UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_150870

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 341·7 Accession No. 28941

Author N15D

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

DIPLOMATIC PRELUDE
1938–1939

Some Extracts from Reviews

" His book is as closely abreast of published sources of information as it could possibly be . . . a book that will certainly become a standard work of reference. . . . Professor Namier has been remarkably successful in carrying out his uncommonly difficult task. His book will for a long time to come be indispensable to the student of pre-1939 diplomatic history and to all desirous of learning the truth about the immediate origins of the war. Moreover, Professor Namier has performed the almost impossible feat of breathing life into the dry bones of diplomatic correspondence. There is hardly a dull page in the five hundred pages of this book. . . . History has now spoken, with Professor Namier's voice, to condemn the guilty out of their own mouths and writings."
— *The Times Literary Supplement.*

" *Diplomatic Prelude* is a show-piece of the historian's art. . . . Meticulous scholarship and deep insight go together, and a sentence often says as much as many pages by another writer. . . . It is surely discreditable that the British Government has published nothing except a meagre Blue-book on German-Polish relations. Until it does Professor Namier's book is likely to remain the most precise and accurate narrative in any language on how the war began."—Professor A. J. P. Taylor in the *Manchester Guardian.*

DIPLOMATIC PRELUDE

1938–1939

BY

L. B. NAMIER, F.B.A.

Professor of Modern History
in the University of Manchester

LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD
1948

COPYRIGHT

First Edition January 1948
Reprinted February 1948

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

I STARTED writing this book in the spring of 1940, as a comparative and critical analysis of the various official collections of documents — the Blue Book, the Yellow Book, the two White Books, etc. The first instalment appeared in the *Political Quarterly* in July 1941. Circumstances allowed only slow progress, and the fifth and last instalment published in the *Political Quarterly*, in April 1945, carried on the narrative to May 1939, that is, to the end of Chapter IV and page 142 of this book.

Meantime the scope of the book was widening. In the first place, I found it necessary to supplement the documents with information derived from the Press. For instance, for Chapter V, on the Anglo-Russian negotiations of March–August 1939, Press reports were, when I started, by far the most important available source.

Secondly, the student of contemporary history has the advantage of being able to talk to men who took part in the transactions. In various passages the careful and conversant reader will trace information perhaps not available elsewhere. I have many friends to thank for the help given in the service of historical record.

Even more important than direct information has been the guidance of such friends. A great many profound secrets are somewhere in print, but are most easily detected when one knows what to seek. Similarly, previous knowledge is a marvellous stimulant to cogent reasoning and astute deductions. I recall a story told by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (it is so long since I read it that I must be forgiven if I have got some details wrong). He was crossing Paris from the Gare de Lyon to the Gare du Nord, on his way back from the Riviera. " Thank you, Sir Conan Doyle," said the taxi-driver on receiving his tip. " How

do you know who I am ? " The man replied : " I saw in the papers that you were coming from Cannes by way of Marseilles, and your hair is cut in the Cannes style, and on your boots is Marseilles mud." " Is this all you recognize me by ? " " No," was the answer. " On your trunk is your name in big letters."

Next to the original collections of diplomatic documents, the most important single source for this book is the documents offered in evidence at the Nuremberg Trial ; the statements made by the accused or witnesses are of much smaller value.

Lastly, documented memoirs have by now started appearing, especially in France and Italy.

I have tried to incorporate in the text of the book information culled from these new sources : it meant a good deal of re-writing and re-shaping — new wine had to be carefully infused into old bottles. But the bottles could not hold it all : for that reason I have added the section on " Episodes and Men ", which, should this book reach further editions, is meant to serve as a " revelation " bag — not in the sense of " revelations " but of expansive capacity ; it is to provide packing space for matter complementary to this book, but which could not be incorporated in it.

I have to thank the editors and owners of the *Political Quarterly*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and *The Times Literary Supplement* for permission to reprint parts of this book which have appeared in their columns. Lastly, acknowledgment from me is due to Messrs. Hutchinson, the publishers of the English translation of the French Yellow Book : while making my own translation of the documents quoted, I have found theirs helpful and suggestive.

L. B. NAMIER

ALDERLEY EDGE
December 15th, 1946

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE ix

PART I: COLOURED BOOKS

CHAPTER I

PRE-MUNICH 3

The German White Book — The Polish White Book — The Two Together (May 1933–October 1938)

CHAPTER II

FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE (September 29th, 1938–March 15th, 1939) 34

After Munich — The Franco-German Declaration — Hitler endorses the Ribbentrop Plan — The End of Munich

CHAPTER III

RE-ALIGNMENTS (March–April 1939) 71

The Aftermath — Chamberlain begins to React — Memel — Back to Danzig — In Search of Collective Defence — The Polish Reply to Germany — Rumours, Fears, and their *Dénouement*

CHAPTER IV

HESITATION AND QUEST 117

More Aggression and Further Guarantees — Interlude — President Roosevelt's Appeal, Hitler's Speech, and Beck's Reply

CHAPTER V

ANGLO-RUSSIAN NEGOTIATIONS (April–August 1939) . 143

The Early Stages of the Negotiations — Parliament Intervenes — Poland, Germany, and Russia — Unsolicited Guarantees and Indirect Aggression

CHAPTER VI

PAGE

GERMAN-POLISH RELATIONS (May–July 1939) . . 211
Hitler decides to Attack — As Henderson saw It — German Manœuvres — Bonnet and Ribbentrop — Further Manœuvres — Preparations and Illusions

CHAPTER VII

PROLOGUE TO CRISIS 248
Danzig Once More — Informing the Italians — At the Wilhelmstrasse, August 15th — The Russian-German Agreement

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRISIS 290
Reactions in London and Paris — Hitler's Address of August 22nd — Chamberlain's Letter and Hitler's Reply — "Incidents" — The Anglo-Polish Treaty — August 25th in Berlin — A Wild-Goose Chase — Daladier's Appeal — The British Reply, August 28th — August 29th — August 30th and 31st

CHAPTER IX

WAR 382
Italian Attempt at Mediation — Great Britain declares War — France declares War

PART II: EPISODES AND MEN

I. THE IDES OF MARCH, 1939 405
II. AN INTERLOPER IN DIPLOMACY . . . 417
III. FRANCE AND POLAND (1935–1939) . . . 434
IV. CIANO AND MUSSOLINI 467

INDEX 495

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

THE issue of a crisis depends not so much on its magnitude as on the courage and resolution with which it is met. The second German bid for world dominion found Europe weak and divided. At several junctures it could have been stopped without excessive effort or sacrifice, but was not: a failure of European statesmanship. Behind the German drive were passionate forces, sustained by obsessionist, sadistic hatreds and by a crude ideology; to these the Germans, whom defeat had deprived of their routine of life, showed even more than their normal receptivity, while the rest of Europe had neither the faith, nor the will, nor even sufficient repugnance, to offer timely, effective resistance. Some imitated Hitler and hyena-like followed in his track; some tolerated him, hoping that his advance would reach its term — by saturation, exhaustion, the resistance of others, or the mere chapter of accidents — before it attained them; and some, while beholding his handiwork, would praise him for having " restored the self-respect of the Germans ". Janissaries and appeasers aided Hitler's work: a failure of European morality.

On November 11th, 1918, it could have been foretold with mathematical certainty that should a united Germany in control of her resources be allowed to achieve re-armament, her European conquerors would be in mortal danger. Germany was now as pre-eminent in numbers and organisation as France had been when she made her two bids for world dominion. There was not a nation on the Continent, barring Russia, whose numerical strength was much more than half that of the Germans, and none whose industrial war-potential could compare with theirs. It had been chiefly France and

Great Britain who fought and defeated Germany in what seemed essentially a war within the traditional core of Europe; but that victory could hardly have been achieved without Russia and America. Had it not been for Russia's immediate offensive in East Prussia, the German invasion of France would probably have been as complete in 1914 as it was in 1940; and had it not been for the millions of fresh American troops ready to enter the battle zone, the German collapse in 1918 would not have been so sudden and decisive. The scales had been tipped by two extra-European Powers, of which one collapsed and the other withdrew: both left Europe.

The first plan formed by France for her future security was based on a permanent occupation of the left bank of the Rhine, which would have given her control of an important part of Germany's industrial war-potential and an advantageous strategic position; she dropped her claim in deference to the U.S.A. and Great Britain and against their promise of a joint guarantee, on which they went back. In those early days France also hoped for a resurgence of Russia, and reckoned with it. But by 1921 close alliances and active co-operation with the smaller States on Germany's eastern flank, principally Poland, became the pivot of her policy: there followed the years of military alliances, of the Upper Silesian plebiscite, and of the Ruhr occupation. Next came a new turn towards the Anglo-Saxons: a period of peace pacts and solemn renunciations of war, of Locarno and the Kellogg Pact. With Hitler's rise, the weakness and uncertainty, nay confusion, of French policy became even more patent: the Four-Power Pact, the Eastern Pact, the Franco-Soviet Pact, and the Stresa Agreement proved equally abortive. By 1936 France could boast of the richest collection of alliances and agreements which any Power had ever made since the Emperor Charles VI attempted to safeguard the Pragmatic Sanction and the rights of

his daughter by paper guarantees. The number of pacts by itself could make one doubt their value; but when in the next three years the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss*, and the destruction of Czechoslovakia proved that France lacked the strength or the will to enforce her rights, to safeguard her interests, or to fulfil her obligations, a new era opened in Europe. The Diplomatic Prelude, 1938–1939, unfolds in the shadow of Munich.

It is difficult to fix or define the uneasy, fleeting, contradictory ideas entertained or professed at that time by French and British appeasers: there was embarrassment, desire for peace, purposeful credulity, an attempt on their part to recover their bearings and to reassert their self-respect (or rather a denial that it had ever suffered), and, above all, exasperation with anyone who would try to probe that mass of emotional pretence and questionable reasoning. They had been tripped, had reeled and rolled down a pit; muddy and dazed, and uncertain how to emerge, they declared themselves well satisfied with the progress they had achieved along the path marked out by moral and realistic statesmanship. Self-condemned to argue the justice of Hitler's conquests and to profess trust in his promises, they burdened their policy with make-believe and disabled themselves from striking out on a new and clear line. Yet the factors which determined the future were obvious even to the ordinary observer. I can refer to what I wrote in an article in the *Manchester Guardian* on October 22nd, 1938:[1] "The security of the French system was collective: last month its quondam members dug their own graves. And if Russia is ever added to the German system — by agreement with the Bolsheviks or by their overthrow — a power will arise greater than the world has known." I questioned whether Britain unaided could still "ensure the

[1] "French Policy in Europe, 1919–1938"; reprinted in my book *In the Margin of History*.

integrity and independence of France, and therefore her own". And I concluded: "The key of the situation is in the relations of the British Empire and France to the United States and Russia".

The United States neither would, nor could, bring immediate help or assume contingent commitments. But what were to be the future relations of the Western Powers to Russia? In a communiqué put out by the Foreign Office on September 26th, 1938, she had been bracketed with Britain as ready to stand by France if France became involved in war over Czechoslovakia; three days later, in the final settlement, Russia was ignored: Munich was a Four-Power Pact dictated by the Axis. Could the Western Powers believe that Hitler had reached the limit of his ambitions (and would now re-start painting Christmas cards), or were they willing to remain passive spectators if, for instance, he turned against the U.S.S.R.? And how did they envisage Poland's fate or part in such transactions? Or were they prepared to disinterest themselves altogether in East-Central and Eastern Europe? Some of the French Ministers had spiritually reached "collaboration"; while British Ministers preferred to interpose "trust in Herr Hitler's word" between themselves and perplexing future problems, unresolved perhaps even in their own minds.

For Hitler, his immediate task was to "clear up" the position on his Eastern flank: the Czechs would be made to choose between servile compliance and extinction, the Poles between becoming satellites and being the next object of his operations. This was the meaning of the "unique, magnanimous offer", first made on October 24th, 1938, that Poland should concede Danzig and a corridor across the Corridor, and enter into an alliance with Germany. It had been assumed in the West that such an understanding would be directed against Russia and aim at conquering *Lebensraum* in the East for both partners. But it is not

certain that Hitler, after having secured his Eastern flank, would have made this the first item on his programme. As late as August 23rd, 1939, General Gamelin explained, in a conference of Ministers with the Chiefs of Staff, that should Poland give in, and thus enable Hitler to throw the entire weight of his forces against the West, France could hardly resist. Had Poland accepted Hitler's terms in the winter of 1938–1939, she would have earned the gratitude and applause of the appeasers for saving them trouble and for proving once more that there were no problems "which should not be capable of peaceful solution". But May–June 1940 might then have been anticipated by a year, and June 1941 would have followed in due course. A reconstituted Triple Entente alone might have stopped either — but of this no one even thought in the post-Munich period.

Hitler's entry into Prague put an end to uneasy pretence, accompanied as it was by accelerated, yet insufficient, re-arming. The British Government, released from their equivocal position and alarmed at the situation which they were now free to face, feverishly set to work to build up a "peace front" against further acts of aggression; but neither to the German seizure of Memel, nor to the Italian *coup* in Albania, was it as yet possible to offer resistance. The next target for Hitler's attack would be Poland — this was recognized, although Colonel Beck, her Foreign Minister, withheld from the Western Powers (and even, wherever he could, from his own Ambassadors) knowledge of the demands which Hitler pressed on him with growing insistence. It was now felt in London that Poland must be assured of support, and thus encouraged to stand up to Hitler if pressure, such as had made Lithuania surrender her port on the Baltic, was brought to bear on her: for were Poland to give in, it was feared that the smaller States in East-Central Europe would tumble over like ninepins. An unsolicited

British guarantee was therefore thrust at her on March 30th: a hasty and ill-considered move, which was, moreover, unnecessary — for Poland would have anyhow resisted German territorial demands or attempts to chain her to the Axis.

There was unconscious levity on the part of Britain in offering the guarantee, and of Poland in accepting it: both seem to have looked upon it as a move in a diplomatic game rather than as a commitment to be weighed and measured, estimated and defined, in military terms. At that stage the only Powers which could have given Poland quick and effective support in land warfare were France and Russia. But France, after the heavy losses of the previous war and the bitter disappointments of victory, recoiled from the idea of renewed fighting: she felt unequal to a Second World War. Even her generals were tired defeatists with purely defensive conceptions, and they and their armies were ill-prepared for the new "war of movement". Still, it seems doubtful whether the British Government, after having first for years done their best to restrain France, and then discouraged her from action over the Rhineland and shared her attitude over Czechoslovakia, fully realized what a weak, unwilling, and therefore ineffective partner they were dragging along into a policy of resistance.

Soviet Russia, too, had her bitter memories of the previous war and the post-war period; no love was lost between her and Britain, nor even, in spite of the Franco-Soviet Pact, between her and France; and the last country on whose behalf she could be expected eagerly to take up arms was Poland of the Pilsudski régime and the Riga Line. But what the Bolsheviks feared with an obsessionist dogmatism was a coalition of "Imperialist, capitalist Powers" settling their differences at Russia's expense. If there were Powers intent on conquest and war was stirring, the Russians deemed it essential for their

own security that Europe should be divided into sharply opposed camps, with one of which they would attempt an understanding. As they did not want war — for they needed time to strengthen the political, military, and economic fabric of their régime and system — and as Hitler was the warlike party, and was even more bitterly hostile to Communism than were the Western Powers, an understanding with these would, from that angle, have been preferable. But there were doubts and difficulties in the way of such an understanding: were the Western Powers serious and sincere in proposing it? Or would they, once Hitler had opened his attack, let Russia bear the main burden, or even witness with pleasure her defeat and a repetition of 1918–1920, perhaps again for the benefit of friends forming a *cordon sanitaire* round her?

Russia's suspicions were, no doubt, at all times too elaborate; but the supposition that in case of war she would have had to bear the main burden was not unreasonable: France would hardly have been more active in the field on behalf of Soviet Russia than she was in September 1939 as ally of Poland. Therefore Russia used as long a spoon in her dealings with the Western Powers as they with her — which was not conducive to quick and successful negotiations. In the second place, in such an alliance she expected to hold the principal place in Eastern Europe, to which her size and power entitled her; this would have entailed the political subordination of the smaller allies; and such subordination might in time have resulted for them in a new integration into Russia, and, moreover, into the Soviet system. Whatever concessions Great Britain made to Russia in the course of the negotiations, she was not prepared to assign to her the border countries from Finland to Rumania as her legitimate sphere of interests. This Germany could do, but not the artificers of the post-1918 settlement, of the League of Nations, and finally of the guarantee treaties of March–

April 1939 (to accept a *fait accompli* was a different matter). Through an alliance with Britain and France, Russia could not even hope to recover the territories east of the Curzon Line which the verdict of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers had originally assigned to her. Thus her risks seemed greater in such an alliance than her prospects, and only imminent danger from Germany, or terms adjusted to the realities of the situation, could have induced her to close with the Western Powers.

The Poles, on their side, greatly overrated their own strength, vastly underrated Russia's, and refused to believe that even a temporary agreement was possible between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. Similar miscalculations were made in London, where, even in responsible quarters, Poland was considered a more important, as well as a more congenial, ally than the Soviet Union. The idea of a joint front with Russia, discussed immediately after Prague, was shelved when it proved unwelcome to Poland, a bilateral agreement was concluded with Warsaw, and a guarantee was given to Rumania before negotiations were resumed with Moscow; and then it was done as if Russia ought to have deemed it a favour to herself that the " Polish-Rumanian wall " had been raised between her and Germany, and a privilege if she was allowed to make her contribution by reinforcing it. But in fact, Poland would not have her do so: having re-arisen through the double defeat of Russia and Germany in the First World War, and having grown at the expense of both; being essentially weaker than either, and in danger from both; she pursued a policy of balancing between them, and of playing them off against each other without committing herself to either. A close co-operation of the Western Powers either with the Axis or with Russia would have been dangerous to her; while the unwillingness of the Chamberlain Government to divide Europe into two hostile camps suited her policy.

She watched the negotiations for a new Triple Entente with comparative equanimity, being convinced that they would fail — and she certainly had neither the wish nor any reason to try to make them succeed ; especially as she did not think possible an understanding between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks.

Even at the end of March, Hitler seems to have thought that he would be able to bully and cajole Poland into concessions and subordination. The greater was therefore his rage over the reciprocal Anglo-Polish guarantee: he now decided to settle accounts with her, once and for all. But first he meant to isolate her. He was assured by Ribbentrop that this was possible, and that the Western Powers would not " fight for Danzig ". But gradually doubts arose in the minds of the Germans Even so Ribbentrop wanted war, and started pressing on Hitler the idea of a pact with the Soviet Government; while Göring would much rather have used that idea with a view to blackmailing the Western Powers and Poland.

Hitler seems, throughout, to have based his military dispositions on the assumption that when attacking Poland he would not have to fight the Western Powers. When, some time towards the end of June, he became convinced that he would have to reckon with such a war, he seems for a while to have seriously considered an approach to Russia ; but recoiling from the idea, he apparently hesitated, again for a while, about attacking Poland in the immediate future. A month later, no doubt encouraged by the lack of progress in the Anglo-French-Russian negotiations, he made up his mind to attempt an agreement with the Soviet Government. But it would have been unsafe for Russia to enter into political conversations with him while he could still have used them as a means for blackmailing the Western Powers and Poland into concessions preliminary to an anti-Soviet coalition. Hitler could not safely open a campaign against Poland

later than September 1st, for fear lest the autumn rains immobilise his armoured divisions; and it was equally obvious that if he wanted an agreement with the Soviet Government, they could have it on their own terms. They therefore seem to have cut as fine as possible the margin between September 1st and their closing with Hitler, and in the meantime continued negotiations with the Western Powers.

Having pulled off the pact with Russia, Hitler felt convinced that the Western Powers would not dare to come out on the Polish side. Again two policies were pursued in Berlin, both countenanced by Hitler; Ribbentrop was advancing towards war, while Göring continued to work for a second Munich. On August 25th, in the early afternoon, Hitler issued an order to invade Poland the next morning at 4.30. But the same afternoon, at 5.35, the Anglo-Polish Agreement was signed in London. Hitler had only some 23 divisions in the West: at 6.30 he countermanded the order for invasion. What happened between August 25th and 31st to make him renew it? Mental incoherence or a sleep-walker's certainty cannot be excluded; but the conviction that the French would not open an offensive in the West while practically all the German forces were operating against Poland, or a revived hope of another Munich, would seem possible explanations. Perhaps he thought that French reluctance would at the last moment stop Great Britain from going to war.

What he seems not to have sufficiently reckoned with was the toughness of British resistance under a great war leader, and his own madness. "Russia and Germany would never again take up arms against each other", Hitler declared to Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador, on August 25th, 1939; less than two years later he opened his unprovoked attack against Russia.

PART I

COLOURED BOOKS

CHAPTER I

PRE-MUNICH

WHY do people talk and argue, clothe hollow nouns with threadbare adjectives, and repeat for a hundredth time the same story, raucous like a damaged cylinder in a barrel-organ? Why do they go to the trouble of trying to appear relevant when, to explain themselves, they might just as well employ something like a Thibetan praying mill? Early in 1939 I sat through meetings of an official conference and listened to a Minister who talked by the hour because he was uneasy in his conscience; and he went on talking till resentment against those who made him feel uneasy got the better of his *malaise.* While he was holding forth, I often wondered why he did not read out to us *Alice in Wonderland* or Bradshaw; either would have made a nice long speech, would have been restful, and for relevancy would have equalled some of his own performances. In the beginning is the need or emotion: to these are gathered words; if burbled like the sounds of an animal or of an infant, or jumbled like objects in an ultra-modern painting, they might transfix a receptive understanding. But in speeches and argument men feel constrained to adopt the modes or appearances of articulate thought.

Why do people listen or profess to listen, believe or wish to believe? The effect of words is but loosely correlated to their visible contents. When they strike home, there is faith: the response of human nature, not of human understanding. Moreover, the weight of argument greatly depends on him who uses it: that of the strong has "force" and carries "conviction"; that of the weak, if unanswerable, is called a quibble and is apt

to cause annoyance. Why do people waste so much time and energy on elaborate, and often tedious, presentations of their case? Because somewhere even the worst retain the desire of seeming to do right; and somehow even the world-wise retain the belief that a proper presentation of their righteous cause will help them to victory. In the eighteenth century, before going to war, a monarch possessed of a sense of decency would produce a title, however spurious, to the territory he claimed; and now belligerents publish collections of documents about the origin of the war they wage.

There is the British Blue Book, the French Yellow Book, the German White Book, the Polish Book in white and red (the Czechs published none: they were weak, were wronged, and a statement of their case would have produced irritation). But, however great the sale has been of the various coloured books, not many people have read them. For who wants to read documents? And what are they to prove? Is evidence needed to show that Hitler was a gangster who broke his word whenever it suited him? that the British Government winked and blinked, and hoped against hope for appeasement? that French foreign policy was singularly timid and ineffective? that Polish calculations were too clever by half? The main facts and the broad outlines of recent history are known and hardly require re-stating, and none of these collections of documents, barring the French (which is rendered brilliant by M. Coulondre's despatches), makes good or easy reading. You must dig into them before you obtain enlightenment or amusement; first each must be read separately, then with its "partner", and finally all of them together. This is a laborious proceeding; but by the time you have them all round you talking past each other — a Bedlam — you begin to understand what they say, and, which is even more important, what each prefers to leave unsaid and unexplained.

The German White Book

The Germans published a preliminary collection of documents in September 1939, and followed it up in December by a volume [1] of 518 large pages, equivalent to nearly 700 in our own Blue Books. To this Herr von Ribbentrop contributed a preface of two pages; whoever knows German should make a point of reading him. Empty of thought, trite in expression, he booms, flatters Hitler, inveighs against England, and thinks that to assert is to convince: the insolence of parrots in power.

> The German people led by Adolf Hitler turns its eyes to the future, not to the past [wrote Ribbentrop]. But the struggle which has been forced on us, and which we have to fight through to the end for the sake of Germany's future, demands that we should remain ever conscious of how it arose and where its origins are to be sought for. Still, this has long been obvious to anyone who wants to see, and has often enough been exposed in public by German authoritative quarters, foremost in the speeches of our Führer. But as the mendacious propaganda of our enemies strenuously exerts itself to hide the truth and to mislead world-opinion concerning the origin of the war and their own aims, it is important by means of authentic official documents once more to produce unanswerable evidence that England, exclusively and alone, bears the guilt for the war and willed it in order to annihilate Germany.

The documents "show the magnanimous and infinitely patient statesmanlike endeavours of the Führer to place German-Polish relations on a permanent basis which would do justice to the interests of both sides", and the "short-sighted obtuseness" of the Poles who were "lured on by a British Government intent on unchaining its long-planned war against Germany". Ribbentrop

[1] Auswärtiges Amt, 1939, No. 2, *Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges.*

wishes it were possible to start with 1919, so as thoroughly to expose British policy and show how it countered every German attempt to effect a revision of the Versailles Treaty by negotiation. Had Herr von Ribbentrop read the documents in his own White Book? The very first is taken from Mr. Lloyd George's Memorandum of March 25th, 1919, urging that the peace terms, though stern or even ruthless, should be " so just that the country on which they are imposed will feel in its heart that it has no right to complain ". No. 11 is from a debate in the House of Lords, on June 15th, 1932, in which several speakers laid stress upon the rights of the German minority in Poland ; and Lord Hailsham, on behalf of the Government, expressed gratitude for any suggestions which would help to bring about a more satisfactory fulfilment of the obligations under the Minority Treaties. No. 255 is an extract from Mr. Chamberlain's speech of November 1st, 1938, defending the " Treaty revision " which he had helped to effect at Munich, etc. But the White Book was meant primarily to satisfy the Germans — and is there anything which a Minister, in any country, cannot put across a willing audience? especially if he does not mind being exposed as a liar to a different public about whom he need not care.

On Ribbentrop's preface follows a " Survey " of 27 pages, presumably by an official[1] — a more competent piece of misrepresentation. It instructs the reader what to find in the documents. These are grouped into four chapters : the first, on German-Polish relations during the years 1919–1939 ; the second : " England Works for War " ; hence the fourth : " Poland the Tool of England's Will to War " ; while the third chapter, " Germany's

[1] Probably by Herr von Moltke, German Minister to Warsaw 1931–1934, and Ambassador 1934–1939. On the occasion of his funeral, on March 2nd, 1943, Ribbentrop said in a broadcast address : " Germany's official publications on the causes of the present war are largely his work ".

Endeavours to Secure Friendly Relations with her Neighbours ", is an interlude intended to please, now fit to amuse : it includes, for instance, the promise made to Belgium on October 13th, 1937, to respect her neutrality, and the Non-Aggression Pact with Denmark of May 31st, 1939.

Here is the history of German-Polish relations since 1919 as propounded in the German documents : The cession of German provinces in the East was the worst injustice of the Versailles *Diktat*, and created an untenable position. The Poles were out to uproot and destroy the German *Volksgruppe*, and neither the German-Polish Agreement of January 26th, 1934, nor the Declaration on Minorities of November 5th, 1937, had any effect on their behaviour (the White Book expatiates on the alleged sufferings of the German minority in Poland which, in respect of space, form its main theme). The Führer could not remain indifferent, and therefore, between October 1938 and April 1939, urged the Poles to accept a new and permanent basis for German-Polish relations : if Danzig (which was anyhow under a Nazi Administration) was reincorporated in the Reich, and an extra-territorial road and railway was conceded across the " Corridor ", he would renounce all further claims on Poland. The untenable position, the intolerable sufferings, the incorrigible Polish ways were to continue with his full and irrevocable consent in exchange for concessions which would not have improved the lot of a single member of the German *Volksgruppe* in Poland. A finer *non sequitur* has seldom been put forward in international politics.

With a good many people talk is a quasi-physiological secretion ; and the discharges of the German mind are often pathological.

The Polish White Book

This title appears on the bi-coloured cover of the *Official Documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1933–1939*. Its German part comprises 152 pages of the same length as those of our Blue Books.

The argument in the "Introduction" (6½ pages) is this: The Weimar Republic aimed at isolating Poland; Rapallo and Locarno were steps in that direction. Hitler, to begin with, tried "to continue this policy . . . as the first stage in German expansion": he signed the Four-Power Pact, and renewed the German-Soviet Agreement of 1926. But like other Governments, Poland wished for appeasement.

(Now the tune changes.) National Socialism denoted the rise of "new ideas and new men"; although its conceptions were "no artificial growth" but an epitome of "German thought and politics", they were "so utterly foreign to the rest of Europe" that there appeared a possibility of a new foreign policy and of a German-Polish *rapprochement*; especially as the leading Nazis — Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, and Hess — were not Prussians (and therefore less concerned with the late Prussian-Polish provinces). Hitler asserted "that the Third Reich was interested only in the fate of Germans and of territories inhabited by a German majority", and hostility to Russian Communism was his "cardinal tenet". During the five years following on the Declaration of January 26th, 1934, Poland scrupulously refrained from any share in "the anti-German crusades of M. Litvinov". She respected the German character of Danzig whose population enjoyed "the same possibilities of fostering their national spirit" as that of Germany. In Poland "the German minority . . . enjoyed a position such as hardly any other national minority possessed in Europe"; but, controlled from the Reich, it engaged in subversive

activities, provoking reactions among the Poles which the Government had to check. " Despite everything, war broke out between Poland and Germany. . . . Why ? "

(The tune changes back.) True, there were certain immediate reasons : *Lebensraum* replaced as programme that of the union of the *Volksgenossen* ; gigantic armaments lead to war or bankruptcy ; autarky militates against international comity ; the Nazi régime stood in need of successes — but " it would be a mistake " to seek to explain the war only by the Hitler régime ; it has a " historical and psychological background ". " German mentality . . . is attracted by force . . . not repelled by brutality. . . ." The Germans by preference give themselves up to leaders who are conquerors. The views of Tacitus and Mirabeau are quoted ; " Germany's ancient history " is left aside, but the medieval Teutonic Knights and their eastward expansion, eighteenth-century Prussia, and the Reich of Bismarck and Wilhelm II are discussed. Prussia's bid for hegemony must start with Eastern Europe, and as Poland refused actively to collaborate with Hitler, he had " to crush Polish resistance by force ". *

Each part of the Polish apologia, though euphemistic, is true, or almost true ; but the whole lacks rhyme or reason. With such knowledge of German history and nature, and so much understanding of their logic, seeing Hitler as heir and exponent of a policy which he at first deliberately continued, how could the Poles expect him to work a lasting change in German-Polish relations ? Moreover, was *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe a new theory with Hitler ? Is there not a whole chapter on it in *Mein Kampf* ? Are not hints by Nazi leaders recorded in the Polish White Book, in 1935, which show that their East-European dreams were merely in abeyance ? A truer picture of Polish policy is required — " warts and all "

In 1918 Poland re-arose in a void, acquiring, even so, less than her due from Germany, and much more than her due from Russia (but Germany, for geographical reasons and because of her aggressive nationalism, felt her losses more acutely than Russia). The Poles were safe only so long as Germany and Russia were outcasts and weak. After a century of non-existence, Poland was intensely jealous of her "sovereignty" and of any "encroachment" upon it; she claimed to be a Great Power, and as such would not play the part of satellite to France. But (to quote Mr. Toynbee's expression), hers was merely "brevet rank as a Great Power", and after 1925 she had to manœuvre not to appear "in a position of manifest inferiority to either of her traditionally and essentially grander, but temporarily and accidentally humbler, neighbours". The Poles loathed the Minority Treaties and League control, "an indignity" not imposed on any Great Power, not even on Germany; similarly, League interference in Danzig; in short, the League. Again, Locarno was intensely resented: it drew a distinction between Germany's Western and her Eastern frontiers, it loosened the bonds between Poland and France, and it brought Germany into the League with a permanent seat on the Council, which was refused to Poland (the reproach of Locarno is tactfully levelled by the Polish White Book only at the Weimar Republic). Shortly after Hitler's rise to power, Pilsudski suggested to France common military action against Germany: France would not take it, and in March–June 1933, negotiations followed for a Four-Power Pact, one of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's futile incursions into international politics. After it had been emptied of substance, it no longer worried the Little Entente; but for Poland it was an "offensive advertisement" that she was not a Great Power. Meantime Russia, frightened by Nazi bluster, was drawing closer to France and to the League,

which Germany left in the autumn of 1933 ; Russia, in turn, was about to be rehabilitated and acknowledged as a Great Power.

The Polish-German *rapprochement* was facilitated by Nazi Germany being " so utterly foreign to the rest of Europe " — this sentence in the Polish White Book, puzzling at first, acquires significance : Germany had lost caste ; now Poland could expect to deal with her on easier terms. Such was the background to the German-Polish Declaration of January 1934. The documents in the two White Books must tell the further story.

The Two Together
(May 1933–October 1938)

For this period there are 42 documents in the Polish White Book and more than 100 in the German (roughly half of them are consular reports about the " sufferings " of the German minority). But even of the diplomatic documents in the two collections, few deal with the same moves or events. For months on end the two corresponding White Books conduct monologues : the German book, taking minority grievances for its main theme, is vocal in the autumn of 1934, when Poland repudiated League control over minority treaties, and in 1937, when the Geneva Agreement on Upper Silesia of May 15th, 1922, was about to expire ; the Polish dwells on Germany's disclaimers of all idea of territorial revendications and on her assurances of friendship, which were specially frequent and emphatic in the first half of 1935 (before the Stresa Front broke over Abyssinia), and between February and October 1938 (while Austria and Czechoslovakia were on the rack). Four official documents and one of Hitler's speeches are given in both White Books, but while each reports a good many interviews during these four and a half years, only three interviews appear in both ; which

is a pity, as opposite accounts of the same talk are illuminating and entertaining.

On May 2nd, 1933, M. Wysocki, Polish Minister in Berlin, on instructions from Warsaw, called Hitler's attention to the excitement which Nazi agitation in, and concerning, Danzig was causing in Poland, emphasised the importance which Poland attached to her access to the sea, and the need to allay apprehensions by a declaration from Hitler announcing that the Reich meant to respect Poland's rights and interests in Danzig. In reply, Hitler, speaking " without a break ", ran over the recitals common to him at that time : he meant to respect treaties ; he was a pacifist having experienced war and its horrors ; even victory had its disappointments ; he was a nationalist and respected other people's nationality ; Poland had a right to exist, and so had Germany ; there was danger from Russia ; etc. (Were Hitler's gramophone items labelled *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, etc., any statement of his could be reported in a brief formula, such as *cdmbf* or *adjkbr* ; while the frequency, incidence, variations, and permutations of these marks would yield useful charts for Hitlerology.) Wysocki gives a full report of Hitler's remarks (and an even fuller of his own — a very common and natural failing). Neurath, who was present at the interview and drew up the German minute, having given the barest summary of the Polish representations, makes Hitler start with an emphatic denial of any specific Polish right to Danzig [1] and deliver a discourse of which there is no trace in the much longer Polish account : " the blindness of statesmen, their absurdity and ill-will, has drawn a frontier between Germany and Poland which well-nigh excludes quiet contiguity between them so long as it

[1] " *Dass er zunächst ein besonderes Recht Polens auf Danzig zurückweisen müsse.*" Wysocki thus reports apparently the same statement : " Germany . . . will not recognise that Poland had any rights in Danzig which would exceed the bounds of existing treaties ". Neurath's version decodes this disingenuous and senseless protest.

endures " — the Poles themselves ought to have refused a Corridor across German territory and sought to reach the sea on the other side of East Prussia. Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, on May 17th, 1933, bears out Wysocki's account and echoes, in an attenuated manner, that of Neurath : " A reasonable approach to European problems could then [in 1919] have furnished a solution in the East which would have fully met both Poland's intelligible claims and Germany's natural rights ".[1] Hitler was probably more explicit with Wysocki ; but had these remarks been as crucial and emphatic as Neurath makes them appear, Wysocki's omission would indeed be odd. In the next talk, on July 13th, 1933, Wysocki reports Hitler saying that " the authors of the Treaty of Versailles had created the so-called Corridor in order to set an enduring abyss between Germany and Poland ".

On October 14th, 1933, Germany announced her withdrawal from the League. On November 15th, after a visit to Warsaw, M. Lipski, who had replaced Wysocki at Berlin, delivered to Hitler the following message from Pilsudski : Poland's security rested on bilateral relations with other States, reinforced by their common membership of the League. Germany's withdrawal was causing nervousness — could Hitler think of a method of compensating Poland for that reinsurance ? In replying, Hitler " spoke rapidly and poured out a flood of ideas " — Lipski reports them at length, though there was nothing new in them. The Saar was the one territorial problem which Hitler named as calling for a solution : but this was provided for in the Treaties. The Versailles Treaty had not established German-Polish relations on an ideal basis, and " was calculated to render them difficult "

[1] A similar hint is contained in Hitler's speech at the Sport-Palast on October 24th, 1933, but again without any indication of what that solution should have been. The translation of the speech of May 17th in the Polish White Book is poor (though not wrong), and a new translation of the passage has therefore been attempted above.

is a pity, as opposite accounts of the same talk are illuminating and entertaining.

On May 2nd, 1933, M. Wysocki, Polish Minister in Berlin, on instructions from Warsaw, called Hitler's attention to the excitement which Nazi agitation in, and concerning, Danzig was causing in Poland, emphasised the importance which Poland attached to her access to the sea, and the need to allay apprehensions by a declaration from Hitler announcing that the Reich meant to respect Poland's rights and interests in Danzig. In reply, Hitler, speaking " without a break ", ran over the recitals common to him at that time : he meant to respect treaties ; he was a pacifist having experienced war and its horrors ; even victory had its disappointments ; he was a nationalist and respected other people's nationality ; Poland had a right to exist, and so had Germany ; there was danger from Russia ; etc. (Were Hitler's gramophone items labelled *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, etc., any statement of his could be reported in a brief formula, such as *cdmbf* or *adjkbr* ; while the frequency, incidence, variations, and permutations of these marks would yield useful charts for Hitlerology.) Wysocki gives a full report of Hitler's remarks (and an even fuller of his own — a very common and natural failing). Neurath, who was present at the interview and drew up the German minute, having given the barest summary of the Polish representations, makes Hitler start with an emphatic denial of any specific Polish right to Danzig [1] and deliver a discourse of which there is no trace in the much longer Polish account : " the blindness of statesmen, their absurdity and ill-will, has drawn a frontier between Germany and Poland which well-nigh excludes quiet contiguity between them so long as it

[1] " *Dass er zunächst ein besonderes Recht Polens auf Danzig zurückweisen müsse.*" Wysocki thus reports apparently the same statement : " Germany . . . will not recognise that Poland had any rights in Danzig which would exceed the bounds of existing treaties ". Neurath's version decodes this disingenuous and senseless protest.

endures " — the Poles themselves ought to have refused a Corridor across German territory and sought to reach the sea on the other side of East Prussia. Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, on May 17th, 1933, bears out Wysocki's account and echoes, in an attenuated manner, that of Neurath : " A reasonable approach to European problems could then [in 1919] have furnished a solution in the East which would have fully met both Poland's intelligible claims and Germany's natural rights ".[1] Hitler was probably more explicit with Wysocki ; but had these remarks been as crucial and emphatic as Neurath makes them appear, Wysocki's omission would indeed be odd. In the next talk, on July 13th, 1933, Wysocki reports Hitler saying that " the authors of the Treaty of Versailles had created the so-called Corridor in order to set an enduring abyss between Germany and Poland ".

