the Liberal bellows easily rekindled it. Free trade, like nonconformity, was discovered to be part of the average Englishman's extraordinary religion. Many Liberals struck this note most effectively, Lloyd George for example.

For those who wanted logic rather than rhetoric Asquith was the man. He followed Chamberlain round on his speech-making campaigns from one provincial centre to another and demolished him. He had Chamberlain at a disadvantage, for the tariff reform

campaign consisted of an original idea overlaid with incongruous afterthoughts. The original idea was imperial preference, and the only import from the colonies worth considering for a preferential tariff was food. There must be food taxes on foreign food before a preference could be given to imperial food. The empire must be bound together even though it might involve some sacrifice to ourselves. 'There!' said the Liberals; 'your food will cost you more'. So the emphasis shifted to the protection of our decaying industries; whereupon they stopped decaying and appeared not to need protection. Chamberlain was no thinker; he was a man of action. His jumble of nostrums, submitted to the ruthless analysis of a trained mind such as Asquith possessed, the mind of a Balliol prizeman and successful K.C., disintegrated into foolishness. The tariff reformers, to prove their case, had to construct, on paper, a new economic system; the free traders had only to demolish it, and it is always easier to demolish than to construct. The longer the tariff reform campaign lasted the less convincing it appeared.

And then South Africa, which had started the rot in the prospects of the Conservative party, returned to complete it. After the war the gold-mining industry of the Rand found itself suffering from a serious shortage of labour. The work was of a kind which white men living in a country with a coloured population will not do. In any case there would not have been enough of them and their wages would have been prohibitive. Native labour was, for the time being at any rate, quite inadequate. In these circumstances the Rand magnates, backed by Milner, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, persuaded the British government in 1904 to sanction the importation of a large labour force from China. About 50,000 were in fact imported. The importation of 'indentured labour', usually from India, under systems which involved the enlistment (or 'enslavement') of the labourer for a fixed period, was a device that had been employed in many parts of the empire ever since the abolition of slavery. It had, for example, created a large Indian colony in Natal. The peculiarity of the present scheme was that the Chinese were not to be allowed to become part of the permanent population of the country to which they were brought. During their period of residence they were to be strictly segregated in

compounds, cut off like prisoners from all contact with the free population, and when they were no longer required they were to be returned to China.

It was natural that Milner should support such a scheme for he was simply an efficient, an exceptionally efficient, administrator and never at any stage of his career showed any understanding of British public opinion. The scheme was opposed by Chamberlain and would probably not have been adopted if he had remained in the government. It is always easy to be wise after the event and, handicapped by that species of wisdom, one is precluded from understanding how the government allowed itself to be persuaded by Milner and to turn a deaf ear to Chamberlain. Perhaps they were rather tired of the sound of Chamberlain's voice by that time. Perhaps they thought that, as no Chinaman was under any compulsion to sell himself into this new kind of slavery, only those would sell themselves who liked that sort of thing. Perhaps they thought that the British electorate had so much to interest them at home that they would hardly spare a tear for the Chinese.

If they thought that they strangely misjudged the still Victorian electorate which ever since the days of Wilberforce had never been too busy about its own affairs to sit back and indulge in a little holiday of moral indignation over the wickedness of other people, however far away they might be. The Chinese indentured labour system, ' Chinese slavery ' as it was popularly called, was open to grave moral objections. As described by indignant orators to excitable audiences it could easily and plausibly be represented as worse than it actually was. Was it for this that we had won the war? The pro-Boers had always said that the war had been undertaken in the interests and at the bidding of a gang of Jew millionaires, capitalists and exploiters who fattened on South African gold, and it now looked as if they had been right.

And there was another way of looking at the matter. Under the impetus of socialism and the new democratic trade unionism bad old ideas of labour as a commodity—' water plentiful and labour docile ' in the words of the oft-quoted and perhaps mythical prospectus—were very much out of favour. What was this ' Chinese slavery ' but a capitalist plot against free workmen demanding fair wages? In vain to tell the Labour-minded elector that the yellow men were doing the jobs not of white

men but of black men ; that until the yellow men got on with the spade work the white men would not find the well paid jobs which were the only jobs that in South Africa they would consent to do. The Labour-minded elector was not going to believe what he did not want to believe. In the general election of 1906 it is said that the most effective vote-winning poster consisted of no more than a hideous yellow Chinese face, but whether votes were won because the elector hated Chinamen or because he hated the enslavement of Chinamen is not so clear.

It will be noticed that each of the controversies which turned public opinion against the Unionist government involved, among other issues no doubt, a moral issue. On Chinese labour it is obviously so. The tariff controversy involved a moral issue in so far as free traders believed, as many of them undoubtedly in a hazy way did believe, that free trade was an aspect of freedom and that freedom was a moral asset ; that the admission of untaxed foreign goods was in some way part and parcel of the fine tradition that had made Britain an asylum for the persecuted of less happy lands ; and that free trade contributed to international peace and good will. The opposition to the Education Act could be presented as a stand for the moral principle that no adult should be made to pay for and no child to be taught a kind of religion that it did not want. And finally, to push back to our first point, C.-B's condemnation of the concentration camps as ' methods of barbarism ' was a moral appeal and nothing else. The average Briton was very much concerned about morality, other people's, if not his own.

Nonconformity, humanitarianism and free trade were Liberal assets, but the newly born or rather newly conceived Labour party had also ever since 1901 been in the enjoyment of a first class grievance of its own. It arose out of a legal decision. There had been a strike of the employees of a Welsh railway, the Taff Vale railway, and the strike had been somewhat reluctantly recognized and supported by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. The company took the novel step of suing the trade union. The case raised the question whether a trade union could be held responsible like an ordinary employer for wrongful acts committed by its servants or agents, the wrongful acts alleged being in connexion with the strike. The

company won their action, lost it in the Court of Appeal but on the last round won it again in the House of Lords. This decision did not alter the law. No decision of the courts can do that. But it did what from a practical point of view comes to very much the same thing; it declared wrong the hitherto accepted view of what the law was. It had hitherto been assumed that the Act of 1871 gave absolute protection to trade union funds against any action for damages. Under the new interpretation bankruptcy stared in the face any union that had the temerity to support or initiate a strike.

It is not necessary to tell the reader that the House of Lords referred to in the previous paragraph is not the august assembly that rejected Lord Grey's first reform bill and Lloyd George's first budget and figures as a chorus in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. The legal functions of the House had long since devolved on half a dozen legal luminaries entitled law lords, the only common feature of the two Houses of Lords being that both are presided over by the Lord Chancellor. But it is said by at least one good historian* that many of the trade unionists whose prospects were affected by the Taff Vale judgement were unaware of this distinction and that in their uninstructed minds the verdict of these six non-hereditary lawyers was added to the list of the iniquitous actions of the six hundred hereditary legislators. This I should not have believed but for a personal experience, for I found some years later, when the alleged iniquity of mining royalties were being pressed upon public attention, that my cook, a person of strong Labour sympathies, conceived, as a result of reading articles about the problem of the coal mines, a marked distaste for the royal family. Such obscure facts are not altogether irrelevant to a study of British politics.

If Balfour's government had been wise they would have introduced a bill putting the law back to where it had been supposed to be before Taff Vale; but there were technical difficulties about this. It was apparently impossible to put the law back to the same place without putting it further still. So the government did nothing for two years, then appointed a royal commission to investigate and then did nothing for another two years. A result of the Taff Vale judgement was that the candidates of the Labour Representation Committee began to win

* Ensor, R. C. K. *England, 1870-1914*, p. 378.

by-elections. They won three by-elections in succession in 1902, and might have gone on to win more had not the tariff storm blown up and filled the sails of the larger opposition ship. Still the Labour grievance was nursed and kept warm for the next election, after which a group of Labour M.Ps. were as keen to secure legislation reversing 'Taff Vale' as a group of non-conformists were to secure legislation reversing the controversial part of the Balfour Education Act. How each of these groups fared will appear in the next chapter.

From 1903 onwards it seemed certain, and not only to those who wished it, that Balfour's government would be defeated at the next election. The evidence of by-elections was convincing. So the demand naturally arose that he should dissolve parliament or resign (which would come to the same thing as his successor would dissolve parliament as soon as he acceded to office) and it was indignantly declared that he had no business to 'cling to office' in face of the manifest will of the people. But such a declaration had no basis in precedent. A government is under no obligation to dissolve parliament unless it is defeated in the House of Commons on a major issue, and the attrition of by-elections was far from depriving the government of its substantial majority. The governments that without having been decisively defeated in the House fall by the way or dissolve parliament before a reasonably close approximation to their allotted term of years, are not those of which the country is 'sick to death' but those which have become sick to death of themselves, like the Rosebery government in 1895 or the Lloyd George coalition in 1922. There was no reason why the Balfour government should commit suicide and several possible reasons why it should not.* Useful legislation on various subjects could continue to be enacted. The tariff reform campaign needed time to educate the electorate. One of Balfour's biographers has suggested, though very likely mistakenly, that he 'clung to office' mainly to carry through and consolidate a major revolution in our foreign policy, the *entente* with France. We have left this subject out of the present chapter because so few people in those days took any interest in foreign policy that the transaction has nothing to do with our present subject, the swing of the electoral pendulum.

* Though Austen Chamberlain privately urged Balfour to dissolve parliament in the autumn of 1904.

We shall pick it up when we reach the date at which the German menace made an impression on the mind of the nation.

By the end of 1905, however, when parliament was some months past its fifth birthday, Balfour decided somewhat suddenly to resign. He appears to have had two reasons for his decision. The tariff reform league had begun to express positive hostility to his detachment from its programme and Lord Rosebery's declaration that he would not serve in a Campbell-Bannerman government which included Home Rule, even though only ' by instalments ', in its programme suggested that a Liberal attempt to create a government might after all reveal a Liberal disruption. Accordingly he did not dissolve parliament but resigned, in December, 1905. C.-B. took office as prime minister, formed his government and dissolved parliament.

Balfour's career was not over, but this is the most convenient place to attempt an estimate of him. He is worthy of study, for we shall not look upon his like again. It is a measure of his personal distinction that such a man should have risen to the premiership, seeing that he took or appeared to take so little interest in most of the problems of the people he governed. It is a measure also of the extent to which the House of Commons was still ' the best club in Europe ' and personal ascendancy in ' the club ' counted for more than any reputation won outside. It is tempting to compare him with Melbourne. Many readers will remember Lytton Strachey's masterly description of Melbourne, culminating in the magical phase, ' he was an autumn rose '. Balfour, too, was an autumn rose, a bloom of the finest perfume blossoming dangerously late in its season when the frosts were already setting in. Melbourne was a man of the eighteenth century overlapping into the reign of Victoria; Balfour was a man of the nineteenth century overlapping in the reigns of Edward VII and George V. We are all familiar with the picture of the girl queen listening with breathless attention to the fascinating lessons in politics with which her first prime minister, carefully excluding all the unseemly elements of his habitual vocabulary, trained her for the career which lay before her, and it is a pity that no similar picture of Balfour and Edward VII is or ever will be available. King Edward got the impression that Balfour regarded him as a bore, and he may have been right.

The outstanding features of both Melbourne and Balfour were a constitutional idleness and indifference to official duties and a personal fascination. The idleness and indifference were in both cases not as extreme as they appeared; there was with both men an element of pose about all that. The fascination, on the other hand, was effortless. No one felt Balfour's fascination more keenly than that connoisseur of personalities, Mrs. Webb, though of the man himself she could not wholly approve. Here is one of many entries on the subject in her diary, from 1903:—'A man of extraordinary grace of mind and body, delighting in all that is beautiful and distinguished, music, literature, philosophy, religious feeling and moral disinterestedness, aloof from all the greed and grime of common human nature. But a strange paradox as prime minister! I doubt whether even foreign affairs interest him. For all economic and social questions I gather he has an utter loathing, while the machinery of government and administration would seem to him a disagreeable irrelevance.'* One is reminded of Max Beerbohm's cartoon of Matthew Arnold addressed by his niece, Mrs. Humphrey Ward —'Why Uncle Matthew, oh why, will you not be always wholly serious?' However, disapprove as she might, Mrs. Webb continued to see a great deal more of Balfour than might seem to have been strictly necessary for the promotion of Fabian policy. Balfour, like Melbourne, fascinated women.†

There are two respects in which Balfour belonged not to the old generation but the new one. He was an accomplished amateur of music and early in his life published an interesting essay on Handel. Nothing more reveals the fact that throughout the nineteenth century intelligent interest in music was confined to specialised and obscure coteries, mostly long haired and mostly Jews, than the complete absence of music from the biographies of all the leading Victorian statesmen, many of them men of wide scholarship and culture in other directions. With Balfour music reaches the Treasury Bench and one must hope it is still there.

The other respect in which Balfour belongs to the moderns is perhaps less admirable. Lord George Hamilton once told Mrs.

* B. Webb, *Our Partnership*, p. 270. Contrast this with her mordant picture of Chamberlain a year later, at the height of the tariff reform campaign. '. . . his mechanically savage persistence in steaming ahead . . . his pitiful unhealthiness . . . irritability, one-sidedness, egotism.'

† Balfour was a bachelor, Melbourne a widower.

Webb that at cabinet meetings in Lord Salisbury's time ministers always addressed one another or referred to one another as ' the Chancellor of the Exchequer ' or ' the Secretary ' for this or that. With Balfour it became ' Bob ' and ' George ' and ' Arthur '. Lord George thought that this was a pity, for some of the ministers were within the christian name circle and others were known only by their surnames.

III. THE LIBERALS AND THE LORDS, 1905-11

THE reader will recall Mrs. Webb's analysis of the prospects of the Liberal party on the morrow of the khaki election, which was quoted at the beginning of the previous chapter. Those 'real leaders of its sections' who 'hated each other and each other's ideas' had been drawn together during the past five years by co-operation in the work of propaganda against tariff reform and other Unionist enormities, a very encouraging co-operation which had reduced the Unionist majority from 134 to 68 by means of by-election victories. But the unity of the party in aims and outlook was not absolute. What party ever is as united as it would wish to appear? The leaders of the right wing, Asquith, Grey and Haldane, the Liberal Imperialists, who had for some years recently been members of a rather shadowy organisation called the Liberal League under the presidency of Lord Rosebery, still regarded C.-B. as a 'lay figure' and conceived that, though he must be accepted as prime minister, he could be induced to withdraw to the House of Lords, leaving the leadership of the House of Commons and the effective leadership of the party to Asquith. But C.-B. refused to budge and they capitulated.

The result was a government containing, it is generally agreed, a larger number of really able and distinguished men than any other before or since. Asquith became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir Edward Grey went to the Foreign Office, where he had served as Under-Secretary in Lord Rosebery's government. Haldane, always essentially more of a Fabian than a Liberal, chose the War Office. Some surprise was expressed at this choice, which was a courageous one, for the War Office had proved the grave of many reputations and it was a post in which no Liberal was likely to win popularity with his own party, since the average Liberal regarded the whole business of 'militarism' with distaste. But his choice may be regarded as fortunate for the country. He succeeded where his Unionist predecessors had failed and created the expeditionary force of 1914 with the territorial army behind it.

Two eminent old Gladstonians, Bryce and Morley, distinguished as men of letters and political philosophers, took charge respectively of Ireland and India. Bryce soon passed on to the more congenial post of British ambassador to the United States but Morley carried through the first instalment of the reforms which have led, though he did not intend it, to Indian independence. Lloyd George went to the Board of Trade, like Chamberlain in Gladstone's 1880 government. There were some bad appointments, two of which may be regarded as symbolical. Herbert Gladstone was given the Home Office, perhaps to remind the older generation that the revered spirit of his father still presided over Liberal destinities. John Burns, once the hero of the dock strike, was made President of the Local Government Board (an ancestor of both the present Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour) presumably to secure the good will of the trade union element in the Liberal ranks. He had refused to join the I.L.P. because he could not bear to play second fiddle to Keir Hardie, and survived as the last of the old 'Lib-Labs'. As a minister he had no ideas and became the mouthpiece of an obstinately conservative group of civil servants, and the despair of reformers. It is rather a mystery why he was allowed to remain in the cabinet until he removed himself as an opponent of the war in August, 1914. Lord Elgin, a former Viceroy of India, proved inert at the Colonial Office, but that merely gave the more scope to his brilliant Under-Secretary, Winston Churchill, who had just passed his thirty-first birthday.

There were many able men in the government, but only two men of political genius—perhaps two is a large allowance for any government—Lloyd George and Churchill. Churchill had entered parliament as a Conservative in 1900 at the age of twenty-five. He was at that time already a South African war celebrity and three years later he was one of the few free traders who made his views on this subject a pretext for changing sides. He had almost from the time of his election onwards taken an unusually independent line and had made a number of striking speeches which gave more satisfaction to the Opposition than to his own party. Lloyd George had entered parliament in 1890 on the Liberal 'ticket' as a somewhat rebellious Welsh nationalist. People said in 1905 that he was given office only because he would be more of a nuisance outside the cabinet than in it, but actually

it would have been impossible, such was already his power in the party, to exclude him. The two men, though one was the grandson of a Duke and the other had grown up in a Welsh cottage under the guardianship of a shoemaker uncle, quickly recognised each other as kindred spirits and drew together. They were well aware, too well aware perhaps, that they had something that was lacking in all their senior colleagues. One of the interests of the next few years, viewed in the light of later events, is to watch them climbing the ladder of fame in friendly rivalry.

And what of C.-B. himself? He would have laughed at the suggestion that he was one of the ablest and most distinguished members of the government, but one of the new Labour members, Philip Snowden, a man not much given to admiring anyone except himself, felt that C.-B. was the right man in the right place, though he gives an odd reason for his opinion. 'In personal appearance', says Snowden 'he was the sort of man one would like to have for a grandfather or an uncle'. Perhaps I may add my own impressions. I was at Oxford in 1905 when C.-B. came down to take part in a Union debate. I had, in the debating hall of that society, listened to the dazzling orations of many clever undergraduates. I had also heard the accomplished and scholarly Conservative Wyndham and the eloquent Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalists. C.-B. disconcerted me. Could this homely old boy, with his long string of halting platitudes, really be the destined occupant of the seat of Salisbury and Balfour, of Gladstone and Disraeli? None the less, I liked him; I wished him well. C.-B. reigned for two years and then died—happy perhaps in the time of his death. There have been many greater prime ministers, few more popular or, within their limits, more successful.

The general election followed in January, 1906. When Mrs. Webb cast the horoscope of such an election she took the view that any possible items in a Liberal programme would lose more votes than they gained. She forgot that what we call general elections are better regarded as general rejections. It was not necessary for Liberals to stress the awkward articles of their own professed creed. Home Rule could be postponed for a season, the ridiculous old shibboleths of local veto and disestablishment of the church could be dropped out altogether. It was sufficient

to say that one would right the wrongs of the past five years and, above all, that one would maintain free trade.

Before the Reform Act of 1918, elections, though lasting only one day in each constituency, were by custom spread out over a fortnight, perhaps to enable the fortunate possessors of more than one vote to visit their several constituencies. Newspapers used to print a sort of chess board of 670 squares with a line down the middle. The squares filled up day by day as the results came in, government candidates on the left side, the side of the Treasury bench, and the opposition candidates on the other. Those old enough will remember the astonishment with which, in 1906, they saw the supporters of the new government quickly fill every square on their own side of the line and overflow across it. At the end of the count there were 377 Liberals, 53 Labour members, 83 Irish Nationalists; the number of these last was always about the same. The Conservatives had dropped to 157. The Liberals had thus a majority of 84 over all the other parties combined, and on the natural assumption that they would for most purposes be supported by the Labour men and the Nationalists they could expect a majority of something like 400. There had never been anything like it before, though it has twice happened since, in 1918 and in 1931.

Of the Liberals almost exactly half were members of non-conformist congregations; never before had there been so many chapel-goers in the House of Commons and never perhaps would there be so many again. Of the Labour men 29 were candidates sponsored by the Labour Representation Committee, 24 trade unionists and 5 I.L.P. men, including Hardie, Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald; but 24 others, miners' representatives and 'Lib-Labs', acceded to the party after election and accepted the Labour whip. The fact that the L.R.C. put up only fifty candidates, more than half of whom were elected, suggests that if they had had more money at their disposal they would have scored more heavily. Of the Unionists two-thirds were reckoned 'whole-hog' Protectionists or Chamberlainites and the rest either Balfourians or members who had explicitly excluded taxes on imported food from their programme. Chamberlain himself had a stroke soon after the election and disappeared from active politics though he lived on till 1914 and occasionally issued advice to those Unionists, not a few, who preferred his authority to that of their official leader.

The first session would obviously be devoted to righting the wrongs, and first of all there was the education business, a task entrusted to Augustine Birrell, who was both a Baptist and a humourist. His baptistry would ensure that his bill contained the right things and his humour that the discussion of them was made as agreeable as circumstances admitted. It was unfortunately impossible to devise any solution of the problem of the elementary schools that did not inflict what the controversialists would regard as a hardship on either the church schools or the opponents of church schools. One could shift 'the boot' from one leg to the other; to conjure it away was impossible. Birrell's bill was a complicated measure and occupied a great deal of parliamentary time. When it passed to the House of Lords it was so mangled with destructive amendments that the Government could not recognize its own child. The bill was dropped and Birrell passed on to take charge of Ireland. Two more successive ministers attempted education bills in the next two years with similar results and then the subject dropped. Was the grievance a real grievance after all? It was certain that the more the average elector heard about it the less he cared.

Meanwhile two other little Education Bills passed almost without controversy through both Houses. One established school meals for necessitous children and the other the medical inspection of school children. These were not properly speaking Liberal notions but socialist notions, put forth long ago by the Fabians and now backed by the Labour party; backed also by Morant from inside the education department.

Then there was the business of the Taff Vale judgement on which the report of the royal commission had recently been published. Trade union law is a notoriously complicated affair, as trade unionists knew to their cost, and the Liberal lawyers devised a bill to meet the occasion which no one but a lawyer could understand. The Labour party was not satisfied, and one of its members introduced a private member's bill simply negativing the Taff Vale judgement and saying that the unions could not be sued for damages; whereupon C.-B. light-heartedly threw over his lawyers and adopted the Labour bill as a government measure. The lawyers, from Asquith downward, were not pleased but the House of Lords let the bill through.

Of the obvious wrongs to be righted there remains 'Chinese

slavery'. It was impossible to break existing contracts, but the government at once issued orders that no more contracts for the importation of Chinamen should be made and that those already made should terminate at the earliest possible date. So this singular experiment was brought to an end. It is said that the Chinese during their period of labour served the purpose for which the experiment had been designed and got the gold mining industry started up again more quickly than it could have been by any other method; but it is also said that the conditions of existence in the compounds, and outside when, as sometimes happened, various Chinamen escaped from them, fully justified the action taken by the Liberal government.

But there was another South African problem. When the war ended the Unionist government undertook that at some undefined future date the two conquered republics should be given complete self-government within the empire, such as was already enjoyed by the British colonies of the Cape and Natal. In 1905 Milner, about to retire from his long and eventful High Commissionership, provided constitutions for the ex-republics which fell a long way short of self-government. Campbell-Bannerman, on taking office, decided that the Milner constitutions should not come into operation and that complete self-government should be granted at once. His policy was denounced by Conservatives as criminal levity and a throwing away of the fruits of victory. Indeed it is quite possible that, if the policy had required legislation, it would have been vetoed by the House of Lords. Fortunately only executive action by letters patent was required. The result entirely justified this bold, generous and truly Gladstonian experiment. Botha and Smuts, both of whom had only four years before been fighting for the independence of their republics, became the leaders of the majority party in the Transvaal and steadfast upholders of the British Empire. Botha was the first prime minister of the Transvaal and, after the union of the four colonies in 1910, under a constitution devised by their own leaders with the assistance of British experts, first prime minister of the Union of South Africa down to his death in 1918. Smuts succeeded him.

It has been suggested, with what measure of truth it is hard to say, that the immediate and complete success of this South African experiment reconciled a number of hitherto sceptical

but open minded persons to the idea of Home Rule for Ireland. The South African Dutch had been our ' enemies ', off and on, for a hundred years; the Catholic Irish for much longer, no doubt, but it was much more than four years since they had actually fought us. Why should not Redmond, who had long shown himself so much more friendly than his predecessor Parnell, become the Irish Botha? The question can be found, asked in those terms, in the controversial journalism of the period. It may be that, with better management, Redmond might have become an Irish Botha, but the Irish problem was more complex than the South African and it could not be settled by letters patent.

Meanwhile Lloyd George at the Board of Trade was making a reputation of a kind that surprised both his friends and his enemies and, maybe, himself. He became, for a time, ' respectable.' Finding in his office the reports of two royal commissions appointed by the previous government he proceeded to embody them in legislation. The first was the Merchant Shipping Bill which confined pilots' certificates to British subjects, raised standards of food and accommodation for British merchant seamen and compelled foreign ships using British ports to conform in certain respects to British standards. The other was the Patents Act, compelling patentees to work their patents in the United Kingdom within three years of the grant of the patent. The opposition, readily supporting these measures, remarked that they were strictly speaking protectionist, but what did that matter? Lloyd George was not a doctrinaire free trader; he was not a doctrinaire at all but an improviser who would pick up ideas wherever he happened to find them. He also ordained the first British census of production, an idea neither Liberal nor Conservative but Fabian, and established the Port of London authority, to amalgamate and supersede the chaos of private dock companies. Here again he was merely carrying out a Conservative policy which the Conservative government had attempted but had lacked the energy or the skill to carry through. Finally, his personal intervention averted what looked like becoming a general railway strike. All this fell within the first two years of the new government. No other of the new ministers could show a record of achievement remotely comparable with his.

In the spring of 1908 Lloyd George passed on to the Treasury in consequence of Asquith's accession to the premiership, and Churchill took his place at the Board of Trade. With the generosity he always displayed wherever Lloyd George was concerned Churchill remarked, 'I've got this pie too late; L.G. has pulled out all the plums'. But therein he underrated his own ingenuity; he would find plums even though he had to put his thumb into other people's pies. There had been for many years past much talk about the 'sweated industries', industries in which slum dwellers, largely women working at home unprotected either by the Factory Acts or by trade unions, toiled for incredibly long hours for incredibly low wages. This state of affairs had been startlingly laid bare by the detailed investigations of Booth's *Life and Labour in London* and as far back as 1889 a royal commission had been set up to investigate the subject. Various Acts had since been passed but they had been wrongly conceived and had done no good. Then Sir Charles Dilke* had got hold of the right idea, the establishment of what were called trade boards in each sweated industry with powers to impose minimum wages. He had pressed it on the House of Commons as a private member again and again but the Home Office, to whom the subject belonged, refused to be interested. Now Churchill grabbed it from the Home Office and carried a Trade Boards Act.† The system proved a great success and was extended to more and more industries as required.

Then there was unemployment, another subject about which nothing practical had ever been done. The Webbs in their minority report of the Poor Law commission recommended a system of Labour Exchanges, but Burns at the Local Government Board, to which department the subject belonged, would have nothing to do with that or any other new idea. So Churchill

* Dilke was a strange survival at this date. In Gladstone's 1880-85 government he had by many been regarded as Chamberlain's equal as a leader of the radical group. In 1885, when already a Liberal cabinet minister, he had retired because he was cited as co-respondent in a divorce case. He returned to the House of Commons seven years later but received no invitation to join Campbell-Bannerman's government. He remained an elderly and uniquely distinguished private member.

† The civil servant responsible for organising the trade boards was Sir Ernest Aves, and the civil servant responsible for organising the labour exchanges, mentioned in the next paragraph, was Sir H. Llewellyn Smith. Both had in their youth been employed by Charles Booth on his *Survey of Life and Labour in London*. So also had Mrs. Webb, before her marriage.

pulled this plum out of Burns's pie as he had pulled the other out of Gladstone's pie and established the labour exchanges. He also promised a scheme of national insurance against unemployment, but that had to wait for the present.

In 1910 Churchill succeeded Gladstone at the Home Office, where he spent about a year and devoted himself to alleviating the lot of the inmates of His Majesty's prisons by the provision of libraries, lectures and entertainments. In his autobiographical book, *My Early Life*, in some ways the most fascinating of all his books, he tells us that he was inspired to take these steps by a recollection of his own intense boredom as a prisoner of war in the hands of the Boers. Few think of Churchill today as a prison reformer, but in this department he set a ball rolling which has since rolled far.

It was somewhere about this time that someone pleasingly described Lloyd George and Churchill as the Cleon and the Alcibiades of British politics. These were characters in Greek history; Cleon a low-born ranting demagogue and Alcibiades a renegade aristocrat who courted popular favour. Up to the present Cleon had done better for himself than Alcibiades. It was easier, it seemed, for Cleon to satisfy the respectable without alienating the mob than for Alcibiades to satisfy either party. The Conservatives could not forgive his desertion and the Liberals never quite convinced themselves that his advanced Liberalism was more than just a species of youthful wild oats. Moreover Cleon was well over forty and Alcibiades not yet thirty-five. In revolutionary times youthful genius will soar to the top of the tree but in a stable society it is difficult to take these overwhelmingly brilliant young men quite as seriously as their brilliance seems to deserve.

These achievements of the successive Presidents of the Board of Trade might be all very well, but the very fact that they were applauded by Conservatives and Socialists marked the fact that there was nothing distinctively Liberal about them. They did little or nothing to satisfy the aspirations that were peculiar to the Liberal back benchers, those hundred and eighty nonconformists. These had been disappointed in their hopes over the education question. Was there no other question which might be answered to their satisfaction? Yes, there was the drink question.

The drunkenness of the less respectable sections of the working class was a much more conspicuous feature of urban life in Victorian times than it has since become, and it was deeply resented by the respectable lower-middle class which provided solid and consistent support to Liberal candidates. ' Temperance ' had long been a Liberal asset, and the brewers and the publicans had in consequence been steady supporters of the Conservative party. At election times every public house was an unofficial recruiting office of the Conservatives, just as many chapels were unofficial recruiting offices of the Liberals. The Liberal party had dropped the idea of local veto, but it still held that one way to reduce drunkenness would be to reduce the number of public houses and certainly in many towns there seemed to be an unnecessarily large number of them. The difficult question was—if a public house was compulsorily closed, what compensation was the owner entitled to receive? In law, by a judicial decision of 1891, public houses, being licensed annually, were entitled to no compensation if the authorities, namely the justices in quarter sessions, refused to renew a licence, but it was generally felt that this savoured of confiscation of property and was not fair. In 1904 the Conservative government had enacted a Licensing Bill which provided that compensation should be paid, not from ordinary tax payers' money but from a special fund raised from the trade itself. This has proved a workmanlike measure and is still in force, but it was denounced by Liberals as a ' brewers' bill ', and as ' endowing the trade '.

In 1908 the Liberal government introduced a Licensing Bill of which it is sufficient to say that it was designed to speed up the reduction of public houses already set in motion but proceeding very slowly under the Conservative Act. It is said to have been a well constructed measure and it received support from some distinguished Conservatives. But it was unpopular with the rowdy elements of the community. A very rowdy by-election at Peckham, where it was the principle topic, resulted in a Conservative victory and the Conservative peers, at a meeting held at Lansdowne House, decided to reject the Licensing Bill.

The Liberals were becoming exasperated, and with good reason. The education bills and the licensing bill may or may not have been good measures but they undoubtedly had the support of the party which had given its leaders the largest majority in

modern history. The House of Lords contained an enormous Conservative majority. What it amounted to was that a Conservative House of Commons could enact any measure it pleased while a Liberal House of Commons could only enact such measures as also pleased their Lordships. No doubt the Lords had hitherto played their hand cleverly enough. They had rejected only measures on which it would have been unwise for the Liberals to dissolve and appeal to the electorate. But were they playing fair? Was it 'cricket'? Shortly after the 1906 election Balfour had publicly declared that 'whether in power or in opposition the Unionist party would continue to control the destinies of this empire', and Liberal and Labour speakers had kept the public continually reminded of this singularly tactless remark. The Lords seem to have been misled by their achievements during the Liberal government of 1892-5. Then they had rejected Gladstone's second Home Rule bill and half a dozen other government bills and the ensuing election had approved their action by returning a substantial Conservative majority. But that had been a minority government dependent on Irish Nationalist votes. The present government occupied a very different position. Anyhow the course of action required of the Liberal party was plain. They must produce a measure sufficiently odious to the Lords to ensure its rejection and sufficiently popular with the country to enable the Liberals to dissolve and appeal to the electorate on the issue of the Lords versus 'the people'.

The same series of promotions which raised Churchill to the Board of Trade and Lloyd George to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer made Asquith Prime Minister. C.-B., who had nicknames, some of them hardly complimentary, for many of his colleagues, used to call Asquith the sledge-hammer. He was the greatest master in his generation of the arts of lucid exposition and destructive criticism. He was as fine an example as one could find of the lawyer turned statesman. If he lacked anything it was glamour. He never quite gripped the imagination of the great public. He had neither the enigmatic aristocratical glamour of Balfour, nor the cheery warm-hearted glamour of C.-B. nor the emotional and demogogic 'little Welsh wizard' glamour of Lloyd George. Perhaps it was a certain fastidiousness which prevented his playing to the gallery. Perhaps he could not have played to the gallery if he had tried. He never made a 'legend'

of himself. His was an unsensational figure, called upon to take the lead in sensational times.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer Asquith's budgets kept within the traditional limits. In 1907 he introduced the important principle of differentiating between earned and unearned income for purposes of income tax, levying a higher rate on the latter, not because the earner is a more virtuous person but because unearned incomes go on for ever, whereas the earner is assumed to be saving up for the days when, though still a spender, he has ceased to earn. In 1908 he announced that a bill would be introduced establishing old age pensions of five shillings a week for persons over seventy.* The pensions were to start in the following year and most of the money for them would have to be found in the 1909 budget. At this point he had to hand over the chancellorship to Lloyd George.

The new Chancellor approached his duties with a very different set of ideas from those of his predecessor. In spite of the fact that Asquith introduced old age pensions one may say that the moment when Lloyd George succeeded Asquith is the dividing line between Victorian, or Gladstonian, and modern financial policy. Asquith and all his predecessors held that the government should not raise or spend more money than was absolutely necessary, as much as possible being left, in an old phrase, to 'fructify in the pockets of the people'. No doubt successive government's conceptions of what was absolutely necessary expenditure had been slowly enlarged, expenditure on education for example and now old age pensions. The revenue had risen from £73,000,000 in 1860, the year of Gladstone's most famous budget, to £148,000,000 in 1908; in fact it had doubled, but the increase is surprisingly small seeing that the population also had nearly doubled in the same period and wealth had increased proportionately. Probably the 'burden' of taxation was no heavier in 1908 than in 1860. Asquith probably regarded the budgets of his day as about the right size and the fact that an additional sixteen million would have to be found in 1909 as a regrettable necessity.

* The pensions sound ridiculously small and so perhaps they were, but one must remember that five shillings then bought as much as 12/6 now. Also that they were a new departure, and half a loaf is better than no bread.

To Lloyd George the necessity was not regrettable at all, Born in poverty he had an instinctive dislike of the rich, even though he was in course of becoming one of them himself. He was the first chancellor to conceive of the budget as an instrument for redressing the inequalities in the distribution of the national income. The inequalities in those days were glaring enough and attention was being focussed on them. A popular writer on economic subjects had recently published a widely read little book comparing the distribution of wealth in the United Kingdom and France, from which it appeared, according to official statistics of both countries, that in France there were twice as many small estates ranging from £500 to £10,000 as in the United Kingdom, but in the United Kingdom three times as many estates over £50,000 and four times as many over £250,000, the populations of the two countries being approximately the same. The redressing of such inequalities was, from Lloyd George's point of view, the most obvious method of securing popular support. To put the matter simply and crudely, if one took £1,000 from a very rich man and distributed it in £10 notes among a hundred poor men one made one enemy and a hundred friends. Moreover the process would increase the sum of human happiness, for the very rich man, once the short sharp pang of extraction was over, would not notice his loss and the hundred poor men would have their drab lives brightened, and would feel encouraged by a hope for more. In fact he welcomed the chance of introducing the biggest budget in British history and looked forward to bigger and better budgets to follow. This time the money was needed for old age pensions; next time it might be for national health insurance, an idea he already had in mind. There was no end to the possibilities. The chancellor, regarded as the arch-spender, should be the most popular figure in a truly democratic government. Of course this would mean throwing to the winds all the respectability and Conservative goodwill that he had just secured at the Board of Trade, but what matter? Political memories are notoriously short, and he could probably win it all back again at some future date if he ever should happen to want it.

There was another item calling for the expenditure of several extra millions in the 1909 budget; the navy. The Anglo-German naval rivalry had begun with the beginning of the century. In the last year of his government Balfour had appointed a first-class

man of business, Lord Cawdor, as First Lord of the Admiralty to co-operate with the famous sailor, Sir John Fisher, in the creation of what would be an entirely new battle fleet. The *Dreadnought* was launched and the Cawdor programme laid down four more Dreadnoughts to be launched in 1906, four in 1907 and so on as long as might appear necessary. The Liberal government had scrapped the Cawdor policy, as a fatuous gesture of peace and goodwill towards Germany, which only encouraged the Germans to accelerate their own programme. In 1908 Balfour called attention to a situation in which, if both navies increased at their current rates, the German would within not so many years be more powerful than the British. The country responded to the danger signal. 'We want eight and we won't wait': in other words, they demanded that eight additional Dreadnoughts should be launched as quickly as possible. The government in turn responded to the popular demand, and launched the eight demanded. These were in fact the ships that provided our margin of naval superiority in the first year of the war.

Lloyd George disapproved of the navy and would gladly have seen it not larger but smaller. He regarded it as a stage property of the Tories and of those crypto-Tories, the Liberal Imperialists, who unfortunately held key positions in the Liberal government. He detested Sir Edward Grey, the only Liberal minister whom the Conservatives regarded with approval. He seems, to judge from his popular harangues, to have persuaded himself, in defiance of the evidence, that the demand for 'the eight' came exclusively from the rich. Well, if the rich wanted their Dreadnoughts they should be made to pay for them, and it would help to swell the total of the biggest and best of budgets.

Needless to say, the famous 'People's Budget' seems to us today a ridiculously small affair. What is more important is that it was not, even by the standards of 1909, anything like so large an affair as both its friends and its enemies contrived to make out. After all, the increase of revenue required was only eleven per cent. on the previous budget and its provisions had to pass the scrutiny of a cabinet that did not contain a majority of full-blooded Lloyd-Georgians. The grading of the income tax was steepened, reaching on the biggest incomes the dizzy height of one and ninepence. There was a heavy tax on licensed premises,

revenge for the rejected licensing bill, and additional duties or spirits and tobacco : the ordinary bottle of whiskey would henceforth cost four shillings instead of three and sixpence. There were the first taxes on motor cars and petrol, an obvious subject for taxation even if Gladstone had still been at the Treasury, especially as the growth of motoring was going to entail a lot of expenditure on the improvement of roads. There were also some exceedingly complicated taxes on what was called the unearned increment, *i.e.*, increase of the value of land and on undeveloped land ; but these would not bring in much revenue for many years to come. They were designed as a gift to the next generation and also as a provocation to Tory landowners.

It was at once remarked, by Snowden and others, that a great many features of the budget seemed to have been ' cribbed ' from a pamphlet by Snowden entitled *The Socialist Budget*. And why not? Lloyd George would have agreed with the Webbs, approaching the subject from the other end, that practical politicians have no time to think out their own constructive ideas. Let students in their studies lay these valuable eggs. It was for the practical politician to steal them and hatch them. He would ' dish '* the Labour party by proving that he could enact their ideas much better than their own leaders. But there is little doubt that from the first he was flying at bigger game than the Labour party. He hoped to get the House of Lords to reject the budget, and with that end in view he must make it appear as dreadful as possible. For this the debates in the Commons were not sufficient. He must go to the country.

Astonishing, positively repulsive in cold print, the mixture of cheap jocularity and cheap rhapsody in the platform speeches of Lloyd George's budget campaign. The most famous was delivered at Limehouse in the east end of London and here is a sample from it :

'A few months ago a meeting was held not far from this hall demanding that the government should launch out and run into an enormous expenditure on the navy, and they promised financial support for the government in this undertaking. What has happened since then to alter their tone? Simply that we have sent in the bill. Well, somebody has got to pay, but these gentlemen

* As Disraeli claimed to have dished the Whigs by enacting a Reform Bill they had advocated and failed to enact.

say they would rather it was somebody else. We sent the hat round. We sent it among the workers and they all brought their coppers. We sent it round Belgravia, but they raised such a howl that we have been completely deafened by it.

'They say "It's not the Dreadnoughts we object to: we object to the pensions". But if they object to the pensions why did they promise them? They won elections in the past on the strength of these promises, but they never carried them out . . . Provision for the aged poor—it is time it was done. It's a shame for a rich country like ours that it should allow those who have toiled all their days to end in starvation. It's rather hard that an old workman should have to find his way to the tomb, bleeding and footsore, through the brambles and thorns of poverty. We cut a new path through them, an easier one, a pleasanter one, through fields of waving corn.'

All went according to plan and before the end of the year the Lords rejected the budget; and the more one thinks of it the more difficult it is to understand how they can have been so foolish as to fall into so obvious a trap. One can only say that the iron of Limehouse had entered into their souls. For the rejection of a budget, containing the scheme of taxation for the current year, was a very different matter from rejecting any legislative proposal however popularly supported. Ever since 1861, when for the first time all the taxes of the year were embodied in a single finance bill, it had been an accepted principle that the Lords could neither amend it nor reject it. The King himself had strongly urged Lord Lansdowne, the Conservative leader in the House of Lords, to secure its passage, but Lansdowne always showed himself, except on one occasion in his life, a weak man* and he allowed himself to be swept along by his followers. 350 peers voted for the rejection, far the largest assemblage of peers since the rejection of Gladstone's second Home Rule bill. Many of the 'backwoodsmen' as they were called, who attended their House on this one occasion, are said to have had to ask the way to it.

* The one occasion on which Lord Lansdowne displayed striking political courage was when in 1917 he sent a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (the *Times* had refused to print it) advocating an immediate peace with Germany instead of waiting for a victory that would probably never come. His view may have been mistaken but it was an act of great courage for a man in his position to give public expression to such views at such a time.

One peer gained notoriety by urging their Lordships to reject the budget and 'damn the consequences'. This was Lord Milner, who had made his reputation as an administrator in Egypt and South Africa and knew nothing at first hand of the House of Commons and the British electorate. And what were the consequences? We shall see, but should here ask rather what would have happened if the budget had been allowed to pass. There would have been a Liberal anticlimax. The budget would have come to rest with its predecessors and would have been seen to be nothing so very wonderful after all. There would have been another year or two of Liberal government and legislation, followed by a general election. We know that, at the general election which immediately followed the rejection of the budget the Liberals lost a hundred seats to the Conservatives (ten had been lost in the by-elections of the last four years) and were thereby placed on an exact equality with them in the new House of Commons, dependent henceforth at every turn on the support of the Labour men and the Irish. Yet at this election they enjoyed the undoubted advantage of the slogan 'the Lords versus the People'. Is it not reasonable to suppose that without this slogan they would have lost many more seats? Moreover time was working for the Conservatives and they should have known it, not only the ordinary swing of the pendulum but the growth of the German menace. The Liberal party was full of pacifists and the more the German menace grew the more the ordinary man would be likely to vote Conservative. All this the Lords threw away. They deliberately gave their opponents the benefits of a 'follow on' such as they themselves had secured by the khaki election ten years before.

By rejecting the budget the Conservatives of the House of Lords made the same sort of mistake as Charles I made when he tried to arrest the leaders of the Puritan party in the House of Commons in January, 1642. At that date the Puritan opposition was steadily losing ground in parliament and in the country. If Charles had taken the advice of his parliamentary friends, Hyde and Falkland, and exercised his patience for a few months, Pym's majority would probably have dwindled into a minority and his own supporters would have secured the dissolution of the Long Parliament. He preferred, however, the advice of his wife, who knew even less about British politics than Lord Milner.

On the rejection of the budget parliament was immediately, and as a matter of course, dissolved, and the result of the election of January, 1910, has already been recorded as part of the argument of the previous paragraph. It was the reverse of gratifying to all three British parties. The Unionists had lost the first round of their gamble, since the Liberals remained in office with power to re-pass their budget. The Liberals, though they retained power on the sufferance of their allies, had lost a hundred seats. It was clear that the 1906 election had not been what their optimists fondly hoped, the inauguration of a long period of uninterrupted ' progress '. The Labour party, regarding themselves as the party of the future and expecting to increase their numbers automatically with every election, found their numbers reduced from fifty-three to forty-one. Only the Irish Nationalists could gleefully rub their hands. Once again they found themselves in a position to put the screw on their British allies, with every prospect that the barrier of the House of Lords would be removed from their path.

The first business of the new House of Commons should logically have been the re-passing of the budget, but here the Irish intervened. They disliked and had previously voted against the whiskey duties in the budget. In the last parliament their opposition had not mattered. Now it did. They would only vote for the budget if the government first laid down, in the form of resolutions preliminary to a bill, their policy for dealing with the House of Lords. The resolutions were short, simple and three in number. The Lords veto on bills certified by the Speaker as money bills was to be abolished ; other bills were to become law, in spite of the House of Lords, if they had been passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions ; and the duration of parliament was to be reduced from seven years to five. Conservative opponents at once fastened their critical attention on the second resolution, demanding that the period during which ordinary legislation could be held up should include a general election. Liberals very properly replied that to grant this would be to grant the whole Conservative case. Conservatives could get all their bills through in the life-time of a single parliament simply because the House of Lords was Conservative. Why should not Liberals be enabled to do the same, at any rate as regards the legislation of the first three sessions of a parliament?

The resolutions were adopted, the budget passed rapidly through both Houses, and before any more could happen King Edward VII died, in May, 1910.

The British people have a very strong sense of decency. King Edward had been a popular figure and his death occasioned an outpouring of loyal emotions which cynics may find ridiculous, but which was perfectly wholesome and genuine, for the crown is an element in the ordinary Briton's conception of patriotism. It stands for that which unites us as party politics stand for that which divides us, and our unity is something deeper than our divisions. It would be unseemly to continue domestic wrangles on the morrow of a king's funeral. It would also be unseemly to embark at once on a constitutional struggle in which the new king might very likely have a delicate part to play. The precedent of the first Reform Bill was a reminder that the only way in which the House of Lords could actually be coerced was by the wholesale creation of new peers. Such a creation would be an act of royal prerogative and the precise circumstances in which the king could properly be asked and could properly assent to such an emergency measure involved most delicate consideration, if His Majesty was to be protected from any possible accusation of ' taking sides ' in party politics. Fortunately, as it turned out, the prime minister who was going to have to handle these difficulties was a man of exceptionally delicate discrimination in such constitutional problems.

That, however, is looking ahead. In May, 1910, on the morrow of the king's death, it was felt that there must be a political ' moratorium '. Could not the time be used in such a way as to secure not merely an armistice but an agreed settlement? The party leaders agreed to meet in a constitutional conference of eight members, four Liberal and four Conservative, to try to discover, in secret sessions, an acceptable solution of the problem of the relationship between the two Houses. The meetings began in June and ended in November. Parliament stood adjourned; it was the shortest session since the easy-going days of Lord Palmerston.

The secrets of the conference were well kept and no official report was ever published, but we can now get, from the biographies of some of the statesmen who took part in it, a clear idea of what happened. There was an earnest search for agreement

on both sides, the most ambitious idea being that of Lloyd George who aimed at nothing less than a ' national government ' containing the leaders of both parties, to settle both the House of Lords and the Irish questions, a novel idea in those days though we have heard much of it since. The crux of the matter was the determination of the Unionists, and more particularly of Lord Lansdowne, who was a large Irish landowner, to exclude Home Rule from the operation of the Liberal scheme already embodied in the resolutions and soon to be known as the Parliament Bill. According to Conservative ideas there should be a third class of measures, not money bills nor ordinary legislation but legislation involving constitutional changes. For such measures it was suggested that, on rejection by the House of Lords, they should be laid before the country by a referendum ; that is to say, by a popular vote, not to elect candidates as in a general election but to answer ' yes ' or ' no ' to the question whether the elector was in favour of a particular measure. To this proposal there were, quite apart from party politics, two grave objections. First there was the difficulty of defining what is ' constitutional ', for in the legal sense of the word there is no British constitution. If you ask an American what is the American constitution he may, or may not, produce a copy from his pocket ; anyhow he can tell you where to find it. If you ask an Englishman what is the British constitution your victim can only enter on a general description of the way we do things and no two people will describe it in the same way. And then the referendum ; no doubt it was used in Switzerland and possibly elsewhere, but there was a great deal to be said against it. In any case it would be a far more revolutionary innovation than a mere curtailment of the powers of the House of Lords.

In fact, as the funeral solemnities receded and the light of common day asserted itself it became apparent that the Conservatives had much to gain from the success of the Conference and the Liberals nothing. The Liberal policy was simple and straightforward and a parliamentary majority of over a hundred were thoroughly satisfied with it. It was necessary to have another general election because at the previous election the Liberal resolutions had not been explicitly before the country, and also for another reason not fully understood till later ; but there was no reason to suppose that the government would fare any worse

than it had fared in January. So the Conference ended, parliament was dissolved and elections held in December. Never since the days of the first Reform Bill had there been two general elections in one year.

The issues between which the electors were asked to choose were unusually plain. On the Liberal programme was the Parliament Bill and Home Rule and also national insurance. Lloyd George and Churchill, closer allies than ever, offered alluring sketches of the good times coming, with pensions for widows and orphans not far ahead. The Conservatives proposed to deal with the House of Lords—they really couldn't leave it as it was—not by curtailing its powers but by reforming its membership. They also offered tariff reform—and the referendum! Lansdowne had demanded that Home Rule should be submitted to a referendum. The Liberals retorted, as a mere debating point, that in that case a protective tariff should also be submitted to a referendum. Balfour, who had never really believed in the tariff, accepted the suggestion in his most irresponsible manner.

The result of the election, strangely yet perhaps logically, was an almost exact repetition of that held eleven months before. It was noticed, however, that fewer people took the trouble to vote. While politicians were working themselves up for an encounter of exceptional savagery the ordinary man turned away; he regarded it as already settled and perhaps not so very important after all.

While the House of Commons debated the Parliament Bill the Lords occupied themselves with an academic scheme for the reconstruction of their own body. Liberals were not interested. So far as composition was concerned they preferred the House of Lords to remain as it was. A reconstructed House of Lords, containing all the best people, would presumably be a stronger House, and that was just what they did not want. Oddly enough it was not considered quite respectable to say so, hence a curious preamble to the Parliament Bill, promising that reform of the composition of the House would be undertaken after its powers had been curtailed. But this was what is vulgarly called eyewash.

When the bill reached the Lords they returned it to the Commons drastically amended, and at this point everyone began to ask where were the 'guarantees' which Asquith had promised to secure from the king before he went to the country a second time,

guarantees that the will of the Commons should prevail over the will of the Lords. Asquith had given that undertaking long ago, at the time when the resolutions were first presented to the House of Commons. He had said nothing about them since, and that might mean that he had not got them. Those who reasoned thus did not know their prime minister. Asquith had said no more about them because there was no reason why he should and very good reason why he should not. If the Lords accepted the logic of the December election the king's name need not be brought into the controversy. They had not accepted it, and it now became necessary for him to play his last card, the ace of trumps. For the King's promise had been secured, and it was to secure this that Asquith had undertaken to dissolve the 1910 parliament and hold the second election.

" Dear Mr. Balfour," began the letter which appeared in the newspapers, " I think it courteous and right . . . to let you know how we regard the situation." After saying that the government could not accept the Lords' amendments, the letter proceeded : " In the circumstances, should the necessity arise, the government will advise the king to exercise his prerogative . . . and His Majesty has been pleased to signify that he will consider it his duty to accept and act on that advice. Yours sincerely, H. H. Asquith."

After this Balfour and Lansdowne were in favour of allowing the bill to pass but the wild men of the party had got the bit between their teeth and were determined to repeat their performance over the budget. To the very last the result of the decisive vote in the House of Lords was uncertain for, though it was possible to calculate the number of the bill's convinced supporters, no one could calculate the precise numbers of the three groups into which the Unionists would divide themselves, the ' Die Hards ' (a regimental nickname first introduced into politics on this occasion) who would vote against the bill in defiance of their leaders ; the followers of Lord Lansdowne who would abstain from voting ; and those who would swallow the bitter pill of voting for the Bill to ensure that their House was not swamped with new creations. In the end the bill was carried by 131 votes to 114, thirty-seven Conservatives voting with the Liberals.

One of the odd features of the crisis in retrospect is that the Liberal leaders were unquestionably anxious to avoid having to

swamp the House of Lords with Liberal additions. No doubt one motive which influenced them was a very proper desire to avoid using the royal prerogative which had not been exercised for this purpose since the reign of Queen Anne. Yet in some respects the solution might have attracted them. It would have 'reformed' the House of Lords and presumably enabled Home Rule to be enacted within a year without recourse to the clumsy procedure of the Parliament Act. How long the new Liberal peers would have remained Liberal by the ever advancing standards of Liberalism is another matter. Indeed it might have given the House just that increase of prestige which was what the left wing of the party wanted to avoid giving it. Asquith was certainly prepared for the emergency and, though the fact was not made known till the publication of his life twenty years later, he had had prepared a list of 250 persons, many of them distinguished names, to whom peerages were to be offered. Throughout the crisis Asquith was at his best. If fate had removed him from the scene immediately after the passage of the Parliament Act his reputation would stand higher than it does. The remaining five years of his premiership subtracted somewhat in the judgement of history, and a great deal more in popular estimation, from his prestige.

As Asquith's reputation rose to its height Balfour's descended to the depths. Ever since the rejection of the budget the Unionist party had suffered a succession of humiliations. It was a little hard to prove, no doubt, that Balfour was responsible for those humiliations but the hot-heads of the party, and many heads were very hot in the autumn of 1911, felt that they would feel better if they got rid of him. At any rate he was not 'sound' on the main plank of the party's policy, tariff reform. B.M.G.—Balfour must go.* His address to the party meeting summoned to accept his abdication was cheerful and serene and not altogether innocent of irony. Waving aside the alleged 'unrest' among his followers which he did not find to be at the moment 'anything exceptional,' he said that he had been told that there was a danger, as the years advanced, of a petrifaction of the faculties. He was sixty-three. He confessed he had not as yet observed

* The formula B.M.G. was invented by Leo Maxse, editor of the *National Review*, an extreme Tory organ.

these symptoms in himself, but no man was a good judge of the progress of his own senile decay, and he was grateful to those who had called his attention to the matter.

We have compared Balfour with Melbourne, but now we have to note a difference. When Melbourne resigned there was an end of him, and history knew him no more. War conditions were to bring Balfour back into office as an 'elder statesman' and in this capacity he was to perform strange and questionable feats. In 1917 he issued the Balfour Declaration, stating that the British government would assist the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jews, 'it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done to prejudice the rights of the existing non-Jewish communities', which was very much as if one undertook to establish a national home for cats in Mouseland without prejudice to the rights of the existing population of mice. In 1922 he issued a Balfour Note on inter-allied debts the irresistible logic of which profoundly irritated our principal creditor. Finally in 1926 he defined the unity and plurality of the British Commonwealth of Nations in terms faintly reminiscent of the Athanasian Creed. In this, his last appearance he succeeded in pleasing everybody. He died in 1930.

It remained to choose Balfour's successor. The first choice of the 'whole hog' tariff reformers was Austen Chamberlain, son and heir of the founder of the campaign. But the Chamberlains were by origin Liberal Unionists and, though the distinction between the two constituents of the Unionist party had long lost all real significance, old jealousies survived. The alternative seemed to be Walter Long, a fine specimen of the old Tory squirarchy. He was not a great brain, no doubt, but nor had Campbell-Bannerman been a great brain; yet he had led a defeated party to victory. In the end the choice fell on neither of these but on Andrew Bonar Law, a Glasgow industrialist of Ulster ancestry. He had not been long in parliament and had never held cabinet office but he had proved himself the best speaker in the party on the tariff issue, with an astonishing memory for the right statistics. And there was something else in his speeches beside statistics. Snowden remarked with approval that they had the same quality as his own speeches, in other words a large dose of vinegar, some might say vitriol. Bonar Law could at any rate be trusted to be offensively rude to the Liberal ministers.

Max Beerbohm symbolised the change of leadership in one of his best cartoons. On one side the old maestro, tall and elegant, with his violin under his arm; on the other a sour-faced little vulgarian beating his drum. Says the former, 'What verve! What brio! and *what* an instrument!' Needless to say my description is of the cartoon, not the man. Bonar Law was neither sour faced nor a vulgarian. He was a man of stern features and no aristocratic antecedents.

IV. THE UNFINISHED MELODRAMA

ON July 1, 1911, when the drama of the Parliament Bill was approaching its final stages, a German gunboat, the *Panther*, suddenly stationed itself off an obscure Atlantic port in Morocco called Agadir. Therewith began a European crisis which lasted with varying degrees of intensity till the middle of October. The prospect of a Franco-German war, in which Great Britain would almost certainly be involved, became suddenly more real and menacing than ever before. Then it passed off again, and most people in these islands appeared to forget about it. At any rate they resumed their domestic disputations with a gusto that suggested that they had done so.

We have excluded this subject, which in retrospect so dwarfs all others, as completely as seemed possible from the preceding chapters because our subject is not history in general but British politics, and apart from the departments specially concerned, the Foreign Office, the Admiralty and the War Office, British politics took almost as little notice of the matter as we have done. The only occasion, previous to the Agadir crisis, when the British public was really aroused was the naval 'scare', as many contemptuously called it, in 1908, the sudden demand for eight more Dreadnoughts; and this we have already chronicled in its place. There is in this respect a complete contrast between the approach to the first great war and the approach to the second. In the nineteen thirties, as soon as Hitler was in the saddle all eyes were fixed on him. Some took him more seriously than others but all who thought about and discussed public affairs at all debated in their own minds and with each other whether he had to be taken seriously as the planner of another war or not. Domestic affairs, once the so-called National Government was firmly in the saddle, the budget balanced and unemployment declining, became remarkably quiescent and uninteresting. Foreign affairs became the all-absorbing topic. The only general election of the period was fought, in essentials, on issues of foreign policy and rearmament. During the years of approach

to the first war, on the other hand, domestic issues inside and outside parliament were more exciting, more alarming than ever before in living memory and, as for the threat of war, most people just couldn't bring themselves to take it seriously; they could not bring themselves to realise that the threat of war with Germany was of a different order from the various threats of war with Russia and with France which had harmlessly come and gone at intervals during the second half of the nineteenth century.

We must now, however, reconstruct the story, briefly, from its beginnings. The story began in 1897 when Tirpitz was put in charge of the then insignificant German navy and set himself, with the steady support of the Kaiser, to create a fleet which should ultimately be strong enough to challenge and destroy the age-long British naval supremacy.

The South African war revealed not only the defects of our army and its commanders; it also revealed the fact that we were cordially detested by all the great nations of the continent. There was never, perhaps, any real danger that a combination of these great powers would take advantage of our embarrassments in South Africa to attack us. But the fact remained; it was the obverse of our boastful imperialism and what we called our splendid isolation. Take for example the words of that dreadful and dreadfully popular song, *The Soldiers of the Queen*

> And when we say we've always won,
> And when they ask us how it's done,
> We'll proudly point to everyone, etc.

or the famous phrase from Kipling's *Recessional* 'lesser breeds without the law' which, though everyone today seems to think that it refers to the subject peoples of the empire, quite obviously refers to our European neighbours; for these lesser breeds are also called 'gentiles' and the gentiles were the heathen neighbours of the Jews, not their subjects. One does not like a nation which speaks in that fashion.

Perhaps a new departure in foreign policy was needed. Chamberlain certainly thought so. Foreign affairs were not his province, but he did not bother about that. In November, 1899, when the South African war was in its early and humiliating stage the Kaiser came to London with his foreign minister Bülow for what was ostensibly a belated celebration of the Queen's eightieth birthday, and Chamberlain laid before them his project

of an Anglo-German alliance. Emperor and minister affected an interest in the proposal and suggested that Chamberlain should publicly ventilate the idea of an Anglo-German alliance which should include the United States. Chamberlain, an utter innocent in the machiavellian subtleties of high diplomacy, followed up the suggestion in a speech at Leicester. He got a crushing snub for his pains from the German press and from the German foreign secretary in a speech before the Reichstag. Proud Britain, the colossus with feet of clay, had got herself into a mess by her own incompetence and now came whining to Germany to get her out of it; that was the burden of the German response.

And here we may well pause and consider, for was not this the fatal turning point, where the twentieth century, about to be born, went wrong and landed us all, including Germany, where we are today? Suppose there had been an alliance, framing in explicit terms a sincere and friendly understanding between the two most powerful civilised nations of the Old World, a satisfied Britain and a satisfied Germany, united to keep the barbaric despotism of Russia in its place, and without hostile designs against any of their neighbours. For Germany at no time in the twentieth century had a quarrel with France. She twice sought to crush France, but only because France stood in the way of her designs against Russia and ourselves.

Such an alliance was impossible, you will say. Impossible perhaps by 1899, but it would not have been impossible ten or fifteen years earlier; for the great Bismarck more than once made just such an offer to British governments as Chamberlain had now made to the Kaiser and Bülow.

The rulers of Germany turned down the Chamberlain offer, partly because they had already wedded themselves to their naval ambitions, partly because, ever since the Kaiser had come to the throne, anti-British animosity had been stimulated by the German press, and partly because they believed that it would prove impossible for us to come to terms with France and Russia. There they were mistaken; but whereas the *ententes*, or quasi-alliances, with France and Russia led almost inevitably to war, an Anglo-German alliance might have ensured an indefinite prolongation of peace. One cannot say; and it may be that such speculations, in which one 'if' leads on to another and another, are altogether unprofitable. One can only say that we made the

offer and they staged its rejection in a manner calculated to provoke the maximum of exasperation.

Meanwhile the French foreign secretary, Delcassé, and his ambassador in London, Cambon, were already beginning to woo us as Chamberlain had wooed Germany. It was a much more deliberate and a much more skilful wooing and it issued at last in the Anglo-French treaty of 1904. The purpose of the treaty was to settle something over half a dozen matters of dispute between the two countries, sore points overseas, some of them very ancient sore points, in every part of the world. The idea was that it would be very much easier to settle all these matters at once than to settle any of them separately; a concession by Britain here could be balanced against a concession by France there. The important points were that France would withdraw her opposition to our government of Egypt, an opposition which for the past twenty years had been a great nuisance to us owing to certain international financial institutions in Egypt which France had manipulated to block our policy, while we in return would give general diplomatic support to the activities already entered on by France to round off her North African empire by the acquisition of Morocco. The treaty was generally popular in both countries and nothing did more to popularise it in France than the visits of King Edward.

The Anglo-French *entente* came as an unpleasant surprise to the German government and they determined to nip it in the bud, to prove to the French that British support would fail them at a pinch and that the only security for France was the goodwill of Germany. Accordingly, in the spring of 1905 the Kaiser, ostensibly as an incident in a yachting holiday, landed at Tangier in Morocco, when he made a speech declaring that his friend the Sultan was and must remain absolutely independent and that all countries must have equal commercial rights within his dominions. The upshot was a twelve-month's 'cold war', as it might be called today, in which Balfour's government gave steady support to France. It was a matter of great importance that Sir Edward Grey, who would presumably be foreign secretary in a Liberal government, declared in October his entire approval of the foreign policy that his political opponents were pursuing. This 'cold war' reached its final and decisive stage in an international conference at Algeciras which only experts in England took any

notice of because something much more interesting, the general election of January, 1906, was going on at the same time. The conference gave France in essentials what she wanted. The *entente* held firm, and by holding firm became far more of a reality than before.

It was not technically an alliance. It never became an alliance until after the war had been begun. We remained to the last free from any paper obligation to fight as France's ally, but as soon as Grey took office he found himself called upon to sanction 'military conversations' between the British and French staffs, to consider how their armies would co-operate if occasion for co-operation ever arose, and by some extraordinary oversight (for such it seems to have been) knowledge of these conversations was communicated only to the prime minister and Asquith and, of course, Haldane at the War Office. What is more extraordinary than the failure to inform the rest of the Cabinet is the failure of all the other members of the Cabinet to ask any questions of Sir Edward such as would have led to the disclosure: it is a measure of the astonishing indifference to foreign policy displayed by the average Liberal minister.

Much later on, in 1912, after Churchill had gone to the Admiralty, naval conversations supplemented the military ones with much more far-reaching results. It was agreed, for example, that the British navy should take sole responsibility for defence in the North Sea and the Channel, leaving France in charge of the Mediterranean. One of the main arguments of Grey's famous speech on the eve of war was that such an arrangement as this had laid us under an obligation of honour to support France. In fact as the years passed the *entente* became rather like the British Constitution or the English language as used by Humpty Dumpty. It said one thing but really was something else. The chief reason why no formal alliance was ever put on paper was that the British electorate would not have stood it. That being so, no subsidiary reason is needed, but it was convenient to be able to say in effect to the French, 'If you are unreasonable and provoke Germany to war, we shall not come in; and we remain sole judges of what is unreasonable.'

In 1907 there followed an *entente* with France's ally, Russia, which never got much further than a polite formality. The Tsar's government was, like that which has replaced it, a savage

despotism, repressive at home and aggressive abroad. When the king paid an official visit to the Tsar certain Labour members protested against the idea of His Majesty 'hobnobbing with bloodstained creatures'. Today we cannot be so particular. We should be delighted to hobnob with them if only they would hobnob with us.

In the autumn of 1908, when Lloyd George was thinking about his budget, there was a second threat of war. The old Sultan Abdul Hamid, another of those 'bloodstained creatures', was overthrown by revolutionary gangsters. Russia and Austria were competitors for the spoils of the European provinces of Turkey, which in those days stretched right across from Constantinople to the Adriatic. Austria stole a march on Russia by proclaiming the annexation of Bosnia, a Turkish province which she had in fact governed for the past thirty years by the terms of one of those fictions so dear to the old diplomacy. Russia protested and assumed a warlike attitude. Germany did the same on behalf of her ally, Austria, and told Russia that she must climb down. Neither France nor Britain were disposed to support Russia, and she climbed down. It all seemed rather far away. None the less, the British public was waking up; it was the year of the demand for the eight Dreadnoughts.

And so we come to the Agadir crisis three years later. Since the Conference of Algeciras the dissolution of the old Moroccan Sultanate had proceeded apace and a French force had just occupied the Moroccan capital, after agreeing that Germany should receive compensation at the expense of French territory in Equatorial Africa. The question was, how much compensation? and it was to stimulate French generosity that the *Panther* was sent to Agadir. What made the situation specially alarming to the few in Great Britain who understood it was that the French premier at the time was Caillaux. There were two schools of foreign policy in France before the first war, as before the second. The predominant school was that which was prepared, at the worst, to fight Germany in reliance on the support of Russia and Britain. The other school held that these allies would prove broken reeds, Russia because she was tottering on the verge of revolution—there had been an abortive Russian revolution in 1905 after her defeat by Japan—and Britain because she was essentially isolationist and would not tie herself to France by an

explicit alliance. Caillaux was the leading exponent of this second school of thought; he was the Laval of his generation. He made no request for British co-operation in his German negotiations. If he got his way the 'great war', if it came, would be a war of Britain against a German-dominated Europe.

On July 21st, three weeks after the *Panther* reached Agadir, Lloyd George had, in the ordinary routine of his duties as Chancellor, to address the bankers of the City at the annual dinner given to them by the Lord Mayor, and it was at his own suggestion, with the entire approval of Grey, that he introduced into his otherwise innocuous oration a passage at which, as Churchill wrote years long afterwards, 'the Chancelleries of Europe bounded together'. He declared that Great Britain was not going to be left out of this business and that, if other great powers thought they could leave her out, then 'peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure'.

The ultimatum owed its peculiar effectiveness to the fact that it came from the mouth of Lloyd George, far the most potent figure in what was regarded as the 'peace at any price' wing of the Liberal party. The German ambassador in London was recalled because he had failed to warn his government that Lloyd George had turned over a new leaf, which was hard on the German ambassador, for Lloyd George was incalculable. Indeed the leaf soon fluttered back again and once more the author of the speech of July 21st was protesting against 'building navies against nightmares'.

The crisis continued to rumble for months. In the end Germany got much less of Equatorial Africa than she had expected. The barometer of Kaiser's prestige—and his popularity in his own country was never as secure as one is inclined to suppose—fell as markedly at the end of 1911 as it had risen in 1908.

When the crisis was over the government proceeded to overhaul its war plans, and it appeared—how strange this seems—that the chiefs of the two services entertained entirely incompatible ideas on the subject. The sailors considered that their first duty would be to seek out and destroy the German battle fleet and, only after some such Trafalgar, to convoy an expeditionary force to whatever theatre of war might be chosen. On the other hand the military conversations with the French staff had been based

on the assumption that, as soon as war was declared, our expeditionary force would be shipped across the Channel and that the first duty of the navy would be to safeguard its passage. The government favoured the army plan, and this meant a transformation of naval strategy. McKenna had been First Lord for the past three years and had put through the eight Dreadnought programme, but he was a convert to, and an exponent of, the Admiralty view. An obvious course would be to send Haldane to the Admiralty; he had done wonders at the War Office. But this might seem to be rubbing in over much the fact that the senior service had to give way to the junior. Asquith looked around and picked Churchill for the job. There was general surprise and in some quarters consternation. Churchill was a left wing man and the left wing men were never accounted sound on national defence; but Asquith had judged his man aright. The day that Churchill entered the Admiralty he began the career which will be remembered as long as anyone recalls the history of our tragic and misguided age. Exit Alcibiades, the aristocratic turned radical; enter Themistocles, who saved his countrymen in their hour of peril by bidding them trust to their wooden walls.*

The Parliament Bill and the Agadir crisis would have been enough trouble for July and August, 1911, especially as they were about the hottest months ever recorded in this country, but there was something more. A four days' railway strike completely paralysed eight out of the nine big railway systems of the country. Nothing like this had ever happened before; never before in Great Britain had a strike brought the ordinary routine of the whole community to a standstill.

The railway strike was the climax of an industrial storm the waves of which had been rapidly mounting since the summer of the previous year. Strikes broke out in industry after industry on pretexts which to the outsider appeared perfectly frivolous, such as the strike of 120,000 cotton operatives over the question whether a single grinder should do a particular job on his machine. Many of the strikes were launched by unofficial committees in defiance of the trade unions, and Arthur Henderson, a leading figure on both the industrial and the political sides of the Labour movement, in his presidential speech at the Trades Union

* i.e., their ships, oracularly called Wooden Walls by the Oracle of Delphi.

Congress of 1910, protested against indiscipline and stressed the injury such indiscipline was doing and would do to the principle of collective bargaining and the honouring of agreements between employers and employed, on which the trade union movement had been built up. In fact his speech was as appropriate to 1949 as to 1910 and produced just as much result as similar speeches delivered during the year in which this page is being written.

There was obviously in the ranks of industrial wage-earners what would today be called a sense of frustration, for which it is easy to find several reasons though less easy to say which reason counted for most. Prices which had been falling for some years had begun to rise again, whereas wages were not yet following suit. Also, the Courts, the wicked 'House of Lords', had once again exasperated the Labour movement by a judgement as hostile and as unexpected as the Taff Vale judgement. Ever since the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, trade unions had financed the political Labour movement by contributions from their funds. They had also, for a much longer period, paid the salaries of a number of working class M.Ps. Now a judgement, the Osborne judgement, had in 1909 declared all that illegal; subscriptions raised for one purpose, the proper purpose or purposes of trade unions, could not be used for a quite different purpose. For a trade union to support a parliamentary political party was as if the society for the prevention of cruelty to children used the subscriptions it received for its acknowledged purpose to subsidise British opera or an expedition to the North Pole. But over and above this, the workers were dissatisfied with the products of political action. An unparalleled 'progressive' majority in the House of Commons did not seem to have done very much for them. They were losing faith in that line of approach to the millennium, a loss of faith reflected in the reduced representation of the Labour party resulting from the 1910 general elections.

A short cut to the millennium had recently been discovered in France. It was called syndicalism and like its successor,* communism, it offered both an objective and a method of reaching it. The objective was the organization of society into producer groups, democratically governed, which would supersede the

* As a theory on paper communism was doubtless the older of the two but as active elements in British Society their order is reversed.

national state. The miners, for example, should own the mines and govern them through a democratically elected parliament of miners. Since this particular form of utopianism has gone out of fashion it might seem hardly worth mentioning but for the fact that it has still left its traces on the working man's conception of what a 'nationalized' industry ought to be and helps to explain the disappointment of, for example, the miners of 1946-50 when they discovered that, after a Socialist government had nationalized the mines, they no more owned and controlled them than they had done before, and that the Coal Board was simply the old boss 'writ large'—and much harder to get at.

The method of the syndicalists was of much more immediate importance. It was class war. It took the old fashioned strike weapon and converted it into an instrument of social revolution. The new industrial tactics included the lightning strike, the sympathetic strike, the stay-in strike, sabotage and finally the general strike, which would make all things new. Early in 1912 these ideas were starkly proclaimed in a pamphlet called *The Miners' Next Step* by two Welsh miners, one of them Cook, the principal author of the general strike of 1926. In fact from 1910 to 1926 the industrial Labour movement was infected with syndicalism. The great disillusionment of the failure of the general strike killed syndicalism and opened the way for communism, though there was, no doubt, a certain overlap of the two sources of revolutionism.

The railway strike of 1911 was followed by an even larger affair, the coal strike of 1912, in which a million men were on strike for a month. The mines had long had a larger representation in the House of Commons than any other industry and in 1908 the Liberal government had been induced to adopt a bill establishing an eight hour day in the mines, a measure which the Lords let through in pursuance of their fixed policy of avoiding action which would offend organized Labour. It soon appeared that the limitation of hours involved a reduction of wages and it was against this that the miners now struck, the particular issue being the piece rates paid on the output of coal to miners who happened to be working on seams of abnormal difficulty. The strike was only terminated by the rushing through parliament of a Coal Mines Minimum Wage Act.

There followed in the summer of the same year a London dock

strike. The dockers had struck successfully in the previous summer and this second effort was an ill-judged, ill-prepared and unreasonable affair, ending in an ignominious capitulation. The most conspicuous feature of the strike was the daily ritual of Ben Tillett, the dockers' leader, who before a large crowd of his supporters would cry out with a loud voice, ' O God, strike Lord Devonport dead ! ' This was religion of a sort though not perhaps the Christian religion. Lord Devonport was chairman of Lloyd George's recently constituted Port of London Authority. He survived.

After this the strike fever abated, having lasted two years, but syndicalism had not yet shot its bolt. The leaders of the miners, the dockers and the railwaymen realised that they might get better results if they all struck at once. Hence arose their Triple Alliance, and the strike of the Triple Alliance was apparently timed for 1915. It is therefore one of the many interesting things that did not happen at the date designed, owing to the great war. But most of these things that did not happen in 1914-18 were merely postponed, and the Triple Alliance strike was no exception. We shall meet it, or something like it, again.

To complete the picture of the general unrestfulness prevailing even before the government had stirred up the Irish hornet's nest we must pass from the men to the women, from the syndicalists to the suffragettes, from the class war to the sex war.

Discussion of Women suffrage bills in the House of Commons can be traced back to the sixties of the previous century and in the ensuing fifty years various societies working for sex equality had secured for women all sorts of professional and legal privileges of more substantial usefulness, perhaps, than the parliamentary franchise. That still delayed, partly because both parties were divided on the subject and partly because there appeared to be no strong pressure behind the demand, and it is a sound instinct of a British conservatism embracing all political parties never to move forward unless strongly impelled from behind. This impulsion began to be exercised when in 1904 Mrs. Pankhurst, supported and encouraged by Keir Hardie, founded the Women's Social and Political Union. The purpose of the W.S.P.U. was not to preach to the people—there had been enough of that—but to frighten the government. Mrs. Pankhurst was the Parnell of

the suffrage movement. Her society would make the lives of politicians a burden and a nightmare until their demand was granted.

After some preliminary skirmishes during and after the 1906 election they induced the prime minister to receive a deputation. C.-B. was himself a supporter of woman suffrage and the deputation found him in his most genial avuncular mood. He told the ladies that their arguments were ' conclusive ' and that he agreed with every word they said, but that, as prime minister of a cabinet including strong opponents of their cause, he was going to do nothing about it. He could only advise them to ' go on pestering ' and to exercise ' the virtue of patience '.

In order to carry out as effectively as possible the first part of Sir Henry's advice the W.S.P.U. was organised on what may be called military lines. All authority was vested in the leaders and the members were to do whatever their leaders told them. The principal activities of the years 1906-10 were ' technical assaults ' such as the breaking of shop windows and the slapping of policemen's faces. The results were favourable, and the short parliament of 1910 gave unwontedly serious consideration to a woman suffrage bill, the rejection of which was followed by far the biggest women's demonstration yet organised. One hundred and fifty-three of the demonstrators were arrested.

A crescendo of violence during 1911-12 drew from Asquith, himself an opponent of woman suffrage, a remarkable offer. The government were about to introduce a franchise bill extending the vote to such males as were still voteless and abolishing plural voting, i.e., the right of voting on a property franchise in more than one constituency. Asquith promised that the bill should be so drafted as to admit amendments giving votes to women, and that if any such amendment were carried on a free vote of the House, it would be accepted as part of the government's franchise policy.

The fateful day arrived on January 23, 1913. Much care and pains had been expended in preparing for it. Three alternative amendments, enfranchising different quantities of women, were to be moved, one by a Conservative, one by a Liberal and one by a Labour member, so that all tastes might be catered for. But first of all an amendment had to be carried deleting the word ' male ' as qualifying ' person ' wherever it occurred in the bill.

It is, however, a rule of parliamentary procedure that an amendment entirely altering the character of a bill is ' out of order '. A bill so amended would become a new and different bill and would have to start its parliamentary career afresh from the beginning. This being so, an opponent of woman suffrage asked the Speaker, before any of the amendments had been moved, whether in fact a woman suffrage amendment was not thus out of order as applied to a bill which, as it stood, dealt only with alterations in the male franchise. The Speaker assented and the prime minister's promise proved a hoax. As a sympathetic gesture, perhaps, the bill was dropped, but that did not help the women. Both plural voting and woman suffrage remained as they were till the former was abolished and the latter enacted in the last year of the war.

After this dreadful exhibition of male incompetence and mismanagement the suffragettes redoubled their frenzy. They had chastised with whips and now they chastised with scorpions. Dreadful deeds were done. The government's only positive contribution to the solution of the problem was the once notorious ' Cat and Mouse Act ', under which suffragette prisoners who had endangered their lives by hunger striking could be released and re-arrested as soon as they had nourished themselves back to health. A hundred and eighty-two women suffered under this measure in 1913 and at the end of that year the Home Secretary, the unfortunate McKenna who had been transferred from the exhilarating task of building the navy, to the office responsible for these distasteful duties, made the grim surmise that the W.S.P.U. selected women of delicate constitutions for the more outrageous acts in the hope that some of them would die under treatment. It is likely enough : the cause had become a religion and, as one of the early Christian Fathers remarked, the blood of martyrs is ' the wheat of God ', the food of the Church. Ordeal by fire became the favourite form of offensive. Houses, pavilions, railway stations and hotels were burnt. A church was burnt to the ground, another damaged by a bomb. Famous pictures were slashed in public galleries. One woman chose death in its most sensational form by throwing herself in front of the horses on Derby day, and was given the most spectacular funeral since that of King Edward.

It is generally asserted that these atrocities injured the cause

they sought to serve, but the assertion cannot be proved. The melodrama, like other melodramas of this hectic period, was cut short by the war. The immense services rendered by women, and not least by the suffragette women, to the national cause during the war provided a better reason for giving them the vote than fear of a renewal of suffragettism.

Lloyd George's Health Insurance Bill shared with the Parliament Bill the honours of the session of 1911. We need not describe the general plan of the measure for it is still with us in a magnified and 'beveridged' form and every one is familiar with it. The original stamps cost sevenpence, fourpence from the employee, threepence from the employer. As the general revenue contributed twopence per head the result was that the insured person got 'ninepence for fourpence'. The Conservatives declared themselves as 'in principle' friendly to the measure, but when they realised how much opposition it was going to encounter they were not displeased. The opposition came from many quarters. To begin with, about one third of the persons to be insured were already insured through friendly societies and trade unions. The national scheme was to work through these institutions wherever possible, much as the national education system worked through the already existing church schools. There was friction here because the friendly societies and trade unions wanted better terms than Lloyd George was prepared to give them. Once the terms were settled, however, the trade unions did very well out of it because many workers, hitherto non-unionists, joined their appropriate union in preference to becoming post office contributors, and it may be that this collaboration of government and the trade unions helped to ease off the syndicalist unrest. The doctors also wanted better terms, and got them, and the mistresses of well-conducted households, a more formidable body then than now, were encouraged to resent the indignity of stamp-licking as symbolical of an intrusion of public officialism into their private affairs.

The Labour party objected to the contributory element in the scheme; they wanted 'ninepence for nothing'. They saw no reason why the service of the sick should not be as much the responsibility of the tax payer in general as the service of the young in education and the service of the old in the pension

scheme. This was also the view of the Webbs, and there is a good deal to be said for it from the standpoint of administrative simplicity. Now that health insurance has been extended upwards to include all of us and income tax has been extended downwards to include a large body of wage earners and is collected at source, it seems a cumbrous arrangement that we should be taxed simultaneously on two different systems, one based on the amount of our incomes and the other on our age and sex.

The Act came into operation as regards payments in the summer of 1912 and as regards benefits at the beginning of 1913. If a general election had been held any time up to and perhaps for some time after the latter date, the authors of the Act would almost certainly have lost votes by it. In retrospect it stands out as one of the great achievements of social legislation.

The Health Insurance Act quite overshadowed in the public mind the Unemployment Insurance Act which passed through parliament in the same session. The latter act only applied to certain trades subject to seasonal unemployment, but it may be regarded as the bolder measure of the two, for the incidence of sickness can be statistically calculated and the incidence of unemployment can not. Moreover it was an entirely new departure. Germany had had national health insurance for twenty years and Lloyd George's scheme was admittedly based on German experience, but no other state had hitherto ventured on unemployment insurance.

So much for insurance ; and what should Lloyd George tackle next? Asquith would be busy from 1912 onward with the dreary business of trying to satisfy the Irish, and there were few British votes to be got out of that. One of the causes dear to all left wing enthusiasts was the nationalisation of the land. He would launch a Land campaign which would lead up to some measure in that direction. What was wrong with the land? According to Lloyd George it was ' shackled with the chains of feudalism . . . The squire is God ; the parson, the agent, the game-keeper—these are his priests ; the pheasants, the hares—these are the sacred birds and beasts of the tabernacle '. This seemed a good start, though the speaker's knowledge of pheasants became suspect when he described them as destroying a crop of mangold wurzels. Perhaps his squire was as mythical a beast as his pheasant. But then something happened that was worse than a little slip in

natural history. Lloyd George got involved in the 'Marconi scandal'. It was asserted that he and two other ministers had used private information available to them as recipients of cabinet secrets to do a profitable gamble in Marconi shares. It turned out to be nothing like as bad as that. The ministers had made no profit; they had in fact made a loss. They had not been wicked; they had only been very silly. But the upshot of the Marconi scandal was that during the last two years before the war one heard less of Lloyd George than at any time since the Liberals had come into power.

The budget of 1911 contained a clause allotting to M.Ps. salaries of £400 a year, a sum which at that date was worth as much as the £1,000 they now receive. The subject of payment of members had been discussed for some time past but its enactment in 1911 was due to the Osborne judgement, which had declared the use of trade union funds for parliamentary purposes illegal. As a remedy for the Osborne judgement payment of members was of course inadequate since it did not cover the other inevitable expenses of a political party, and in 1913 a bill was enacted enabling trade unions to establish political funds, any member of a union who did not wish to subscribe being enabled to contract out of doing so without impairing his rights as a member of the union. As for payment of members it is on the whole surprising that it should have been postponed so long. Gratuitous service in the House of Commons was based on two assumptions: first, that the electorate would as a rule wish to return to parliament men of wealth, and secondly that the duties of an M.P. would not be too arduous to prevent members from combining their parliamentary activities with their money-earning occupations. Both these assumptions were ceasing to correspond with the facts.

The Parliament Bill having become law it was now necessary to make use of it. The government had in view three contentious measures which the Lords were expected to reject and which could therefore only become law by means of the new, and tedious, process of passing through the Commons in three successive sessions. The first session of the five year parliament was already over. It would be rash to presume that the fifth would be reached. Therefore all three measures must be carried through the Commons and (presumably) rejected by the Lords in the session of

1912, a session which in consequence became so long that it did not terminate till early in 1913. The three measures were the Irish Home Rule Bill, a bill separating from the Church of England its four Welsh dioceses and disestablishing them, and a bill to enfranchise the five million adult males who were still voteless and to prevent half a million wealthy persons from voting in more than one constituency unless the second constituency was either a university or the City of London. The three measures were all required at once, but not because the whole of the coalition supporting the government was panting with equal zeal for all three of them. That was very far from being the situation. The government's tenure of office rested on the support of three parties and it might be said without much exaggeration that each of the three parties regarded two of the three measures with indifference bordering in some cases on dislike, and could only be got to vote for them by means of the 'bribe' of the remaining measure. The Irish Nationalists obviously cared about nothing but home rule. The middle class nonconformist Liberals wanted the Welsh bill. The newer democratic Liberalism and the Labour party wanted to place the 'one man one vote' principle on the statute book.

We have already recorded the fate of the Plural Voting Bill. The Welsh bill would have become law under Parliament Act procedure but its operation was suspended owing to the outbreak of the war and in 1919 another bill with slightly different terms was substituted for it. It may, however, be regarded as the only bill that became law under the terms of the Parliament Act previous to the Steel Bill of 1948-9. Though it was opposed with injudicious energy by those who claimed to represent the Anglican communion it has proved a wise measure, and after four years' experience of the new system the Archbishop of the independent episcopal church of Wales declared that 'few if any of us would wish to go back to the old order'.

The fact that the Parliament Act has been so little used does not prove that it has not served its purpose. If a pedagogue enacted that any boy who put the object of the verb in the nominative case would receive a stroke of the cane, the fact that only two strokes was administered in nearly forty years would prove the well nigh miraculous efficaciousness of his enactment. Actually we cannot claim as much for the Parliament Act, for the 'boys'

in this case have not, as it were, been doing Latin sentences all the time. Strange as it may seem, at no time between the two wars was the House of Lords confronted by a hostile majority in the House of Commons. There were two brief Labour governments but each had to satisfy an opposition majority of Conservatives and Liberals in the Commons, which thus constituted an effective first line of defence for the Upper House. The efficacy of the Parliament Act was not really tested again, after 1914, until the parliament of 1945-50. How far the caution and self-restraint of their Lordships during those five years was due to the memories of 1911 and how far to more general causes is a question that can hardly be answered.

The Home Rule Bill was the third attempt of a Liberal government to give to a united Ireland a system of partial self-government. The attempt failed; the curious constitution provided in the bill was never tested on a United Ireland and people often say that it would in any case have proved unworkable. Such assertions can generally be neither proved nor disproved but in this case there is evidence in disproof, for the constitution which has been in operation in Northern Ireland for the past thirty years is practically the same as that which was proposed for all Ireland in 1912. We hear very little about this Northern Ireland constitution—good evidence that it is a success.

Before the bill appeared in the House of Commons at all Ulster* organised an impressive protest. Sir Edward Carson, a Dublin man and a politician who had held office in the previous Unionist government, had been invited by the Ulstermen to organise their opposition to the Liberal policy. Before an enormous audience in Belfast he announced that the men of Ulster would refuse to be governed from Dublin, and that they would prepare a government of their own to take over the management of their affairs if the Home Rule constitution came into operation elsewhere. Finally he called for the enrolment and military training of a volunteer army. 80,000 volunteers enlisted in the three following months. 'Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right', as Lord Randolph Churchill had cried at the time of Gladstone's first bill, twenty-six years before.

* Ulster, the north eastern province of Ireland, contained nine counties, four with large Protestant majorities. The other five are thinly populated, three of them containing large and two of them small Catholic majorities. Present day 'Northern Ireland' consists of the four counties first mentioned and the two last mentioned.

It is easy to be wise after the event but it is not always impossible to be wise before it. If Asquith had been a wiser and a greater man he would at this stage, the spring of 1912, have recognized an unpalatable fact and taken a bold decision. The unpalatable fact was that 'Ulster', however it might be ultimately delimited, four counties or six, could not be forced into an all-Ireland home-ruling community. The bold decision would have been to re-enact at once the old Unionist measure, fatuously dropped by the Liberals on taking office, which rendered illegal the organization of private armies. He could not have hoped to enforce such a measure against the Ulster volunteers unless he first cut Ulster out of the Home Rule Bill. It is possible, of course, that once 'Ulster' had been cut out of the Home Rule Bill the Ulster volunteer organization would have been dissolved, and the re-enactment of the veto on private armies rendered unnecessary. On the other hand, since the avowed object of Carson and many of his supporters was not to rescue Ulster but to defeat Home Rule, it is possible that the volunteers might have been kept in being, and in that case what theorists called the bold decision would have been necessary and the case for it irresistible. In any case private armies should be illegal at all times and in all places.

Why did not Asquith take action on these lines? Because the idea of the partition of Ireland, so obvious and inevitable to us today (though not to the present rulers of the Irish Republic), was repulsive to all parties in both islands in 1912. The Ulstermen and their Unionist leader were not really aiming at partition; their object was to defeat home rule, to maintain a United Kingdom which included Dublin and Cork as well as Belfast. Redmond and his fellow Nationalists felt that they could not afford to accept home rule for a bare three-quarters of their island even if they had personally been willing to do so. The Irish parliamentary party had changed a great deal since the 'heroic' age of Parnell. It had changed because it consisted so largely of the same men. The young fire-eaters of the eighties had grown elderly, respectable and dull. They were uneasily aware that there was a younger generation knocking at their doors, a generation which might idolise Parnell, who had conveniently long been dead, but regarded his surviving colleagues as a lot of seedy old political hacks, and the home rule bill as a mere lever for prizing open the door of independence. If the Redmondites agreed to partition

they feared that they would suffer the fate which in fact overtook them during the war.

These considerations explain why the right course for Asquith was not as obviously right nor as easy as it may seem to us. It does not alter the fact that it was the right course and that he should have taken it. It might have led to something like collaboration of the two British parties in the solution of the Irish question. It would in any case have avoided the scandalous state of affairs which arose from his failure to grasp the nettle. He preferred to 'wait and see'.* Not until March, 1914, did Asquith offer the Ulster counties the opportunity of voting their exclusion from the operation of the bill, and even then the exclusion was to be nominally for six years only. The offer was a mean one and came two years too late.

It was unfortunate that the Ulster leader was a Dubliner and a Unionist politician. It was even more unfortunate that the leader of the Unionist party was an Ulsterman by ancestry and sentiment.† Bonar Law might not have displayed good sense and moderation even if all his ancestors had lived in Suffolk, for these were not the qualities that his exasperated followers required of him, but as an Ulsterman he could hardly approach the Irish question with a 'British' mind. In a once notorious speech of July, 1912, he declared, 'I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go which I shall not be ready to support'. After the syndicalists the suffragettes, after the suffragettes the leader of the Conservative party. Where had all this lawlessness, or condonation and encouragement of lawlessness, begun? Possibly with Cain, the first murderer. But those who confined their attention to the twentieth century found at the head of the procession those worthy and pious men, the passive resistors who refused to pay rates after the Balfour Education Act.

So each of the two great British political parties allowed themselves to be led down the slippery slope by one or other of two factions of quarrelsome Irishmen. The Ulster Irish raised

* The use of this phrase as a nickname for Asquith originated in 1910, when, in reply to parliamentary hecklers who tried to 'pump' him on the subject of the use of the royal prerogative to create peers, he answered, 'The hon. member must wait and see.' 'Wait and see,' however, became an only too appropriate description of the premier's policy over Ireland.

† Bonar Law's family had migrated from Ulster to New Brunswick, Canada, where he was born. He recrossed the Atlantic and settled in Glasgow.

and trained their army to oppose the application of the Home Rule Bill to their province, and the Southern Irish, much later on and in defiance of their parliamentary leaders, raised their own army, afterwards the Irish Republican Army, to conquer Ulster. Both Irish factions are believed to have thoroughly enjoyed themselves and both British parties grew more and more disturbed and dismayed. This is not the place to tell the tale of the hectic events of the spring and summer of 1914. A few names may refresh the memory of the reader who already knows it. In March the so-called 'mutiny' at the Curragh; officers of the British army manifesting unwillingness to fight against the Ulster 'rebels'. In April the gun-running at Larne; these same rebels, whose favourite hymn was the National Anthem, arming themselves with German rifles to fight the other Irish and if necessary the British army too. In July the gun-running exploit of the 'other' Irish at Howth.

Just as the Ulster volunteers drove Asquith after two years of 'wait and see' to offer exclusion to the Northerners, so the Southern Irish volunteers drove the Northerners to realise that they could not smash home rule so far as the rest of Ireland was concerned. Towards the end of June the government introduced in the House of Lords an Amending Bill to exclude certain counties for six years from the operation of the original bill which, owing to the exigencies of the Parliament Act, could not at this stage be itself amended. The struggle now turned on how many counties were to be excluded, the four indubitably Protestant or two more as well, Tyrone and Fermanagh, which had small Catholic majorities. It was over these two insignificant counties with their sparse peasant populations that the struggle was still raging when the European war intruded and closed down this melodrama also—for the time being. After the war Northern Ireland got Tyrone and Fermanagh and still retains them. They enjoy the privilege of electing a member of the British House of Commons but regularly elect a republican who makes his silent protest by refraining from taking his seat. If Northern Ireland were to allow these counties to vote themselves into the Irish Republic, she would strengthen her already strong case against the claims of that Republic to the possession of her other four counties.

After the Agadir crisis had died down relations with Germany appeared to improve. The British government set itself to find

out what the Germans really wanted, with a view to what was at a later date called appeasement, and Haldane, a minister with many personal contacts in Germany, was sent over to explore the ground. The Germans wanted us to promise neutrality in the war they definitely intended to provoke, and that we could not do; but they welcomed the idea of a treaty on the lines of our entente treaties with France and Russia, a treaty which would settle outstanding matters of conflict between the two countries. Such a treaty, mainly concerned with the German-constructed Baghdad railway and the Persian Gulf, was actually drawn up and was ready for ratification when the war began. Our object in these negotiations was to avert a general war; the German object was to make us think that the war was not coming and to secure our neutrality when it came.

In the autumn of 1912 the Balkan wars began. Bulgaria, Servia and Greece combined to conquer the European provinces of Turkey outside Constantinople and, after some fighting among themselves as well as against Turkey, divided the spoils. The only point that need concern us here is the great increase in the territory and prestige of Servia. The old Austrian Empire, which Lloyd George a few months later correctly described as ramshackle, had long felt the strain of the centrifugal forces of the various nationalities it contained. In its southern provinces were millions of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, now combined under the common appellation of Jugoslavs. These would feel henceforth an increasing pull towards union with their independent fellow nationals. Austrian statesmen felt that they must destroy Servia if they were to avert the dismemberment of their own empire.

Germany also wanted Servia destroyed. The imperial ambition of her rulers was summarized in the formula ' Berlin to Baghdad ', a compact empire stretching from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, based on the control and Germanization of the moribund empires of Austria and Turkey. Servia broke the chain at a vital point. The murder of the Austrian Archduke while visiting the capital of a Serb province of the Austrian Empire came in so conveniently as a pretext for war that many suspected, though wrongly it appears, that it had been plotted not in Servia but in Austria. There is a great deal of evidence proving, or strongly suggesting, that the real rulers of Germany—and these were not

the Kaiser nor his Chancellor but the naval and military chiefs—had decided more than a year earlier to launch their war in the summer of 1914.*

The archduke was murdered on June 28. Only two English newspapers, the Tory *Morning Post* and the Socialist *Daily Citizen*, gave any evidence of awareness that it might prove the match that kindled the powder barrel. The Irish melodrama continued, and in the middle of July Lloyd George, once again addressing the City bankers, called for economy in naval expenditure on the ground—and is not this one of the most surprising opinions expressed by a British statesman?—that the international sky had never been 'more perfectly blue'. On July 23 Austria despatched an ultimatum to Servia, an ultimatum such as no state could accept and retain its independence. Three days later Austria was at war with Servia. Russia could not allow Servia to be destroyed. It was obviously a mere matter of days before Russia, Germany and France would be at war.

On July 26 the British cabinet was still, according to Churchill's account in his *World Crisis*, 'overwhelmingly pacifist'. At least three quarters of its members were determined not to be drawn into a European quarrel unless Great Britain herself were attacked, which was not likely.' This majority undoubtedly represented the view generally prevalent in the country at that stage. It was no mere left wing pacifism. Nowhere was the opposition to British intervention in arms more forcibly expressed than in the principal headquarters of the City of London. The war party in the cabinet at this stage consisted of Asquith himself, Grey the foreign secretary, Haldane and Churchill.

No doubt we should in any case have been forced into the war at an early stage of its development. It was Belgium that brought us in at the start. Here was a perfectly plain obligation set down in a treaty, a 'scrap of paper' which the Germans had torn up. It was a moral issue, and that was the sort of issue British people can understand. The Liberal cabinet pulled itself together with only two unimportant resignations, Morley who was already too old and Burns who should have been turned out long before. The Unionist leaders had already offered to

* The evidence, which it would be outside our subject to enlarge upon here, is well summarized in *England, 1870-1914*, by R. C. K. Ensor, in Chapter XIII and also Appendix III.

support the government. In the Labour party a few I.L.P. intellectuals, such as MacDonald and Snowden, opposed the war but the bulk of the trade unionist M.Ps. supported it. After Sir Edward Grey's famous speech on the evening of August 3, so impressive in its simplicity and moderation, the country was as nearly unanimous on the subject as any free country, where people are encouraged to form their own opinions, is ever likely to be about anything.

The ordinary man quite understood that we had got to enter the war. He understood the Belgian business. But as for why Germany had attacked Belgium ; why the murder of an archduke whom apparently nobody missed, by some Servians whom nobody wanted to defend, should have lead to this fearful catastrophe—about that he was far from clear. The war had taken him, like Lloyd George, by surprise and he looked round for a little book which would tell him why it had happened. The best he could find for his purpose was not written by an Englishman but by a Belgian, Sarolea, professor of French in Edinburgh university. Published in 1912, a year after Agadir, it attracted little attention ; in the autumn of 1914 it became a ' best seller '.

Books about Hitler and the Nazi menace had become best sellers long before the autumn of 1939.

V. POLITICS IN WAR TIME, 1914-18

THERE will in this chapter be no account whatever of the fighting of the first great war. We present *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Our concern is with Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Taking for granted the epic, the heroic, the tragic events of the time we have only to consider how these mighty forces impinged upon and deflected the course of our own limited and occasionally perhaps unedifying subject, the course of British politics.

The first authentic piece of war news was the appointment of Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War, announced on August 5. Asquith had himself taken charge of the War Office after the fiasco of the Curragh ' mutiny ' and it was obvious that he would now relinquish the post. The appointment of Kitchener, a far bolder departure from cabinet traditions in 1914 than one would feel it to be today, was apparently Asquith's own idea, and it reassured the public as nothing else could have done. Kitchener had long enjoyed, and in many ways deserved, a unique reputation throughout the British Empire as a strong silent superman. He was more than a man ; he was a legend. His appointment seemed to convert the Liberal government into a ' National ' government at a single stroke, without any of the drawbacks that would have been involved in a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives who only a week before had been quarreling over Tyrone and Fermanagh. Four days later he issued his first appeal—for 100,000 men, whose term of service was to be ' three years or the duration of the war '. Kitchener, we soon knew, had said it would be a long war. How did he know that? All the experts had concluded that a European war under modern conditions must inevitably burn itself out in about six months. Indeed the bases of Kitchener's forecast remain a mystery to this day. Perhaps it was less a forecast than a determination to err on the safe side. Whatever it was, stroke of luck or stroke of genius, it confirmed the general impression that Kitchener was a great man—which was just what was needed.

None the less, even with the inclusion of Kitchener, the government remained a party government. When the war began the Conservative leaders pledged their support to its war measures and they kept their word; but it was inevitable that, as soon as Liberal war measures furnished material for legitimate criticism, the critics would lay their cases before the Conservative leaders. It was equally inevitable that the Conservative leaders would then recollect that theirs was the traditionally warlike and patriotic party, bound by the closest social ties with the professional heads of the fighting services. They could also claim that the Conservative party was, by a small margin, the largest single party in the House of Commons. Yet frank criticism and discussion across the floor of the House was impossible because the facts could not be revealed to the enemy.

From the early days of the war the possibility of a coalition had been discussed, but both Asquith and Bonar Law were against it. No doubt if one took a superficial and 'atomistic' view, it was obvious that the twenty ablest statesmen were not all to be found in one party. But a government is something more than the sum of its members: it is a team. With Ulster memories only a few weeks old a coalition certainly would not start as a team. It was best that the Liberal government should continue to govern and that the Conservatives should for the time being adopt the line they had so often attributed to the prime minister; that they should 'wait and see'.