On October 14th, 1933, Germany announced her withdrawal from the League. On November 15th, after a visit to Warsaw, M. Lipski, who had replaced Wysocki at Berlin, delivered to Hitler the following message from Pilsudski : Poland's security rested on bilateral relations with other States, reinforced by their common membership of the League. Germany's withdrawal was causing nervousness — could Hitler think of a method of compensating Poland for that reinsurance ? In replying, Hitler " spoke rapidly and poured out a flood of ideas " — Lipski reports them at length, though there was nothing new in them. The Saar was the one territorial problem which Hitler named as calling for a solution : but this was provided for in the Treaties. The Versailles Treaty had not established German-Polish relations on an ideal basis, and " was calculated to render them difficult ".

[1] A similar hint is contained in Hitler's speech at the Sport-Palast on October 24th, 1933, but again without any indication of what that solution should have been. The translation of the speech of May 17th in the Polish White Book is poor (though not wrong), and a new translation of the passage has therefore been attempted above.

Still, he emphatically declared that he would not try to change it by force. The German minute of the interview, in length only one-fourth of the Polish, again suppresses most of the Polish statement, and while it reproduces Hitler's pacific declarations, makes him say that the position created at Versailles was "unbearable for Germany and bound to pain every German". The agreed communiqué about this interview declared that the two Governments intended to proceed "by way of direct negotiation" and "to renounce all application of force in their mutual relations".

The Polish White Book supplies no further information about the preliminaries of the German-Polish Agreement: its aim is to show how the Germans, after having zealously sought and enthusiastically endorsed the Agreement, subsequently tore it up, not how the Poles had come to sign it.[1] It is therefore in the German White Book that this part of the story has to be traced.

On November 24th, Herr von Moltke, German Minister at Warsaw, was instructed to submit to Pilsudski the draft of a German-Polish Declaration which, while no ess binding than any pact, was to dispense with "traditional conceptions and somewhat worn-out formulations".

> For your information [wrote Neurath] I wish to point out that the text of our draft in no way implies a recognition of the present German frontiers in the East, but says on the contrary that this Declaration is to provide a basis for solving all problems, therefore also the territorial problems.

[1] The same kind of pact had been offered by Hitler, in the autumn of 1933, to Czechoslovakia, which rejected the proposal and immediately informed Paris, London, Warsaw, Belgrade, and Bucharest about it. Dr. Beneš first learnt of the German-Polish negotiations about Christmas. In January 1934, both he and Colonel Beck attended a League meeting in Geneva. On the 15th, Beneš called on Beck at the Hôtel Beau Rivage, and asked him point-blank whether he was negotiating with Berlin: Beck replied with a categorical denial, which was kept up till the treaty was

For the German Minister's personal information — at that time the least hint of this kind to the Poles would have closed the discussion.

On November 28th Moltke saw Pilsudski, who " in his own drastic language " approved of the suggested " new formulation ", but warned against mentioning in it " the Locarno Agreement which in Poland had a bad name ". Though he wished " to place German-Polish relations on a good-neighbourly basis ", he stressed the fact that a thousand years of hostility between Poles and Germans would render such improvement difficult. Moltke (with less frankness) denied this being so in Germany, and claimed that effective steps had been taken with regard to the German Press. " Pilsudski replied by expressing his unmeasured contempt for the Press, with which he would have no dealings. . . ."

Then for more than a month nothing is heard of further negotiations : during that time Pilsudski was sounding Paris once more about common action against Hitler. The talks were confined to military channels — the first approach was made through General d'Arbonneau, French Military Attaché in Warsaw. The result was negative, and on January 9th a new draft was submitted by the Poles to Berlin. It ruled out from the scope of the Declaration all questions " which fall under the exclusive competence of States " ; this, as Lipski explained on the 20th, was to prevent any meddling with the affairs of the other country. Finally it was agreed that " questions which under international law are to be regarded exclusively as the internal concern of one of the two States "

signed. Absolute secrecy had been enjoined by Pilsudski, among other reasons because he feared premature publicity ; Prussian opposition to an agreement with Poland might have wrecked it. According to M. Léon Noël, French Ambassador to Warsaw 1935–1939, some members of the Polish Government learnt about the conclusion of the treaty only " at the same time as the public, and through the Press " ; see *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne* (1946), pages 23-4.

should not be covered by the Declaration. And here is the ingenious comment made for domestic consumption in a German Foreign Office minute :

> This formula has the advantage . . . that it no longer excludes minority questions from diplomatic discussions between Germany and Poland. For minority problems undoubtedly cannot in international law be deemed exclusively the internal concern of one State.

The German-Polish Declaration, signed in Berlin on January 26th, 1934, announced that the two Governments would " settle directly " any problems which might arise between them, and would in no case resort to force ; it invoked the Kellogg Pact, but not the League Covenant or Locarno. Hitler and Pilsudski, both deeply contemptuous of pacifism, now employed its language : each period has its forms, and each form has its twaddle. The Declaration, devoid of content and basis, was a demonstration and a manœuvre. Poland, while specifically reserving " international obligations undertaken . . . towards a third party " (principally the Franco-Polish Alliance of 1921), declared that henceforth she would deal with Germany " directly " ; Hitler, having left the comity of nations formed under the aegis of the Western Powers, achieved the first signal success in his endeavours through " bilateral dealings " to isolate potential opponents and future victims. But the Declaration claimed to supply " an essential pre-condition for the general peace of Europe ", and to contribute to the " well-being " of the contracting States, and " of the other peoples of Europe as well ". " Where international Conferences and Pacts had failed," said Colonel Beck to Moltke on January 27th, " a bold policy evincing the will of leaders [1] makes itself strongly felt, especially when it takes account of the

[1] ". . . *eine mutige und von Führerwillen zeugende Politik* " (Moltke to the German F.O., January 27th, 1934).

existing wish for peace" ; the event had made an impression on Polish public opinion which exceeded his own expectations, and it had a good reception abroad. (Indeed, it was acclaimed by a world exuding appeasement.)

The "Introduction" to the Polish White Book says that Hitler as an Austrian, and Göring as a Bavarian, could be expected "to rise above the Prussian hostile attitude to Poland", and that the Third Reich claimed to be interested only "in the fate of Germans and of territories inhabited by a German majority". In other words, the Poles expected Hitler to start with Austria and Czechoslovakia, and not with Poland : which suited their book. Nor must they be condemned offhand because of this piece of *Realpolitik* : for years a strenuous German propaganda had placed the Corridor and Danzig in the foreground of its attacks against the Treaty of Versailles, and so successful had been its specious arguments,[1] most of all in this country, that had Hitler started his extra-German operations by demanding a frontier-revision in that quarter, the reaction to such a demand would probably have been very different then from what it was in 1939. On the other hand, unanimity seemed to prevail about the need of maintaining Austria's "independence", and no one in Western Europe had as yet discovered the Sudetens as a name, as a problem, or as a righteousness. Had the conflict between Hitler and the Stresa Powers broken out over Vienna, both sides would have been fully convinced of Poland's right to the Versailles frontiers, and the storm might have passed with-

[1] Conviction through the visual sense can be produced without mental effort, and that the Corridor separated East Prussia from the Reich was patent. But it would have taxed the imagination to think of East Prussia as an island and to see that even if all connexion between Königsberg and Stettin had to be by sea, this would be no tragedy ; while to gauge the full gravity of Poland's position if deprived of access to the sea required some hard and informed thinking.

out ravaging Poland ; the Poles therefore meant to play for time. There is a Jewish story of a poor fellow who, not knowing which way to turn for a living, promised a whimsical nobleman that in five years he would teach that man's favourite dog to talk ; asked how he could give such a foolish undertaking, the Jew replied : " In five years either the master or the dog may die." This was the sense and justification of Poland's policy towards Hitler ; where the Poles went wrong was in gilding and garnishing that policy till they came to believe that their statesmanship was both subtle and bold, and that one can act like a jackal and look a lion.

The Polish White Book contains not a single further document for 1934, the time when Barthou and Litvinov, after having initialled on May 18th an East-European Pact of Mutual Assistance, were trying to gain Poland's adhesion to it ; and the Introduction to the Polish White Book tactfully refers to Litvinov only, and to Poland's refusal to participate in his " anti-German " activities. In the German White Book the two main sub-chapters for 1934 bear the headings : " German-Polish appeasement fails to improve the position of the German *Volksgruppe* (November 1933–August 1934) " and " Poland rejects further Minority Control of the League of Nations (September–November 1934) ".

On September 13th, 1934, before Russia was admitted to the League and assigned a permanent seat on the Council, Colonel Beck declared at Geneva that, pending the introduction of a general and uniform system for the protection of minorities, Poland refused to submit to further League of Nations supervision. When, the same day, the Polish Minister informed the German Foreign Office that Poland could no longer suffer such *déclassement*, he was told that the Minority Treaties were a counterpiece to the territorial sacrifices imposed on Germany at Versailles. This, however, was merely a first

reaction or retort : at that time France was drawing closer to Russia and Italy, and it was therefore imperative for Germany to keep Poland out of a European coalition. On November 14th Moltke was instructed to tell Beck that Germany attached no special importance to the co-operation of the League which she had " long recognised to be of no value ", to remind him of the German-Polish Declaration which envisaged direct negotiations, and to say that Germany sympathised with Poland's resentment of international control ; still, she could not disinterest herself in the fate of her *Volksgenossen.* But, while dropping some hints about their grievances, Moltke was to declare that " the German Government did not think in any way of using its interposition on behalf of the German minority in Poland as a means for unrolling frontier problems ".

Moltke saw Beck on November 19th, and started by declaring that his *démarche* aimed at rendering German-Polish relations even more intimate (*eine Vertiefung deutsch-polnischer Beziehungen*). Beck, after profusely complimenting Hitler, replied that Poland's move had been provoked by " the incredible treatment " recently accorded to her by the League — " people sit there who are no use except to create difficulties for themselves and for others, and who have no understanding of realities ". The rights of the German minority will be perfectly safe without the League, and subordinate officials will be duly instructed. Beck rounded off his discourse by suitable remarks on the harmful influence of the Jews in the Polish Press. Moltke, in closing his despatch, expresses the conviction that " the Poles have full understanding " of the interest shown by the German Government for the German minority in Poland. (What the Poles failed to understand was that by excluding the League, they were letting in the Germans.)

In April 1935 the Stresa Conference met, and on May

2nd the Franco-Russian Pact was concluded. The Nazis were redoubling their attentions towards the Poles: Goebbels had visited Warsaw in June 1934, and Göring in January 1935; and he went there again in May to attend Pilsudski's funeral. Not a single diplomatic document in the German White Book deals with these visits. It is now the Polish White Book which speaks.

On January 22nd, 1935, after the New Year banquet to foreign diplomats, Hitler engaged Lipski in cordial conversation: he declared that "the theory of Polish-German hereditary enmity was very unsound"; in the past there had been periods of co-operation against a common danger from the East; soon they might have to defend themselves against Russia. "In his opinion, the policy of former German Governments, and in particular of the Reichswehr, which had aimed at uniting with Russia against Poland, was the greatest of political mistakes"; he had told General Schleicher that possible territorial gains at the expense of Poland would not outweigh the increased danger from Bolshevism.

Göring further developed this theme during his first visit to Poland, spicing it with gross flattery: "theoretically one could imagine a new partition of Poland by means of a German-Russian collaboration", but practically this would be impossible "partly because of the strength and dynamic power of Poland, partly because . . . a common German-Russian frontier . . . would be highly dangerous to Germany"; when in January 1933 Schleicher advised Hitler to seek an understanding with France and Russia which would eliminate Poland, Hitler did not reply but afterwards said to Göring: "*Und ich werde das Gegenteil machen.*" [1] In further talks Göring hinted at "an anti-Russian alliance and a joint attack on Russia"; and he brought up the topic even with Pilsudski, though Lipski had warned him through Moltke

[1] "And I will do the opposite."

" to exercise some reserve ". " The Marshal in reply *hat gestutzt*,[1] as Herr Göring later put it. . . ."

On April 25th Lipski spent several hours with Göring at his hunting lodge at Schorfheide; Göring told Lipski that Hitler had " asked him to pay special attention to Polish-German relations, independently of official channels" (Göring, the sportsman, was always detailed " to pay special attention " to nations and statesmen accessible to such approach); Hitler's Polish policy " was not governed by any consideration of a tactical nature but sprang from a very deep perception of this problem ". " In Göring's reasoning ", writes Lipski, " there was, as usual, a strong anti-Russian bias, whether in regard to the Soviets or to any other possible Russian régime." For the Nearly-Fifth Column among West-European visitors, the Nazi leaders had anti-Red ravings; but as the Poles, if anything, preferred the Bolsheviks to a non-Bolshevist Russia (for at that time the Bolsheviks, like the Nazis, were " so utterly foreign to the rest of Europe "), in talking to the Poles the Nazis made a show of indiscriminate hostility to Russia.

On May 21st, 1935, Hitler declared in the Reichstag that Germany " will blindly observe " the Non-Aggression Pact with Poland. The next day he delivered to Lipski a eulogy on Pilsudski (who had died on May 12th), and produced an improved version of the Schleicher story, even suggesting that Schleicher's policy had not been " disinterested ", and saying that his help " to build up the Soviet military power was ample justification for the end that befell him ". Hitler went on to declare

> that a *rapprochement* with Poland was more advantageous to Germany than uneasy relations with Russia. Russia is Asia, he said. Germany was faced

[1] The Polish White Book erroneously puts *tat* in place of *hat*, and translates these words in a footnote as " stiffened "; but *hat gestutzt* means " was puzzled ".

with the problem of finding areas for economic expansion or space for her population. Poland had not, and could not provide, either. There was criticism of his attitude in regard to the question of the " Corridor ", against which he maintained that in face of the greater problems the " Corridor " was of no importance whatever.

Possibly "an idea, premature to-day", will be feasible some fifteen years hence : " the building of a special railway line and of a motor road for transit " through the Corridor. The Polish Ambassador[1] in reporting the conversation refrains from all comment on this significant hint.

In July 1935 Beck visited Berlin. An official communiqué about his talk with Hitler stated that it had been " conducted in an atmosphere of frankness ". " The conversations revealed a far-reaching agreement of views. . . . Both governments . . . will devote all their energies to the cause of peace in Europe."

On December 18th, 1935, Hitler again discoursed to Lipski on the impossibility of any *rapprochement* with Russia : European solidarity for him ended at the Polish-Soviet frontier ; pacts were not possible with States which did not recognise " the same ethical principles in international policy ".

Of all these talks there is no trace in the German White Book ; and indeed, its 518 large pages, covering more than six years of the Nazi régime, do not contain a single remark unfavourable or disrespectful to Russia or to the Bolsheviks, for the book was published in December 1939.

On March 7th, 1936, Hitler announced the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. This was one of the crucial moments of modern history. France lost the last military safeguards which she had secured in 1919, and

[1] The German Minister in Warsaw and the Polish Minister in Berlin had been advanced to the rank of Ambassadors in October 1934.

which were solemnly confirmed to her at Locarno ; and a barrier was placed between her and Eastern Europe. At that juncture M. Flandin was French Foreign Minister, while Great Britain was ruled by the MacDonald-Baldwin coalition of " sham Conservatives, sham Liberals, and sham Labour ". The Western Powers condoned Hitler's coup ; and never has a most fatal decision received more general approval.

Not one document bearing on the re-militarisation of the Rhineland appears in the German White Book, while the British Blue Book and the French Yellow Book start their full story only after Munich. Even the Polish White Book is silent about the crisis of 1936, though the Poles, whatever their mistakes had been during the preceding two years, did not fail to gauge the significance of the event and declared to France their readiness to take joint military action against Germany. Once more they met with a refusal — the distance between them and France was growing.

The speech in which Hitler announced the re-militarisation of the Rhineland was profuse in pacifist assurances — he invariably offered opportunities to those intent on self-deception. Among other things he explained :

> National-Socialist foreign policy . . . finds it painful that the outlet to the sea of a people of 35 millions is situated on territory formerly belonging to the Reich, but . . . recognises that it is impossible and therefore unreasonable to deny a State of such a size as this any outlet to the sea at all . . .

— again a hint that Poland, the land of the Vistula, ought to have been given access to the sea not at the mouth of her own river.

The introduction to the Polish White Book says :

> In Danzig, as to which Chancellor Hitler repeatedly gave explicit and solemn assurances, the Polish

> Government respected the German character of the majority of the population. The National-Socialist Senate was never troubled by Polish interference in the internal affairs of the Free City. The Polish Government confined their activities in Danzig to the maintenance of the Polish rights established in international treaties. So far as the internal political life of the Free City was concerned, it was an independent State. In this sphere the Senate had unlimited freedom of action. . . .

Or in plainer language : Hitler promised to forgo the re-incorporation of Danzig in the Reich and to respect the interests of Poland and the rights and status of the Poles in the Free City ; and in exchange the Nazis were allowed by fraud, violence, and intimidation to make themselves masters of Danzig, to rule it in their fashion through a " Gauleiter " receiving orders from Berlin, and to flout the League High Commissioner if ever he tried to protect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of non-Nazi Germans or Jews. " So marked were the breaches of the [Danzig] Constitution " that the question was considered " whether the High Commissioner should not be withdrawn and the post abolished ".[1] At the meeting of the League Council on July 4th, 1936, Herr Greiser, President of the Danzig Senate, delivered a most provocative speech,[2] and in the Council Chamber cocked a snook and put out his tongue at some journalists.

While in conflict with the League, Hitler courted the Poles. On August 12th, 1936, he spoke to the Polish Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Count Szembek, of " the Danzig question " as " negligible " in comparison with the grave problems which bid them harmonize German and Polish policy ; in 1933 he had ordered his

[1] Report of M. Carl Burckhardt, High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Danzig : Geneva, March 19th, 1940. Official No. C 42, M.38, page 2.

[2] For his war crimes he was hanged at Poznań on July 20th, 1946.

nen in Danzig " that they should at all costs come to an nderstanding with Poland " ; and he

> reiterated his statement that Polish rights in Danzig could not be violated in any case. To this I remarked [writes Szembek] that we were interested to know what the future of Polish-Danzig relations would be, and what guarantees we would have of the maintenance of our rights in the Free City in the event of an overthrow of the present Statute and of the League of Nations in Danzig. The Chancellor replied that there was no question of that. In all his policy he was governed by the principle of signing nothing and promising nothing if he had any doubt whether he could realize it in practice. From the moment, however, when he assumed some obligation or concluded a certain friendship, there was no power on earth which could make him break his pledged word.

The Poles were obviously prepared to bargain away the nternational status of Danzig, but the Germans apparently hought it cheaper and more convenient to Nazify the Free City with the connivance of the Poles, without an pen change in its status.

On August 14th Ribbentrop received Szembek, epeated the assurance " that nobody wanted to violate he status of the Free City or the position of the League in Danzig ", and then enlarged on the grave problems at which Hitler had hinted.

> Both Poland and Germany were faced with a serious danger arising from the fact that the Soviets had not renounced the conception of world revolution. Moscow could not renounce this conception, and Stalin was bound to carry on a corresponding policy, otherwise there would be a break-down of the whole Bolshevik system, which aimed at levelling down and destroying all the achievements of Western civilisation and culture. Chancellor Hitler could not make any compromise in relation to Russia, because the slightest deviation from his own present policy

> must open the way for the reign of Bolshevism in Germany. Herr von Ribbentrop considered that Poland was menaced by the danger of Bolshevism equally with Germany, and that the only way of counteracting this danger was to prevent the catastrophe by crushing even the smallest signs of Communism at their roots.

During the next few months incidents in Danzig were frequent, opposition to the policy of co-operation with Germany increased in Poland, and the tone of the Press in both countries became acid. On November 18th, 1936, Moltke, having returned from Berlin, had an interview with Beck, which is reported in both White Books. Moltke in his Minute, or the part which has been published, claims to have expostulated sharply with Beck about the attitude of the Polish Press, the treatment of the German minority, and about Danzig.

> Referring to the increasingly obvious tendency of Poland to obtain new rights in Danzig, I declared, in accordance with the instructions received from the Führer and Chancellor, that such procedure would unavoidably produce sharp reactions, and therefore acute disturbances in German-Polish relations.

But the Führer, Moltke went on to say, wished to continue the understanding with Poland. "M. Beck replied that he gratefully welcomed this extremely valuable declaration."

In Beck's Minute of the conversation, assurances from Hitler are reported at length, and so are his complaints about Mr. Lester, the League High Commissioner at Danzig, while those about the Polish Press can only be inferred.

> I . . . thanked the Ambassador for his declaration which I regarded as a desirable basis for a quiet and objective study of the problem which caused the greatest difficulties, *i.e.* that of Danzig. I had undertaken the perhaps thankless mission of investigating

> the Danzig question on the basis of the League Mandate. I thought, however, that the Polish Government, which was not influenced by doctrines and had no desire to create difficulties, could find a solution. A cardinal condition was the goodwill of the Senate, who would have to contribute their share to the success of this mission.

In the further conversation, Beck " detected a certain nervousness on the part of the Ambassador lest Poland should desire to exploit the situation and extend her rights considerably at the Senate's expense, which would lead to new difficulties ", and claims to have replied that, as the Danzig Senate had by its actions disturbed " the equilibrium of the *status quo* ", Polish interests demanded new guarantees.

> Judging from the conversation as a whole, I had reason to believe that pressure would certainly be brought to bear on Danzig from the German side, provided we did not place them in too difficult a position by putting forward demands either compromising the activities of the Nazi Senate or extending, not the practical, but the theoretical Treaty Rights of Poland.

In short, Beck admits to have spoken with contempt about the existing " basis of the League Mandate " — to him principles were " doctrines " ; and if this basis was not destroyed at that time, it was obviously because the Nazis did not as yet intend to take overt action. Beck was playing a singularly weak, double-faced game : according to Burckhardt, the new League High Commissioner at Danzig, " it was chiefly in deference to the Polish Government's views that it was decided in January 1937 to maintain the post of High Commissioner ", but at the same time he was warned by the Poles not to hamper the internal administration of the Free City of Danzig.[1] When, early in March 1937, Burckhardt visited

[1] Report of M. Carl Burckhardt, page 2.

the President of the Polish Republic, M. Mościcki, the latter declared to him that the Nazi régime in Germany had normalised relations between Danzig and Poland. All important questions between them, Beck pointed out to Burckhardt on another occasion, " were being settled in Warsaw and Berlin ", and he advised Burckhardt to make personal contact with the German Government. At the New Year reception, on January 11th, 1937, Hitler expressed to Lipski " the conviction that Danzig affairs would be settled satisfactorily, and . . . that the growth of National Socialism in Danzig would be a guarantee of peace and good relations with Poland ".

The German-Polish Agreement of May 15th, 1922, regulating economic and minority problems in Upper Silesia during a transition period, was to expire on July 15th, 1937, and, in January, Neurath urged on Beck an early consideration of the position which would arise. The Germans wanted an agreement which, under cover of minority rights, would have enabled them to consolidate the German *Volksgruppe* in Poland, whereas the Poles wished only to discuss " concrete " cases. On March 16th, in Beck's absence, Szembek told Moltke that the Polish Government were averse to a bilateral minority treaty, that German minority rights in Poland were anyhow secure, while the Polish minority in German Upper Silesia were too poorly organised to profit by such an agreement. On April 19th Beck added that the Polish Government viewed international commitments on minorities as an infringement of sovereignty apt to lead to interference in internal affairs, that the Poles were jealous of their sovereignty, and, having suffered from League control, were loath to accept anything which might look like its continuation. Moltke's distinction between a one-sided obligation under international control, and the free resolve of two Governments to settle a problem which disturbed their relations, failed to impress the Poles.

The next step was a formal *démarche* by Moltke on June 1st, 1937, and a memorandum which expressed " disappointment, nay, serious apprehensions " because of Poland's refusal, and argued that concrete cases raised outside the framework of a treaty would savour even more of interference in internal affairs, that Germany's acquiescence in Poland's repudiation of League control did not affect the legal position with regard to German minority rights in Poland, and that Germany could not disinterest herself in that German minority ; it enumerated grievances, and suggested that, if Poland persisted in refusing a bilateral Minority Treaty, declarations dealing with the protection of the two respective minorities should simultaneously be published by the two Governments. In reply Beck assured Moltke that " the wishes of the Führer were always certain to receive specially serious consideration " in Warsaw ; and on June 6th, in a further talk, declared that, wishing to meet a *démarche* ordered by Hitler, the Polish Government were ready to consider the proposal of parallel declarations, though they declined a treaty. " Beck's renewed, though less categorical refusal of negotiations by experts ", reported Moltke, " suggests that no intrinsically important declaration is contemplated. It seems therefore advisable to open the negotiations with a draft of our own."

This, sent from Berlin, was submitted on June 24th to Beck, who " with regard to its concrete terms " merely " pointed to the difficulties which might arise over the Jewish minority " — for fending off the German proposals the Jews in Germany had their use, but this apparently was all the attention that their position received in the negotiations. On August 26th Beck accepted what seems substantially to have been the German draft of the Declarations. A further delay of over two months was caused by Poland demanding a declaration to safeguard her rights in Danzig, and by certain Polish measures in

Upper Silesia, considered by the Germans contrary to the forthcoming Declarations. These were published on November 5th, 1937, and added little to the stale theme of ineffective minority regulations.

On the day the Declarations were published, Hitler talked to representatives of the Polish minority about the *Volksgruppen*; President Mościcki told representatives of the German minority that they would continue to receive favourable treatment if they showed loyalty to the Polish State; Neurath presented the Polish Ambassador with an *aide-mémoire* on what was expected from the Declarations, further suggesting "periodical conferences between representatives of the two States" — something of a condominium in minority questions; Beck, in a circular to "all Polish Diplomatic Missions abroad", explained that the two Declarations were "sovereign acts in the sphere of home affairs", were based on "the principle of reciprocity", and that they emphasised "absolute loyalty on the part of Minorities as a condition of enjoying the protection which is the exclusive attribute of sovereignty"; Lipski was received by Hitler and "in the course of the conversation it was confirmed that Polish-German relations should not meet with difficulties because of the Danzig question" — a phrase in the official communiqué which appeared so important to Beck that he announced it beforehand in his diplomatic circular.

In the German White Book the story of the Minority Declarations of November 5th, 1937, fills twenty-two large pages, equal to almost thirty of the Polish White Book. In the Polish White Book there is nothing about their origin, merely their text, Beck's circular, the communiqué on Lipski's interview with Hitler, and Hitler's address to the Polish minority, together about three pages. On the other hand, the Polish White Book reproduces pronouncements by Nazi leaders in which they descanted on the inestimable value of a strong Poland for Germany, and

affirmed their fixed hostility to Russia. But not a single talk which Göring, detailed " to pay special attention to Polish-German relations ", had with the Poles is reported in the German White Book.

In February 1937 Göring was once more in Poland. In a talk with Marshal Smigly-Rydz, he declared that Germany had no desire to deprive Poland of any of her territory.

> Germany was completely reconciled to her present territorial status. Germany would not attack Poland and had no intention of seizing the Polish " Corridor ". " We do not want the ' Corridor '. I say that sincerely and categorically ; we do not need the ' Corridor '." He could not give proof of this ; it was a question of his word being believed or not.

Next followed once more the story about Schleicher, the Reichswehr, and the Bolsheviks. But the advent of the Nazis had changed this for good and all.

> Germany would never return to a pro-Russian policy. For it should always be remembered that there was one great danger coming through Russia from the East, and menacing both Germany and Poland alike. This danger existed not only in the form of a Bolshevist and Communist Russia, but of Russia generally, in any form, be it Monarchist or Liberal.

The policy of the two nations must be harmonized, misunderstandings must be removed, " cultural contacts must be made and strengthened ". And at the end of this candied harangue, he once more dropped a hint which the Polish Minute reproduces, but avoids probing :

> When mutual relations were completely regularized, then it might be possible to consider facilitating German transit to East Prussia.

On November 4th, in a talk with Szembek in Berlin on the eve of the signing of the Minority Declarations, Göring repeated his assurances that Germany regarded

Poland's " territorial integrity as inviolable ", and that the Third Reich would never collaborate with Russia, whatever may be her internal régime. In the talk which Lipski had with Hitler after the Declarations had been signed, Hitler asserted once more that no change would be attempted with regard to the status of Danzig, that he would always keep his word — " a surprise step was out of the question " — " *Danzig ist mit Polen verbunden* ".[1]

On the same day, November 5th, 1937, an important conference was held by Hitler at the Reich Chancellery, at which von Blomberg and von Neurath, Ministers for War and for Foreign Affairs, and von Fritsch, Göring, and Raeder, Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, the Luftwaffe, and the Navy, were present. It marked (as Sir Hartley Shawcross pointed out in his address to the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, on December 4th, 1945) " the transition to planned aggression ". The burden of Hitler's argument was Germany's need for more territory in Europe. " Austria and Czechoslovakia ", stated Sir Hartley, " were specifically envisaged. But Hitler realised that the process of conquering these two countries might well bring into operation the treaty obligations of Great Britain and France." He also foresaw and discussed the likelihood of Poland being involved in a general European war.

> When, therefore, on that very day Hitler assured the Polish Ambassador of the value of the 1934 Pact, it can only be concluded that its real value in Hitler's eyes was that of keeping Poland quiet until Germany had acquired such a territorial and strategic position that Poland would no longer be a danger to her.

By 1938 Nazi Germany had successfully traversed the danger zone ; Hitler had re-armed, and had re-militarised the Rhineland ; Germany was no longer vulnerable.

[1] " Danzig is united to Poland."

To frighten statesmen who showed greater aptitude for fear than for action, he even exaggerated the degree of his preparedness. By exploiting their weakness and blunders he succeeded in disorganising the post-war diplomatic system of Europe. In February Schuschnigg was summoned to Berchtesgaden ; on March 12th Austria was invaded. By the end of May Hitler's relations with Czechoslovakia reached their first crisis. On September 29th the Munich surrender crowned the achievements of his first half-year of expansion and conquest. These were developments of paramount significance for Poland. Her rulers did not oppose Hitler but followed in the wake of the man-eating tiger. When he invaded Austria, they put the screw on Lithuania ; when he started to partition Czechoslovakia, they helped themselves to two pounds of flesh in Teschen, to territory with as many non-Poles as there were Poles in it. But what discussions passed between the Germans and the Poles during the period from January to September 1938? Both White Books are significantly reticent : to those supremely important nine months the German devotes eleven out of a total of 459 pages,[1] and even then deals merely with local detail — minority questions — not with problems of European policy ; the Polish devotes to that period four out of a total of 142 pages, reproducing extracts from three speeches of Hitler and from conversations with him, with Göring, and with Ribbentrop, all on old themes — not a word about what was happening. This reticence finds its counterpart in the French Yellow Book and the British Blue Book, which open properly only after the two, let us call them, " major operations " of 1938 had been performed. During the nine pregnant months of that year all the " Coloured Books " suffer from vapours and faintness, and from a most remarkable mental blackout.

[1] The figure of 518 on page 5 includes the Introduction, the Summary of Contents, and the Index.

CHAPTER II

FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE
(September 29th, 1938–March 15th, 1939)

After Munich

"Peace for our time", "peace with honour", Mr. Neville Chamberlain triumphantly announced on his return from Munich.

"A total and unmitigated defeat," replied Mr. Churchill in the House of Commons on October 5th, 1938.

> All is over [he said]. Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. She has suffered in every respect by her association with the Western democracies and with the League of Nations. . . .
>
> . . . the Czechoslovak State cannot be maintained as an independent entity . . . in a period which may be measured by years, but may be measured only by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi régime. . . . At any rate, that story is over and told.
>
> We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude which has befallen Great Britain and France. Do not let us blind ourselves to that. It must now be accepted that all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will make the best terms they can with the triumphant Nazi power.
>
> Many people, no doubt, honestly, believe that they are only giving away the interests of Czechoslovakia, whereas I fear we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France.

> . . . we have sustained a defeat without a war . . . we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged. . . . And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning.[1]

The suddenness and completeness of the Munich surrender, and the way in which Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier coerced Czechoslovakia into suicide, took Europe by surprise. When Chamberlain first offered to go to Berchtesgaden, Hitler could hardly believe his luck — "*ich bin vom Himmel gefallen*," [2] he said with a chuckle, when recounting the story to a foreign diplomat. Some doomed statesmen had preceded Chamberlain on the sorry pilgrimage to Hitler, and many were to follow, but he went of his own resolve, twice repeated it, and in the end returned apparently glad at heart, nay, exulting ; and he was acclaimed by the blind and the half-sincere. The new frontiers of Czechoslovakia were to be drawn by a Commission of the Munich Powers sitting in Berlin under German chairmanship — an "impartial" Commission presided over by an interested party ! And it "deliberated" after Czechoslovakia had been disarmed, and the Western Powers had shown that they would not fight.[3] Further, the Polish and Hungarian

[1] On November 1st, 1938, replying to Mr. Attlee, Mr. Chamberlain asserted that publicly to call the Munich Agreement "a great defeat" was fouling one's own nest.

[2] "I fell from Heaven !"

[3] Coulondre writes in his despatch of March 16th, 1939 : "Indeed, during the proceedings of the International Commission in Berlin early in October, it soon became obvious that the Germans acted on strategic even more than on ethnic considerations. The frequent interventions of the Oberkommando of the Wehrmacht in the negotiations showed that the foremost purpose of the rulers of the Reich was to trace a frontier which would deprive Czechoslovakia of all her fortifications and natural defences and reduce her to complete military impotence. In fact, the frontier which the Prague Government had to accept in October engulfed 850,000 Czechs in the Reich." This was the higher righteousness which Chamberlain and Daladier had secured at Munich, and to which the Western Powers pandered in the Berlin Commission.

claims, unless settled " within three months by agreement between the respective Governments ", were to be brought before a Four-Power Conference. After all claims against the Czechs had been satisfied, a system of guarantees was to be established for their new frontiers, which, according to Mr. Chamberlain, held out to Czechoslovakia the prospect of " a greater security than she has ever enjoyed in the past ". Mr. Churchill replied : ". . . now that the fortress line is turned, what is there to stop the will of the conqueror? Obviously, we are not in a position to give them the slightest help at the present time." Paper guarantees, feelingly accorded to the despoiled, merely add a sickening, humiliating touch, which no one who has been through such transactions can ever forget.

Had Poland stood by Czechoslovakia, the Western Powers might have taken a less discreditable line ; had the Western Powers stood firm, public opinion in Poland would probably have compelled the Government to support them. The declaration addressed by Poland to France at the time of the re-militarisation of the Rhineland, envisaging joint action against the Nazis, showed the very uneasy nature of her friendship with Germany. Now the Polish Government were after cheap gains. Sore at not having been invited as equals to Munich, they would not appear as suppliants before the Axis Powers or a Four-Power Conference, but would help themselves to whatever they claimed. The British and French Ambassadors tried to speak to Colonel Beck about Teschen. " The door was shut in their faces. The French Ambassador was not even granted an audience and the British Ambassador was given a most curt reply by a political director. The whole matter is described in the Polish Press as a political indiscretion committed by those two Powers. . . ." [1] Polish troops occupied the

[1] Churchill, in the House of Commons, on October 5th.

Olsa district of Teschen and some scraps of Slovak territory — a sorry performance.

" The process of Czechoslovakia's conversion into a vassal state is unfortunately more or less an accomplished fact ", wrote M. Coulondre, the new French Ambassador in Berlin, on December 15th, 1938. " ' My country is no longer anything more than a province,' said my Czech colleague to me yesterday . . . and, according to him, certain German circles go so far as to declare that henceforth the Czech Army will be called upon to play the same part which the Bavarian had played in the Second Reich." Through Slovakia the Nazis reached Carpatho-Russia, now re-named Carpatho-Ukraine. This was to be the seed-plot of a Great-Ukrainian agitation, which was to realise Hitler's and Rosenberg's East-European dreams. " Thus, by a curious turn of fate," wrote Coulondre, " Czechoslovakia, established as a bastion against German expansion, is used by the Reich to-day as a battering-ram against the gates of the East."

But a Great-Ukrainian agitation was even more dangerous for Poland than for Russia, as in East-Galicia alone the Ukrainian movement had firm root. Poland was therefore anxious that Carpatho-Russia should pass once more under Hungarian rule, which would have put a stop to nationalist Ukrainian agitation in that backward mountain province. Poland had long wished for " a common frontier with Hungary " ; this programme was now taken up in all earnest ; the Nazis were told that Carpatho-Russia was " a veritable Communist centre " (Communism was about as strong there as in the Orkneys), and that a common Polish-Hungarian frontier would " be of great value as locking out the East " (in Western Europe the " lock " was represented as working the other way, and rumours were circulated about a Polish-Hungarian bloc favoured by Mussolini).

Time was pressing : the Hungarian frontiers were

about to be settled, but Hitler and Ribbentrop had w drawn to Berchtesgaden. On October 18th M. Franç Poncet, the retiring French Ambassador, saw them th — Hitler in his mountain fastness (described by Franç Poncet in a much-quoted despatch that would h earned him a prize in any literary competition). Li wanted to see at least one of the two. Suddenly he recei an invitation to Berchtesgaden. Was he to see Hitl He was merely to lunch there with Ribbentrop at Grand-Hôtel ; at that luncheon, on Monday, Octc 24th, there appeared as third a Herr Hewel, whom Li had never met before, but who served as Foreign Of liaison with Hitler ; while the notorious Danzig G leiter Forster was nosing about the place.

The Polish White Book, in recording the transacti of that day, gives what is obviously only an extract fi Lipski's report, whereas the German Minute, drawn by Hewel, runs into two large pages and tries to sup atmosphere and vistas ; in substance the two accou agree. Ribbentrop began with a general survey of international situation (presumably as table talk while food was consumed). The business started with Li on Carpatho-Russia : " Poland wishes for its inclusior Hungary. . . . Rumours about an intended bloc agai Germany are nonsense. . . . Poland counsels moderat to the Hungarian Government with regard to Slova and action in the Carpatho-Ukrainian question. . . . Lipski, hopes that such a solution is not contrary German interests." [1] Ribbentrop replied that he appr

[1] With the above, cf. extracts from Göring's " Notebook ", publi by *The New York Herald-Tribune* on July 10th, 1945, about a talk Lipski on October 21st, 1938 :

" Discussions about Polish intentions.

Maintain contact, avoid misunderstandings.

Hungarian-Slovakian problem — pressure on Hungary to give but only with regard to Slovakia.

Problem Carpatho-Ukraine. Poland interested but not in questio territory.

ated the Polish point of view, but had to consider certain difficulties.

Next, Ribbentrop opened up " the great general problem which made him invite M. Lipski to Berchtesgaden " ; he wished to talk in the strictest confidence — Lipski was to inform no one but Beck about it, and this by word of mouth, " as otherwise the danger of leakage, especially in the Press, is too great ". Ribbentrop wished Beck would visit him — " Polish friends had a standing invitation to Germany ". He thought the time had come to " crown the work initiated by Marshal Pilsudski and the Führer " by removing all sources of friction. In a similar settlement with Italy, the Führer had renounced the South Tyrol. He hinted that Germany might enter in the future into " a clearer deal " with France, " transcending the Führer's declaration concerning the frontier ". The first problem between Germany and Poland was Danzig — " Danzig was German, had always been German, and must remain German ". He proposed that it should be reincorporated in the Reich ; an extra-territorial road and a several-track railway were to be conceded to Germany across the Corridor, and to Poland across the Danzig territory ; Poland was to have a free port in Danzig ; frontiers and territory were to be mutually guaranteed, the German-Polish treaty was to be extended from ten to twenty-five years, and " a consultation clause "

Poland afraid that Communist trouble would develop there. Country inclined toward Hungary.

Should be bridge for settlement of Great-Ukrainian question.

But this country means nothing to Great Ukraine. Different religions. Ruthenians are not Ukrainians.

Communist center for Balkans and against Poland was and is established there.

For Poland such source of Ukrainian intransigeance is very alarming.

Would lead to hardening of Ukrainian problem in Poland.

Poland therefore wishes that this part should go to Hungary so that it can be controlled.

Propaganda in west to the effect that this common frontier would be danger to Germany. That would be absurd."

inserted. According to Lipski's report, Ribbentrop further proposed joint action in colonial matters, emigration of Jews from Poland, and " a joint policy towards Russia on the basis of the Anti-Comintern Pact " — an offer consonant with Nazi policy at that time, but not when the German White Book was published.

In reply, Lipski recalled Hitler's declaration to him on November 5th, 1937 (" *Danzig ist mit Polen verbunden* "), repeated to Beck on January 14th, 1938 ; and he warned Ribbentrop not to expect an agreement based on a reunion of Danzig with the Reich. Ribbentrop would accept no immediate answer — Lipski had better consider the matter and talk it over with Beck. Lipski replied that he would go to Warsaw. Then he reverted to the question of Carpatho-Russia. " M. Beck had instructed him to say that if Hungary's wish for arbitration by Germany, Italy, and Poland was accepted by the first two, Poland was prepared to join in it " (thus taking a place among the Great Powers). Ribbentrop answered that risks were involved in arbitration.

Some twenty minutes after they had parted, Ribbentrop sent for Lipski and offered a favourable settlement of Carpatho-Russia if the German demands regarding Danzig and the Corridor were accepted. Lipski replied that he was merely instructed to place Poland's views about Carpatho-Russia before the German Government, just as they had been placed before the Italian.

The German Minute repeatedly emphasises the cordial character of the conversation, which Ribbentrop conducted with pressing affability. Lipski, who had come to urge, was forced to fend. Nor was he told whether the proposal emanated from Hitler or whether it was Ribbentrop's (sometimes Hitler's gallopers would outdistance him). But it was fundamental and far-reaching, and was made at a time when no European statesman or diplomat could be sure of his bearings.

When Chamberlain, stepping from the aeroplane at Heston, waved his " treaty " with Hitler, like a happy autograph hunter — " here is a paper which bears his name " — Europe was astounded. Could Chamberlain's trust, joy, and triumph be genuine? His experience was that of a middle-class business man, and he infused into politics the atmosphere of the " pleasant Sunday afternoon ", dull and sober. He was shrewd, ignorant, and self-opinionated, and had the capacity to deceive himself as much as was required by his deeper instincts and his purpose, and also to deceive those who chose to be deceived. Once more he scored a great and miserable victory over Churchill. But within him there was an uneasy, unclear compromise which he preferred not to probe: if he was so happy about Munich, why re-arm? if he was playing for time, why make such poor use of it? No foreigner could ever have understood Chamberlain. Hitler was puzzled and indignant. After Godesberg and Munich he had assumed British *désintéressement* in people of " far-away " countries " of whom we know nothing "; but when he spoke at Saarbrücken on October 9th, he was less certain. Still, he would go ahead on the Continent. He saw the listlessness of France, and the greed and megalomania of the Polish Government. With Daladier, Bonnet, and Beck he hoped to settle Europe. On October 18th he tried, through François-Poncet, a new approach to France; six days later Ribbentrop spoke to Lipski.

Ribbentrop asked of Poland a small surrender and offered a great friendship; the offer was more formidable than the claim. Had Poland become a second junior partner in the Axis, her dependence would have been complete and final; Italy, accessible to the Western Powers, could have changed sides: had Poland entered the German system, these Powers would have confined their East-European policy, if any, to Russia. Hitler could

then have bid Poland seek in Russian territory " compensations " for the cessions which he would have dictated to her in the West ; or, alternatively, could have partitioned her with Russia. In Poland's fatal geographical position, an alliance with either of her great neighbours must result in a measure of dependence : while an independent existence between them, especially if in conflict with both, is a continuous acrobatic performance. Even had Danzig been less vital for Poland, a far-sighted Polish Government would have hesitated to close with Germany's offer. Beck had strong totalitarian leanings, and co-operation with the Axis suited his tastes ; he had personal resentment against France, and hostility to Russia was part of Pilsudski's presumed " political testament " ; but even Beck was averse to a close connexion with Germany and had to count with the intense Polish feeling about Danzig.

Towards the end of the month Lipski went to Warsaw and, on October 31st, received instructions from Beck, rambling, turgid, and long-winded. This, in brief, is their substance as published in the Polish White Book : " The Polish-German Agreement of 1934 has stood the test of the greatest political upheaval in post-war Europe " : it is " not of a transient and tactical nature ", and the need for it is now greater than ever ; progress is noticeable, in that Hitler's public declarations about Poland " contain increasingly precise and unequivocal formulas ". The Polish Government favours " a certain extension in the period and form of the 1934 Declaration ". Poland has paramount economic interests in Danzig ; Gdynia alone is insufficient ; Danzig must remain within the Polish Customs system ; Poland never interferes in Danzig's internal politics ; " the Polish Government proposes the replacement of the League of Nations guarantee and its prerogatives by a bilateral Polish-German Agreement " which would guarantee the Polish economic and the German political interests in Danzig, but " any attempt

to incorporate the Free City into the Reich must inevitably lead to a conflict" of a more than local character. Beck is ready to go to Germany for personal talks, but enjoins on Lipski first clearly to explain " the principles to which we adhere ".

On October 24th Ribbentrop had urged Lipski to proceed to Warsaw immediately. Now that Lipski returned with Beck's reply, Ribbentrop did not see him till November 19th. Possibly he was put off by Beck's interview with the Hearst representative in Warsaw, in which Beck denied that negotiations were being conducted for a surrender of Danzig and the creation of a transit-route across the Corridor.[1] The interview of November 19th is reported in both the White Books. The German Minute is by Ribbentrop himself. Both Minutes state that Lipski read out his instructions. Ribbentrop thus reports the first point of Lipski's *exposé* and his own reply to it :

> Foreign Minister Beck considers that German-Polish relations have on the whole stood the test. The Czechoslovak crisis has shown that the German-Polish Agreement is built on solid foundations. He believes that the straightforward Polish policy has benefited Germany in the acquisition of the Sudetenland and has greatly contributed towards a thorough settlement of that problem in the German sense. During those critical days, the Polish Government paid no attention to blandishments held out to them from a certain quarter.
>
> I replied to M. Lipski that in my opinion also the German-Polish Agreement had proved its strong power of resistance. The action of the Führer against Czechoslovakia had enabled Poland to obtain the Olsa territory and a number of other frontier improvements. Still I agreed that the attitude of Poland had rendered things easier for Germany.

[1] The Hearst representative seems to have had astonishingly accurate information, and Ribbentrop complained about that interview to Lipski on November 19th.

There is nothing so blatant in Beck's published instructions as Ribbentrop's summary of its first paragraphs ; but Lipski, reading his instructions, is not likely to have added to them in this manner, nor Ribbentrop to have gone to the trouble of inventing the story either then or afterwards.

To the part of Lipski's instructions dealing with Danzig Ribbentrop replied that he regretted Beck's attitude ; it may be difficult for Beck to justify a surrender of Danzig, but so it is for the Führer to justify a renunciation of the Corridor. When he (Ribbentrop) put forward his suggestions for placing German-Polish relations on a permanent basis, he did not mean " to engage in diplomatic small talk ". The Führer " takes a very wide view of the German-Polish problem ". Ribbentrop did not absolutely reject a bilateral treaty about Danzig, but hardly thought it feasible, and urged the Poles to reconsider the matter. Lipski's Minute of this part of the interview is fuller ; Ribbentrop speaks in it with more cordiality and less reserve, but taking all in all the two reports are perfectly compatible. Both mention an enquiry by Ribbentrop about the transit-corridor, and Lipski's reply that he had no instructions on that point but believed a solution possible. One important point mentioned by Lipski is, however, omitted in the German Minute : a discreet hint by Ribbentrop that his suggestions had been his own — he had talked only in a vague manner with Hitler on the subject. Obviously they were to be dropped for the moment.

According to a Minute by Beck, Moltke called on him on November 22nd, assured him that Ribbentrop continued to attach the highest importance to good Polish-German relations, and had taken due note of Lipski's statement. Moltke said that he had always warned Ribbentrop that Poland would be adamant about Danzig, and was glad that after the conversation with Lipski,

Ribbentrop " thoroughly realised this ".

It was on that very day that the Polish Ambassador in Paris was officially informed about the negotiations for a Franco-German Declaration.

The Franco-German Declaration

François-Poncet reported from Berlin on October 4th, 1938 :

> The German Press is prodigal in phrases friendly to France. It persists in repeating that there is no ground for conflict between France and Germany. It delights in rendering homage to the part played by M. Daladier at Munich. . . . Quoting an expression of Herr Göring, it says " that with a man like M. Daladier it is possible to make politics ".
>
> Discussing the declaration issued by the Führer and the British Prime Minister after the Munich conference — which has been represented here as a Non-Aggression Pact — it hints that there is nothing to prevent a similar arrangement between France and Germany. But first France must adopt a realist policy based on the recent events which have thrown Europe out of gear.

Munich was to be the " starting point for building up a New Europe " — the term *Neuordnung* was not yet current but was implied in these dissertations, and the " realism " expected from France was *désintéressement* in Eastern Europe.

On October 18th, when taking leave of Hitler, François-Poncet was treated to " fairly indulgent appreciations of the French attitude " and bitter reproaches against England. Hitler suggested a Franco-German agreement confirming their frontier and containing a consultation clause — not a Non-Aggression Pact, to avoid reservations relating to the League of Nations Covenant and to existing treaties with third parties. With regard to limitation of armaments, Hitler suggested starting with

a programme " for humanizing war (bombing of open cities, etc.) ". François-Poncet assured him that the French Government would give the most sympathetic consideration to his proposals. The negotiations were to be kept secret, except that the French Government was free to sound the British Government, and the German to inform the Italian. Poland and Russia were not mentioned.

" I certainly am under no illusion concerning the character of Adolf Hitler ", wrote François-Poncet. " I know him to be changeable, insincere, contradictory, uncertain." Still, he thought that, " at least intermittently ", Hitler shared the wish of the majority of Germans to close the weary, age-long conflict with France ; and that this was aided by the sympathy aroused in him for Daladier by the Munich meeting, " and also by the idea that our country is now evolving in a direction which will permit it better to understand the Third Reich " (*i.e.* moving towards the " New Order ").[1] " But it is equally certain that the Führer remains intent on breaking up the Franco-British bloc, and on securing peace in the West in order to have his hands free in the East." Still, François-Poncet urged a positive approach to Hitler's proposals.

On October 21st the French Government notified François-Poncet of their favourable attitude, which was immediately communicated to the Germans. " Like you," wrote Bonnet, " I view Herr Hitler's initiative with all the interest which it deserves, and I agree that we should endeavour rapidly to reach concrete results." No discussions about the text of the Declaration are recorded either in the French Yellow Book or in the German White Book. (They were complicated and delayed by the claims

[1] This current English translation of *Neuordnung* is facile but not quite accurate ; the German for " New Order " would be *neue Ordnung*, whereas *Neuordnung* means new-ordering, re-arrangement, re-settlement.

which Italy started raising against France, and by the murder in Paris of the German diplomat vom Rath, who was killed by a young Polish Jew, Grynszpan, exasperated at the treatment to which his parents were subjected in Germany.) A whole month is a blank in the two collections of documents, and the story restarts only on November 20th. That day the new French Ambassador, M. Coulondre, called on Ribbentrop, who claims to have told him that a Franco-German understanding would be greatly facilitated if " a certain mental ballast was dropped ". " It is necessary that the European States should confine themselves to their real interests : France to her great Colonial Realm, England to her Empire, and Germany to her proper sphere of interests, which is South-Eastern Europe." On November 22nd, at Berchtesgaden, Coulondre presented his credentials to Hitler who played off some of his gramophone records about no territorial problem dividing France and Germany, about the pacifism and comradeship of ex-combatants, etc. On the same day the text of the Declaration (drafted by the Germans and accepted by Bonnet) was agreed to in Paris, and its outlines were officially communicated to the Polish and Russian Ambassadors, with an assurance that French relations with third parties would be safeguarded.[1] M. Łukasiewicz " showed himself very favourable to the plan " ; the Russian, M. Souritz, made no comment, but on November 23rd asked for the full text,

[1] Among the diplomatic documents which the Germans allege to have found in Warsaw (*Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3, March 1940) is a despatch from M. Łukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, dated December 17th, 1938, in which he mentions that, when leaving for Warsaw at the end of October, he was told by M. Bonnet that " the Declaration may be signed and published any day " — obviously he knew about it ; he writes further that " pro-Russian politicians such as Mandel " were worried whether the Declaration was compatible with the Franco-Polish Alliance and the Franco-Russian Pact. " Finally, he [Mandel] persuaded M. Bonnet to talk to me about it, and probably also to the Russian and Belgian Ambassadors."

which was refused on the ground that it had not been shown to anyone. The same day Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax came to Paris and were shown the text;[1] and the fact was disclosed that a Franco-German Declaration, similar to the Anglo-German signed at Munich, had been drawn up and only awaited ratification. On November 24th Chamberlain publicly blessed it as " marking a new effort in the direction of peace ", and Ribbentrop's forthcoming visit to Paris was announced. On the 26th Souritz, asked by Bonnet for his observations, said that he had received no instructions and that, moreover, the text of the Declaration was fixed ; Bonnet replied that Souritz had been informed of its outlines before it was submitted to the Cabinet. The same day, a " friendly agreement " was concluded at Moscow between Russia and Poland to live together henceforth as good neighbours : an after-effect of the exclusion of the two from Munich.

On December 6th Ribbentrop and Bonnet signed the Declaration which, having dwelt on the importance of good Franco-German relations for European appeasement, solemnly recognised the existing frontier between the two countries as final, and concluded with a consultative clause " under reserve of their particular relations to Third Powers ". The official communiqué mentioned that " the principal European problems " had

[1] From an entry in the *Carnets secrets de Jean Zay*, dated Wednesday, November 23rd, 1938, it would appear that the French Cabinet themselves were shown the draft of the Declaration only that day ; it met with considerable opposition. Zay's diary, stolen from his house while he was imprisoned by the Vichy Government, was published in April 1941 in the *Gringoire* by Philippe Henriot (who on June 29th, 1944, was executed in his official apartment at the Ministry of Propaganda by members of the Resistance movement). He naturally made his selection of what to print ; but neither Zay in his *Souvenirs et solitude* (published in 1946) nor his widow in a letter addressed to the judge presiding at the trial of Pétain and dated August 4th, 1945, deny the authenticity of the passages published by Henriot. These, in fact, were compromising in the eyes of Vichyites and Nazis only.

been discussed ; a statement by Bonnet asserted that the Declaration opened the way for a collaboration aided " by the conviction that no difference exists between the two countries liable to disturb the peaceful basis of their relations " ; another one by Ribbentrop, that it opened the way " for a mutual recognition and respect of their vital national interests (*ihrer nationalen Lebensinteressen*) " — a hint at a delimitation of spheres of interest.

On December 14th, in a Circular Note sent to the French Ambassadors in London, Berlin, Brussels, Rome, and Barcelona, and to the Minister at Prague, Bonnet gave an account of these talks ; Ribbentrop had made light of " unofficial " Italian revendications against France ; the fight against Bolshevism was the essence of Axis policy : Germany was not interested in the Mediterranean ; a Franco-German *rapprochement* would react favourably on Franco-Italian relations ; and why should there not be Four-Power co-operation ? Dealing with Spain, Ribbentrop had again made a parade of anti-Bolshevism. Incidentally, French policy towards the U.S.S.R. " seemed to him a survival of the encirclement policy of Versailles " — in reply Bonnet had recalled that the restricted character of the Franco-Russian Pact was due to the refusal of Germany and of other Powers to join it. Ribbentrop had blamed the attitude of the British Government, and still more of the Press, and complained of the emphasis laid in London on re-armament ; Bonnet had spoken of " the fundamental and unshakable character of Franco-British solidarity ". They had talked about Czechoslovakia and the implications of Munich : Ribbentrop on his return to Berlin was to re-examine the question of the international guarantee, of which Germany had accepted the principle. According to Bonnet, these informal talks, " without resulting in precise conclusions capable of being minuted, have thrown interesting light on certain essential points "

Poland is not mentioned in the Circular Note, which was not sent to the French Ambassador at Warsaw (nor at Moscow). The omission was remarkable, and underlined the distinction which France was making between Great Britain and the Eastern Allies. Her withdrawal behind a diplomatic " Maginot Line " was encouraging to the Nazis, who were openly treating freedom of action in the East as corollary to their (present) renunciations in the West : Coulondre says it in so many words in his despatch of December 15th. They all, including Ribbentrop and Göring but with the sole exception of Hitler, were talking to him, though in different ways " and always with deliberate imprecision, of the need for German expansion in Eastern Europe ". Across Czechoslovakia and Hungary, reduced to vassalage, their eyes seemed fixed on the Ukraine, the *Lebensraum* of Nazi dreams : Coulondre saw that this would have meant " curbing Rumania, convincing Poland, despoiling Russia ", but failed to draw the conclusion that this was more than would be undertaken at the outset. And the Bulgarian Prime Minister, about the same time, told the French Minister at Sofia that, in his view, it was Poland who was more immediately threatened — he foreshadowed the possibility of a German-Russian understanding, and of a new Partition.

After Hitler had occupied Prague, a dispute was to arise as to what had been said about Czechoslovakia in Paris on December 6th. Baron von Weizsäcker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, claimed that Bonnet had given Ribbentrop " verbal assurances " that it would never again be " the subject of an exchange of views " — " he added that the German Government, could they have thought otherwise, would not have signed the agreement ". Bonnet replied with a categorical denial : he had reminded Ribbentrop of the promised guarantee to Czechoslovakia, but failed to obtain from

him any assurance as to when Germany would give it. The whole thing probably seemed to the Nazis a mere farce — which it was ; they did not duly appreciate the delicate feelings and consciences of the appeasers who, when they threw anyone to the wolves, would plead a higher righteousness and give the victim a beautifully illuminated safe conduct. But though there is reason to suspect that Bonnet had signified his *désintéressement* in Czechoslovakia, formally his statement seems correct ; he claimed at the time to have talked about the question of the guarantee for Czechoslovakia to Ribbentrop ; and on December 22nd, on instructions from him, Coulondre raised it with Weizsäcker, whose reply was negative.

> " Could not this matter be forgotten," he said to me with a smile [reports Coulondre]. Seeing Germany's predominance in that region, would not the guarantee of the Reich in fact suffice ? " I naturally signified that engagements, once undertaken, cannot be forgotten, and I put the matter right. But it was my impression that on this point he adhered to a decision already made.
>
> " Besides, it would be for Czechoslovakia to claim that guarantee," he concluded. " Anyhow, we are in no hurry to settle this question, and M. Chvalkovsky is not coming to Berlin till after the holidays." In fact, the journey of the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister has already been postponed twice.

But what was the position of the Chamberlain and Daladier Governments with regard to that guarantee ? Annex No. 1 to the Munich Agreement reads :

> His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government have concluded the above agreement on the understanding that they adhere to the offer in paragraph 6 of the Franco-British proposals of 19th September, 1938, concerning an international guarantee for the new frontiers of the Czechoslovak State against all unprovoked aggression.

> After the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy, on their part, will similarly give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia.

And on October 4th Sir Thomas Inskip declared in Parliament that, though technically incomplete, morally the guarantee had to be treated by Britain " as being now in force ".

On October 18th, 1938, Hitler, speaking to François-Poncet about the Polish and Hungarian territorial claims, said that he was trying to have them settled out of court, for in an international conference the Axis would have to support Poland and Hungary — " because of the political ties which bind us to them " — while the Western Powers would have to stand by Czechoslovakia. " I hope a compromise will be reached. But the affair is dangerous. It shows how wrong France and England were to guarantee Czechoslovakia's frontiers even before these had been clearly defined. The most annoying complications may yet result from it."

Hitler endorses the Ribbentrop Plan

When Ribbentrop's proposals had met with a Polish refusal, he subsided — was it to avoid possible disturbance to the French negotiations? But after December 6th Beck seems to have been willing to resume the ticklish discussions about Danzig, where the position had seriously deteriorated. In the German White Book Moltke reports an interview with Beck on December 14th (not mentioned in the Polish White Book). Having learnt from Moltke that he was going to Berlin, Beck invited him for a talk, praised the Agreement of 1934, and deplored the present tension in Polish-German relations. " The reason probably was that too much had suddenly changed in the last few weeks. Czechoslovakia had received a new

appearance, and a series of systems and combinations, which had been of weight in the past, had broken down." He wished to review the situation with Ribbentrop. Passing to concrete problems, he mentioned new difficulties in Danzig, expressed an earnest hope that "undesirable *faits accomplis* would be avoided", and referred to the "preliminary discussion" about Danzig which, sooner or later, would have to be resumed ("he obviously alluded to the Berchtesgaden conversation", writes Moltke). Polish public opinion was deeply apprehensive lest Carpatho-Russia be used for an anti-Polish policy, but Beck disclaimed any wish to exclude Germany from the Danube basin. Lastly, in view of possible developments, he recalled Poland's economic and shipping interests in Memel. Moltke answered that in Germany there was irritation against Poland, mainly because of minority problems, especially in the Olsa district of Teschen "where the population had gradually come to consider the twenty years of Czechoslovak rule a Paradise compared to their present condition". Beck replied with assurances customary on such occasions.

When Beck expressed the wish to meet Ribbentrop, he meant at Warsaw, on a return visit to that paid by him to Berlin three years earlier. But while Beck was spending Christmas on the Riviera, an invitation reached him from Hitler to call at Berchtesgaden on his way home. They met on January 5th; Ribbentrop, Moltke, Lipski, Beck's Chef de Cabinet Count Łubieński, and Herr Schmidt were present. The interview is reported in both the White Books; but the German Minute by Schmidt is almost three times longer than the Polish. It seems fairly credible, except that Hitler's anti-Russian (not merely anti-Bolshevik) effusions, noted in the Polish Minute, were obviously excised from the German before publication in December 1939.

Beck started by again emphasising how well German-

Polish relations had stood the test of the September crisis ; if of late they had not maintained " the high level " of those days, both sides should endeavour to remove existing difficulties. He mentioned Danzig — what, for instance, was to happen should the League of Nations withdraw from Danzig ? Further, " in the agitators operating in Carpatho-Russia, Poland recognised old enemies, and she feared lest in time it became such a focus for anti-Polish activities as to compel her to intervene, which might produce further complications ". Hence a common frontier with Hungary had been desired.

Hitler replied that he fully adhered to the principles of the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934. He disclaimed all direct interest in Carpatho-Russia, and insinuated that the responsibility for the settlement lay with Hungary. But to reach finality between Germany and Poland, it was necessary to go beyond " the mainly negative Agreement of 1934 ". He hoped to settle the problem of Memel with the Lithuanians " who seemed willing to concur in a reasonable solution " ; Danzig and the Corridor were felt by Germany to be difficult problems which required a new approach. For Danzig a formula had to be found which " would join it politically to the German Commonwealth, while economically leaving it with Poland ". " Danzig was German, would for ever remain German, and sooner or later must return to Germany." Germany required a connexion with East Prussia across the Corridor. If a reasonable solution was found for these two problems, he would guarantee the frontier with Poland as he had guaranteed that with France. He " underlined once more the psychological difficulties of the problem which only he could solve in this manner ". It was not easy for him to guarantee the Corridor to Poland, and by so doing he would incur a great deal of criticism. But as a *Realpolitiker* he wished to see the problem settled and relegated, as had been those

of the South Tyrol and of Alsace-Lorraine.

Beck replied that Poland, too, stood by her agreement with Germany, and would continue " the independent policy pursued of recent years as against attempts to connect her closer with Russia through an Eastern Pact.[1] Poland was less concerned about reinforcing her security than France, and had no opinion of the ' security systems ', absolutely discredited since the September crisis : which made that crisis a turning point in history. He valued, however, the German attitude, now reaffirmed by the Führer." He took note of Hitler's wishes, but, although he persistently disregarded the " coffee-house opposition " and yet continued in office, he had to mind national opinion, and this rendered the Danzig problem very difficult. Still, he would calmly think over the matter.

The Polish record of Beck's reply is so unusually brief as to suggest uneasiness about it—thirty-eight lines of Hitler against five of Beck ; what there is bears out the German account ; but it accentuates Beck's attitude towards guarantees : in Hitler's scheme he saw " no equivalent for Poland " (the actual words used were : *ich sehe keine Gegenleistung*).

The next day Beck met Ribbentrop at Munich. The Polish White Book publishes only a very short extract from Beck's minute of a conversation which lasted one hour and a half.[2] He asked Ribbentrop to tell Hitler that, for the first time, an interview with Hitler made him feel pessimistic, and that he saw no chance of settling the Danzig problem on the proposed basis. Ribbentrop replied with renewed assurances " that Germany was not

[1] Beck touched also on the Polish-Russian Declaration of November 26th, 1938, and described it as defining relations " on the lines of their Non-Aggression Pact ". But he denied its pointing against Germany. These remarks of Beck's are not mentioned in either report.

[2] The Polish White Book had to be compiled mainly from materials in the Embassies, and these were not always supplied by Beck with full information.

seeking any violent solution ". His minute, which covers more than a page, reports Beck to have started immediately on Danzig : the League of Nations may withdraw — what then ? Or events in Danzig may force Poland to act. He was at a loss how to solve the problem ; to the entire Polish nation it was " the test of German-Polish relations ". Ribbentrop repeated that Germany desired " a final and comprehensive consolidation of their mutual relations on big lines " ; rehashed what Hitler had said about Danzig, the Corridor, and Carpatho-Russia ; raised minority complaints ; and accepted Beck's invitation to Warsaw, without fixing the date.

It seems that Beck, usually brazen and overbearing, had felt constrained in his talk with Hitler ; he committed the mistake of speaking of an " equivalent ", which implied the possibility of a deal ; and afterwards, urged by Lipski and Łubieński, tried to correct with Ribbentrop the impression which his feeble reaction must have produced.

Back at Warsaw, he received the French Ambassador, M. Léon Noël. " *Si l'on en croit M. Beck,*" rightly remarks Noël,[1] this was all that had happened : the need of good neighbourly relations was re-asserted ; Hitler talked a great deal, but not feverishly, and did not seem to contemplate vast plans, nor to think of bringing about great events at short notice. He expressed satisfaction at war having been avoided ; made friendly references to France ; inveighed against Russia, " not only against Bolshevism " ; no relaxation of anti-Jewish persecutions was to be expected, though negotiations about the Polish Jews were to be reopened ; Ribbentrop seemed imperfectly informed of Hitler's intentions ; he would visit Warsaw about the end of the month. What a lot Beck had to tell Noël merely to suppress the things which mattered !

On January 25th, 1939, Ribbentrop arrived in Warsaw on a three-days visit. There are seven documents about

[1] For Noël's relations with Beck, see below, especially pages 437-47.

it in the Polish White Book, but only one single Minute in the German. To M. Mościcki, the President of the Republic, Ribbentrop declared that there were no insuperable difficulties between Germany and Poland ; to Marshal Smigly-Rydz he talked about Russia, " asserting that she was growing weaker ", but was " quite incalculable in her behaviour ". To draw Poland into the Anti-Comintern Pact seems to have been Ribbentrop's main objective during his visit to Warsaw. Beck states to have explained to him the impossibility of Poland joining it ; to have " categorically rejected " an extra-territorial route — that is, German sovereignty over Polish territory — but " transport facilities " could be discussed. With regard to Danzig he claims to have refused any concessions, " for we could not part with our tangible rights in exchange for mere assurances " — which again implies that the concessions could be had at a price. But next he rightly declared that the incorporation of Danzig would give Germany " economic and therefore political control over Polish national life ". Asked by Ribbentrop what impression his talk with Hitler had produced in Poland, " M. Beck said, the worst possible " (*i.e.* in official circles, as nothing about it was allowed to reach the public). The one concrete result named by Beck is a " Gentlemen's Agreement " that, should the League of Nations withdraw from Danzig, a joint declaration was to be published immediately, stating that pending an understanding between Germany and Poland the *status quo* would be maintained. Ribbentrop merely mentions an agreement to negotiate ; he thought Beck " impressed " by his *exposé* of the German claims, but worried about Polish public opinion ; " none the less willing to consider thoroughly the German suggestions ". Asked by Noël, was there anything new about Danzig, Beck replied in the negative, repeating his promise to keep France informed. From some other source Noël learnt

about the demand for " a corridor across the Corridor " ; of the demand for Danzig he apparently remained ignorant. According to him, Ribbentrop left Warsaw " greatly discontented ", showing " coldness and ill-humour ".[1]

The End of Munich

After Munich, Czechoslovakia was bound to pass completely into the German orbit, or to suffer disruption and extinction ; if the Czechs, besmirched and betrayed, would not turn into Nazi janissaries, the scattered Germans remaining in Bohemia and Moravia, the Hlinka Guard in Slovakia, and the " Ukrainians " in Carpatho-Russia, were to complete the work initiated by Henlein and the " Sudetens ". But Munich marked the limit of what Great Britain would brook, and to which her appeasers themselves would go. Knowing how poorly they had prepared the country for war, and therefore most anxious to avoid it, they had accepted at face value Hitler's demand for a union of all territories inhabited by Germans, and had hoped to pin him down to it. The position was geographically impossible and politically untenable, and the ideas of the appeasers were fancifully naive in their wishful misconceptions of German psychology. They expected Hitler to save their faces by preserving at least a certain outward decorum. But he neither understood nor cared for their niceties ; the manner in which the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia were fixed, his speeches in the autumn of 1938, the intensified anti-Jewish persecutions and the November pogrom, the Nazi activities in Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia, the increasing pressure put on the Czechs, and lastly the delay in implementing the guarantee promised to them at Munich for their new frontiers, brutally tore down the trappings from Chamberlain's make-believe. Chamberlain would still defend what he

[1] See *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne*, page 293.

had done and stiffly protest that no defence was required, and he would depict on his Christmas-card the aeroplane in which he had flown to Munich ; but the atmosphere round him was changing perceptibly. The agonies of Czechoslovakia were the death-rattle of appeasement as the guiding principle of British policy ; meantime the policy of France and of Poland continued to flicker and flutter, with Bonnet and Beck each pursuing a line more tortuous, though more realist, than that of Chamberlain and Halifax.

But whereas, in spite of certain suppressions, the course of the foreign policy of France and of Poland during the year preceding the war can be traced in their printed documents, so far the material is lacking for a study of British diplomatic activities during that period. The Chamberlain Government refrained from publishing the wires, despatches, and memoranda from which the story of their endeavours and disappointments could be told : to the self-esteem of politicians, a record of drivel, fuddle, and bungling is more painful than one of unprincipled but consistent action.

The policy of the French Government was inspired by deep defeatism, born of disenchantment in victory ; by a passionate anxiety to avoid sacrificing any more French lives ; and by a fear and hatred of the " Reds " overruling national considerations — the Left believed in " class war " and the Right practised it. In this spirit effective resistance to totalitarian Germany was impossible, and the road to Vichy had to be traversed, in one manner or another : and yet there was the desire to maintain the appearances of continuing the traditions of France as a dominant European Power.

In Poland the epigoni of the Pilsudski régime were influenced by their totalitarian leanings and by traditional hostility against Russia, and, in view of the virtual eclipse of France, they had, more than ever, to seek a

modus vivendi with Germany. They did not believe in the possibility of Nazi-Soviet co-operation, and they overrated Poland's military strength.

In Great Britain Churchill alone, month after month and year after year, exposed the growing dangers of the international situation, pleaded for a consistent and active European policy, and pressed for re-armament on an adequate scale. Labour and Liberals believed in the League of Nations and " collective security ", advocated action but opposed re-armament. The so-called National Government combined a worldly-wise scepticism with inaction and unpreparedness, and abhorrence of Nazi atrocities with a sneaking admiration for totalitarian achievements (best seen in the Chamberlain foible for Mussolini). Still, even if during the years preceding the war there was no national policy worthy of the name, there was diplomatic correspondence of which the public had a right to see as much as could have been safely printed. Something resembling the French Yellow Book might have been expected even from the Chamberlain Government.

Le Livre Jaune Français bears the sub-title : " Diplomatic Documents, 1938–39 " ; and the opening sentence states : " This Yellow Book is a collection of the principal documents which show and explain the action of French diplomacy between September 29th, 1938, the date of the Munich Agreement, and September 3rd, 1939, the day on which France and Great Britain, acting on their assurances of assistance, declared themselves in a state of war with Germany ". The book comprises 431 pages of the size of our Blue Book, and 370 documents; of these, 124 are communications from the French Embassy in Berlin (86 previous to August 23rd, 1939, the beginning of the acute crisis) ; 106 from the Embassy at Warsaw (57 previous to August 23rd) ; and more than 40 emanate from the French Foreign Office. Here (although the

collection originally made was severely cut and pruned before publication) is material for a study, if not of French foreign policy, at least of the work of French diplomacy.[1]

The title of the Blue Book presented to Parliament on September 21st, 1939 (Cmd. 6106) reads : " Documents concerning German-Polish Relations, and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3rd, 1939 ". Thus Anglo-German relations enter into it only, as it were, incidentally, and British diplomatic transactions with Germany during the eleven months, September 29th, 1938, to August 23rd, 1939, are outside its purview : for that entire period it contains only three communications from the British Embassy in Berlin. If it was necessary to rush the publication of a Blue Book so limited in scope, this did not absolve the Chamberlain Government from following it up with a wider documentary account of its foreign policy, such as other, less democratic, Governments felt it their duty to attempt. But all they vouchsafed to the public on the history of appeasement was a book by Sir Nevile Henderson, Ambassador to Berlin 1937–1939. He writes in the " Prologue " to his *Failure of a Mission* :

> It was the stationmaster at Grantham who finally overcame my scruples about the writing of this book. Mr. Gardner was kind enough to invite me into his office, where there was a fire, one cold morning when I was waiting for a train for London, which was late. We spoke of this and that, about the war and its origins, and his final remark to me was that he and people like him knew nothing of the facts of the case.

[1] Bonnet's foreign policy cannot be fully gauged by his despatches. For instance, in his dealings with the Berlin Embassy he is reported to have followed up more than once soft-pedalling instructions, given over the telephone, with a stiff and stern despatch; which is said to have made Coulondre await, whenever possible, written orders before taking action.

A very sensible remark. But a Minister is not free to quote in Parliament from documents which the Government is not prepared to table ; without permission from the Government, Sir Nevile Henderson could not have tried to enlighten the stationmaster at Grantham ; and a semi-official apologia should not precede the publication of documentary evidence. And though Sir Nevile unfolds his " Greek tragedy " (with a good deal of pseudo-artistic claptrap), the serious student is no wiser for it and, in tracing the collapse of appeasement, so far has no British diplomatic sources to draw on.

On January 11th–13th, 1939, Chamberlain and Halifax visited Rome, and in talks with Mussolini raised the question of the guarantee promised for Czechoslovakia's new frontiers ; and early in February the British and French Embassies in Berlin were instructed to make that guarantee the subject of a *démarche*. Coulondre did so, and in his *note verbale*, dated February 8th, asked for the earliest possible reply ; what the British Embassy did, when and how, is nowhere stated. Meantime, on February 7th, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, M. Chvalkovsky, back from Berlin, gave M. de Lacroix, the French Minister at Prague, an account of his talks with Hitler and Ribbentrop which had hinged on the promised guarantee. What seems to have struck him most was the disproportionate importance attached by them to the Jewish question : both declared emphatically that it was impossible to give the German guarantee " to a State which does not eliminate the Jews ". They regretted " the sentimental and leisurely manner " in which they themselves had dealt with the Jews ; described them as Germany's chief enemies, " responsible for all the difficulties which we encounter in our relations with Paris, London, and Washington ". " We shall give similar advice to Rumania, Hungary, etc. Germany will seek to form a bloc of anti-Semitic States, for she

cannot be friends with any State in which the Jews retain any influence, either through their economic activities or by holding high office." Next, they demanded full freedom for the Germans within the Czechoslovak borders to organise on Nazi lines, and to wear their party badges in public ; last but not least, a considerable reduction of the Czech Army. By February 17th, seven more points were added to these three preliminary conditions, amounting to an entire subordination of Czechoslovakia's foreign and economic policy to that of the Reich.

On February 22nd Bonnet asked Coulondre about the results of his pressing *démarche* undertaken a fortnight before, and was told that no reply had been received. This was given a week later in a Note which combined circumlocution with veiled threats and sallies. During the six or seven weeks after the "Vienna Award", adjudicating the Hungarian claims, the new Czechoslovakia had been extolled by the Nazi Press as a firmly-established State, which would prove the superiority of Axis creations over the "flimsy structures" of the post-war settlement ; now it was described as lacking the stability stipulated as pre-requisite for an Axis guarantee. At the same time, the Western Powers were warned not to interfere : their "more or less serious military guarantees" had in the past encouraged the Czechs "to neglect the imprescriptible revendications of national minorities", and such a guarantee might now "aggravate" the differences between Czechoslovakia and her neighbours. The Note concludes :

> The German Government is fully conscious that ultimately the general evolution of that part of Europe falls primarily within the sphere of the most essential interests of the Reich: historically, still more geographically, and, most of all, from the economic point of view.
>
> It further deems it necessary to await an elucida-

tion of the internal development of Czechoslovakia, and an improvement in her relations with her neighbours, before it assumes a new attitude.