In these circumstances, in a war in which every belligerent made repeated and disastrous mistakes, the collapse of the Liberal government, sooner or later, was inevitable. Its actual fall, in May, 1915, was due to the actions of two highly placed professionals, Lord Fisher, the head, under Churchill, of the administration of the Admiralty, ('First Sea Lord' as he is called) and Sir John French, commander of the British expeditionary force in France. Either alone would have brought down the government. The *coup de grâce* happened to come from Lord Fisher.

Fisher was generally esteemed the greatest figure in our naval history since Nelson. He first held high office in the Admiralty in 1885 and he had done more than anyone else to create the navy which now controlled the oceans of the world. He was,

within his own range, a man of genius, and at the same time one of the most eccentric, cantankerous and quarrelsome of mankind. He had retired from the Admiralty, on reaching the age of seventy, in 1910. On the outbreak of war Churchill, who, being also a man of genius, found in Fisher a congenial spirit, brought him back to the Admiralty. It was a bold experiment, on the same psychological lines as the appointment of Kitchener to the War Office, but it proved a mistake. Fisher was too old; and perhaps two men of genius in one government department is one too many. The Dardanelles naval expedition, Churchill's own favourite plan, was in progress in the early months of 1915 and got into difficulties. On this subject Fisher found he could not cope with the youthful energy and overwhelming argumentative powers of his parliamentary chief. He had never been so overwhelmed before. He contrasted his position with that of Kitchener. Why should Kitchener be in the cabinet while he, his naval equivalent, was subordinated to a civilian minister? He poured forth his woes to his friends in the Conservative party. He created an intense prejudice against Churchill as a naval administrator in the minds of men who had never had any reason to love him as a party politician. At last, on a point of no importance in itself, he resigned.

The purpose of Fisher's resignation was, of course, to get Churchill out of the Admiralty. Asquith would have preferred to keep him there, for he believed that Churchill understood war better than any other front bench man on either side of the House. Bonar Law, however, told Lloyd George that his party would not stand it, and would make the Fisher resignation the occasion of a full dress attack on the war policy of the government. Lloyd George, seeing at once that the result might be a Conservative government from which he would be excluded, threw all his weight into the scales in favour of a Coalition government, which would include himself and—very unfortunate, but it could not be helped—exclude his old friend Churchill. Asquith accepted the Coalition plan. Churchill was dropped: the Unionist leaders insisted on it, and so, for the same reason was Haldane, who had long left the War Office and become Lord Chancellor. The case against Haldane was that the popular press had made a dead set against him. Haldane had studied at a German University and had once rather unfortunately spoken of Germany as his spiritual home. That was enough.

So the minister who had done most to prepare the army and the minister who had done most to prepare the navy for the war were excluded at the bidding of the Conservatives from Asquith's Coalition government, which held office from May, 1915, to December, 1916. Asquith was a man of so loyal a nature that one wonders that he did not prefer to go with them. But if he had gone, who would have succeeded him? Presumably Bonar Law, and of Bonar Law he had, perhaps mistakenly, a low opinion. He could hardly condemn the country to a Bonar Law premiership in the middle of a great war. He must stick to his post.

The new government contained all the leading Conservatives, and a cabinet office was accepted by Henderson as leader of the Labour party. A post was also offered to Redmond as leader of the Irish Nationalists, and he had been so loyal a supporter of the war that he might have been glad on general grounds to accept it, but he felt that acceptance would weaken his position in Ireland. That position was in fact already undermined. For the rest, Grey remained at the Foreign Office. Balfour succeeded Churchill at the Admiralty, but the appointment which aroused most interest was that of Lloyd George to the newly created post of Minister of Munitions.

What was called the 'shells scandal' had been maturing at the same time as the wrath of Lord Fisher. It is a complicated story and one may say at once that there was no 'scandal'; the term was merely the jargon of the popular press. There had already been, under War Office management, a great expansion of munitions production. No doubt it was not adequate to the demand, but no government on either side had foreseen, or could humanly have foreseen, the scale of the expenditure of shells, for no one had foreseen the development of immobilized trench warfare. At the battle of Neuve Chapelle in March, 1915, the first and smallest of the massed attacks of 1915-17, a very small affair by later standards, fought on a three mile front, the British guns shot off as much ammunition as had sufficed for the whole South African war. So there was certainly a shell shortage, and this got inextricably mixed up with the grievances of Sir John French and consequently with party politics. French was on bad terms with Kitchener. Just as Fisher resented his subordination in the Admiralty to a civilian minister, so French resented his subordination as commander in the field to a fellow soldier at

the War Office. He would, he felt, have been in a stronger position to deal with the government if his departmental chief had been an ordinary civilian. So he, like Fisher, poured out his woes, in person and by deputy, to his Conservative friends, and when that proved insufficient he laid his case before Lloyd George and also before Lord Northcliffe, the press lord who at that time owned not only the *Daily Mail* but also the *Times*. Lloyd George and Northcliffe were already allies, and the upshot was the removal of the whole munitions production from the War Office and the creation of a new department, staffed by business men, under the management of Lloyd George.

Lloyd George's year of office as Minister of Munitions established his new reputation, that of the man who could win the war. He gathered around him some of the foremost industrialists of the country and let them loose upon our industrial resources with a mandate to mobilize them for war production. When they met with obstruction Lloyd George sallied forth to deal with it in person and the obstruction generally disappeared. But he did more than that. Without any technical training he saw, as in a vision, the scale which military requirements were to assume and, with this vision before his eyes, he pooh-poohed the actual requisitions of the War Office. Did they say that two machine guns would be enough for each battalion? After a talk with unofficial people who knew better he multiplied the order by sixteen. He took up the Stokes gun, in spite of official discouragement. He gave his support to the eccentrics who were at work on tanks.

So, of our two men of genius, Lloyd George went ahead on the crest of the Coalition wave while Churchill was engulfed by it. Lloyd George passed on from Munitions to the War Office and then to the premiership. Churchill accepted a minor post as a consolation prize, threw it up, and went to serve as a battalion commander at the front. He was brought back to office by Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions in 1917, but by that time munitions were no longer in the centre of the picture. Several years after the war was over he published his magnificent five volume history of *The World Crisis*, and his two greatest friends in politics, Lloyd George and Birkenhead, expressed on different occasions the opinion, intended to be complimentary, that he would be remembered less as a statesman than as the author of

the greatest of war histories, as a Thucydides in fact. But they were wrong. Churchill's book was not only a general history but also a personal apologia.* It laid the foundations in the public mind of a firm conviction that, if Churchill had been given his chance, the war would have been much better managed, and it so happened that this conviction was one day to be put to the test and triumphantly vindicated. It is not altogether fanciful to say that the fortunes of Hitler and of what we may call Churchill II were both alike founded on books. It may even be true that the writing of both books was begun at about the same time, somewhere in the years 1922-24. It is curious and fortunate that Churchill should have been born at exactly the right date to play leading parts in both wars. Had he been born ten years later he would have been too young for high office in the first; if ten years earlier, too old to carry the burden of the second.

The opening month of the war had witnessed not only a suspension of party politics but also an industrial truce. The trade union leaders, without waiting for any definite understanding with the employers, abandoned 'for the duration', to use the common abbreviation of Kitchener's famous phrase, the use of the strike weapon. But prices soon began to rise, and without some clear lead from the government it was difficult to see what was to happen to wages. The railways were under government control from the start and the railwaymen, whose pre-war wages were extremely low, negotiated with the government the first war bonus, as it was called, before the end of 1914. As regards wages in general the prime minister made in February, 1915, a statement which was regarded by the wage earners to whom it was addressed as exasperately vague and aloof. It was immediately followed by an unofficial strike of munition workers on the Clyde. The government ordered the men to return to work by a named date, and referred the dispute to arbitration. The strikers made a point of continuing the strike a few days beyond the date ordained for their return, and were awarded a larger advance of wages than their employers had offered.

There was a complex of questions at issue. In the first place

* The dual nature of the book was pleasingly indicated by someone who said 'Winston has written an enormous book about himself and called it *The World Crisis*.'

there was the elementary fact of the wage-earners' standard of living, which would fall to starvation level if prices continued to rise and wages failed to keep pace with them. Secondly there was the demand for what was called equality of sacrifice. It took the government a long time to realise, indeed by the standards of the second war it never realised, the degree of economic control required by war conditions. Certain classes of employers were already making enormous profits, profits of which some of them expressed themselves frankly ashamed, and business men in the cabinet, Runciman for example, a typical exponent of old-fashioned Liberal *laissez-faire*, could not imagine employers of labour following any policy except the traditional one of selling their goods at the highest price obtainable. ' If they find offers coming along at increased prices week by week ', he said, ' it is more than we can expect of human nature that they should refuse these offers. All business men are anxious to get as much as they can for what they have to sell. This applies to every section of the community, employers and employed alike.' It did not apparently occur to him that this doctrine justified the unrestricted use of the strike weapon.

A third element in the problem was that the government was beginning to demand a complete reorganization of the engineering industry and ultimately of every other industry. The war required that every man available should join the army and that at the same time industry should yield the maximum output of munitions in addition to what might still be necessary in the way of production for ordinary purposes. This could only be achieved by the abandonment of an immense body of ' trade union conditions ', customs of trade painfully elaborated by generations of trade unionists to protect themselves from what they rightly or wrongly regarded as exploitation. Thousands of patriotic people, especially women, to whom trade unionism meant nothing, were clamouring for munition work. Their admission to the factories and the consequent dilution, as it was called, of trade union labour was absolutely necessary if anything like the production required was to be secured.

In March, 1915, the government proposed that the trade unions should accept both compulsory arbitration and the abrogation of trade union conditions, on condition that the status quo should be restored at the end of the war. This was accepted by all the

unions concerned except the miners, and the agreement was given the force of law in the Munitions of War Act, 1915. The force of law was soon tested in South Wales. A wage dispute developed and the government extended the application of the Act to the Welsh coal fields by Order in Council. Thereupon 120,000 went on strike and remained out for a week. It was proved that, even in war time, law could not enforce compulsory arbitration in Great Britain. The 120,000 had rendered themselves liable to terms of imprisonment, instead of which they secured practically the whole of their demands and returned to work unpunished.

Lloyd George struggled valiantly through the Labour growing-pains of his new ministry. He was not always wise but he was never irresolute. At one stage he suddenly declared 'drink' to be the greatest enemy, greater than the Germans, and forced a sceptical cabinet to consider a scheme for the nationalization of the drink trade. His 'plain talks' on the insobriety of the working classes were warmly applauded in the worse sort of Conservative circles, but they were neither accurate in their facts nor just in their conclusions. 'I never believed what he said about the rich', someone is reported as saying, 'and I see no more reason now to believe what he says about the poor.' None the less, with many jolts and imperfections an enormous mobilization of industry for war under state control was achieved. In July, 1915, a procession of 30,000 women, organized by the suffrage societies, paraded the streets of London with banners inscribed, 'We demand the right to serve'. Rain poured down on them all day, and one newspaper described it as 'a touching sight'. By the end of the year they had probably all got their rights and were serving.

One result of this industrial mobilization was a very marked rise in the standard of living throughout the wage-earning classes. It was not that wages had risen faster than prices; they did not. The rise was due to the immense amount of overtime work and the immense amount of wage earning undertaken by the wives and daughters of working class households. Organized Labour was determined that these standards should be maintained after the war. War-conditions also threw, or seemed to throw, a new and favourable light on the policy of nationalization. If industries could be run by the state so successfully in war time, why not in

peace time? The Trade Union Congress of 1916 carried unanimously a resolution in favour of nationalizing all the vital industries. But what would nationalization imply? On that point there were differences of opinion, and the differences were by no means resolved when the outbreak of peace came to give them a greater actuality.

Labour began the war unrestfully, and unrestful in varying degrees it continued to the end. In this as in so many other respects the national record of the first war was very inferior to that of the second. Labour conditions in 1914-18 resembled not those of 1939-45 but those of 1945-50. In both these periods the trade union leaders co-operated, as far as they dared, with the government in urging the men to work hard for the national salvation and be content with their wages. In both periods Labour unrest found its expression through unofficial strikes organised by shop stewards and suchlike minor officials. Many of these men were syndicalists and after 1917 drew fresh revolutionary inspiration from the Russian revolution, which broke out in the spring of that year and was collared by the communists—Bolsheviks as they were then called—in the autumn.

It seems curious to a later generation that full conscription was not adopted until May, 1916, when more than a third of the war, as it turned out, was over. Britain had never had conscription, and regarded the voluntary system as one of the cherished freedoms which made her ' the envy of less happier lands '. If we once admitted it, should we ever be able to get rid of it? And was it necessary, seeing that three million men had freely offered themselves? Many people felt about diluting our free armies with ' conscripts ' rather as, I understand, Rugby Union enthusiasts feel about the admission of professionals. Organized Labour was dead against it. No use to tell a Labour man that conscription was not only a device of ' Prussian militarism ' but had also long been practised by such admirable peoples as the French. Most likely the Labour man's antipathies were determined by the fact that, only a few years back, a French government had broken a railway strike by calling strikers who were army reservists to the colours. Organized Labour felt about conscription exactly what the seventeenth century squire had felt about a ' standing army ' ; that it was an institution incompatible with the elementary human liberties as understood in this island. Thus the Trade

Union Congress of September, 1915, after wholeheartedly supporting the war policy of the government, carried with an equally close approach to unanimity a resolution ' emphatically protesting against the sinister efforts of a section of the reactionary press in . . . attempting to foist upon this country conscription, which has always proved a burden to the workers, and will divide the nation at a time when absolute unanimity is essential '.

Throughout 1915 the government itself was divided on the subject. Asquith was against it and was supported, rather surprisingly perhaps, by Kitchener. On the other side were most of the Conservatives who had joined the government, and Lloyd George. In the end the cause of conscription won the day, and the arguments for the change, under war conditions, are so obvious to us today that it is not necessary to recapitulate them. British conservatism, so often more conspicuous in Liberals than Conservatives, insisted that the cherry should be taken in two bites. In December, 1915, the Government enacted conscription of bachelors. General conscription followed in May, 1916.

With conscription came the problem of the so-called conscientious objector, a problem which would be very simple in Germany and simpler still perhaps in Russia. In England it was far from simple and received a somewhat muddled solution. The intention of the Conscription Act was that those who could prove ' conscience ' should be exempted without any pains and penalties. But what is conscience? In what does it differ from mere opinion? And how could it be proved? It was soon plain that to accept ' conscience ' on the mere assertion of the objector would offer altogether too strong a temptation to the potential shirker. In result, practically all who could not prove membership of the Society of Friends, and some who could, were treated as non-conscientious and, if they refused alternative forms of non-combatant national service, were sentenced to penal servitude for the remainder of the war. Actually about 16,000 persons refused combatant service, of whom more than ninety per cent. accepted a prescribed alternative. 1,300 went to prison. Several years after the end of the war there was published a little book called *We did not fight*, containing essays by nineteen former conscientious objectors. The essays are written with an admirable candour which in some cases verges on self-depreciation, and

the book as a whole illustrates the variety of human types and motives involved.

In December, 1916, when the war was rather more than halfway through—though needless to say no one knew it to be so at the time—Asquith was extruded from the premiership and replaced by Lloyd George. This appears in retrospect a simple and obvious event; an elderly and tired statesman with no genius for leadership in war is persuaded to give place to a younger man who has caught the public eye as the best man for the job. Actually what happened was far from simple and provides an interesting example of how things may work out when party discipline has been swept away and no loyalty to an acknowledged superman, such as Churchill proved himself to be in the second war, has arisen to replace it.

No government is ever so 'national' that it fails to provoke an opposition, be it 'His Majesty's Opposition' or some other.* 'His Majesty's Opposition' there could not be, for the only regular opponents of the Coalition were a handful of pacifists with no body of opinion behind them. But nature abhors a vacuum, and the task of opposition passed into the not unwilling hands of the lords of the press, among whom the Irishman who had created the British 'popular' press and become Lord Northcliffe was the chief. As an opposition these men enjoyed formidable powers, for the government could not defend itself against their attacks without giving information to the enemy. Besides, Asquith and Grey were inhibited by their very natures from taking the steps necessary to secure the goodwill of these potentates. Northcliffe had driven Haldane out of public life. For that Asquith and Grey detested him; nothing would induce them to bow in that particular temple of Rimmon.

Lloyd George suffered from no such inhibitions. Northcliffe was a fashioner of public opinion. Lloyd George wanted the enthusiastic support of public opinion, for patriotic reasons of course, and also for reasons of his own. He was quite ready to be friends with Northcliffe, and Northcliffe wanted a prime minister who would be friends with him. So he set himself, week after week, in all his organs from the *Times* downwards, to

* Churchill's 1940-45 government proved an exception to this rule. Its critics hardly added up to an opposition.

depreciate Asquith, the man of 'wait and see', as contrasted with Lloyd George, the man of 'push and go'.

After the death of Kitchener in the summer of 1916 Lloyd George had passed from Munitions to the War Office and here he had found himself thwarted at every turn by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, a technically competent but possibly unimaginative and certainly very strong minded professional soldier. Asquith upheld Sir William, and it became apparent that Lloyd George could get past the obstacle in his path only by deposing Asquith with the help of the Conservative members of the Cabinet. But here he was on difficult ground, for the Conservatives in general upheld soldiers against civilians and more particularly against Lloyd George.

Bonar Law, the Conservative leader, also had his troubles. He attached very great importance to the maintenance for post-war purposes of an undivided Conservative party, and when we consider what happened to the Liberal party in the next few years we cannot account his anxiety unreasonable. All through 1916 the Conservative party was threatened with schism by reason of the activities of Sir Edward Carson, who had left the Coalition government and was now a formidable free-lance. Carson may not have been a great statesman but he had a gift for catching the public eye and a formidable debating power in the House of Commons. Bonar Law wanted Asquith to take Carson back into the Cabinet but he would not do so; he had had quite enough of him as a colleague already. But suppose the government made a bad mistake and gave Carson a good opening. Suppose in such circumstances Carson detached the bulk of the Conservative party and defeated the government. What then?

We possess interesting evidence of Bonar Law's state of mind in May, 1916. Redmond, the Irish leader, kept a very detailed and accurate diary; he was certainly not of the opinion of the melancholy Irishman in one of Shaw's plays who said that it was trouble enough to live one's life without the further trouble of recording an account of it day by day. On a date in that May he records a confidential talk with Bonar Law. Bonar Law expatiated on the general unsatisfactoriness of the political situation and the growing House of Commons popularity of Carson. Redmond asked him if he meant that Asquith ought to go. Bonar Law said 'that his own personal opinion was that Asquith was by far the

best man for the position and that the idea which was abroad that he was vacillating and hesitating on any matter of war policy was quite mistaken . . . but he foresaw that Asquith would probably go.' Who was to replace him? Lloyd George? ' I asked him what he thought of such an arrangement, and with an expressive gesture he said, " You know George as well as I do." He seemed very depressed about the whole affair '.*

The man who reconciled Bonar Law to the idea of a Lloyd George government and reconciled both of them with Carson so that the three of them combined to get rid of Asquith was, according to his own account, Sir Max Aitken, a newspaper-owning M.P. little known to the public at the time but soon to be famous as Lord Beaverbrook.† Up to the very last the plot, if one may call it so, was a ticklish affair, for nearly all the other Conservative ministers wanted to get rid of not Asquith but Lloyd George. However, all went well. Lloyd George pressed upon Asquith demands which would have excluded the prime minister from all real control of the war policy of his own government, an ultimatum intended, like the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, for rejection. Asquith refused : Lloyd George thereupon resigned. Then Asquith himself resigned, to facilitate a complete reconstruction of the government. The King, following the normal procedure on such occasions, sent for Bonar Law who, as pre-arranged, advised him to entrust the formation of a new government to Lloyd George. The pro-Asquith Conservatives accepted the unwelcome event and took office in the new government, from which Asquith and Grey and most of the old Liberal ministers were excluded. Balfour succeeded Grey as foreign secretary.

It was a new government in more than the ordinary sense of the term. The old cabinet, consisting of about twenty members, nearly all of them responsible for departmental administration, was abolished and its place taken by a war cabinet of six members, relieved of all departmental duties and thus able to concentrate their entire energies on the general direction and co-ordination of the war effort. The premier's five colleagues in this supreme organ of government were Lord Curzon, formerly Viceroy of India, Lord Milner, Carson, Henderson representing Labour,

* Quoted in Spender, J. A. *Life of Asquith*, II, p. 247.

† Lord Beaverbrook. *Politicians and the War*, Vol. II.

and Bonar Law, who was also to be Leader of the House of Commons, relieving the prime minister of his parliamentary routine duties. This cabinet, unlike the old cabinet, was to be assisted by a Secretariat, an innovation which has proved of permanent value. Gathered around and under the authority of the war cabinet were not only all the old ministries but an abundance of new ones, Ministries of Food, Labour, Shipping, National Service and Reconstruction. These and also some of the old ministerial offices, as well as a host of secondary departments and controllerships, were entrusted to business men. Research has proved that the new government contained representatives of railways, textiles, hardware, coal, chemicals, newspapers, oil, margarine and sugar.*

There was, no doubt, a large element of showmanship in all this. In many cases changes of names advertised to the public changes in essentials which had already been carried through under Asquith. But to say this is not to condemn. Good advertisement is essential to success in business, and Lloyd George's inaugural performance, clothing as it were the venerable British constitution itself in khaki and training her for active service, acted on the spirits of the nation at large as the striking up of the band acts on the marching of tired troops. Whether Lloyd George's government was really a better government than Asquith's is a question that has been argued up and down by the partisans of the henceforth rival Liberal factions. The general public thought it was much better and has gone on thinking so ever since, so far as it still thinks about the matter at all. Lloyd George had the second half of the war, so that he was on the spot when the enemy collapsed : that seemed to prove it.

The Ministry of Reconstruction was a means of reminding the public that the war would not go on for ever and that, in so far as it could be done without relaxing our war effort, we should lay the foundations of the 'brave new world',—to use the phrase which Aldous Huxley afterwards borrowed from Caliban. Herbert Fisher, an Oxford tutor in charge of the ministry of education, carried through parliament a bill which, besides providing many excellent and expensive improvements in the

* Raymond, E. T. *Mr. Lloyd George*, p. 221. Though written in 1921, just before the break up of the Lloyd George coalition (which the author foresees), this book remains, so far as I know, the most discerning and fair-minded estimate of Lloyd George's character and career.

ordinary state schools system, ordained compulsory part-time education for all young persons up to the age of eighteen. That ideal is still unrealised. A Franchise Bill did for men what the bill which Asquith introduced and abandoned in 1912 would have done, and gave women the vote—if they were over thirty. This last, like conscription of bachelors, was certainly an example of taking two bites at the cherry. The explanation was that many who were converted to the principle of giving women the parliamentary vote shied at the notion of a female majority on the electoral role. How would the creatures use their vote? Would they assert themselves and return a House of Women? When it was found that the women actually elected were too few rather than too many the remainder of the cherry was consumed, in 1928. Even then a section of the popular press protested at the 'flapper vote'* and professed to regard it as the cause of the Conservative defeat in 1929. When the largest Conservative majority in history was returned in 1931 even the press lords must have recanted. Anyhow they said no more about it.

The result of the bill, enfranchising practically all the rest of the men and the majority of the women, was to multiply the electorate by rather more than three. Our method of conducting elections prevents anyone from knowing how any individual has voted, but provides (though of course it does not publish) a list of those who have done so. In an average general election about seventy per cent. of the electors avail themselves of the privilege, but I confess that I have never seen any statistics showing the male and female percentages separately. Possibly the publication of such statistics is illegal.

Another reconstruction scheme, which came to nothing, was the plan for an Imperial Constitutional Conference to meet after the war and fulfil the old Disraeli-Chamberlain ideal of the 'consolidation' of the empire. War time appearances favouring the idea were delusive. The war naturally drew the mother country and the dominions together in the organization of a common strategy but the ultimate effect of the war was to make the dominions much more conscious than before of their own nationhood. The imperial family had become a family of grown up

* Flapper: commonly supposed to be derived from the flapping 'pigtails' of a Victorian teen-ager, but Dr. Eric Partridge in his Dictionary of Slang traces it to the vocabulary of sport, a "flapper" being a young duck or other game bird that had not learnt to fly properly and so was immune from the sportsman's attention. Only after the term had come into use did the majority, who knew nothing of duck shooting, invent the pigtail derivation—which has nothing to do with politics but is, perhaps, interesting.

sons, and any form of federation would have been rejected by all the dominions.

In March, 1918, there occurred on the western front what seemed, and in certain respects was, a defeat unexampled since the retreat from Belgium in the first month of the war. Actually it was the prelude to the series of events which led to the final victory, but no one could have so envisaged it at the time. 800,000 Germans attacked British forces of less than half that number at the point where the British armies joined the French. The British were rolled back. Pétain, commanding the French, threatened to break contact with them, and only the prompt action of Haig, commanding the British armies, and Milner, sent over to France as the representative of the war cabinet, averted this disaster by securing the appointment of Foch as generalissimo in control of the whole western front.

Behind all this lies a deplorable story. There had long been complete lack of confidence and cordial co-operation between the British prime minister and the commander of the British armies. They were an ill-matched pair; on one side a voluble Welsh politician, a man of slapdash genius, his head full of his own amateur strategical notions, sometimes brilliant and sometimes absurd; on the other side an inarticulate Lowland Scot, no genius perhaps, intensely professional in outlook, distrustful of new ideas but loyally supported as their best man by his fellow professionals. To Lloyd George Haig and his like were 'stone age' soldiers. They had been blind to the significance of tanks; they had wasted our man power, it was said, in the prolonged and resultless offensive of the summer and autumn of 1917, commonly called the battle of Passchendaele.* They should not be allowed to repeat the performance in the spring of 1918, before the Americans arrived. So Haig, though compelled by pressure from the French, backed by Lloyd George, to extend the length of his lines, was denied the reinforcement of two or three hundred thousand newly trained troops that could have been sent out to him from England. These troops were hurried

* There are two views about this. Some say that 'Passchendaele' was absolutely necessary to keep the Germans occupied and prevent them from launching a big offensive against the French who were for several months on the point of a collapse like that of 1940, after the failure of Nivelle's offensive in the spring. But we must not be led outside our proper subject.

across only after the blow had fallen. The obvious criticism is that, since he took this view of Haig's performance, Lloyd George should have removed him from his command. But that, in view of Haig's professional prestige, he did not feel strong enough to do. He was not a Churchill, and never enjoyed an ascendancy over all his instruments, civil and military, such as Churchill enjoyed in the second war.

In the House of Commons Lloyd George, defending the government after the March disaster and blaming the soldiers, declared that we had had more troops in France on January 1, 1918, than on the corresponding date in 1917. General Maurice, recently Director of Military Operations in the War Office, wrote a letter to the press on his own responsibility, flatly denying the truth of this statement. Asquith, the leading member of the House of Commons outside the government, felt reluctantly compelled to take the matter up and demanded a Committee of Enquiry. Lloyd George made the refusal of such an enquiry a matter of ' confidence ' on which the government would stand or fall, and by taking this line secured a handsome majority. The debate has a post-war significance, for this was the final cleavage between Lloyd George and what became the Asquithian section of the Liberal party. The 106 members who voted for Asquith's motion in the ' Maurice debate ' were marked down for destruction in the general election at the end of the year. Very few of them retained their seats. Lloyd George's line of action in the House naturally suggested that he had a blunder to conceal, but the official statistics since published show that both he and Maurice could claim to have been right. Their difference depended on what one included under the term ' troops ' ; was it fighting troops or did it include all the military population at the bases and lines of communication ? So it seems that Lloyd George simply wanted what is now called a show-down at the expense of his former Liberal colleagues.

Another result of this German offensive was the introduction of a bill extending conscription to Ireland, a measure so foolish as to suggest a loss of nerve. It offers an occasion for picking up the Irish story where we last left it and carrying it through the war years. We left that story at the point where the war interrupted the two parties still quarrelling over whether Tyrone and

Fermanagh should go with the North or the South. Soon after the war had begun the Home Rule Bill and its Amending Bill were both carried through their remaining stages, practically without controversy, and put into cold storage, Tyrone and Fermanagh being allotted to Northern Ireland.

But before this official internment of past controversy for the duration of the war, in fact on its second day, Redmond declared that the Ireland for which he spoke would, loyally and without conditions, contribute her share to the military effort of the British Empire. It was a sincere and noble gesture. It helped the British parties to put the Irish question behind them and forget recent animosities. It was also perhaps a tribute to the influence of Westminster on one who had been there so long, that Redmond had said what could not conceivably have been said in similar circumstances by his predecessor Parnell thirty years before. None the less, the fact remains that Parnell's Nationalist party of the eighties did really embody the angry soul of Irish nationalism whereas Redmond's party had become a polite façade behind which that same angry soul was seeking fresh embodiments. Two years later James Stephens wrote of Redmond's well-intended pledge: 'The leader of the Irish party misrepresented his people in the English House of Commons. He took the Irish case, weighty with eight centuries of history and tradition, and he threw it out of the window'. In the upshot Redmond's Anglo-Irish patriotism fell tragically between two stools. It failed to reconcile Ulster to home rule, and it failed to persuade Southern Ireland to active co-operation with the British Empire at war.

The Nationalist Volunteers had been founded without Redmond's approval and, though he had succeeded in imposing upon them a board of management on which he and his parliamentary colleagues possessed a majority vote, the rank and file had accepted this arrangement with reluctance. When the war began the Nationalist Volunteer force split in two, the Redmondites and the rest, and the rest came to be controlled by members of a society called Sinn Fein, meaning Ourselves Alone. Before the war Sinn Fein had appeared to be nothing but a coterie of journalists enthusiastic for the revival of the Gaelic language, its greatest triumph being a decree of the Senate of the National University making Gaelic a compulsory subject for matriculation. It was a

curious chance that a society with aims so harmless and idealistic should have become the spear head of a nationalist revolution, wading through bloodshed to victory.

There were two parties among the leaders of what now called itself the Irish Republican Army, those who wanted to conserve their forces till the war was over and those who wanted rebellion at once. Casement's unsuccessful attempt to land a cargo of arms from Germany just before Easter, 1916, somehow precipitated the control into the hands of the latter party and enabled them to stage the Easter Week rebellion in Dublin. Its chance of success was hopeless from the first but it involved a week of murderous street fighting. There seems little doubt that at the time the rebellion was condemned by the great majority of Southern Irish, whatever the ultimate ideals. None the less, it appears in retrospect as the heroic opening of the new chapter of Irish history which has ended in the establishment of a completely independent Irish republic. The parliament men had failed; the physical force men were going to succeed.

It is commonly said that every step taken by the British government to deal with the Irish situation after Easter Week was an egregious blunder. So perhaps it was. We will record some of these strokes of British policy and leave the reader to judge for himself.

First, fifteen of the leaders of the rebellion, youthful but ferocious idealists, several of them poets, were shot after secret trials by court martial, and in this case as in so many others the blood of the martyrs proved the food of the church. One only was reprieved, De Valera, because he was technically an American citizen, and we were almost morbidly anxious at that time not to annoy the United States. Three thousand more persons were arrested, some of whom had had nothing to do with the rebellion, and of these two thousand were interned, most of them it is true for a very brief period, somewhere in Wales.

Then Asquith went over to Ireland in person, conferred with various people, some of whom had been active participators in the rebellion, declared that the existing system of government had broken down and that steps must be taken to bring home rule into operation as quickly as possible, without waiting for the end of the war. So it looked as if the rebellion had been a success after all.

Then Lloyd George took over the negotiations. He came to terms both with Redmond and with the Ulster leaders. Unfortunately it transpired that Redmond understood the terms to be home rule with the temporary exclusion of the six counties and Ulster understood that her six counties were to be excluded permanently. In view of this misunderstanding Asquith announced that the Irish 'settlement' would be abandoned for the duration of the war.

When Lloyd George became prime minister he summoned a Convention of Irishmen of all parties to meet in Dublin and tackle the problem afresh. Sinn Fein, steadily growing in popularity—it had won its first by-election in February, 1917—refused to have anything to do with the Convention, but even without the Sinn Feiners the Convention did nothing but reveal the diversities of Irish opinion. Three reports were presented, and the majority report was carried by only 38 votes to 34 in as assembly originally composed of a hundred members.

The Convention wound up its labours in April, 1918. At that date the British government had other things to think of. The great German offensive was in progress, and the Man Power Bill extending conscription to Ireland was being rushed through parliament. This settled the fate of the old Nationalist party. Redmond was already dead. His career had ended in tragedy as deep as Parnell's, with the difference that it was no fault of his own. His final defeat had been marked by his resignation of the presidency of what had been his section of the National Volunteers. He could no longer control them, and they all went over, 150,000 strong, to the Republican Army. Dillon, his successor as leader of the old parliamentary party, entered into a futile competition in extremism with Sinn Fein, thereby proving that there was no reason for his party's continued existence. The Irish were quick to recognize this fact and, in the general election immediately after the end of the war, returned 73 Sinn Feiners, who constituted themselves a rebel parliament in Dublin. The old Nationalists who had secured round about eighty seats in election after election, found themselves reduced to six.

As for Irish conscription no attempt was ever made to enforce it. A soldier and an Irishman, Lord French, was sent over to govern Ireland, to hold the fort until the wisdom of post war statesmanship could be applied to the problem.

VI. THE POST-WAR LLOYD GEORGE GOVERNMENT, 1918-22

THE Armistice came into force on November 11, 1918. Ten days later parliament was dissolved and the general election was held ten days before Christmas, though the result was not announced till after Christmas owing to delay occasioned by collecting the votes of men abroad on active service. The result was a foregone conclusion, a sweeping victory for the government. The supporters of the Lloyd George coalition, three quarters of them Conservatives, won 526 seats; the Labour men, most of them trade unionists who had supported the war, 63, and the Asquithian Liberals only 33. The Irish republicans won 73 seats and refused to occupy them. The percentage of the electorate that took the trouble to vote in this election was much lower than in any other election recorded in this book: only just over fifty per cent. One may guess that the women who had just been given the vote had not yet learnt to value it.

The minority parties called it the coupon election, coupons having been popularized (though that is not quite the right word) by food rationing, the 'coupon' in this case being the letter signed by Lloyd George and Bonar Law and sent to candidates of whom they approved. It was suggested that there was something immoral about this 'coupon', but it lay in the logic of the facts. The leaders of the coalition were clearly entitled to distinguish, for the guidance of the electorate, those whom they regarded as loyal supporters from those whom they did not so regard.

The same parties also declared, after the result and perhaps before it also, that it was 'an act of political immorality'* to hold the election so soon after the fighting had ceased, implying that the sole purpose of the election was to secure for Lloyd George and his colleagues a further lease of power before the electorate had had time to look around, to calm down, and presumably to grow wiser. But an immediate election was inherent in the logic

* Keynes, J. M. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published a year later, uses this phrase.

of democracy, all the more so because the war parliament, elected for five years in 1910, had had its life prolonged to eight years by its own and not the electorate's votes, simply to avoid an election till the war was over. Indeed an election at the end of 1918, when the new registers including the female electorate would be ready, had been widely forecasted and advocated at a time when it was assumed that the war would be still in progress. Argument that the election could have been postponed until some unspecified condition which we may call 'the crisis of peace' was over, was based on two unwarranted assumptions: first, that the game of democracy can be played with reservations, and secondly, that 'the crisis of peace' would prove a period of brief duration. The only logical alternative to an immediate election would have been a continuance of the 1910 parliament until what an American statesman in 1920 called 'normalcy' had returned to bless the world. On that alternative the parliament of 1910 might well be still sitting today, the 'Long Parliament' of the twentieth century.

When we pass to the programme and the electioneering of the coalitionists we find their critics on stronger ground. The programme seems to have been borrowed from the headlines of the popular press: Hang the Kaiser; make Germany pay for the cost of the war; make the country fit for heroes to live in. The Kaiser was not hanged, though if he had led his country in the second war he would presumably have found his way to Nuremberg. Making Germany pay proved a snare and a delusion and was abandoned twelve years later. 'Homes for heroes' and the rest of it was a very proper aspiration, though it might have been submitted to the electorate in a less emotional and more dignified guise; but emotionalism rather than dignity had always been Lloyd George's way, the Limehouse way, and there is no doubt that the country wanted more Lloyd George. It is tempting to consider what Gladstone would have done with the 1918 election; but Gladstone, if he had been alive and prime minister when the war began, would almost certainly have been overthrown by Disraeli before it was over.

However that may be, the result of the election was in many ways deplorable. It involved Lloyd George in endless embarrassments when, resuming once again the role of statesman, he pleaded for moderation and good sense at the peace conference.

It provided Great Britain, during four years which were to be packed full of industrial crises and social problems, with the wealthiest, the stupidest and the least representative House of Commons since the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Keynes asked his friend Stanley Baldwin what he thought of the new House. ' They are a lot of hard-faced men ' said Baldwin, ' who look as if they had done very well out of the war.'

And now a word by way of introduction to all the rest of this book. When, omitting the wars as abnormalities, one transfers one's attention from pre-war politics to inter-war politics and then onward to our own post-war politics one senses what mathematicians call a progression. The men remain the same size but the problems they are called upon to deal with grow bigger and bigger. Perhaps this growth in the size of the problems was already beginning to show itself in the last years before the first war, in which case the two great wars are not the only cause of the ' progression '. Perhaps one could push it further back still. In the mid-Victorian heyday, in ' the palmy days of Palmerston ', the problems seem to have been really delightfully small. Year after year it was unnecessary to do anything in particular and, whatever one did, it did not much matter. How different from the days of Sir Stafford Cripps, when every choice seems to be a choice of evils.

The same fact may be expressed in another way. Churchill tells us somewhere that when he was a very young man Sir William Harcourt, the old Gladstonian statesman, said to him, ' Believe me, nothing of importance ever really happens ' ; and Churchill comments : ' From that date onward things of importance began to happen and they have never stopped happening since '. (The date was, I think, that in which Germany began to build her fleet). Like the sorcerer's apprentice, we have set the creatures moving and we cannot stop them. It is all explained in more philosophic terms in Toynbee's *Study of History* under such headings as the Drive of Industrialism and the Drive of Democracy, and it implies the twilight of ' Politics ' ; for a noonday of politics is an age when the politicians are the masters of the materials they handle.

We are entering, then, on a period in which events ruled men instead of men ruling events. The outstanding facts in the domestic affairs of Great Britain during the four years covered

by this chapter are boom and slump. During 1919-20, in spite of the immense release of service men there was practically no unemployment. Industry absorbed the men as quickly as they were demobilized. Prices soared and wages with them, till both stood at three times the pre-war level. Then in 1921-22 came the reaction, collapse of prices and a forcing down of wages, till both stood at about 70 per cent above pre-war level. Unemployment rose to 2,000,000, though by the end of 1922 it had fallen to 1,400,000. One wants to ask, how do these unemployment figures compare with those of any of the bad times before the war? The question cannot be answered, because before the introduction of national insurance there were no statistics. The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1911 had covered only a few trades subject to seasonal unemployment. A new Act, covering nearly all industries except agriculture, passed through parliament and became law at the end of 1920, in time to pay benefits to the unemployed but not in time to accumulate reserves from which the benefits could be paid. From a revenue standpoint it was a bankrupt and subsidised concern from the start.

The boom years witnessed labour 'unrest' on an unprecedented scale. The strikes of 1919 surpassed all previous records. By the end of June more days had been lost through strikes than in the whole of any previous year, and by the end of the year the number of days' work lost reached the amazing figure of 32,000,000, which meant that an average of over 100,000 men had been on strike every day.

It is easy to find half a dozen reasons for this state of affairs. For example, the men returning from four years of war, in itself an unsettling experience, had been promised a land fit for heroes. Well, where was it? The government had not produced it, so they would produce it for themselves by the syndicalist method. Then there was Russia. What had happened in Russia? Few could have answered that question in a manner which would have won many marks from a scholastic examiner, but something had undoubtedly happened. The 'workers' were on top in Russia, so why not in Britain? Then there were the lessons to be learnt from the war. The war had proved—what had it proved? It had at any rate displayed the possibilities of extravagant expenditure undreamed of before 1914. If it was possible for the State, that mysterious abstraction, to spend seven millions a day

on killing Germans, what could not now be spent on making British workmen happy? And finally there was the fact that no one had any idea what, after four years of abnormality, a fair wage should be. In ordinary times organizations of employers and employed had long been in continuous contact and current conditions of work and wages had represented fairly accurately the balance between their respective forces, and the real value of those wages had been assured by the stability of prices. All that had gone, and the only way to discover how the balance of power stood between capital and labour in the post-war world was to fight and see. The chances seemed favourable, for never had so large a proportion of the wage-earners been organized in trade unions. Their numbers, which had been two and a half millions in 1910, four millions in 1914, six and a half millions in 1918, rose to over eight millions in 1920.

The two most sensational strikes, for different reasons, were a railway strike and a police strike. The former paralyzed the railways for a week and afforded a valued advertisement of the rapidly growing resources of motor transport. The latter was mainly confined to Liverpool, where more than half the police came out on strike without notice. This gave as much scope to the criminals as the railway strike had given to the motors. Troops were called in to restore order, and the strikers were dismissed from the service and forfeited their pensions, with the general approval of the public. But the most extensive and prolonged strikes were in the mining industry, three crises, two of them involving strikes, one in the boom and one in the slump ; and these cannot be dismissed in a sentence.

In January, 1919, the miners demanded an increase of wages, a reduction of hours from eight to six, and also the nationalization of the mines. The government replied with the offer of a royal commission, which should report on wages and hours in March and on the organization of the industry in June. The members of the royal commission were chosen on a novel and, as many thought, absurd principle. Each of the belligerents, miners and mine-owners, were invited to nominate three representatives and the government added three theoretical socialists on one side and three industrial magnates on the other. All would therefore depend on the choice of the ' neutral ' chairman, and the government selected Mr. Justice Sankey, who a few years later became

Lord Chancellor in a Labour government. In these circumstances the miners decided to wait and see what the commission had to say.

Needless to say, from such a body there issued a variety of reports, but the chairman's March report proposed an increase of wages, less than the miners had asked for, and a reduction of hours from eight to seven, prefacing these proposals with the remark that ' the present system of ownership and working stands condemned '. Encouraged by this forecast of favours to come the miners postponed their strike until after the final report in which, sure enough, the chairman, the three miners and the three socialists recommended the nationalization of the mining industry. Lloyd George had given what looked like a promise that the government would carry out the recommendations of the commission, but it was obvious that a House of Commons with a large Conservative majority was not going to nationalize the mines ; so that promise had to be explained away. However, there was no strike on this issue. The men had got good wages, shorter hours, and a ' Sankey report ' saying that the mines ought to be nationalized. That was enough for the present.

Coal mining boomed as it had never boomed before. Never before had there been such a bumper export trade and at such bumper prices. The industry ' profiteered ' (that was the word in those days) at the expense of the continental purchaser whose local coal mines had been put out of action by the war. The owners passed on part of these profits to the British consumer in the form of reduced prices. The miners wanted a larger share of it for themselves in increased wages. Over this division of the spoils there was a month's strike in the autumn of 1920.

Six months later the situation was indeed transformed. The slump was in full blast ; export prices fell from 115/- to 24/- a ton ; the home demand shrunk week by week as more and more industries went on short time. The government, which bore certain responsibilities and exercised certain controls, a relic of wartime measures, ratted from the sinking ship and ' decontrolled ' the industry in a hurry, leaving owners and miners to fight the battle of inevitable wage reductions among themselves. The strike began on April 1, 1921, and what rendered it alarming to the general public was that now at last the famous pre-war ' triple alliance ', the sympathetic or general strike—call it what you

please—was to come into action. It all depended on the decision of the shrewd Welshman, J. H. Thomas, the best known trade union leader in the country, who managed the affairs of the National Union of Railwaymen. The 'full strike power of the triple alliance' was to be put into operation on April 12. Then it was postponed to April 15, and finally adjourned indefinitely. That was 'Black Friday', which the *Daily Herald* described as 'the heaviest defeat that has befallen the Labour movement within the memory of man'. An ambiguous announcement of the miners' leader had given 'Traitor Thomas' a pretext for switching off a policy to which he had never given more than a very reluctant approval. A sequel to these excitements was a libel action in which Thomas won damages from an extremist paper for comparing him with Judas Iscariot and other historical characters. As for the coal strike, it dragged on for three months and ended with the miners squarely beaten. Their defeat was accepted by other industries as a sign that it was no use striking against fate as manifested in a falling market. Since good times had meant good wages, so must bad times mean bad wages. There was much less 'unrest' during the slump than during the boom.

Boom and slump each in turn gave its character to the domestic policy of the government. So long as the boom persisted the government pursued what seemed by pre-war standards insanely extravagant schemes for a new and better Britain. Addison at the new, or newly named, Ministry of Health, produced the first instalment of subsidised 'council houses'. An Agricultural Act of 1920 showed an intention to preserve, by the maintenance of high prices and high wages, the prosperity farmers and labourers alike had enjoyed during the war. But with the slump an 'anti-waste' campaign, organised in the popular press, blighted all these hopeful prospects. Was government expenditure never going to fall below £1,000,000,000?* Was income tax always to remain at its wartime maximum of six shillings in the pound? The coalition, which had been losing seats to Labour in industrial constituencies now began to lose them to 'anti-waste' rebels in the strongholds of income tax and respectability. Lloyd George

* It had been only £200,000,000 just before the war, and that figure was regarded as exceptional, and temporary, being partly due to naval competition with Germany.

bowed to the storm, and it is characteristic of his political genius that he made even economy sound picturesque. One of his old big-business colleagues in Munitions days, Sir Eric Geddes, was deputed to go round the departments cutting down expenditure ' with an axe ' ; hence the phrase ' to be axed ', i.e., to lose one's job through one's employer's economies. The Geddes axe managed to lop off about fifty millions and in 1922 income tax was reduced by a shilling. The Addison housing scheme was wound up, and Addison ultimately found his way from the Liberal to the Labour party. An economy more lastingly disastrous was the abandonment of the first serious attempt to restore British agriculture since its decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Soon after the end of the war Lloyd George had said that ' inhuman conditions and wretchedness ' must be made to surrender ' like the German fleet '. They had proved a more elusive enemy.

The seventy-three Irish republicans elected by the machinery of a British general election in December, 1918, did not trouble Westminster with their presence, a fact for which Westminster had every reason to be grateful. Instead, they constituted themselves the first ' Dail ', which appears to be Gaelic for Assembly, and approached President Wilson with a view to securing a place among the many newly emancipated nationalities, Czechs, Jugoslavs and the like, at the peace conference in Paris. It was an astute manoeuvre, but nothing came of it. Wilson did not want to antagonize the British government at the start of the peace conference. He preferred to disappoint the Irish, and they secured only a barren revenge when, in the following year, the Irish-American vote was swung against the Wilsonian candidate in the next presidential election and thus contributed to the withdrawal of the United States from the League of Nations.

After this failure to secure Irish independence by diplomacy there only remained force, a ' war ' of ambush conducted by the Irish Republican Army against the Royal Irish Constabulary. Eighteen of the latter were killed in 1919 and 176 in 1920, the killers being paid from Sinn Fein funds, which were continuously replenished from America. By the end of 1919 it had become impossible to recruit for the R.I.C. in Ireland, and an office was opened in London to recruit as volunteers for the Irish service

non-commissioned and afterwards commissioned officers of the British army who had been demobilised after the war. This force, which came to be known from its uniform, khaki with a black beret, as ' the Black and Tans ', was authorized to undertake reprisals. It is curious and perhaps characteristically British that public opinion seemed to be much more shocked by the outrages of the Black and Tans than by the Irish outrages to which these were a reply in kind. It may have been that we felt ourselves collectively responsible for the former outrages and not for the latter. Perhaps, also, we had come to feel that the Irish had better be given what they wanted, whatever it might be, and the sooner the better.

Meanwhile Asquith's Home Rule Act and Amending Act were still in cold storage. Instead of putting them into operation the government produced a new Home Rule Act creating two semi-self-governing units, the six counties and the rest, with provisions enabling the two Irelands to combine themselves in one if and when they thought fit. Northern Ireland accepted, without enthusiasm, the constitution provided for her, and is governed by it to this day.

Thus it came about that in June, 1921 the King went to Belfast to open the first session of the parliament of Northern Ireland, and the generous and conciliatory terms of the paragraph of his speech which was addressed to the rest of Ireland opened a way out of the impasse. Two days later the prime minister invited De Valera, the president of the Irish self-styled republic, and Sir James Craig, the prime minister of Northern Ireland, to meet him in London. Some were shocked by this invitation to a bloodstained rebel, but, after all, there is a statue of George Washington in Trafalgar Square. The rebel, after sundry dialectics, accepted and came. An armistice was achieved, and arrangements were made for a peace conference in London ' with a view to ascertaining how far the association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British Empire might be reconciled with Irish aspirations '. Thus the question whether Ireland was or was not already an independent republic was left unanswered and De Valera's republican honour remained untarnished. But, wiser perhaps than President Wilson, he refused to commit himself in person to the hazards of the peace conference, sending instead five deputies, who met five members of the

British government in secret session during the autumn of 1921.

The result was no foregone conclusion. Only a threat that war for the reconquest of Ireland would be renewed with overwhelming force extracted from the would-be republican delegates their signatures to the 'treaty' by which Ireland, without the six counties, accepted the status of a completely self-governing dominion within the British Empire. How De Valera repudiated the treaty; how a civil war ensued between Treatyites and Republicans, a war far more savage and destructive than the preceding Anglo-Irish warfare; how the Treatyites emerged victorious and Cosgrave, their leader, established an Irish government which for ten years loyally observed the terms of the treaty: these are matters outside British politics, which at long last had got rid of 'the Irish question', at any rate as an indigestible element in its internal affairs.

Thus Ireland had secured, from a predominantly Conservative, or Unionist, government and House of Commons, far more than any Gladstonian Home Ruler had ever asked for on her behalf. For Lloyd George it was all very well; he had never been a Unionist, and in any case he was by nature a man of expedients rather than of principles. For Unionists it was a bitter pill to swallow, a sharp curve of policy to negotiate, and no one did more to help his party to negotiate the curve and the Irish republicans to abate their republicanism than the remarkable man who had entered parliament as F. E. Smith and was at this time Lord Birkenhead.