So long as Hitler expected a united, though truncated, Czechoslovakia to serve as Nazi transmitter to Eastern Europe, the Vienna Award was described as " definitive ". A change may have occurred in his immediate plans : the " Ukrainian " agitation in Carpatho-Russia tended to create a common interest between Poland, Rumania, and Russia, and also with Hungary which coveted that province. Moreover, the Czechs, even in their bitter misery and humiliation, did not prove truly docile. According to Sir Nevile Henderson, " the revulsion abroad " to the anti-Jewish pogrom, " and particularly in the U.S.A., where Dr. Beneš had taken refuge . . . encouraged the anti-German section in Czechoslovakia . . . to raise their heads again and to hamper the conciliatory efforts of Dr. Hacha and M. Chvalkovsky for better relations with Germany ". In January, reports Coulondre, Hitler said to a foreign diplomat " that if Czechoslovakia did not toe the line, he would let loose against her a lightning action ". On February 5th a Nazi, in close touch with Hitler, told an official of the French Embassy that " a disintegration " (*Auflösung*) of Czechoslovakia might prove unavoidable, in which case Slovakia would become independent, Carpatho-Russia would go to Hungary, " and the Reich would, in one form or another, assume control of Bohemia and Moravia ". The Note of February 28th clearly pointed the same way ; the programme was complete ; " movements " and " incidents " could now be expected.

Sir Nevile Henderson, who since the end of October had been away ill, returned to Berlin about the middle of February. " My compulsory absence was a minor disaster ", he writes. He met Hitler at a banquet on March 1st : " he carefully avoided looking me in the

face . . . confined his remarks to general subjects, while stressing the point that it was not Britain's business to interfere with Germany in Central Europe. . . . In the light of wisdom after the event, I have no doubt that he was already weighing the various contingencies in regard to Prague, and making his plans for March 15th." This wisdom does not, however, prevent Sir Nevile from saying, on another page, that " if the Czechs had been a little more prudent, and if the Stanley-Hudson visit [1] had taken place ten days earlier . . . March might, after all, have gone out like a lamb ", and from inveighing against the " folly " and " obstinacy " of the Czechs, their " incredibly shortsighted and domineering " treatment of the Slovaks, etc. Still, he was " once again moderately hopeful and not inclined to see the black side of anything " (except in the actions of the wronged). Presumably his reports encouraged Ministerial optimism in London. On March 9th Chamberlain gave a " sunshine talk " to lobby correspondents about prospects of peace being better than ever before, and about hopes of a new disarmament conference before the end of the year. The next day Sir Samuel Hoare spoke at the Chelsea Town Hall about the " notable change in public opinion " which had occurred since the beginning of the year — " confidence, almost suffocated in the late autumn by defeatism, has returned, hope has taken the place of fear, moral and physical robustness has overcome hysteria and hesitation ". He talked of " the greatest opportunity that has ever been offered to the leaders of the world ", and refused to believe that they would not join Mr. Chamberlain in the high endeavour of appeasement upon which he was engaged. Taking the cue, *Punch*, on March 15th, published a cartoon in which an awakening John

[1] A visit to Germany by Mr. Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade, and Mr. R. S. Hudson, Secretary D.O.T., had been planned for the middle of March in connexion with trade talks.

Bull sees the " war scare " vanish and says, in reply to " pessimists " who had " predicted ' another major crisis ' " for the Ides of March : " Thank goodness, that's over ". On March 10th the final crisis started in Czechoslovakia, and on March 15th Hitler entered Prague. It was all over.

In Slovakia the Nazis operated through types now known as quislings, and through the local Führer, Herr Karmasin, at the head of 120,000 *Volksdeutsche.* In November provincial Governments had been set up in Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia. Now, encouraged from Berlin, the separatists in both were clamouring for virtual " independence " while, to say the least, with the silent cognisance of Berlin the Czechoslovak Government were preparing to take action against them. On March 10th Prague removed from office the Slovak Premier, Mgr. Tiso, and M. Durčansky, who escaped to Vienna and immediately started virulent anti-Czech broadcasts over the Nazi radio. Next, the Slovak ex-Ministers appealed to Hitler ; were summoned to Berlin and on March 13th were told by him that he desired " a completely free Slovakia " ; the Slovak Diet was convened for the next morning at Bratislava, while Tiso continued till 3 A.M. his conferences with Ribbentrop and other Nazi leaders. On the 14th the prescribed " independence " was voted by the Diet.[1] In the morning of the same day, Weizsäcker received Henderson (I follow here a despatch of Coulondre's) ; declared that Tiso's was the only legal Government, that " the Reich desired the maintenance of order, proper treatment for the German minority, and the final elimination of the ' Beneš spirit ' ", but that no decisions had yet been taken. " My colleague," writes Coulondre, " in reporting the conversation to the Foreign

[1] For a fuller account of these transactions based on documents offered in evidence at the Nuremberg Trial, see below, pages 406-12, essay on " The Ides of March, 1939 ".

Office, said in conclusion that Berlin still hesitates what line to adopt . . . but I am not certain that the declarations of the State Secretary still square with the actual facts." [1] According to a report of the interview cabled by the Berlin Foreign Office to the German Ambassador in London, " Henderson stated that he neither meant to make a *démarche*, nor create the impression of his Government meddling in this matter. Predominant German interest in Czechoslovakia is acknowledged (*stehe fest*). Also British Press had shown greatest restraint. But it would be fatal if impending visit of . . . Stanley . . . coincided with application of force against the Czechs." Then follow Weizsäcker's explanations and assurance that " legitimate German claims would be enforced in a decent manner " ; " Henderson concluded by repeating acknowledgment of predominant German interest in Czech territory (*im tschechischen Raume*) ".

[1] Henderson thus reports the interview and its sequel in his *Failure of a Mission* (pages 203-5) :

> I went to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the Monday morning and adjured the State Secretary to see that nothing was done to violate the Munich Agreement or to upset the Stanley-Hudson visit. I found Weizsäcker completely non-committal, and all that he could assure me was that whatever was done would be done in a " decent " manner. . . .
>
> I left the Wilhelmstrasse . . . filled with the gloomiest forebodings. I tried to comfort myself with the State Secretary's assurance about " decency ". . . .
>
> The Czech Government was alone in a position to save itself by its action. After my conversation with Weizsäcker, I accordingly saw the Czech Minister, and once again urged him . . . to propose to his own Foreign Minister, Chvalkovsky . . . an immediate visit to Berlin. . . . When not only Chvalkovsky, but also President Hacha himself came to Berlin, it was already too late, and the announcement, which was made on the following day, March 14th . . .

Thus Sir Nevile Henderson, as usual, finds grounds for blaming the Czechs : he saw Weizsäcker on Monday, March 13th ; after that he repeated his wholesome advice which, if acted upon immediately, might have saved the situation ; it was " too late " when " on the following day, March 14th . . ." But, as appears from the French Yellow Book, Nos. 57 and 63, and the German White Book, No. 258, Henderson's interview with Weizsäcker took place on the 14th, and not on the 13th : the story breaks down on closer examination.

Meantime an ominous campaign had started in the German Press and broadcasts: the hackneyed stories reappeared of atrocities committed against harmless, helpless Germans — "*Blutbad*", "Marxist plot at Prague", etc. Another German coup was clearly imminent, but the Czechs in their utterly defenceless condition could not think of resisting. For some time past the "decent" Weizsäcker had carefully avoided all contact with the Czech Minister in Berlin; and on March 13th, Ribbentrop instructed the German Embassy in Prague to give no reply to any written communication they might receive from President Hacha, and "to make a point of not being available if the Czech Government wants to communicate with you during the next few days". It was now decided in Prague that President Hacha and M. Chvalkovsky should proceed to Berlin and try to reach some settlement; but the enquiry whether such a visit would be welcome seems, in fact, to have crossed a summons from Hitler. They left Prague late in the afternoon and arrived in Berlin at 10 P.M. Miss Hacha, who accompanied her father, was given a bouquet of flowers from Ribbentrop at the railway station, while a box of chocolates from Hitler awaited her at the hotel. Hacha's talks with Hitler, Göring, Ribbentrop, etc., started at one o'clock in the morning and lasted till 4 A.M.[1] He was told from the very outset that there was no question of negotiating, that he had to accept decisions already formed, and sign a document of surrender which had been prepared beforehand, that Prague would be occupied the next morning (German motorised detachments had in fact already crossed the Czech border and occupied the vital district of Moravska Ostrava and Vitkovice); and that if the least resistance was offered, the most terrible destruction would be wrought in Prague by the *Luftwaffe* (a forecast of

[1] For the German Minute of the talk with Hitler, see below, pages 413-15.

Warsaw, Rotterdam, and Belgrade). Hacha fainted, and was given injections; pleaded that he could not take decisions of such gravity without the assent of his Government, and was ordered to obtain it over the telephone; and he finished by signing a statement that after "the serious situation" had been examined "with full frankness", the two sides agreed to aim at "safeguarding calm, order, and peace in that part of Central Europe".

> The President of the Czechoslovak State has declared that, in order to serve that aim and to achieve a final pacification, he places, with full confidence, the destiny of the Czech people and country into the hands of the Führer of the German Reich. The Führer has accepted that declaration. . . .

In the afternoon of March 15th Hitler entered Prague and hoisted the Nazi flag from the Hradchin. A chapter closed in the history of Czechoslovakia, and also of Europe. "*La Tchécoslovaquie a vécu*", wrote Coulondre. And Churchill said at Waltham Abbey, on March 14th: "Not until the Nazi shadow has been finally lifted from Europe — as lifted I am sure it will eventually be — not until then will Czechoslovakia and ancient Bohemia march once again into freedom".

But what became now of the guarantee, or promise of a guarantee, given to the Czechs at Munich? In the House of Commons, on March 15th, Chamberlain, having acknowledged that there has been "a moral obligation to Czechoslovakia", went on to say:

> . . . His Majesty's Government have endeavoured to come to an agreement with the other Governments represented at Munich on the scope and terms of such a guarantee, but up to the present we have been unable to reach any such agreement. In our opinion the situation has radically altered since the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia. The effect of this declaration put an end by internal

> disruption to the State whose frontiers we had proposed to guarantee and, accordingly, the condition of affairs . . . which was always regarded by us as being only of a transitory nature has now ceased to exist, and His Majesty's Government cannot accordingly hold themselves any longer bound by this obligation.[1]

Equally remarkable in that debate was Sir John Simon's account of what had happened to the guarantee : having summed up " the central tragic thing " in a dictum attributed to Herr Goebbels — " the State of Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist " — he put it forward as an " obvious point " that " in that situation it was indeed impossible to suppose that a guarantee to maintain the State of Czechoslovakia could have any meaning at all ". In these clever explanations the Munichers reached their nadir.

[1] But this was Halifax's view of the " internal disruption ", stated in the House of Lords on March 20th :

> I find it impossible to believe that the sudden decision of certain Slovak leaders to break off from Prague, which was followed so closely by their appeal for protection to the German Reich, was reached independently of outside influence.

CHAPTER III

RE-ALIGNMENTS
(March–April 1939)

The Aftermath

The occupation of Prague was the logical result of the Munich surrender: in March 1939 the first-fruits of September 1938 were garnered. "This is only a beginning," declared the notorious Streicher on the night of March 15th, addressing the officers of the Nuremberg-Fürth garrison. "Far greater events will follow. The democracies may throw their weight about: in the end they will succumb."

On the 16th Hitler issued a decree establishing "the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" which was "to exercise its sovereign rights in consonance with the political, military, and economic interests (*Belangen*) of the Reich"; [1] in other words, was to have no sovereign rights. The "Protector" residing at Prague, and working with the Gestapo, the S.S., the German armed forces, the *Sudetendeutsche*, etc., was henceforth master of the Czech provinces; and Baron von Neurath was chosen for the post.

Slovakia had proclaimed her "independence" on March 14th, and Hungary and Poland hastened to recognise it; they hoped to gain a footing in the country, and to keep out the Germans. But the same day on which the Czech "Protectorate" was established, Mgr. Tiso "begged" the Führer to take Slovakia under his care, and a week later a formal German-Slovak Agreement

[1] In Halifax's speech of March 20th, the German word *Belangen* was wrongly translated as "importance".

was concluded ; Germany guaranteed the " independence " and territorial integrity of Slovakia, and acquired the right to maintain military establishments in a specified zone in which " the German armed forces shall exercise rights of military jurisdiction " ; Slovakia's army and foreign policy were placed under German direction.

The " Ukrainians " of Carpatho-Russia similarly proclaimed their " independence " and asked for German protection. But to them no answer was vouchsafed — theirs was to be a " Republic for a Day ".[1] It was hinted to Count Csaky, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, during his visit to Berlin (January 16th–18th), that, should Czechoslovakia be broken up, Germany would not oppose Hungary seizing Carpatho-Russia. On the 14th the Magyars, having in an ultimatum to Prague demanded the withdrawal of the Czech garrisons, invaded the province, and occupied it after a few fights with the Ukrainian bands, which had previously distinguished themselves in bullying and ill-treating helpless pro-Russians, Jews, and Czechs.

The Nazis had been " merely awaiting a favourable opportunity to finish the work begun at Munich, and to deal the *coup de grâce* to a State which, mortally wounded, was struggling with inextricable internal difficulties ", wrote Coulondre from Berlin on March 16th. And again on the 19th :

> Though a direct challenge to world opinion in perfidy, cynicism, and brutality, the *coup de force* whereby the Third Reich has wiped Czechoslovakia off the map of Europe cannot by itself be considered a break with the general line pursued by German policy since last autumn, or even as a deviation from it. . . . The Germans understood — or pretended to understand — that at Munich France and Great Britain had wished above all to prevent a recourse

[1] On Carpatho-Russia during that period see Michael Winch, *Republic for a Day* (1939).

to force, but that for the rest they were resigned to Germany's will prevailing in regions where neither Paris nor London could effectively intervene.

The Munich Agreement, completed by the Anglo-German and the Franco-German Declarations, meant in the eyes of Germany her right to organise Central and South-Eastern Europe as she wished, with the tacit approval, or at least the connivance, of the Western Powers. For months past, this view was flaunted daily by the great, officially inspired, German newspapers, as was repeatedly shown in despatches from this Embassy. I myself more than once noticed this state of mind in Herr von Ribbentrop and Herr von Weizsäcker, both of whom expressed a certain surprise whenever I stated that France, as a European Great Power, expects to be consulted in all that pertains to Europe, and that on this point there must be no mistake or misunderstanding. Yet the misunderstanding did exist. Members of the German Government did not fail to stress on all occasions that Central Europe was a region with which, as the Führer himself said in his speech of January 30th, " the Western Powers had no legitimate concern ".

But had Paris held the same language as Coulondre? " M. Bonnet ", wrote M. Łukasiewicz, the Polish Ambassador, on December 17th, 1938,[1] " is a weak man, incapable of strongly espousing any cause, and he tends to adapt himself in turn to any person he talks to." France is since Munich " like a defeated army, unable to disengage itself from the pursuing enemy. . . . She is too feeble to break with her international engagements, and too feeble firmly to stand by them. Chaotic and resigned, she yields beforehand a defeatist assent to anything that may happen in Eastern or Central Europe." " Signs abound that should . . . France be called upon to discharge the obligations arising from her alliance with us, attempts will be made to wriggle out of them rather than

[1] *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3.

to perform them " ; it would almost seem as if she was " not far off from consciously playing a double-faced game towards us ". " French policy treats the British alliance alone as an asset, but her alliance with us and her pact with Soviet Russia as liabilities which are reluctantly avowed." What then could be the French attitude towards the helpless remnant of Czechoslovakia ? " From what M. Bonnet has told me," wrote Łukasiewicz, " Herr von Ribbentrop obtained an assurance that France will not oppose Germany's economic expansion in the Danube basin ; and he must further have gained the impression that neither will political expansion in that direction meet with firm action on the part of France."

Had Henderson warned Hitler that Great Britain was not indifferent to the further fate of Czechoslovakia, and expected him to abide by the settlement which he himself had decreed at Munich ? No case-book has been published of " applied appeasement ". But Henderson mentions Hitler telling him, at the banquet of March 1st, 1939, " that it was not Britain's business to interfere in Central Europe ", and adds : " I had heard it all before " — he does not register having ever dissented from such significant and courteous pronouncements. Indeed, Henderson's *Failure of a Mission* lends credibility to the German Minute of his interview with Weizsäcker on March 14th : in this he appears solely concerned with good relations being preserved between Great Britain and Germany.

Did Chamberlain or Halifax ever utter a warning ? There can be no certainty on this point until the relevant British documents are published. But on February 1st Chamberlain hastened to welcome Hitler's Reichstag speech of January 30th, with its brutal, menacing remark that the Western Powers " had no legitimate concern " with Central Europe — " I very definitely got the impression," said Chamberlain, " that it was not the speech

of a man who was prepared to throw Europe into another crisis." Nor is there any trace of a rejoinder to the sinister German Note of February 28th. The makers of the Munich Agreement preferred not to probe prematurely into differences in interpretation for fear of seeing their make-believe founder: ambiguity is the soul of appeasement.

Even after the Germans had entered Prague, Chamberlain's first inclination was to avoid blaming Hitler. The end of Czechoslovakia "may or may not have been inevitable," he said in Parliament on March 15th,[1] "and I have so often heard charges of breach of faith bandied about, which did not seem to me to be founded upon sufficient premises, that I do not wish to associate myself to-day with any charges of that character." But he could not maintain this position: in the Press, in Parliament, in the Cabinet itself, indignation was rising; public opinion was moved. The German Ambassador in London, Herr von Dirksen, cabled on March 17th that since the preceding day "a stiffening has occurred in official and Parliamentary circles". "Chamberlain's moderation is strongly attacked within his own party, and his position seems to have suffered in the last few days. Differences of opinion between Chamberlain and Halifax, occasionally noticeable in the past, are becoming more patent, Halifax recommending a sharper attitude." And the next day he reported: "The adherents of the sharper course, especially Lord Halifax, who is entirely under the influence of the Foreign Office, have prevailed in the Cabinet". Naturally not even a publication of documents will reveal the attitude of the Foreign Office — this cannot be fully established till the files, with the notes on their "jackets", are open to inspection. But most people acquainted with the Foreign Office will endorse

[1] Sir Archibald Southby, one of Chamberlain's staunchest adherents, improved on this in the same debate: Czechoslovakia "collapsed, as it was bound to collapse; and it collapsed from within".

the compliment which Dirksen has unwittingly paid them: it is borne out by the fact that Chamberlain preferred not to employ diplomatic members of the Civil Service in some of his unfortunate diplomatic transactions.

On March 15th the text of President Hacha's surrender was officially communicated to the Western Powers by the Germans, with a notification of the entry of German troops "to restore order in the Czech territory". When Dirksen presented it, Halifax, according to the German report,[1] "expressed regret that the events of the last few days should have produced fresh unrest and concussions, and interrupted the incipient process of general appeasement". There was renewed uncertainty concerning German intentions. "For the time being it was impossible to proceed with the visit of the President of the Board of Trade, Stanley, to Berlin, and to complete the general economic settlement, from which so much had been hoped." Dirksen replied with a discourse which blamed "the Versailles Powers" for having created "the impossible State-compound of Czechoslovakia", indicted the Czechs, etc.; and declared that "anyhow there was no connexion between those events and German-British trade relations".

In Berlin Göring "professed the utmost indignation" that the Stanley-Hudson visit "should be cancelled for such a trifle!"[2]

Chamberlain begins to React

On March 17th Chamberlain addressed a meeting at Birmingham. He had intended to talk on subjects of

[1] There is no reason to accept it as full and reliable, seeing that many German reports can be proved to be misleading, but as so far the British Minute of the interview has not been published, the necessary means for correcting Dirksen's report is lacking.

[2] See Henderson, *Failure of a Mission*, page 213.

home policy, but " the tremendous events which have been taking place this week in Europe had thrown everything else into the background. . . . Public opinion in the world has received a sharper shock than has ever yet been administered to it, even by the present régime in Germany." He tried to make amends for his speech of the 15th : information then was " only partial ; much of it was unofficial ". There had been no time " to digest it, much less to form a considered opinion upon it ". (Henderson's, so far unpublished, wires may indeed have been " partial " — but in Paris the official information available was sufficient : see Yellow Book, Nos. 56-70 ; and, if the fault was Henderson's, how could time have enabled the Government to " digest " what was lacking ?) That day he had had to confine himself to " a very restrained and cautious exposition. . . . And, perhaps naturally, that somewhat cool and objective statement gave rise to a misapprehension . . . that . . . my colleagues and I did not feel strongly on the subject. I hope to correct that mistake to-night."

But first Chamberlain devoted about one-fourth of his speech to protesting (too much) about Munich ; and he remarked in the middle : " Really I have no need to defend my visits to Germany last autumn. . . ." He appealed to faltering Munichers : " The facts as they are to-day cannot change the facts as they were last September. If I was right then, I am still right now." And as if to renew the bond, he expressed his " grateful thanks " to all those who had then written to him " from all over the world to express their gratitude and their appreciation " of what he had done. He went on to assert that no one could " possibly have saved Czechoslovakia from invasion and destruction ", and that even after a victorious war " never could we have reconstructed Czechoslovakia as she was framed by the Treaty of Versailles " (a passage duly selected for reproduction in the German White

Book). He recounted how at Godesberg " Herr Hitler . . . speaking with great earnestness . . . repeated . . . that this was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe, and that he had no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than German ". Chamberlain had therefore considered himself justified in hoping for appeasement " once this Czechoslovakian question was settled " — now, without consulting the fellow-signatories, Hitler has " taken the law into his own hands. Before even the Czech President was received, and confronted with demands which he had no power to resist, the German troops were on the move. . . ." And here a new note was sounded : " Who can fail to feel his heart go out in sympathy to the proud and brave people who have so suddenly been subjected to this invasion, whose liberties are curtailed, whose national independence has gone? . . . What has become of the assurance ' We do not want Czechs in the Reich ' ? " [1] (And what, one might add, has become of that Munich guarantee from which Czechoslovakia, after having been reduced to a condition in which she " had no power to resist " new German demands, was to have derived " a greater security than she has ever enjoyed in the past " ? It was forgotten even by the new Chamberlain, enlightened and indignant.) A little further there is another passage in the speech which has been picked out for reproduction in the German White Book : the methods were objectionable in the unpleasant surprises which Germany had previously sprung upon the world — Rhineland, *Anschluss*, Sudetenland — but in each case, according to Chamberlain,

> whether on account of racial affinity or of just claims too long resisted — there was something to be said

[1] When, two days earlier, Dr. Dalton spoke of the " brutal invasion of that once free and happy model democracy in Central Europe ", some Hon. Members, unnamed in *Hansard*, shouted " Oh ! " — the Munichers' last (public) kicks at Czechoslovakia.

> for the necessity of a change in the existing situation.
>
> But the events which have taken place this week in complete disregard of the principles laid down by the German Government itself seem to fall into a different category, and they must cause us all to be asking ourselves : " Is this the end of the old adventure, or is it the beginning of a new ? "

England will now turn to her partners in the British Commonwealth of Nations and to France ; and, no doubt, " others, too, knowing that we are not disinterested in what goes on in South-Eastern Europe, will wish to have our counsel and advice ".

This passage suited the Germans : it morally justified Hitler's previous *coups* ; and next, it showed Britain preparing to resist Germany — which, to the German mind, is inherently wicked. But in the middle of a passage of 340 words reproduced in the German White Book, there were these thirteen conveying an unpleasant truth : " in complete disregard of the principles laid down by the German Government itself " ; and so, to avoid staining the White Book, they were replaced by a few dots.

Late, very late in the day, Chamberlain announced that " we are not disinterested in what goes on " in countries even more distant than that of which, half a year earlier, we knew " nothing ". Still, while he declared that Britain would resist to the utmost an attempt at world domination, should such a challenge be made, he was " not prepared to engage this country by new unspecified commitments operating under conditions which cannot now be foreseen ". Even this restriction was soon to be dropped in a headlong plunge ; to quote Churchill : the Government " turned round over the week-end ".

On March 17th Henderson informed Weizsäcker that he had been summoned home " to report ". The same

day, both Henderson and Coulondre were instructed to protest against the measures notified in the German communication of March 15th. Coulondre called at the Wilhelmstrasse in the morning of March 18th, and, in the absence of Ribbentrop, saw Weizsäcker. The French Note declared the German action " a flagrant violation of the letter and spirit " of the Munich Agreement ; pointed to the circumstances in which the Czechs had given their consent ; and stated that the French Government were unable to recognise " the legality of the new situation created in Czechoslovakia by the action of the Reich ". Before receiving the Note, Weizsäcker asked to be informed of its contents, and then refused to entertain a French protest concerning Czechoslovakia ; he begged Bonnet would reconsider the matter. Coulondre persisted ; invoked diplomatic usage and the right of France to make known her attitude ; especially as a solemn act, signed by the two Governments, was in question. Weizsäcker now alleged that in December Bonnet had told Ribbentrop that Czechoslovakia would never again form " the object of an exchange of view ". Coulondre denied there being anything in the Declaration of December 6th, " however widely interpreted, recognising an eventual suppression of Czechoslovakia " ; and recalled its " consultation clause ". Weizsäcker argued Czech consent ; Coulondre spoke of *duresse*. Finally Weizsäcker " declared that he took the Note as if it had been sent to him through the post, but he feared that the French Government would regret this *démarche* ". Bonnet, in a despatch of March 19th, hotly denied having declared to Ribbentrop his further *désintéressement* in Czechoslovakia : Herr von Weizsäcker had not been at their conversation ; only M. Léger and Count Welczek had been present.[1]

[1] But they had not been present at all the conversations. Pertinax writes in his book, *Les Fossoyeurs* (1943), vol. II, p. 112, that Bonnet had two private talks with Ribbentrop : " one at the Hôtel Crillon, and the other

The British Note must have borne a very similar character, Henderson having been instructed to declare that His Majesty's Government regarded " the events of the past few days as a complete repudiation of the Munich Agreement ", and the changes effected in Czechoslovakia as " devoid of any basis of legality ".[1] It was delivered on March 18th, at midday, and Henderson left Berlin the same night ; Coulondre, the next day. Russia, too, lodged a sharp protest, and the United States declared that they would maintain the diplomatic status of the Czech representatives. The Germans immediately replied to the Western Powers, in a public statement, that " the Reich Government is not in a position to accept such protests as they are devoid of any political, legal, or moral basis ".

Germans would feel it derogatory to their " sense of honour " if they ever missed giving a retort : there must be one, however far-fetched and irrelevant. On March 18th Dirksen duly journeyed to the Foreign Office to inform Halifax that he, too, had been summoned home " to report ", and he lodged a protest : against " the vulgar abuse of the Führer ". For once the Press was merely mentioned ; the show-piece of the complaint was a speech delivered by Mr. Duff Cooper " without the Speaker intervening, or a member of the Government repudiating it ". Dirksen's own report unconsciously conveys how bored Halifax was in having to listen and to reply to the German's zealous and learned arguments ; finally he said that he would report to the Prime Minister. " I replied ", writes Dirksen, " that I, too, would report

at the Louvre, having offered to show him over the Museum. No one will ever know their secret ." Similarly Noël, *op. cit.* page 279 : " The reflections on foreign politics will never be known which the two Ministers may have exchanged in a conversation which they had in private before Ribbentrop's departure. . . ."

[1] Halifax's instructions to Henderson, dated March 17th, 1939, were among the documents presented at the Nuremberg Trial.

to my Government the gist of our conversation."

The recall of the German Ambassadors in London and Paris to report in Berlin is " not a mere formality ", but expresses mistrust of the British attitude, wrote on March 20th the *Deutsche diplomatische Korrespondenz*, which was understood to reflect closely the views of Ribbentrop. Veiled threats now appeared in the Berlin Press that the Naval Agreement with Great Britain would be denounced.

Chamberlain had intended to spend March 18th — his seventieth birthday — in Birmingham. But on Friday the 17th, M. Tilea, Rumanian Minister in London, informed Halifax that apprehensions were caused in Bucharest by the threatening attitude of Herr Wohltat, the head of the German economic mission, which was negotiating there a new trade agreement. He also saw the Secretary for War and the First Lord of the Admiralty : it was apparently feared that the Germans might continue their advance to the East, and invade Rumania. Tilea's alarms seem to have been unfounded. The German Chargé d'Affaires in London reported, on March 19th, " from a reliable source ", that Tilea had acted on his own initiative, that he was " most sharply reprimanded " by his Foreign Minister, M. Gafenco, " and, at the end of a lengthy and stormy telephone conversation, was directed to issue a denial ". Tilea may have acted without instructions from Gafenco ; but King Carol is supposed occasionally to have taken a hand in foreign affairs. Be that as it may, in the tense and anxious atmosphere of those days, the Rumanian scare helped to stir the late appeasers into action — " even if there is no menace to Rumania ", said Halifax on March 20th, or if it " has not to-day developed ", there is ground for " the gravest misgivings ". A Cabinet was summoned for Saturday the 18th, and sat two and a half hours. Before it Halifax had asked the French and Russian Ambassadors to call on him, and enquired from M. Maisky what the Soviet

Government would do if Rumania were subjected to an unprovoked attack. Russia replied the next day by proposing a conference to be immediately convened at Bucharest, at which the Powers most directly concerned—Great Britain, France, Russia, Poland, Rumania, and Turkey — would consider the question of German aggression: the U.S.S.R. was obviously prepared to co-operate provided it was satisfied that the Western Powers meant business. The Russian suggestion was, however, declined by the British Government as " premature " ; it was apparently feared that the procedure might prove too slow, and that such a conference, unless properly prepared, might end in failure.

On March 21st a British Memorandum (published in the Polish White Book) proposed as a first step against a possible German policy of domination,

> that, the French, Soviet, and Polish Governments should join with His Majesty's Government in signing and publishing a formal declaration, the terms of which they suggest be on the lines of the following[1]:
>
> " We, the undersigned, duly authorised to that effect, hereby declare that inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interest and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European State, our respective Governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action."

This Declaration " should be followed by an examination by the signatories of any specific situation which requires it, with a view to determining the nature of any action which might be taken ". Other Governments were not to be approached " before the four Powers are agreed on

[1] " I drafted the formula myself ", wrote Chamberlain ; see Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, page 403.

the declaration ". But the fact of such a proposal having been made was published immediately, probably as a warning to Germany.

In Berlin it was received with a show of indifference and scepticism. Small nations associating themselves with it would " commit an act of suicide " ; a system of collective security could not be revived. The Germans were on velvet. On March 16th the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* wrote :

> We reckon calmly with an ideological offensive ensuing from the latest developments. . . . The liquidation of Czechoslovakia signifies a perfectly clear increase in power for the Great-German Reich. . . . In the Skoda Works one of the greatest arms plants in the world has come under German control. . . . Germany has now taken a mighty step forward which puts into cloudy uncertainty the day, hoped for by London and Paris, when armaments parity or superiority could be attained.

And Coulondre reported on the 19th :

> An official of the Ministry of Propaganda seems to have summed up accurately the state of mind of the Nazi leaders in a remark made to one of our compatriots : " We have before us so many open doors, so many possibilities, that we no longer know which way to turn, or what direction to take."

From Warsaw, Noël wrote on the 16th :

> Is the action which Germany has taken in Central Europe the prelude for further operations in the West or in the East ?
>
> In Warsaw, the second hypothesis is looked upon as likely.
>
> Germany's dissatisfaction with Poland is manifest. . . .
>
> Herr von Moltke does not conceal from his colleagues his ill-humour which does not spare M. Beck. . . .

While the German intrigue in Slovakia was developing, Lipski, for three days, March 11th–13th, asked in vain for an interview with either Ribbentrop or Weizsäcker.[1] On the 13th at night, he met by chance General von Keitel at a reception given by the Minister Herr Kerrl, and told Keitel that, " despite German activities so immediately affecting Poland ", he had been unable " to make contact with the German Government ". Keitel promised to intervene with Ribbentrop — but without result. On March 14th German troops seized Vitkovice and Moravska Ostrava in the eastern corner of Moravia, moving rapidly towards the Carpathian passes which lead into Slovakia — Göring subsequently, in a talk with Henderson, excused that " advance occupation " as having been " effected solely in order to forestall the Poles who, he said, were known to have the intention of seizing this valuable area at the first opportunity ".[2] On the 15th Ribbentrop went with Hitler to Prague — and the Polish Ambassador was still kept waiting, out of touch with the German Foreign Office. On the 16th Lipski saw Göring, as acting Head of the State, and lodged a protest; Göring, who had only just returned, interrupting his holiday in Italy, professed a touching innocence. On Saturday, the 18th, Lipski left for Warsaw, in this case truly " to report ".

In Poland, the German advance into Slovakia, and the negotiations for a German protectorate over the country, were causing profound dismay. While the Polish Government realised that Munich had converted the Czech provinces into a German dependency, and acquiesced in the change, they regarded Slovakia as within their own sphere of influence, possibly to be shared by the Magyars.

[1] On March 11th even Attolico, the Italian Ambassador, was unable, as he told Lipski, to get at Ribbentrop or Weizsäcker, and, to cover himself, wired to that effect to Mussolini.

[2] Henderson to Halifax, May 28th, 1939. This despatch, which deals with Henderson's visit to Karinhall on the 27th, is one of his three communications prior to August 23rd, 1939, published in the Blue Book.

Moreover, Beck still thought, in terms of 1934, of parity in a working partnership between Poland and Germany ; he used to boast : " Things that concern us cannot be decided without us ". The Munich Conference, from which Poland was excluded, had deeply hurt his self-esteem, and he had vented his resentment in rudeness to the British and French Ambassadors, and in forcible action against stricken Czechoslovakia. But what was happening now was a direct threat to Poland, and produced consternation in the Polish General Staff and the Army : by entering Slovakia, the Germans outflanked Poland from the south, and turned whatever defensive line she might still have hoped to hold in the west, after having, insanely, allowed the Czech bastion to be destroyed by the Germans. And all this was done without a word to the Polish " treaty partner ", and without the Polish Ambassador receiving even the barest minimum of the attention to which his diplomatic position and rank entitled him.

Memel

But a minor German larceny was to be perpetrated before Poland was ushered into her seat as object of Hitler's anger and of his surgical fancies. At Munich he had assured Chamberlain that he did not mean to interfere in Memel. But in March Memel reappeared in the German Press as a black spot of anti-German " cruelties ". The Lithuanian Foreign Minister, M. Urbsys, returning from Rome to Kaunas, arrived in Berlin on March 19th, and the next day, accompanied by the Lithuanian Minister, M. Skirpa, called on Ribbentrop ; only Urbsys was admitted. Here is the account of the interview given by Sir Samuel Hoare in Parliament on March 22nd :

> As regards Memel, I understand that the Lithuanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was

> recently in Berlin, received while there the demand from the German Government for the immediate cession of Memelland to the Reich, coupled with the threat that in the event of any resistance or any application for support elsewhere, the matter would no longer be dealt with diplomatically, but in a military sense. This demand amounted to an ultimatum and the Lithuanian Government were required to take a decision on it within approximately four days, but they were assured that if it were accepted, no further demands would be made of them. I also understand that this demand has now been accepted.

The next day the *Völkischer Beobachter*, with typical veracity and charm, described this account as a " downright lie ". But what had happened was even worse : Urbsys was bidden to cede Memel forthwith ; and when he pleaded incompetence to do so, Ribbentrop told him (as he had told Hacha) to obtain the consent of his Government over the telephone. Urbsys refused ; and, as a concession, was given the ultimatum reported by Hoare. Warned not to apply " for support elsewhere ", the same afternoon he communicated the facts to Great Britain, France, and Poland (but not to Russia) through their Military Attachés in Berlin, avoiding the normal diplomatic channels : he added that the attitude of the Lithuanian Government would depend on what aid they could expect. He left Berlin on March 20th ; returned in a German aeroplane on the 22nd ; was ceremoniously received at the airport (like Hacha at the railway station), and was invited to proceed, as *Reichsgast*, to the Adlon ; he declined, and went to the Lithuanian Legation. At 6 P.M. a meeting with the Germans, headed by Weizsäcker, opened at the Foreign Office, in a room adjoining Ribbentrop's. The Germans were elaborately courteous, but refused to admit any changes in their text of the " Agreement " ; when Urbsys tried to argue he was asked to

speak to Ribbentrop in the next room. The "Agreement", signed at 1 A.M. (with ceremony, spotlights, and clicking of cinema cameras), was designed to secure "friendly relations between the two countries"; it starts with the declaration that "the Memel territory, severed from the Reich by the Treaty of Versailles, is this day reunited with the German Reich", promises Lithuania a free zone in Memel, and ends with an undertaking by both parties "not to use force in their mutual relations, nor encourage its use against either by a third party". Henceforth the Germans overflowed with "generosity" towards Lithuania, hoping to find in her, because of Vilna, an ally against Poland: another Slovakia on her northern flank.

Even before the "Agreement" was signed, Hitler, at the head of the German navy, sailed for Memel; it is said that on the trip he was violently sea-sick, and that this hardened his determination to obtain from the Poles an overland connexion with East Prussia. "The news of the entry of German troops into Memel, and of the Chancellor's demonstrative voyage . . . along our coast", writes Lipski in his *Final Report* of October 10th, 1939, "was as great a surprise to Polish public opinion as the German entry into Slovakia had been." They felt outflanked and outwitted.

Back to Danzig

Even before the Memel affair was settled, Ribbentrop reopened that of Danzig. Lipski was invited, returned immediately from Warsaw, and on March 21st, at noon, called on Ribbentrop. The tone of Ribbentrop's discourse, according to Lipski's *Final Report*, "departed considerably from that in which matters . . . had been discussed in the past, and was distinctly coercive". Both White Books report the conversation without serious divergencies.

There were excuses from Ribbentrop that the " headlong course of events " concerning Czechoslovakia had prevented him from keeping foreign representatives in Berlin properly informed, the usual story about the nature of that crisis, and a reference to the settlement of the problem of Carpatho-Russia which, he assumed, must have given " the greatest satisfaction in Poland " ; there were complaints about the Polish Press, about the anti-German demonstrations in Warsaw during Ciano's visit (February 25th–27th), about the Polish attitude on the Minorities Committee which had failed to reach agreement, and an assertion, ascribed to Hitler, that a poster in a Danzig café forbidding entry to " Poles and dogs ", which had produced demonstrations by Polish students, had been their own work (Lipski vigorously denied it). There was sparring over historic and ethnic rights, and over claims to gratitude ; Poland, said Ribbentrop, owed her resurrection in part to Germany's victory over Russia, and her Western frontiers to Germany's bitterest misfortune — defeat in the World War ; Lipski talked about the attitude and understanding which, since 1934, at crucial junctures his country had evinced towards Germany, often in trying circumstances. But all these arguments, and others which are hardly worth recounting, were mere debating points, decorative and meaningless. Lipski's chief complaint was about the situation which Germany had created in Slovakia.

> I pointed to our long frontier with Slovakia. I indicated that with us the man in the street would not understand why the Reich had assumed a protectorate over Slovakia, this being directed against Poland. I said emphatically that this question was a serious blow to our relations.

Ribbentrop pressed the proposals first made in October 1938, and repeated with growing urgency in January

1939.[1] Danzig was to be incorporated in the Reich ; an extra-territorial railway and road were to be conceded across the Polish Corridor ; and the understanding between Germany and Poland was to be given an explicit anti-Soviet character. After their relations had thus been put on a satisfactory basis, the question of Slovakia, and also Poland's participation in guaranteeing [2] that State, might be considered (*man könnte darüber sprechen*, were Ribbentrop's words). The bold and unique initiative of the Führer, who on these terms was prepared to leave the Corridor to Poland, was stressed by him once more ; and a threat was added : there should be no delay — the Führer was puzzled by the Polish attitude in a number of problems — " it was essential that he should not be given the impression that Poland simply refused ". Ribbentrop suggested that Beck should come to Berlin ; the Führer desired an exchange of views. Lipski should go to Warsaw to report. When asked about the talk with Urbsys, Ribbentrop gave an evasive reply.

Lipski supposed that Ribbentrop meant to secure Polish neutrality " during the Memel crisis " ; further, that Ribbentrop's suggestion of a talk with Beck

> and his emphasis on its urgency are proof that Germany has resolved to carry out her Eastern programme quickly, and so desires to have Poland's attitude clearly defined.
>
> In these circumstances the conversation acquires very real importance and must be carefully considered in all its aspects.

A report of it was immediately despatched through a secretary of the Embassy, and on March 23rd Lipski returned to Warsaw for consultation and instructions.

[1] See above, pages 39-40 and 53-7.

[2] That " guarantee " might possibly have changed into a partition of Slovakia between Germany, Hungary, and Poland ; see below, pages 415-416.

The Germans seem to have entertained curious illusions about the way in which Poland would react to their blackmail. A document marked " Information given to the Supreme Commander of the Army by the Führer on 25 March, 1939 ", and offered in evidence at the Nuremberg Trial, contains the following paragraphs on the " Danzig Problem " :

> " L. will return from Warsaw on Sunday, 26 March. He was commissioned to ask whether Poland would be prepared to come to some terms with regard to Danzig. The Führer left Berlin during the night of 25 March, he does not wish to be here when L. returns. R. shall negotiate at first. The Führer does *not* wish, *though*, to solve the Danzig problem by the use of force. He would not like to drive Poland into the arms of Great Britain by doing so.
>
> A military occupation of Danzig would have to be taken into consideration *only* if L. gives a hint that the Polish Government could not take the responsibility towards their own people to cede Danzig voluntarily and the solution would be made easier for them by a *fait accompli*.

But the Poles, instead of asking Hitler to help himself to Danzig without exacting their formal consent, replied by a partial mobilisation of troops in its neighbourhood — which evoked the wrath of Hitler and Ribbentrop.

In Search of Collective Defence

On March 21st President Lebrun and Bonnet arrived for a three-days visit to London. The proposed Four-Power Declaration was discussed. France accepted the suggestion ; Russia, provided both France and Poland did ; but no reply had yet come from Warsaw.

> Poland's position is admittedly difficult [wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* of the 23rd]. The Polish Government, as is well understood, are

> reluctant to prejudice even their present uneasy state of truce with Germany except in return for a clear and tangible offer of co-operation from the other Powers. The draft declaration in their view hardly seems to go far enough. . . .

Perhaps even Russia's conditional assent was prompted by the conviction that Poland would refuse to join in so vague a declaration.

> Countries which are in daily fear of invasion [wrote Mr. Vernon Bartlett in the *News Chronicle* on March 22nd] are not much comforted by the suggestion that in the event of another act of aggression, all the signatories of the proposed declaration should consult together. . . .
>
> There is, in fact, a suspicion in many embassies and legations that all this talk about a strong line is not much more than an attempt to silence criticism by a show of activity on the part of Ministers. . . .

The proposal of a Four-Power Declaration was presented to the Polish Foreign Office by Ambassador Sir Howard Kennard on March 21st. Beck was laid up at home. The British Memorandum, immediately taken to him, was received with mixed feelings. Prompt action of momentous importance was required. His aim, in a dangerously tense European situation, was to preserve Poland's (seeming) freedom of action, and to continue the non-stop acrobatic performance of balancing between Germany and Russia: an understanding with Britain was welcome if it could be used as a steadying make-weight, not if it were to bring him down on one side. Beck had not lost hope of an arrangement with Hitler. He thought in terms of diplomatic moves and counter-moves, and paid insufficient attention to military problems, on which, in Poland's geographical position, discussion would have had to centre had he seriously envisaged war.

Discussion of concerted resistance to Germany was bound to raise the problem of Russian-Polish relations.

The Chamberlain Government, with their anxieties sharpened by Memel, Rumanian rumours, and rumours fostered by military concentrations on the German-Polish frontier, admitted the need of Russia's co-operation; yet they let themselves be diverted from a policy so novel to them. The Poles argued that to bring in Russia at this stage would provoke Hitler (when close co-operation between the Western Powers and Russia could alone have restrained him), and they greatly overrated their own military strength, and underrated that of Russia; and so did the British Government.[1] Moreover, the Poles understood that, faced by a reconstituted Triple Entente, they would become subordinate to Russia — a position which appeared unbearable to them, and was not devoid of danger, especially while they held Ukrainian and White Russian territories. In the *Observer* of March 26th, the diplomatic correspondent aptly summed up the situation: Poland means to preserve her neutrality between Germany and Russia, and "no Russian army could be welcomed on Polish territory, for no matter what purpose"; France wishes the Western Powers to restrict their commitments "to German aggression in the West";

[1] Mr. Arthur Krock thus reports, from American diplomatic sources, a talk between Ambassador Kennedy and Lord Halifax on March 24th, 1939 (see "How War Came: Extracts from the Hull File", in the *New York Times Magazine*, July 18th, 1943):

> Lord Halifax believed that Poland was of more value to the democratic tie-up than Russia because his information showed the Russian air force "to be very weak, old and short-ranged", the army "poor", and its industrial background "frightful". . . . The most that could be expected from Russia, assuming that Russia wanted to be of help, would be "some ammunition to Poland in the event of trouble", and Lord Halifax thought it possible that Rumania might join with Poland in a fight against Germany.

Similarly Count Raczyński, Polish Ambassador in London, reported in his despatch of March 29th that Kennedy had told him "that the British Government attach greater importance to collaboration with Poland than with Russia, and anyhow treat that collaboration as the pivot for further possible action" (see *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3).

Russia argues " that the peace of Europe now depends on Anglo-Russian relations ", and that the two countries should fully commit themselves to military action against German aggression wherever it occurs.

On March 23rd Beck sent instructions to Count Raczyński for a reply to the British proposal of a Four-Power Declaration (it was presented in a Note the next day). Seeing the " unavoidable difficulties and complications, and consequent waste of time, involved in multilateral negotiations ", and " the very rapid pace of events ", he enquired whether the British Government would not consider concluding immediately with Poland " a bilateral agreement in the spirit of the proposed declaration " ; " such an agreement would not prejudge the fate of further general negotiations ", and as Poland had an alliance with France, and Britain an *entente* with her, it would accord with the policy of both.

The Polish counter-proposal was meant to keep out Russia : so much is visible even in Beck's cautious and plausible instructions. But *le dessous des cartes* — unvarnished Polish reactions to the British proposal, and Polish feelings about co-operation with Russia — appears in a despatch of March 29th,[1] in which Łukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, reports to Beck what, on the 24th, he had said to his American colleague, Mr. Bullitt. He had started by explaining that he had not seen either the British Memorandum of March 21st or the Polish reply (an amazing nescience in so important an Embassy, yet credible under Beck); but that the British move seemed to him " at least three parts calculated for inner consumption ".

[1] *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3. The copy of the despatch photographically reproduced in the collection does not bear Łukasiewicz's autograph signature. It is explained that this is a carbon copy, but on its front page appear various office marks and initials, among them those of Count Szembek, then Polish Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

It is childishly naive, and also dishonest, to invite a State in Poland's position to compromise its relations with a neighbour so powerful as Germany, and expose the world to the disaster of war, to suit the home policy of the Chamberlain Government. It would be still more naive to suppose that the Polish Government will not see through this manœuvre and its consequences.

Further, it is supremely rash to start such action publicly, and give prominence to the participation of Soviet Russia, which disfigures the political physiognomy of the group of States called upon to collaborate, and also the purpose of their action. To seek ostentatiously the collaboration of Russia, in a form and scope answering exclusively the needs of British home policy, creates wrong appearances, and suggests that this is not a mere question of securing States threatened by the new technique of German policy, but also an ideological fight against Hitler, and that the aim is not peace, but revolution in Germany. Whoever knows the old and firmly established principles of Polish policy cannot suppose that the Polish Government could fall in with the frivolously dangerous political moves of Mr. Chamberlain.

As " the experience of the last twenty years has shown that neither England nor France has ever lived up to any of their international obligations ", continued Łukasiewicz, " and have not even been able properly to defend their own interests ", no one will take their proposals seriously unless they are ready to imperil their own relations with Germany.

The British initiative — rash, frivolous in form, and incomplete in substance — places the Polish Government before the alternative of compromising their relations with Germany or of failing in their negotiations with London. In the first case Hitler may feel compelled to apply to us pressure to which we shall be forced to react by war. A European conflict will ensue, and in its first stage French and

> English indecision will expose us to the impact of Germany's entire force. Our whole war industry will be endangered, or even lost. This will, at the very outset, create the worst possible conditions for us, and also for France and England. If, on the other hand, negotiations with London fail, this will be for Hitler proof of the insincerity and weakness of English and French policy, and will encourage him to further aggression in Eastern and Central Europe, which, sooner or later, will result in the catastrophe of war. It is therefore childishly criminal to throw on Poland the responsibility for peace or war. It should be understood, once and for all, that this responsibility rests principally on France and England, whose policy, either nonsensical or ridiculously weak, has led to the present situation and events. Should the British Government fail to understand this, a European war, and possibly a world war, is inevitable, and that soon, for the choice of time is with Hitler.

Bullitt, according to Łukasiewicz, was much impressed, asked him to repeat his argument, and the next day informed him that, making use of special powers, he requested Kennedy to go and repeat it all to Chamberlain, emphasising Britain's responsibility in the matter ; and on March 26th Bullitt is stated to have received a telephonic report of that talk. But when on the 28th Raczyński, on instructions from Warsaw, enquired of Kennedy " about the talk which he was reported to have had recently with Chamberlain about Poland ", Kennedy " seemed taken aback, and declared categorically that there had been no such talk of any special significance. At the same time, in a way contradicting his statement, he expressed dissatisfaction with his colleagues in Paris and Warsaw ' who cannot fully appreciate the position in England as he can ', but speak about it with so much assurance ". Raczyński adds that rumours were circulating among journalists that Kennedy had, in fact,

talked to Chamberlain about Eastern Europe a few days before.[1]

The Polish Reply to Germany

On March 25th Lipski returned to Berlin with instructions from Beck, of which the substance was to be presented to Ribbentrop in a memorandum.[2] He saw Ribbentrop on Sunday, March 26th, and the talk, of a decisive character, lasted an hour and a half. "The Polish Government, now as in the past," says the memorandum, "set great store by the maintenance of lasting good-neighbourly relations with the German Reich." In 1933 "they were one of the first foreign Governments to adopt a friendly attitude towards the Third Reich"; and they assumed "a positive attitude" towards the National-Socialist Senate in Danzig. During the five years 1934–1939, Poland "steadily avoided joining in activities directed against the Reich"[3] (a hint at Barthou's plan for an Eastern Pact, and Litvinov's pursuit of collective security). The historical survey closes with a flourish about the Czech crisis, similar to that in Beck's instructions of October 31st, 1938[4] (it is again omitted in the Polish White Book):

[1] *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3. See Raczyński's despatch of March 29th.

[2] There are some divergences between the text of identical passages in the (rather poor) English translation of Beck's instructions published in the Polish White Book, and the Memorandum printed in the German. Polish communications to the German Government were usually in Polish, but a German translation was appended. The German text of the Memorandum was supplied by Lipski, and ranks therefore as an original document.

[3] This statement is formally correct: the Poles were averse to collective action against Germany planned in conjunction with Russia. But on three occasions, in March and November 1933, and again in March 1936 (over the re-militarisation of the Rhineland), they suggested to France armed action against Germany. While Pilsudski's initiative in 1933, though authentic, cannot be easily documented, Beck's move in 1936 was made in a regular declaration to Noël, which was repeated in Paris, and confirmed in writing.

[4] See above, page 43.

> Finally, it is well known that in the autumn of 1938 Poland's determined attitude greatly contributed to preventing an armed contest in connexion with the carrying through of the German demands.

Turning to the claims against Poland, Beck declared her readiness to make liberal concessions with regard to " facilities in road and rail transit between Germany and East Prussia ", but of a purely technical character — there must be no infringement of Polish sovereignty : hence " extra-territoriality for lines of communication cannot be considered ". The problem of Danzig has to be settled by an understanding between Warsaw and Berlin, the League of Nations no longer being fully able to discharge its obligations in that matter : he proposed a joint Polish-German guarantee for Danzig securing " the free development of the German *Volkstum* and of its inner political life ", the rights of its Polish population, and Poland's " economic, maritime, and transit interests ". He stressed the need for an early consideration of these problems.

> I request you [Beck instructed Lipski] to add orally, and with some emphasis, that Marshal Pilsudski explicitly stressed to me that the method of handling the Polish-Danzig problem would be a touchstone of Polish-German relations. I ask you to add that you would be grateful if this opinion were brought to the Chancellor's notice.

As for a meeting with Hitler, Beck feared that without " a previous elucidation of the above-mentioned questions ", it might do harm rather than good ; moreover, in view of Germany's unconcerted action in Slovakia and Lithuania, " the general atmosphere demands clarification. . . ."

This it was to receive, unmistakably, through Ribbentrop's talk with Lipski. " Herr von Ribbentrop gave me a distinctly cold reception ", writes Lipski ; and Ribben-

trop's minute, while in substance it tallies with Lipski's, deliberately aggravates the asperity of the interview. Having read the Polish Memorandum, he declared that he saw in it " no basis for a German-Polish settlement " ; and he re-stated the German demands. " M. Lipski replied ", writes Ribbentrop, " that it was his painful duty to point out that any further pursuit of these German plans, especially regarding a return of Danzig to the Reich, would mean war with Poland." Nothing in Lipski's report suggests such language — what was Ribbentrop's purpose in ascribing it to him ?

> Next [states Ribbentrop] I called attention to the reported Polish troop concentrations, and warned Ambassador Lipski of the possible consequences. The Polish attitude seemed to me a strange reply to my recent offer for a final German-Polish appeasement. If things continued to move in that direction, a serious situation might soon arise. I wished to inform him that, *e.g.*, an infringement of Danzig territory by Polish troops would be treated by Germany as on a par with an infringement of the Reich frontiers.
>
> Ambassador Lipski emphatically denied any Polish military designs against Danzig. The troop movements were of a purely precautionary character.
>
> I then asked him whether the Polish Government would not, when things have calmed down, consider the German proposals anew. . . . Ambassador Lipski gave an evasive answer, and referred me again to the Memorandum.
>
> I replied . . . that I would report to the Führer. Most of all I was anxious to avoid suggesting to the Führer that Poland simply refused.

Lipski notes that Ribbentrop spoke excitedly about Polish " mobilisation measures ", and recalled " similar risky steps taken by another State (obviously he was thinking of Czechoslovakia) ". He argued that the German demand for extra-territorial lines of communication could not be

treated in merely technical terms : the " painful separation of East Prussia from the Reich must find such an accommodation as would secure the desired psychological effect " through a " kind of corridor within the Corridor ", " a German-owned link between East Prussia and the Reich ". As for Danzig, nothing short of reincorporation in the Reich would satisfy Germany.

The next day, March 27th, at Ribbentrop's request, Lipski called again. The interview is mentioned in Lipski's *Final Report*, and a minute of it by Schmidt (who was not present) appears in the German White Book. Ribbentrop launched out on the ominous theme of " excesses " against *Volksdeutsche* — but the inculpating report from the German Passport Office at Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) is not in the German White Book (which includes at least 150 documents about the " sufferings " of the Germans in Poland, often of the most trivial character). Something of its contents can be gathered from a despatch sent by the Wilhelmstrasse to the German Ambassador in Warsaw : there had been demonstrations at Bromberg, inciting speeches, cries against Hitler, demands for Danzig and Königsberg — " the Polish police succeeded with difficulty in protecting German property from the violence of the excited crowd " (so they did protect, and did succeed). Ribbentrop now " called the Polish Ambassador to account ", stated that " these new outbreaks had produced a catastrophical impression in Germany ", taxed the Polish authorities with connivance, deplored this turn in German-Polish relations, and stressed that the Polish Government would be held " strictly responsible for such events ". Lipski offered to enquire into the matter, and remarked that similar demonstrations against Poland had occurred in Germany. Ribbentrop sharply retorted " that so far all provocations had come from the Polish side " ; and when Lipski asked

" whether a few words of ' appeasement for both nations ' could not be found ", Ribbentrop repeated his allegation, adding that when " the German Press starts answering the Polish attacks — and soon it will hardly be possible to stop them — they will do so thoroughly ". In short, a Press campaign, such as regularly presaged German territorial demands and armed aggression, was officially signalised : and its connexion with the *impasse* reached the previous day was indicated.

> The Reich Foreign Minister concluded that he could no longer understand the Polish Government. The generously planned (*grosszügig*) German proposal had been refused. The proposal submitted yesterday by the Polish Ambassador could not possibly be regarded as a basis for settling the problem. The relations between the two countries were therefore suffering severe deterioration.

Lipski, according to the German minute, promised " to do all he could to master the difficulties ".

On March 28th the German Ambassador, von Moltke, was, in turn, sent for by Beck, who made a formal statement on behalf of the Polish Government. To Ribbentrop's declaration " that Polish aggression against the Free City of Danzig would be regarded by the Reich Government as an aggression against Germany herself ", they replied that " any intervention by the German Government aimed at changing the *status quo* in Danzig will be regarded as an aggression against Poland ", and that any similar attempt by the Danzig Senate would produce an immediate reaction on the part of Poland. Still, the Polish Government did not intend " committing any act of violence against the Free City ", and considered that its fate should be settled by agreement between the Polish and German Governments. So far the Polish and the German minutes of the interview agree in substance. But all that the Polish adds is a skirmish :

THE AMBASSADOR : " You want to negotiate at the point of the bayonet ! "

M. BECK : " That is your own method."

Moltke, on the other hand, reports that he complained of Polish " mobilisation measures ", of the war-atmosphere engendered by them and heightened by the Press and propaganda, and of the " unheard-of excesses at Bromberg and Liniewo ", and that he received rather conciliatory replies — though " Beck spoke of the impression which was growing on him of our standing at a turning-point in German-Polish relations ".

Thus both Ribbentrop and Beck recorded, with pride and pleasure, smart *dicta* of their own : the Germans started their usual " war of nerves " (which would have failed even had the Poles realised their hopeless military situation) ; and the Poles meant to show that they could not be intimidated, but would call the " German bluff ".

RUMOURS, FEARS, AND THEIR *DÉNOUEMENT*

The German demands put forward on March 21st and 26th amounted to an ultimatum with its date of expiry unnamed.

> . . . the Polish Government [writes Lipski in his *Final Report*] not wishing to increase the tension, and desirous of leaving the way open for further conversations, preserved silence about the subject of the conversations in March.

It was from Hitler's speech of April 28th that the Polish public first obtained certain knowledge of what had happened — after a month of official secretiveness in Warsaw, and of semi-publicity in Berlin through Press leakages and rumours, calculated to arouse anxiety without as yet forcing the issue.[1] When towards the end of

[1] In the speech at Wilhelmshaven, on April 1st, Hitler did not mention Poland.

March, German reports circulated in Warsaw that the Speaker of the Polish Diet, in a meeting of the Government Party, had admitted the existence of Hitler's demands, they were authoritatively denied.[1] Indeed, the Polish Government went so far in its reticence as to conceal even from France the nature and result of the Ribbentrop-Lipski talks.

On March 27th the French Consul in Danzig reported to Bonnet having heard from an " authoritative German source that a voluntary retrocession of Danzig to the Reich formed the object of negotiations between Berlin and Warsaw, which are not, however, likely to succeed " ; and the next day he obtained confirmation from the office of the Polish High Commissioner. On the 28th M. de Montbas, Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin, reported that negotiations were still being carried on " in the greatest secrecy ". On the 30th M. de Vaux Saint-Cyr (who replaced Montbas) wrote :

> Polish circles in Berlin do not hide their opinion that the situation which has arisen over Danzig is very serious, and that the tension between the Reich and Poland may become extremely grave overnight. Most members of the Embassy and of the Polish colony have already sent away their wives and children, Polish students in Berlin have returned to their country, and, according to some of our agents, the consuls are said to have received orders to burn the secret papers in their archives.

He further correctly reports Ribbentrop's demands for Danzig, extra-territorial lines of communication, and an " elucidation of Poland's attitude towards the Axis ", but erroneously adds a frontier rectification in the Oderberg district. Thus the French were left at first to pick up scraps of news, and to guess ; and when they obtained more authoritative data, it was " from Polish Embassy

[1] See Warsaw despatch in *The Times* of March 30th, 1939.

circles in Berlin ", not by way of official communications from the Polish Government.[1]

Concealment *vis-à-vis* Paris precluded frankness in London.[2] Even when Beck arrived in England early in April, and Halifax asked him about the German demands, he gave evasive and inconclusive answers, although by then the British Press had, from German sources, ascertained Hitler's terms.[3] Possibly Beck hesitated to go on record about these anywhere; not even Raczyński did he inform about them — his own Ambassador had to elicit the facts from him in conversation. Beck was probably loath to admit the failure of his policy, and he meant to continue negotiations with Hitler, allowing or inducing the Western Powers to play into his hand but without showing it to them. He may have feared that knowledge of Poland's danger might affect his position with them, or frighten them away, or make them urge concessions on

[1] How poorly the French were informed about German-Polish negotiations is also shown by Noël, French Ambassador at Warsaw, reporting the following as news on April 30th, 1939: " One of my colleagues has learnt from one of M. Beck's closest collaborators that last September, January, and March, the German Government proposed in Warsaw collaboration directed against the U.S.S.R." And again on June 22nd Noël wrote from Warsaw: " It is now three months since Germany put her demands to Poland. . . ." Obviously even then he did not know of what had passed between Hitler and Beck on January 5th. In his book *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne*, he complains of Beck's habitual secretiveness; see below, page 438.

[2] On May 4th, after Hitler had disclosed the nature of his demands, Sir Arnold Wilson asked the Prime Minister " whether the terms of the proposals made by the German to the Polish Government relating to the Polish Corridor and Danzig, and the Polish Government's intended reply thereto, were known to the British Government before the recent guarantee was offered to Poland?" Chamberlain replied that " H.M. Government were of course aware of the general subjects on which exchange of views had taken place between the two Governments, and of the attitude that each Government was disposed to adopt. . . ." Translated into plain terms, this evasive answer merely stated that the British Government were aware of Danzig and the Corridor being subjects at issue between Germany and Poland.

[3] And when Halifax asked him what he thought would be Hitler's next objective, Beck replied, obviously with his tongue in his cheek: the Colonies.

him, or cause them to restrict their own commitments concerning Danzig and the Corridor. Such fears (if entertained) were ill-founded as far as Britain was concerned ; yet his silence, by evoking equally groundless apprehensions in London — that Poland was negotiating with Germany under extreme duress and might capitulate — helped him, in an unexpected manner, to win the first round. During these crucial weeks, in which the realignments took shape, Poland became the pivot of British policy, while Russia faded out of the picture.

After the proposals for a multilateral conference or declaration had been allowed to drop, London settled down to await Beck's arrival. "The ironic situation was reached yesterday," wrote the *Observer* on March 26th, "that the discussion of the proposal for immediate action is postponed for ten days." "Growing importance is attached to the forthcoming visit of Colonel Beck . . ." wrote the *Manchester Guardian* on March 29th. "The Anglo-Russian discussions have been interrupted not because there is any hitch . . . but because . . . matters of more immediate urgency have to take precedence. Discussions between London, Paris, and Warsaw are, it is held here, at the moment all-important." And the *Daily Mail*, on the same day :

> It is quite clear that at this stage Soviet Russia is not being sought as a partner in the contemplated alliance. Apparently the British Government will be content to obtain complete Anglo-French co-operation as a first step, followed, it is hoped, by a new defensive alliance between Poland and Rumania that will jointly resist German aggression if either is attacked. If Poland and Rumania agree to this course, there will be a far-reaching Four-Power anti-aggression pact which Soviet Russia and others may be invited to join at a later stage.

The next day Vernon Bartlett wrote in the *News Chronicle* that the reluctance of Poland, Rumania, and Yugoslavia

to enlist Russia's help " is undoubtedly an important factor in delaying the development of a system of collective defence " ; but he did not believe that the British Government intended leaving her out, " though it may not be pursuing a very tactful course in keeping Russia so assured ".

Chamberlain, when urged in the House to " maintain the closest possible touch and co-operation " with Russia, replied that " the Government are in touch with the Government of the Soviet Union " — the difference between question and answer can hardly have been accidental. And he would, at times, treat the question of including Russia in the peace pact " as though " — to quote Lloyd George — " it were a matter of placating the Labour Party " rather than one of first-rate military importance. A new scheme was being evolved : Poland and Rumania were to provide the wall against German aggression (and Russia was snugly to shelter behind it). But would the two stand firm and united ? This was the besetting concern of British diplomacy in the last week of March. The diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote on March 28th : " Yesterday, Count Raczyński . . . called at the Foreign Office with the object, I gather, of denying reports that Poland was in negotiation with Germany on certain of Berlin's alleged demands ". Had Poland given in, the other, smaller, States of East-Central Europe could not have stood up to Germany. The courage, determination, and also the rashness of the Poles were underrated in London : there was as little likelihood of their meekly surrendering as of their correctly appraising forces and chances. Clear-headed, determined statesmanship and a lead were required from Great Britain — but a motion tabled in the House of Commons, on March 28th, by 34 Members (31 of them Conservatives, including Churchill, Amery, Duff Cooper, Brendan Bracken, Eden, Law, Macmillan, Wolmer, etc.)

and calling for a " National Government on the widest possible basis ", passed unheeded.

On March 28th, after Lipski's third talk with Ribbentrop, the semi-official *Deutsche diplomatische Korrespondenz* adopted a menacing attitude towards Poland, and so did some leading provincial papers. Tension was developing rapidly and reports appeared in the British Press of " heavy troop movements on the Polish frontier, notably Silesia ", which " raised misgivings about Germany's intentions towards Poland ", and even fears of a German invasion " within the next few hours ". On March 29th a full Cabinet was suddenly summoned, sat for nearly three hours, and met again the next morning. That day Sir Howard Kennard called on Beck :

> During this conversation [states the Polish Minute] the Secretary of the British Embassy in Warsaw, Mr. Hankey called, bringing Sir Howard an instruction from his Government to ask the Polish Government whether they had any objection to a British Government guarantee to meet any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces. Mr. Chamberlain would propose to make a declaration on the subject in the House of Commons the next day, March 31st.
>
> M. Beck informed Sir Howard that the Polish Government fully accepted the British Government's proposal.

A singular scene ! The Ambassador has come to discuss the Polish Note of March 24th, when one of his officials brings him an announcement which marks a revolution in diplomatic history — and indeed in diplomatic technique. It was the first of the guarantees sent home on approval. Beck made up his mind (as he himself told a friend) between two flicks of the ash off his cigarette. He then communicated by telephone with President Mościcki

and Marshal Smigly-Rydz, and accepted the offer [1] — apparently the Cabinet were not consulted.

The same night the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy [2] sat in London, and again the next morning, March 31st. The leading newspapers carried reliable forecasts of the declaration which the Prime Minister was expected to make: that Britain was determined to go to war, if need be, in resistance to new acts of aggression, and that the guarantee was intended to cover both Poland and Rumania. It being Friday, the House met at eleven, and Mr. Greenwood, acting leader of the Opposition, asked a question about the European situation, alluding to "the wild rumours which are floating round". Chamberlain replied that "they are not confirmed by any official information . . . and the Government must not be taken to accept them as true" (not "accepted", they were acted upon). He would make a statement on the adjournment. At 2.55 P.M. Chamberlain, after reiterating that "there should be no question incapable of solution by peaceful means", declared that, even before certain consultations with other Governments were concluded,

> in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

He was authorised to add that France stood "in the same position in this matter".

[1] See Noël, *op. cit.* page 323.

[2] Its composition was never made public, as responsibility for policy rests with the whole Cabinet. But it is not difficult to guess who were its members: the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, two late Foreign Secretaries who now held other offices (Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare), and presumably the Service Ministers — certainly the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary for Air.

Did Britain guarantee the integrity of Poland's Western frontier, or only her independence? and if the frontier, did this include Danzig? The interpretations supplied by various newspapers reflected their own wishes and policy, but aroused anxiety in Warsaw lest the guarantee be used to urge concessions on Poland. On Saturday Raczyński called at the Foreign Office, which issued a communiqué expressing surprise "that attempts should have been made in London to minimise the Prime Minister's statement", which is "of outstanding importance" and "perfectly clear and categorical". The significant sentence was added: "The Polish Government will wish to keep His Majesty's Government fully informed, although the latter do not seek to influence the Polish Government in the conduct of their relations with the German Government". In Moscow the exclusive attention paid to Poland and Rumania produced coolness — though, according to the *Izvestia*, a policy of collective security could still "count on the full support of the only country which bears no responsibility for Munich"; in Warsaw there was studied silence about relations with Russia; in London an answer from Rumania was awaited — Tilea was about to return, and was expected to bring the desired reply.

On April 3rd the guarantee to Poland was debated in Parliament. Chamberlain quoted its description in *The Times*: "a cover note issued in advance of the complete insurance policy". While the Government's action was generally approved, Churchill, Sinclair, and Greenwood emphasised the importance of obtaining Russia's adhesion, and Lloyd George asked what were without her the means for implementing the pledge? "If war occurred tomorrow, you could not send a single battalion to Poland." Nor could France, faced by fortifications far more formidable than in the last war. What then was to happen to the Poles, brave but much inferior to the Germans in

numbers, and still more in vital equipment? Russia alone could reach them, and she alone had an air-fleet to match the German.

> I cannot understand why before committing ourselves to this tremendous enterprise, we did not secure the adhesion of Russia. . . . We have undertaken a frightful gamble. . . . If Russia has not been brought into this matter because of certain feelings the Poles have that they do not want the Russians there, it is for us to declare the conditions, and unless they are prepared to accept the only conditions under which we can successfully help them, the responsibility must be theirs.[1]

The same day, Halifax, in the House of Lords, explained that certain circumstances had seemed "to suggest the possibility of dangerous developments in the relations between Germany and Poland", and the British Government, while not accepting the rumours "as true", in order to "stabilise the situation", had given the advance pledge to Poland. Further:

> His Majesty's Government are fully alive to the importance of the attitude of the Soviet Government, and attach value to good relations with them. We are bound, however, to have regard to the fact that the relations of some States with Russia are complicated by particular conditions, though . . . so far

[1] A different view, at that time widely held in London, was voiced by the diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, when on March 23rd he described Poland's co-operation as more important than that of Russia. "Poland is on the spot and has a very fine Army. . . . She has been constantly underrated as a military Power. . . ." And on April 5th: "The immediate object of British foreign policy is a defensive alliance between Great Britain, France, Poland, and Rumania. This . . . will . . . be, so to speak, the 'inner group'. . . . But it is confidently hoped that there will be an 'outer group' . . . of friendly Powers who will at least observe benevolent neutrality, these Powers being the Soviet Union, Turkey, Greece, and Yugo-Slavia. . . . To force a Russian alliance on the Poles might ruin the work that has been done, work of the most delicate nature and so far very successful. A Polish-Russian alliance is in fact an impossibility. . . ."

as His Majesty's Government are concerned, these difficulties do not exist.

How far had Russia been kept in touch with these developments of British policy? Sir John Simon stated in the House of Commons, on April 13th, that the Soviet Ambassador had been told on March 29th "that we had to recognise that it was useless to pursue the idea of a Four-Power Declaration," and he was given "a provisional outline of the new course we were contemplating, which would involve us [*sic*] giving assurances, together with France, to Poland and Rumania". On the crowded day of hasty decisions, March 30th, nothing was said to Maisky; and it was only after the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, on the morning of March 31st, that Halifax acquainted him with the impending declaration (which was by then a *fait accompli* and common knowledge) "and asked him whether the Prime Minister could say in the House of Commons that afternoon that the Russian Government would associate itself with the guarantee of Britain and France. But for this unexpected situation the Ambassador, not unnaturally, had no instructions."[1] None the less, a few hours later Chamberlain had no doubt "that the principles upon which we are acting are fully understood and appreciated" by the Soviet Government.

Beck arrived in London on April 3rd. The visit had been suggested by the British Government as far back as February, and was announced in Parliament before Prague. Its original purpose was to improve Anglo-Polish relations, somewhat strained since October 1938, and to exchange views on Danzig (Halifax was the League *rapporteur* about it). Now the visit assumed a different significance. There were conferences and receptions, Beck was courted and fêted, taken to Portsmouth, etc.

[1] See Hugh Dalton, *Hitler's War. Before and After* (March 1940), pages 113-14.

The British declaration of March 31st was to be replaced by an Anglo-Polish agreement.

When before Beck's departure the question was discussed by him with President Mościcki and Marshal Smigly-Rydz of making the British guarantee reciprocal, it was decided that before this was done they should be consulted once more. Beck, however, from the outset had favoured reciprocity — as he put it, to him " alliance sounded better than guarantee " ; besides, he supposed that Britain would prefer it ; while Mościcki's main objection was to a public agreement liable to increase still further the tension in Polish-German relations. Lipski, who joined Beck's train at Frankfort-on-Oder and travelled with him to Berlin, warned him that a very sharp reaction was to be expected from Hitler to an Anglo-Polish Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which would therefore require very careful drafting ; he suggested that Poland's counter-guarantee to Great Britain should be hitched on to the Franco-Polish Treaty of Alliance which Hitler had accepted as being in existence when the German-Polish Pact was concluded in 1934. But when in London, in the discussions of April 4th to 6th, the question of making the guarantee reciprocal was raised by the British Ministers, Beck repeatedly assured them that this had from the first been the intention of the Polish Government, it being " the only basis that any self-respecting country could accept " ; and on the 5th he stated that he was fully authorised to declare that the guarantee between Great Britain and Poland, in the event of a direct attack, was reciprocal. Once Beck had made up his mind to give the guarantee, it was in his style to do so with bravado and a show of " Great Power " consciousness ; and conditions in Warsaw were peculiar : the President, the Commander-in-Chief, and Beck had become totalitarian fixtures, running their respective departments in an understanding, but with a sometimes

disconcerting, independence.[1] After having given the assurance, Beck informed Warsaw about it and received *ex post* the approval of his two colleagues. His argument was that the new agreement was merely complementary to the Franco-Polish Treaty,[2] and that, having found the British Government ready to enter into permanent and far-reaching co-operation with Poland, he had " in the higher interests of the State " to assume the responsibility and clinch the matter. But in fact, having done so, he himself was not without misgivings : the agreement was a new and serious departure in his policy.

The following account of the Anglo-Polish conversations, framed jointly with Beck, was given by Chamberlain in the House of Commons on April 6th, the day before Beck left London :

> The conversations with M. Beck have covered a wide field and shown that the two Governments are in complete agreement upon certain general principles.
>
> It was agreed that the two countries were prepared to enter into an agreement of a permanent and reciprocal character to replace the present temporary and unilateral assurance given by His Majesty's Government to the Polish Government. Pending the completion of the permanent agreement, M. Beck gave His Majesty's Government an assurance that the Polish Government would consider themselves under an obligation to render assistance to His Majesty's Government under the same conditions as those contained in the temporary assurance already given by His Majesty's Government to Poland.
>
> Like the temporary assurance, the permanent agreement would not be directed against any other

[1] The Cabinet hardly existed as a governing body, and even the Prime Minister was not invariably informed of the most important decisions. Of the men outside the triumvirate, M. Kwiatkowski, the Minister of Finance, probably carried the greatest weight and was most frequently consulted.

[2] That line of argument was followed by Arciszewski, under instructions from Beck, in his talks with Moltke in May 1939 ; see below, page 174.

country, but would be designed to assure Great Britain and Poland of mutual assistance in the event of any threat, direct or indirect, to the independence of either. It was recognized that certain matters, including a more precise definition of the various ways in which the necessity for such assistance might arise, would require further examination before the permanent agreement could be completed.

It was understood that the arrangements above mentioned should not preclude either Government from making agreements with other countries in the general interest of the consolidation of peace.

" Colonel Beck ", wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* of April 6th, " explained his Government's reluctance to enter into any closer agreements with Soviet Russia, first, because they had no wish to antagonise Germany, secondly, because they were chary of having troops carrying the Red Star in Poland. At the same time there seems to have been a hint that Poland would have nothing to say against a move towards closer contacts, were they suggested, between Great Britain and Russia." And further : " From the Polish side it is learned that Rumania was much discussed ". The British Government were still always haunted by the fear of a German invasion of Rumania (though clearly this would have implied joint action with Hungary, hence a partition of Rumania, which would have brought Russia into the picture, and impaired Germany's chances of obtaining what she wanted — Rumanian wheat and oil) ; and they seem to have still pursued the idea of giving a general character to the Polish-Rumanian alliance, which was only against Russia : [1] but Poland would not endanger her good

[1] M. Gafenco, Rumanian Foreign Minister, 1938–1940, in his book, *Les Derniers Jours de l'Europe*, relates that M. Potemkin, Soviet Deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, during his visit to Bucharest early in May 1939, asked him whether the Polish-Rumanian Alliance was *erga omnes* or against the Soviets alone. " I told him the truth : the text of the Treaty

relations with Hungary and Italy for the sake of Rumania, nor Rumania her relations with Germany for the sake of Poland. And so the scheme of the Polish-Rumanian wall collapsed. In appearance the outcome of Beck's London conversations was highly satisfactory ; in reality a great deal remained unsaid which called for plain and open speaking.