Apart from his services in connexion with the Irish treaty Birkenhead failed to make as great a contribution to the history of his time as might have been expected from his outstanding personality, for he was the only man on the Conservative side at this time who seemed to possess, like Lloyd George and Churchill, something like political genius. Certainly both of them recognized him, almost as soon as he entered parliament in 1906, as a kindred spirit. All three were close friends, in fact a mutual admiration society. All three were by nature coalitionists, and it was through Smith, as he then was, that during the political truce of 1910 Lloyd George had approached the Conservative leaders with his grandiose plan for a national government which would provide settlements of all the controversial problems. Perhaps Smith's legal eminence interfered with

his political progress. In the coalitions of 1915-22 he was successively Solicitor-General, Attorney-General and Lord Chancellor. The holders of these offices have highly responsible and difficult duties, but their work is not in the limelight, and by accepting the Lord Chancellorship he removed himself to the obscurity of the House of Lords. Perhaps he also failed through faults of character. It was difficult to discover any purpose in his career beyond personal ambition. With a strong streak of cynical materialism in his nature, his hatred of humbug made him pose as more of a cynic than he was. He enjoyed life enormously, 'burned the candle at both ends' (everyone from Churchill downwards seems to have fallen to this hackneyed phrase in his case), earned a fabulous income at the bar and spent more than he earned, and died worn out in what should have been the prime of life, but not before he had left politics in order to earn fresh fortunes in the City. The public, perhaps rightly, did not admire him, but his friends, including a man of such unblemished rectitude as Austen Chamberlain, were devoted to him. Judged by the standard of the average front bencher he had a brilliant career; judged by the standard his powers suggested he must be reckoned a failure.

We must now return once again to the beginning of our four years and consider the greater events on the European continent in so far as they affected British politics.

The making of the peace treaty with Germany, the Treaty of Versailles, fills the first half of 1919 and treaty making with the other defeated enemy states followed thereon. The interest of the British public in these great matters was much more languid than one might suppose. Our one object in entering the war had been to prevent Germany from conquering Europe. That had been secured by the fighting and ratified in the Armistice. Compared with that, the innumerable subsidiary decisions by means of which the peace conference wound up the whole dreadful business and huddled it off the stage scarcely interested us. After all, we were an island folk; at least we had been before August, 1914, and we now thankfully resumed our insularity. Isolationism is a British phenomenon as well as an American, less successfully maintained, no doubt, because the Channel is narrower than the Atlantic. Lloyd George declared in his charming way

that till he went to Paris he had never heard of Teschen. It was no doubt very galling for the Foreign Office that, at this crisis of history, they should be at the mercy of the spasmodic and incalculable impulses, at one moment all for vengeance and at another all for Christian charity and conciliation, of a Welsh wizard who had never heard of Teschen. But we were with Lloyd George in this matter: we had never heard of Teschen, nor of many other places, and we did not want to hear about them now.

As for what was understood to be the general principle of the treaties, self-determination, the right of each nationality to become a self-governing state, that seemed to us liberal and progressive. Eastern Europe seemed to be bulging with Irelands, and it was unfortunately difficult to say where one Ireland ended and the next began. Every Ireland had its Ulsters and every Ulster its Tyrone and Fermanagh to perplex the cartographers of the new political geography. But that was their affair: our own Ireland was enough for us.

For those who were disposed to be critical the treaties presented an enormous target for criticism. The treatment of Germany, for example. Those who wanted a peace of conciliation, a 'forgive-and-forget' treaty, would hardly find what they wanted in the terms of Versailles and even less in the unprecedently harsh and overbearing treatment meted out to the German delegates in Paris. It hardly seemed a promising beginning to the new and better world and we soon began to realise that, though we might want to conciliate the Germans, France would not—for very substantial reasons, no doubt. Those, on the other hand, who wanted to see a beaten Germany so strapped down that she would never be able to rise again, felt that the treaty had not gone nearly far enough, that there was more insult than injury about it. Thus the two main schools of criticism contradicted each other and appeared to cancel out. Or perhaps the treaty fell between two stools, either of which could have been sat upon but not the space in between.

As for the general question whether the treaties were good or bad, the average person took the very sensible and labour-saving view that the proof of the pudding would be in the eating. If the world settled down to the enjoyment of peace and prosperity the treaties would be proved to have been good. But perhaps

that was too simple. The treaties must almost certainly be bad. Too much ground had to be covered in too short a time. Someone had said that a quick peace was more important than a good peace. Happily the treaties all contained in their first chapter a mechanism for their own correction and improvement, the Covenant of the League of Nations. President Wilson had seen to that.*

The British idealization of Woodrow Wilson, the stiff and starchy university professor whom the lottery of American electioneering had elevated to the presidency, is one of the curious features of this time. It illustrates the psychological fact that nations in a crisis of their destinies, however parliamentary their traditions and habits, imperatively demand a flesh and blood leader—Fuhrer, Duce; translate it into what language you will. We had found a war leader in Lloyd George. Moral and intellectual 'highbrows' never ceased to sniff at him, but for the nation at large he had proved a satisfyingly dramatic and energizing figure. But for the peace? Once the excitements of the coupon election were over no one, except perhaps other Welshmen, could discover in the Welsh wizard that elevation of mind, that nobility of soul, that profound historical understanding which seemed to be demanded of the architect of the peace. And failing Lloyd George, who else was there in British politics? Sir Edward Grey, perhaps: a very noble but already half forgotten figure, a member of the insignificant Asquithian opposition. And no one else. That was where Wilson came in. We saw him from across the Atlantic, and distance lent enchantment to the view. His speeches were full of noble sentiments and had he not laid down Fourteen Points?† When he came among us for a brief visit *en route* for Paris, we caught at every detail which might illustrate his greatness. The mere fact that he appeared before a press photographer with one trouser turned up and the other turned down provided, for one journalist, matter for ingeniously favourable comment. He had, it was said (quite wrongly), invented the League of Nations and was about to bestow this blessed invention upon the world. A year later Keynes in his famous book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* pricked the bubble of Wilson worship. He showed

* If any reader should want to know my own views on the Treaty of Versailles and other European events of the years following, he will find them in a book of mine called *Between the Wars*.

† Four more than 'le bon Dieu', as the cynical Clemenceau afterwards remarked.

him as a tedious old presbyterian and a bit of a hypocrite, too: and perhaps that was just as far from the truth as the other picture had been. Meanwhile the man himself had ended in defeat and tragedy. Woodrow Wilson and Ramsay MacDonald—both cast by fate for parts which were too big for them. We cannot pursue the parallel here but it may recur to the reader's mind when we come to consider the character and career of MacDonald.

So the work of the peace conference made but a vague impression on the public mind. Very different was the impact of the Russian 'Bolshevik' revolution.* This act of gangsterism, perhaps the greatest and most successful in history, acted as a shibboleth on British political opinion, dividing the sheep from the goats, the Left from the Right. Practically all shades of Labour and advanced Liberal opinion, meaning thereby the Lloyd George budget type of Liberalism, sympathised in a greater or less degree with the Bolsheviks. Only a few perhaps bowed down and worshipped at the altar of the new dispensation, but all the Left held that the experiment, whatever its blunders and crimes, must be allowed to proceed unhampered by the interference of the 'capitalist' world outside. On the other hand all Conservatives and all the more conservative sort of Liberals held with varying degrees of emphasis that this new and more barbarous Jacobinism was, like the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, a threat to the traditional civilization of Western Christendom. Some were content to hold up their hands in horror; others wanted to do something about it, and among these last was Churchill, who denounced the Soviet system as 'a foul baboonery,' a phrase which, though not perhaps based upon any close study of the habits of baboons, had none the less a satisfyingly abusive flavour.

It so happened that Churchill was now at the War Office. His predecessor had got into a tangle over demobilization and provoked something like a mutiny in certain army units. Churchill took over in a hurry, straightened all that out, and fixed his eyes on Russia. The Bolshevik government had been at war since

* The term communist as applied to these people did not come into common use in England till some years later. 'Bolshevik' gives the right local colour for the early twenties. 'Shibboleth' (in the next sentence) was originally a test word. If you would pronounce it correctly you were let through: if not, you were not. See *Judges* XII—6.

1918 with three anti-Bolshevik forces, thousands of miles apart but vaguely threatening Moscow from three directions. The Bolsheviks, like their successor Stalin in 1939, had made a treaty with Germany and these White Russian forces were therefore our allies. We could not, it was argued, desert them just because the German war was over, and we now had masses of munitions to spare, munitions which, since they had been manufactured and paid for, had much better be shot off at Bolsheviks than thrown on the scrap heap. So Churchill was allowed to send munitions to the White Russians operating from the south, the only ones we could get at. Unfortunately, puny as the resources of the Bolsheviks might be, those of the White Russians were punier. They were all 'liquidated' by 1920.

Then Poland attacked Russia and more British surplus stores were sent to the Poles. British organized labour outside parliament began to get restive. It disapproved of the Polish invasion of Russia—which certainly was a ridiculous act of aggression—and it disapproved of the Black and Tans. A meeting of the Trade Union Congress passed two resolutions, one calling upon the government to abandon its Polish and Irish activities, and the other recommending the trade unions to prepare for 'action'. A 'Council of Action' was elected to organise the paralysing of the government by means of political strikes, another weapon from the armoury of syndicalism. These were strange and hazardous projects, and no one was more thankful than the more conservative type of trade union leader, Thomas for example, that nothing came of them. The Irish Republicans rather rudely told the Council of Action to mind its own business, and as for the Poles, they were bundled out of Russia and it soon became a question whether the Bolsheviks would conquer Poland and break into prostrate Germany, a disaster averted, not for ever as Churchill hoped, but for twenty-five years, by the battle of the Vistula, 1920.

So Bolshevism was confined to Russia, but in Russia it had apparently come to stay. What was to be done about it? Would it not be best to make friends with it? Could the West prosper without Russian trade? Along such lines moved the mind of Lloyd George, a man of the Left presiding over a government of the Right. In one of his platform speeches he called attention to the 'bulging corn bins', which were waiting for the British

markets to open, but this proved but one more Russian myth. That happy country was just about to enter upon the worst famine seen in Europe (if Russia be Europe) since the seventeenth century, and the Russian famine, too, like the revolution, proved a shibboleth for British minds. The men of the Left said it was due to the weather; the men of the Right said it was due to the ridiculous efforts of the 'Bolshies' to force socialism upon agriculture.

The peace conference inevitably made many mistakes, but none incurred so early and violent a correction as the settlement dictated to but never even formally accepted by the new Turkish government established by Mustafa Kemal at Angora in the middle of Anatolia. Turkey in Europe, apart from Constantinople, had already gone in the Balkan wars of 1912-13, and it was right to lop off the Arab provinces of Syria, including Palestine, and Iraq. It was quite another matter to sanction a Greek empire in the western half of the Turkish homeland. The coastal towns might be Greek but all the hinterland of Anatolia was purely Turkish. This experiment arose out of the fascination exercised over Lloyd George in Paris by the kindred spirit of the Greek statesman Venizelos. Once again it was a case of the Left versus the Right in the British cabinet, for most of the Conservative ministers and in particular Lord Curzon, who succeeded Balfour as foreign secretary after the peace conference, disapproved of the experiment. So did our French and Italian allies.

We need not recall the earlier stages of a long and complicated story. In the summer of 1921 a Greek army advanced on Angora, but was brought to a standstill after a ten days' battle fifty miles from the Turkish capital. There it remained wasting away for a year, while Greece was rent by feuds between royalists and republicans and France made a deal of her own with the Turks and sold them surplus munitions such as we had sold to the anti-Bolshevik Russians. In August, 1922, Mustafa Kemal struck. The Greek army was routed and in a surprisingly short time the whole Greek population was either massacred or driven out of Anatolia.

Interest now shifted to the straits which, together with Constantinople, had been placed under international control and provided with small British, French and Italian garrisons, a

makeshift arrangement arising from the fact that Russia, for whom these spoils had been intended, had fallen out of the war. The French and Italian garrisons withdrew to the safer side of the straits, leaving only the British under General Harington at Chanak on the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles. Happily the Turks acted with prudence and General Harington with firmness and tact. After a fortnight of tense excitement an armistice was signed, and in the following year the Treaty of Lausanne gave Constantinople and the straits to Turkey. But during that fortnight the British government in London kept much less calm than its general on the spot. A flamboyant communiqué was drafted by Lloyd George and Churchill and published in the press, calling on the British Dominions and the Balkan states to co-operate with Great Britain in resisting the Turkish menace; and, incredible as it may seem, this was done without consultation with Lord Curzon who was supposed to be in charge of foreign affairs. The Chanak communiqué proved the last of many nails in the coffin of the Coalition government. Within five weeks of its publication Lloyd George had resigned. He never held office again.

For a long time past the government had presented a curious spectacle to anyone who recollected what cabinet government had been before the war. Lloyd George had practically withdrawn from the House of Commons, entrusting its leadership more and more entirely to Bonar Law. He surrounded himself with a large and irregular corps of civil servants and other assistants under his own direction, handling whatever affairs he fancied with little regard to the established departments to which such affairs properly belonged. The Chanak communiqué was only an extreme example of his methods. Fortified by the example of their chief, ministers went their own ways and trod on each others toes. One of them, convicted of an outstanding act of insubordination, defended himself by saying 'Cabinet responsibility has become a joke'.

Amidst all this confusion the reputation of Bonar Law steadily rose. Experience of high office had sobered his style and matured his mind. It was generally recognised that he made the best of a very difficult job. In the spring of 1921 he had to resign on account of ill health. Austen Chamberlain was elected by his

fellow Conservatives leader of their party and appointed by Lloyd George as leader of the House of Commons.

When it had been decided that the Coalition government should prolong its existence beyond the end of the war some, such as Lloyd George and Churchill, thought of it as the foundation of a new alignment of parties. History was, they might have said, repeating itself. Just as Joseph Chamberlain, the vital force in the Liberalism of the eighties had brought his contingent over into the Conservative camp and infused new life into the inert body of Conservatism, so had they come over twenty years later and performed the same operation; and as the alliance of 1895 had ended in fusion, so should this new alliance of 1918. Most Conservatives, on the other hand, regarded the Coalition as a temporary expedient, forced upon their party by the chances of war; for, unlike the Labour party of 1945, they had not been ready to face a post-war election with the wartime hero in the field against them. They did not like the coalition, but they were prepared to accept it for election purposes and then to see what came of it.

And what had come of it? It had blown hot and cold. It had stultified itself in relation to every subject it had touched. It had poured out money on social reforms and subsequently repealed them. It had prosecuted a barbarous war against the Irish republicans and subsequently given them everything but the name of a republic. It had proved a false start. What was wanted was a new beginning, a new government with a clean sheet. Only the Conservative party, with a Conservative prime minister, could supply that. Thus argued an increasing number of back-bench Conservatives on whose support the Coalition depended for its existence. And good fortune supplied them with just the leader they needed. Bonar Law had been removed from office before the Coalition had entered on the more scandalous or, if you prefer, the more unfortunate period of its existence. He was not tarred with the brush of Irish surrender or abandonment of agricultural reform. And now a prolonged rest seemed to have restored him to health. He had returned to the House but not to office, and stood aloof, a formidable critic if he choose to become one. On the subject of the Chanak communiqué he wrote a letter to the *Times* which read like a vote of censure on the government.

Among the Conservative ministers there was one man on whose

loyalty to himself Lloyd George could rely, their leader Austen Chamberlain. It may have been at Lloyd George's suggestion that he summoned the famous party meeting at the Carlton Club on October 17, 1922, and the purpose of the meeting undoubtedly was to restore discipline, to satisfy the disgruntled and bring the back-benchers to heel. It worked out quite otherwise, and the man who brought down the Coalition was Stanley Baldwin. He had recently been appointed to cabinet office as President of the Board of Trade, but to the general public he was still an unknown man. Most people were surprised when they read in the *Times* on the following morning that he was ' the best-liked man in the House of Commons '. In his speech to the meeting he acknowledged that Lloyd George was a dynamic force, but warned his audience that ' a dynamic force is a very terrible thing '. It had disintegrated the Liberal party and was in process of disintegrating the Conservatives. He therefore moved a resolution to the effect that, when the next general election came, the Conservative party would fight it ' as an independent party with its own leader and its own programme '.

It is said that Baldwin went to the meeting expecting his resolution to be defeated, but it was carried by 187 votes to 87, most of the Conservative cabinet ministers voting with the minority. Lloyd George at once resigned. Bonar Law, who had studiously kept himself in the background up to this point, consented to form a government and at once dissolved parliament.

More than a third of the party had voted for the continuance of the Coalition but, once it had fallen, the great bulk of these came over to the majority. There remained outside the new government a small but individually distinguished group of Conservative Coalitionist ex-ministers who for a variety of reasons refused to accept office with Bonar Law. Chief among them was Austen Chamberlain.

Austen Chamberlain had modelled himself on his father and that was why he was so unlike him. For two diverse originals, Joseph Chamberlain and Lloyd George for example, have fundamentally more in common than an original and its copy. In a family letter of 1910 Austen wrote, ' Left to myself I do not think I should have done much . . . If I work and persist and fight it is because I am his son, and *noblesse oblige* '. There is the man

in a sentence. The keynote of his character was loyalty: loyalty first and foremost to the protectionist policy which his father had launched; loyalty to the leadership of Balfour in spite of the many occasions when that elusive dialectician caused straightforward tariff reformers to blaspheme; loyalty again on the day when in 1911 he withdrew his claims to the leadership in favour of Bonar Law in order that the party might not have to vote on the issue; for it seems to be agreed that if he had chosen to play his cards as his astuter friends would have played them for him, he would have been elected. And now on this occasion loyalty to Lloyd George. Austen Chamberlain was not, like Churchill or Birkenhead, a natural coalitionist. On the contrary he was a strong party man. Nor is it possible that such a man should have esteemed Lloyd George's personal character. But he felt that the Conservative party had made use of Lloyd George when they needed him and drawn electoral advantage from his personal popularity. He could not bring himself, now that the man was no longer needed by the party, to throw him over. For others as honourable as himself that might be the right course—for Bonar Law who had been eighteen months out of the Cabinet, or Baldwin who had only just entered it; but it could not be right for him, who had been there all the time. By taking the course he chose he sacrificed the virtual certainty of accession to the premiership in the very near future, for Bonar Law could not last. He was in fact a dying man. When he went, no other claim could have competed with that of Austen Chamberlain.

In exalting his virtues one need not underrate his talents. He was one of the most accomplished parliamentarians of his day, speaking effectively on a wide range of subjects, but he had not an original nor perhaps an interesting mind. He leaves no great mark on the pages of history; but if one had to pick from our period one politician, and one only, to illustrate the finest tradition of what a schoolboy would call sportsmanship in the political field, Austen Chamberlain would be the man.

When Lloyd George resigned in September, 1922, he brought to an end an 'innings' unequalled and indeed unapproached in duration since the first Reform Bill. He had held a series of Cabinet offices continuously for only three months less than seventeen years. It was a record of amazing vitality, amazing

adaptability. The former quality no one could refuse to admire: the latter had its less admirable features. Lloyd George had shown again and again a remarkable gift for synchronizing his jumps with those of the cat. And now at last the cat had stolen a march on him. He never held office again.

VII. THREE GENERAL ELECTIONS, 1922-24

BONAR LAW'S electoral programme condensed itself into a single word; he offered 'Tranquillity'. It may have occurred to some that in such a world as the war had left us tranquillity was not to be had for the asking, but at least he would aim at it. In the interests of tranquillity he discarded for the time being from his programme the policy on which he had risen to leadership eleven years before, tariff reform. What he offered was a rest from alarums and excursions, a government that would leave the country alone. 'I do have at the back of my mind', he said, 'a feeling that in a condition so critical as ours the real cure must come from better trade and better industry'. How restful were such platitudes, and the assumption that trade and industry would revive if only the government would sit still and leave them alone. Lloyd George described the Conservative leader as 'honest to the verge of simplicity', with the implication, it would seem, that his own honesty stopped short of that. Baldwin caught the mood of the electorate when he replied, 'If in truth Mr. Bonar Law resembles the portrait his predecessor had drawn of him, then the public will certainly say, "Here is the man for us".'

They did so. They gave the Conservatives a clear majority over all the other parties. 344 out of 615 seats. The Liberals fought as two separate parties. Asquith's Liberals doubled their numbers and rose to 60. The Lloyd George Liberals had their numbers halved and fell to 57. Labour more than doubled its numbers and rose to 142. Some Conservatives, Neville Chamberlain for example, had expected Labour to score even more heavily, for they went into the election the only party unrent by the schisms of coalitionism. Even so, their numbers were sufficient to put them ahead of the Liberals as the official Opposition.

Perhaps the most important ministerial appointment in the new government turned out to be that of Neville Chamberlain as Minister of Health. While Austen had been apprenticed to politics from early manhood Neville had pursued a career resembling

that of his father. He had been a successful man of business and an enterprising Lord Mayor of Birmingham, entering the House of Commons for the first time in 1918 when he had already reached his fiftieth year. As Minister of Health he tackled the housing problem with a long experience of its municipal aspects and carried through parliament a Housing Bill which proved one of the most successful measures of the inter-war period. Avoiding the prodigality of the Addison scheme he gave both to private builders and local authorities a financial support which proved sufficient to get the houses built and discouraged extravagance. The bill served its purpose for many years to come.

Meanwhile Baldwin, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, went to America and secured a settlement of the Anglo-American war-debt. This debt, amounting to nearly £1,000,000,000 had been incurred after the United States had entered the war. So long as America was neutral the British government had to make its American purchases in the ordinary markets of commerce. After the American government had declared war on Germany its credit was at our disposal for purchases in American markets. Much of what we bought was not for our own use but for the use of our allies. The American government preferred to do business that way, perhaps because it thought that its chance of getting back anything lent to the Continental allies was small. So there was the British debt to the American government, debts of France and Italy to Great Britain and also to America, and also 'reparations' as they were called, due under the Treaty of Versailles to Great Britain, France and Italy, a scheme for the payment of which had been fixed up to the latter days of the Coalition government—a subject which the reader has been spared. America with ostentatious magnanimity refused to touch a penny of reparations, but so long as the European belligerents had to pay America it was inevitable that they should try to recoup themselves from Germany.

It was a terrible tangle. The British government, though certainly not the French government, had fairly soon reached the conclusion that 'making Germany pay for the cost of the war' or 'squeezing the German lemon till the pips squeaked' as one of Lloyd George's big business colleagues elegantly put it, was no more than electioneering nonsense. Nothing worth getting was to be got that way. As for the inter-allied debts there

was a financial argument against them, for those who could follow it. It was argued that it would prove more cursed to receive than to pay them, or at any rate that the dislocation of trade such payments would involve would more than offset the value of the payments. What the debtors had received was not money but goods, and they could repay only in goods. But how could they repay if the creditor excluded the only available goods by erecting tariffs against them? And so on. For those who found this line of argument fatiguing there seemed to be a moral argument much simpler and more satisfying. War is an all-out affair, in which each ally gives what he can. We had given more than France in money; France had given more then us in human lives. We could not repay France for her surplus contribution in blood, so was it not almost indecent that we should expect France to repay to us our surplus contribution in money? And as France stood to us, even so and much more so did both Britain and France stand to America, for the American contribution to the casualty lists of the first war was, by comparison with those of Britain and France, quite trifling.

For the first few years after the war nothing was done about these debts; they simply went on increasing by compound interest. Then, early in 1922, Congress demanded that each of her debtors should fix up schemes of repayment. Our reply was the once celebrated Balfour Note. It was not addressed to our American creditor but to our Continental debtors. In it the British government declared that they would have preferred to forego all claims both upon their late allies, and upon Germany for reparations. As, however, they had got to pay America, they were reluctantly compelled to make claims on their debtors, but they would claim no more from their debtors than they were forced to pay to their creditor—Uncle Shylock across the Atlantic.

The Note presented a cast iron case, and yet was an extremely poor piece of statesmanship. Uncle Shylock did not like it, and was in consequence the less inclined to be generous. The Note added quite unnecessarily to Baldwin's difficulties. It should have been issued, if at all, after and not before we had settled with the American government.

Baldwin brought back a settlement which represented a thirty per cent. reduction on the original American demand. Bonar Law thought he could have got better terms himself, and it

may be so. Still, it had to be accepted, and under its terms substantial payments to the richest community in the world were made at regular intervals for the next ten years until the Great Slump brought all such follies to an end. At the same time, or rather soon afterwards, both Great Britain and America fixed up debt settlements with France and Italy on terms very much more generous than America had accorded to Great Britain.

Bonar Law had taken office under sentence of death. He retired in May, 1923, and died before the end of the year. Elected leader of his party when its fortunes had been reduced to a very low ebb, signalised by the loss of three consecutive general elections, he had steered it unobtrusively but very skilfully through the storms of war and post-war and had lived just long enough to preside for a few months over the first Conservative government for seventeen years.

Who was to succeed him? Austen Chamberlain was, by his own decision, out of the running, and that being so, far the most conspicuous figure in the party was Lord Curzon. He had been the most notable Viceroy of India in living memory, member of Lloyd George's war cabinet, and foreign secretary ever since the Treaty of Versailles. He confidently expected the appointment. But it would not do. Whether a figure of such antique grandeur, such stately deportment, would, if he had been a member of the House of Commons, have been a conceivable prime minister in a post war world in which Labour constituted the alternative to Conservatism, is a question which it was not necessary to raise. It sufficed that he was in the House of Lords. The retirement of Lord Salisbury in 1902 marked a date, unrecorded at the time, in the history of our mysterious constitution. Before that date prime ministers had been as often as not members of the House of Lords.* After that date there would be no more of them. Rejecting therefore Austen Chamberlain and Curzon, both of them familiar names since the beginning of the century, the succession passed inevitably to Stanley Baldwin of whom but few had as yet any distinct impression. He was to rule the

* During the seventy years from the Great Reform Bill to the retirement of Salisbury the premiership was held in the House of Lords for 32 years and in the House of Commons for 38.

country for the greater part of the next fourteen years, to be greatly admired and afterwards undeservedly despised. He had not been many months in office before he sprang a surprise on the country.

The primary domestic problem was the persistence of the unemployment figure at a point well over a million. Curious, is it not, how statistics stimulate the imagination. Most people never knew when they were ill until someone invented a machine for recording their temperatures, and few people suffered sleepless nights over the unemployment problem—except of course the unemployed—until unemployment insurance made possible the weekly publication of their numbers. With regard to unemployment Baldwin found himself in a false position. He believed that the most likely remedy would be a protective tariff, but he was prevented from introducing such a tariff during the lifetime of the present parliament by Bonar Law's election pledge that no such tariff would be introduced. The obvious remedy was to dissolve parliament, a step which would also afford an opportunity for bringing back the Conservative Coalitionists, more particularly Austen Chamberlain, the son and heir of tariff reform, into the fold. And so, against the advice of some of his friends, he dissolved parliament in the autumn of 1923 and subjected the country to another election within a year of the last.

The result showed that these friends of his had good reason for their advice. The defence of free trade gave the two Liberal parties an excellent pretext for re-uniting their forces. Asquith and Lloyd George came together again in 1923 just as they had come together exactly twenty years before in opposition to Joseph Chamberlain's campaign after their differences over the South African War. The Liberals gained; Labour gained; the Conservatives lost. The statistics of the election afford an interesting example for those who deplore the rough and ready methods of our political arithmetic. Measured according to the total poll, treating that is to say the whole country as a single constituency, each party secured almost exactly the same percentage of votes as in 1922. To be exact the Conservative poll fell from 38 per cent. to 37.5; the Labour poll rose from 29.2 to 30.7; and the Liberal poll rose from 29.1 to 29.9. Yet in the House the Conservative party fell from 344 to 257; Labour rose from 142 to 192 and the Liberals from 117 to 157. (In each

parliament the addition of a few 'Independents' raises the number to 615).

An interesting and dubious result, but one thing was plain; though the Conservatives remained the largest party, their policy had been defeated, and they would, in the normal course of events, be defeated in the House on a free trade amendment to the Address. Baldwin decided, as the leader of what was still the largest party, not to resign until parliament met, and this gave the organs of the popular press plenty of time to make their readers' flesh creep at the prospect of Labour in office. Baldwin was entreated to combine with Asquith and Asquith with Baldwin in a new coalition to avert such a misfortune. There was never any danger that these eminently sensible statesmen would be led into such foolish courses by the scribes of Fleet Street. A coalition between the author of a protectionist policy and the leading advocate of free trade immediately after an election fought on that very issue would have been as politically objectionable as the once notorious coalition of Fox and North and would have given the supporters of Labour good reason for saying that the 'capitalist' parties would descend to any depth of political turpitude to exclude them from office. Besides, whatever terrors might be in store when Labour should secure an absolute majority, the experiment of a Labour government cribbed, cabined and confined by an anti-socialist majority of 120 could be at worst no more than a harmless experiment. Such a Labour government would find as it were its 'House of Lords' in its own House. It was perhaps expedient that such a new and untried party should make its first essay under such safeguarding conditions.

All fell out as had been forecast. MacDonald moved the traditional amendment to the Address, the Liberals supported it and, as can so seldom happen under modern conditions, the Conservative government fell in the first week of the new parliament.* Ramsay MacDonald, as the leader of the larger of the two opposition parties, became prime minister.

We must retrace our steps a few years to pick up the history of the Labour party from the opening of the war onwards.

* In old days such events were common form, as a government defeated in an election remained in office till the new parliament met and recorded its adverse vote. The practice of a defeated government resigning on the announcement of the result of the election dates from the Gladstone and Disraeli epoch.

When the war broke out the party in the House of Commons consisted of about forty members, five of whom were professed socialists of the Independent Labour Party and the rest trade unionists most of whom had never professed socialism. It will be remembered that at its foundation the party had avoided all mention of socialism and had restricted its aim to the promotion of the interests of Labour. The five socialists had opposed the war whereas the rest of the party, after a momentary hesitation, gave it their support. MacDonald, who had been elected leader in 1911, resigned his leadership and Arthur Henderson, a trade union official who had been a Liberal party agent before he joined the party, took his place. Various Labour members held various ministerial posts in the coalition governments, but it is a remarkable fact and a striking illustration of the solidarity of the movement that the party never allowed its differences on the fundamental issue of the war to produce a schism in its ranks. MacDonald, though he ceased to be leader in the House, retained an official post in the outside organisation and the members who became ministers in a government prosecuting the war continued to meet their pacifist or semi-pacifist colleagues at the annual gatherings of the party. All alike looked forward to reunion and a great future when the war was over.

Indeed there can be no doubt that the war, though for the time being it obscured the independent existence of the party in all eyes but its own, was in the long run of the greatest service to its fortunes. The war, as everyone understood, closed an epoch of history and opened a new one. The terms ' pre-war ' and ' post-war ' became categories of thought on every conceivable subject. In these circumstances it was natural, indeed inevitable, that all who were not temperamentally conservative should feel that Labour's lack of historic tradition would be a positive advantage in the post-war world. ' The old men have ruined the world : it is for the young to rebuild it '. Facile generalizations of this kind were all in favour of a party unencumbered, it might be supposed, by political inhibitions which the war had rendered obsolete. As for Labour's competitor in pre-war years, the Lloyd Georgian variety of Liberalism, where was it now? The Lloyd George of the budget had become the Lloyd George of the ' war lords ' and the ' profiteers '. The so-called Lloyd Georgian Liberals of 1918-22 were hangers-on of the Conservative party,

and their subsequent reunion with the other Liberals was to bring with it not peace but a series of squabbles which destroyed whatever chances the Liberal party may ever have had of regaining its pre-war position.

Vaguely, no doubt, but none the less confidently sensing its future the leaders of the party determined, like their successors in 1945, to have nothing to do with post-war coalitionism. A Labour Party Conference in February, 1918, presided over by Henderson and steered by Sidney Webb, amended the party constitution and adopted a new programme. Hitherto it had been a 'Labour' party as the term was commonly understood, a party of organized Labour, trade unionism, designed to send to parliament a body of weekly wage earners to represent the interests of their fellows and, though it included a few, such as Snowden and MacDonald, who belonged to the 'black-coated' working class, it had not looked further afield than that. Now and henceforth it addressed its appeal to all who 'produce by hand or brain', a formula which would evidently cover the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Nuffield: in fact it proclaimed itself a national party and no longer a class party. At the same time Socialism was for the first time formally adopted as the party programme: 'To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon a basis of common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service'.

The result was no such immediate triumph as rewarded their successes in 1945. Why these two post-war elections went so differently is a point to be considered when we come to the second of them. In 1918 Labour put up about 350 candidates, far more than ever before, and won only 57 seats, a slight numerical improvement, but the pacifists and semi-pacifists, Snowden, MacDonald* and others, who were also the ablest parliamentarians, naturally failed to secure election. The record of the Labour opposition to the Coalition government was very undistinguished. Their first choice of a leader was Adamson, who made no mark. He was succeeded by Clynes, who had done well

* The solidarity of the party is illustrated by the fact that Thomas, who had been a prominent supporter of the war, spoke at one of MacDonald's election meetings in Leicester.

as Minister of Food in the last stage of the war but cut no great figure in debate.

Very different was the state of the party after the election of 1922. Not only were its numbers more than doubled. New parliamentary types, of altogether different calibre from the stolid inarticulate trade unionists of 1918-22, reinforced its ranks. Snowden and MacDonald were back again. Aristocratic desertions from Liberalism contributed a Ponsonby, a Trevelyan and two Buxtons. Most significant of all, a contingent of twenty-nine 'Left-wingers' had arrived from Scotland. Snowden tells us that all these twenty-nine except one were teetotallers, an alarming fact, suggesting that in one respect at any rate they were not completely representative of their constituents.

The first duty of the party at the opening of the new parliament was to elect a leader, for in this respect the methods of the Labour party differ from those of the older parties, and leaders do not carry on automatically from one parliament to another. There were two candidates, Clynes and MacDonald, standing respectively, it might seem, for safety and adventure. It was a near thing. Both Snowden and Thomas, who knew MacDonald well, supported Clynes, but the Clydesiders, who knew him only by hearsay, were enthusiastic for MacDonald. He was elected by 61 votes to 56. Those who afterwards regretted the decision point out that MacDonald would not have been elected but for the absence of twenty trade unionists at a committee of their union. If this be so, it merely shows that these twenty members of parliament showed little sense of the relative importance of the two duties that simultaneously claimed their attention.

What manner of man was this Ramsay MacDonald whose career was, up to a point, so sensational a triumph, and who lived to be reviled by the party he had done so much to create with a bitterness and a maliciousness happily unique in British political history?*

He was born at Lossiemouth in 1866, the illegitimate son of a peasant girl, and assumed his father's surname though apparently he never knew him. In boyhood he experienced extreme poverty, but it was the wholesome and, for those who are not crushed by

* McNeill Weir's *Tragedy of Ramsey MacDonald*, the fullest presentation of the post 1931 Labour view of their 'lost leader', is an amazingly malicious book. It presents a picture of a cold blooded schemer and hypocrite which no one possessed of ordinary common sense could accept, even if he wished to do so.

it, the bracing poverty of the countryside, not the sordid poverty of slums. Physically robust and mentally precocious he set out, as so many ambitious Scots lads have done before and since, to seek his fortune in the South. After several false starts and mishaps which would have broken a less hardy spirit he secured a post as secretary to a kindly Liberal M.P., Thomas Lough. He was early attracted to socialism and was a member successively or simultaneously of all the three socialist societies that figure in the first chapter of this book. The Webbs did not think much of him and refused his application for a lectureship at their new London School of Economics on the ground that he was ' not good enough '. He got on better with Keir Hardie, and we have already met him at the very birth, or more strictly the conception, of the Labour party as secretary of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900.

In 1896 he had married the daughter of a university professor, who brought with her to her marriage more money that the daughters of professors usually command. Henceforth he was secure from financial worry. He had married into the cultured middle class, which was where, in spite of his humble birth, he naturally belonged. Elected to the House of Commons in 1906 he rapidly made his mark as the most effective parliamentarian of the new party, for Keir Hardie, essentially the founder of the party, was never an effective parliamentarian. It was observed that Balfour always made a point of listening to MacDonald's speeches with respectful attention. This may have been because they interested him. On the other hand, it may have been done just to annoy the Liberals, for Balfour was fond of professing the view that the important feature of the 1906 election was not the four hundred Liberal members but the fifty representatives of Labour.

MacDonald presented at all stages of his career the façade of a great man. He looked extremely distinguished ; no one could ever mistake him for anyone else. He was obviously a man of strict principles and high ideals, and he had at his command an inexhaustible output of emotional oratory and emotional journalism. He seemed to be just what was wanted for a leader. His fellow members of parliament appreciated his political dexterity ; the rank and file in the provinces purred under the spell of his oratory. Terribly unreadable this oratory today, but so is most

oratory when reduced to the cold storage of print. MacDonald's audiences consisted very largely of people who had given up going to church or chapel and thereby cut out of their diet a staple food more necessary to their systems than they realised, namely sermons. How then could they fail to respond to passages like this, from a speech delivered at Bristol in 1923. After something about the Bedouins, which I will not quote, he continues:

'But, my friends, I see no end of the journey. We have come, we shall journey, and we shall go on, and our children coming after us will go on with their journey, and their children will go on with theirs. But, my friends, what you and I have to take care of is that the journey is both onward and upward.'

It is, after all, not so very far removed from the eloquence with which Mr. Chadband, after being well primed with hot buttered muffins, improved the occasion in Mrs. Snagsby's back parlour.* Mr. Chadband was unfortunately a humbug. MacDonald was not, unless it be thought that he humbugged himself along with his audience.

For it is when we leave the Bedouins and come down to what are called brass tacks that we get into difficulties. What was MacDonald's policy? He embraced socialism because he had, under the influence of crude ideas derived from science, abandoned the faith of his fathers, and he was the sort of man that cannot get on without a religion. But it is difficult to discover in the maze of his writings and speeches any hard core of socialistic doctrine. He certainly condemned every kind of revolution, syndicalist or otherwise. He had no grasp of economic theory and was not much interested in it. Though born in poverty he had no more direct experience of the world of organized labour than Balfour or Asquith, and much less than statesmen who had graduated in the school of industry, like Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. No doubt he earnestly desired to promote the welfare of the working classes, to alleviate poverty, but what statesman worthy of the name in his generation did not? He may have desired it more earnestly than many others, for he was emphatically a good man in the simplest sense of the word. But it is difficult

* Here is a sample of Chadband for purposes of comparison. 'My friends, we have partaken in moderation of the comforts that have been provided for us. May this house live upon the fatness of the land; may corn and wine be plentiful therein; may it grow, may it thrive, may it proceed, may it advance, may it press forward . . .' Dickens, *Bleak House*, Ch. XIX.

to discover in his doctrine anything that would have prevented his being a Liberal, or even one of the wicked Tories he was so fond of denouncing. Moreover he found the idealistic type of Liberal or Tory, broadminded men of birth and breeding, the George Wyndhams, the Trevelyans, the Buxtons, much more congenial than the hard-boiled narrow-minded trade unionists or the fanatics of left wing. He was a natural coalitionist, continually seeking and finding contacts outside his party—we cannot say outside his class, for he was a classless man, a nobleman by instinct, a bourgeois by habit and a proletarian only by origin. And yet a vague and meaningless set of gestures, a waving of the red flag, had become second nature with him. Lord Elton, who greatly admired him, sums him up in a phrase: he was 'a moderate with the equipment of a fanatic.'

During the war he was commonly regarded as a pacifist, but he was not. He was something much more dangerous. The real pacifists, the men who condemned war as such, were a comparatively harmless sect, like teetotallers and vegetarians, a peculiar people who would make few converts. MacDonald did not condemn war. He condemned this particular war. Within ten days of its declaration he wrote an article attacking the British policy which had brought the nation into the war in terms widely quoted by German propaganda. Nevertheless he held that the war, once started, must be won, and proceeded to say and do everything in his power to make the winning of it more difficult. He founded a body called the Union of Democratic Control, where his associates were mostly not Labour men but Left-wing Liberals, and their purpose seemed to be to discredit every war measure of the government.

Whatever one may think of his wartime activities, there can be no question that he displayed persistence and courage in the pursuit of them. He was the most hated man in the country. Lloyd George had been the same in the far milder and briefer crisis of the South African War, and it has often been said that Lloyd George's pro-Boerism was the foundation of his fortunes. When a man has shown courage in an unpopular cause people, at any rate British people, have a wholesome way of forgetting the cause and remembering the courage. It was, one may conjecture, MacDonald's war record much more than his misty socialism that secured him the support of the Clydesiders in 1922

and his consequent election to the leadership. They had not necessarily been opponents of the war, though some of them had been, and many of them had been involved in the savage wartime strikes of the Clydeside. But they were men who felt that they were 'up against' things in general. MacDonald had been 'up against' virtually the whole country throughout the war and had borne himself proudly, like a man. He was, they thought, the man for them. Neither they nor anyone else realised, of course, that in selecting a leader for the 1922 parliament they were in effect choosing the first Labour prime minister, though had they known this they would not have chosen differently. But they entirely mistook the man they chose.

When MacDonald came to form his cabinet he discovered that his party did not contain sufficient men of ministerial calibre, and sought some recruits from outside. Lord Chelmsford, for example, an ex-Viceroy of India, who had never belonged to the Labour party, was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. This was not very gratifying to the rank and file, but it was nothing to the trouble that followed over what may be called questions of etiquette. Should Labour men wear court dress on the appropriate occasions? Should they accept invitations to social functions organized by members of the capitalist parties? This latter question was the more urgent as Lady Astor, the first woman member of parliament and a great figure in society, seemed to be organizing a sort of 'social offensive' against them. They were positively bombarded with invitations. All this was most welcome to MacDonald, who wanted his men to behave themselves like gentlemen, and was anathema to the Pharisees of the Left who wanted to behave as no party possessing the government of the country had ever behaved before.* They took as their precedent the Irish Nationalist party of Parnell, which refused to fraternize socially with its British fellow members. But the analogy was a false one, for the Parnellites claimed to be 'foreigners' and their sole objective was to get themselves and

* The word Pharisee is entirely appropriate, for the word in its original context meant those who separated themselves from the vulgar herd of Jews who conformed to foreign ways. The best account of all this from a Left wing standpoint, and of much else in the history of the Labour party from 1923 to 1931, is to be found in *The Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* by John Scanlon, a violent but good-tempered and very amusing book.

their country separated from Great Britain. No doubt the wilder spirits thought MacDonald wrong in consenting to form a government at all in the circumstances of 1924. In their view Labour should have waited until it enjoyed an absolute majority, which it would use, apparently, to suspend parliament and carry through a revolution by dictatorial decrees.

However, the King's government had to be carried on and these burning questions of etiquette were left to find such solutions as each member individually chose to apply to them. Snowden became Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was, after MacDonald, much the most distinguished figure in the Labour movement. Their careers had run curiously parallel. Both had been propagandists of the I.L.P. since its earliest days. Both had entered the House of Commons in 1906, lost their seats in 1918 and returned to the House in 1922. Neither of them were really socialists in any acceptable sense of the word. One might have expected that they would be friends as well as allies in the cause, but they were not. Whatever MacDonald may have thought of Snowden, Snowden always disliked and never lost an opportunity of depreciating MacDonald. They were indeed men of very different types; MacDonald handsome, emotional, warm-hearted and woolly-minded, Snowden a cripple, clear-headed, cold, intense and bitter. MacDonald wanted to elevate the poor, Snowden to pull down the rich. Yet this cannot be a complete account of Snowden, for many men of good judgement outside the Labour party, while they dismissed MacDonald as a windbag, found something admirable and lovable in the crabbed little Yorkshireman, and it is a curious fact that the Labour movement after 1931, while condemning MacDonald to the lowest depths of the socialist inferno, has dealt much more mercifully with Snowden's reputation though in many respects his behaviour on the fatal occasion might seem, as we shall see in due course, so much less forgivable.

Snowden's budget illustrated the fact that, whatever might be the quality of his socialism, he was a bigoted free trader. During the war the purity of our free trade had been impaired by the introduction of certain protective duties, called the McKenna duties from the name of their author, on certain imports such as foreign motor cars. Snowden swept these away, to the embarrassment and annoyance of many Labour men who

represented constituencies in which the industries thus protected were important employers of labour. The popular part of his budget was the reduction or abolition of duties on tea, coffee, cocoa and sugar, thus contributing to the good old Radical ideal of the ' free breakfast table '. He so arranged matters that the next budget would have a deficit to cover. No doubt he forecast, correctly, that the responsibility for covering that deficit would fall to a ' capitalist ' successor.

The only Clydesider or Left-wing man—the terms were almost interchangeable in this parliament—in the cabinet was Wheatley, who went to the Ministry of Health and scored the only legislative success of this brief government, a Housing Act which, after some drastic amendment at the hands of the opposition parties, proved a useful supplement to Chamberlain's Act of the previous year.

The Labour party, unlike other British parties, elects an Executive Committee to manage its affairs and, while MacDonald chose his cabinet mainly from the Right, the party elected an executive of the Left on which Lansbury, editor of the *Daily Herald* and a fine old Christian socialist, was the leading spirit. This Committee summoned minister after minister to appear before it and answer for their shortcomings. Henderson, for example, was censured because he had not used his powers as Home Secretary to reinstate the police strikers who had been expelled from the force after the strike of 1919. The fact was that the back benchers and the front bench were out for different things. Maxton, a charming person and a revolutionist who endeared himself to men of all parties, declared that socialism was ' no game but a very definite and bitter class war, which could not be fought with kid gloves '. MacDonald, on the other hand, wanted the very name of socialism to be dropped as a party label ' because there is a sort of bookish association about socialism '. Let the party be called Labour, ' and then you will have a heart and spirit that in some sort of mystical way associates yourself and the great simple heart of the common people, with all its failures and all its divine potentialities and possibilities '. This sort of talk was rather exasperating to Conservatives, but much more exasperating to the men who had chosen MacDonald as their leader.

However there were other and greater matters afoot than these party discontents. MacDonald had decided to be his own foreign

secretary. Foreign affairs were what really interested him, and he was well equipped to deal with them. Ever since his marriage had provided the means, foreign travel had been his special delight, and travel with him had been no mere casual globe-trotting and sight-seeing. He had set himself to establish contacts with foreign statesmen of all shades of opinion. Whatever his deficiencies as a socialist there was no British public man at that date with a better claim to be called a good European, and it so happened that he took up his task just at the moment when circumstances enabled him to score a resounding triumph.

In 1921 a plan for reparations payments from Germany had been fixed up and payments began to be made. Towards the end of 1922 the Germans, for good or bad reasons, defaulted, whereupon the French government of Poincaré sent troops over the Rhine into the Ruhr valley and occupied this great centre of German industry. As might have been expected, the occupation of the Ruhr proved, from an economic standpoint, a costly failure. The German workers refused to produce for their foreign task-masters. They were supported in their idleness by funds raised from the rest of Germany and this was one of the causes of the catastrophic depreciation of the German mark, which ruined the most stable and conservative classes of German society and prepared the way for the Nazis. Meanwhile Curzon, as foreign secretary in Baldwin's government, had suggested that the United States might be willing, as a neutral suffering from the consequences of the Franco-German feud, to lend a hand in getting reparations started afresh. The result was the appointment of an international committee under the chairmanship of the American General Dawes to investigate Germany's financial position and produce a reparations scheme based on economic facts and not on political passions. The essential feature of the Dawes Report was a proposal to establish in Germany a permanent international Transfer Committee to which reparations should be paid. The committee was to fix the amounts that Germany could and should pay at any given time and to be responsible for the transfer of Germany's payments into the currencies of the creditor states.

There were the cards in MacDonald's hands and he played them in masterly fashion. He had already established friendly relations with the austere and ruthless Poincaré, a task in which

Curzon had conspicuously failed. Then a French general election expressed disapproval of the Ruhr adventure by overthrowing Poincaré in favour of Herriot, a Radical of the MacDonald school of thought. After entertaining Herriot at Chequers* he was able to issue invitations to a London Conference which arrived at an agreement with American financial houses for a substantial loan to Germany. For just as, I understand, bees have to be given honey before they will consent to produce it, so, under the Dawes plan, a preliminary loan to Germany was a prerequisite of the new scheme of reparation payments. The Germans were then invited to the conference and the Dawes plan was accepted by all concerned, France undertaking to complete the evacuation of the Ruhr within a year from that date.

As one looks back on these events after a second German war one does not feel very greatly exhilarated, but that was not the mood of the time. The men of 1924 felt as we should feel in 1950 if the 'iron curtain' were drawn aside. 'For the first time in five years,' said a writer in *The Round Table* for September, 1924, 'it seems reasonable to expect some alleviation of the plagues that have tormented Europe'. The man who had been hated above all others for opposing the war was now acclaimed above all others for achieving the real peace which President Wilson had failed to achieve in 1919.

Unfortunately MacDonald had other international fish in fry at this time. As soon as he was installed in office he had reversed Lord Curzon's Russian policy, and had despatched a note recognizing the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics as *de jure* rulers of Russia and inviting it to send plenipotentiaries to London to discuss the war debts incurred towards Great Britain by the previous Russian government and to consider the means of re-establishing commercial relations between the two countries. The project in itself, as an attempt to break away from the barren anti-Bolshevism of the previous régime, was to be commended, but most people outside the Labour party awaited the result with anxiety. It was well known that the Bolsheviks were desperately anxious for a loan, and many feared that MacDonald, extending

* No prime minister ever made fuller use of Chequers than MacDonald. His colleagues and his party said he went there to get away from them. That may well be, but there can be no doubt that he enjoyed the life of a country gentleman in a historic 'seat' for its own sake. As I have already said, he was a nobleman by instinct.

his international magnanimity to the point of credulity, would be prepared to oblige them. However, the Opposition elicited a promise from the prime minister that on no account would the British government guarantee a Russian loan.

When, two months later, and at the very end of the summer session, the Russian conference completed its labours, the projected treaty was found to contain a proposal for a loan after all, though it was so hedged about with conditions which the Bolsheviks were unlikely to fulfil that nothing was likely to come of it. Still, the mere project of loan to these bloodstained enemies of our civilization and religion, paper project though it might be, was as offensive to Conservatives as it was delightful to what have since been called the ' fellow travellers '. Opposition flared up. It was plain that the Russian treaty might bring the government down in the autumn session.

It was very tiresome for the prime minister that, just when all his energies were required for these high matters, he should be distracted with talk of biscuits. A certain wealthy friend, a manufacturer of biscuits, realising that prime ministers have to spend more money than they are paid, had given MacDonald a handsome car with an endowment for its maintenance. Soon afterwards the wealthy friend received a baronetcy, and let it be said at once that he was a man entirely suitable for such an honour, and that his name had been on a list of such suitable persons before he made his presentation to the prime minister. Still the coincidence was unfortunate. Exchange of gifts has been a pleasing feature of social intercourse since the days of Homer but there are times when, owing to the deplorable tendencies of other people's minds, it is open to misinterpretation, and this was certainly one of them. When in the middle of one of the prime minister's finest flights of eloquence some rude person suddenly shouted ' biscuits ' the eloquence stopped short and collapsed. Opponents in the House and in provincial audiences discovered with delight that the great man had, unlike most politicians, a very thin skin. A Churchill or a Lloyd George would have delighted in such an interruption, would have picked up the biscuit and returned it with far more dazzling velocity and deadly aim. Even a Baldwin or an Asquith would have good humouredly shaken off the offensive missile and proceeded unperturbed. Such is human fallibility that we all drop biscuits from

time to time, and manage to get over it. For MacDonald the biscuits were more than he could bear: they reduced him to the ignominious condition of a schoolmaster who cannot keep a class of naughty children in order.