At Weizsäcker's request Lipski called on him on Thursday, April 6th, in the afternoon. The reports of the talk in the two White Books substantially agree. Lipski said he had as yet no detailed information about the London talks but was acquainted with their basic principles. Poland was signing nothing contrary to the Polish-German Declaration of 1934, she was not joining any bloc, merely concluding a bilateral defensive pact.[1] Weizsäcker replied that he no longer understood Poland's policy — instead of seizing with joy Hitler's magnanimous offer, " which would not be repeated ", she had resorted to sabre-rattling ; if the Press reports about the London talks were correct, he failed to see how they could be squared with the Agreement of 1934. He thus hinted that the " offer " would be withdrawn, and that an Anglo-Polish Pact would destroy the German-Polish Agreement. Otherwise the conversation ran in well-worn grooves. " In short," boasts Weizsäcker, " I gave with unconcern the obvious replies to Lipski's phrases ; and then we parted."

Beck left London on April 7th and passed through

was conceived in general terms, but the military convention annexed to it envisaged solely the case of a Soviet attack." But the Rumanian Government, added Gafenco, was willing to extend it to all possible contingencies. From Bucharest Potemkin proceeded to Warsaw, and there put the same question to Beck who, according to Gafenco, refused any extension of the treaty with Rumania, pleading Polish regards for Hungary.

[1] At that time Lipski knew merely the bare facts concerning the decision arrived at in London ; but the assurance that Poland " was not joining any bloc " (aiming, in conjunction with Russia, at an " encirclement " of Germany) was henceforth a standing argument on the Polish side. See again talk between Arciszewski and Moltke in May 1939 (page 174).

Berlin without stopping.[1] The German Press, after the anti-Polish campaign at the end of March (intended perhaps to deter Beck from going to London) had during the visit moderated its tone. But now the attack was resumed. The French Chargé d'Affaires reported that Hitler was in a state of constant anger (*le Führer qui ne décolère pas ces derniers temps*). Moltke was in Berlin. Beck, on his return to Warsaw, expressed the wish to see him. He was expected back on the 13th. But on April 24th M. de Vaux Saint-Cyr wrote from Berlin : " Herr von Moltke still awaits the order to return to his post ".

[1] The story reported by de Vaux Saint-Cyr, on April 10th, that Ribbentrop had a personal letter delivered to Beck when he passed through Berlin, demanding the withdrawal of the Polish troops from the German frontier, lacks all foundation. His account of Lipski's talk with Weizsäcker, sent on April 8th, does not contain the main points, and erroneously makes Lipski say that the forces mobilised by Poland did not exceed two army corps. On April 12th Ambassador Noël reported from Warsaw that, in reply to his enquiries, Beck denied that there had recently been a conversation between Lipski and Ribbentrop, and added " that a high official of the Wilhelmstrasse, in the course of a non-political conversation, had confined himself to asking M. Lipski the reason for the military measures taken by Poland ". One wonders how much about the Weizsäcker-Lipski conversation was known in London.

CHAPTER IV

HESITATION AND QUEST

More Aggression and Further Guarantees

On March 23rd, the day on which Lithuania was compelled to surrender Memel, Chamberlain declared in Parliament that the British Government were determined to oppose, by all means in their power, a procedure by which " independent States are subjected to such pressure under threat of force as to be obliged to yield up their independence ". The guarantee to Poland was the first-fruit of the new resolve ; others were to follow. But what good were a multiplicity of guarantees with unsubstantial military backing lavished on second or third-rate Powers ? One wonders, looking back, in which character the Chamberlain Government were a greater menace to their country and its friends — as travellers in appeasement or as insurance brokers ? Bankrupt, they tried to re-start business : a procedure equally inadmissible in politics and in trade. Prestige, insight, and freedom of spirit are required in builders of coalitions : the Munichers were unfit for the work. But, fortunately, so also were the dictators who, while trying to show that the guarantees of the Western Powers offered no security, frightened the smaller nations into accepting them. On April 12th Ribbentrop addressed a circular to German diplomatic missions in Europe, instructing them what language to hold about the Anglo-French " endeavours to encircle Germany and Italy " : one can only be sorry, he said, for States whose Governments let themselves be " ensnared " by England ; any connexion with that system will be looked upon as directed against Germany — the words

should be recalled which the Führer pronounced at Wilhelmshaven on April 1st : " He who declares himself ready to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for those Great Powers must expect to burn his fingers ". Ribbentrop concluded : " In general, I request you to speak about the whole matter with great *nonchalance*, and to stigmatise the anxious bustle of the English in trying to make other States subserve their purpose ".

On April 5th the Chief of the Italian General Staff met the Chief of the Reichswehr at Innsbruck ; on the 6th, Italian warships entered Durazzo harbour ; and on Good Friday, the 7th, the day Beck left London, Italian troops landed in Albania. On the 9th, a personal message from Mussolini was delivered to Chamberlain, who is reported to have replied in a personal letter. On the 12th, an appropriate " Constituent Assembly " offered the crown of Albania to Victor Emmanuel III, " King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia ". In Berlin, Albania was described as no concern of England or France, but its eclipse as a " rebuff to British diplomacy " trying " to force worthless guarantees on Turkey and Greece ".

On April 13th Chamberlain gave an account in Parliament of the invasion of Albania and of the diplomatic transactions of the previous week. Italy had acted counter to the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 16th, 1938, which pledged the two Governments to preserve the *status quo* in the Mediterranean area. Next followed this piece of uneasy self-assertion :

> So far as I am concerned, nothing that has happened has in any way altered my conviction that the policy of His Majesty's Government in signing the Anglo-Italian Agreement a year ago was right. . . . No doubt, some would say that we should now declare that the Anglo-Italian Agreement must be considered at an end. I do not take that view myself. Nobody with any sense of responsibility can in these days lightly

> do anything which would lead to an increase of international tension. . . .

He still hoped that Italy would honour the remaining provisions of the treaty. But two new guarantees, modelled on the one to Poland, were added, this time of a permanently unilateral character.

> His Majesty's Government attach the greatest importance to the avoidance of disturbance by force or threats of force of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean and the Balkan Peninsula. Consequently, they have come to the conclusion that, in the event of any action being taken which clearly threatened the independence of Greece or Rumania, and which the Greek or Rumanian Governments respectively considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Greek or Rumanian Government, as the case might be, all the support in their power. We are communicating this declaration to the Governments directly concerned, and to others, especially Turkey, whose close relations with the Greek Government are known. I understand that the French Government are making a similar declaration this afternoon.

Chamberlain would apparently have concluded his speech without a word about the U.S.S.R. but for an interjection — " What about Russia ? " — which made him eagerly explain that it must not be inferred from his not having mentioned Russia " that we are not keeping in the closest touch with the representatives of that country ". But : " We have to consider, not only what we wish, but what other people are also willing to do ". (This referred foremost to doubts whether Poland and Rumania were willing to be associated with Russia : " We are not concerned merely with the Russian Government ", Chamberlain stated with somewhat greater precision a month later, on May 19th. " We have other Governments to consider.") Churchill insisted that " the full inclusion of Soviet Russia

in our defensive peace bloc " must be the first step in opposing aggression. Sir John Simon, in winding up for the Government, spoke at some length about relations with the U.S.S.R. — he was verbose and inconclusive, and more sweet than candid. When challenged by Dalton whether the Government had " at any time proposed to the Russians a definite military alliance between this country, France, and the Soviet Union ", he replied with a passage explicit only in its evasiveness :

> I had intended, as a matter of fact, to say a word about that. . . . There is no objection on our part in principle to such a proposition at all. These things are not always as simple as they may appear. . . . I do not think, powerful as Russia is, that we ought to concentrate the whole of our gaze simply upon that great Power — we have to remember that there are others even nearer to danger than Russia is. But though I cannot say that that particular proposition has been made . . . the House may take it that the Government is raising no objection in principle to any such proposition.

In short, the Good Samaritan would squint at the mighty, but turn his gaze to those in need and danger.

Again the British Press was remarkably well informed. On the morning of the debate, April 13th, the *Daily Herald* reported the prevalent feeling that " in spite of all advertisement in the Press and in Parliament about ' contacts ', ' close touch ', ' consultations ', etc., which are supposed to exist between London and Moscow, there is . . . no real collaboration " ; flirtations with Mussolini continue, and Russia is under the impression that Great Britain does not mean business.

INTERLUDE

Poland, through her refusal of a Four-Power Declaration and the successful counter-proposal of an Anglo-

Polish Agreement, had effectively checked the incipient Anglo-Russian *rapprochement* produced by Hitler's entry into Prague : and the Poles remained vigilant observers of those relations. In a despatch of April 26th,[1] Raczyński traced their development : Chamberlain's policy aiming at a close collaboration of the two Western Powers with Poland and Rumania precluded closer relations with Russia, and even the French connexion with her was looked upon with disfavour. There was a fleeting change of attitude when on September 26th, 1938, at the height of the crisis, a communiqué issued in London announced that should France, while fulfilling her obligations in Central Europe, become involved in war, Great Britain and Russia would stand by her. After Munich relations cooled off once more. " The British Press ", wrote Raczyński, " devoted much space to the ' Ukrainian problem ', and clearly hinted that that area was not within the sphere of vital British interests. Even Government representatives spoke in this sense." Disappointment over Munich again produced a slight change. But it was superficial : " relations were correct but not cordial, and were meant to be kept so ".

> The Czech crisis in March [Raczyński went on to say] created a new situation. The Soviet proposals for a conference of the interested States, or of those threatened by further German aggression, did not take effect ; similarly the British proposal for a Four-Power Declaration failed for well-known reasons. During this period the two Governments were in comparatively frequent touch, but when the British Government abandoned their own proposal, and decided to give Poland a guarantee, the contacts were broken off, to the great dissatisfaction of the Soviets. Their London Ambassador made it generally understood that he was kept *en écart*, and complained to Opposition Members about it.

[1] *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges*, Auswärtiges Amt, No. 3.

Maisky was informed about the guarantee to Poland on March 31st, only two hours before the announcement in Parliament; and so again of the guarantees to Rumania and Greece on April 13th.

About the middle of April, negotiations were restarted in London and Moscow concerning Russia's part in the new political configuration of Europe. Raczyński continued:

> Undoubtedly England wishes for Russia's participation, but does not want a formal or close connexion. I gather from explanations given me by the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, Cadogan, that France and Great Britain merely wish Russia to declare that in case of war she would adopt a friendly attitude, which would secure the necessary transit, raw materials, etc. This could be done, for instance, through a unilateral declaration of the Soviet Government defining their attitude in case of a German attack against Poland or Rumania. But the Russian counter-proposals aiming at a political treaty of reciprocal aid — be it through an Anglo-Russian Agreement corresponding to that between France and Russia, be it through an Anglo-French-Russian treaty — was, according to Cadogan, unacceptable to Great Britain, and not desired by France. He pointed to practical considerations, and also to the reactions which would be produced in other countries, and named among them Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Spain. At the same time he underlined the difficulties facing the British Government, as they do not want to cause irritation through a negative reply.
>
> The same things were said to Minister Gafenco,[1] who gained here the conviction that the British Government are averse to closer relations with the Soviets. He thinks that the present Anglo-Russian negotiations may miscarry. Thus British policy, which still eschews too clear an anti-German tone,

[1] Gafenco was in London, April 23rd-26th.

tries to avoid a direct linking-up with the Soviets. But the international situation may develop in such a way as to render this line impossible.

Present negotiations meet, therefore, with many difficulties: an additional one arises from the attitude of the Opposition and of a part of the Conservative Party, led by Churchill, who clearly prepare for war and see in Russia a State with great reserves and war potential.

In Polish-German relations the demands and countermoves of March 21st–April 6th were followed by an uneasy, disturbing silence. Lipski remained in Berlin till the 11th, when he was summoned for consultation to Warsaw, but he returned on the 14th; neither before nor after did he see Ribbentrop. Moltke demonstratively stayed away from his post: it was clear that the German Government did not desire further exchanges of views, at least not for the present. Was this a "war of nerves", or due to hesitation as to what line to adopt? — a good deal of the mystery attaching to Hitler's policy at crucial moments arose from indecision. He and Ribbentrop were taken aback when for the first time their blackmail failed to work. Hitler still believed that the Poles could be made to accept his demands and subordinate their foreign policy to his, and he was determined to enforce his will. On April 6th de Vaux Saint-Cyr reports having learnt from a Slovak that the previous day Ribbentrop had said to their Premier, Mgr. Tiso:

> The Führer does not want war. He will resort to it only with reluctance. But the decision concerning war or peace does not rest with him. It rests with Poland. On certain questions of vital interest to the Reich, Poland must give way and satisfy demands which we cannot relinquish. If she refuses, it is on her, and not on Germany, that the responsibility for the conflict will fall.

President Roosevelt's Appeal, Hitler's Speech, and Beck's Reply

In this atmosphere of suspense President Roosevelt addressed on April 15th an identical appeal to Hitler and Mussolini: "There would seem to be", he wrote, "at least a momentary relaxation — because no troops are at this moment on the march", and therefore "this may be an opportune moment for me to send you this message". "The peoples themselves desire that fears be ended. . . . Three nations in Europe and one in Africa have seen their independent existence terminated. . . . Reports, which we trust are not true, insist that further acts of aggression are contemplated. . . . I am convinced that the cause of world peace would be greatly advanced if the nations of the world were to obtain a frank statement relating to the present and future policy of your Government." He enumerated some thirty countries, covering Europe and the Near and Middle East, and asked Hitler and Mussolini to promise not to attack or invade their territory or possessions — ten years being suggested as "a minimum period of assured non-aggression", and twenty-five, "if we dare to look that far ahead". Such assurances he would immediately transmit to the Governments concerned, who would no doubt make them reciprocal. He further declared his readiness to take part in discussions on international trade which would enable every nation of the world "to buy and sell on equal terms in the world markets." But a discussion of complex world problems, he argued, requires an atmosphere of peace, free from threats of force or fear of war.

On April 17th it was announced in Berlin that the Führer would reply to President Roosevelt in the Reichstag which was summoned for the 28th — in order that its members (so Hitler explained in his speech) "might have an opportunity of hearing my address first, and

of either confirming or rejecting it". Again rumours thickened, and to counter them Beck issued, on April 20th, an internal circular " to all Polish Diplomatic Missions abroad ", explaining that the Polish Government, while determined to leave the fullest internal freedom to the German population of Danzig, refused to surrender their own rights, or " put them under the control of a third party ", or to accept any unilateral decision regarding Danzig. About the same time Beck began to speak more frankly to Allied diplomats about Hitler's demands.

On April 20th Halifax announced in the House of Lords that Sir Nevile Henderson, who after Hitler's entry into Prague had been recalled " to report ", would shortly return to Berlin. He did so on the 24th (and Coulondre on the 26th). " Sooner or later ", wrote *The Times* on April 25th, " an end had to be put to an abnormal state of affairs. The Government wished in these vital days to have contact with the German leaders in the direct way that only an Ambassador can request and expect." Chamberlain explained in the Commons, on the 24th, that " no special significance " attached to Henderson's return ; and two days later, that Henderson had " no suggestions or proposals to convey to the German Government, merely to keep them informed as to the developments of British foreign policy ". It was specifically mentioned that the British Government desired to notify the German Government of the impending introduction of the Military Training Bill and to explain the circumstances before the statement on the subject was made in Parliament. But it seems clear that the sudden despatch of the Ambassador was caused by a wish to establish contacts with the German Government before Hitler delivered his speech on April 28th, and it was freely admitted in the Press that Henderson was expected to see Ribbentrop immediately on his return to Berlin.

But Ribbentrop was in no hurry. He came up to town the next day, April 25th — to receive the Finnish Minister of Education ; in the afternoon he went to meet at the Tempelhof airport the Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cincar-Markovitch, who stayed in Berlin till Thursday morning, April 27th ; that day the Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Teleki, and the Foreign Minister, Count Csaky, were due to arrive. Ribbentrop therefore was not to see Henderson till the following Tuesday, May 2nd — for a whole week he could not find time for the British Ambassador. On April 26th Chamberlain, asked in the Commons whether Henderson would have an opportunity of an interview with Ribbentrop before the meeting of the Reichstag, replied : " His Majesty's Ambassador was received by the State Secretary [Weizsäcker] this morning, since it was not possible to arrange an interview with the Minister for Foreign Affairs " ; and in answer to a supplementary question : " I understand that the German Foreign Minister was engaged, on account of the visit of the Yugoslav Foreign Minister ".[1] — The same demonstrative nonchalance was

[1] Henderson, in his *Failure of a Mission*, states that he returned to Berlin on April 25th, and that the immediate purpose of his return was to notify the German Government of the Military Training Bill. He goes on to say (page 221) :

> Before leaving England I was, however, told that I should make no notification until I received from London the exact terms of the announcement. . . . It had been originally proposed in principle to make this announcement on the following Tuesday, April 27th, but, in the event, my instructions did not reach me till the Tuesday night, and were to the effect that the announcement would only be made in the House on the Wednesday afternoon. By this time the intention of His Majesty's Government was an open secret, and I decided, for this and other reasons, that it would be preferable to make the notification to the State Secretary rather than to Ribbentrop himself. I accordingly telephoned, myself, to the State Secretary in the early hours of the Wednesday morning, and told him that I had a communication which I wished to make to the German Government before the afternoon. Baron von Weizsäcker, after remarking that he was aware of the object of my visit, said that he could receive me at midday, and it was to him that the official notification of the intentions of His Majesty's Government was ultimately made.
>
> It would not have been worth while recounting this episode, if the

shown by the German Government in delaying till May 6th the return of their Ambassadors to London and Paris.

Of Henderson's interview with Weizsäcker, on April 26th, only the German account is available,[1] and this cannot be checked until the relevant British documents are published.[2] According to Weizsäcker's minute, Henderson stated that Chamberlain was pursuing a policy of peace, but believed it to be best served by evidence of England's preparedness to fight. The British Government did not deny that problems existed, but were convinced

> Press had not seen in it an opportunity to start a story that I had been rudely rebuffed by Ribbentrop.

This, he writes, was not the case : there was no need to make the prior notification of a British measure to the Foreign Minister in person.

> Moreover, I fully realised that my withdrawal from Berlin after Prague had deeply offended the Nazi Government, who would be only too anxious to show that they resented it, and, if I had asked Ribbentrop to see me, it is more than probable that he would have found pleasure in finding some excuse to delay doing so. It was an obvious pitfall which I had wished to avoid.
>
> Two days later, on April 28th, Hitler made his speech. . . .

As for Henderson's dates : he returned to Berlin not on April 25th, but on the 24th ; and the 27th was not a Tuesday, but a Thursday. But " Tuesday " cannot be a mere slip for Thursday, or he could not say that the announcement " would only be made on Wednesday " ; nor can " April 27th " be a slip for the 25th, for this was the day on which Henderson alleges to have returned to Berlin. Lastly, there is in his time-table no room for " two days " between his talk with Weizsäcker and Hitler's speech. It is a hopeless muddle. The announcement of the Military Training Bill was made on Wednesday the 26th.

Henderson's book, trifling or absurd in big matters, is unreliable even in its simplest statements of fact. As for his indignation at the Press, Chamberlain's own statement in the House of Commons clearly shows that Henderson had been expected to see Ribbentrop, and no one will accept as sufficient the explanation that Ribbentrop had no time to see the British Ambassador. The attitude of the Germans was significant.

[1] Also the British *aide-mémoire* is published in the German White Book ; see No. 251.

[2] In 1944, His Majesty's Government sanctioned the publication on a large scale of Foreign Office documents on British policy between the two wars, 1919–1939. This publication has already begun. References to the lacunae in the evidence from the British side should therefore not be taken as criticism of the policy of the present Government, or of Mr. Churchill's, with regard to the publication of documents.

that these could be solved without a World War ; they had no aggressive intentions, nor did they mean to let themselves be drawn into aggression by others. By declaring that in certain eventualities they would oppose aggression by third parties, they hoped to obviate incidents which might provoke war, and not to encircle or threaten Italy or Germany.

> To this formal communication of Henderson's [writes Weizsäcker] I replied briefly that we would judge the British Government by their measures and not by their words. There would be no sense in my engaging in argument when the Führer was due to speak the day after to-morrow — his speech was already in print ; one remark only I could not eschew : the British guarantee to Poland was most fit to encourage subordinate Polish officials in oppressing the local Germans, and thus provoke rather than prevent incidents in that sphere.

Hitler's speech on April 28th lasted two and a half hours ; its tone was relatively calm ; the reply to President Roosevelt was elaborate, querulous, cheap but clever, full of turns and twists, and of debating points for American isolationist consumption ; there was a long discourse on his own foreign policy and on his proceedings with regard to Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Memel — still, despite the usual tirade against Versailles, the speech was, as Coulondre put it, " an apologia rather than an indictment ", and " directed to the past more than to the future ". But its essence was in the parts addressed to Great Britain and Poland, and leading up to a denunciation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 and the German-Polish Agreement of 1934 : Hitler's answer to the Anglo-Polish Pact of April 6th, 1939.

The Naval Agreement, he said, presupposed an atmosphere of mutual confidence and " the conviction that a war between England and Germany would never again be possible ". But now Chamberlain declared that

he was " not able to put any trust in German assurances ", and the opinion prevailed in London " that no matter in what conflict Germany should some day be entangled, Great Britain would always have to take her stand against Germany ".

> . . . by the policy of encirclement . . . the basis for the Naval Treaty has been removed. I have therefore resolved to send to-day a communication to this effect to the British Government. . . . Should the British Government, however, wish to enter once more into negotiations with Germany on this problem, no one would be happier than I at the prospect of still being able to come to a clear and straightforward understanding.

The German Note [1] re-stated Hitler's argument in more precise terms. But, as was pointed out in the British reply of June 23rd, there was neither encirclement nor consistent hostility in guarantees which " could only operate if the countries concerned were to be attacked by Germany " ; nor did the Naval Agreement contain any " provision for unilateral denunciation " (therefore, if there was to be a new Agreement, how did the German Government " propose to ensure " that any denunciation or modification during the term of its " validity should carry the consent of both parties " ?).

" There is little to be said as regards German-Polish relations ", was Hitler's introductory remark to the most material part of his speech. Having delivered his usual rigmarole about " the jugglers of Versailles ", whose malice had in a " strange way " delineated Poland's access to the sea,[2] and about his own fair-minded, realist

[1] In the British Blue Book (page 52) the Note bears the date " Berlin, April 27th, 1939 " ; in the German White Book (page 282) it appears under date of April 28th. As it was not delivered till the 28th, it seems more convenient to refer to it by that date.

[2] Cf. above (pages 12-13) Neurath's Minute of Hitler's talk with the Polish Minister, Wysocki, on May 2nd, 1933, with its suggestion that the Poles themselves ought to have sought access to the sea " on the other side

approach to the German-Polish problem, exemplified by the Agreement of 1934, he entered upon the " one open question " remaining between the two nations — that of " the German city of Danzig ", and of reconciling Poland's access to the sea with Germany's to East Prussia. Neither the Polish Corridor, nor a German route across it, was of any military, but of " exclusively psychological and economic importance. I made a concrete offer to the Polish Government. I now make this offer known to you, Gentlemen, and you yourselves will judge whether this offer did not represent the greatest imaginable concession in the interests of European peace." He proceeded to recite his demands for the retrocession of Danzig and for extra-territorial routes across the Corridor, his offer to guarantee to Poland economic rights and a free harbour in Danzig, and to accept as final her existing frontiers with Germany ; next he claimed to have offered " to conclude a twenty-five years' non-aggression treaty with Poland, a treaty therefore which would extend far beyond the duration of my own life "[1] and " to guarantee the independence of the Slovak State by Germany, Poland, and Hungary jointly — which means in practice the renunciation of any unilateral German hegemony in this territory ". The Polish Government had rejected the offer " made this once by me ",[2] and would only negotiate about a sub-

of East Prussia " ; a detour round East Prussia, and across Lithuania, would apparently have been a " straight way ", but to keep to the Vistula, which from its sources to its delta traverses ethnically Polish territory, was to follow a " strange way ".

The story related in Coulondre's first despatch of May 9th, 1939, of Hitler having at Berchtesgaden, on January 5th, shown Beck a map with Danzig and the Corridor included in the Reich, and Lithuania and Memel in Poland, lacks all foundation.

[1] Publicised death-forebodings are a common sentimental trick, but their invocation in such a context is probably unique : in 1939 Hitler was only fifty.

[2] In German " *diesen einmaligen Vorschlag* ", *i.e.* one which would not be repeated. Coulondre's despatch translates it into French as " *cette proposition unique, qui ne lui sera jamais plus refaite* ".

stitute for the League High Commissioner, and consider transit facilities across the Corridor. Still worse, " under pressure of a lying international campaign ", Poland, " like Czechoslovakia a year ago ", had called up troops ; and next, entered into a mutual assistance agreement with England, liable to involve her in other Powers' conflicts with Germany. " This obligation is contradictory to the agreement which I made with Marshal Pilsudski ", and in which only the existing obligations towards France were reserved : to extend them subsequently " is contrary to the terms of the German-Polish non-aggression pact ", which he therefore looked upon " as having been unilaterally infringed by Poland, and thereby no longer in existence ". He had " sent a communication to this effect to the Polish Government " : still, his attitude with regard to these problems remained (in principle) unchanged, and he was prepared to conclude " fresh contractual arrangements " with Poland, provided that they " were based on an absolutely clear obligation binding both parties in equal measure ".

Again, the official German Memorandum, handed the same day to the Polish Government, re-states Hitler's argument in fuller and more precise terms — indeed, it is longer than the corresponding part of his speech, notwithstanding his copious irrelevancies. There is, however, one amusing discrepancy : the joint German-Polish-Hungarian guarantee, to replace the " unilateral German hegemony " in Slovakia, which Hitler claims to have offered (and of which there is no trace in any document, Polish or German [1]), shrinks to an expression of readiness on the

[1] Even a participation of Poland alone in such a guarantee is mentioned only once, and then in a very guarded, tentative manner : Ribbentrop, in the Minute of his talk with Lipski on March 21st, 1939, says about the protectorate over Slovakia : *Hierbei gab ich deutlich zu verstehen, dass man die Frage gemeinsam einmal beraten könne, falls das allgemeine deutsch-polnische Verhältniss eine befriedigende Entwicklung nehme ; man könne hierbei an eine Teilnahme Polens an der Garantierung des slowakischen Staates denken* (" In this

part of the German Government " to respect Polish interests in ensuring the independence of Slovakia ". But far more important is a point which both speech and Note omit, and which was an essential part of all German " offers " since October 1938 : there is nothing about a common front against Russia — not one word against the Bolsheviks. Lastly, though a new " arrangement " with Poland was suggested which would pre-suppose a settlement of the " one open question ", no offer as good as that which the Poles had rejected was to be vouchsafed to them again — then what did his " unchanged attitude " with regard to Poland amount to ?

Beck answered Hitler in a speech delivered in the Polish Diet on May 5th. " The Polish-German Pact of 1934 was a treaty of mutual respect and good-neighbourly relations ", but must not be interpreted as limiting the freedom of Polish policy, or be made the basis for demands of " unilateral concessions contrary to our vital interests ". The German Government has denounced that Agreement " on the strength of Press reports " about the Polish-British understanding, and without approaching either Government about it — " immediately on my return from London I expressed my readiness to receive the German Ambassador, who has hitherto not availed himself of the opportunity ". Does this mean that Germany objected to Polish collaboration with the Western Powers, and by the Agreement of 1934 intended to isolate Poland ? Next, Beck re-stated Poland's case with regard to Danzig and

connexion I clearly hinted that the question could some day be discussed in common, if general German-Polish relations developed in a satisfactory manner ; Poland's participation in the guarantee for the Slovak State might then be considered "). These hints of what might some day be considered do not seem to have appeared so " clear " to Lipski who, in his Minute, merely quotes Ribbentrop as saying about Slovakia that " conversations would be possible on this subject " ; and when Lipski stressed that the German protectorate over Slovakia was " a serious blow " to Polish-German relations, " Herr von Ribbentrop reflected a moment, and then answered that this could be discussed ".

the Corridor.[1] In Danzig, Poland had refrained from exercising any pressure in national, ideological, or cultural matters ; in the Corridor, she offered Germany the most extensive traffic facilities. But the Polish counter-proposals of March 26th were left unanswered, and are now described as a refusal to negotiate. " A self-respecting nation does not make unilateral concessions. Where, then, is the reciprocity ? " [2] The proposal of a triple *condominium* in Slovakia he first heard mentioned in Hitler's speech on April 28th ; there had been only vague allusions to possible negotiations about Slovakia. Nor was the proposal of extending the non-aggression pact to twenty-five years " advanced in a concrete form in any of the recent conversations " (here Beck was on weaker ground — it was as concrete as any of these oral suggestions — and anyhow what was the value of non-aggression pacts, especially with Germany ?). " But in such conversations various other hints were made which went much further than the subjects under discussion. I reserve the right to return to this matter if necessary " (a clear hint at the demand that Poland should join the anti-Russian front [3]). As for the acknowledgment of frontiers which exist *de jure* and *de facto*, this truly cannot be looked upon as a concession.

The same day, May 5th, the Polish Government replied to the German Memorandum of April 28th. They recalled that for several years past, foreseeing " the difficulties

[1] He rightly insisted that the Corridor should be referred to by its proper name, " Pomorze " ; none the less, it seems rather difficult to use this unfamiliar name in English, which, if employed, had best be rendered as " Polish Pomerania ".

[2] Beck here obviously reverts to his answer on January 5th, 1939 : *Ich sehe keine Gegenleistung* (" I see no equivalent " — cf. page 55), a wrong formulation suggesting that the German demands could have been conceded — at a price ; whereas Polish interests and Polish public opinion would not have admitted them at any price.

[3] On May 10th, during the visit to Warsaw of M. Potemkin, Soviet Deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the semi-official Polish Telegraphic Agency " Iskra " confirmed that the hint in Beck's speech of May 5th referred to German proposals directed against Russia.

encountered by the League of Nations in carrying out its functions at Danzig", they had suggested "frank conversations" on the subject. While avoiding these, the German Government had used reassuring language, and it was only after the events of September 1938 that demands were put forward concerning Danzig and transit routes. In the talk of March 21st Ribbentrop stressed "the necessity for a rapid settlement of these questions", or else the German offer might be withdrawn. On the 26th the Polish Government presented written counter-proposals: for a month there was no formal reply, till they were told, on April 28th, that not to accept verbal German suggestions without alteration or reservation was looked upon "as a refusal of discussions". Such an attitude was incompatible with the Declaration of 1934, and with Poland's interests and dignity. Nor could she consider herself precluded by that Declaration from entering into agreements with third States: this would be almost tantamount to "a renunciation of independence in foreign policy" — Germany, for her part, had felt free to conclude treaties with Italy and Slovakia. And here the Polish Memorandum scored another neat point (as unavailing as are all such arguments): the Declaration of 1934 was based on the Kellogg Pact, which was "a general renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy"; Poland's new obligations could only arise if, in contravention of the Kellogg Pact, Germany threatened Great Britain. The Polish-British Agreement did not violate the Polish-German Agreement of 1934; which, moreover, was to run ten years, without possibility of denunciation. If Germany desired, however, to discuss a new agreement, "the Polish Government would be prepared to entertain suggestions of this kind with the reservation of their fundamental observations contained above in the present Memorandum".

Hitler's speech and Beck's reply laid open the tussle

which had gone on between them for half a year. What Hitler had demanded — with " a magnanimity unique in history " — was a token tribute denoting Poland's adhesion, which meant subservience, to the Axis. The significance of her refusal was equally patent : Hitler had lost the round, and, for the time being, had to restrain his fury — even the German Press was made to preserve what for them was a measure of moderation. The plan now adopted by Germany seems to have been to avoid direct negotiations, but by continued tension and ever-growing armaments to wear out Poland, and still more the Western Powers, while harping in London and Paris on the proposition that " Danzig is not worth a European war " (in both capitals there were pro-Germans, or mere pacifists, only too ready to play Hitler's game in this matter) and retailing stories about the alleged sufferings of the *Volksdeutsche* in Poland. That this was the line adopted by the Germans is confirmed by what is known about Henderson's interview with Ribbentrop (of which the only available report is in Coulondre's despatch of May 4th), and Coulondre's with Weizsäcker (reported in the German White Book only). Coulondre found Henderson " rather disappointed " over his conversation with Ribbentrop who, paraphrasing Hitler's speech, launched out into a harangue about Great Britain and France trying to encircle Germany " in order to attack her one day ", and then seemed hardly to listen to Henderson's correcting remarks (both were apparently playing off old gramophone records). Still, one interesting impression Henderson did carry away from the talk : that Ribbentrop, who a year ago was convinced that neither England nor France would act over Eastern or Central Europe, now admitted the contrary. " Nevertheless, he does not believe it concerning Danzig."

> This impression [adds Coulondre] is corroborated by what Herr Dietrich, Minister for the Press, con-

fidentially told another one of my colleagues : that at a Council held by the Führer the day after his speech of April 28th, Herr von Ribbentrop, supported by Herr Himmler, asserted that neither England nor France would stir because of Danzig.

Still, according to information gathered by Sir Nevile Henderson, and confirmed to me from other quarters, Herr Hitler means to let the Polish problem drag on. He considers that time works for him, that Danzig is a favourable ground on which to divide British and French opinion, and that one day Poland herself will have to ask for mercy.

According to a Berlin despatch in the *Manchester Guardian*, Henderson's talk with Ribbentrop lasted twenty-five minutes — not much after an interval of more than six weeks, even if the time had been used to good purpose.

Coulondre saw Weizsäcker on May 8th, for the first time since their rather stormy interview of March 18th.[1] Coulondre is reported to have said that he meant to work, as he had set out originally, for an improvement in Franco-German relations, " though naturally he no longer held the broken threads, and M. Daladier still felt the bitter taste of the March events ".

Turning to Poland [writes Weizsäcker] Coulondre inquired whether German-Polish conversations could be resumed. I tried to make clear to him how very sterile was Beck's attitude : in his reply to us Beck sat down like a Pasha, and left us free to reopen the conversation if we conformed to the principles laid down by him. Such behaviour offers no opening. The Führer has described his offer as unrenewable. The behaviour of the little tin gods in Western Poland seemed to me dangerous. Serious incidents may occur. . . .

There was, however, yet another line on which Hitler was about to engage — a new policy of which Ribbentrop seems to have been the author, or at least the protagonist.

[1] See above, page 80.

Probably the most important and most ominous feature of Hitler's speech of April 28th was his unwonted silence about Russia : it ought to have been a portent and a caution to all whom it concerned ; and so also should have been the German reaction to the replacement of Litvinov by Molotov on May 3rd. Soon Coulondre started sending explicit warnings concerning Hitler's plans and intentions. In his despatch of May 7th, he enclosed a résumé of a conversation which took place the previous day between a member of the Embassy and one of the Führer's associates, described as " X ", who was " in a particularly good position to know the intentions of the Führer and of his principal lieutenants " ; in talking this man became excited, " as is his habit ", and apparently " finished by saying much more than he was authorised to tell us ". Beck's speech, he said, " may seem very adroit and juridically well-founded ". But Hitler is a man of action, and despises legal arguments ; " he envisages realities and needs ", and is determined to settle the problem of Danzig and the Corridor ; and his recent demands represented a minimum. But he will wait till he holds all the trump cards.

> Were you not struck by the absence from his last speech of any reference to Russia ? Have you not noticed in what an understanding manner this morning the Press — under precise instructions — speaks about M. Molotov and Russia ? You must have got wind of certain current discussions, and of the journey of the Ambassador and the Military Attaché of the U.S.S.R. to Moscow ; on the eve of their departure, the first was received by Herr von Ribbentrop, and the second by the *Oberkommando* of the *Wehrmacht*, and they have been fully informed of the views of the Reich Government. I really can tell you no more, but some day you will learn that something is brewing in the East (*dass etwas im Osten im Gange ist*).

The Poles, " X " went on to say, are emboldened by the support of the Western Powers,

> and imagine they can count on material help from Russia. But they are wrong : Hitler did not venture to tackle Austria and Czechoslovakia without the assent of Italy, and similarly does not think now of settling the German-Polish conflict without Russia.

And, getting more and more excited, " X " declared : " There have been three Partitions of Poland ; *eh bien !* believe me, there will be a fourth ! " He added that a war over the Sudetenland would have been unpopular, but a war against Poland would appeal to the Germans, and especially to the Prussians.

Coulondre returned to the subject of German-Russian relations in two despatches of May 9th. Will Germany try to play off Russia against Poland ? " Certain declarations and the way the fall of Litvinov is interpreted by political circles in Berlin seem to suggest it." And again : the sudden dismissal of Litvinov raised hopes in German official circles of a new orientation of Russian policy. But very quickly a more reserved attitude prevailed, though the intention persisted

> to disturb and upset, in one way or another, the anyhow delicate negotiations between Moscow and the Western Powers. Did this idea appear in a concrete form before Litvinov went, or was it inspired by that event ? It is difficult to say. Anyhow, in the last 24 hours, a rumour has gone the round of Berlin that Germany had made, or was about to make, to Soviet Russia proposals for a Partition of Poland.

A fortnight later, on May 22nd, Coulondre wrote another long despatch on the subject. Ribbentrop, so it seems, pressed for this reorientation of German policy. He ranted about the Polish refusal, and alleged that Beck had accepted Hitler's offer in January but had gone back on it under pressure at home ; he did not as yet give up

altogether the idea of Poland entering the German orbit, but basically desired her annihilation. And " with the obstinacy of a fanatic ", he pursued his ultimate aim : the destruction of the British Empire.

> One of the immediate aims of the protagonists of a *rapprochement* with the U.S.S.R. [wrote Coulondre] seems to be to get Russia to play in a dismemberment of Poland the part which Poland played in that of Czechoslovakia. The more distant objective would be to employ the material and human resources of the U.S.S.R. as an instrument for bringing down the British Empire.

He was encouraged by any hitch in the negotiations between Russia and the Western Powers. Now that these were entering a decisive phase,

> we ought clearly to realise the situation, and bear in mind how the Reich would exploit against France and Great Britain any failure, however screened, of the negotiations now carrying on with Moscow.