In the end it was neither the Russians nor the biscuits that brought down the government, but the Campbell case. J. R. Campbell was editor of an obscure communist paper which published an article urging soldiers to disobey orders rather than shoot their fellow countrymen when on strike—a dilemma with which the soldiers of the British army were in no immediate danger of being confronted. The Attorney-General decided to prosecute and the preliminary steps were taken. This irritated various back benchers and a few days after the end of the session, i.e., in August, the prosecution was withdrawn, a very unusual procedure. Campbell, however, far from being grateful for the turn events had taken, roundly declared that the prosecution had been withdrawn as a result of pressure brought to bear by left-wing members on the prime minister and by the prime minister on the Attorney-General. There seemed at any rate a case for believing that improper pressure had been brought to bear on the Attorney-General, who in these matters acts on his own responsibility as the prosecuting authority. The Attorney-General in the subsequent debate, in the autumn session, denied that he had been subjected to any such pressure. He said he had decided on his own account to drop the prosecution when he found that Campbell had a good war record and was, in various other respects, an unsuitable object for a prosecution of this kind. The prime minister's account of his own part in the matter was provocative and obscure. The case raised an important point of principle and could have been cleared up by an enquiry. This was what the opposition parties demanded, and not unreasonably. The prime minister resisted their demand and declared that, if the government was defeated on the motion for an enquiry, he would dissolve parliament. The opposition pressed their motion to a division. The government was defeated, and parliament dissolved. Whatever the result of the election, there was no doubt in any quarter that it would terminate the existence of the first Labour government.

Why did MacDonald choose to bring his government to an end on this issue? It may be that, in schoolboy language, he ' lost his

wool '. Very likely too he had come to the conclusion that, from the point of view of the party's future, the experiment of a minority government, ' Labour in chains ', had gone on long enough. They had carried a popular budget and a useful Housing Act. Far more than this, they, or rather he, had settled the dreadful reparations question. To go on longer would only be to fare worse. On the opposition side, each party had its own reasons for wishing to bring the nine months experiment of Labour in office to an end. The Conservatives felt that, with the powerful support of the Campbell case, the Russians and the biscuits, they could win back all, and more than all, the majority they had lost at the previous election. And so it turned out. The Liberals were heartily sick of maintaining in office by their votes a government which, in order to convince the world that it was not a protegé of Liberalism, did nothing but revile and abuse its benefactors. The Liberals, some one said, were the patient oxen drawing the Labour chariot, only to be sacrificed for their pains at the end of the journey. And so, also, it turned out.

One more point before we pass on to the general election. The prime minister and the back benchers at the end of the first Labour government were in a state of bitter mutual disillusionment. Why then did the party retain MacDonald as its leader? The answer to this question is to be found by asking another: what was the alternative to MacDonald? The other senior men, all men of the Right wing, Snowden, Henderson, Thomas, were open to the same objections as MacDonald, and could command far less support among the ' floating vote ', the great body of the unattached, which decides the results of elections. On the Left wing there was Wheatley,* an able man no doubt; but a Wheatley-led party, whatever support it might command on the Clyde or in the coal fields, would never in the foreseeable future secure a parliamentary majority. The party stuck to MacDonald because he alone could win elections for them. But henceforth they had no excuse for pretending they did not know him. If, when the party returned to power in 1929, he led them, still waving the red flag, up the garden path to the Right, they had only themselves to blame for the result.

* He died in 1930, after having been excluded from the second Labour government.

To return to 1924. The electors returned 413 Conservatives. Labour dropped from 193 to 151. The Liberals lost over a hundred seats and were reduced to 40. They rose to 60 in 1929 but thereafter fell to a mere dozen or so. Henceforth the Liberal party was merely an electoral nuisance, blurring the verdict of the electorate. For the fundamental question at each British election is ' Do you want A, or B, the only two parties capable of providing a government? ' Those who voted Liberal said in effect ' I want neither ', which is not a useful answer.* No doubt it is a good thing to have a sprinkling of Independents in the House, and the Liberals were in fact Independents, for they seldom acted together as a party, some inclining to the Conservative and others to the Labour side, but the candidatures of several hundred Liberals, ninety per cent. of them defeated and perhaps half of these producing results in which the elected member secured a minority of votes cast was, as I have said, an electoral nuisance.

There was one very curious feature about this election. A few days before polling day the Foreign Office published a communication which it had despatched to Rakovsky, the Russian ambassador, subjoined to which was the celebrated Zinoviev letter. This was a document which, if genuine, had been sent out by Zinoviev, the head of the communist propaganda department of the Russian government, to the communists of Great Britain, urging them to work for the violent overthrow of the British constitution. The Foreign Office had decided to publish the letter because another copy of it was in the possession of the proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, who would certainly not keep it under a bushel till the election was over. Whether the letter was a genuine Moscow product or the work of anti-communist forgers is a question which, oddly enough, has never been conclusively answered one way or the other. No one disputes that Zinoviev was in the habit of addressing the subjects of foreign governments in this manner. Labour apologists said at the time, and have gone on saying since, that the Red Letter, as it was called, exercised a devastating effect on the result of the election. Snowden says so in his autobiography and then, a few pages later, says that it had no influence in his own constituency. Probably he was a better judge of what

* At this point the reader may say, why not introduce some other system of voting, such as ' the alternative vote '? Without entering on a discussion which would occupy too much space I will simply say that I am against any such system.

happened in his own constituency than of what happened elsewhere. The strongest evidence that the Red Letter did not take many votes away from Labour is the fact that the Labour party actually polled a million more votes in this election than in the previous one. Why then did the number of their successful candidates drop by forty? Because the Liberals put up much fewer candidates. The previous election, with the free trade issue in the foreground, had keyed them up to a great effort. Now they had fallen back and contested only the seats they thought they had some chance of winning. That deprived Labour of the chance of winning so many seats as a result of a split 'capitalist' vote. In fact, Red Letter or no Red Letter, the result of the total poll was very gratifying to the Labour party. Very few parties have increased their total poll as a result of a period in office.

However that might be, Baldwin was in again and this time it would be for five years. The small but distinguished group of Coalition Conservatives returned to the fold, Austen Chamberlain becoming foreign secretary. At the same time there returned to the Conservative fold an even more distinguished sheep who had been astray not for two years only but for twenty. Churchill had lost his seat in the 1922 election and had been out of parliament for two years. This was perhaps a good thing, as it enabled him to change his uniform off the stage. His sun had set in the north, at Dundee, a Liberal sun, and after two years 'wandering with the antipodes' rose in the south, at Epping, a Conservative. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new government. It is curious to reflect that the five years during which he held this office constitutes practically the only part of his career, apart from his first three years in parliament as a very young man and previous to his joining Neville Chamberlain's government in 1939, in which he can be reckoned a member of the Conservative party. From 1903 to 1924 he was first a Liberal and then a Lloyd Georgian. From 1930 to 1939 he was an Independent Conservative.

VIII. BALDWIN'S SECOND GOVERNMENT, 1924-29

THE favourable wind which had wafted MacDonald to greatness as an international statesman in 1924 continued to bless the efforts of Austen Chamberlain in 1925 with the result that he became one of the authors of the famous Treaty of Locarno and was awarded the rare honour of a Garter. The series of events we have to describe arose out of a controversy about the League of Nations and its Covenant. What was this Covenant? It was an idealistic and yet also a very cautious document. The idealism was on the surface. The very terms 'Covenant' and 'League' had a certain poetry about them, suggesting a Puritan ancestry such as President Wilson himself could claim. There had been long ago a Solemn League and Covenant which was a very religious affair. The caution became apparent when one looked into the detail of the document. It laid down the principle that any nation which resorted to war without giving time for the League to invoke arbitration or at least to publish to the world an impartial statement of the matter in dispute, with proposals for its peaceful solution, should be regarded as a common enemy. At this point the Council or the Assembly of the League could 'recommend' members of the League to declare war on the common enemy, but these bodies could go no further than that, for each member was a sovereign state in unimpaired control of its own foreign policy. Even as regards measures short of war, 'sanctions' as they were rather oddly called, a majority voting for sanctions had no right to call upon those who voted against such a policy to implement it. After all, every member of the League was free to resign its membership, and the act of resignation did not make the resigning state a 'common enemy'. All this was natural and inevitable, for the authors of the Covenant had been faced with the task of combining incompatible principles, the principle of absolute sovereignty of the member states and the principle which came to be called 'collective security'; and the latter principle had been sacrificed to the former.

In these circumstances some held that the terms of the Covenant

went dangerously far, that they imposed, or at any rate suggested, obligations which would prove a snare and a delusion to those who put their trust in them, because, when it came to the point, the obligations would not be fulfilled. Others held that the Covenant did not go far enough, that it was full of gaps (as indeed it was) and that what was needed was to stop up the gaps and, as someone said, 'put teeth into the League'. The view predominating in Britain and still more in the overseas Dominions was that the real security for peace was to be found in the wisdom and moderation of the various states and that the function of the League was to enable international difficulties and possible threats to peace to be discussed in a co-operative manner and reasonable solutions found for them; and that, where the terms of the Covenant went beyond this, they were unwise, would prove inoperative, and should be modified. But in France, and in Poland and Czechoslovakia, both allies of France and likely to be endangered by a German revival, the opposite view prevailed, a view supported also by a well-meaning organization in this country called the League of Nations Union. These wanted a more cogent Covenant, by which all members would be pledged, on any outbreak of war, to participate actively on the side which the League declared to be in the right.

A scheme of this kind, called the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, had been produced in 1923 by a committee of the League under the chairmanship of Lord Robert Cecil, a son of Lord Salisbury, the former Conservative prime minister, and a leading light of the League of Nations Union. It was rejected, on behalf of Great Britain, by MacDonald during his brief premiership in the following year. MacDonald, however, was rightly not content with a gesture of mere negation. Immediately after rejecting the Draft Treaty he attended a meeting of the Assembly of the League in company with the French prime minister, Herriot, and under the impetus given by their speeches the task was undertaken afresh. The result of this second effort was known as the Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes.

The Protocol aimed at stopping up the gaps in the Covenant and in this it certainly succeeded. Its purpose was to abolish aggressive war by creating a system under which every international dispute should be decided by judicial or arbitral means

and all members of the League were to be under an obligation to go to war with any states which refused to accept such awards. This was, or would have been, an international revolution indeed.

France ratified the Protocol at once and so did a number of small states of the kind much in need of protection and not likely to be called upon to bear an important part in the task of protecting others. In Britain, however, the scheme was condemned not only by the new Conservative government but also by Lloyd George and by the *New Statesman*. A writer in the quarterly *Round Table* put the British view in a nutshell when he wrote: 'It has never been any part of British policy to sign a blank cheque . . . There is all the difference in the world between the influence of the British Empire being thrown into the scale at Geneva or elsewhere in accordance with the deliberate views of its own statesmen, and its being used at the discretion of five arbitrators sitting at Geneva.' This says all that need be said. Europe might, with greater wisdom, have avoided the second great war; it could not have insured itself against such a war by a document like the Protocol, for its peoples had not yet reached the supernational stage of development which the Protocol assumed.

So Austen Chamberlain had to slay the Protocol as MacDonald had slain its predecessor, but he too pointed forward to another effort. Would it not be possible to apply the principle of the Protocol to a single limited yet all-important problem, the Franco-German problem? Stresemann, the first statesman of any calibre produced by post-war Germany, had made a suggestion which Chamberlain warmly supported, that France and Germany, Belgium and Great Britain should recognize the finality of the present western frontier of Germany. Briand, the French foreign minister, at once raised the point that France could not disinterest herself in the security of her allies on Germany's eastern frontier, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Indeed, the suggested guarantee in the west immediately lowered the political barometer in the east, Poland in particular resenting the suggestion that her own German frontier was less axiomatic than that of France. The implication was, none the less, in accord with the facts as understood in Britain. Alsace and Lorraine were regarded as French by right, whereas the Polish corridor and the neutralization of Danzig were experiments which might or might not

stand the test of time. We were prepared to guarantee the former, but not the latter.

The Conference which met at Locarno in October, 1925, had therefore to deal with two frontiers in separate treaties. France, Germany, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia, the states with the frontiers affected, undertook in no case to go to war with one another but to invoke arbitration in its place, and abide by its decisions. Great Britain and Italy guaranteed that this procedure should be observed as regards the western frontier; France similarly guaranteed the eastern settlement.

The Locarno conference was made the occasion of a variety of festivities expressive of the inauguration of a new era of peace and its proceedings were followed in England with enthusiasm. Less optimistic persons remarked that it involved Great Britain in a very hazardous commitment. True, we had refused to guarantee an eastern frontier in which we did not much believe, but could east and west be kept apart? The 1914 war had not originated in a western quarrel, but had none the less begun with a western invasion. What we had now done was what we had always refused to do before 1914 except in the special case of Belgium. We had pledged ourselves in advance to take part in any prospective Franco-German war, on one side or the other, and as there was as yet no Hitler visible and France had recently been so rampageous over the Ruhr we were far from certain on which side we were most likely to find ourselves. On which side, for example, should we have rightly placed ourselves if the Locarno arrangement had been in force at the time of the Franco-German war of 1870?—a question not very easily answered. Of course, if the Locarno treaty really did turn out to mark the beginning of the ' Great Peace ', then it was all well worth while, but on the morning after the Locarno night before we did not feel so certain of this. The British people have great difficulty in believing in extremes of wickedness, a fact which was to put them at a disadvantage later on in dealing with the Nazis; but they find it equally difficult to believe in extremes of goodness. They expect people, especially foreigners, to go on behaving very much as they have always behaved.

Two events were to follow Locarno as its natural corollaries. First the Allies were to withdraw their troops from one of the three districts of the German Rhineland which, under the terms

of Versailles, were to be in allied occupation respectively for five, ten, and fifteen years. This withdrawal was some months overdue. It had been postponed because France had claimed, and very properly, that Germany had not on her side fulfilled all that the treaty demanded of her. It was now carried out, with a suitable exchange of compliments.

The other item on the Locarno programme was the admission of Germany as a member of the League and a permanent member of its Council. About admission to the League there was no question, but over Germany's admission to a permanent seat on the Council, which implied an equality with the victor Great Powers and a superiority in status over all other members, an unseemly quarrel arose. Poland claimed a permanent seat also, supported by France. So did Spain and Brazil. Germany's admission had to be postponed while new rules for admission to the Council were considered, rules which saved the face of Poland and Spain—for Brazil withdrew from the League in dudgeon—without actually allotting them permanent seats. None the less, Germany was admitted in 1926 and the speech made on this occasion by Briand is said to have brought tears of emotion into the unlikely eyes of the shorthand reporters.

' Those who indulge in irony and detractation at the expense of the League of Nations ', he said, ' and proclaim that it is doomed to perish, what will they think now? . . . Peace for Germany and for France. That means that we have done with the long series of terrible wars which have stained the pages of history . . . Henceforth our road is to be one of peace and progress . . .'

Yet there was an element of make-believe, a suppression of inconvenient facts, about all this, as Briand very well knew. The Covenant laid down that any state admitted to the League must be proved to have fulfilled its existing international obligations. Germany had notoriously not fulfilled its disarmament obligations under the Treaty of Versailles. For five years past General von Seekt, in this matter the fore-runner of Hitler, had been evading them by every kind of camouflage. He had been doing for Germany what Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, famous in our own century as the names of German battleships, did for Prussia after her defeat at the hands of Napoleon a hundred and fifteen years before. The Inter-Allied Disarmament Control Commission, the body entrusted with the supervision of Germany's

disarmament, had prepared a long report specifying in detail Germany's evasions of her obligations. This report was simply ignored and suppressed. It was not at all what the diplomatists of Locarno wanted to read about, and the 'Locarno spirit' must at all costs be preserved, even if its preservation involved a large dose of what afterwards came to be called wishful thinking. What was more, the thankless labours of the Control Commission were now brought to an end. The armaments of a member of the Council of the League could hardly be subjected to the insult of foreign supervision.

The four years following Locarno have been called the period of recovery and, though the recovery proved to lack solid foundations, these years were free from any international catastrophe such as marked nearly all the other years of the inter-war period. The three great powers of Western Europe were held together in reasonable amity by their three foreign ministers, Briand, Stresemann and Chamberlain. Briand was, however, regarded by many Frenchmen as a sentimental optimist, building an imaginary security for France on the assumed goodwill of an imaginary Germany—and these many Frenchmen were quite right. As for Stresemann, what had happened suited him very well. He had got the French out of the Ruhr, and as for the reparations Germany now had to pay, they were far more than covered by the money which flowed into Germany from abroad, mostly from America. For the initial loan of the London Agreement proved a mere foretaste of favours to come. America was enjoying the unprecedented prosperity associated with the name of President Coolidge. American money sought investment and the economic reconstruction of Germany seemed a profitable investment. With this assistance Germany created the most up-to-date industrial plant in the world. A few years later it would be all ready for Hitler to switch it over to the production of munitions of war. Finally, by joining the League Stresemann had got rid of the Disarmament Commission. He was no Briand. He was widely denounced in his own country for his meekness in collaborating with the authors of the unforgivable Treaty of Versailles, but he could put up with that. Actually, as his papers since published show, he was a thorough realist, biding his time and fooling the world with peace-talk till Germany should be ready for revenge. Like von Seekt, but more subtly, he was a fore-runner of Hitler.

As for Chamberlain, his reputation reached its peak with Locarno and thereafter slowly declined. At the end of his five years there was a general impression, based on minor transactions which we have not space to record, that he had not been a successful foreign secretary, and Baldwin's undertaking to retain him in that office if he won the 1929 election was not well received. Actually the Conservatives lost the election and Henderson, the Labour man, went to the foreign office. He proved a failure as foreign secretary. So did his successors in the National Government, Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare. What then was the matter with all these eminent men? The matter was something we mentioned on an earlier page, the size of the events they had to deal with. The current was against them and moved faster than any feats of swimming they could achieve. By the time we reach Sir Samuel Hoare and 1935 Hitler was firmly in the saddle, openly rearming at full speed, and Mussolini was invading Abyssinia.

But our narrative is still in the twenties, and the appalling thirties were unforeseen. None the less the world was still the wicked old world in which force was the only ultimate argument. What had we been doing with our forces? Ever since the end of the first war we had indulged in an orgy of unilateral (or, in better English, 'one-sided') disarmament. Conscription had gone at once. The 'war to end war' had been won and, as the greater includes the less, it was clearly a war to end conscription. We were grieved that France did not follow our example and frequently annoyed her by telling her so. The Air Force was reduced by the Lloyd George coalition from 187 squadrons to 18. Hoare, the Air Minister in Baldwin's 1924-29 government, intended to raise it to 52 squadrons but actually only got it up to 31. The navy was drastically reduced in accordance with the agreements reached at various naval disarmament conferences beginning with that at Washington in 1921. When we read Churchill's severe strictures on the inadequacy of the rearmament measures of the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments of the thirties to which he did not belong it is well to remember that he was a member, and of course a very influential member, of the Lloyd George and Baldwin governments of the twenties that had done most of the disarming.

Baldwin's brief tenure of office in 1923 was over almost before

the general public had had time to take him in. Now they began to realise him, and found him singularly attractive.

Churchill says that Baldwin and MacDonald were more alike than any other two prime ministers in our history.* The remark is intended, of course, to belittle Baldwin, but there is something in it. Both were distinguished and attractive personalities rather than effective men of action. MacDonald never, and Baldwin only for a short time, held departmental office, and neither would have distinguished himself as an author of difficult and important legislation or as the controller of a complicated departmental machine. Both of them reverenced, and perhaps sentimentalised, the past and ' the common man ', and Baldwin went so far as to profess to be a specimen of the latter article himself. Both had sympathies extending beyond the class from which they sprang and which their respective parties are commonly, though erroneously, supposed to represent. (I say erroneously, because if the Conservative party was only supported by the so-called upper and middle classes it would never win a single seat in the House of Commons and if the Labour party was only supported by ' wage-earners ' it would not command the services in parliament of scores of university graduates.) MacDonald once remarked that the prosperity of our parliamentary institutions depended on the fact that the sons of Eton and Harrow, Winchester and Rugby, were willing and eager to serve there—a very sound view, but not to be expected from one who had devoted his life to an organization designed to fill the House of Commons with ' working class ' representatives. Baldwin, on his side, felt a strong sympathy with the Labour members. He overlooked their frequent muddle-headedness, for he sometimes felt a bit muddled himself; he recognized their moral earnestness and remarked that in an earlier, which with him generally meant a more sensible, generation many of them would have been nonconformist ministers.

But Baldwin was in every way the bigger man of the two. For one thing he really was what he professed to be, a liberal minded Conservative working for the breakdown of class consciousness and class warfare, whereas MacDonald, who wanted much the same things, was always stumbling over his red flag. MacDonald impressed from a distance, but was bad at personal contacts; he

* Churchill, *The Second World War*, I, p. 18.

evoked few personal loyalties and made few friends. Baldwin on the other hand was a man of exceptional personal charm and nowhere did he exercise it more effectively than in the House of Commons. Lansbury, a real red socialist and a very honest man, bears curious testimony to this. Replying to Baldwin in what was, in fact, a not very important debate he said, 'When I listen to the prime minister at any time he almost persuades me that I ought to be his supporter, and I think his speeches have a similar effect on a good many other people, too.' Vigorous Cabinet colleagues, such as Neville Chamberlain, found Baldwin an exasperating leader on account of his lack of decision and 'edge', but no statesman in peace time since Palmerston had come so near being a national and not merely a party leader. And there is another respect in which Baldwin was very unlike MacDonald. His speeches, like Churchill's and Disraeli's but very few others', belong to the small class that can be read with pleasure long after their context has passed into history. An anthologist may well draw on them a hundred years hence.

Some of the best of these speeches had, it is true, nothing to do with politics. There were addresses to the Classical and the English Associations, full of felicitous touches and quotations which reminded any who had forgotten it that Baldwin, though an ironmaster by training, was also a cousin of Rudyard Kipling. Even the grim abstractions of Capital and Labour were transformed in his vision when he talked reminiscently of the paternal atmosphere of an old family business as he had known it in his youth. Stanley Baldwin's Worcestershire began to take a place on the map of an ideal England comparable with that of Hardy's Wessex. But it was a political speech in the House of Commons of 1925 which established the peculiar quality of Baldwin's leadership.

An Act of 1913, already described, had enabled the trade unions to create special political funds for the support of the Labour party, with the proviso that those who did not wish to subscribe could sign a form contracting out of doing so without prejudice to their rights as members of their union. Many Conservatives held that this was wrong. The Act appeared to assume that it was normal for a trade unionist to be a socialist. They held that the business of signing papers and 'contracting' should be imposed on those who wished to subscribe for this purpose, not on those who did not, and a Conservative named McQuisten

introduced a private member's bill, widely supported, to alter the law in this manner. Baldwin intervened in the debate with a striking appeal for forbearance. There was, he admitted, a case for the change, but the case for peace and goodwill and national unity was far stronger. Let it never be said that in any encounter of what was called the class war the Conservative party fired the first shot. The bill was rejected.

There were at that time many of the best minds of the rising generation who felt politically unattached. Lloyd George they could not away with; the Asquith Liberals seemed to have no future; Labour was tainted with class war doctrines; Conservative leadership since the rejection of the Lloyd George budget had been factious and barren. Here at last was a man who seemed to stand for something worthy of one's political allegiance.

Since Ireland, or threequarters of it, had become a Free State the term Unionist as an alternative name of the Conservative party seemed to have lost its significance. Baldwin suggested that it should be retained with a new connotation to describe the party which stood for the unity of all classes within the nation as opposed to the Socialist party with its doctrine of class war. This new Unionism was about to be severely tested. We approach the famous 'General Strike'.

The factors making for the crisis which caused the general strike were the bankruptcy of the coal mining industry, the general drift of Labour towards the industrial 'Left' after the failure of MacDonald's government, and the link between these two furnished by Cook, the Secretary of the Miner's Federation. Cook had been an advocate of syndicalism and joint author in 1912 of the notorious pamphlet called 'The Miners' Next Step'. He now described himself as 'a humble follower of Lenin'. Syndicalism was merging into communism, and the Trade Union Congress of 1924, after giving a chilling reception to MacDonald, had listened with appreciation to the fraternal delegate from the Soviets and had presented him with a gold watch. The trade union executives are much less representative of their constituents than is the House of Commons. To vote at a general election is a short and simple proceeding and three quarters of us summon up enough energy to perform the feat,

but control of a trade union depends on assiduous attention at innumerable local committees and the moderate majority are generally too lazy, too tired, or too fond of their homes to attend. The communist, syndicalist, general-striking element in the wage-earning class was a small minority, but Cook and his friends, as 'humble disciples of Lenin' did not believe in majority rule; they believed in 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', that is to say, of themselves.

As for the mining industry, the irony of the situation lay in the interaction of good and evil at home and abroad. In 1923-24 the industry had once again enjoyed immense prosperity—because the French were in the Ruhr. Export of coal surpassed the best pre-war years and in the spring of 1924 the miners secured a big advance on the wages paid under the agreement of 1921. Then came the Dawes Agreement and the recovery of Germany, and British coal-mining, once again exposed to continental competition and hampered by the seven hour day imposed on it by legislation after the Sankey Report, once again plunged into depression. In the spring of 1925 a committee of owners and miners set to work to investigate the position. They agreed on the facts, but could not begin to agree on the remedies and, on the last day of June, the owners gave a month's notice to terminate existing agreements, offering in their stead terms which would have reduced coal mining in the worst paid districts to the level of a sweated industry. These terms were immediately rejected.

In rejecting these terms the miners were relying on the support of a sympathetic strike of the transport and perhaps other industries such as had been so nearly secured by the Triple Alliance in 1921. The Triple Alliance was dead, but its place had been taken by what was commonly called the T.U.C., but was more accurately described as the Industrial Committee of the Council of the Trade Union Congress.* Cook took the measure of the members of this Committee. He knew that most of them did not want to launch a sympathetic strike, but he thought he could bluff them into it, and he was quite right.

So July began to slip away. Birkenhead, writing to Lord Halifax, at that time Viceroy of India, said 'It would be possible

* Bevin, the Secretary of The Transport and General Workers Union, was a member of this body. Hence he is still somewhat touchy on the subject of the general strike.

to say without exaggeration of the miners' leaders that they are the stupidest men in England if we had not frequent occasion to meet the owners.' Obstinate perhaps, but not as stupid as they looked. Both parties to the dispute were trying to drive the government into subsidising the industry from the resources of the state, that is the taxpayer, and up to a point they succeeded. After a display of wobbling which his critics described as characteristic Baldwin announced, on the last day but one of the month, that the government would appoint a Royal Commission to make a detailed examination of the industry. For nine months, the greater part of which the Commission would require for its task, the owners would pay the new wages and the miners receive the old ones, the difference being made up from the Exchequer at the cost of £24,000,000.

Thus the crisis was postponed for nine months. Some left-wing writers say that the Samuel Commission (for its chairman was Sir Herbert Samuel, formerly a member of Asquith's government) was simply a pretence ; that the real purpose of the delay was to give the government time to make such preparations as would enable it to cope with a general strike. This is surely great nonsense. The government must have hoped that the Commission would produce an acceptable report, but it would have been extremely negligent if it had not used the nine months to prepare for the worse alternative. The fact was that the government used the respite to very much better purpose than the T.U.C. who hoped for the best and did nothing, and when the ' class-war ' came, entered it unprepared. *Hinc illae lacrimae*, which means, that is the real grievance of these people.

The Commission reported on March 11, 1926, thus leaving a month and a half for the parties to consider the report and shape their course. It is generally agreed that it was an excellent report, impartial and businesslike, offering a mass of practical suggestions for making the industry more efficient and thus enabling it to pay better wages. At this point Baldwin made a serious mistake. He should have said, ' We accept the report as a whole and propose to impose its terms upon the industry '. Instead, he said, ' There are various things in the report which we do not like, but we will accept it, if the owners and miners will agree to do the same '. This invited both parties to pull the report to pieces and refuse the parts they did not like. So the weeks slipped away. The

miners went on strike with enthusiasm on May 1. The T.U.C. reluctantly called out all transport workers and printers two days later. And with what objective? Cook defined it as ' not a cent off the pay, not a minute on the day.' The miners would not accept a reduction in wages or an increase of hours. But this could only be secured by a continuance of the subsidy. The general strike was a strike to compel the government to subsidise a particular industry for an indefinite period.

The general strike was a nine days wonder, from May 4th to 12th inclusive. The first and most fundamental impression of the ordinary citizen—if I may claim to be such—was that it felt curiously like the first weeks of the war. There was the same sense of insecurity, a feeling that all was adrift and anything might happen. In one respect things were still more abnormal, for there was no newspaper on the breakfast table. Nothing did more to turn the general public against the general strikers than the attempted suppression of the press. The idea seems to have been that the press, being for the most part owned by ' capitalists ', would be biassed against their cause. But newspapers, after all, contain facts as well as ' dope ', and the ordinary man felt he had a right to his daily allowance of facts. However the scheme for the suppression of the press proved as ineffective as all the other schemes of the T.U.C. The ordinary newspapers gradually struggled back to life, and the government produced a newspaper of its own, under the supervision of Churchill, called the *British Gazette*, which was balanced by a much less easily obtained newspaper of the T.U.C. called the *British Worker*. Even more important was the wireless. Broadcasting, which had begun in America with the presidential election of 1920, had already been installed in the more enterprising households, but was as yet far from universal. Most people had to visit a neighbour's house to hear the news, which was of course government news, and came away decided to buy a radio set of their own. Whatever damage the general strike did to other industries it made the fortune of this one.

As an attempt to bring the life of the nation to a standstill the strike was a failure from the first. The government had prepared the ground very thoroughly. Before its first day was over a vast number of volunteers were engaged all over the country in transporting food supplies by motor, running trains and buses. There

was no food shortage anywhere. Day by day the armies of the volunteers increased in numbers and efficiency. At first they were mainly drawn from what socialists call the bourgeoisie but, as the tide flowed ever more strongly in favour of the government, the unemployed sought employment and the strikers themselves drifted back to work. There was remarkably little disorder, a fact for which the strikers themselves deserve a large share of the credit. Foreigners were greatly impressed. If this was indeed an English Revolution, it was as bloodless as the Revolution of 1688 which has traditionally annexed that epithet.

Baldwin took the line that the general strike was an unconstitutional attempt to coerce the government, duly installed in power by an enormous majority less than two years before, into doing what it believed to be wrong, a conspiracy against the constitution which was the only true embodiment of the national democracy. He demanded what in a different and later context was called unconditional surrender. He refused all parley until the general strike was called off and in this attitude he was supported by all the leading Liberals except Lloyd George. The Labour leaders were placed in a humiliating position. Everyone knew that MacDonald and Snowden disapproved of the general strike, but as party politicians they felt themselves bound to give it an indirect blessing by abusing the government.

After the general strike had been going on for a week all that was needed to end it was some formula that would enable the T.U.C. to call it off without excessive humiliation. This was furnished by Sir Herbert Samuel who, acting on his own initiative, drew up a memorandum of terms 'suitable for adoption and likely to promote a settlement in the coal industry'. At the same time Baldwin promised in a broadcast that the government would do all they could to see that the strikers were reinstated in their jobs. The T.U.C. took the Samuel memorandum to the miners' leaders, who at once rejected it because it involved a reduction of wages. Thereupon they went to the prime minister and informed him that they would at once call off the strike in order that negotiations about the future of the coal industry might be resumed.

At the end of the general strike Baldwin's prestige stood higher than that of any British statesman since Lloyd George had lost in peace the reputation he won in war; higher than any reputation

was to stand again till Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich. There was a general feeling that even if, by some measure which his critics never succeeded in defining, he could have averted the strike, he had more than atoned for his fault, if there was one, by the firmness and consistent magnanimity of his attitude throughout those dangerous days. 'With malice toward none: with charity for all: with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in: to bind up the nation's wounds . . .' The words of the greatest and most completely Christian of modern democratic statesmen, spoken when the Civil War which he, too, was accused of having provoked, was drawing to its end—Abraham Lincoln's last message would not have been inappropriate in the mouth of Stanley Baldwin in the middle of May, 1926.

Yet the coal strike remained unsettled. It dragged on drearily and senselessly, to the detriment of all concerned and not least the ordinary consumer and taxpayer, until far into the autumn. The miners exhibited the quality for which Englishmen have so often praised themselves; they did not know when they were beaten. Cook's slogan, 'Not a cent . . . not a minute . . .' still stood. The government carried through parliament, against bitter Labour opposition, a bill enabling the miners to return to the eight hour day, such as they had worked before 1919, if they wished to do so. Thereupon the owners offered revised terms of wages. On the basis of an eight hour day the miners were offered in districts employing three-quarters of the mining population terms as good as or better than those in force before the strike. In nearly all the remaining districts the reductions were less than ten per cent. That was in June; but the miners still held out. Various persons, from Bishop Temple to their own leader, Cook himself, essayed the task of bringing them to reason. The strike began to crumble, district by district, in the autumn, and all was over on Armistice Day.

The dismal end of the great coal strike marked the end of a Labour unrest of fifteen years, beginning with the syndicalist strikes of 1911, continuing in a different form throughout the first great war, and renewed immediately after its conclusion. It had proved a failure. In 1927 Williams of the Transport Workers Union, a Direct Actionist only a few years before, declared that 'the era of effective strikes has passed', and there has certainly

been nothing on the same scale since. The strikes of recent years have for the most part been either local or unofficial or both, and undertaken in defiance of the accredited leaders of the trade unions concerned.

The right wing of the Conservative party had long been anxious to curtail the powers of trade unions and in the year after the general strike Baldwin assented to what he had refused in the year before it. A Trade Disputes Bill was introduced, founded upon four propositions: that a general strike is illegal; that intimidation is illegal and that no man shall be compelled by threats to abstain from work against his will; that no man shall be compelled to subscribe to the funds of any political party unless he so desires; that the civil servants' trade unions must be outside party politics and must therefore sever their connexion with the Trade Union Congress. The first two of this quartet of propositions involved notorious difficulties of definition. What was a general strike? Labour maintained that there had been no general strike in 1926 but only a combination of sympathetic strikes. And what was intimidation? This question had puzzled the lawyers ever since the days of Gladstone and Disraeli. The third proposition was simply a reversal of the procedure under the Act of 1913 (see p. 92). Under that Act trade unionists who did not want to subscribe to the special political fund for the support of the Labour party had to sign a form contracting out of doing so. Under the new bill, those who wished to subscribe to the political fund would have to put themselves to the trouble of 'contracting in'. Actually the change made surprisingly little difference to the percentage of trade unionists subscribing to the funds of the Labour party.

Perhaps the bill was altogether unnecessary and unimportant. What made it interesting was its reception. The Labour opposition lashed themselves into a frenzy and organized a whirlwind campaign to stir the passions of their followers throughout the country. They failed, with a completeness of failure that surprised themselves and everyone else. The ordinary trade unionist was sick of strikes, whether general or particular. The Trade Union Congress turned down with derision the proposal that there should be another general strike in protest against the Act forbidding general strikes. 'Good bye to all that' was the mood of the moment. The new 'Unionism', not the trade unionism sort

but Baldwin's conception of the Unionist ideal, was in the ascendant. None the less, twenty years later, the first Labour government to enjoy an ample majority repealed the 1927 Act with enthusiasm and Bevin, descending from his Olympian eminence as an international statesman, favoured the House with an account of the general strike negotiations which will rank as a historical curiosity.

Apart from Locarno and the general strike Baldwin's five years were comparatively quiet ones. Neville Chamberlain again distinguished himself at the Ministry of Health; indeed it can hardly be questioned that he proved himself the best departmental minister of the inter-war period and as good as any in any period of our history. Returning to an office with whose business he was already familiar he immediately laid before the cabinet a list of twenty-five measures which he hoped to carry through parliament during the new government's tenure. He carried twenty-one of them and the remaining four were taken over by his successor. They covered such subjects as rates, milk, smoke abatement, poor law, patent medicines, asylums, and housing. The most conspicuous of his achievements was the Widows, Orphans and Old Age Pensions Act of 1925. This Conservative measure constitutes the middle term between the original Liberal old age pensions and health insurance of Asquith and Lloyd George and the gigantic scheme of today which was first elaborated in the Report of a Liberal, Beveridge, adopted in principle by the National government of the second war and enacted by the post war Labour government. Another measure, less directly affecting the average voter but important in its way, was the English Local Government Bill of 1928. This was one of the most elaborate measures ever presented to the House of Commons, and Chamberlain, like Asquith, excelled in lucid exposition. It so happened that, shortly before the bill was introduced, an elderly and eminent barrister had won a by-election and become an M.P. for the first time. After hearing Chamberlain's speech introducing this bill he remarked, 'That's the best opening of a case I've ever heard or am ever likely to hear.' Chamberlain appreciated in others the gift in which he himself excelled. It is pleasant to read of him rubbing his hands with satisfaction and 'purring' over the intellectual quality of Cripps's attack on one of his own budgets.

One of the things Chamberlain hated was waste and another was sentimentality, and on both grounds he fell foul of the Labour party over what was called 'Poplarism',* the use of rate payers' money for the reckless subsidising of the unemployed. In these debates he did not mince his words, and his words were not Baldwinian. 'Stanley begged me to remember', he records in his Diary, 'that I was addressing a meeting of gentlemen. I always give him the impression', he said, 'that I looked upon the Labour Party as dirt . . . Their gross exaggeration, their dishonesty in slurring over facts which tell against them, do embitter me sometimes.'†

These antipathies had their importance many years later, when, on the outbreak of the second war, the Labour leaders refused to join any National government of which Chamberlain was the head. On Chamberlain's side it was an antipathy somewhat like that which the average British Indian district officer, working day by day to relieve the hardships of the humble folk within his charge, used to feel towards the average Indian political agitator who merely exploited such hardships for the promotion of his own political nostrums. After all, the Chamberlains, father and son, had been in the forefront of this business of social reform for the last half century and more. What did the average half-educated socialist-sentimentalist know about it? Very little except how to get votes out of it. Chamberlain never put it quite like that, but that was rather the impression he conveyed.

At the Treasury Churchill made budgets more interesting than any one had made them since Gladstone, always excepting the 'People's Budget' of 1909. In 1925 he restored the gold standard, which proved a false dawn; in 1926 he made an attempt to tax betting which resulted in the introduction of a machine called the totalizator. In 1928 he outlined a scheme of debt reduction which would, if his successors lived up to it, extinguish the whole of the National Debt in fifty years' time. Today it looks as if it would take rather longer.

* The borough of Poplar, in East London, was one of the worst offenders, and the leading spirit in this borough was Lansbury, leader of the Labour party from 1931 to 1935. It is worth recording that Chamberlain's attack on these abuses was entirely approved by Sidney Webb.

† Feiling, K. *Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p. 142. Baldwin's remark, which reads oddly without a context, was based, one may guess, on an allusion to Palmerston's remark in the House eighty years before. 'Sir', he said, 'we are here an assembly of gentlemen; and we who are gentlemen on this side of the House should remember that we are dealing with gentlemen on the other.'

Churchill and Chamberlain were, of course, thrown much together during these years. Forty-five years earlier their fathers had eyed one another from opposite sides of the House and mutually recognized a certain kinship; both were rebellious spirits seeking to modernize their respective parties. Now their sons were together, the two most vigorous ministers in a powerful government. They respected each other's abilities but they were not altogether congenial to each other. Chamberlain, a man of enormous industry and, apart from a certain lack of imagination, first-rate ability, was a highly cultured specimen of the top-most stratum of the middle-classes. In his spare time his delight was in string quartets, in wild flowers and in salmon fishing. He did not easily make friends outside his own large family clan. Churchill, by ancestry half aristocrat, half American, was a man of genius and from his youth upward a great adventurer.* The people he found most congenial were other great adventurers, Lloyd George, whom Neville Chamberlain detested above all other members of parliament, Birkenhead, Beaverbrook. Neville Chamberlain was not quite in his line. Long afterwards, when at the Admiralty in the first months of the second war, he entertained Neville and his wife at dinner in his flat in the Admiralty building. The evening was a great success. Neville got talking about his early days trying to grow sisal on a West Indian Island which the great Joe had purchased for the purpose. Churchill was fascinated, and tells us in his book that this was the only intimate social conversation they ever had during all the business they had done together during the previous twenty years.† He remarks that it was a pity that Hitler had not known how tough a customer was concealed within this immaculately dressed old man with his umbrella. It is a pity, also, that Churchill and Chamberlain had not been closer together in personal sympathy during the difficult years before the war. Neither was to blame for this; it was the way they were made.

And so the 1924 parliament approached its legally appointed end. It would be the first parliament to die a 'natural' death since quinquennial elections had been ordained by the Parliament

* I trust it is possible to use this word without implying a trace of the evil connotation often attached to it.

† Churchill, *Second World War*, I, p. 389.

Act of 1911. The chief issue worrying the electorate and the parties which were to seek its support was unemployment. Nothing would induce it to fall below a million and from time to time it rose to a million and a half. The hard core of unemployment was more and more found to be localized in certain coal-mining and heavy industry districts which came to be known as the Distressed Areas. Baldwin's government took certain measures to deal with them but the results were distressingly inadequate. What had anyone else to offer towards the solution of this problem?

Asquith was dead and Lloyd George enjoyed for the time being undisputed control of the Liberal party. Assisted by Sir Herbert Samuel he produced a large number of bulky reports about roads, bridges, houses and telephones and declared roundly that, if returned to power, he could and would ' conquer unemployment '. The Labour party continued to suffer from its internal stresses. As in the army of Lars Porsena, those behind cried ' forward! ' and those in front cried ' back! ' Snowden poured icily cold water on the more extravagant schemes of the idealists. The official programme ' Labour and the Nation ' was caustically criticized for its inadequacy by Maxton and Cook but was too large a mouthful for MacDonald who adroitly removed most of its items from the region of practical politics by delcaring that it was a manifesto not merely for the election of 1929 but for many elections to come and that it was ' pregnant with programme after programme '. He devoted his speeches mainly to foreign affairs in which he was much more interested. In fact it looked as if the Liberals were further to the Left than Labour. As for Baldwin he proceeded with his usual honesty. He and his friends had done their best for five years. If returned to power they would go on doing their best. He offered ' the mixture as before ' and called it ' Safety first ! ' If instead of enfranchising ' the flappers ', as his government had just done, they had disfranchised everyone under forty, this would have proved a very attractive programme.

The ' Safety first ' election was remarkable on two accounts. It was the first election in which the completed electorate, all the men and all the women, were entitled to vote. We can hardly go further in this direction unless we enfranchise the children, or at any rate those of them that have passed the new School Certificate Examination. It was also the first election in which broadcasting was used on the lines with which we have since become familiar.

Otherwise it was a humdrum affair, the least dramatic election in our period. The swing of the pendulum operated against the party which had been five years in office. The Labour party increased its holding of seats from 160 to 290, thus becoming for the first time the largest party in the House, though failing to obtain a clear majority. The Conservatives fell from 396 to 260. The Liberals rose from 40 to 60. If we look at the 'global' totals we find that in Conservative and Labour parties each polled a little over eight million votes and the Conservatives rather more than the Labour party. The Liberals polled five million. The Labour party owed their leading position not so much to their own popularity as to the revival of Liberalism which split the anti-Labour vote and enabled an unusually large number of Labour candidates to get in with the support of the largest of three minorities in their respective constituencies. However that might be, there would be another Labour government dependent for the retention of office on support outside its own party.

The most satisfactory feature of the election was that of the twenty-five communist candidates twenty-one forfeited their deposits by failing to poll one-eighth of the votes cast in their constituencies. Only one communist was elected and he was a wealthy Parsee of the name of Saklatvala. He represented Battersea.

IX. THE GREAT SLUMP AND THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, 1929-36

BRITISH politics are as a rule conducted with about as much practical effectiveness as can be expected from 'such a creature as man in such a world as the present one',* but an exception must be made for the two years of the second Labour government. It was an interlude of sheer futility. The fault cannot be wholly laid at the door of the government, for a government that cannot command a majority for the policies it believes in cannot be held wholly responsible for its inactions. But such excuses do not carry very far. All the time there was a great slump, a great depression of trade, spreading and deepening all over the world, and the only response of 'socialism' seemed to be to pretend it was not there. Never before or since has a British government indulged in so much eye-shutting.

The Labour team was much the same as before with the men rather differently distributed. Snowden was again at the Exchequer. Henderson took the Foreign Office and Thomas had a special assignment, to cure unemployment. We will follow his fortunes first.

We have already remarked on the unfortunate fact that events had become more powerful than the men who had to deal with them and never was this more strikingly illustrated than by the relative potencies of the Great Slump and 'Jimmy' Thomas. Thomas went to Canada and came back again. He unfolded a 'plan' before an unappreciative House of Commons. He tried every possible metaphor. We were pulling through; we had reached the bottom; we were not down and out; the worst was past; the cloud had a silver lining; the day was dawning; the tide had turned. Unemployment was unaffected by these incantations. Under Thomas's treatment, which lasted a year, the numbers of the unemployed went up from one million to two: after he had gone they went up from two to three and stayed thereabout until 1933, when they began to come down again.

* From Bishop Butler, the eighteenth century philosopher.

Among Thomas's assistants in his task was Sir Oswald Mosley, a young man of ancient lineage and great wealth who had entered parliament as a Conservative and had now reached the Labour party. He had at any rate more ideas than Thomas and embodied them in a memorandum which, since the government would not publish it, he issued on his own account. He was now the hero of the rank and file and was looked upon by many as the future leader of the party. At the Annual Conference in 1930 a resolution in favour of his policy was nearly carried against the party leaders. But Sir Oswald's patience was too easily exhausted. He left the Labour party and formed a new one of his own which put up two dozen candidates in the election of 1931. They were all defeated and he soon reappeared as the leader of the British Fascists. Someday, I suppose, posterity will have an impartial and discerning biography of this extraordinary man. Presumably he lost patience with the parliamentary system, and he obviously lacked the ' team spirit ' without which parliamentary institutions will not work. Had he possessed that virtue he might quite conceivably be where Attlee is today.

As the numbers of the unemployed rose, so did the sums of money required from the general taxpayer to supplement the Unemployment Insurance Fund, all the more so as the government fulfilled at any rate some of its promises to increase the benefits received by the unemployed and their dependents, in spite of the fact that the purchasing power of money had increased since the benefits were last fixed. At the time of the crash, towards which the government was marching with its head screwed round in the opposite direction, the Fund had borrowed £115,000,000.

To turn to foreign policy. In the early days of the government there appeared to be three foreign secretaries. Snowden went off to the Hague to quarrel with France over a re-allocation of the German reparations which Germany was just about to cease for ever to pay. His performance was curiously popular at home and the glow of its popularity had not worn off when its hero came to write his Autobiography several years later. He describes his ill-judged and entirely useless achievement with childlike satisfaction. MacDonald went off to America to prepare the ground for another naval disarmament conference. Henderson stayed at home and arranged that the Allies of the past war should evacuate

not only the second of the three sections of the Rhineland, as was at that date due, but the remainder also in which, by the Treaty of Versailles, the Allies were entitled to remain until 1935, and indefinitely if the Germans infringed that treaty. This was appeasement, and, like all previous and subsequent appeasements of Germany, it had the opposite effect from what was intended. Indeed it might be regarded as the gravest of all the errors committed in this direction. If the Allies had remained in one third of the Rhineland and had persisted in remaining there when Hitler openly tore up the treaty of Versailles he would hardly have ventured to occupy the remaining two-thirds in 1936. At least, so one might presume, but it is a mistake to be dogmatic about the ' might have beens '.

The domestic policy of the government was necessarily based on a desire to conciliate bodies whose support they could not do without. There were, for example, the Liberals, who wanted the electoral system altered to their supposed advantage by the introduction of what was called the Alternative Vote. This is a system in operation in the States of Australia, providing that, when there are more than two candidates, the electors shall indicate not only the candidate they prefer but also the one they like next best and that, in calculating the result of the election, if no candidate has an absolute majority, the returning officers shall add the ' second preferences ' indicated on the voting papers, beginning with those of the lowest candidate and continuing until either some candidate secures an absolute majority or all the second preferences have been exhausted. It sounds complicated, but it is simple enough in practice. The Liberals wanted it because they thought that, being the middle party, they would secure most of the second preferences on both Conservatives and Labour voting papers. The Labour party did not like it, but felt that it was a price worth paying for a continuance of Liberal support. It was carried through the House of Commons but returned with drastic amendments from the House of Lords, and in that state it remained until the government fell.

There was also a Trade Unions Bill intended to repeal most of the provisions of the Conservative measure carried after the general strike, which was defeated by a combination of the two oppositions, and an Education Bill raising the school leaving age to fifteen, which was thrown out by the House of Lords on the

ground that, in a time of steadily declining revenue and increasing expenditure, the country could not afford it. Perhaps the only useful measure of any importance carried by the government was a Coal Mines Bill which, apart from reducing the statutory day's work from eight hours to seven and a half, established a system of marketing the product which justified itself in the following years.

There were also the expected discords between the government and its Left wing supporters, the Maxtonites as they were often called from the name of their leader, or the I.L.P.; for that famous society, the prime source of the party in which MacDonald and Snowden had long ago learnt their first lessons in parliamentary politics, had become the stronghold of the extremists. The little group of Maxtonites enjoyed the theoretical advantage of a coherent social philosophy. It might ruin the country if it was put in practice, but as it was not going to be put in practice that did not matter. They also enjoyed the tactical advantage that a much larger body than the professed Maxtonites would have liked to support them but under party discipline did not dare to do so. Unlike the Liberals and the miners, the Maxtonites could not be conciliated, and could only be rebuked. The prime minister told them that they had lost their grip of socialism and that their salt had lost its savour, though it would surely have been more apposite to say that they had gripped their socialism too tightly and that their savour was oversalted. One of the last actions of the government before its fall was the expulsion of Maxton and four of his followers from the Labour party. After the crash Maxton could offer MacDonald his ironical sympathy. They had by that time both been expelled, though in opposite directions.

It is time to say something about this mysterious and terrible slump, though the limitations of our subject will surely excuse us from going at all deeply into the matter.

In the nineteenth century the civilized world had developed without conscious effort or premeditation a perfectly workable and continuously expanding system of production and exchange. 'The distinctive feature of the system was its self-regulating and automatic quality . . . The economic and financial structure was more like one of the marvellously intricate structures built by the

instincts of beavers or ants than the deliberately designed works of man.'* This delicately adjusted system, based on a world-wide gold standard, had been completely dislocated by the war and the reason of man seemed powerless to reconstruct it.