On June 1st Coulondre wrote again : " Through a reliable intermediary I have personally received the following indications supplied by a high official of the Wilhelmstrasse concerning the way in which the settling of the problem of Danzig is envisaged " (the " high official " was the notorious Dietrich, Minister for the Press, one of the closest associates of Hitler and Goebbels, and the " intermediary " was Dr. Karl Boemer, Chief of the Foreign Press Department of the Ministry of Propaganda, whom his indiscretions cost, later on, his place and his freedom).[1] While, in the war of nerves, " German diplo-

[1] Howard K. Smith, in his book *Last Train from Berlin* (1942), tells the story of Dr. Boemer, " a brilliant young man . . . and an ambitious opportunist " who " was given to speaking too much and too loud when he was in his cups, which was often ". Before the attack against Russia, " at a reception in the Bulgarian Legation, Boemer got drunk and told the Bulgarians Germany was going to fix that false ally, Russia, too ", and that " the German Army would one day wipe Russia right off the map ". This

matic representatives abroad have been instructed to spread the report that France and England would not go to war over Danzig", Hitler knew that the opposite was true, and therefore enquired of Keitel and Brauchitsch whether in such a general conflict Germany was likely to prove victorious.

> Both made their answer depend on whether or not Russia kept out of the conflict. If she did, General Keitel replied "Yes", and General Brauchitsch (whose opinion is of greater value) answered "Probably". But both declared that if Germany had to fight Russia, she would have little chance of winning the war. Both generals attach a fairly considerable importance to an intervention by Turkey, but do not expect her to range herself on the side of the Western Powers unless Russia joins in.
>
> The prevalent opinion at the Wilhelmstrasse is that if Poland stands firm, Hitler's decision will depend on whether the Anglo-Russian Pact is signed. It is believed that he will risk a war if he need not fight Russia, but if he knows that he will have also her against him, he will draw back rather than expose his country, party, and himself to destruction.

Coulondre emphasised once more the enormous importance which was attached in Berlin to the Anglo-Russian negotiations, and "the urgency of promptly concluding them".

And on June 13th: "Herr von Ribbentrop awaits the outcome of the negotiations between the Western Powers and Russia". He has not abandoned the idea of destroying Poland with the help of Russia, nor will he

was overheard by some officials of the German Foreign Office hostile to him, the Gestapo was brought in, and "a month later, when the Russian war had begun, Boemer was sentenced to two years' imprisonment".

The *New Yorker Staatszeitung und Herold*, of August 24th, 1942, reporting Boemer's death on the Eastern front, adds to this story that after a few months' imprisonment, Goebbels obtained for him Hitler's reprieve on condition that he enlisted as a private in the army. He died of wounds received in the battle of Kharkov.

abandon it " until the Anglo-Russian Pact is signed. Meanwhile he will make no decisions and will continue to humour the Soviets."

On June 20th Coulondre reported again that Hitler seemed to be awaiting the outcome of the negotiations between the Western Powers and Russia before taking action with regard to Danzig — " for in Berlin they still hope that these negotiations may break down ".

Warnings similar to those given to the French by " X " reached the Poles through no less a person than Major-General Bodenschatz of the *Luftwaffe*, a Bavarian, intimate with Hitler and still closer to Göring, with whom he had served during the previous war in the famous " Richthofen circus ". It is obvious that Bodenschatz did not just blab, nor could he have acted off his own bat : these " indiscretions " were contrived from above. Göring, who had become one of the richest men in Germany, wallowing in wealth and luxury, over-fond of rank and its cheapest trappings, was producing a counterfeit of Conservatism, devoid of realism, dignity, or tradition : and the mere idea of an agreement with the Bolsheviks was abhorrent to him. He by far preferred the Poles — the task of cultivating them had originally been assigned to him by Hitler,[1] and he had been visiting their country, staying with their foremost aristocrats, attending shooting parties in forests such as are hardly to be found anywhere else in Europe ; in short, he had been consorting with them : which does not mean that the sportsman and *faux bonhomme* would not have pilfered or blackmailed them. But he did not intend to destroy them, least of all in unsuitable company. He disliked Ribbentrop's new policy (as much as he disliked the man himself) and a faint touch of this disapproval appears even in the conversation which he had with Lipski on August 24th, the day after the German-Soviet Treaty had been signed. The warnings were

[1] See above, page 21.

probably meant, while traversing Ribbentrop's plans, to frighten the Poles into submission. Various discourses of Göring's at that time seem to point to these conclusions. But the Poles refused to believe that Hitler could possibly come to any kind of arrangement with Moscow ; and even the Western Powers seem hardly to have taken sufficiently to heart Coulondre's warning concerning the supreme importance of concluding the Anglo-Soviet Agreement.

CHAPTER V

ANGLO-RUSSIAN NEGOTIATIONS
(April–August 1939)

THE tragic core of diplomatic history during the half-year preceding the outbreak of war is in the Anglo-Russian negotiations. It is difficult to write about them without the painful consciousness that here was perhaps the one chance of preventing the Second World War, or of ensuring Hitler's early defeat. But such were the prejudices, miscalculations, and suspicions on both sides that only on June 22nd, 1941, through Hitler's supreme blunder and Churchill's instantaneous action, was that unity established which foresight should have built up two years earlier. The details of the abortive negotiations cannot be traced in any authoritative collection of documents. The British Government was about to publish a Blue Book early in 1940, and it was printed, but was suppressed at the instance of the French; while the Soviet Government, the original champions of open diplomacy, have throughout been the least communicative as far as their own is concerned. The course of the negotiations has therefore to be pieced together from newspaper items and occasional communiqués, from debates and replies in Parliament, from a few speeches by Russian statesmen, and from some recent French, German, and Polish disclosures: from incomplete materials, which leave serious gaps and unanswered questions. Still, in studying the antecedents of the Second World War, the story of the Anglo-Russian negotiations cannot be left a blank — a great unknown; and it is possible to distinguish certain features which stand out,[1]

[1] With a slight touch of exaggeration, the special correspondent of *The Times* wrote from Moscow on July 28th, 1939:

> Incidentally it may be said, in view of the wealth of publicity at every stage [of the Anglo-French-Russian negotiations], that never has

even while much is still shrouded in mist and darkness.

The starting-point for negotiations between the Western Powers and Russia was basically unfavourable : at the end of the last war, Bolshevist Russia was relegated to the defeated Powers, and treated as a moral outcast against whom a *cordon sanitaire* had to be established. Everyone could claim against her that " right to self-determination " which at all times only works against the defeated, and neighbours were free to despoil her even of ethnically White Russian or Ukrainian territory. Powers whose system comprised Poland and Rumania with frontiers unduly extended to the East, and the Baltic States, implicitly identified themselves with a situation which was bound to become increasingly intolerable and untenable, as the early Bolshevist internationalism, with its dreams of world-revolution, gradually receded before a Russian national revival and a regained consciousness of Russia's greatness. Blunders concerning frontiers, which in 1918–1920 the British Government in vain tried to prevent, added Russia to the " Revisionist " Powers, and it was natural that in conjunction with them, and not with those who were, at least nominally, responsible for the existing settlement, she should try to re-establish her European position. The Poles, who had boasted that they would form a " barrier " between Germany and Russia, merely helped to bring them together : the Rapallo Agreement of 1922 was the earliest overt recognition of a common interest. During the next eleven years these two Powers, possessing by far the greatest war potential in Europe, were re-arming in a silent understanding — which does not mean that Soviet Russia trusted the Weimar Government more than any

the first of President Wilson's Fourteen Points had so fine an airing — " Open covenants openly arrived at. . . . Diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."

The reasons and results of that publicity were, however, equally discouraging.

other anti-Communist Government ; but in the circumstances it was mutually convenient to co-operate.

Hitler's rise to power broke the link between Germany and Russia, and raised before the eyes of the Bolsheviks the spectre of that coalition of " capitalist, Imperialist States " bent on the destruction of the Soviet Union, which is a tenet of the Marxist cosmogony : the Bolsheviks had long lived out of the world, and he who leaves the walks of common men, meets ghosts. Yet with a doctrinaire dogmatism Russians at all times blend shrewd realist perception. Devoid, or free, of the Roman tradition and untainted with modern bourgeois conventions, Russia follows a path of her own and pursues a policy which is logical and clear-sighted if viewed from the angle of its own premises, devious and incomprehensible when correlated to conceptions alien to it. Nor indeed is it easy at any time to work with the Russians : secretive and suspicious, conscious of their own strength and indifferent to the opinion of foreigners, they will not take the trouble to put their case, being either too powerful or too distracted, and invariably too distant spiritually, to argue and explain. Thus they themselves bear a fair share of responsibility for the scant success of the endeavours which they made to co-operate with other nations after the Nazi menace had arisen : but only a share. Hitler's sinister orb rose over a European scene which was perplexed and deranged, over a chaos wherein men unequal to the situation hopelessly floundered. In 1933 the Bolsheviks knew more than anyone about Germany's actual and potential strength ; and they realised that Hitler's dreams of *Lebensraum* constituted a danger very different from Mussolini's vapourings about a new " Roman Empire ". Russia felt in most immediate danger, and her reaction was to join the ranks of those opposed to aggression and change : she entered the League of Nations and became a foremost exponent of

" collective security " which Litvinov summed up in the famous phrase : " Peace is indivisible ". Barthou, the last of a great generation of French statesmen, and the last French Foreign Minister before 1939 with a mind and policy of his own, eagerly responded to the Russian advances ; he favoured an " Eastern Pact " which would have encircled Germany and made Russia the chief partner of France in Eastern Europe.

But Great Britain, in spite of what the Germans are wont to say, did not wish to encircle them, while Poland was utterly averse to the Triple Entente being recreated with Russia as a principal, and herself reduced to an inferior plane. She therefore refused to play, and the Franco-Russian Pact, signed after Barthou and his policy had died, was not even a posthumous child but rather an abortion. Events were throwing their shadows ahead : Ramsay MacDonald's " Four-Power Pact " of 1933, associating the Western Powers with the Dictators, delineated the pattern of policy which led to the Munich surrender ; Poland's refusal to join with Russia in a bloc against Germany, and her desire to continue balancing between the two (uncommitted to either but, if anything, closer to Germany than to Russia), foreshadowed her disastrous policy of 1939. Aversion to the Bolsheviks undoubtedly played a part in the conciliatory attitude of the Chamberlain Government towards the Dictators; but far more important was their desire to avoid war, and their delusion that " appeasement " could succeed. Did they mean to deflect Hitler against the East, especially against the Soviet Union ? They yearned for peace all round ; but if there had to be aggression, they, like everyone else, hoped that Hitler would start on some country other than their own, and at as great a distance from it as possible. The Poles refused to co-operate with Russia; but they also refused to join Hitler against her, as a victory won in common with Germany would for them have been

barren of results, and indeed fraught with the greatest dangers : with Russia annihilated and Germany supreme, they would have been at her mercy. Whatever the Bolsheviks imagined or professed to believe, neither Britain nor Poland thought of joining a coalition against them — but even less did either favour an anti-Nazi bloc with the participation of the Soviet Union ; and France, with her internal divisions and weakness steadily increasing, had become incapable of an independent, to say nothing of a bold, policy.

For twenty years mutual dislike and distrust subsisted between the ruling strata in Great Britain and in Soviet Russia. In either country sinister intentions were ascribed to the other, and, what was worse, such suspicions and charges were turned to domestic use. Soviet Russia was an argument rather than a reality in British politics, and so was Great Britain in Russian home propaganda : a " Red letter " in a general election, or a " sabotage " trial of British engineers, was staged and exploited for internal purposes without regard for the way in which it affected relations between the two countries. Even a defence of Soviet Russia by the Left in Great Britain was inspired by opposition to the Conservatives rather than by a correct appreciation of the Bolshevist system, and was apt to topple into pained disapproval whenever the lack of spiritual affinity between Lenin and Mr. Gladstone was too crudely revealed. Moscow, in turn, had mostly contemptuous rebukes for its liberal-minded foreign sympathisers — it is often more difficult to satisfy the Bolsheviks as a friend than as an opponent, for the actions of the declared opponent have at least the merit of conforming with their expectations and theories. What a distance, what a burden ! And yet how much depended on an Anglo-Russian agreement. This might perhaps have been achieved had a true Tory Government been in office. Xenophobia, combined with a mellow for-

bearance for what foreigners do among themselves, and a realism common to Tories and Bolsheviks might have enabled them to co-operate where interests coincided. But the official " Conservative " leaders of 1938–1939 were mostly ex- or semi-Liberals of middle-class, Nonconformist extraction, whose Liberalism had gone rancid — anxious business men lacking imagination and understanding even in business, and in foreign politics lay preachers full of goodwill *à bon marché*. " Oh, how small is the policy of the Great Powers ! " exclaimed President Masaryk once as we were discussing Europe ; he did not live to see Munich.

September 1938 raised new barriers between Britain and the U.S.S.R. When Dr. Beneš thought of resisting, he was warned of the risk of finding himself alone with the Bolsheviks ; the Premiers of Great Britain and France met the Dictators in " cordial " colloquy to the exclusion of Russia, and they parted professing a new friendship founded on the Munich achievement.[1] Was it all fear and surrender, or was it a set policy ? Something of both. Men bewildered by a sudden perception of their own moral and material unpreparedness tried to disguise their failure by adopting, and proclaiming, a faith and a hope which would appeal to the public at home and preserve the appearances of self-respect. Anti-Bolshevism supplied a flavouring but was not the basic substance of the

[1] In a Moscow despatch of the *New York Times*, on April 4th, 1939, Walter Duranty wrote about " the profound indignation and humiliation felt in the Soviet Union during the so-called Munich crisis ". Assurances were given in Paris, London, and Geneva that the U.S.S.R. meant " to fulfil the obligations inherent in its pacts with Czechoslovakia and France. . . . Yet Georges Bonnet . . . expressed doubts both of Russia's willingness and ability to perform what she had promised, and M. Bonnet's words found a ready echo in London. Then there was the ' Lindbergh incident '. . . . Perhaps in the whole Munich business there was nothing that burned Russian hearts so painfully. . . . There was also . . . the Russian offer to begin military consultations with a view to impending hostilities. It was ignored. Such things are not easily forgotten, and Soviet Russia does not easily forget."

Munich concoction. Still, the theories and fears of the Bolsheviks were confirmed — what might not Hitler make of the situation? Moreover, what would be the value of an alliance with the Western Powers? Were they still *bündnissfähig* (as the Germans would put it)? France, usually expected to give a lead to Britain in Continental affairs, had betrayed an ally and herself; but Daladier and Bonnet, so far from being hounded from office, were thanked for the relief[1] afforded by Munich. What certainty was there of their not repeating the performance? And as for Chamberlain, no foreigner could be expected to gauge what he was, or was not, capable of doing or believing. In whatever ratio various ingredients entered into the composition of Munich — unpreparedness, unwillingness to fight, apathy with regard to Central and Eastern Europe, British ignorance of Continental affairs and an incipient French " collaborationism ", a lurking, half-envious admiration for the Dictators who knew how to deal with their " Reds " — the Bolsheviks could not but feel misgivings. " You distrust them," said Lloyd George in the House of Commons on May 19th. " Have they no ground for distrusting us? " Since 1931 every pact concluded " to deal with a situation like this, we have broken ".

To another question which preoccupied the Russians, a valid or binding reply was hardly possible. The Poles, vastly overrating their own military strength, and expecting the Germans to share that appreciation, did not truly believe that war was coming, and failed to explore with sufficient care the extent and nature of the succour which they could expect from the Western Allies. But the Russians, who were not directly concerned in the dispute, before putting their heads into the noose wanted to be

[1] The story bears retelling of a Frenchman who said to a friend about Munich : " *Mais enfin, c'est un soulagement.*" The other replied : " *Ah oui, un soulagement, comme quand on a . . . dans sa culotte.*"

satisfied on this point. The assurance, repeatedly given, that they would not be expected to enter the war till after the Western Powers had done so, was hardly sufficient. Were the Germans to attack in the East, patrol activities in the Saar would have been to the Russians of as little comfort as, in effect, they were to the Poles. If the French meant to remain behind the Maginot Line, and the British to operate mainly at sea, in the absence of an active Second Front the brunt of resistance would fall on Russia — and she, for one, must have had a fair idea of the material unpreparedness of the Polish Army. Suspicion, justified and unjustified, whispered caution into Russian ears.

Poland under Pilsudski and his successors was, if anything, more hostile to Russia than to Germany. It was not a friend that Russia was asked to " guarantee " and to defend, but a State which enclosed within its frontiers ten times more Ukrainians and White Russians than Germans. Poland was justified in feeling no friendship for Russia as Russia was in feeling none for her : but in these circumstances it was by no means easy for the Western Powers to find a basis on which to negotiate a partnership with both. The Poles were determined not to admit Russian troops into the White Russian and Ukrainian provinces which Russia had been forced to relinquish to them at Riga in 1920. Hence the fantastic, or at first even insulting, conditions named for the acceptance of Russian support. A different line might have been taken by the Western Powers had they correctly appraised Russia's military strength. But there was the conviction that State management of industry could not work, that the Russians were hopelessly inefficient, and that their alleged achievements were, to say the least, greatly exaggerated ; moreover, the belief that Russia could not, and would not, fight was deliberately fostered in September 1938, and willingly accepted ever since, as an argument and an excuse for surrender.

The Early Stages of the Negotiations

Here is the course of the Anglo-Russian negotiations as far as I am able to trace it from the available sources.

After March 15th, the British Government turned to the other major European Powers, France and Russia ; but before ten days had passed, Poland and Rumania rather than Russia held the foreground as the first whose adhesion to the " peace front " had to be secured — groundless fears of an impending attack against Rumania and of a moral weakening in Poland contributed to this deflection of British policy. It was only after Britain had become tied up with these two secondary Powers that concrete suggestions were made to Soviet Russia. On April 15th, two days after the debate in the House of Commons, Sir William Seeds, British Ambassador in Moscow, enquired of Litvinov whether the Soviet Government would be prepared to give unilateral guarantees to Poland and Rumania. The proposals were summarised by Chamberlain in the House of Commons on May 10th. Having explained that His Majesty's Government had given their guarantees " without inviting the Soviet Government to participate directly in them, in view of certain difficulties to which, as the House is well aware, any such suggestion would inevitably give rise ", he said :

> His Majesty's Government accordingly suggested to the Soviet Government that they should make, on their own behalf, a declaration of similar effect to that already made by His Majesty's Government, in the sense that, in the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in discharge of their own obligations thus accepted, the Soviet Government, on their side, would express their readiness also to lend assistance, if desired.

A turgid sentence, verbose, clumsy, ungrammatical, and hardly accurate.[1] The declaration asked of the Russian Government was not of " similar effect to that " made by Britain, whose arrangement with Poland was reciprocal, whereas the guarantee of the Soviets was to be unilateral. Further, support under the Anglo-French guarantees was to be conditional only on resistance being offered by the party attacked, whereas Russian assistance was to be given " if desired " — desired by whom ? the Western Powers or the State to be assisted by them " in discharge of their own obligations " ? Lastly, according to this passage in Chamberlain's summary, Russian obligations were to arise only after Great Britain and France had become " involved in hostilities " ; but next he recounted how, at a later stage in the negotiations, His Majesty's Government

> made certain modifications in their original proposal. In particular, they made plain that it is no part of their intention that the Soviet Government should commit themselves to intervene, irrespective of whether Great Britain and France had already, in the discharge of their obligations, done so.

However difficult it proved subsequently to convince the U.S.S.R. of Britain's honest intentions, had the " original proposal " been as clear on this point as its summary by Chamberlain, why should he himself particularise the second version as a modification ? To be " involved in hostilities " is, if anything, more concrete than to have " intervened ".[2]

[1] One wonders who drafted Chamberlain's statement ; redundant expressions such as " on their own behalf ", " already ", " in the sense ", " on their side ", suggest the style of the proverbial bureaucrat rather than of the Foreign Office draftsman. And what exactly was asked of Russia ? Was she now to express her readiness in the event mentioned to lend assistance, or was she to declare that in such an event she would express her readiness, etc. ? The difference may seem slight, but there is a difference, and in a prepared document of such importance lucid precision is essential.

[2] According to Gafenco, *Derniers Jours de l'Europe*, pages 140-41, there was a divergence of opinion between London and Paris about the formula

Reliable information about the negotiations appeared in the British Press before there was any official statement, and, couched in more explicit language, it forms a useful supplement. On May 4th, *The Times* reported that " the British Government had invited Soviet Russia to declare simply that she would come to the help, as and when required, of Poland and Rumania. . . ." [1]

to be proposed to the Soviet Government, the British text appearing " too vague " to Bonnet, and the French " much too precise " to Halifax. Two separate communications were therefore made to the U.S.S.R., the French on April 14th and the British on the 15th. The French formula as given by Gafenco, ran as follows : " Should France and Great Britain find themselves at war with Germany in consequence of action undertaken with a view to aiding or assisting Rumania or Poland, victims of unprovoked aggression, the U.S.S.R. would immediately render them aid and assistance. Should the U.S.S.R. find itself at war with Germany in consequence of action undertaken with a view to aiding and assisting Rumania or Poland, victims of unprovoked aggression, France and Great Britain would immediately render it aid and assistance." (The difference in the formula, " aiding or assisting " in the first case, and " aiding and assisting " in the second, must be due to an error in transcription, while the placing of Rumania ahead of Poland, not justified either by their relative importance or alphabetical order, was presumably adopted as a courtesy in communicating the text to Gafenco). The British communication which Gafenco gives in French, starts by quoting Stalin's declaration in favour of supporting States which might be victims of aggression, provided that they were prepared to defend their independence, and proceeds to suggest that the Soviet Government, having made reference to the above general declaration and to the recent declarations of the British and French Governments, should repeat that in case of aggression against any State bordering on the Soviet Union, and resisted by that State, the Soviet Government would lend assistance, if desired, and give it in the most appropriate manner. There is nothing in this formula to correspond to the phrase used by Chamberlain to render the " original proposal " : " In the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in discharge of their own obligations thus accepted " ; and in its absence, the " modification " in the second is real. But then, did Chamberlain draw here on the French formula which he had refused to endorse ?

[1] In certain ways this " simple " proposal resembles the Parliamentary arrangement made on the resignation of William Pitt in 1761, when George Grenville, though full of doubts and apprehensions, was persuaded to assume the leadership of the House of Commons. Lord Bute, to " tranquillise " him, secured for him the support of Henry Fox (by the promise of a peerage for Lady Caroline Fox). But now Grenville was seized with fear lest Fox's " superior abilities should eclipse him " — " what a figure shall I make ? " he asked. And so Bute had to try a new arrangement :

In what form they would accept it had been explained in the *Daily Telegraph* on April 15th: they were both prepared " to receive air force support from the Soviets ", and were " desirous of being assured that they would be able to draw on Soviet resources of raw materials and even of finished equipment ", but would not conclude arrangements which " might lead to Soviet armies coming on to their territories ".

" Almost simultaneously " (with the British proposals of April 15th), Chamberlain went on to say,

> the Soviet Government suggested a scheme at once more comprehensive and more rigid which, whatever other advantages it might present, must, in the view of His Majesty's Government, inevitably raise the very difficulties which their own proposals were designed to avoid.

The gist of these Russian counter-proposals of April 17th was not given by Chamberlain on May 10th — though it had already been disclosed in the *Daily Telegraph* on April 29th, and was thus summarised in *The Times* on May 3rd:

> The Soviet Government have put forward their plan for a triple alliance between Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, covering in the first place an attack against one of them, and in the second place an attack on any country in Eastern Europe from Finland to the Black Sea. They leave open for the present the question of mutual [1] action in case of an attack against one of the smaller Western countries which Great Britain and France number among their vital interests.

" Mr. Fox is to act, speak, or not speak ", when and as advised (almost exactly the formula which seems to have been suggested to the Russian Government). " I own," remarked Lord Rockingham, " without being a friend of Mr. F., I could hardly help smiling at the bargain made with him."

[1] Should be " common ".

Russia, moreover, suggested consultation between the General Staffs.[1]

On April 18th Maisky left London by air for Moscow to report on the views of the British Government. About the same time, Merekalov, Soviet Ambassador to Berlin, arrived in Moscow, " fully informed of the views of the Reich Government ".[2] On the 24th, the day Maisky left Moscow for London, the Warsaw correspondent of *The Times* reported that the U.S.S.R. was believed to insist on a " collective agreement ", but that Poland and the other Border States " will not in advance come into a formally proclaimed United Front with Soviet Russia. If Moscow persists in requiring this, it means that Soviet Russia will stand aloof from active open participation in an eventual clash of arms with the ' aggressors '."

Maisky returned to London *via* Paris on Friday night, April 28th, and saw Halifax on Saturday morning. The British Press was optimistic, it being generally assumed that Hitler's denunciation of the German-Polish agreement would modify Poland's unwillingness to enter into open defence negotiations with Moscow (that this step might help to clear the ground for a German-Russian understanding, was not realised at the time). At a special Cabinet meeting on May 1st Halifax reported on his talk with Maisky. " After a string of proposals and counter-proposals ",[3] wrote *The Times* on May 2nd, " the Govern-

[1] M. J. Łukasiewicz, late Polish Ambassador in Paris, writing in the London *Dziennik Polski* of November 14th, 1946 (*Remarks and Recollections*, " Negotiations with Soviet Russia "), states that on April 25th, 1939, Bonnet informed him of the terms of the Russian reply: it proposed an Anglo-French-Russian alliance, and demanded the extension of the guarantee to the Baltic States, and the cancelling of the Polish-Rumanian Treaty (as directed against Russia). Cf. below, pages 177-9, Molotov's talk with Grzybowski, Polish Ambassador in Moscow, on May 7th.

[2] See above, page 137.

[3] According to David J. Dallin, *Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939–1942* (page 30), " by May 20 about thirty different schemes for an Anglo-Soviet Agreement had been examined and rejected ! "

ment are now considering the latest plan given by M. Litvinov to Sir William Seeds. . . ." And again on May 3rd : " The British look for a Soviet declaration that the eastern countries of Europe would receive Soviet help as and when required, on the understanding that British and French help would already have been given to the country attacked. Were such a declaration given, Great Britain, France, and Soviet Russia would find themselves in line on Eastern European problems. In considering any wider agreement, the Government have to take into account the views of many Governments that are suspicious of Soviet intervention." Last week M. Gafenco, when in London, " spoke frankly of his Government's reluctance to enter into open agreement with Soviet Russia ". The Duke of Alba " yesterday declared again his country's aversion to any dealings with ' Communistic countries ' " ; but Spain was looking forward " to a renewal and expansion of the old tradition of friendly ' maritime intercourse ' with Great Britain ".[1]

And this was a further summary published by *The Times* on May 4th :

> The Soviet Government have so far maintained their belief in collective security on as wide a basis as possible ; and the British Government hesitate to enter into a close agreement which would cause other smaller countries to recoil . . . they feel it their duty to recognise the marked reluctance of some other countries to associate themselves with the U.S.S.R. They are looking for a compromise that would not hasten a division of Europe into two *blocs* — except . . . of the aggressor and the attacked. . . .

[1] " To-day ", wrote the London correspondent of the *New York Times* on May 1st, " the Cabinet's sinking spell came from the fear that Spain, Portugal, Japan, and — vitally important to Britain on moral grounds — the Vatican might be displeased if Britain were to enter an outright military alliance with the Communist colossus. . . . As far as is known, there has been no hint of a warning from the Vatican, but there have been indications that English Catholics are disturbed by the implications of an alliance with Communist Russia."

This estimate is confirmed by a British document of April 29th published by Gafenco [1]. It thus defines the British aims in the negotiations with the U.S.S.R.:

(*a*) to neglect no chance of obtaining Soviet help in case of war;
(*b*) not to compromise the common front by offending the susceptibilities of Poland and Roumania;
(*c*) not to alienate world opinion by lending colour to the German anti-Comintern propaganda;
(*d*) not to compromise the cause of world peace by provoking violent action on the part of Germany.

It was obvious to the French that if so much regard was to be paid to the feelings of everyone opposed to Russia, her help would not be obtained. They therefore proposed the same day another formula for an agreement with the Soviet Government:

> Should France and Great Britain find themselves at war with Germany in consequence of action undertaken to prevent a modification by force of the *status quo* in Central or Eastern Europe, the U.S.S.R. will immediately lend them aid and assistance,

and *vice versa*. This proposal the British Government considered "too wide", and the assistance "too automatic"; Bonnet replied that "his proposal was simpler and better, and had more chance of being adopted". Thus, says Gafenco, every article in these negotiations "had to pass through strange and numerous metamorphoses; it had sometimes to make several journeys between Paris and London, accompanied by numerous memoranda and *notes verbales*, before being able to pursue its voyage to Moscow in a double version, English and French. From there it would return changed beyond recognition. Everything had to start anew."

[1] *Op. cit.* pages 165-7. It is an *aide-mémoire* communicated by Sir Eric Phipps to the French Government.

On May 2nd, in the House of Commons, Chamberlain was again answering questions about Russia in a placidly appeasing manner : " We are carrying on discussions of a perfectly friendly character. There must necessarily be a great many details which have to be considered, and there are other Governments to be considered. . . . There is no want of goodwill on the part of His Majesty's Government." But the Russian plan was not accepted ; and on May 3rd, at night, it became known in Moscow that Litvinov had, " at his own request ", relinquished the office of Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Next day a four-line Tass statement, inserted on the back pages of the principal Russian newspapers, announced his resignation, and a three-line communiqué, on the front pages, Molotov's appointment ; while editorials in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* treated of awards of medals to rural school teachers for their efforts to promote loyalty and culture. " Foreign diplomats here are simply flabbergasted," cabled Henry Denny to the *New York Times* on May 4th. " The British and French envoys, who had been negotiating with Mr. Litvinov, appeared to be as bewildered as the rest. . . . Even his subordinates at the Foreign Office had no inkling in advance." Duranty, another Moscow correspondent of the *New York Times*, concluded that the Kremlin, " fed up with all this shilly-shallying with the two Western governments it neither liked nor trusted ", had " in the most demonstrative way " thrown overboard the policy of collective security, and resumed " complete liberty of action in all its relations with all parties in Europe " Similarly the Warsaw correspondent of *The Times* :

> The tactics of M. Litvinov . . . approved only half-heartedly by the Political Bureau, brought the Soviet Government into relatively close collaboration with other Governments and into membership of the League of Nations. His retirement may be expected to bring a greater measure of isolation into the conduct

of Soviet foreign policy and an independence more advantageous for the purpose of " criticising " conditions in both non-Communist camps of the world.

But a *Times* leader on May 5th saw " no reason to anticipate . . . any change in the prime objectives of Soviet foreign policy ".

In Parliament a fresh crop of questions about Russia was addressed to the Prime Minister who, obviously rattled, vented a peevish displeasure on the Opposition. To Attlee's remark that the delays were causing uncertainty, he snapped back : " I do realise that uncertainty is being created by a number of people who are all the time suggesting that if there is any fault it must be the fault of the British Government " — their " purely partisan attitude " is not " conducive to the interests of this country, but I cannot be held responsible for that ". When urged " that the nation should be informed what the proposals made really are ", he quoted *The Times* for the state of ignorance in which the U.S.S.R. kept its own people ; and when Gallacher suggested his " making personal contact in order to get Stalin's own view ", he replied : " Perhaps the hon. Member would suggest with whom I should make personal contact, because personalities change rather rapidly " — a partisan retort, conducive to no good and hardly befitting a responsible statesman in the middle of negotiations on which the peace of Europe most truly depended, and which his Government professed to treat seriously.[1]

At what stage the U.S.S.R. ceased so to treat them may remain a moot point even after its archives have been opened, for the change is more likely to have been a gradual shifting of interest and emphasis than a sudden *volte-face*. The shelving of the Jew Litvinov removed a personal obstacle to Russian-German conversations ; it should

[1] On May 10th he himself described them as " of the greatest importance and of real urgency ".

have been a warning to this country, but was hardly taken as such : too little was read into it at the time, and too much in the light of subsequent events. As yet Russia merely resumed full freedom of movement ; but the trend was away from the Allies, and the layout of the field would have made the game perplexing even for skilled, far-sighted, and alert players on the British side, and rendered it well-nigh hopeless for men who had tied themselves up in useless combinations and failed to perceive the danger ahead.

With the Bolsheviks there was the doctrinal, axiomatic fear of a coalition of " capitalist " Powers, settling their differences and realising their " Imperialist " aims at the expense of Soviet Russia. Hence the desire for an understanding with one side or the other to preclude such a combination ; and this desire grew more urgent as the aggressiveness of the Nazis increased. The U.S.S.R. would have liked best to prevent war, or at least to put it off, for it needed time to strengthen the military, economic, and political fabric of its system and régime ; and realising Hitler's determination to act, and the obsessionist depth of his hatred against Communism, it wanted to see him effectively encircled by means of an open and firm coalition. Any declarations by Chamberlain or Halifax deprecating a division of Europe into " potentially hostile groups " or " opposing blocs ", or any advances made by them to Hitler's satellites in Italy and Spain, were therefore apt to arouse Russian suspicions.[1] John W. Owens, editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, cabled from London on May 10th :

> Consummate the alliance, say the Russians, and Mussolini would be negotiating in London and Paris within twenty-four hours. There would be peace. Fail to consummate the alliance, or water it down,

[1] Even appeasing fustian by Lord Rushcliffe, in a letter to *The Times* on May 5th, seemed ominous to the Russians.

> or even parley too long — again stating the policy when Litvinov was in office — and there will be war this year. . . .
>
> Are the Russians altruistic? They say not. Any major war, they reason, will retard their development. And no one knows where Hitler will strike. It may be in the East, and in a manner that will . . . compel the Russians to war even though they are not bound by the alliance. They claim that they are not so vulnerable . . . as Britain and France, but still they are vulnerable. Hence they serve themselves when proposing an alliance that in their opinion will bring Hitler to a halt.

Whether the hesitations of the Western Powers sprang from weakness, ignorance, or from a dislike of the U.S.S.R., from an obstinate hope of reforming Hitler or of converting Mussolini and Franco, or from regard for Poland, Rumania, and the Baltic States, the outcome, the Russians feared, might be a super-Munich at their expense. However unfounded, these apprehensions were genuine. If there was to be no alliance with the Western Powers, the U.S.S.R. was preparing to strike a bargain with the Nazis. This, it must have realised, would mean a European war : but also a decisive break in the " capitalist " camp. Probably the Russians overrated the strength of the Allies, and expected a much longer and more even struggle on the Continent, leaving them the arbiters, possibly without serious effort and fighting on their part. Anyhow, it was in their interest that the Western Powers should be first in meeting the impact of the German attack, and that the German march on Warsaw should turn against Paris rather than be continued against Moscow. Lastly, in a combination in which priority as allies was given to Poland and Rumania, and regard was paid to the Baltic States, Russia could not hope to recover provinces lost during her eclipse as a Great Power at the end of the previous war. Was she to risk fighting another one,

and bear its main brunt on land, with little chance of regaining her international position or even her national territory? When Göring said to Nevile Henderson at Karinhall, on May 27th, that Russia " out of self-interest " would not give the Poles " any effective military assistance ", he clearly had in mind the situation created by Poland's expansion beyond the Curzon Line.

What Russia now demanded was a new Triple Entente, in which she would be the principal partner in the East, with her smaller neighbours subordinated to her : a faint anticipation of what was to be conceded to her at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. But nothing of this kind was as yet envisaged in the West, least of all by the Chamberlain Government. Pertinax wrote on May 9th, in a despatch to the *New York Times*, that in Stalin's opinion Britain and France, " as long as they withdrew from the pact, practically refused to extend to Russia the treatment of a Great Power and strove to push her back to a position of inferiority ", and that Litvinov was dismissed " because the British Government refused to comply with his request that an Anglo-French-Russian Pact of mutual assistance should be concluded and form the central piece of the new system of security ".

The negotiations had therefore to be continued with a new man who could talk to Ribbentrop as easily as to Halifax (or easier : for Halifax would not go to Moscow) ; and they dragged on in an atmosphere of irritation and mutual distrust, with the Russians all the time afraid of being double-crossed by the Munichers. But seldom does anyone entertain such apprehensions unless himself inclined to take similar action : and then he is apt to do so first.

It was only on May 8th that the British reply to the Russian proposals of April 17th was presented by Sir William Seeds in Moscow ; and then it merely endeavoured to reassure the Soviet Government that they

would not be expected to intervene on behalf of Poland or Rumania " irrespective of whether Great Britain and France had already . . . done so ". (According to Pertinax, Daladier had tried in vain to convince Chamberlain " that it was urgent . . . to comply with the Russian wishes about the capital point of the Anglo-French guarantee to Russia ".) The next day, a Moscow communiqué of Tass called attention to Britain's silence about reciprocal assistance to Russia should she " become engaged in military operations in fulfilling obligations undertaken with regard to other Eastern European States " ; and on May 11th an editorial in *Izvestia* declared that there could be no real collaboration without reciprocity, and pointed to " the highly interesting fact " that Great Britain and France alone were to decide whether and when aggression should be resisted, though the brunt of such resistance " would fall principally on the U.S.S.R. owing to its geographical position ". The criticism was justified, but so intent were the Russians on detecting loopholes and pitfalls in British proposals, and such was their distrust, that one wonders whether even a sensible offer from this side could have assuaged it.

A new approach to the problem was now hoped for in London from a personal exchange of views between Halifax and Potemkin, Deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, at a meeting of the League of Nations Council in Geneva, called for May 15th. Potemkin, who had visited Ankara, Sofia, and Bucharest, reached Warsaw on May 10th, and, at Russia's request, the Council meeting was postponed to the 21st, to enable him to report to his Government. But on May 16th it was announced from Moscow that he would be unable to go, and that Maisky would represent the U.S.S.R. There was a touch of farce in conversations being continued in Geneva which could have much better been carried on in London. It was suggested at the time that Russia was trying to

manœuvre the British Government into sending a Cabinet Minister to Moscow. On May 10th Dalton had suggested in the House of Commons that Halifax should go ; and it was alleged from Russian sources that, on June 12th, Halifax was officially invited through Maisky, but that no reply was ever vouchsafed to that invitation. On the other hand, on June 21st, Chamberlain, questioned in Parliament whether " the Russian Government had ever asked for the visit of a British Cabinet Minister to Moscow ", replied with a flat denial : a conflict of evidence to which there is no obvious solution.

On May 15th the Russian reply to the British Note of the 8th was received in London : its terms were again withheld from Parliament, but leakages in the Press quickly disclosed its tenor and terms. " The Russian reply ", wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* on the 16th, " . . . does not, it is understood, advance matters much at the present stage. The Russian Government apparently do not feel satisfied that their desire for complete reciprocity in liabilities . . . has been fully met." According to Vernon Bartlett, in the *News Chronicle* of the 17th, the reply from Moscow was explicit on three points : " There should be an Anglo-Russian-French mutual assistance pact. There should be guarantees by these three Powers of the integrity of all Eastern European States bordering on Russia. There should be agreement on the material assistance to be given in carrying out the mutual assistance pact." But he added that Finland, Estonia, and Latvia were " not at all anxious for the attention that guarantees attract ". And on the 19th : " There is less than no progress in Anglo-Russian discussions. After his two talks with Sir Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office, M. Maisky agreed to forward some British suggestions and questions to Moscow ", but " explained that he did not think they would interest his Government ". " I learn ", added Vernon Bartlett, " that

they have failed to do so, since there is still no indication that the British Government is prepared to conclude a three-party pact of non-aggression, and the Soviet Government still insists on this defensive alliance as a first and necessary step."