But such general considerations do not explain why a period of prosperity in the later twenties was closed down by the outbreak of a quite unprecedented depression in 1929. That is a rather simpler matter. It is an extreme example of the old story of alternating booms and slumps which had been characteristic of world trade ever since—perhaps we may be excused from deciding whether this rhythm began with Adam or with Adam Smith; let us be cautious and simply say 'for a long time past'. The rhythm corresponds with something fundamental in human nature. A 'boom' means a period in which optimism prevails. Customers are prepared to buy on a large scale; the makers of goods are prepared to produce on a large scale because they feel confident of their customers; thus they build new factories, buy lots of their raw materials, employ more workers, pay good wages. Unemployment decreases. Shareholders profit as the value of their shares go up. Money is abundantly borrowed and lent at high rates of interest. Everybody's prosperity seems to contribute to everyone else's. Then comes a slump. Makers of goods have been too confident and produced more than they can sell. Workers are dismissed. Unemployment increases. Speculators who have bought stocks at absurdly high prices become alarmed and want to sell. The farther the boom has gone the more violent the reaction is likely to be. Bankruptcies abound. All confidence is lost. Then after a number of lean years the demand of the buyer begins to revive; the producer takes heart again, and so on.

Such was the normal 'up-and-down-and-up' as it worked within the self-regulating system of the nineteenth century. The great slump of 1929 onwards arose from an application of the same causes to the post-war dislocated world, and more particularly to the American-German relationship from 1924 onwards, of which we have already noticed the beginning. Americans were enormously prosperous and they poured their surplus money into Germany, in the form of short term loans which were used for long term purposes, converted into bricks and mortar, steel and concrete, machinery and so on. In 1928 American loaning to

* Sir A. Salter, *Recovery*, p. 10.

Europe in general and Germany in particular slackened off and money began to be recalled for the more exciting purpose of gambling in the American share markets. That insane gamble, the climax and abrupt conclusion of the 'Coolidge prosperity', the South Sea Bubble of modern times, reached its peak and crashed in the autumn of 1929. All over the American industrial world production fell till it stood at only about half its Coolidge level. Henceforth America refused to lend abroad the money without which the interest on her previous loans could no longer be paid, and other lending countries followed her example. The economic situation grew darker all over the world. International trade seemed to be mysteriously drying up, and in each country the plight of its export and shipping industries infected all the rest of the national economy. The countries that suffered least were those least dependent on external economic relations, such as France. Great Britain was, of course, at the very opposite end of the scale.

Though the government might shut its eyes to what it did not want to see the British public in general had no reason to do so, and its reaction was unmistakable. A conviction began to manifest itself, outside and beyond any question of party politics, that we must arm ourselves with a general protective tariff. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce, the historic centre of the free trade movement, declared for it. A representative gathering of bankers followed suit. The Federation of British Industries, the Economic Committee of the Trade Union Congress, Sir John Simon, the great brain of Liberalism, and Sir Oswald Mosley, till his resignation the 'live wire' of the younger generation of Labour, all said the same thing in their different ways. It looked as if Joseph Chamberlain was at last to enjoy a posthumous triumph.

Baldwin had been a Chamberlainite from the first, in days when, not yet a minister or even a member of parliament, he was managing the family business at Stourbridge, but experience had made him cautious. The party had won an election by dropping tariffs in 1922, lost an election by taking them up in 1923, won an election by dropping them again in 1924. The burnt child shuns the fire, and Baldwin was the burnt child. So the lords of the press set themselves to the congenial task of gingering him up. If they could not ginger him up they might achieve what they

would like even better, for between Baldwin and the Rothermeres* and Beaverbrooks, as between Asquith and Northcliffe, there was a profound mutual antipathy. The ominous letters B.M.G. reappeared, with ' Baldwin ' replacing ' Balfour '. History went even further in repeating itself, for Baldwin, like Balfour of yore, weakly suggested a referendum on tariffs, and as in 1911 a Chamberlain was at hand to take his place. It seems very probable that, had Neville Chamberlain wished it, he could have stepped into Baldwin's shoes, stolen from him by the press lords, a few months before the Labour crash ; but Chamberlains don't do that sort of thing. As Chamberlain said, ' Nothing would induce me to play Lloyd George to Baldwin's Asquith '.

At the same time Baldwin's leadership was threatened from another quarter on account of his support of the Liberal policy pursued by the Labour government and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, afterwards Lord Halifax, in Indian affairs. Churchill withdrew from the Conservative ' shadow cabinet ' (as the conclave of ex-ministers in opposition is traditionally called) and denounced a policy which invited a ' naked fakir '—Mahatma Gandhi, to wit —to visit and negotiate with the Viceroy at his official Residence. There was a by-election at St. George's, Westminster, a safe Conservative seat, and the Conservative candidate declared himself an opponent of Baldwin's leadership, with the full support of the Lords and the popular press. At a late stage in the election Duff Cooper stepped in to oppose him on behalf of Baldwin and won by a handsome majority.†

Baldwin had a well-earned reputation as the least acrimonious of politicians. Accusations of dishonesty and other vices, so common on the lips of other politicians that they are inevitably accepted in a Pickwickian sense,§ had scarcely ever fallen from his lips. So when, breaking through the tradition that cabinet ministers do not speak at by-elections, he addressed a meeting in the Queen's Hall and accused Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere of falsehood, mis-representation, suppression of facts and unscrupulous insinuation, and declared that they sought ' power

* Northcliffe was dead, and his brother Rothermere carried on his business.

† Duff Cooper was an able man whose subsequent career proved that he did not support a leader unless he really believed in him. He was the only Cabinet Minister in Chamberlain's government to resign in protest against ' Munich '.

§ See the first chapter of Pickwick, where Dickens satirises this feature. His satire is based on a particular interchange of amenities between Canning and Brougham.

without responsibility, the privilege of the harlot throughout the ages ', the ordinary man knew that he meant what he said. Anyhow, his leadership was henceforth secure. He had his defects, but he was the best man they had for winning the marginal voter. The Conservatives would be wise to stick to him for the same reason as the Labour party had stuck to MacDonald.

One man in a key position was entirely unaffected by the drift towards protection. Snowden's attachment to free trade was a faith beyond all argument. If a combination of Joe Chamberlain and Bloody Mary had arisen and started burning free traders he would have gone to the stake, for he never lacked courage. In his first budget he swept away the duties ' safeguarding ', as the phrase was, certain specially vulnerable industries, which had been imposed by the previous Conservative government. Then there was a Dyestuffs Act, behind which a prosperous industry had been built up in the preceding ten years. It was about to expire and Snowden refused to renew it. The House of Lords, however, reinserted the Dyestuffs Act in the Expiring Laws Continuance Bill and sent it back to the House of Commons. The government moved to disagree with the Lords on this point but so many Labour back benchers disagreed with the government that their majority, even with Liberal support, fell to six. The Lords again reinserted the Dyestuffs Act and the government did not venture to ask the House of Commons to cut it out again. Indeed one of the interesting features of these two years of futility is the renewed activity of the ' veto '. On three occasions that we have mentioned, and two others that could have been mentioned, their Lordships did something in particular and, like their prototypes in *Iolanthe*, did it very well, representing, so far as one can judge, the will of the country much better than the government.

All this time the slump crept onward. Challenged by Neville Chamberlain in February, 1931, to tell the House and the country about the economic situation, Snowden admitted that it was grave. Invited by Samuel to appoint an Economy Committee to investigate and offer concrete proposals he assented with characteristic contemptuousness, declaring that he could write its report himself. However, the committee got to work, under the chairmanship of Sir George May, Secretary of the Prudential Assurance

Company, who had held various posts under the Government during the war.

In April Snowden produced his second and last Labour budget. Coming from a man who had declared that he could write 'the May Report' out of his own head it was a perfunctory affair. It did little more than grab for the current year's revenue a large instalment of income tax which would normally be paid in the following year, robbing future Peter to pay present Paul.* At the end of July, which was also the end of the parliamentary session, the May Committee reported. It estimated, and as it turned out under-estimated, the deficit for the current year at £50,000,000 and £120,000,000 for the following, and recommended drastic cuts in many directions, the most conspicuous being the salaries of teachers in State schools and the benefits of the unemployed. The government appointed a cabinet committee to study the scheme during the recess.

Meanwhile the slump had produced new and alarming manifestations. These began, like the first great war, in Austria where the principal bank suspended payment in June. This caused a 'run' on Germany, in other words a demand by Germany's creditors for repayment of floating debt and short-term loans. President Hoover of U.S.A. tried to save the position by proposing a year's moratorium of reparations and war-debts. The principal international bankers made a 'standstill' agreement by which they agreed to renew their advances to Germany till the following February. This reacted on the Bank of England whose credits in Germany were henceforth 'frozen' while its liabilities remained assailable. Gold began to be withdrawn from the Bank.

The weakness of Great Britain's industrial and commercial position, her bankrupt unemployment insurance fund, her unbalanced budget, had long been advertised to the world with a wealth of unimpeachable statistics. On top of these came the May Report with its stark and simple arithmetic and apparently impossible schedule of economics. The Report pointed the way to the solution of the crisis by administering a wholesome shock to the British electorate but it also precipitated it by giving

* Ordinarily a large part of the income tax for the year, say, April, 1931—March, 1932, is paid in two instalments, one before January 1, 1932, and the other before July 1, 1932, the latter falling, of course, into the next financial year. Snowden simply made three-quarters payable by January 1, leaving a quarter for July 1.

a similar shock to the foreign investor. 'The flight from the pound' accelerated.

The cabinet committee, with Snowden at its head, reported on August 13 that the budget must be balanced by 'equality of sacrifice', half the money being found by economies and half by fresh taxation. In essentials it accepted the May report. Decision thus passed to the cabinet itself, of which almost exactly half the members accepted and the other half refused to accept the ten per cent. cut in the benefits of the unemployed. A modified scheme, omitting the unemployed cuts, was drawn up and submitted to the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal oppositions and to the leading bankers. They were submitted to the opposition leaders in order to secure for the proposals a safe majority in the House of Commons and to the bankers in order to discover whether in their judgement the policy would suffice to restore international confidence. Both replied, in effect, that the proposals were not good enough; there must be the recommended cut in the main source of loss of revenue, the unemployment benefits.

We must abbreviate a complex story, confining ourselves to what is essential to the formation of a general judgement. On August 24 MacDonald told his colleagues that he was going to tender to the King the resignation of the government. They naturally expected that the King would send for Baldwin and that, in spite of their present disagreements, the party would go into opposition and there rediscover the unity it had lost in office. Many parties had tried this cure with success in past times. He returned with the announcement that he was still prime minister —of a National government. It was an emergency government of ten members, four Labour men, Snowden, Thomas, Sankey the Lord Chancellor and himself, four Conservatives and two Liberals. The new administration, it was soon announced, 'would not exist for a longer period than was necessary to dispose of the emergency and, when that was achieved, the political parties would resume their respective positions. As soon as the financial crisis had been settled there should be a general election, and at the general election there would be no merging of political parties and no 'coupon' . . . The administration that was being formed would not propose any party legislation of a controversial character but would confine itself to the one purpose for which it was being formed.' Baldwin said much the same to an

enthusiastic party meeting. 'When this parliament dissolves, when the economies are carried and the budget balanced, you will have a straight fight on tariffs against the socialist party.'

Who was responsible for this curious plan? It may have represented MacDonald's wishes, but though he might propose only Baldwin could dispose. The plan must therefore be regarded as Baldwin's responsibility, and it was obvious to many people from the first that it bore little relation to realities. There had been much talking and writing, in political and journalistic circles, during the past few months about the necessity of a National government, but no one had thought of such an ephemeral, makeshift affair as this. Balancing the budget was one thing; dealing with 'the emergency' of which the budget was only a symptom, was quite another. The forecast that after the fundamental shake-up of party loyalties, especially within the Labour party, an election could be held in a very few months time in which the several parties would reappear 'in their own dimensions like themselves', was surely unlikely to be fulfilled. It would have seemed more sensible if MacDonald and Baldwin had taken a leaf out of Kitchener's book and claimed National support 'for three years or the duration of the' emergency, slump or what you will.

Of course it may be that this was an example of a phenomenon we have noticed before, the taking of two bites at the cherry. It may be that some such profession of the temporary character of the National Government was necessary to reconcile strong party men to inclusion in the same cabinet as their political enemies; that its inevitable extension, with a consequently drastic re-alignment of parties, would arise naturally out of the course of events. Did Baldwin see it like that? Or rather, how soon did he see it like that? Churchill says that Baldwin was 'the greatest party manager the Conservatives ever had',* really an artful dodger in such matters. Others say that he was always a woolly minded idealist. Can one have it both ways? Perhaps one can, if one shifts one's terms. Baldwin was a man of instinctive rather than reasoned judgements, and being, unlike Churchill, a very typical Englishman his instinct was seldom at fault. He did not look ahead; he felt and expressed the mood of each moment as it came. He led so successfully because the country and he were

* Churchill, Second World War, I, p. 26.

moving in the same direction anyhow. It is not the highest form of leadership, but the second best.*

To return to the narrative of events. When parliament met for an emergency session in September almost the whole of the Labour party was ranged in angry opposition under Henderson, a solid trade unionist, very popular with the rank and file—they called him 'Uncle Arthur'—who had long been on bad terms with MacDonald. The work of the session was a supplementary budget with an increase of income tax and supertax and—what hit the small taxpayer much harder—a drastic cutting down of the generous allowances for wives and children introduced by Churchill five years before; and an Economy Bill which cut down all official salaries from that of the prime minister downward; judges, M.Ps., soldiers and sailors, police, teachers, and of course the ten per cent. cut in unemployment benefit. With the cuts and new taxes it was estimated that the budget would be balanced.

The formation of the National Government had been followed by demonstrations of financial patriotism. The Treasury post bag was filled with cancelled war bonds and saving certificates. But there was also a very natural ferment among certain sections of the victims of the cuts. What excited special attention, magnified as it inevitably was in the popular press, was the 'mutiny' of certain sailors in the Atlantic fleet at Invergordon. This acted on the apprehensive foreign investor as the May Report had done; and certainly, if the violent language of the Labour opposition meant anything, it meant that the British people were not going to take their economic medicine with docility. Once again, and more formidably, the drain upon gold began. The government had been formed to save the gold standard. On September 21 it abandoned it.† Many people, remembering the fate of the mark and (in a lesser degree) the franc and forgetting perhaps that England had been off the gold standard from 1914 to 1925, began to envisage catastrophe.

But nothing happened, at least nothing dreadful. Internal prices remained stable, and the rapid fall of the pound to about

* Better at any rate than that of the leader of whom it was said 'He turned his back upon the people and said, "I have the people at my back".' If the reader can place this quotation for me I shall be grateful to him.

† i.e., it repealed the clause of the Gold Standard Act which compels the Bank of England to sell gold on demand at a fixed price.

two-thirds of its former value abroad provided at once a welcome encouragement to the export trade. It also afforded the government an opportunity for revising their ideas about their own future. A general election had been promised for the autumn and, whatever might have been said in the original ' prospectus ' of the government, the only possible issue was that between those who supported the drastic economies and those who did not. For national security it was necessary to get the election over, to prove that the present opposition, though they might command nearly half the present House of Commons, had no such hold upon the electorate. What was wanted was a decisive National majority and a clear run for the next five years.

What should be said about tariffs? Everyone had come to realise that there was going to be an end of free trade at last, but many Liberals were almost as sensitive on the subject as Snowden and tariffs had brought bad luck to the Conservatives in so many past elections. Then someone had a brilliant idea ; to go to the country asking for ' a free hand ', ' a doctor's mandate ', to employ whatever prescriptions, including tariffs, the rapidly changing and unpredictable future of the patient might seem to require.

It was a straight fight between those who supported and those who opposed the ' cuts '. The opposition were not without hope. They counted up the victims, reckoned on the support of all the unemployed ; that would be three million to start with. They declared that reduction of unemployment benefit was designed as a means to a general reduction of wages and as a first step to the abolition of the social services. Drawing further on their imaginations and assisted by hints from Lloyd George, they declared that the whole crisis was a figment, an invention of the ' money barons ', a ' banker's ramp '. It is difficult to understand how men as shrewd as Herbert Morrison, as honourable as Attlee, can have stood for this sort of thing. Nobody replied to this propaganda so vigorously as Snowden. He was not himself seeking re-election, but his manifestoes were a leading feature of the campaign. He had long been known as the owner of the most biting tongue in British politics, but invective tires when its object remains the same. Now he was free to shift his ground and pour forth the long accumulating reservoirs of his contempt upon his late associates. It was a curious swan-song of hate, and

many Conservatives did not much like it. *Non tali auxilio;* which means, I would prefer to win without his help. After all, no single person bore so heavy a responsibility to the Labour party as their own Chancellor of the Exchequer for the mess they had got themselves into.

The result of the election surpassed all precedents, including that of 1918. 558 National government candidates were elected against 56 for the Labour opposition. Of the government candidates 471 were Conservatives, 35 National Liberal (followers of Sir John Simon and henceforth Conservatives in all but name), 33 Liberal (free traders following Samuel) and 13 National Labour. There were also five Lloyd Georgian Liberals supporting the Labour opposition. Of the Labour cabinet ministers who had broken with MacDonald in August, every single one was defeated except Lansbury, who thus became leader of the party.

The Cabinet of the National government was now enlarged to normal dimensions. Baldwin contented himself with the titular office of Lord President but it was obvious that he would be, whenever he chose to assert himself, the real head of the government. Neville Chamberlain took the Exchequer. One great name was absent, that of Churchill, who had separated himself from the Conservative leaders over India in the previous year. He writes in his book ' I had felt the need of a national concentration. But I was neither surprised nor unhappy when I was left out of it . . . What I should have done if I had been asked to join I cannot tell.' His omission had a greater importance, for good or evil, that either he or any one else could have foreseen at the time.

Before we pass on we might consider whether the formation of a National government, so called, proved to be the best solution, on the political level, of the 1931 crisis ; in other words, whether it would have been better if Baldwin had taken the premiership and formed a frankly Conservative government, as he obviously could have done, possibly inviting like-minded individuals from other parties, MacDonald and Thomas, Simon and Runciman, to take places in his cabinet, an offer they might or might not have accepted. The argument in favour of the course chosen is obvious and strong ; it was desirable from the standpoint of confidence, at home and abroad, to secure as decisive a victory as possible—though this idea was explicitly not in the minds of the authors

of the plan in its first phase. But let that pass. The general election certainly gave an overwhelming vote of confidence, and those who fought it testify to the deep impression made on the mind of the ordinary elector by the fact that the leaders of all the parties (except Lloyd George) were behind the programme. Still, the precedent of 1924 suggests that the Conservatives alone would have won by an ample margin.

On the other side must be set the fact that the ' Nationalness ' of the government proved a somewhat bogus affair. It was a Conservative government with a Labour figurehead and sundry other non-Conservative trimmings of no great weight or value. Samuel and the free-trade Liberals soon resigned. MacDonald and Thomas had already seen their best days. Simon proved a misfit at the foreign office. The only really valuable non-Conservative recruit proved to be Malcolm MacDonald, son of the prime minister, who did excellent work later on at the colonial office. The Labour opposition felt that they had been tricked and the country bamboozled, and such thoughts demoralized them for many years to come. The ordinary rigours of the game of party politics were henceforth poisoned by bitter resentments of the Labour party against leaders who had ' betrayed ' them. MacDonald's manner of changing sides was not calculated to mollify their resentment. He created the impression that he was very glad to be quit of the ' workers ' party in exchange for the leadership of ' the gentlemen '. The opposition party of the years 1931-39 was about the worst and the most unreasonable opposition in our history. That proved unfortunate, and the misfortune must be, to some extent, traced to the peculiar course of events in the late summer of 1931 ; a temporary National government, promising a ' party ' general election, turning out to be a National government entrenching itself in power for a period of years by means of a ' coupon ' election.

There is a good deal to be said on both sides. If I have seemed to throw my weight upon the latter side it is because its case has hitherto received less consideration.

The National government remained in power, under the leadership in succession of MacDonald, Baldwin and Chamberlain, growing all the time more undilutedly Conservative, until in the first crisis of the second great war, May, 1940, it was replaced by a

really National government. It has come, in retrospect, to be judged almost exclusively on its record in rearmament and foreign policy. People have almost entirely forgotten its strikingly successful performance of the task for which it had been created, the reconstruction of the national economy, which it took over on the verge of bankruptcy. Its work in that field, immensely important but not today perhaps very interesting, we must now briefly survey, and add thereto various other items of domestic concern down to the abdication of Edward VIII at the end of 1936. In the next chapter we will pick up the story of the German menace and the government's reactions to it from an earlier date. As a rule historical narratives do well to stick as closely to chronology as they can, for the order of the events is a part of the events themselves, but in the case of this chapter and the next a certain amount of chronological overlap seems convenient.

As soon as the new parliament met an Abnormal Importations Bill was hurried through as a temporary measure, to be succeeded early in 1932 by a general protective policy set out in an Import Duties Bill. It was a pleasing circumstance that the framing and advocacy of this measure should have been shared between the younger son of the great apostle of tariff reform and Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, who had always been a free trader and claimed to be one still—under normal conditions. The bill imposed a general ten per cent. duty on all imports other than those scheduled in a ' free list ', and imports from the Dominions which were to be dealt with at an Imperial Conference due to meet at Ottawa. Further, a Tariff Advisory Committee was set up to advise on increases or reductions of the general ten per cent. rate. Thus responsibility for the details of the tariff was, for more than one good reason, taken out of the political arena. This committee, under the chairmanship of Sir George May, got to work very quickly and raised the duty to thirty-three per cent. on a large number of articles.

The tariff served many different purposes. It corrected the balance of trade by diminishing the excess of imports over exports ; it raised much needed revenue ; it protected home industries ; made possible a completer system of imperial preference, and put the government in a position to negotiate mutual reductions of tariffs with foreign countries.

On the free list of 1932 were practically all the major food imports. Food imports had always been the most unpopular item on the protectionist programme, yet no industry stood in greater need of protection than agriculture. The protection of the producer of home grown food without raising the price of the consumer's necessities—that baffling problem was now tackled with considerable success by the Board of Agriculture under Walter Elliot. It would be true to say that the direness of the need facilitated the remedy. As the world slump developed the bottom fell out of agricultural prices. It became possible to protect the home grower by imposing duties on all foreign food except meat without the consumer suffering any rise of price whatever. So far as he was concerned all that happened was that prices fell less than they otherwise would have done.

Tariffs were not the only instruments of the new agricultural policy. Under a 'quota' system foreign imports were rationed and the home producer thus assured an adequate market, and he was assisted to make the best use of it by government marketing schemes covering the whole range of the agricultural industry. Such governmental interventions may be ideally an evil, and yet actually a necessary evil of our disordered world.

Another group of industries as much in need of protection of some sort as any were the great transport industries, railways and shipping. Railways needed protection against the alarmingly rapid transfer of goods traffic from rail to road. Something was done to redress the balance by the Road and Rail Traffic Act, dealing with the licensing and regulation of goods motor vehicles, but it could do no more than touch the fringe of a problem that is still with us. The protection of shipping was equally difficult. Owing to the generous subsidies lavished on their shipbuilding and shipping industries by other states and to the shrinkage of overseas trade everywhere since the oncoming of the slump the tonnage at the disposal of the world was vastly in excess of its requirements, and Great Britain, as the greatest carrying trader, suffered more than any of her neighbours. To compete with the United States in shipping subsidies was quite beyond our means. In 1934 a small experimental subsidy was granted, under conditions, to the tramp steamer companies. More helpful was the fact that British exports had already begun to expand again though the world export trade was still shrinking. By 1936 the

quantity of British shipping that had been lying idle three years before had been halved.

The fall of prices enabled the government to stop granting any more housing subsidies, a measure justified by the fact that more new houses were built in the first unsubsidised year than in any single year since the war—or, for that matter, any year before it. Thereupon the government threw its energies and available financial resources into a campaign of unprecedented dimensions for the elimination of slums. One traces the Chamberlain influence here, and indeed everywhere else. MacDonald might preside in the shop window and Baldwin at the back of the shop, but they were static figures. Chamberlain was, from the first, the dynamic element in the government. The amount of slum clearance and re-housing actually carried out between 1934 and the outbreak of the second war is entirely forgotten today, partly because bomb damage created a new housing problem in its place, and partly because of the success of Labour propaganda in creating the impression that nothing was done for social welfare between the wars. Churchill, the leader of the post-war Conservative party, has never been interested to defend the achievements of a 'National' government from which he was excluded and with which he had profound differences on foreign policy and rearmament, and the men who laboured at rebuilding Britain in the thirties, Chamberlain himself for example and Hilton Young, the Minister of Health, are either dead or have gone out of politics.

The first convincing evidence that the government had done something more than avert the evils threatened in the summer of 1931 was the successful issue of the 3½% Conversion loan in the summer of 1932, the biggest operation of its kind ever carried out by any government. By means of this and subsequent Conversions the burden of the national debt was reduced by one-fifth. This did not only mean a reduced burden for the taxpayer; it meant the lowering all round of the standard rate of interest, 'cheap money', which is the best stimulus of business enterprise.

Unemployment figures did not respond so readily, largely because, though the tide had turned in Britain, it had not yet reached its lowest ebb in most other countries. Throughout 1932 the volume of production and exports continued to fall rapidly in France, Germany and the United States; in Britain it failed to rise but it ceased to fall. We rose from the third to the first place

in the list of exporters and were the first to profit by the general turn of the tide which began in 1933. Unemployment remained close to the three million mark until 1933. By 1937 it had fallen to less than half that figure, to about 1,300,000, which was unhappily the basic and normal figure of the inter-war period.

At the Treasury Chamberlain kept his budgets of 1932 and 1933 well within the limits of prudence. Allowing himself a little Dickensian joke he said that, though confronted with 'Great Expectations', he could only offer 'Bleak House'. Only in 1934 came a first instalment of the rewards of abstinence. In that year he abolished the whole of the cuts in unemployment benefit and half the cuts in the salaries of the various bodies of state employees. In the following year he got rid of the remainder of the salary cuts and restored in essentials, though with differing details, the remissions of income tax on the smaller earned incomes. The last of the burdens imposed in the emergency budget of the autumn of 1931 had been lifted. By that time the National government might claim that it had faithfully carried out the arduous task entrusted to it. King George V's Silver Jubilee, which fell in that same spring of 1935, provided a welcome occasion for national thanksgiving.

A few months later MacDonald resigned the premiership and withdrew from active politics. His health was broken, and he died two years later.

Thus ended a remarkable and in retrospect a tragic career; for it is tragic to witness at the age of sixty-five the results of the work of a lifetime shattered to pieces, and if, as may be alleged in MacDonald's case, the shattering is in part one's own fault, that makes it not less tragic but more so. Such had been President Wilson's fate also, though in his case it was not the labour of a lifetime but the labour of a presidency. For Wilson there was no aftermath of consolation; the man was shattered physically along with the shattering of his work. For MacDonald there was the consolation of four year's premiership as the head of a National government which, as has been shown, accomplished much. How far this afforded personal consolation to the man himself we shall not know until an adequate life of him appears. But we know enough to realise that he made no complete recovery. His powers were already on the wane when he resumed office

in 1931 and as a prime minister for the ensuing years he was, it seems, little more than a figure-head.

A year later Thomas, the last survivor of old Labour ministers who joined the National government, came to a much sadder end. 'Lloyds' have for many years offered policies of insurance for those who wish to insure against changes in taxation. In 1936 they informed the government that insurances in exceptionally large sums on a change in the income tax rate which had not been generally expected had been placed, one of them immediately before the presentation of the budget to the House of Commons. The evidence suggested the probability of a leakage. Thereupon Baldwin, who was now prime minister, announced that the government would ask parliament to pass the necessary resolution setting up a Tribunal of Enquiry under the chairmanship of a High Court Judge. The Tribunal found that Thomas had disclosed this part of the budget, after he had had knowledge of it as a member of the cabinet, to two friends, one of them a member of parliament, and that these two had taken out policies in the light of the knowledge they had thus acquired. The tribunal did not suggest, and no one who knew Thomas supposed, that he had given the information with a view to enabling them to make money by these dishonest means. It was the careless action of a careless man who was unwise in the choice of his friends. None the less, it inevitably brought his ministerial and parliamentary career to an abrupt conclusion.

Thomas had long been a unique figure in public life, and few men enjoyed a wider popularity irrespective of political opinions. A cynic has said that it is difficult to love a saint. The cynic is very probably wrong, but his remark suggests a reason why men found it easy to love Jimmy Thomas, for he was all too human. Hard judges might say that he had been spoilt by prosperity. In spite of his humorous proletarianism, his carefully dropped aitches, he had fallen in with the ways of the rich and not the best sort of rich either. He had rendered good service over a long period to his trade union and had been a steadying influence in his party, but other men have rendered greater services without winning anything like as much affection. Perhaps the secret of his charm is revealed in a remark made by Maxton to a fellow member immediately after Thomas's exposure and resignation. No better evidence could be taken, for Maxton was a man of

austere probity and a revolutionist to whom Thomas's sham socialism was more vexatious than the most die-hard conservatism. He said, ' I always regarded Jimmy as a rogue in Labour politics but the man never had an ounce of malice in him from the day he was born '.

King George V died in January, 1936, eight months after the celebration of his silver jubilee. There was something very instructive about the veneration of his subjects for this admirable man, for he had been a living embodiment of the Victorian virtues, and the feeling with which he was regarded proved that the British people, in spite of the acquisition of so many un-Victorian habits of life and modes of thought, were still largely Victorian at heart. Before the end of the same year his successor, so long the hero of multitudes in all parts of the English-speaking world, had abdicated.

Essentially the problem was exceedingly simple. The King was determined to marry Mrs. Simpson. Precedents established the fact that the King could not marry against the advice of his ministers without committing a breach of the spirit of the constitution. Baldwin, rightly interpreting the feeling of the country, had to tell the King that Mrs. Simpson would not be acceptable as queen. She was unacceptable, not because she was born outside the ranks of royalty or nobility, still less because she was an American, but because she was about to pass for a second time through a divorce court. The King suggested the possibility of what is called a morganatic marriage, a marriage which, though complete as a legal bond between the individuals concerned, remains a private affair and does not give the wife of a king the status of queen. Such a marriage, common in the courts of minor German princes of a past age, would have been without precedent in this country and Baldwin, after sounding opinions both in Great Britain and the Dominions, had to tell the King that it was also unacceptable. So the choice was between renouncing Mrs. Simpson and abdication, and the King without hesitation chose the latter.

Thus it may seem a simple matter, but it required very careful handling, partly on account of the need to harmonise and synchronise the proceedings in the parliaments of all the self-governing Dominions of the Crown, and still more on account of the divinity

that doth hedge a king. It was essential that nothing should mar the dignity of proceedings so intimately affecting not only the present occupant of the throne but the kingship which is eternal, the prestige of the only great and ancient monarchy surviving in the modern world. Baldwin's handling of the abdication crisis was his last service to his country, and there was general agreement that in this matter he was above and beyond criticism. More than any other statesman whose name appears in this book he was an embodiment of the common sense and common decency of the British people. In some other spheres this might limit his outlook. In dealing with the abdication it was the secret of his success. No one else, it was felt, could have managed the matter so well. No one else could have delivered so absolutely right a speech as that in which, on December 10, he told the whole story to the House of Commons and to the world.

The episode impressed foreign opinion in much the same way as the general strike had done. It illustrated the quiet stability of the British people. Many said at the time that the dignity of the British monarchy would prove to be irreparably compromised; but it was not so. The incident was soon seen to have affected no one but King Edward himself. He disappeared, and in a few months it was exactly as if he had never been, and George VI had succeeded George V.

Only one public man sounded a jarring note—Churchill, who, as a personal friend of King Edward, pleaded for delay. As the King had made his choice, delay would have been useless and dangerous. Many felt, perhaps unjustly, that Churchill's intervention was prompted by his general distrust and dislike of Baldwin, and it was sharply resented in the House of Commons and throughout the country. As he himself acknowledges in his book, the episode involved an unfortunate set-back in his campaign for driving the government on into more rapid re-armament.

X. THE GERMAN MENACE, 1933-39

IN the Preface to his book on the Second World War Churchill says that he suggested to Roosevelt that this war should be called The Unnecessary War. ' Never was there a war more easy to stop.' There is a sense in which this is obviously true. When Hitler took control in 1933 Germany was still, in spite of the painstaking and subterranean activities of General von Seekt and others, virtually unarmed. When he publicly flouted the Versailles Treaty by introducing conscription in 1935, when he sent his troops into the Rhineland in 1936, his forces were still quite incapable of coping with a declaration of war by France and Britain. The same line of argument may apply, though this is more debatable, to the case of Czechoslovakia in 1938, but we may leave that till later. In 1933, 1935 or 1936 Great Britain and France, either or both of them, could have occupied Germany by a brief and almost painless operation, much as she is occupied today after six years unexampled agony—and then what? In that sense the war was ' easy to stop ', or prevent. At the same time it was also insuperably difficult, because no one, Churchill or any one else, could have persuaded the British people that it would be either wise or right to march into Germany in the circumstances of any one of these three years.

In 1875 Bismarck, it is said, planned another attack on France. France was recovering with what seemed alarming rapidity from her defeat in 1870. Better to knock her down again at once before she was firmly on her feet. The plan did not come off, but it has always been regarded in this country as an extreme example of political wickedness. There is of course this difference between 1875 and 1933-5-6, that the recovery of France involved no breach of any treaty, whereas the activities of the Nazis involved breaches of the Treaty of Versailles. There was a case in international law against the Germany of 1933-5-6 as there had not been against the France of 1875. But British people had long been told that there was much that was wrong in the Treaty of Versailles and they were well aware that treaties, like laws, call for revision as

circumstances change. They regarded the parts of the treaty which said that Germany was not to have what armaments she pleased and not to fortify her own Rhineland as similar to the clauses in the Crimean treaty of 1856 which had said that Russia was to have no naval base on her own Black Sea coast. When Palmerston was asked how long he thought that would last he jauntily replied, ' It will last my time ' ; and he was then seventy-one !*

I have in this chapter to cover the same ground as is covered by Churchill in the first half of his first volume. The reader will have read that masterly and enthralling narrative and retain a general impression of it. That narrative, full as it is of striking and valuable and uncontrovertible contributions to authentic history, leaves on the reader's mind, does it not, an impression already created by the propaganda of the Labour party (for the most part neither valuable nor uncontrovertible) that the statesmen of the National government, ' the Men of Munich ' as they are sometimes called, made a great mess both of foreign policy and of rearmament during those crucial years and landed us in a war which with better management could have been avoided, or ' stopped ', or at any rate won at much less expense. That such better management would have been provided by Messrs. Attlee and Co. will appear before the end of this chapter, even if it does not appear already, to be a somewhat ludicrous proposition. We need not waste time considering it. The interesting question may be posed somewhat as follows. Suppose Churchill had joined the National government in 1931 ; suppose both Baldwin and MacDonald had withdrawn from public life in 1933 (as many thought they well might have done), and suppose Churchill had maintained his seniority in office over Chamberlain and become prime minister with the National government's immense majority behind him in 1933. None of these suppositions involve any improbability. How much, in that case, would the course of British policy and general European history have differed from the course it actually pursued? How much of what Churchill, in opposition, declared the government ought to do would he in fact have been able to do himself as the head of the government? That is the question that I would ask the reader to carry with him in his mind as he reads this chapter ; and I would ask him also to remember that, although Churchill has proved himself an

* Actually it lasted till five years after his death at the age of eighty, fourteen years.

incomparable leader in war, he has never at any stage of his career proved himself a shrewd judge or a dexterous manipulator of public opinion in peace time, and without the support of public opinion a statesman can take but few steps in any direction however wise those steps might be. That is democracy.

The disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles allowed Germany a long service army of 100,000 men. There was to be no conscription, no air force, nor submarines. The navy was to be narrowly limited in both the number of vessels allowed and their size. The authors of the treaty made no promises but they expressly stated that the enforced disarmament of Germany would be followed by voluntary disarmament on their own part, when circumstances permitted. That was the position all through the twenties. When would circumstances permit? So far as we ourselves were concerned we evidently thought they permitted already and embarked, as had already been related, on one-sided disarmament, as regarded our army and air force, and naval limitation by agreement at conferences attended by the United States and Japan, neither of whom had a potential enemy within three thousand miles of their shores.* We did all this mainly no doubt because it saved taxpayers' money but also because we thought it was the right thing to do. We wanted France to do the same. It was a commonplace of the twenties and the early thirties to remark that we were still living in an artificially maintained system of unbalance of power: Germany disarmed and surrounded by France and her Allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia, fully armed. Sooner or later, either France must disarm or Germany would arm, and the former was to be preferred. Churchill on the other hand said that, if either of these events happened, Germany would resume her natural superiority, based on the fact that there were, or soon would be, twice as many Germans as Frenchmen. Germany would seek revenge and there would be another war. It seemed not unlikely, and yet the alternative opened up a hopeless prospect. Could a nation of recognised sovereign independence be expected or compelled to remain disarmed for an indefinite period?

However, there was to be a Disarmament Conference under the auspices of the League to deal with the thorny question of

* France and Italy also sometimes came into these naval agreements.

disarmament of land forces as other conferences had already dealt with naval disarmament. It had long been promised and postponed, while an obscure body called the Preparatory Disarmament Commission had for years been preparing at Geneva a draft scheme to provide a basis for its deliberations. It met at last in 1932. Its chairman was Arthur Henderson, late foreign secretary in the British Labour government. He was a well-meaning second-rate man, but that really did not matter. The greatest statesman that ever lived could not have extracted success from the Disarmament Conference of 1932-3. Either he would have failed to put French and German armies on an equality or he would have succeeded with results worse than could have followed from his failure. The summer and autumn of 1932 were spent by the Conference in considering what was called the MacDonald plan. As France would not give up conscription there was to be conscription all round but the conscription of each country was to be limited by international rules and supervision. As France had a very powerful force of artillery a large part of it was to be destroyed so that all might start level. France demanded a four years postponement of this sacrifice. Great Britain agreed. Thereupon Hitler, who was now firmly in the saddle, defiantly withdrew his country both from the Conference and from the League of Nations. The Conference was not dissolved but it was adjourned. Maybe it is still in theoretical existence; maybe it is not. It never met again.

In the very same month occurred a by-election at Fulham. A socialist pacifist, fighting explicitly on the disarmament issue, won what was regarded as a safe Conservative seat, reducing the Conservative poll of the general election by 10,000 votes. Lansbury, the leader of the opposition, was also explicitly a pacifist and said that 'all nations must disarm to the level of Germany'. The Fulham election impressed and discouraged Baldwin. His mind was already moving reluctantly towards a rearmament programme, but he felt that such a policy would not be possible unless and until he could carry a solid majority of the electorate with him.

Another event of the same year was the once notorious debate of the Oxford Union in which a majority voted for a motion that this House 'refuses to fight for King or country'. What exactly the undergraduates who supported this motion meant thereby is not plain; they may merely have meant that they would not

fight in an 'imperialistic' war of aggression in which their country was seeking its own advantage. Their nursery game received a publicity and created an impression abroad which they can have neither expected nor desired. If one wanted to find an excuse for them one could find it in the words of their elders and betters. Attlee was also an Oxford man. He had seen a lot of the world since his Oxford days and had had an excellent military record in the first war. Speaking with the full responsibility of a public man he declared a year later that he and his party 'had absolutely abandoned any idea of nationalist loyalty'—which comes to exactly the same thing as the Oxford resolution. That was said in 1934 when the government made its first small increase in the Air Force. On this increase the Labour party moved a vote of censure and Attlee said 'We deny the need for increased air armaments'.

Chamberlain was much nearer the mark. He wrote at the same date, 'We shall be much more likely to deter Germany from mad-dogging if we have an air force which, in case of need, could bomb the Ruhr from Belgium'. At this date the *Spitfire* and the *Hurricane* types of fighter were designed. In 1935 Cunliffe-Lister, afterwards Lord Swinton, took over the Air Ministry and air re-armament went ahead. It never caught up the lead Germany had secured. In fact the German lead steadily lengthened and in 1939 her air force was twice the size—many people imagine, I think, that it was much more than twice the size—of ours. None the less expenditure on the Air Force rose from £17,000,000 in 1934 to £248,000,000 in 1939. Numbers of new aircraft produced rose from 1,830 in 1936 to 7,940 in 1939. Much of the credit for this should go to Swinton, but his services have been almost as completely forgotten as those of Hilton Young in the matter of slum clearance.

But we have run ahead of our date. In 1935 Hitler announced the introduction of conscription. Churchill says that immediately on this announcement the Rhineland and its bridgeheads should have been re-occupied by the Versailles powers by order of the League of Nations. This opportunity the government missed. Their response was the Stresa Conference at which Great Britain, France and Italy launched a general denunciation of Germany's new departure. Hitler was not impressed, but he thought it would be as well to make a conciliatory reply. He justified his

breaches of the Treaty of Versailles on the ground that that treaty had been imposed on Germany by force, but declared his unswerving loyalty to the Locarno treaties. He expressly stated that he neither wished nor intended to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, a matter in which Mussolini was specially interested. The speech seems to have won commendation from everyone of importance except that 'incorrigible war-monger', Churchill.

Rearmament was being discussed and a general election could not be far off. In these circumstances the Council of the League of Nations Union decided to collect from as wide a public as possible answers to a series of questions. The League of Nations Union was independent of party politics. Its sole purpose since its foundation had been to promote interest in and support for the League of Nations. Its publications had always adopted a somewhat optimistic view of the powers and prospects of the League. This was sound policy up to a point, for the League would only succeed in so far as the public in all its constituent states believed it could succeed. It was at the same time dangerous and misleading in so far as it created in some people's minds the impression that 'The League' and 'collective security' were things that existed in themselves apart from the policies and, what was equally important, the power of armed force behind the policies of the states, more particularly the great powers, which were members of the League. To that extent the outlook expressed in the propaganda of the Union was nearer to the outlook of the Labour party than to the policy of the government.

The questionnaire was called 'The Peace Ballot', and that in itself was misleading, for it suggested that those who gave affirmative answers to the questions were voting for peace, and that those who gave negative answers wanted war. Everyone wanted peace and no one wanted war, in Great Britain at any rate, however it might be in other less satisfied lands. The real issue was what measures would be most likely to secure peace. Since Hitler was building an Air Force as fast as he could and nothing we could say would stop him, would it make for peace if we did the same, or not? That was a question which might well have been asked, but it was not. The principle questions asked were: Are you in favour of the all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement? Are you in favour of all-round abolition of national

military and naval aircraft by international agreement? Eleven million people answered these questions in the affirmative and apparently they did not realise that the questions had about as much sense in them as the question, Are you in favour of the admission of Adolf Hitler as a member of the League of Nations Union? Hitler had not applied for membership, but his application was quite as likely as any international agreement, including Hitler's Germany, on the policies indicated in the questions actually asked. Yet many of those who answered these questions affirmatively doubtless felt in a muddled sort of way that they were voting for ' peace ' and also voting against British rearmament.

The ' Peace Ballot ' questionnaire concluded with the following: Do you consider that if a nation attacks another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by (*a*) economic and non-military measures, (*b*) if necessary military measures? The same eleven millions voted for (*a*); only a two-to-one majority voted for (*b*). There remains another question which was not asked but might well have been: Suppose the ' other nations ' won't play. In that case do you consider that it is the duty of your own country alone to compel the nation which attacks another to stop by (*a*) as above or if necessary by (*b*) as above? That question was soon going to be asked in a manner more urgent than any L.N.U. questionnaire. And surely it is a very proper question. ' The League ' was not an end in itself but a means of making the sovereign nations internationally virtuous, and it is a queer kind of virtue that has only to be exercised, like ' forming fours ', by collective action.

Chamberlain said the Peace Ballot was ' very mischievous ', and so it was. All invitations to muddled thinking are mischievous. One of the most surprising passages in Churchill's book is that in which he takes the opposite view. His account ignores the fact that the vote for ' if necessary, military measures ' was much less unanimous than that for the other proposals. He writes as if people had responded with an omnibus vote to all the questions taken together.*

At this point, namely the late summer of 1935, a red herring was drawn across what we may call the hunt of the Nazi wolf and

* Churchill, *Second World War*, p. 132.

the hounds all went baying after the Italian fox. Mussolini decided to conquer Abyssinia. Behind this there was a long story from which differing conclusions might be, and in fact were, drawn. On one side was the fact that Abyssinia had long been recognized by the great powers as an Italian interest; that as far back as the nineties, in the general 'scramble for Africa', Italy had tried to conquer Abyssinia with the entire approval of the British and French governments but had ignominiously failed; and lastly, that the state of affairs in Abyssinia, itself an 'empire' built up by one set of Africans conquering others at a fairly recent date, suggested that the peoples of Abyssinia, though not of course the ruling clique, might profit by a spell of European control, as many other parts of Africa are said to have profited, at any rate those controlled by ourselves. In fact the enterprise proposed by Mussolini was very much the same sort of enterprise as those by which all empires, including our own, have been largely built up. Rhodes's destruction of the Matabele and establishment of Rhodesia is the first example that springs to the mind. None the less, as Churchill remarks with his inimitable irony, the exploit was 'unsuited to the ethics of the twentieth century'. It belonged to the class of wars 'for King and country' of which neither the Oxford undergraduates nor the Labour party could possibly approve.

And on the other side there was more to it than this. Abyssinia had, with Italian support, been made a member of the League of Nations and as recently as 1928 Italy had bound herself to Abyssinia by a twenty-year Pact of Friendship and Arbitration in which she undertook to submit any disputes which might arise between the two countries to a procedure of arbitration. So there was a question of the sanctity of treaties, and if there is to be no international defence of the sanctity of treaties then international relations relapse into barbarism. Then there was the question of the authority of the League. The League had already lost ground by its failure to stop Japan from conquering Manchuria a few years before, but it could excuse its failure on the ground that action then had been impossible without the co-operation of the United States. Italian aggression was a much more cogent test, Italy being a very secondary 'great power' at the mercy of her neighbours if they chose to assert themselves.

It was this latter set of considerations that appealed to the

British public, irrespective of party. The British public, so lethargically indifferent hitherto to the threat to its own existence from the re-arming of Germany, at once took Abyssinia, about which it knew nothing, to its bosom as a little Black Belgium, and demanded that the League should apply sanctions, which means economic boycotts, to stop the Italian invasion.

Baldwin was greatly disturbed. Sanctions, real sanctions sufficient to stop the invasion would, in Mussolini's present mood, mean war. War with whom? With 'the League'. What was the League? Germany and Japan had left it; America and Russia had never joined it; the League was in fact Great Britain and France and 'the rest'. The rest included admirable communities like Holland and Norway, less admirable communities like Lithuania and Guatemala, dozens of them, but for the purpose of a naval and air war in the Mediterranean 'the rest', even if they offered to help, would be about as much use as the pygmies of the African jungle. France was determined on no account to fight Italy with whom she had just fixed up arrangements for mutual defence against Germany. So the war of Italy with the League would in effect be a war between Italy and Great Britain, to keep Italy out of Abyssinia. Baldwin seems to have been determined not to have such a war, and though the British electorate was never asked the question in that direct form, it is to be presumed that the British public agreed with him. Yet British public opinion was determined to have 'sanctions' and, as Baldwin said, sanctions, real sanctions, meant war. Then what was to be done? The answer is obvious. Apply sham sanctions. Let the League of Nations, for example, decree—as it did decree—that its members would export no more aluminium to Italy, aluminium being one of the few metals that Italy produced herself in quantities far in excess of her own requirements. But it would never do to apply an 'oil sanction', because without foreign oil the whole expedition would wither away, and Italy would very probably fight 'the League', that is to say, Great Britain, rather than submit to that. And there was this further point; all the oil required could be got from America. But, you will say, America disapproved of Italian imperialism as strongly as the British public. True, but that would not have prevented her industrialists from financing it. She disapproved, with even better reason perhaps, of the imperialism of Japan, but her

industrialists financed it up to a much later date than that which we have now reached.

To return to the narrative of events. Before we tried sham sanctions we tried bluff. On September 10, Hoare, who had recently become foreign secretary in succession to Simon, met his French opposite number, Laval, and they privately agreed to rule out ' everything that might lead to war '. Two days later Hoare delivered at Geneva a stirring speech in favour of ' the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety and particularly for the steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression'. For the first time for a long while the British Labour party applauded the government, but Mussolini, who only six months before had joined the British and French governments in making an equally emphatic demonstration at Stresa, was not unduly troubled. The Italians invaded Abyssinia and sham sanctions began. Very few people in England understood the real situation. We confidently hoped for the best. Mussolini did not seem to mind the sanctions very much, but we had learnt from the experience of the wartime blockade that these things worked slowly.

Meanwhile the government was thinking about a general election. It was not legally inevitable until a year later, but since in the days of the Septennial Act parliaments had in practice been limited to six years, there could be nothing improper in limiting the present one to four, and the time seemed propitious. The austerities of 1931-2 had already begun to pay dividends and the government's foreign policy was remarkably popular ; and, since that policy was based on what might unkindly be called a pretence, one could not rely on its popularity lasting very long. Chamberlain wanted to fight the election on a straightforward programme of national defence and rearmament. The warnings of political agents made Baldwin rather nervous about that but a defence programme featured in the official programme of the party issued over his signature : to increase the Air Force to a point of equality with that of Germany, to recondition the fleet by the replacement of obsolescent ships, and to organise industry for speedy conversion to defence purposes.

The Labour party was in an obvious difficulty. In essentials its rank and file were, as always except when the country is actually at war, profoundly ' pacifist ', in the sense of being

unwilling to face the possibility of war or to prepare for it, but Bevin, the most powerful of the politically-minded trade union leaders, had a wide following as a stalwart opponent of Italian aggression and in general the party supported the sanctions policy of the government. So the party decided to make as much capital as it could out of the wickedness of rearmament in general. Tory candidates emphasizing the necessity of re-armament were often interrupted with cries of ' the Tories want war ', and a favourite Labour poster was a picture of a baby in a gas mask.

The National government lost half the enormous majority it had secured in the crisis of 1931 but it retained a majority of 247 which is far the biggest majority ever given to a government going to the country to ask for a ' follow on ', except the Lloyd George victory of 1918.

The claim that the government asked for a mandate for re-armament has been answered by pointing to a sentence in a single speech of Baldwin's, addressed to the Peace Society. ' I give you my word that there will be no great armaments '. In many other speeches, of course, he spoke up to his brief, the official re-armament programme of his party. The single sentence quoted is a bad example of Baldwinian wobbling and I, for one, am not concerned to defend it. Presumably he meant that the official programme did not, apart from the Air Force, imply an increase in the quantity of the armed forces. There would be no conscription, but only provision of up to date weapons ; no enlargement of the navy, but new ships for old.

His own defence, more than a year later, was different. Saying that he was going to be ' appallingly frank ' he told the House of Commons that he had not proposed to the country as drastic a rearmament programme as circumstances required, because, if he had done so, his government would have been defeated, and a Labour government would have replaced it which would have done less for rearmament than his government was doing. Churchill says that this statement ' carried the naked truth about his motives into indecency . . . The House was shocked '. It was certainly annoyed. The Labour men were annoyed because the part of the statement that concerned them was true. The Conservatives were annoyed because, whatever validity the apologia might possess as a defence of the leader's own wobbling, it implied a gross injustice to the party as a whole and the official programme

on which it had won the election. They had asked for a mandate to rearm and they had got it.

A month after the election and two months after the beginning of the attack on Abyssinia Sir Samuel Hoare set out for a holiday in Switzerland. He was persuaded by French importunacy to break his journey in Paris and to discuss matters for which he had not prepared himself in advance by agreement with his colleagues. The League was about to consider the imposition of further sanctions, including an oil sanction. Before consenting Laval was determined that another effort should be made to conciliate the belligerents, and the only effective instrument of conciliation would be an offer of terms which Mussolini could present to his people as a tolerable alternative to the victory of Italian arms. Hoare assented to proposals which, in Laval's opinion, bore this character. The terms were to be submitted in the first instance to the belligerents, and afterwards to the League, with Franco-British sponsorship, but, as usually happens where French politicians are concerned, the proposals 'leaked' at once into the French press. They gave Italy about half the Abyssinian empire.

British public opinion was aghast. Did this represent the policy of 'steady collective resistance to aggression' which Hoare had advocated at Geneva three months before, and on the strength of which the government had just won a general election? No new fact had been disclosed since the Geneva speech except the fact of Italian aggression, an aggression which had as yet achieved no impressive results. What could possibly justify Great Britain and France in going behind the back of the League, foresaking the great principle of collective security, and seeking to do a deal with Mussolini in the worst style of the old 'secret diplomacy' at the expense of the unfortunate country which, as League members, they had pledged themselves to defend?

The events of the ten days following the publication of the proposals constituted a striking proof of the realities of representative democracy in this country. A government just returned to power by an overwhelming majority, led by a prime minister who was respected far beyond the ranks of his immediate followers, seemed to endorse the Hoare-Laval proposals. They did not, in fact, like them but they decided to stand by their colleague. But the country would have none of it. Hoare had to give up his holiday, return to England, and resign.

Hoare's defence in the debate following his resignation contained some impressive features. He pointed out that, though fifty nations had agreed to impose sanctions, not a single one except ourselves had taken a single step to meet the attack for which, as Baldwin had said a year before, all states imposing sanctions should be prepared. That, however, did not justify the Hoare-Laval proposals. They were killed stone dead by British public opinion, and Baldwin frankly admitted that his government had made a mistake in not repudiating them as soon as it received them.

Hoare was the first foreign secretary to crash against an obstacle in mid-flight since Palmerston had been dismissed for congratulating Louis Napoleon on his coup d'état. His successor, Anthony Eden, had one outstanding merit. He was young, under forty. The average age of cabinets had been growing higher and higher and the National government was one of the worst offenders. Neither Baldwin nor Chamberlain were very encouraging to the younger generation. Baldwin liked his old friends. His ideal cabinet was one in which

> The men that were boys when I was a boy
> Grow old along with me.*

Chamberlain had never been an aspiring young M.P. He entered parliament at fifty, already sufficiently distinguished to enter a cabinet as soon as he felt inclined. He often remarked that the young men of the party were rather a disappointing lot. Young men often seem rather disappointing to old men, but probably no more disappointing than the old men appear to the young men.

As for Mussolini, he went ahead and conquered Abyssinia in the spring. Churchill's view is that we should have been wise not to burn our fingers with the defence of Abyssinia at all, but that, having entered on the course, we should have gone through with it and faced, in defence of the League, an Anglo-Italian war. Our available naval and air forces were on paper inferior to those of Italy, but there can be no doubt, on the basis of 1940-43 experience, that we should have beaten them with ease, rescued Abyssinia and, what was much more important, vindicated the authority of the League. Hitler was not, at that time, strong enough to intervene. With all this one may agree, but the whole Abyssinian episode is not, relatively to the main problem of

* Belloc, H. *The South Country.*

Germany, a matter of first rate importance either way. It is full of instructive features, but the main lines of the story of this chapter would be much the same if the Abyssinian episode could be cut out of it.

While Mussolini was completing the conquest of Abyssinia another event of very much graver import occurred nearer home. On March 7, 1936, Hitler sent his troops into the Rhineland, the province between the Rhine and the French and Belgian frontiers which, though in all other respects an integral part of the German state, had been declared by the Treaty of Versailles to be permanently demilitarized. The Allies were, under the treaty, to occupy various parts of it for stated periods—or indefinitely if Germany failed to carry out her treaty obligations—and after that it was to remain, as it were, a military vacuum. Such it had been since 1930.

This was primarily a question for France. If the French government had said to the British government 'We will not stand this. We are sending in our troops to drive the Germans back and we call upon you, under the Treaty of Locarno, for your immediate and active support', we could not and should not have refused, one must presume, though it is quite likely that there would have been a good deal of Labour opposition. The French did not do this. They were already suffering from the creeping paralysis out of which they were only shaken by the experience of German occupation.

Churchill points out, very truly, that this was the beginning of the end so far as prospects of peace were concerned. Once the Germans had created a more or less impregnable wall of defence along the French frontier they could turn east and work their will, and any attempt to stop them there would mean a major war. The driving back of the Germans out of the Rhineland in the spring of 1936 would, on the other hand, have been a short and simple operation. It is difficult to realise, in view of the overwhelming German superiority of force in 1940, that four years earlier there was an equal, or rather a much greater, superiority against them. The German generals were opposed to the enterprise as they fully expected France to call Hitler's bluff. Hitler knew better, and by this, the most audacious of all his moves, he established his reputation as an infallible judge of European situations which

he did not begin to lose until he lost the battle of Britain. The British government did not urge the French government to resist and call upon us. It lay low and waited for the French to take the initiative, hoping no doubt that they would not take it. The French, much less excusably, waited for us. The question, then, arises: Supposing that, as we supposed at the beginning of this chapter, Churchill had been prime minister at the time, could he have galvanised France into activity, and brought Britain in on her side? On the question of the German action as a thing in itself the British reaction was perfectly expressed by Lord Lothian, a highly intelligent man who soon afterwards distinguished himself as British Ambassador at Washington, when he said, 'After all, they are only going into their own back garden'. But on the point of honouring the Treaty of Locarno on the demand of our ally, British opinion would probably have swung round. The Germans would have been pushed out of the Rhineland and it would, presumably have been strongly re-occupied by allied troops. And what then? Further enquiry does not yield easy answers.

In May, 1937, shortly after King George VI's coronation, Baldwin resigned the premiership to Chamberlain and retired altogether from public life. Both Baldwin and Chamberlain were men of absolute integrity and both suffered from a sort of fundamental Englishness which disqualified them from grasping the realities of Nazi Germany, but in other respects, as these pages have already shown, they were very different men. Here we are concerned only with their European outlook. No British prime minister ever disliked 'foreign affairs' as much as Baldwin. He brought his mind to bear on them only as a dire necessity and with extreme reluctance. Chamberlain on the other hand confronted the European scene with courage and astonishing self-confidence. He became on major issues the director of the foreign policy of his government, as a prime minister has always, if he wishes, the right to be. He formed his own picture of the situation, and it turned out to be fundamentally mistaken, yet it may be that his policy was for the time the right policy to pursue. It came to be called appeasement.

'Appeasement' became in retrospect a term of reproach, the shibboleth separating Chamberlainism from Churchillism, so it is amusing, though of no argumentative significance, to find the

word used by Churchill himself to define our correct foreign policy in 1920—'prudence and appeasement'.* Of course the word, like most abstract terms, has different shades of meaning. If it means 'creating an atmosphere of peace' everyone would support it. If it means paying blackmail, trying to pacify an enemy by giving him what is not yours to give nor his to take, then it is clearly cowardly, immoral and bad. The idea behind Chamberlain's policy of appeasement may be stated as follows. The Germans have certain legitimate grievances. Hitler can make certain legitimate demands. So long as his demands fall within these limits we have no case for going to war with him over them, however much we may abhor his system of government. It may be that, when these demands are satisfied, he will be satisfied. In that case war will have been avoided. If he goes beyond these demands, then at last we shall have a cast iron case against him. Then we should have to fight, but not till then. Meanwhile we must go on rearming.

The line between the legitimate and the illegitimate demand Chamberlain based fairly and squarely on the old Wilsonian principle of nationality or self-determination. So long as Hitler demanded the annexation of territories predominantly inhabited by Germans who appeared to wish to live under his rule we should not resist him. That was Chamberlainism. It was a logical policy logically pursued, though Chamberlain made some singularly foolish remarks in the course of his pursuit of it.

Meanwhile rearmament went ahead, though not as fast as it should have done. Increased Service estimates came before the House year by year, and year by year the Labour party opposed them. In the retrospective propaganda with which they sought to cover their tracks Left wing propagandists asserted that the opposition leaders did not oppose these estimates because they were against rearmament but because they objected to the government's foreign policy and used the Service votes as a means of censuring the government. It seemed a safe line of defence because not one reader in a thousand of Gollancz's little books was going to look up the debates in question and see what was actually said. If he did so he would find that the Labour speakers specifically opposed rearmament as such, again and again.

And what was the foreign policy which the opposition offered

* Churchill, *Aftermath*, p. 378, quoted by Feiling, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 250.

as an alternative to that of the Government? It was called 'collective security', and if ever there was a phrase without meaning it was 'collective security' as opposed to national security under the conditions of the later thirties. The Labour party had in fact been knocked silly by their catastrophe of 1931, and I have already suggested that they had some excuse for vexation. They had a further excuse for vexation over the election of 1935, for it is obvious that if that election had been held after the Hoare-Laval fiasco it would have given a very different result. The leaders of the Labour party have since entirely recovered from their silliness, over foreign affairs at any rate, as a result of five years training under Churchill. A man who has recovered his sanity only wastes his time in trying to prove that he was just as sane as he is now during the years when he was unfortunately mad.

As between the government and its Labour critics there can surely be little doubt of the 'verdict of history', if there is such a thing, but what about Churchill and his attacks on the government for doing not too much but too little? Actually, while reserving his freedom to criticize, Churchill had since 1935 been exercising a stimulating influence within the Air Ministry and the Admiralty as a member of research committees. But this was all behind the scenes. The question that should be asked is, should he not have been invited to join the government? With the passage of the India Act of 1935 the formal cause of his separation from the party had been removed. Austen Chamberlain, who had stood aside from the National government on account of increasing age and died a few months before his brother became prime minister, held very strongly that Churchill should have been offered high office. The obvious occasion for such an offer was after the election of 1935, when the government had won a mandate for the policy of rearmament which Churchill had made his own. Another opportunity was the reorganization of the government in 1937 when Chamberlain succeeded Baldwin. He was not asked. It is easy to find party-political reasons for this. None the less it was wrong of the government not to offer the control of and responsibility for its rearmament programme to the one man in the country who obviously knew more about such matters than anyone else. At the same time it is unlikely that Chamberlain, who was as stiff and positive as Churchill himself,

would have allowed Churchill to interfere with his foreign policy. If Churchill had entered the government in 1935 or 1937 he might quite possibly have resigned, with Eden, at the beginning of 1938, when Chamberlain insisted on paying what proved an entirely useless visit of appeasement to Mussolini. Churchill's own view is that he was fortunate in escaping all responsibility for the inadequacies and errors of the years before the war. We may agree that he was fortunate, and that the country was fortunate too. We went into the war with our ' second eleven '. When it got into trouble we had our ' first eleven ', under our only possible captain of England, ready to replace it.

This is not a history of the events preceding the war but only a study of British politics. We need not, for example, spend much time on the Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936 and ended in 1939. It was a part of the Left wing insanity of the period to pretend, or perhaps really believe, that this was a struggle between Darkness and Light. Actually, as a very little research suffices to show, it was a struggle between two rival gangs of terrorists whose aims and methods were equally abhorrent to British standards. Nor were those on firmer ground who declared that a victory for Franco would provide another ally for Germany. Franco, like the Austrian Schwartzenberg eighty years before, proceeded to ' astonish the world by his ingratitude '* to the German and Italian Dictators who had contributed so substantially to his victory. On the balance, as Churchill shows, he rendered in the course of the war more service to the Allies than to Germany, not because he loved them but because it suited him to do so.

In the spring of 1938 Hitler grabbed and devoured Austria. Vienna was the key position from which everything north, south and east of it could be dominated. We now know, of course, that Hitler's ambition was insatiable. Churchill knew it in advance because, being built on Napoleonic lines himself, he could understand the new Napoleon. To the British government and the British people Austria was simply a country inhabited by Germans. It had wanted to be united with Germany in 1919 and this had

* The Hapsburg monarchy was rescued from dissolution by Russia in 1849. Five years later Schwartzenberg pursued an anti-Russian policy in the Crimean war, saying ' We will astonish the world by our ingratitude '. The British historian, C. A. Fyffe, drily remarked that an exhibition of Austrian gratitude would have astonished the world still more.

been forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles, very wrongly in liberal opinion. German-Austrian union had come up for discussion at various intervening dates. What Hitler had now done seemed, in spite of the revolting manner of his doing it, something that had got to be accepted.

After Austria, Czechoslovakia. This multi-national state contained three million Germans, Sudeten Germans as they were called, not scattered all over the country but concentrated in the frontier districts where Czechoslovakia bordered Germany on the north and west and Austria on the south. It was possible to draw a fairly indisputable map of the districts containing over fifty per cent. Sudeten Germans. They had been better treated than many minorities in many of the new states, but they had their grievances and were easily whipped up to demand incorporation within the Reich. If the Czech government chose to fight over it France was bound by treaty to support Czechoslovakia and we, though under no treaty obligation to Czechoslovakia, were bound by treaty to support France. Chamberlain held that it would be wrong for Great Britain to be drawn into a second great war to prevent a territory containing a majority population of three million Germans from being transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany. The rightness of the present frontier was in fact so dubious that in 1919, when Germany was down and out and without a friend in the world, the question of redrawing the old Bohemian frontier in such a way as to bring most of the Sudeten Germans within Germany had been discussed, but preference for the historic frontier, which had the further merit of following the lines of the mountain ranges, had prevailed at that time. It was to prevent a war on this issue that Chamberlain made his three famous visits to Hitler by air in September, 1938.

At the first meeting, at Berchtesgaden, Hitler demanded the immediate incorporation in the Reich of all areas of Czechoslovakia containing an over fifty per cent. German population. Chamberlain returned, secured the agreement of the French government and the assent, under strong protest, of the Czech government.

Having secured French and Czech assent to the Berchtesgaden ultimatum Chamberlain flew to Germany again, six days later, meeting Hitler at Godesberg. Adopting his favourite technique Hitler, having secured acceptance of his demands, proceeded to

alter them and stiffen them in various particulars. These new terms Chamberlain denounced and, after a stormy interview, returned home and ordered immediate mobilization. Thereupon Mussolini, either of his own accord or by arrangement with Hitler, proposed a four power conference at Munich. The invitation reached Chamberlain when he was in the middle of addressing to the House of Commons an ' entry into war ' speech equivalent to that of Sir Edward Grey in August, 1914. The Munich Agreement saved the face of the British and French governments by modifying the Godesburg ultimatum in certain unimportant details. As Churchill said in the course of the subsequent debate, ' £1 was demanded at the pistol's point (at Berchtesgaden). When it was given, £2 was demanded at the pistol's point (at Godesberg). Finally (at Munich) the Dictator consented to take £1 17s. 6d.'

There was also a supplementary agreement at Munich, which was Chamberlain's own idea. At Berchtesgaden he had, we read in his diary, ' got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word.' It is truly amazing that Hitler should have made such an impression—Hitler with his record of mendacity, a record which reduced Napoleon himself to a status not far removed from that of George Washington. Even so the impression might be supposed to have passed off at Godesberg, but enough of it survived to inspire the idea of a joint declaration of ' no more war ' over the signatures of the two great men, the man of the swastika and the man of the umbrella. Chamberlain composed the document and Hitler assented to it with enthusiasm. In 1914 the ' scrap of paper ' was seventy-five years old, and those who made it had no conception of the circumstances in which it would be torn up. In 1939 the ' scrap of paper ' had been specially manufactured for the tearing a mere six months before it was torn.

In the parliamentary debate on the Munich settlement the opposition were handicapped by the fact that they had applauded Chamberlain's announcement of his intention to go to Munich. Of course they had to attack the Agreement after it was made because they attacked everything Chamberlain did or did not do. Their tactic was to move a long-winded resolution regretting this, that and the other and demanding ' active support of collective security through the League of Nations and the summoning of a

world conference . . .' Thus do well-meaning people shut their eyes and deceive themselves with verbiage. There was at this date no ' League of Nations ', as the body bearing that name contained only two of the six great powers. And as for a world conference, any one could see that the offer of such to Hitler would be about as much use as the offer of a Bible to a boa-constrictor. The real attack on Munich came from Churchill and his friends and was based on the view that we ought to have stood firm and, if necessary, gone to war on the Czech issue. Quintin Hogg, who fought a by-election a month after Munich, said that no one in any of his audiences expressed the view that we ought to have gone to war on that issue.

' Munich ' has long since become a symbol of shame, so it is the more necessary, in the interests of historical truth, to record that when Chamberlain returned from Munich with war averted he enjoyed, for a brief space, a world wide popularity and prestige such as had fallen to no man since President Wilson sailed for Europe at the end of 1918. And there was this difference. Chamberlain's prestige was based on an achievement; he had averted a second great war. Wilson's prestige was almost entirely an expectation of favours to come. Actually ' Munich ' should be neither a symbol of shame nor a symbol of glory. It was not ' peace with honour ' as Chamberlain so unfortunately called it, nor was it a disgraceful betrayal. It was an avoidance of war on an issue on which the British nation would have been divided and most of the British Dominions definitely hostile.

' We must have grounds more relative than this.' Perhaps such grounds would never be provided. There were occasions when Chamberlain still spoke as if he really thought so. Meantime, the rearmament effort was redoubled.

The months immediately following Munich were quiet in comparison with the previous summer, for, as Goebbels explained with his usual urbanity, ' the boa-constrictor needed to digest all that it had eaten before it started again '. In Germany the persecution of the Jews was intensified. In Italy an allusion by the foreign minister Ciano, to ' the natural aspirations of the Italian people ' was greeted with shouts of ' Tunis! Nice! Corsica! ' and it was generally assumed that these interruptions had been arranged in advance by the agents of the government. Hitler's

annual speech on January 30 emphasized the value of the German-Polish treaty of 1934 and eulogized the late Polish dictator, Pilsudski. On the basis of precedent this might have been taken as evidence that an attack on Poland was imminent, but hope sprung eternal once more in the British breast, and Hoare, back in the government and engaged in preparing a valuable statute of penal reform which was enacted in its main outlines by the post-war Labour government, denounced alarmists as 'jitterbugs'. Then in March Hitler grabbed and devoured the remains of Czechoslovakia.

This was the logical, and also the actual, end of the policy of appeasement. At this point, as it seems to me though I have never seen or heard it suggested by anyone else, Chamberlain should have addressed the House of Commons somewhat as follows:

'My policy, the policy I have pursued ever since I became prime minister, with the support of the House and, as I have good reason to think, with the support of the great bulk of the British people, has failed. I do not think it was a mistaken policy. It was right to give Germany the benefit of the doubt, to assume that Hitler's aims were limited to the inclusion within Germany of districts mainly populated by Germans. We could not wisely or rightly, in my opinion, and it is an opinion which I know is widely shared, have gone to war on any issue of that nature. But now an entirely different issue has arisen. We can see now that his aims are unlimited, his lust for dominion insatiable. It is wise to assume that we are on the verge of war, however earnestly we may pray that by some unforeseeable event, some miracle of destiny, the course in which events are running may be changed. If I continued to occupy my present position I should act in such a way as to make it plain to the world that any further act of aggression by Germany would result in an immediate declaration of war on the part of this country. In the circumstances that would not be a reversal of my policy but the logical development of it.

'However I recognize that I am not the man to lead the country along the road it has now to follow. My name is too intimately associated with the falsified hopes of Munich. There is one man and only one man to whom that duty should fall. He has never faltered in the forthright statement of his assurance that

my policy of appeasement would fail. Therein he was right and I was wrong. I have tendered my resignation to His Majesty and advised him to invite Mr. Churchill to form a truly National government. That invitation I know that Mr. Churchill will accept, and I feel sure that the country will accept his leadership with a whole-heartedness which it would not accord to me. I shall be in entire agreement with the policy which I feel sure that he will pursue, and if he offers me any position in his government I shall be proud to accept it. If he thinks that it is not in the national interest that he should do so I shall support him with the same loyalty as a private member.'

An unprecedented course of action, you may say; but the situation was one that called for the breaking of precedents. With all his virtues Chamberlain was not the man to lead the country in war. His name had become the storm-centre of controversy, not controversy totally unconnected with the oncoming war, such as that which had raged round Asquith in 1914, by controversy over the war-problem itself, in a word, over 'Munich'. Further he was remarkably deficient in a quality in which Churchill excelled all other living Englishmen, the quality of saying the right thing to the nation in the supremely right way, the microphonic gift as we may call it, a quality essential to the war leader of a democracy provided with wireless sets. Further, he was, for reasons already given, uniquely obnoxious to the Labour party. Though he had done more by legislation for the causes they had at heart than any other statesman of his day he disliked and despised the Labour leaders. They knew it and they hated him.

And there was another difference between the two men, fundamental and all-important. Chamberlain loathed war, and everything to do with war. And Churchill?—of course he too loathed war. All good men loathe war: Churchill is a good man: therefore Churchill loathes war. That is a syllogism, and you cannot escape its conclusion except by denying one or other of its premises. But man is a complex creature and deep down in Churchill's nature was a part of him which might murmur, like Napoleon at St. Helena, 'Ah! la guerre! belle occupation.' Unlike Napoleon he loathed the necessity of war, but when it became necessary he could, like Napoleon and unlike Chamberlain, undertake its conduct with zest, and with the enjoyment

that arises from a feeling of mastery. In his early manhood he had sought war experience wherever he could find it, in Cuba of all places, on the North-West frontier of India, in the Sudan, in South Africa. When he was not in office during the first great war he was at the front. He had studied wars and written about them, off and on, all his life. If he had not been a great statesman he would have been a great soldier. Some day there will be no more wars; but so long as there are wars, may God send us Churchills.

Actually, of course, Chamberlain never for a moment considered the course we have recommended. His self-confidence remained supreme and, one may add, superb; his enemies will add, fatuous. His courage was equal to Churchill's. Both men felt, like the elder Pitt, that they and no one else could save the country. The difference is that Pitt and Churchill were right and Chamberlain was wrong.

The actual measures taken during the last six months of peace were very much the measures that Churchill himself, one may presume, would have taken. Treaties of alliance were made with Poland and with other states falling within range of possible German aggression. Conscription was introduced in May. Credit for this bold step should go to the Minister of War, Hore-Belisha, who five years earlier as Minister of Transport had made his mark on the vocabulary as the inventor of pedestrian crossings marked by curious standards called ' Belisha beacons '.

Attlee opposed the Conscription Bill on behalf of the Labour party. Churchill says that Attlee was personally in favour of the measure but opposed it because his supporters were against it.* This is an odd idea of leadership.

We need not linger longer on the pre-war scene. Hitler proceeded to a propaganda offensive against Poland exactly similar to the propaganda offensive against Czechoslovakia in the previous year, the German-inhabited city of Danzig being cast for the part previously played by the Sudeten Germans. This time we were not deceived. War began on September 3.

During the last weeks before the outbreak of war thousands of enormous posters were displayed on Metropolitan hoardings bearing the words ' Churchill must come back '. Scores of young volunteer men and women carried sandwich-board placards with

* Churchill, *Second World War*, I, p. 278.

similar slogans up and down before the House of Commons. Churchill, needless to say, had no contact with the extremely sensible persons who organized these expressions of public opinion.

XI. ARMS AND THE MAN, 1939-45

AS soon as the war began Churchill was offered, and accepted, the post of First Lord of the Admiralty with membership of the War Cabinet. He writes, ' It would be unjust to the Chamberlain administration to suggest that the navy had not been adequately prepared for a war against Germany and Italy '. His post turned out to be more exclusively in the forefront of the battle than anyone could have expected, for during the first six months there was a virtual standstill (apart from the destruction of Poland) except at sea. At sea there was all-out war from the first, with nothing ' phoney ' about it. It is interesting and curious, and rather charming, to observe in Churchill's narrative of these months, during which the greater man was the subordinate of the lesser, how the two of them, so different and yet with so many of the same virtues, both so proud and self-confident, drew together and learnt to appreciate each other. Churchill had never supported Chamberlain in his appeasement policy and has never since depreciated him. A very great many very inferior people have done both.

Those who think that the country both should and could have been led into war over the Czech issue with that ninety per cent. degree of unanimity essential to a free country entering on a major war should consider the evidence for the state of public opinion in the first months after war had been declared on the Polish issue, when the case against Hitler had become so much more damning. That hitherto infallible judge of situations had been genuinely surprised when Great Britain, dragging a reluctant France along with her, declared war on the Polish issue, but he felt confident that, if he left the Western front in quietude while he conquered Poland and then pointed out to the ' counsel for Poland ' that their client was dead, they would accept the fact and behave as they had behaved at Munich. It seems that a good many people in this country were ready and anxious to prove him right. Chamberlain recorded in his diary on October 8 : ' In three days last week I had 2,450 letters, and 1,860 of them were " stop the war " in one form or another . . . I have little doubt

that Ll.G. was encouraged by his correspondence to think that he would get a lot of support for a move that (he hoped) might damage the government . . .'*

The reference here is to a speech Lloyd George had recently made in the House in which he begged the prime minister to give careful consideration to the peace offer that he was soon likely to receive. It was an offer in which Hitler's good faith would be guaranteed by those other upright and honourable men, Stalin and Mussolini. A few months later Lloyd George was enjoying himself in a venomous attack on Chamberlain for his lack of vigour in the conduct of the war. We have not encountered Lloyd George in the last few chapters and it seemed worth while to remind the reader that he was still alive.

In April the Germans invaded Norway and our effort to stop them failed. On May 7 and 8 there was a debate in the House of Commons which began as a non-party discussion on the Norway campaign but developed into a Labour vote of censure on the government for its conduct of the war in general. Several independent Conservatives fiercely attacked the government, Amery for example, who concluded his speech with Cromwell's outburst dismissing the Rump or remnant of the Long Parliament. ' You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go! ' Amery held various offices of cabinet rank in the course of his career, but general history is more likely to remember him for this outburst than for any of his more solid and less dramatic achievements.

The debate was pressed to a division and the government majority dropped to eighty. Sixty Conservatives abstained from voting and thirty voted with the opposition. Chamberlain realised that it was in essence a vote of censure on himself. By the afternoon of May 9, Churchill writes, ' I became aware that I might be called upon to take the lead. The prospect neither excited nor alarmed me. I thought it would be by far the best plan.'†

On May 10 came news that the Germans had broken into Holland, Belgium and France. By an amazing coincidence the real war had begun on the very day on which our real leader was

* Feiling, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 424.

† Churchill, *Second World War, I*—522-26 for this and other following quotations.

going to take charge of us. Churchill was summoned to 10 Downing Street where he found Chamberlain and Halifax, who had been foreign secretary since Eden's resignation. Chamberlain declared that he was going to resign. The question was, which of them should he advise the king to send for as his successor. It seems incredible that Chamberlain should have been in any doubt. But let us take the liberty of quoting again. 'A very long pause ensued. It certainly seemed longer than the two minutes which one observes in the commemoration of Armistice Day. Then at length Halifax spoke . . .' He remarked that it was inconvenient for a prime minister to be in the House of Lords, and such-like platitudes. 'By the time he had finished it was clear that the duty would fall upon me—had in fact fallen upon me.'

And then the magnificent conclusion:

'As I went to bed at about 3 a.m. I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial. Eleven years in the political wilderness had freed me from ordinary Party antagonisms. My warnings over the last six years had been so numerous, so detailed, and were now so terribly vindicated, that no one could gainsay me. I could not be reproached either for making the war or for want of preparation for it. I thought I knew a good deal about it all and I was sure I should not fail. Therefore, though impatient for the morning, I slept soundly.'

And there we may leave him, for what followed for the next five years, though the most amazing chapter in British history, is a blank in the history of British politics. We had real leadership, and politics was in abeyance. It was not a leadership imposed by force on a half hypnotized race of slaves, like that of Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini. It was not the leadership of a great partisan like Roosevelt, detested by one half of his countrymen. It was just completely national leadership. The difference may be illustrated by the experience of a British minister who went over to make some speeches in America during the war. He was warned by his American friends not to quote Roosevelt since, if he did so, he would only annoy half his audience. Imagine an American visitor in similar circumstances being warned not to quote Churchill.

We have already noticed how, as our story advanced, the men became less and less adequate to the events they had to deal with, not because the men were smaller but because the events grew bigger and bigger and more unmanageable. And here we come to the one great exception; for when the biggest event of all threatened to overwhelm us a Man arose as big as the event, a giant, and unlike most of the giants of history and fiction a genial giant, a giant not of Despair but of Courage. Someone said of the elder Pitt: "No one ever went into his closet who did not come out of it a braver man". Comparatively few are privileged to enter the closets of prime ministers but on the radio all can listen to them. To what extent by his bold planning and expert control he contributed to victory only experts can estimate. What the sound of his voice meant to the plain people in their millions, those same plain people very well know. His actions saved us from destruction and his words saved us from despair. And it was leadership not for Britain only. A few months ago I was talking to a Norwegian. He said that during the years of German occupation his people just kept alive from one Churchill broadcast to the next; and still today you will find it much easier to buy a little plastic bust of Churchill in the shops of Oslo than in those of London. My friend could not for the life of him understand why we had turned out Churchill and put in a lot of . . . but that belongs to the next chapter.

From time to time, of course, some disgruntled or self-advertising politician, a Shinwell or an Aneurin Bevan, would attack the government, and their criticisms might be valid, though generally they were not; for the government, like all governments, especially all governments at war, made mistakes. But it did not amount to anything worth calling politics. Parliament was kept continuously busy. War-time legislation and war-time control of all the country's activities both called for and received the critical discussion for the sake of which parliament exists. Ministers dealing with domestic problems—and such problems were innumerable—had to justify or modify their proposals in response to criticisms which had all the more validity because they were not the slings and arrows of organised party politics. But all this lies outside our subject. There is no material to fill a chapter, such as the material with which I filled,

and could have filled twice over, the fifth chapter of this book.

And so my tribute to the war leadership of Winston Churchill is to cut out five years from the narrative of this book. It is a negative tribute but the best I can offer.

XII. LABOUR IN POWER, 1945-50

ALL through the war there had been an electoral truce. When by-elections became necessary the parties agreed to allow a representative of the party to which the last occupant of the seat had belonged to retain it without contest. Those who wished to register dissatisfaction had sometimes, toward the end of the war, an opportunity of voting for a candidate put forward by the Common Wealth party, an ephemeral organization created by an idealistic landowner, Sir Richard Acland. Common Wealth candidates presented themselves only in Conservative constituencies. The party was in fact a sort of Labour *alias*, and shortly after the war it was merged in the Labour party.

As the German war drew to its close in the early months of 1945 the question arose—what then? The Labour party, following the precedent it had set for itself in 1918, decided that it would leave the government as soon as the German war was over. Churchill wished the National government to be maintained until after the end of the Japanese war, and it was generally expected that the interval between the conclusions of the two wars would be much longer than the four or five months which it proved to be. Labour rejected this proposal. Churchill announced that, in that case, the election would follow within a couple of months of the break-up of the coalition. The German war ended early in May. Labour then left the government and Churchill formed a purely Conservative government to carry on till after the election, which was held early in July though, to facilitate the voting of service men overseas, the results were not announced until the end of the month.

Never had there been less tangible data for forecasting the result of an election. In the ' coupon ' election of 1918 an overwhelming victory for the ' coupon ' had been inevitable. Before any ordinary peace-time election, one can say ' The existing figures are so and so ; add x for the political circumstances of the moment and y for the mechanical swing of the pendulum, and the result will be round about so and so '. In 1945, with a parliament ten

years old, elected in a period of ancient history, and no political circumstances constituting *x* beyond the fact that the war had ended in unconditional surrender, the prophets might prophesy but the statisticians had nothing to go upon.

And now for the figures. The Conservatives lost 160 seats and were reduced to 198. Labour gained 230 seats and rose to 393. Even when allowance is made for the fact that the number of seats had been increased by 25 by a Redistribution Bill, breaking up some of the largest constituencies, it is apparent that the minor parties, the two groups of Liberals, and the Independents had suffered heavily. Their combined numbers had fallen from 87 to 32.

One retrospective remark may be interposed at this point. This was the first election since 1906, the only election so far recorded in this book except that of 1906, in which the Conservatives had not polled more votes than any other single party. The Conservative Party is always represented by its opponents as the party most averse to change. Taking these two facts together one must conclude that the prolonged successfulness of the Conservative party at the polls is a remarkable testimonial to the general contentedness of a large part of the British people throughout the period we have thus far covered. No other country on this side of the Atlantic could show anything like it. Conversely, the figures of 1945 suggested that this general contentedness had come to an end, though in actual fact the number of votes for Labour and Communist candidates was barely half of the total of votes cast.

To Churchill the result came as a slap in the face, a vote of censure where he reasonably expected a vote of gratitude.* In the chapter of his book from which we have already quoted a few pages back he writes 'Thus . . . I acquired the chief power in the State, which henceforth I wielded in ever growing measure for five years and three months of world war, at the end of which time, all our enemies having surrendered unconditionally or being about to do so, I was immediately dismissed by the British electorate from all further conduct of their affairs.'

One might put it like this. Lloyd George was a great war leader who won a great war and his grateful country rewarded him

* When a lady in Jugoslavia heard the result she said, 'Poor Mr. Churchill! I suppose he will now be shot!' But it was not going to be quite as bad as that.

with an unprecedented victory at the polls. Churchill was a greater war leader who won a greater war and his grateful country . . . ' But the parallel is not so simple. The victory of 1918 was not only a victory of Lloyd George. It was also, in an equal or perhaps a greater degree, a victory of the Conservative Party, which produced the great majority of the successful candidates. As a matter between parties and without taking account of ' supermen ' the Conservative party was due to win in 1918, and in an equal degree the Labour party was the party due to win in 1945. The Conservatives on the first occasion and Labour on the second occasion had been in opposition during the years when the country was drifting into war. True, the conduct of the Labour opposition during the thirties had been quite deplorable, but so also in a different way had the conduct of the Conservative opposition during the years before 1914, the years of the rejection of the budget and the encouragement of the Ulster rebels. That did not matter. It was electorally their turn, and this instinctive preference of the electorate for swinging the pendulum is not as unreasonable as it might seem. If one agrees that each of the alternative parties has a certain bias, to left or right, then the best way to reach the goal straight ahead is to give each of them alternate turns at the wheel. The course thus steered by the ship of state resembles that of a sailing yacht whose objective is straight into the wind.

Again, what were the alternatives to the Lloyd George coalition in 1918?—a broken-up Liberal party and a still adolescent Labour ' group ' some of whose leading members had been branded as pacifists. In 1945, on the other hand, Churchill had to face an adult Labour party, led by well tried and experienced men. And who had given these men their trial and experience?—Churchill himself. The most conspicuous positions in his government, the offices whose activities were not overshadowed by his own mighty personality, had gone to Labour men. Attlee had been his Bonar Law, leading the House of Commons. Morrison had been Minister of Home Security, Bevin Minister of Labour and National Service. Very likely they were the best men for their respective posts, but in comparison with them the Conservative Ministers had nothing. Eden was Foreign Secretary, but one hardly noticed him in Churchill's shadow. The Chancellors of the Exchequer had also been Conservatives, but who bothers

about paying the bill, till the war is over? No ; whatever limelight was to spare from Churchill had gone to the Labour leaders. When Churchill saw the hosts of Labour advancing to defeat him he might have said, like Simon de Montfort as he watched his former allies advancing against him at Evesham ; ' Behold, they come on in goodly array, but it was I that taught them.' No one person contributed so much to the Labour victory as Churchill, unless a claim be put in for Gollancz.

And that brings us to the most important element of all. The two parties had taken entirely different views of what was implied in the electoral truce. The Conservatives interpreted the truce as an agreement to refrain from party propaganda. They more or less completely disbanded their organization. Their young men went into the fighting services. They put party politics altogether out of their minds. The Labour people did nothing of the kind. They never forgot that they had two duties, to win the war and to win the post-war election. Their organizations maintained a partisan activity which was not the less effective for being unofficial.

Their efforts were very skilfully supplemented by the enterprise of a publisher of left wing views, Victor Gollancz. Some years before the war he had run an organization called the ' Left Book Club '. There had been a ' Book of the Month Club ' which supplied the needs of people who wanted to buy a good novel once a month and did not trust themselves to choose it. It occurred to Gollancz that he could adapt this scheme to the literature of Left wing policies, with profit both to the policies and, very reasonably, to his own balance sheet. The success of his Left Book Club prompted others to launch a Right Book Club, but it never did anything like as well, partly because it had not anyone as clever as Gollancz behind it but also because the men and women of the Right have less appetite for this kind of fare. Colonel Blimp is one of the wisest of men. He supported Baldwin's Air Force rearmament programme from its start, and was heavily satirised by the cartoonist Low for doing so, but if you had asked him to join a Right Book Club his response would not have been encouraging.

Then during the latter part of the war and in preparation for the election Gollancz launched a series of little books with such titles as ' Guilty Men ' and ' Your M.P.' They were cleverly designed for their rather ignoble purpose, which was to blacken

the records of every Conservative politician whose record was worth blackening—except Churchill ; they knew it would not pay to throw mud at him. The authors remained anonymous, but one at least has since revealed himself, a man named Wintringham who was a communist from 1922 to 1938, when he ceased to be so not, apparently, of his own volition but because he was expelled from the party. Communists, of course, quite frankly regard themselves as at war with ' capitalists ' and do not regard it as part of their duty to tell the truth about their enemies.

For these reasons, the normal swing of the pendulum and the one-sidedness of wartime party propaganda, it is likely enough that the Conservatives had already lost the election in the minds of the electorate before the electioneering began. The one thing that might conceivably have saved them was a brilliant electioneering performance on the part of their leader. But this was what they did not get. Having just defeated the greatest and wickedest tyrant in history in the greatest of wars, Churchill simply could not concentrate his powers on the task of defeating Clem Attlee and his friends in a tournament of oratory. The whole business was wearisome and distasteful to him. His broadcasts were altogether ill-judged, with their attempt to make a mountain out of the Laski molehill* and their warnings that the Labour party, if it established socialism, would have to establish a Gestapo to maintain it. The contrast between the great wartime broadcasts and this electioneering knockabout stuff was tragic, painful. If that mysterious body, the ' floating vote ', wanted a reminder that Churchill, a demigod in war, had often proved an erratic and injudicious guide in peace, they had got such a reminder—straight from the horse's mouth.

The 1945 election might be described as a contest between a Party with a Programme and a Man asking for a Mandate. Those who voted Labour were not bedazzled by the glamour of Attlee ; he was less of a glamour boy than any party leader since Bonar Law. They voted not for a man nor for a group of men but for a programme, a collection of nostrums and a collection of ideals. More precisely perhaps, if it be true that the main motive of electors is rejection of what they disapprove, they voted against a

* Professor Laski, chairman at the time of the Labour Party Executive, a body outside parliament, had made some remarks suggesting that a Labour prime minister would have to take his orders from this Executive. What Laski meant is not clear and does not matter. Nothing has been heard of him since the election.

return to the conditions of the inter-war period which they had been persuaded, with how much truth the reader of previous chapters can judge, was a period of social misery and governmental apathy. On the other side Churchill offered himself. He said remarkably little about the Conservative party, and why should he have said more? He had been detached from it for nine years before the war. He was not just a party leader ; he was the one and only Winston, who had led the country through the war and would have liked to continue to shape its destinies.

The country preferred the Programme to the Man. Up in Huddersfield a young socialist woman shouted herself hoarse in Churchill's honour as he drove through the streets. When she got home she said, " He's a marvel, and we owe him everything. But how old he looks ! and how tired ! What he wants is a good rest, and that is what we are going to give him."

Of course the result measured in electoral votes was nothing like as decisive as it appears in the record of seats won and lost. It can even be proved, if one adds Conservative and Liberal votes together, that there was a small anti-socialist majority. But paradoxes of this kind can be extracted from the statistics of almost every election.

So Labour was not only in office but in power at last, and many who had voted against it soon began to think that the Labour victory was probably rather a good thing. The bitterer partisans may have thought that the management of affairs for the next few years would prove so difficult that whatever party bore the responsibility was bound to fail and that the Conservatives were well out of it. A more commendable standpoint was that of those who held that in tackling these difficulties a Labour government would enjoy certain advantages from which the whole community would profit. If 'Labour' at home proved unrestful, it would be more likely to accept unpalatable advice, and if necessary unpalatable orders, from the statesmen of the party which it regarded as its own. If Russia turned from an ally to an enemy, a Labour government would be able to maintain the national interests without laying itself open to the charge that its opposition to Russian aggression was based on ideological prejudice.

Among the new ministers were a number of remarkable men of

diverse types and origins, Attlee, Morrison, Bevin, Cripps and Aneurin Bevan.

Attlee's early career illustrates a point that was made in the first chapter of this book concerning the awakening of the social conscience of the upper classes during the bad times of the eighties of the last century. No man had expressed that awakening in words and action more powerfully than a young Oxford tutor named Arnold Toynbee. After his early death certain friends established a hostel, Toynbee Hall, in the East End of London where young men of the professional classes could live and combine the pursuit of their professions with a study of social conditions in the East End, service in boys' clubs and so on. After a public school and university education Attlee had gone to Toynbee Hall and his experiences there had led him on to socialism.

His political career bore a curious resemblance to that of Bonar Law. Like Bonar Law he had become leader of the opposition a few years before a great war. Like Bonar Law he had acquired experience and a wisdom he previously lacked as second in command under the great war-leader of his day. Like Bonar Law he remained, even while holding the highest office under the Crown, a curiously elusive figure. Yet it is obvious that, however commonplace he might seem at the microphone in comparison with his predecessor, he had great gifts of judgement and leadership within his Cabinet. He held together what was perhaps a difficult team in what were certainly difficult times. One might compare him with Lord Liverpool, who held the old pre-Victorian Tory party together during a fifteen years' premiership after the Napoleonic war. No one seems able to tell us what Lord Liverpool did—' nothing in particular ' perhaps, but he obviously ' did it very well ', for as soon as he had been stricken down by paralysis and retired the old Tory party fell to pieces and let in the Whigs who carried the first Reform Bill. He must have had a gift for holding together a number of colleagues more conspicuous than himself.

Herbert Morrison, who supported Attlee as deputy leader of the House of Commons, was* a Londoner who had made his way

* As I near the end of the book I find myself in a dilemma between the past and the present tense. I shall probably fall into inconsistencies but I intend to preserve the historical atmosphere by the use of the past tense.

up from a humble origin by his ability and energy, but not by way of the trade union ladder. He had been for some years leader of the Labour majority in the London County Council. I have heard it said, but offer no proof of the statement, that in the crash of 1931 he was very near the dividing line which separated those who followed MacDonald from those who went into opposition. It is likely enough, for he combined a staunch and pugnacious party loyalty with a moderate and realistic outlook.

Ernest Bevin was a big man in every sense of the word. He had for years been secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, and when Churchill made him Minister of Labour he may well have felt that a man who could manage the largest and most miscellaneous of the Unions, the Union which includes the dockers, was capable of managing anything. Previous to accepting office under Churchill he had not been a member of parliament. He now took the Foreign Office, and developed a line of policy, more particularly in relation to Russia, which gave general satisfaction to Conservatives and provoked opposition from the Left wing of his own party, a group of people who, without being Communists, persisted in regarding the Communist Colossus through the distorting medium of rose-coloured spectacles. Bevin had hated Communists long before he had to deal with Russia. He had had plenty of experience of the home-bred or imported variety in his days as a trade union leader.

Sir Stafford Cripps was generally supposed to excel all other members of both parties in sheer intellect, but his political career had not been without its ups and downs. The crash of 1931 drove him into an extreme position in which he made rude remarks about ' Buckingham Palace ballyhoo ' and proposed that if and when Labour won an election they should, like Hitler, use their majority to suspend parliament and legislate by decree. He was expelled from the Labour party, and there was a brief period about 1934 during which Cripps and Mosley appeared to be the rival candidates for the British Dictatorship, rivals who claimed to be opposites but illustrated the theory that extremes meet. Early in the war he was sent as Ambassador to Russia, and when Russia was forced into becoming our glorious ally, Cripps shared the glory. He came home and joined the National government.

In the Labour government Cripps was at first President of the Board of Trade and in 1947 succeeded Dalton at the Exchequer

when that statesman, very fortunately for the country as most Conservatives thought, had to remove himself from office because he had revealed the main points of his budget to a journalist before announcing them in the House of Commons. Cripps was a man of ascetic habits, and some say that he thinks asceticism is good for us. Churchill has said that his programme is 'Strength through misery'. It may be that it is the only way through to strength. In any case, he held the key position. If Cripps failed the Government failed, and the country, too.

If one were to equate the Labour government of 1945 with the Liberal government of 1905 Aneurin Bevan could claim to be its Lloyd George. Like Lloyd George he was a Welshman. Like Lloyd George his zeal for the welfare of the poor was alloyed by a passionate and irrepressible hatred of those who had enjoyed a much more comfortable start in life than his own. Unlike the four men already described he had not been a member of Churchill's National Government, which he attacked from time to time with vitriolic intensity. Some of his suggestions for the better conduct of the war make queer reading today. As Minister of Health he was responsible for the housing programme and also for the vast national health insurance scheme the main lines of which had been accepted by all parties during the war. He has declared that all Tories are vermin, and is the popular hero of Labour party conferences. If the party is going to swing further to the Left he will prove the most acceptable leader. He was the only member of the cabinet under fifty at the time of its formation.

Over a large range of policy there was a general agreement between the parties. Both accepted the conception of what has been called the Social Service State, or the Welfare State, in which everyone can obtain a variety of goods and services at the cost of everyone else. Both parties, in fact, were agreed that, after spending our last penny on winning the war, we could at once begin spending more than we had ever spent before on making ourselves healthy and wealthy and wise. This will suggest to a detached philosopher a train of thought which no practical politician would willingly pursue. But the practical politician might find in the long run that he had got to pursue it. But that was not yet.

Extended plans of social service were made by the National

government during the war and it is a mere accident of the order of precedence accorded to these plans that the extension of the education service became law during the National government's tenure of office and the extension of the health and pensions service during the Labour administration. These things and others like them are inherent in democracy. When everyone, rich and poor, has been given the vote it is a mere matter of time before the poor, who constitute the majority, will insist on having, at the public expense, the advantages which the rich pay for out of their own well-lined pockets. This is not the place to expatiate on the merits of these developments nor on the difficulties and dangers inherent in them. Every sensible person irrespective of party is aware of both. The most clear cut dividing line in domestic policy between the parties was provided by the Labour policy of nationalization. For a whole generation socialists had been preaching the virtues of nationalization as a cure for industrial inefficiency and injustice. Now that Labour was in power at last its leaders could hardly do other than apply the cure.

First came the nationalization of the Bank of England. Many people in their ignorance supposed that this was a national or nationalized institution already. They were rather hazy about it, but if they had been asked whether it should be classed as something akin to the post office or something akin to Selfridge's, they would have classed it with the former. However, it could apparently be nationalized a bit more and everyone agreed that this would make no real difference and consequently do no harm. The case for the measure was really psychological. Socialists had always regarded the great banks as hostile powers, fortresses of capitalism. In their fairy-tale version of the events of 1931, the downfall of the Labour government had been described as the result of a 'bankers' ramp', whatever exactly that might be. So the Bank of England was nationalized, and George Gibson, a trade union official, became one of its directors until he resigned after the Lynskey Report had commented adversely on some of his other activities.

Then came the nationalization of the coal industry. Here it was common ground with all parties that the condition of the industry was still profoundly unsatisfactory. On an earlier page we quoted Birkenhead's unflattering opinion of the mine-owners, and it was widely shared in Conservative circles. Something

drastic seemed to be required, and that meant either nationalization or—what? The weakness of the Conservative position was that during the long years of Conservative government, the alternative treatment had never been resolutely applied, though a programme for the purpose had been provided by the Samuel Report of 1926. Ever since the Sankey Report of 1919 the miners had felt themselves entitled to nationalization. They would not be happy till they got it. Everyone, irrespective of party, hoped that they would be happy now, and would show their happiness and their gratitude by producing quantities of coal at least equal to the quantities produced a generation earlier with much less assistance from modern mechanical devices.

Then came nationalization of railways, which did not seem to matter much, and of road transport, which involved a multitude of difficulties and alleged injustices; also nationalization of gas and electricity supply. Finally the government produced their long threatened bill for the nationalization of the steel industry. Such interference with an industry as prosperous and productive as the coal industry was the reverse, an industry which was the mainstay of the export trade without which we should starve, seemed to Conservatives a proposition of an altogether different order from those that had gone before. They set themselves to defeat the bill by every means at their command, in other words by the use of the House of Lords.

Hitherto the House of Lords had been far from idle. The government in their legislative enthusiasm had overworked their departmental officials, their parliamentary draughtsmen and the House of Commons. Complicated measures had been sent up to the House of Lords in a state which, quite irrespective of party politics, called for careful revision and multitudinous amendment. The Lords considered it their duty to accept in principle measures designed to carry out policies to which the electorate had given their approval, but they sent the bills designed to carry out these policies back to the Commons 'blue-pencilled' all over, like the compositions of over-hasty schoolboys after they have passed through the hands of the conscientious schoolmaster. Ministers were constrained to accept multitudes of such amendments. Some expressed their appreciation of the help thus given; others, such as Shinwell, accepted it with ill grace and resumed their mechanical abuse of the House of Lords the next day.

Now it seemed likely that Lords would reject the Steel Bill, and its introduction had been so long postponed that the general election would arrive before the measure could be got past the House of Lords under the procedure of the Parliament Act of 1911. This the government had foreseen and, in the session previous to the introduction of the Steel Bill, had carried through the Commons and presented to the Lords a bill amending the Parliament Act and reducing the duration of the Lords suspensive veto from two sessions to one. Thus, though the Steel Bill would not have time to become law under the old Parliament Act, the new Parliament Bill would have time to do so and, as its application was made retrospective, it could carry the Steel Bill along with it. An ingenious scheme: what the South African Dutch call 'slim'.

When the Steel Bill came before the Lords for the first time they did not reject it but drastically amended it, including among their amendments one which postponed the coming into operation of the bill to a date in the autumn of 1950, beyond the latest possible date of the next general election. This postponing amendment the Government rejected at the first time of asking but accepted at the second, either because it was an equitable proposal or else, and more probably, because by accepting it they secured a wider margin of choice for the date of the next election. Once the operational date of the steel bill was put beyond the latest possible date for the election they would no longer feel bound to prolong parliament until the operational date was passed. Another argument for accepting the amendment may have been that the administrative arrangements necessary before the steel industry could be taken over would not in any case be completed in time for the date originally chosen.

However, apart from the steel controversy, nationalization has now been on trial for a year or two in several large industries and the question may be asked, has it been a success? It may be replied that the trial has been too short for a valid judgement and that a certain amount of experimentation must be expected before precisely the right machinery for running these vast concerns is discovered. Allowing for that, however, the question may still be asked, and perhaps one should ask first a previous question, what was expected of it? Socialist politicians expected that it would produce greater contentment and in consequence better

work in the industries concerned. We had been told again and again, by all sorts of persons from Archbishop Temple downwards, that industrial discontent had a moral and not merely an economic foundation. Wage-earners objected to the fact that the profits of their labours went into the pockets of share-holders. If only they were working not for share-holders, whom they regarded as their natural enemies, but for the welfare of the whole community they would tackle their work in an entirely different spirit.

This hope has been disappointed, and various Labour members have very frankly and honestly admitted as much; and that raises the question, what did the average trade unionist, as distinct from socialist politicians, expect from nationalization? Why did they want it at all?

The demand for nationalization first became really active in the days of the syndicalist movement just before the first war. Syndicalism offered a social pattern in which the various industries would be owned and controlled by the workers themselves. This was rather too revolutionary for British tastes and a group of thinkers led by G. D. H. Cole, a Fabian of the second generation in revolt against the state socialism of the Webbs, put forward a scheme called Guild Socialism, which was intended to combine the syndicalist and the socialist ideals. Guild Socialism had its day but failed to secure permanent foothold in the programme of British socialism. None the less the syndicalist idea survived in the mind of organized Labour. The workers expected that nationalization would somehow give the workers control of their own industries, and of course it has not done so. The Coal Board is to them simply the old coalowner ' writ large ', and much more inaccessible.

Again, organized Labour assumed that when an industry was nationalized it would have the economic resources of the state behind it. In old days the argument for an increase of wages was ' the industry can afford to pay more ', and what more the industry could pay was provable, limited, and perhaps nothing. Under nationalization the argument runs: ' the community, which cannot do without our product, can afford to pay more, out of the taxpayer's pocket ', and that means out of the pockets of workers in other industries. This is, again, an argument which a Labour government can no more afford to admit than a

Conservative government. A community in which every industry was nationalized and enjoyed a subsidy from every other industry is a community which defies arithmetic, and in that battle arithmetic wins. Thus, from the workers' standpoint, nationalization has proved a hoax. It may be an improvement on private enterprise in certain respects or it may not, but it is not going to give the worker what he expected from it.

It was certainly no fault of the Labour government that its first five years in power were among the gloomiest in our history. After the first war people said that another war like that would bring our civilisation down in ruins. Immediately after the second war we thought they had been wrong. Now we are not so sure. It was but a small matter in itself, however vexatious, that rationing and conscription, which melted away like snow in springtime after the first war, continued and seem likely to continue indefinitely. Rationing in some respects got worse before it began to get better and was extended for a time to bread. Here the Conservative opposition was unwise, seeming to take its cue from the less responsible sections of its press. Whether bread rationing turned out to have been necessary or not is a point that may be argued in retrospect. It was obvious that in rationing bread the Labour government was doing an unpopular thing because it believed it to be necessary, and it should have been supported. If bread rationing led people to throw less bread away uneaten and if the habit has survived the end of the rationing, it certainly was not altogether in vain.

Rationing was only a part, the lesser part, of the general state of privation of things we wanted to buy. These privations were a necessary consequence of the export drive and the export drive was a necessary consequence of the fact that unless we could pay for the importation of enormous quantities of food and raw materials we should fade away altogether. And there were some things, neither food nor raw materials, of which we insisted on importing more than we had ever imported in the days when we could easily pay for them, cigarettes for example. At this point perhaps the leader of the Conservative party missed a magnificent opportunity. If he had gone to the microphone and said ' I hereby from today halve my consumption of cigars. Let those who love their country and want to serve it follow my example with their

cigarettes', he might have regained national leadership with a bound and improved his chance of winning the next general election. He would have supported Cripps as a national statesman and scored off him as a party politician, for, if what we hear is true, there is nothing that Sir Stafford could give up except perhaps a little water and a few cabbage leaves, and neither of these are imported from hard currency countries. But there are some things which it is perhaps unreasonable to expect even from our greatest men.

We had not got very far into the post-war years before our international position defined itself. There were now only two really 'great' powers and we were not one of them. Across the Atlantic there was the United States; behind the iron curtain there was Russia and her satellites. The iron curtain screened off half Germany and was soon to extend round Czechoslovakia; Austria was a debatable land between east and west. The mention of Austria suggests the alarming shrinkage of the area of our Western Christian civilization. Far back in the Middle Ages this same Ost Mark, or Eastern Frontier post, had been established by a Holy Roman Empire to guard the upper Danube from the incursions of the heathendom beyond. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it had twice successfully stood siege by the Turk. Then our frontier had advanced and the frontier post became a centre of European culture, far inland like an old seaport from which the sea had withdrawn. Now once again it was a threatened frontier post.

Three days before our entry into the first great war a Liberal journalist, A. G. Gardiner, wrote in the *Daily News*, 'If we crush Germany in the dust and make Russia the dictator of Europe and Asia it will be the greatest disaster that has ever befallen western civilization'. The prophecy took thirty years to fulfil and the prophet was dead before its fulfilment, but it has come true in the end and with a vengeance. Gardiner was of course thinking of the Russia of the Tsars but the change over to Communist Dictatorship has merely increased the menace, for the Tsardom had few ideological attractions for anyone in Western Europe and consequently no 'fifth column' in our midst. But essentially the Russian menace is much older. It began as soon as this barbaric community, as large as all western and central Europe taken

together, began to adopt western techniques and to push through to the Baltic and the Black Sea. Henceforth it would loom over Western Europe as Macedon loomed over the cities of classical Greece. If the states of the western European civilization went on fighting each other, like the cities of Classical Greece, they would sooner or later let the enemy in.

C. A. Fyffe in his 'History of Modern Europe', written seventy years ago, remarks that it might have been a good thing if Napoleon had won his Russian campaign of 1812. His own artificial empire would soon have fallen to pieces in any case, and it would have been worth postponing its collapse a few years if western Europe could thereby have been saved from the subsequent Russian menace.* Perhaps we cannot follow Fyffe and wish that Hitler had smashed up the Communist regime in 1941 but we can sympathise with the legendary American soldier of 1945 who, having marched victoriously across Germany until he encountered the Russians advancing from the opposite direction, suggested that he should be allowed to go on and 'finish the job'. It is possible that, even as early as that, Churchill sympathized with this American soldier, but Roosevelt did not. His friend Hopkins had been to Russia and had brought home a very favourable account of it.

The iron curtain began to be rung down as soon as the war was over. Churchill used the phrase in a speech as early as August, 1945. In the following March he delivered a notable speech at Fulton, Missouri, in which he forecast the post-war grouping in which Great Britain and the United States would have to combine to defend the free peoples of the world against communist aggression. The Labour government strongly disapproved of the Fulton speech, and at the end of the same year Bevin was still maintaining that our policy was to hold a balance between the two colossi, and declaring that we could not wholly approve of either of them. From that position he was steadily driven by the force of circumstances, in other words by Russian aggression and hostility in all its various manifestations, in Czechoslovakia, in Berlin, in Trieste, in the communist inspired strikes of France and Italy, and in the monotonous reiteration of the veto in the Security Council of the United Nations. Repelled by Russia, he inevitably drew closer to America. The 'Marshall Aid' offered

* Fyffe, *op. cit.* p. 368 in one vol. edition, or Vol. II p. 1.

was ' seized with both hands '. There followed the Atlantic Pact and all the bewildering variety of organizations linking America, Great Britain and Western Europe.

Thus Bevin had been driven into a foreign policy contrary to a cherished tradition of his party. For the Labour party had maintained all through the inter-war period that it was possible to be good friends with Communist Russia and that only the prejudice of the wicked Tories had prevented it. The war with its superficial appearance of a grand alliance seemed to confirm their opinion. Now they knew the facts. But there are always some people who, when facts contradict their theory, say ' So much the worse for the facts ' and go on as before. These constituted the opposition to Bevin and his ' Tory ' policy ; he had succumbed, they said, to the persuasions of those subtle fellows, the civil servants of the foreign office. Bevin enjoyed sitting on these extremists of his own party from time to time, and very likely they enjoyed it too for they emerged from the ordeal in the same shape and form as before. But there was no need for him to worry overmuch about them. They were only a little group of intellectuals, Zilliacus and the like, exotics with no roots in British soil. They were not even Communists. If the Communists were to seize power such men would find a new ground of opposition, for opposition was their nature, and end up in concentration camps.

Bevin's task was hard, no doubt, but Cripps's was far harder, for he had against him the most deeply rooted tradition of the trade unions. In the beginning the trade unions had financed the Labour party to be their own political organ, and though the percentage of trade union officials in the 1945 parliamentary party was much smaller than it had ever been before they still thought of the party as their own. Shinwell expressed this view crudely in one of his ourbursts of temper—for such one must in charity suppose it to have been—when he said that the party stood for organized labour and that the rest of the community did not matter ' two hoots '.

Cripps had to try to bridge the ' dollar gap ', and the only way to do so was to produce more and more and to sell it for less, but the trade unionist ideal had always been ' less work and more pay ', and now that their own party was in power they had thought

that they would get it. Ever since what has been called the working class movement, of which trade unionism is one of the chief manifestations, had arisen out of the agonies of the industrial revolution, the demand had been for a larger, that is to say a fairer, share of the national prosperity, a larger slice of the cake. By means of trade union belligerency and social service legislation their share had been growing fairly steadily all through the period covered by this book but, as the French say, the appetite increases with eating. After the victory of 1945 they expected their slice of the cake to furnish a more substantial meal than ever before, and indeed it does so, but it does not seem large enough yet. It still compares very unfavourably with the American slice. How difficult to persuade them that the cake they had long eyed so hungrily was no longer there. A series of larger events contemporaneous with those which had given them the power to grasp a fairer share of the cake had reduced the dimensions of the cake so drastically that all alike must be prepared for a time, the length of which no prophet could determine, to go on short commons.

People do not like to open their eyes to unpleasant facts, and these facts were in any case conveniently veiled by American subsidies. Some bluntly described it as charity and sought to stir national pride by unpleasant pictures of a pauper-Britain providing itself with social services financed by American doles. Others declared that America was merely repaying in no excessive fashion the services we had rendered to them and to all the world by standing alone in the forefront of the battle throughout the decisive years, 1940-41. It did not matter which way one described it. American subsidies were keeping the British economic system afloat, and were due to end in 1952.

What Cripps called for, what the country needed, was not only more production than ever before, but more production at less cost. Has the demand been met? Neither of the simple answers, yes or no, seem appropriate. Those who forecast that the Labour government would go down catastrophically in ' another 1931 '—a crisis politically similar however different in its economic background—have proved mistaken. ' The crisis ' at which our flesh should creep has continued to impend but has not fallen ; the Government has stumbled along and its supporters have been able to maintain with a fair measure of plausibility that it was

stumbling in the right direction. Sometimes things have seemed to get better and sometimes to get worse, but they have never got sufficiently better to justify complacency or sufficiently worse to create a nation-wide realisation of supreme emergency, an economic equivalent of the spirit which carried the country through 1940-41.

More production at less cost—less work for more pay. The conflict between these excellent but incompatible aspirations has been a complicated and indecisive affair. The less work principle began by scoring all along the line. In the first two years after the war the working hours of organized labour are said to have been reduced by 175,000,000 a week, and, however this sensational figure may have been arrived at, it is certain that the reduction, mostly due to the introduction of five-day weeks, was very substantial. If one took this fact by itself one could preach a very gloomy sermon on its text. Looking back on pre-war history we marvel that, in 1936, at the very moment when Hitler's Germans were working like demons on their rearmament programme, the French reduced themselves to a forty-hour week, and we cite it as an illustration of the creeping paralysis which beset France during those years. Might not posterity regard our own proceedings ten years later in much the same light? As we see the French slackening effort of 1936 in relation to the France of 1940 might not posterity see our slackening effort of 1946 in relation to—whatever the date of the crash might prove to be?

The average working man was not impressed by such sermons. He had got full employment and good pay, and if this was a 'crisis' he hoped it might long continue to flourish. It was an old trade union tradition that shorter hours and slackened speeds of work within those hours were not only agreeable in themselves but also sound policy, as averting unemployment. If one worked too hard the work would all be finished and one would be turned off. That was an argument anyone could follow. It was much more difficult for Cripps and his colleagues to get into the heads of unwilling listeners the fact that, under present conditions, unemployment would result not from working too much but from working too little; because, if we could not export enough, we should not be able to buy the raw materials with which to make more. That fact was veiled, and its operation postponed, by American subsidies.

And in spite of reduced hours and in spite of allegations of slackness—all kinds of slackness from the simple sort of slackness which no doubt began as soon as Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden to the highly complicated varieties of slackness concealed behind what are called restrictive practices—there was in certain directions, especially as the government's five years tenure drew towards its close, a very remarkable increase of productivity and export. Coal production was disappointing; the building industry had a bad record; but the main export industries, steel, engineering, motors, showed remarkable results. Those who wanted to be complacent could focus their attention on these.

As the sellers' market, inevitable after the end of a war, began to pass off the government called not only for more production but for more production at less cost, yet costs and consequent prices began to increase. Cripps asked for a stabilization of wages at existing levels. That was in 1948, and the T.U.C. replied that 'in the light of its experience, which in this matter cannot be challenged, the T.U.C. has remained throughout firmly convinced that it is impracticable and would in any case be undesirable to impose specific limits and restrictions on wage increases'.

Not much help from that quarter in 1948. None the less, by the end of the year, the nation, and therewith the government, seemed to have made real headway. The *Economist*, in its last issue for the year, wrote of 'the almost magical change that has occurred in that sensitive barometer of national standing, the prestige and position of the pound sterling', and the *Annual Register*, a publication not much addicted to praise or blame, attributed the result to 'the austere honesty of the Chancellor's fiscal policy'. But in the next year the mysterious wheel of fortune took another turn and the stone began rolling down the hill again.

In the second quarter of 1949 there was a big rise in the dollar deficit. The government imposed checks on dollar expenditure and prepared to reduce dollar imports by twenty-five per cent. On July 6 Cripps told the House of Commons that the government had not the slightest intention of devaluing the pound. On the evening of Sunday, September 18, after flying back from a Washington Conference, he broadcast the news that the Government had decided on devaluation, and a very drastic devaluation

too. Instead of four dollars to the pound it would now be less than three.

This devaluation, we were told, was only a first step. The Cabinet was devising plans for curtailing capital and current expenditure, for checking renewed inflationary tendencies and increasing the production available for export to dollar markets. Ministers who may or may not have been in the inner councils of the government warned the country that something very drastic and unpleasant was ahead of it. The opposition took the same line. 'Tell the country the truth' said Conservative speakers, which meant 'Tell the country what an awful mess you have got it into'. The general election could not be postponed many months and every political pronouncement on an economic problem far too complex for the average voter's understanding was inevitably coloured by the supposed requirements of party politics.

On October 24 the prime minister unfolded the government's post-devaluation proposals. Attlee has never been sensational, but he never missed sensation by a wider margin than on this occasion. The proposals seemed just nothing; they would not inconvenience us at all. 'That means they will do you no good' said the opposition speakers. 'Too little and too late'. 'Enough for the purpose' was the government reply, and if that meant 'enough to keep up the reputation of the government until the election is over', the calculation seems to have been shrewd enough.

But when was the election to be? Churchill called for it in the early autumn of 1949 after the devaluation of the pound, declaring that the old parliament was not only dead but decomposing. This was no doubt meant to indicate that the Conservative party was on its toes and full of confidence, but it may also be interpreted in a more subtle fashion. Many people thought that the winter would see the beginning of those bad times so often forecast by pessimists irrespective of party allegiance and that the longer the government 'clung to office'—that is the accepted phrase on such occasions—the more would their failure to bridge the dollar gap, and the disastrous consequences of that failure, be exposed. Churchill may have hoped that by daring the prime minister to dissolve at once he would push him in the opposite direction.

It may be that these tactics had their influence but it is more likely that they did not, for Attlee is not a man to be much impressed by Churchillian fireworks. It is more likely that the prime minister calculated that things would not go so badly for the next few months and that, as the excitement of devaluation faded into the past and the inevitably large, though equally inevitably temporary, improvement in the inflow of dollars consequent on devaluation revealed itself, the standing of his government would improve. In October he announced that there would be no general election until the new year. On January 11 he announced the date of the election as February 23. It would fall just four days before the Jubilee of the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee, the birthday of the party.

Needless to say, we were soon hearing or reading that this was going to be the most critical and epoch-making election in our history, but of which of the thirteen elections recorded in this book was that not said on the eve of the polls? In actual fact it would be easy to point to elections, 1931 for example and 1906, more epoch-making than this was likely to prove to be. In essentials it was more a choice of men than of measures. Apart from the question of more or less nationalization there was a broad measure of agreement between the whole of the Conservative party and the bulk of the Labour party. Both were committed to the immense experiment of the social services, a policy launched by a national government which had comprised most of the leaders on both sides. When a leading statesman spoke of the 'big risks' taken 'in assuming so many commitments so soon after a crippling war' and about the impossibility of undertaking 'more substantial commitments however desirable' until 'we can be sure of meeting in all weathers the commitments which we have already undertaken' the newspaper reader who had failed to look at the head of the column might have imagined that he was reading a Conservative pronouncement. Actually he was reading a speech of Herbert Morrison.

'Wooing the middle class vote' was an opponent's comment on this speech. No doubt Aneurin Bevan was at the same time saying something quite different. The Labour party spoke with two voices while the Conservatives in general spoke with one. Had the two-voice technique a tactical value? Lincoln said one could not fool all the people all the time, but one might fool a

sufficient number of them for the brief period of an election campaign—or one might not. One thing seems probable: if there were no Bevans in the Labour party there would be many more votes for the Communists. Bevan is a bulwark against Communism just because he combines an extremist programme with a stalwart faith in the freedoms of parliamentary democracy.

Whatever government was returned to power would have to answer to the best of its ability the two terrible riddles of the post-war sphinx, riddles symbolised in the familiar phrases, the dollar gap and the iron curtain; our relations with our best friends and our relations with our declared enemies. How could we struggle upwards into an economic position in which we could prosper without American subsidies? and how could we play an effective part in an effective defence of the Western Europe and Southern Asia against communist imperialism? The question the electors had to decide was whether a Labour government or a Conservative government, Attlee's team or Churchill's team, should be entrusted with these tasks. There were not likely to be any very big differences between their methods and none at all between their aims. The question was, which team was likely to prove the more competent and successful.

So much for the issues, and now for the fascinating and hazardous game of forecasting the result. After the general election of 1945 there were 392 Labour members, 196 Conservatives, 13 National Liberals who may for practical purposes be regarded as Conservatives, 12 Liberals and 27 Independents and others, such as for example the two Communists. At the dissolution there were 382 Labour members, 202 Conservatives, 13 National Liberals, 10 Liberals and 27 Independents and others.

We had so often been told that Labour had not lost a single by-election that the decline of ten in its numbers seemed odd. There was, however, a simple explanation. Certain Labour members had been expelled from their party for opposition to the government's foreign policy and were thus reckoned perforce with the Independents, though remaining rather exceptionally full-blooded socialists. Two had left the party by the other door, as it were, and become Conservatives owing to disagreement with the government's domestic policy. Neither law nor custom compels such members to resign their seats, though there is an obvious argument in favour of their doing so. There are also

arguments on the other side, and any rule which made it more difficult than it already is for private members to exercise independent judgement would be regrettable. The great authority of Burke is in favour of the present custom.

Though the Liberals were once again putting several hundred candidates in the field it seemed unlikely that they would increase the insignificant number of their successes. Did a Liberal candidate subtract more votes from Labour or from Conservatism? No one knows the answer to this question, and no doubt it varies from constituency to constituency. Very likely the Liberal candidate subtracts about equally from both. One must hope so, for only in such conditions does the Liberal intrusion fail to cause a misrepresentation of the choice of the electorate as between the two effective parties.

The number of Independents would almost certainly be reduced by the abolition of the university constituencies. Even at this late stage in our narrative we may be permitted to shed a tear over the disappearance of this pleasing anomaly in our electoral system, an anomaly fittingly introduced by our 'English Solomon', King James I. There had been a time when university members were invariably Tories, but since the end of the first world war the universities had broken loose from this tradition and sent to parliament a number of distinguished and valuable Independents who might not have cared to contest other seats, or at any rate would not have won them without accepting a party allegiance. It seemed strange, too, that the universities should be disfranchised just when their membership had become far more representative of the democracy than before. However, they had been disfranchised like the rotten boroughs of old, though the Conservative party had promised to restore their representation if it were returned to power.

However all interest naturally concentrated on the Labour and Conservative figures. If one adds the National Liberals to the Conservatives, the Conservatives had to win 83 seats from Labour to secure equality with them, irrespective of Liberals and Independents. Were they likely to do this, and also to secure a further number of victories such as would give them a sufficient majority for practical purposes? Labour had not lost a single by-election, but it had never had to re-contest a constituency in which its majority had been dangerously small. Its by-election

victories had been won by reduced majorities. Reduced by how much? An authority put it at six per cent. It does not sound much, but a twelve per cent. transfer of votes in the opposite direction in 1945 had converted a Conservative majority of two hundred into a Labour majority of the same dimensions. A six per cent. transfer in 1950 would bring the two main parties to something very near equality—a result more deplorable, in the opinion of many, than a clear victory of either of them.

Those who ignored the arithmeticians and trusted their own psychological insight seem to have expected that Labour would retain a majority, however drastically reduced, perhaps because it is easier to imagine a small change than a big one. Against this view Conservative optimists could argue that, with the modern vast electorate of both sexes, the pendulum generally swings further than the prophets have forecast.

As the electoral battle progressed it became apparent that the Socialist party was hiding its socialism under a bushel. Aneurin Bevan was kept away from the microphone and the Labour spokesmen called attention neither to the past triumphs of nationalization nor to the official plans for further advances in this direction. They preferred to advertise their achievements of full employment and general well-being and omitted to mention the debt of both of these to ' Marshall Aid.'

It was natural that the author of this book should cast his mind back to see which, if any, of the previous elections of the past fifty years presented any close analogy with that of 1950. That of 1929 seemed the most appropriate. The 1929 election, like that of 1950, followed the dissolution of a parliament which had died a ' natural ' death within a few months of the conclusion of its legally allotted span. Baldwin's government, which had enjoyed a majority of about 200, could present a four-and-a-half years' record of considerable achievement, while affording at the same time a broad target to legitimate criticism. It offered the electorate ' the mixture as before ' and labelled it ' Safety first '. Every word of this description applies equally to Attlee's government in 1950, even down to the ' Safety first ' label, for the fundamental article in the Labour prospectus was the continuance of full employment and the suggestion that the Conservatives either could not or perhaps did not really want to preserve this security. Yet 1929 had swept away a Conservative majority of

200 and replaced it with a Labour majority of 30 or rather less. Would history repeat itself? Surely it never does repeat itself with quite such pedantic accuracy.*

And now for the result of the polls. The Labour party secured 315 seats, the Conservatives and National Liberals (who were Conservatives under an alias) 296, and the Liberals 9. The Communists and the Left-wing Labour rebels were swept out of parliamentary existence, ninety of the hundred Communist candidates forfeiting their deposits by failing to poll one-eighth of the votes cast in their respective constituencies. The Independents were also swept away. This result was partly due to the abolition of the university seats, but not entirely. Whatever the decision of the electorate as between the two main parties, it expressed a clear intention to concentrate its approval on them alone and to discourage the free lance.

Hence also the fate of the Liberals. Of their 476 candidates over 300 forfeited their deposits. Of the nine elected one owed his seat to an arranged abstention of the local Conservative party and four came from Wales. It must be said that the Liberal party deserved its fate. In so far as its programme differed from the Conservative it consisted of vote-catching frivolities which no party in danger of securing office could have ventured to advocate, such as ' home rule ' for Scotland and Wales and the abolition of conscription. Home rule implies a receipts and expenditure account and it is inconceivable that a Scottish or a Welsh budget could cover Welsh or Scottish liabilities. As for conscription, its defects are as obvious as its unpopularity, but every responsible person knows that the abandonment of conscription in Great Britain today would do more to throw Western Europe into the arms of the Communists than any other single measure conceivable.

As for the two main parties, their battle proved, as the Duke of Wellington said of the battle of Waterloo, ' a damned near run thing '. The Conservatives failed to win, but the Labour party failed to secure a working majority such as would enable them to proceed, or justify them in trying to proceed, with their distinctively socialist policies. The Conservatives had been beaten, but so had nationalization.

* Everything down to this point was written before the declaration of the poll.

As we listened to the results piling themselves up one by one throughout the morning and afternoon of the day after the election, there must have been few who did not rejoice each time the prospects brightened of their own party securing a minute lead on the total, for no one who is not a philosopher can fail to regard a general election as, among other things, a sporting event. It is like an enormously long race and one wants one's favourite to be first at the finish though it be only by a yard. But while as sportsmen we longed for victory, even such a victory as that, we may have realised that victory by so small a margin would be more embarrassing than defeat. The victory with its embarrassments fell in the upshot to Labour, and on the following day Attlee announced that the King's government must be carried on and that in the circumstances he and his colleagues must shoulder the burden.

And there we must leave it. Much will happen in the next few weeks and months and much will be known to the earliest readers of this book which is at the moment of writing, concealed from its author. Our story must end, even though the end be not a full stop but a note of interrogation, the symbol which separates the past from the future, history from prophecy.

A record of fifty years of British party politics creates an illusion of stability in a changing world. One general election follows another and in certain respects they are all very much alike. No doubt even here there have been changes, of quantity and quality. In 1900 the voters were only a little over four million ; in 1950 they were more than twenty-eight million. The total population has grown ; a far higher percentage of it is enfranchised ; and a higher percentage of those enfranchised record their votes. In 1950, eighty-three-and-a-half per cent. of the electorate recorded their votes ; in no previous election had the percentage been as high as eighty. As regards quality, electioneering methods and manners have moved very much further from Eatanswill ; they have become as Churchill, perhaps almost regretfully, remarked, positively ' demure '. Whether there is less deliberate misrepresentation of the past records and future intentions of opponents is another matter. But the lying is less robust, less rhapsodical ; there is less poetry and perhaps more science about it. Even so, elections retain much of the Victorian tradition.

It may be said that what has proved stable and repetitive and has been on the stage of our narrative is a very small matter compared with the tremendous events off-stage which we have had to notice only by the way. That is very true and very obvious. The world of 1950 has been transformed in the past fifty years. The most lurid imagination of 1900 could not have conceived such changes and it would be entirely inappropriate to wax eloquent about them here. In such a transformation it is comforting to observe that some things, such as the mechanism of British party politics, still transact themselves much as of yore.

Such politics lie along the surface of history, and we have not often ventured to probe the depths below them. Any attempt to be profound in our final paragraphs would be quite out of place, but as we look back over the fifty years we have covered, fifty years crowded, it must surely be allowed, with a fascinating diversity of political events and political characters, it seems agreeable, to the writer at any rate, to single out some one feature for a few last words.

We began with the Conservative and Liberal parties in full strength and vigour and apparently in indisputable possession of the field. But one of them was nearer its demise than anyone realised, and less than half-way through our period it had dwindled to an insignificant and fissiparous group. Labour took its place. By a fortunate coincidence the second month of the very first year of the period covered by this book witnessed the conference which marked its foundation. We have watched the new party grow from nothing to where it is today.

But very soon after we launched our new party we found ourselves also encountering a man, who grew as the new party grew until he became for a time, himself alone, something greater than any party ; and he too has been with us to the end. Let us explore these parallel existences, that of the party and that of the man, a little further.

Winston L. Spencer-Churchill was born in 1874 and the general election of that same year saw the return to parliament of the first two ' working-men candidates ', the Lib-Labs as they afterwards came to be called, not quite Labour members in the modern sense, but representatives of ' Labour ', elected with trade union support and attached to the Liberal party. They and their successors made no great mark on the history

of the next twenty years, but nor did Winston Churchill.

In 1893 Keir Hardie founded the Independent Labour party; MacDonald and Snowden soon joined it. Almost immediately afterwards Churchill began to get busy. He joined the army, fought in several campaigns and wrote several books.

Though 1900 was the year of the foundation of the Labour party Churchill occupied much more space in the press than the obscure doings of the Labour Representation Committee. He had just achieved fame by his escape from captivity as a prisoner of war in Pretoria and was triumphantly elected Conservative M.P. for Oldham in the 'Khaki' election, when all but two of the L.R.C. candidates were defeated.

When the Conservative government resigned at the end of 1905 Churchill became for the first time a minister of the crown, and the Labour party appeared for the first time as an independent party of fifty members in the newly elected House of Commons.

From that time onward the adventures of the party and of the man are recorded in successive chapters of this book. We cannot quite truly say that they went on from strength to strength. Each of them advanced through an alternation of political booms and slumps, each boom marking a higher level of power than its predecessor. They were on opposite sides and if all the hard things they said of each other were collected we should have a fine anthology of political vituperation. Yet history will record that they achieved greater things in the five years when they pulled together than in all the forty-five years when they pulled in opposite directions. And as we leave them we leave the party still in office after guiding the country through four-and-a-half of the most critical years of its history; and we leave the man, defeated it is true for a second time in a post-war election, but still far the greatest single figure in the public life not only of our own country but of the whole range of our western civilization from the frontier of the iron curtain to the coast of the Pacific.

POSTSCRIPT 1950-3

Nearly all this book was written in 1949, and completed at the end of February 1950 so as to cover the result of the general election in that month. The issue of a new edition gives an opportunity to sketch the development of party politics down to the early months of 1953. As a result of the general election of 1950 Labour remained in office, but with a majority reduced from round about 200 to a mere ten. The questions we have to consider are:—how did the Labour Government manage to carry on with so narrow a margin for a year and a half? Why, in the autumn of 1951 did it abandon the struggle? for it abandoned it voluntarily, without suffering defeat. What were the issues deciding the result of the election of October 1951? and finally, how did the Conservative Government fare, for the next year or so, with the only slightly larger majority which the electorate gave it? Other and possibly more important matters will only come into the story insofar as they affect the anwers to these questions. In the main body of this book I was trying to write history. I would hardly claim so high a title for these comments on the very recent past and I will acknowledge the difference by giving everyone a 'Mr.', but I will do my best to write with strict impartiality.

As soon as the election results were known commentators began to say that there was bound to be another election in a few months. Not for a hundred years, not since the establishment of the modern party discipline, had any government carried on with anything like so small a majority. It had been customary to say that 30, or even 50, was a minimum 'working' majority. There had, of course, been governments with no majority of their own at all, depending for their existence on the support of a third party. The Labour Governments of 1923 and 1929 were examples. So long as the Liberals chose to support them they were safe. If and when the Liberals changed their mind, they fell. But this was not such a case at all. It turned out that three of the nine Liberals supported the Government on various occasions and the remaining six on a few, but there was no alliance as on the earlier occasions.

On the other hand, it was no use having another election in the near future if it was likely to lead to a repetition of the same result.

If the electorate is presented after a brief interval with the same issues it will give the same response. The two elections of 1910, eleven months apart, had illustrated this fact with almost perfect exactitude. It is true that in 1922, 23 and 24 there had been three elections at yearly intervals which had given widely different results, but each of these was fought on different issues, as a previous chapter of this book shows. So the longer the next election could be postponed the better for all concerned.

Thus when the new parliament met the battle of the polls was followed by what a commentator called ' the battle of the benches', and the Government fared better in its possibly distasteful task than it may have hoped. Party discipline was stricter than ever before, and membership of the House of Commons became more than ever a whole-time job, a fact more deplored by Conservatives than by Labour men, though the latter were heard to say that if it was to be a whole-time job it should receive a more adequate whole-time salary. The Government conducted itself with prudence, and its majority seldom fell below 8. Spokesmen such as Mr. Morrison and Mr. Morgan Phillips made a point of distinguishing their socialism from any taint of Marxism. The latter emphasized the religious and ethical bases of the party, saying it was ' Methodist, not Marxist '—with an eye perhaps on the Liberal voter who was very often a nonconformist.

The only party-political question on which the Government behaved provocatively was the nationalization of the steel industry. The Bill had been enacted, by means of another Bill reducing the duration of the Lords' veto, before the general election, but the ' vesting day ', on which the new arrangements came into operation, had been postponed until October 1950. The idea was that, if Labour won, the electorate would have endorsed their policy and they could go ahead; if the Conservatives won, the ' vesting day ' could be postponed indefinitely, pending any denationalizing measure the new Government might introduce. In the result, Labour had won, but hardly a ' moral victory ', and if one turned to the figures of the poll, one could show that there was a clear majority of voters, Liberal and Conservative against nationalization. None the less, the Government persisted in bringing the Act into operation.

In June 1950 the North Korean Communists invaded South Korea. ' Naked aggression, and it must be checked ' said Mr.

Attlee the same evening in the House of Commons, and the British representative on the Security Council of the United Nations was at once instructed to support the American proposal that the United Nations should furnish assistance to South Korea. The first stage of the Korean war was a desperate but successful attempt to maintain a foothold in the southern tip of the peninsula. Then followed an advance which was carried up to the neighbourhood of the Chinese frontier, and General MacArthur, the American supreme commander, announced that 'the boys would be home by Christmas'. Then Communist China came to the rescue of the North Koreans, and the U.N. forces were driven back to the neighbourhood of the thirty-eighth parallel, which had been the frontier between the two Korean states. Here a stalemate, reminiscent of the western front in the First World War, was established. In the summer of 1951 armistice negotiations were opened on a Russian suggestion, but it gradually became apparent that these negotiations, which continued without result till near the end of 1952 were merely a device to slow down hostilities while the Chinese were mobilizing their resources with the support of Russian armaments.

This is not the place to consider the significance of the Korean campaign as an element in the world-wide conflict of the 'cold war'. Within the limits of our subject it may be said that the Korean war improved what an insurance company would call the expectation of life of the Labour Government. Here was an issue which for the time being dwarfed all others, and the Government were facing it in a manner approved by most of their own supporters and by all their opponents. They were acting nationally, with Conservative support. Equally whole-hearted was Conservative support for the very ambitious re-armament programme which the Prime Minister announced a month after the outbreak of the Korean War. Re-armament was inevitable in any case, in view of the Russian menace. The Korean war was the occasion rather than the cause of it.

Mr. Attlee faced the new parliament with very much the same colleagues as before. The 'big four' described in the previous chapter still held their posts, but their ranks were soon to be thinned. First Sir Stafford Cripps and then Mr. Bevin retired, mortally stricken in health. Sir Stafford was succeeded at the Exchequer by Mr. Gaitskell, another Wykehamist. Mr. Morrison, who had

been a tower of strength as Leader of the House, went to the Foreign Office where he proved rather a misfit, for the qualities required for the two positions are entirely different. Mr. Morrison, in spite of the moderation of his socialism, is temperamentally a pugnacious debater, and the great Foreign Secretaries, such as Sir Edward Grey, Mr. Bevin and Mr. Eden (to take one from each party) have been men whose tone and demeanour lifted national issues above the level of party controversy.

However, it is only fair to Mr. Morrison to say that, almost before he had time to turn round in his new sphere, he was faced with two problems that might well have baffled the greatest of Foreign Secretaries. Persia tore up the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1933 and proceeded to confiscate the property of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Egypt tore up the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and announced her intention of expelling the British forces from the Canal zone and annexing the Sudan which, though in form an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, had in fact been rescued from barbarism and set on the path towards civilized self-government by a succession of British administrators during the previous fifty years. In the good old days of Victorian imperialism we should not have hesitated to change the minds of these 'lesser breeds' by forcible methods. In 1951 the climate of opinion and the circumstances of world politics were both very different, and it was not easy to know what to do with a man like Dr. Moussadek, the Persian prime minister. The Persian business was practically all over before the fall of the Labour Government. Mr. Morrison protested and, in the language of his critics, 'scuttled'. The Egyptian question took longer to mature and provided headaches for Mr. Morrison's successor.

Of the four there remains Mr. Bevan. He had always occupied a somewhat independent position and, unlike the others, had not given his services to Mr. Churchill's war government. He was the recognized leader of what was called the 'Keep Left' group, and membership of a Government which could attempt nothing ambitious was irksome to him. In April 1951 he resigned, with his colleague Mr. Wilson, the President of the Board of Trade, the reason given being that he objected to various features of Mr. Gaitskell's Budget, among them the charge, to be imposed on those who could afford it, for certain National Health services, such as the supply of spectacles and dentures. There was perhaps

a personal antipathy between the passionate Welsh demagogue and this cool and sagacious product of the public schools who had advanced so suddenly to the front rank in the Labour hierachy. A fellow Labour member said that Mr. Bevan decided to resign before he decided on a reason for doing so. He may well have thought that, with a general election obviously not far ahead, he could best advance either his party's prospects, or his own career, or both, by assuming an independent position.

The Gallup poll, like the microphone, has added a new weapon to the armoury of party politics. By means of these mysterious soundings it is possible to take, as it were, the Government's temperature and discover whether the patient is gaining strength or losing it. At the time of the 1950 election Dr. Gallup foretold a dead heat and so, in effect, it was, but by the following January, eleven months later, the doctor announced that Conservative support had risen to 51% and Labour fallen to 38% (the remainder being Liberal or undecided). This result may well have persuaded the Government to hold on and hope for a rise; it certainly created in many Conservative breasts a strong feeling that the Government had no right to its position and a determination to use every available device of parliamentary tactics to render its political existence unbearable. Mr. Boothby, a very able Conservative member, said in March, 1951, ' We shall harry the life out of them. We shall keep it up day and night . . . and grind away until they get absolutely hysterical and say " We cannot stand it any more".'

Perhaps this was a mistake; indeed Mr. Boothby admitted that it was a year later. Nothing has bedevilled politics so much since the second war as party warfare for warfare's sake, creating the maximum area of controversy instead of the maximum area of collaboration. An illustration is the absurd demand of a section of the Labour Party in opposition in 1952 that Labour should have ' a foreign policy of its own different from that of the Tory Party '. In the period 1909-14 there were bitter party conflicts, to be sure, but the conflicts were about real differences. In recent years the conflicts have been laregly matters of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, as anyone can see for himself when he tries to discover the real differences between the programmes at elections. The trouble began, perhaps, with Mr. Churchill's first broadcast in the 1945 election when he suggested that if we had a Socialist

Government we should soon find ourselves ruled by a ' Gestapo ', the name, more familiar then than now, of Hitler's police force. Stanley Baldwin had his faults, and they have been exaggerated by the current fashion of depreciating everything that was done in the inter-war period, but he did not make that sort of mistake. He always worked for concilliation.

In spite of the harassing tactics of Mr. Boothby and his friends the Labour Government jogged along until the end of its second session in the summer of 1951. Seven weeks later, during the recess, the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of parliament and the holding of a general election in October. Why did he do this ? No doubt he and his colleagues had had enough of a very unsatisfactory situation, but there was a further argument for clearing out. The balance of payments to our creditors abroad was once again turning alarmingly against us. The gold reserves were oozing out at every pore.

This is a myserious business, a recurrent economic disease from which we have suffered ever since the second war, much as between the wars we suffered from another economic disease, unemployment. The present disease seems to come on every alternate year. It was bad in 1947 and bad in 1949, when the pound was devalued. In 1950 we were getting better, and the recovery undoubtedly helped the Labour Government to carry on. Now in the latter half of 1951 it was getting worse than ever. Every Labour politician had at the back of his mind the spectre of 1931, when in the worst phase of unemployment the Labour Party split because most of its members refused to take the prescribed medicine. Mr. Attlee probably did not wish to subject his party to a similar test of fortitude. He certainly did not wish to be another MacDonald. So he dissolved parliament. These remarks are speculations widely entertained at the time. Mr. Attlee, being a wise man, did not give his reasons, or at any rate not all of them.

The election was not fought on a high argumentative level of socialism versus capitalism or private enterprise. The meaning of these terms was in any case becoming more and more obscure. There was, for example, talk of ' nationalizing water ', and it is doubtful if any Conservative said ' Another classic example of stout-hearted private enterprise threatened '. The Labour men knew that an offer of more nationalization would repel rather than

attract the dubious voter. The Conservatives promised to repeal the Steel Act and parts of the Transport Act, but the minority who were interested knew that these would be difficult operations and that in any case there was no question of returning to what a Victorian would have regarded as free enterprise in these industries.

Instead, each party, very sensibly, tried to prove that it would be the more efficient of the two teams claiming to 'play for Britain'. Mr. Churchill coined the slogan 'Bevan, Abadan, Sudan', which might be translated 'A Socialist victory will entrust the Government to a class-war fanatic. The Socialists have already given away Persian oil, and if you vote them in they will give away the Sudan'. Fear of Bevanism (whatever exactly that might be) probably turned some votes. As for 'Abadan' and 'Sudan', we were no longer imperially minded and it is probable that the average voter cared less about these remote affairs than perhaps he ought to have done. The Labour response was more effective; it was to denounce the Conservatives and more particularly Mr. Churchill as war-mongers. If the Tories came into power, they said, the danger of the Cold War being hotted up would be increased. Labour had called Mr. Churchill a war-monger in the thirties when he was trying to rouse the country to prepare for the onslaught of Germany, and the Labour Opposition was opposing the re-armament programmes of the Baldwin-Chamberlain governments. Mr. Churchill had proved right, and when the war came had saved the country with the collaboration of the Labour leaders, and now the Labour Government itself had launched a programme of rearmament. But the old cry was brought out again. It was nonsense, but it would serve. As Mr. Mayhew, a Labour minister, said after the election; by making peace or war a dominant issue 'we limited the success of the Conservative Party'. Conservatives said it was a dirty trick, and so it was. Labour men could reply that it was no worse than Mr. Churchill's 'gestapo' broadcast in 1945, which might be true, but it seems a poor defence. It was notable that Mr. Attlee, unlike Mr. Morrison, made no use of the war-mongering argument.

At the beginning of the campaign the Gallup poll gave the Conservatives an eleven per cent lead, which would have meant a very substantial majority of seats. This lead dwindled with each successive sounding. The last gave a 2½% lead and this vanished

away on polling day. If one allows for some uncontested Conservative seats in Northern Ireland and a couple of British seats where Conservatives supported a Liberal candidate it appears that the number of potential voters on each side was as near as may be equal. This dwindling of Conservative prospects was a repetition of what had happened in 1950. What was the explanation ? Probably there are a number of people who, when Gallup-polled, register an expression of dissatisfaction with their own party, if it happens to be in office, but, when the real voting comes, return to their normal allegiance. It will be interesting to see whether, next time, the rule works the other way round, the Conservatives being the office holders.

In the result the Conservatives gained 23 seats and numbered 321 in the new House. Labour lost 20 and numbered 295. The Liberals, who had put up only 100 candidates as compared with 500 at the previous election, dropped from 9 to 6. There were two Irish Nationalists (who probably would not take their seats) and one Irish Labour member. It may seem odd that an equal number of votes should give the Conservatives small majority in seats. The reason is that the number of constituencies with large Labour majorities is greater than the number with large Conservative majorities. In other words, there are more Coketowns than Bournemouths.

Narrow majorities are inconvenient, irrespective of party, and the fact that two successive elections had produced narrow majorities encouraged those who want to alter our whole electoral system by the introduction of proportional representation in one or other of its many forms. The assumption was that there is something in present day conditions which makes something like a dead heat between the Labour and Conservative Parties more likely than of yore; but there is really no reason for any such assumption. Quite a small turn-over of votes might easily give either party a majority of a hundred or more. The arguments for a change of system are neither strengthened nor weakened by the results of the last two elections. The Liberals want the change because they would obviously benefit by it. Both the other parties are against it because neither of them wants to hold office at the mercy of a middle party.

So Mr. Churchill became Prime Minister once again at the age of seventy-seven with Mr. Eden as Foreign Secretary and

Mr. Butler as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The new ministers, on taking office, professed themselves horrified by the appalling financial situation from which their predecessors had run away. The King's Speech (it was George VI's last) promised measures denationalizing the steel industry, and the road transport sections of the transport industry. but in fact neither of these projects got beyond the 'White Paper' stage until the second session (November 1952 onwards). The solid Conservative achievement of 1952 was the restoration of the country's financial position. This was the work of Mr. Butler and his staff of advisers. Friends outside, such as the writers in *The Economist*, constantly told him that his measures were not sufficiently drastic, but it seems that they were mistaken. The near-bankruptcy of January was converted into the solid surplus of December. It was notable that in the first six months of 1952 Labour leaders somewhat arrogantly claimed that an immediate election would put 'the Tories' out of office. In the second half of the year they sang a different tune, for at two autumn by-elections the Conservatives improved on their general election figures.

Labour leaders in the autumn of 1952 had, moreover, something else to think about besides Tory misdeeds. Mr. Bevan was on the war-path. A party in opposition obviously offers more scope for back-bench freedom (or insubordination) than can be enjoyed by the supporters of a government in office. Mr. Bevan, now a prince of the back-benches, quickly gathered round himself a 'party within the party' numbering over fifty, and they showed their teeth in March, 1952, during a debate on the Defence programme. The Opposition leaders tabled an amendment supporting the programme, merely expressing as a matter of parliamentary form their doubt of the ability of the Government to carry it out. Fifty-seven Bevanites refrained from supporting this amendment and insisted on voting, instead, against the Defence programme itself. In July there appeared to be another successful revolt which was kept off the public stage. The debate was on the ratification of the treaties creating the new European Defence Community, negotiations for which had been initiated by the previous Labour Government. The Labour Opposition now tabled an amendment to the effect that ratification was 'inopportune'. It was noted that neither Mr. Attlee nor Mr. Morrison, the ex-Foreign Secretary, took part in the debate, a singular

circumstance which suggested that the amendment had been accepted by them as the lesser of two evils, to avoid another public split in the Labour ranks.

But the heyday of the Bevanites came with the annual Labour Party Conference which in 1952 met at Morecambe in September. Mr. Bevan had been for years past the most popular speaker at these Conferences, for the membership is mainly drawn from the party workers in the constituencies, admirable people who do a lot of unpaid work from devotion to the cause; and it is natural that their views lie far to the Left both of the parliamentary leaders and of the masses on whose votes the party depends. To describe exactly the course of events at Morecambe would require a preliminary essay on the complicated constitution of the Labour Party, an undertaking which would be quite out of scale with the rest of this chapter. Suffice it to say that there is a body called the National Executive Committee, more august than important it is said, to which seven members are annually elected by these same constituency workers and the result announced at the Conference. In the previous year the Bevanites had created a stir by securing four of these places. At Morecambe they secured six out of seven, actually displacing Mr. Morrison, who may fairly be described as Mr. Attlee's right hand man. That was one excitement. The other was the forthright denunciation of Mr. Bevan and all his works by two of the weightiest trade union leaders, Sir William Lawther (coal) and Mr. Deakin (transport).

A few weeks later Mr. Bevan made another bid, for the Labour Party has a passion for intra-party elections not shared by the Conservatives. The matter was the electing of the Deputy Leader in the House and the voters were the Labour M.P.s Mr. Morrison had held this position unchallenged for years. Mr. Bevan now challenged him and secured 82 votes out of 276. Then came the election of twelve members who would constitute, along with the Leader and Deputy Leader and Chief Whip, the policy making committee of the Opposition. Several Bevanites stood but, as a result perhaps of some rather sharp manoeuvring by the 'old gang', only Mr. Bevan was elected, and at the bottom of the list of successful candidates.

Meanwhile Mr. Attlee had intervened. At a meeting of the parliamentary party at the opening of the autumn session he moved a resolution calling for the immediate abolition of all group

organizations within the party. It was carried by 188 votes to 51, with 53 abstentions. *Tribune*, the organ of the Bevanites, criticized the resolution in outspoken terms.

Nothing is more remarkable in all this story than the position of Mr. Attlee. He appears to stand aloof and aloft, the symbol of a higher unity in which surface disunities are transcended. His interventions in the Morecambe debates were cold and passionless, as of a man who says ' The fun and games of this Holiday Camp are of no interest or importance to me '. At about this time, though in another connexion, ' Janus ' of *The Spectator* remarked ' How little we know this man '. It is true. Never were rival leaders more sharply contrasted than Mr. Churchill and Mr. Attlee. Mr. Churchill we feel we know as perhaps no public man has ever been known before. It is not only that he has been writing entertaining books about himself for over fifty years and is one of the most accomplished broadcasters. His character, with its greatness, its humours and its foibles, shines through every newspaper report of his activities. Mr. Attlee, after twenty years in the front ranks of British politics remains—shall we say impressively obscure ? He is obviously a very able and a very powerful person, but we arrive at the knowledge indirectly, by results.

Mr. Churchill is seventy-eight. As Lord Salisbury was succeeded by his nephew, Mr. Balfour, so in all human probability Mr. Churchill will be succeeded by his nephew-in-law, Mr. Eden. Mr. Attlee is seventy and Mr. Morrison is about the same age. Who will succeed Mr. Attlee ? That unanswered question is perhaps at the bottom of Bevanism and anti-Bevanism.

GOVERNMENTS AND GENERAL ELECTIONS, 1900-51

1900				SALISBURY
1901				"
1902				BALFOUR
1903				"
1904				"
1905	C.-BANNERMAN			"
1906	"			
1907	"			
1908	ASQUITH			
1909	"			
1910	"			
1911	"			
1912	"			
1913	"			
1914	"			
1915		ASQUITH		
1916		"		
1917			LLOYD GEORGE	
1918			"	
1919			"	
1920			"	
1921			"	
1922			"	
1923				B.-LAW, BALDWIN
1924	MacDONALD			
1925				BALDWIN
1926				"
1927				"
1928				"
1929				"
1930	MacDONALD			
1931	"		MacDONALD	
1932			"	
1933			"	
1934			"	
1935			BALDWIN	
1936			"	
1937			CHAMBERLAIN	
1938			"	
1939			"	
1940		CHURCHILL		
1941		"		
1942		"		
1943		"		
1944		"		
1945				CHURCHILL
1946	ATTLEE			
1947	"			
1948	"			
1949	"			
1950	"			
1951				CHURCHILL

Liberal and Labour Governments on the left, Conservative on the right. The rest are coalitions. Those of Asquith and Churchill are shown as 50-50 coalitions : those of Lloyd George and MacDonald as predominantly Conservative. General elections shown by horizontal lines.

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