Parliament Intervenes

On May 19th, in the House of Commons, Lloyd George delivered a speech of statesmanlike insight. "We have reached a point", he said, "where the decisions taken . . . by ourselves, by France, and by Russia, will be more fateful than any decision taken by these three countries since 1914." The situation recalled the early spring of 1918, when it was known that a great attack was coming from Germany, but no one knew where the blow would fall. Now, too, the atmosphere was filled with uneasiness. Something was preparing in the nature of another attack from the aggressors. Peace could be ensured, or victory rendered more certain, by enhancing one's own strength or by securing allies. Mussolini boasted of having countries with a population of 150 millions on the side of the dictators, and apparently this did not include Spain. Moreover, they were superior in equipment, armaments, in the number of trained men, and in pursuing a clear purpose.

> We do not quite know where we are. . . . All this business about Russia is proof of that. We do not quite know what we want. There is a great desire, if possible, to do without Russia. Russia offered to come in months ago. For months we have been staring this powerful gift-horse in the mouth.
>
> Wing-Commander James: And seen its false teeth.
>
> Lloyd George: We are frightened of its teeth. That means that you cannot make up your mind;

> but the other people can. . . . Let us examine the military position as it is or will be with and without Russia. We are going through critical hours . . . in which the fate of Europe, the fate of human rights, and the fate of human freedom, and, it may be, the fate of our Empire, are involved . . . we are passing through hours when a decision taken one way or the other will make all the difference to these essential issues.

The aim of the dictators, like that of Napoleon, "is to produce quick results, to avoid a prolonged war. . . . Germany's ideal is now, and always has been, a war which is brought to a speedy end"; as in 1866 and 1870. "In 1914 plans were made with exactly the same aim in view, and it was very nearly achieved; and they would have achieved it but for Russia." If now "Poland is attacked . . . what help can we render" to defend a frontier of 1500 miles against the Germans? Without Russia the pledges to Poland and Rumania could not be redeemed.

> There has been a campaign of detraction of the Russian Army, Russian resources, Russian capacity, and Russian leadership — a regular campaign of detraction. A good deal of it has been in public, but most of it has been in private. We shall never forget the Lindbergh episode. . . .
>
> There is a reluctance . . . to acknowledge the tremendous change which has occurred in Russia industrially and militarily. . . . Their industrial output is ninefold what it was in 1914. The same thing applies in other fields. They have the finest air force in the world, they have an extraordinarily powerful tank force. And they are offering to place all this at the disposal of the Allies provided they are treated on equal terms. . . . Why is not that done?

An alliance with Russia should be accepted on equal terms and without insulting distinctions.

> What is the good of this political snobbery . . . ? The issues are too tremendous for that. To say simply she must come in with a guarantee here and must send her troops there — that is not a full and whole-hearted alliance. Why do we not make up our mind, and make it up without any loss of time, that we should come to the same terms with Russia as we do with France? If you do that . . . the chances against war would go up.

A very different note was struck by Chamberlain when he rose to reply. Lloyd George seemed to him " almost to go out of his way to find . . . evidence of the imminence of some frightful catastrophe ".

> MR. LLOYD GEORGE : Unless Russia were brought in.
>
> MR. CHAMBERLAIN : I do not want to underrate the gravity of the present situation, but I think the right hon. Gentleman painted a somewhat overgloomy picture. . . .
>
> The assurances which we gave to Poland . . . Rumania, and to Greece were . . . what one might call first-aid treatment given to avoid any further deterioration in the situation. It still remains to strengthen them by more permanent arrangements and to try to get more support for them from any other quarters that are able and willing to give that support. I want to make it clear that this policy is not a policy of lining up opposing blocs of Powers in Europe animated by hostile intentions towards one another, and accepting the view that war is inevitable. . . . We are always trying to avoid this policy of what I call opposing blocs, because it seems to us to be essentially an unstable policy. . . .

As for the part played by Russia in 1914 :

> At that time Russia and Germany had a common frontier, and Poland did not exist, but it is a satisfaction to think that, if we should become involved in war, there is that great, virile nation on the borders of Germany which under this agreement

is bound to give us all the aid and assistance it can. . . .

The House may remember a recent statement by M. Stalin, that it was the policy of the Soviet Union "to support States which might be victims of aggression, provided that they were prepared to defend their independence". That is our point of view. . . . But we were also aware . . . that the direct participation of the Soviet Union in this matter might not be altogether in accordance with the wishes of some of the countries for whose benefit, or on whose behalf, these arrangements were being made. We would desire to have the collaboration of all these countries, and we do not want to have any division among them. . . .

. . . we are trying to build up, not an alliance between ourselves and other countries, but a peace front against aggression, and we should not be succeeding in that policy if, by ensuring co-operation of one country, we rendered another country uneasy and unwilling to collaborate with us.

Churchill cut through this amiably soppy stuff with a statement of hard facts: after many weeks of negotiation, at a most vital moment, there was a complete deadlock between the U.S.S.R. and the British Government; the differences were not stated, nor the objection against making an agreement "in the broad and simple form proposed by the Russian Soviet Government"; he could not see what was wrong with the Russian proposal of a Triple Alliance.

I do not know whether I can commend it to my right hon. Friend by adopting a simile selected as a special compliment to him. It is like setting up an armoured umbrella, under which other countries would be invited to take shelter. . . . If you are ready to be an ally of Russia in time of war . . . why should you shrink from becoming the ally of Russia now, when you may by that very fact prevent the breaking out of war? I cannot understand all

these refinements of diplomacy and delay. . . .

You will not extend your responsibilities, or your burdens, by extending your guarantees to cover all those countries [Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia]. . . . You are in it up to the neck already, and the question is how to make your system effective, and effective in time.

Poland, Germany, and Russia

On May 20th, Maisky was reported by *The Times* to have told the Foreign Office, " that his Government saw no hope of agreement on the lines of the latest British observations ", and the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy thereupon to have suggested a new approach. The same day (May 20th) Halifax conferred with Daladier and Bonnet in Paris. The French were inclined to favour a Three-Power Pact ; exposed to more immediate danger, and therefore more realistic, they would go further to meet the Russians (or else the Germans). The next day, in Geneva, Halifax had with Maisky a long talk, officially described as " cordial and exploratory ". Each side restated its view, but some *rapprochement* was said to have been achieved. " It is possible ", wrote the Paris correspondent of *The Times* on May 21st, " that either directly, or by implication, Lithuania would be guaranteed, since the Polish Government presumably regard the independence of that country vital to that of their own. The other Baltic countries, however, would not be included." It was not stated whether Lithuania had asked for such a guarantee, or was at all willing to receive it ; and the " since " in the carefully worded paragraph is indicative of the weight attached to Polish views and wishes. But Moscow could not relish this marked priority conceded to Poland. " If London and Paris can conclude an alliance with Warsaw, why not with Moscow ? so the Russians argue ", wrote the diplomatic correspondent in

the *Manchester Guardian* on the 22nd.

On the other hand Poland, as reconstituted at Versailles and self-enlarged at Riga, was obliged to balance between Germany and Russia and was unable to draw closer to either; and she could not welcome the prospect of a new Triple Entente which would have divided Europe into two " opposing blocs " and forced her to choose between them. She would have wished the Western Powers to maintain towards Germany and Russia a position analogous to her own : that is, not to commit themselves to either. She therefore watched Anglo-Russian negotiations with distrust, but apparently also with discretion, expecting them to fail : the form and tenor of her diplomatic action are not known — most probably it hardly lends itself to precise definition. Chamberlain, when pressed in Parliament for information concerning the attitude of Poland and Rumania, avoided giving direct answers, though he would speak of " other Governments " which had to be considered, and by implication or half-admissions confirmed the surmise of objections being raised from those quarters.

Thus on May 10th, when asked by Noel-Baker whether the guarantee to Poland admitted of an Anglo-Russian alliance, and whether Beck had given " express assurances on that point ", Chamberlain replied that such an alliance was not excluded.

> MR. NOEL-BAKER : And did Colonel Beck raise no objection ?
>
> THE PRIME MINISTER : I did not say that at all. The question which the hon. Member asked me was whether the arrangement with Poland excluded the possibility of an alliance between this country and Russia, and to that I said " No ".

On May 15th :

> MR. BOOTHBY asked the Prime Minister whether the Governments of Poland and Rumania have made

any formal objection to the conclusion of a pact of mutual assistance between this country and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ?

THE PRIME MINISTER : The views of the Polish and Rumanian Governments have not been given formal shape, but their general attitude towards the negotiations which His Majesty's Government are conducting with the Soviet Government is known. . . .

MR. BOOTHBY : May we take it that there is no objection in principle to the conclusion of some form of agreement between His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Government ?

To this there was no reply.

And on the 17th :

MR. COCKS : Have the Government any recent information that Poland and Rumania have withdrawn any of the objections they may have had to the pact [between Great Britain, France, and Russia] ?

THE PRIME MINISTER : Not so far as I am aware.

While the negotiations for a new Triple Entente were proceeding, a curious intermezzo occurred in Warsaw, about which only one document has been published and nothing has ever reached the Press.

Since the end of March, there was a complete deadlock in German-Polish relations. Moltke refrained from calling on Beck, nor did Lipski in Berlin ever see Hitler, Ribbentrop, or even Weizsäcker (except in public and on formal occasions) ; " contact on current matters with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs " was maintained, as Lipski mentions in his *Final Report*, by members of his Embassy. But in the German White Book there appears the following report from Moltke, dated Warsaw, May 23rd, 1939 :

I recently had the opportunity of a talk with Under-Secretary Arciszewski,[1] of which the follow-

[1] Mirosław Arciszewski, a Polish diplomatist, not to be confused with Tomasz Arciszewski, the last Premier of the *émigré* Government in London.

ing seems to deserve attention :

M. Arciszewski was visibly concerned to make clear that the deflection in Polish policy evidenced by the Anglo-Polish declaration of mutual assistance, was not initiated by Minister Beck. The whole policy goes against his grain, and he has acted under pressure from the military and from public opinion. In the end he could not refuse the British offer. But a public discussion of the matter seemed to him inopportune, even because of Poland's present mood, and he continued postponing it till forced into argument by the speech of the Führer. His reply in the Diet, in which he could not avoid defending a policy which was not his, and the enthusiasm with which his speech was received by the public, merely exasperated him. M. Arciszewski proceeded to describe in a dramatic manner how M. Beck, on the day after his speech in the Diet, in an outburst of anger, flung a sheaf of congratulatory wires into a corner. M. Beck even now basically favours the previous policy. In particular he thinks it absurd that just the two comparatively poor countries, Germany and Poland, should fight each other in the ultimate interest of the rich countries.

This account may be somewhat coloured. Still, various indications seem to show that in the course of the last few months M. Beck has been steadily losing support in his pursuit of the policy inaugurated towards us by Marshal Pilsudski. And when an opportunity offered of obtaining a British guarantee for Poland's Western frontier, the military circles obviously contrived to deflect Poland's policy. M. Beck was then forced to follow suit, or otherwise he could not have retained his position.

The account is un-German in its vagueness concerning the time, place, and occasion of the interview (and unusual in recording no reaction on the part of the writer). But in fact there had been two meetings between Moltke and Arciszewski : the matter was started by the Bulgarian Minister in Warsaw, M. Troyanov, enquiring of Arciszew-

ski whether he was willing to meet Moltke at lunch. Clearly Troyanov must have known Moltke's attitude before asking the question — indeed, it would seem more likely that the initiative was Moltke's, though it is not easy to gauge his purpose. Arciszewski accepted, and was instructed by Beck to try to find out how matters stood in Berlin, and to convey to Moltke that Poland's hands were not tied nor the doors closed against further conversations. (Ribbentrop was suspected of misinforming Hitler about Poland, and it was now hoped to set him right through Moltke.) The talk at Troyanov's was presumably of an exploratory nature, but a few days later Moltke invited Arciszewski to a *tête-à-tête* luncheon at the German Embassy. Moltke (in the best style of 1939) started by expatiating on the blow which the ruin of his work for a German-Polish reconciliation had been to him (the failure of his mission). Hitler's speech of April 28th was not a mere tactical move, but sprang from the deepest conviction : he had consulted various people, especially legal experts, and all were unanimous in declaring that Poland's agreement with Britain contravened the spirit and letter of the German-Polish Treaty. Hitler, according to Moltke, followed closely what was happening in Poland, and received information also from sources other than the Warsaw Embassy. Next, Moltke's discourse slid into the usual ruts : he complained of Polish military preparations, Press attacks, claims to East Prussia and Upper Silesia, severe and growing persecutions of the German minority ; lastly, he spoke of the deadlock over Danzig : Hitler could not renounce that German city without betraying the basic principle of National Socialism — to him Poland's negative attitude in this matter seemed to impugn his historic rôle in Germany's destiny.

Arciszewski replied by enumerating the services which Poland had rendered to Hitler at critical moments, incurring obloquy in Europe. It was not till January 1939 that

the Reich started pressing claims to Danzig as a ransom for good-neighbourly relations. There Poland had made far-reaching concessions to the Nazis, and was prepared to go still further, but not the length of admitting German economic or military dominion over the Free City. No Polish statesman could do so without losing all hold over his country. In March, German armies, without a word of explanation, outflanked Poland through Slovakia and Memel, and this was followed by an ultimatum with its term of expiry so far unnamed : no wonder if Poland felt threatened. In these circumstances Beck could not refuse the British guarantee, even if he might have preferred good-neighbourly relations with Germany which would call for no such assurance. But anyhow the agreement was in no way aggressive. Here followed perhaps the most significant point in Arciszewski's argument : what change, he asked, did that agreement make in European alignments ? Poland was the ally of France, and France of Great Britain, which would thus anyhow be drawn into a European conflict. The Polish-British agreement merely assured Poland of more direct and immediate assistance, but did not mark any change in her policy towards Germany. Were Poland to abandon the middle line between Germany and Russia, and enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union, then, and only then, would there be substance in allegations of a change in Polish policy. But, Arciszewski continued, Poland had refused to take part in such combinations in the past, and would continue doing so. For Beck the recent turn in Polish-German relations was as severe a blow as for Moltke — and here Arciszewski told the story about Beck angrily flinging the sheaf of congratulatory wires into the corner (also the remark about " the comparatively poor countries " fighting in the interest of the rich is authentic, but was apparently meant as a joke). To avoid public controversy and a consequent exacerbation of feelings,

Beck had tried to conceal Germany's demands on Poland, and even when asked point-blank about them by Halifax in London, gave an evasive answer. The Polish nation learnt about them only from the Führer's speech on April 28th. Even now, he hinted, Beck had not yet abandoned all hope of reaching a friendly arrangement with Germany.

It is not known how much of Arciszewski's discourse closely kept to lines laid down for him by Beck, nor can this ever be ascertained. Obviously their interpretations differed : for though it is from Arciszewski alone that Beck can have heard what had been said to Moltke, he is reported to have blamed Arciszewski for having talked too much. Certainly the statement that Poland would enter no combinations with Russia, obvious as this must have been to anyone thoroughly acquainted with the outlook and policy of the Pilsudski régime and the inherent needs of a Poland extended to the Riga line, must none the less have been illuminating to the Nazis — even with regard to the stage reached in Anglo-Russian negotiations ; and one wonders to what use they may have put it ? As far as German-Polish relations were concerned, there seems to have been no sequel to the talks between Moltke and Arciszewski.

On May 22nd, in Berlin, the German-Italian treaty of alliance — the " Pact of Steel " — was signed by Ribbentrop and Ciano, with much show and ceremony and in Hitler's presence ; and the next day, the final decision to attack Poland at the first opportune moment was taken in a conclave of Nazi leaders.[1] On May 24th the British Cabinet decided to meet Russia's demand for " reciprocity " ; and the same day Chamberlain expressed in Parliament the hope that " it will be found possible to reach full agreement at an early date. There still remain some further points to be cleared up, but I

[1] See below, pages 213-17.

do not anticipate that these are likely to give rise to any serious difficulty ". And the next day the diplomatic correspondent wrote in *The Times* :

> Agreement among Great Britain, France, and Soviet Russia seems at last to be in sight. Yesterday morning the Cabinet passed a plan providing for immediate and concerted action in case any of the three Powers was attacked and for common action — as may be requested or devised — in case of aggression against certain other Powers. . . . As soon as the Soviet Government accept this plan . . . an announcement will be made in the House.

Meantime, on May 23rd, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* had reported with obvious relief from Geneva : " Polish and Rumanian misgivings are now understood to have been largely removed. Both States have let it be known that they themselves are satisfied with their arrangements with the West ", and neither would object to arrangements " which the Western Powers felt obliged in their own interests to make with the Soviet Union ". Hints at such a change in the attitude of the two Powers occur also in Molotov's speech of May 31st : still it is difficult to determine what it all amounted to — perhaps exaggerated importance was ascribed to the apparently favourable results of Potemkin's visits to Bucharest and Warsaw, or of conversations between Kennard and Beck about Poland's attitude to the proposed Anglo-French-Soviet Treaty.[1]

[1] Łukasiewicz, in his *Remarks and Recollections*, published in the London *Dziennik Polski* (November 16th, 1946, "The British Proposal and Molotov's Reply "), states that on May 20th, 1939, Sir Howard Kennard informed Beck of the line taken by the British Government in their negotiations with the U.S.S.R. As a result of this talk a text was settled " which accorded with the views and interests of Poland " : help to third parties was to be made conditional on their asking for it, and no obligations were to be imposed on them by the Treaty [for instance, to allow the use of their territory by foreign troops]. Beck did not object to arrangements which the Western Powers thought it necessary to make with the Soviets, but would not have Poland in any way committed by them.

But when, on May 27th, Mr. Clifford Norton, British Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw, in a Note on Danzig argued for restraint because if " full military action can be postponed for a little time, Germany may be compelled to adopt a more reasonable attitude under the impression that Great Britain, France, and the Soviets are supporting Poland ", the concluding paragraph of the Polish reply read as follows :

> M. Beck has . . . the honour to observe that he doubts whether intervention on the part of the Soviet Government would be favourably accepted by the German Government. Consequently it is possible that such intervention might render the peaceable settlement of an eventual incident very difficult. In any case, M. Beck reserves the right to formulate his opinion on this subject.

In other words, he refused to have Poland included in a combination with Russia which might be resented by Germany : he kept to what had been said to Moltke.

Beck, to the very last moment, clung to the hope of reaching a peaceful settlement with Germany, and, anxious not to infuriate Hitler, carefully kept out of the negotiations which were proceeding between the Western Powers and the U.S.S.R., however closely they concerned Poland — which, besides, is evidence of his having trusted them to fail. The *Final Report* of the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, M. Grzybowski, dated Paris, November 6th, 1939, and published in Part II of the Polish White Book,[1] once only records their having been brought up in talks between him and the Russian Foreign Office. On May 7th, two days after Molotov had replaced Litvinov, he invited Grzybowski to call on him, and, after some high praise of Beck's speech of May 5th, turned to the subject of Russia's negotiations with the Western

[1] A few passages from this *Report* have been deleted at the instance of the French.

Powers. (According to a reliable source, Molotov then informed Grzybowski that the U.S.S.R., in their Note of April 17th, had offered to give military help to Poland provided she agreed to the entry of Russian troops and renounced her alliance with Rumania, this being directed against Russia ; and provided Russia received the assurance that the British guarantee to Poland was against Germany only.) Grzybowski replied that he would have to await instructions from Warsaw, but so much he could say immediately : that Poland's attitude to all her neighbours was " pacific and loyal ", that she favoured collaboration between the Western Powers and Russia, and that she intended to adhere to her alliance with Rumania.

A few days later, having received his instructions, he called again. He confirmed the three points he had previously made, adding that Poland's alliance with Rumania was of a purely defensive character ; and then he stated : that Poland declined to accept a unilateral guarantee ; that she could not enter a treaty of mutual assistance, as in case of a conflict with Germany her forces " would be completely engaged ", and she could not spare any " to give help to the Soviets " ; that she would not engage in " collective negotiations " — " we rejected all discussion of matters affecting us other than by the bilateral method " ; that she considered bilateral negotiations with the U.S.S.R. premature " before the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations had achieved a result " ; that Poland's definite attitude " depended on that result " ; and that Poland did not reject " specified forms of Soviet aid ", but considered it premature to define them now. " M. Molotov ", concludes Grzybowski, " made no objections whatever." But he never reverted to the subject. And Grzybowski remarks speaking about the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations : " We felt no optimism whatever in regard to the result of those

negotiations ". In short, Poland's reply to Russia was every bit as negative as it sounded.

Unsolicited Guarantees and Indirect Aggression

On May 27th the British and French Ambassadors in Moscow presented a new draft agreement to the Russian Foreign Office : the Western Powers were now willing to discuss a triple pact of mutual assistance in the event of direct attack by aggressors, and immediately after signature of the pact to enter into military discussions. But action under that agreement was to conform with Article 16 of the League Covenant ; " immediate aid " was limited to the States guaranteed by the Western Powers ; while in case of attack against any other State there should be consultation, if asked for. These proposals were reviewed by Molotov in a meeting of the Supreme Soviet on May 31st ; the German and Italian Ambassadors were present, the British and French stayed away. Molotov's speech was more than reserved — hardly friendly to the Western Powers. He acknowledged that of recent months the policy of the Western Powers had moved " in the direction of counteracting aggression ", but added : " How serious these changes are still remains to be seen ". Possibly their endeavours " to resist aggression in *some* regions " will prove no obstacle to unleashing it " in *other* regions ". " We must therefore be vigilant." He further acknowledged that the latest proposals for mutual assistance recognised the principles of reciprocity, which " of course is a step forward " ; but again added that such were the hedging reservations (he named the reference to the League Covenant) " that it may prove to be a fictitious step forward ". There was no progress towards reciprocity in guarantees : assistance was to be given by the U.S.S.R. to the five countries guaranteed by the Western Powers (Poland, Rumania, Greece,

Turkey, and Belgium) but nothing was said " about their giving assistance to the three countries on the North-Western frontier of the U.S.S.R. (Finland, Estonia, and Latvia), which may prove unable to defend their neutrality in the event of attack by aggressors ". Molotov's speech contained a favourable reference to economic negotiations with the Axis Powers.

The purpose of invoking the League Covenant is not clear — no such reservation was made in the case of Poland : and the long spoon for Soviet Russia was bound to engender misgivings, of which there was anyhow more than enough on her side. Nor, given mutual distrust, was the Russian argument devoid of cogency that the damming-up of German aggression by guarantees in some directions might deflect it into other, less well-protected, channels; Russia feared being made the quarry, and then left to fend for herself. But if there was so little consciousness of a deeper community of interests, it is difficult to see how any treaty guarantees could have been accepted as adequate. Lastly, the doubts whether the Baltic States would be able " to defend their neutrality ", distinguished the guarantees demanded for them from those given to Poland, Rumania, etc., which were contingent on those countries themselves deciding to fight.

Russia demanded that provision be made for assisting her in the defence " of her vital interests in the Baltic ", wrote the Moscow correspondent in *The Times* of June 2nd ; and the offer of the Western Powers of " consultation " should the " independence of unguaranteed States " be threatened and should they appeal for help, was deemed insufficient : for they might accept German " protection " rather than Soviet assistance. " The Russian Government do not wish to let the Baltic countries make that choice, and it is generally thought here that Russia would send armed forces to prevent the extension of German hegemony over them." " The Baltic States ",

reported the London correspondent of the *New York Times* on June 1st, "have begged Britain not to offer any assistance that might seem to draw them into a bloc and thus compromise them in the eyes of Germany."[1] Indeed, their Prime Ministers protested publicly against having guarantees forced on them, and on June 6th "Augustus Schmidt, Estonian Minister in London, conveyed to Halifax the refusal of Latvia, Estonia, and Finland to allow other Powers to guarantee them against German aggression".[2] The next day Karl Selter and V. Munters, Foreign Ministers of Estonia and Latvia, signed Non-Aggression Treaties with Germany; and before long General Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, visited their countries where fortifications were being constructed under the supervision of German military experts.

"The Russian claim", wrote Churchill in the *New York Herald-Tribune* on June 7th,

> that Finland and the Baltic States should be included in the triple guarantee is well founded. . . . People say, "What if they do not wish to be guaranteed?" It is certain, however, that if Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were invaded by the Nazis or subverted to the Nazi system by propaganda and intrigue from within, the whole of Europe would be dragged into war. . . . Why not then concert in good time, publicly and courageously, the measures which may render such a fight unnecessary?

[1] Daladier said in the French Chamber of Deputies on July 18th, 1946:

> On June 2nd [1939], after agreement had been reached on all points essential from the political point of view, Soviet Russia brusquely demanded that the three negotiating Powers, Great Britain, France, and Russia, should lend their military support to the Baltic States, even if these refused it.

Greater emphasis may have been put on that demand; but it could hardly have been so new and startling as Daladier's words suggest, seeing that it was discussed in the Press before June 2nd.

[2] See Frederick L. Schuman, *Night over Europe* (1941), page 248. The book is based on a thorough digest of official publications and of the very well-informed American Press.

Why indeed, one might ask, should there have been the distinction foreshadowed in *The Times* between Lithuania and the other three Baltic States ? [1] German aggression across Holland and Lithuania was guarded against in the Anglo-Polish Treaty of August 25th, 1939 ; [2] and Holland is known to have been discussed during Beck's visit to London in April 1939. It might be argued that there was no danger of Great Britain, under cover of a " guarantee ", trying to annex Holland. But Poland never ceased propounding schemes of " federation " with Lithuania — what was there to justify unsolicited secret arrangements about her with Poland ? Still, only with regard to the other three Baltic States, Chamberlain's conscience seemed to boggle.

The Russian answer to the Anglo-French proposals of May 27th was delivered on June 2nd. This, according to information given by Bonnet to Łukasiewicz,[3] demanded all reference to the League of Nations Covenant to be deleted ; mutual help to be assured in case of attack against one of the three Contracting Powers, or against Belgium, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Rumania, Turkey, or Greece, or against a neutral Power prepared to defend its neutrality (Holland and Switzerland) ; help to be automatic (no " consultation clause ") ; the article precluding obligations to be imposed on third parties to be deleted ; [4] and the political agreement to be tied up with the conclusion of a military agreement.

> What the Soviet Foreign Office have done in their reply [wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* on June 5th] is to go through the Anglo-French draft agreement clause by clause, point by point. Some clauses they return more or less as sent them : the one dealing with immediate assistance in case one

[1] See above, page 169. [2] See Cmd. 6616 (1945), Protocol.
[3] See *Dziennik Polski*, November 16th, 1946.
[4] See above, page 176, *n.*

> of the three Powers is directly attacked, the proposal for immediate military discussion, the suggested term of five years, with option of renewal — all these points are accepted. Other clauses are rewritten in the light of Molotov's speech. The result is a complete new draft . . . or, as it could be called, the Three-Power Pact, eleventh edition ; revised and enlarged ; private circulation only.

That "private circulation" apparently included *The Times* but not Parliament, who as a rule were informed about current negotiations in general terms only.

On June 7th Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons :

> It is not intended that the military support which the three Powers would agree to extend to one another should be confined to a case of actual aggression upon their territory. It is possible to imagine various cases in which one of the three Governments might feel that its security was indirectly menaced by the action of another European Power. . . .
>
> There remain one or two difficulties to be resolved, in particular the position of certain States, which do not want to receive a guarantee on the ground that it would compromise the strict neutrality which they desire to preserve. It is manifestly impossible to impose a guarantee on States which do not desire it, but I hope that some means may be found by which this difficulty . . . shall not stand in the way of giving effect to the principle of mutual support against aggression.[1]

[1] A short time later, General Sir Walter Kirke, Director-General of the Territorial Army, was visiting the Finnish military establishments, and the following despatch from Helsinki appeared in *The Times* of June 10th :

> General Sir Walter Kirke . . . receives warm tributes for his timely and happily worded toast to Finland at the dinner given yesterday by M. Erkko, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Particular appreciation has been won by his playful reference to Finland as a pretty girl with many suitors, although she is not eager to get a partner for the next dance, and his subsequent remark that everybody in Great Britain appreciates her attitude and nobody wants to disturb her maidenly modesty.
>
> In alluding to Sir Walter's words that Finland desires to sit alone,

> In order to accelerate the negotiations it has been decided to send a representative of the Foreign Office to Moscow to convey to His Majesty's Ambassador there information as to the attitude of His Majesty's Government on all outstanding points. I hope that by this method it will be possible more rapidly to complete the discussion that is still necessary to harmonize the views of the three Governments and so reach final agreement.

Pressed for the name of the emissary, Chamberlain refused to disclose it but described him as a civil servant. Next day it was known in Fleet Street that it was Mr. William Strang, Head of the Central Department at the Foreign Office.

Chamberlain's statement represented the usual mixture of concession and hesitation, of endeavour and reluctance. The need of guarding against " indirect aggression " was acknowledged, and an attempt at circumventing the opposition of the Baltic States was foreshadowed ; and yet there was a certain haziness, where a show of clear, hard determination was called for. Even the sending of a comparatively junior official of the Foreign Office, however able and experienced, on a mission of such paramount importance was surprising. " Yesterday M. Maisky . . . called to ask Lord Halifax what exactly Mr. Strang proposed to do at Moscow . . .", wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* of June 9th. " On the Soviet side it had apparently been hoped that a Cabinet Minister would go to Moscow at this stage." Had the Soviets been truly keen on an agreement with the Western Powers, they might have said like Talleyrand writing from London in 1831 : " We have to deal here with timid people. *Ils arrivent un peu lentement, mais enfin ils*

the Press remarks that even though Finland may not remain quite alone she will refrain from joining the " dance " now being arranged, and will herself choose the company in which she will watch it at a distance. Finland has no higher desire than that British politicians also will share the General's views on this matter.

arrivent." But the Russians were already in two minds, and considering two opposite lines of action ; they were therefore hardly gracious in their way of receiving the tentative and tardy moves of the British Government to attain a position which would prove satisfactory to the Russians.

On June 7th Pertinax cabled from Paris to the *New York Times* the gist of the formula which was being elaborated :

> Each signatory . . . Britain, France, and Russia, would be entitled unilaterally to define its " vital interests " and call upon the two others to give help. Such a formula was conceded last April to Poland in order to enable her to counteract an offensive of any kind launched against her across Lithuania. It will extend analogous protection to Soviet Russia as far as Latvia and Estonia are concerned.

On the 10th *The Times* seemed to confirm the forecast that the so-called " Polish formula " would be accepted. But the next day Pertinax reported that Chamberlain, John Simon, and Samuel Hoare had gone back on the formula agreed by the Cabinet on the 7th.

> As a consequence, they amended rather drastically the draft of the mutual assistance pact and provided for previous diplomatic consultation to take place whenever the territorial integrity or political independence of the Baltic States would be placed in jeopardy and Russia turned toward her two great allies.
>
> It goes without saying that such stipulation would not have even the most slender chance of proving acceptable to Moscow. Since yesterday the French Government has been hard put to it to convince London that on the above lines there is not any serious prospect that an agreement can be arrived at.

Finally an understanding, according to Pertinax satisfactory to Paris, seems to have been reached between the

Western Powers : no consultation was to be required in case of aggression, direct or indirect, but only if one of the signatories were to become " engaged in hostilities as the outcome of international complications ", which expression was supposed to cover " political penetration ". From London on the same day (June 12th) it was reported by the *New York Times* correspondent, Ferdinand Kuhn, that Strang was not taking out any particular formula, but that he " has been well coached on the British Cabinet's attitude and will be able to work out various alternative texts ", and that Britain was willing to give " a sweeping pledge of support ", but not to name the Baltic States. *The Times* similarly denied Strang having been given a " hard-and-fast draft for the proposed agreement " —for in that case " there would really be no point in his going ; the draft could be much more easily sent by telegram ". Strang left by aeroplane on the 12th.

About the same time rumours concerning Russia began to appear in the American Press, which was naturally much freer than the English in registering and discussing them. Thus Edwin L. James wrote in the *New York Times* on June 11th that little credence was given in London and Paris " to the idea that Russia is stringing them along with the basic idea of ending up by making an arrangement with Hitler ". And Kuhn, in his despatch of the 12th : " There is still an undercurrent of doubt here whether the Russians really want a pact. . . ."

On the eve of Strang's arrival at Moscow (June 13th), *Pravda* published a front-page editorial insisting that the Baltic States must be guaranteed ; it also claimed that Poland and Rumania had abandoned their original objections to guarantees by the Soviet Union.

On June 15th the British and French Ambassadors and Strang had a talk of two and a half hours with Molotov and Potemkin, and a second meeting of one

hour on the 16th, when they received the Russian reply to their proposals. The same day a statement was published and broadcast declaring that " in the circles of the Soviet Foreign Ministry the results of the first talks are regarded as not entirely favourable " (the surviving " consultation clause " seems to have been considered specially objectionable) ; also the demand for Staff talks before the political agreement was finally concluded seems now to have been urged by Russia. On June 21st the Western representatives produced yet another draft treaty which they discussed for two hours with the Russians ; and early the next day Tass issued the following communiqué :

> The British Ambassador, Sir William Seeds, the French Ambassador, M. Naggiar, and Mr. Strang were received by M. Molotov yesterday, and they handed him " new " Anglo-French proposals, which repeat previous proposals of Great Britain and France.
>
> Circles close to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs note that the " new " Anglo-French proposals do not show any progress compared with previous proposals.

The same day, the Ambassadors and Strang had a talk of barely half an hour with Molotov, to receive Stalin's reply. They were told that their formula concerning the Baltic States was unacceptable, but no alternative was offered : only Reuter's correspondent was given an " unofficial " hint that " the Soviet Government insists on cast-iron guarantees to the Baltic States ". Now apparently it was the Western Powers which urged that naming certain countries invited attack against the unnamed, and that guarantees to the Baltic States, while Holland and Switzerland were omitted, would leave Russia free to stand aside in case the latter were attacked ; moreover, the previous argument was urged that the Baltic States

would bitterly resent having guarantees imposed on them.

" The expert draughtsmen at the Foreign Office are continuously engaged in framing words to set Soviet doubts at rest ", wrote the *Daily Telegraph* on June 23rd. The same day Halifax asked Maisky to call on him in the evening ; according to the *Daily Telegraph* of the 24th, Halifax was " at a loss to know what further steps can be taken by Britain to carry conviction in Moscow on the *bona fides* of British intentions ". The same day, *The Times* wrote : " . . . the lack of progress towards an Anglo-Russian agreement is felt to be distinctly disappointing ". " It is common knowledge that the latest Anglo-French proposals embodied all points upon which the Soviet Government laid emphasis at the outset of the discussions."

It had been a mistake on the part of the British Government, so quick, unstinting, and easy about terms when handing out guarantees to second and third-rate Powers, to have treated Soviet Russia like a suppliant, and to have started off with suggestions which were both ludicrous and humiliating ; it was a further mistake to have gone on haggling about every concession, which rendered it ungracious and unconvincing ; it was a third mistake to have sent a junior official to negotiate with Russia, and, later on, Service men of less standing than were sent, for instance, to Poland or Turkey. Behind it all was a deep, insuperable aversion to Bolshevist Russia, such as was not shown in dealings with Hitler or Mussolini ; and whether it was justified or not, it certainly was not conducive to success in very difficult negotiations. " Seeing that these negotiations have now dragged on for ten weeks ", said Dalton in the House of Commons on June 26th, " and it is more than ten days since Mr. Strang was sent to Moscow, is not the Government taking some more energetic action in the

form, for example, of sending a Minister to meet M. Molotov?" "I do not think that this would help matters", replied Chamberlain.

By the end of June this view may possibly have been correct; nothing could have been less gracious or engaging than the way in which the Russians were now conducting the negotiations: snubbing and disparaging every effort to meet their declared wishes, refusing all compromise, raising new points and difficulties, and making a public show of calculated and aggressive rudeness. People naturally began to wonder whether a favourable issue was at all desired in Moscow; and, in the light of after-events, the question has been asked whether negotiations with Germany had not already been going on, those with the Western Powers merely serving to exert pressure on the Nazis. There can be no doubt as to the usefulness of continuing such talks as something to fall back upon, even if the possibility of closing with the other side was already seriously examined. But while hints may have been dropped in the economic *pourparlers* which were conducted between Moscow and Berlin, it seems most unlikely that there should have been any political negotiations before August. An objective consideration of the Russian position, ideas, and tactics suggests that in their own interest the Bolsheviks would not have engaged in premature political talks with the Nazis. They knew full well that they could have an agreement with Berlin at any time, on terms which called for no lengthy discussions; they further knew that they were dealing with people capable of every sort of blackmail and double-crossing; they were obsessed with the fear of a coalition of the "capitalist, Imperialist Powers" (as early as the beginning of May, Göring sent Bodenschatz the round of the Allied Embassies with hints of an impending German-Russian *rapprochement* in order to frighten those Powers into voluntary compliance with

Hitler's demands [1]). The date for opening a campaign against Poland lay between the harvest season and the autumn rains. Had Moscow enabled Berlin to reveal, say early in July, a grouping and disposition of forces such as appeared in the last week of August, a protracted " war of nerves " might have resulted in a bloodless German victory, followed by some kind of coalition against Russia. Therefore even had Stalin already made up his mind not to conclude the Triple Pact which he was discussing with the Western Powers, Russia would have had to cut as fine as possible the margin between starting political negotiations with the Nazis and the date beyond which these could not delay opening the campaign against Poland.

In the meantime the Russians could continue improving the terms of their proposed arrangements with the Western Powers upon which they might yet have to fall back; and while doing so they were able to indulge in public rudeness to people who had been none too courteous to them in the past — which had the additional advantage of keeping the Nazis in suspense. And though there can be no doubt of the sincere desire of the Anglo-French negotiators for a favourable result, it is equally certain that there was a good deal of ambivalence in the attitude of the governing circles in Britain, and even of the diplomatic corps. The despatch published in the *Chicago Daily Times* of July 8th, 1940, purporting to reproduce the conversation of a diplomat (quoted by name) who served in 1939 in the British Embassy in Moscow, is not sufficiently authenticated to be treated as evidence. But the well-authenticated remarks by an ex-diplomat, Sir Francis Lindley, are indicative of the attitude which prevailed in certain circles : on June 8th, 1939, addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee of Conservative members of the House of Commons, he declared,

[1] See above, pages 137-42.

according to the official report (as quoted in the *Manchester Guardian* the next day), " that British prestige would suffer less if negotiations with Russia failed than if they succeeded, because in the latter case it would be considered abroad that we had been driven to accept an alliance on the Russian terms ". And Nevile Henderson, speaking on August 23rd at Berchtesgaden with Hitler, thought fit to declare that " if an agreement had to be made with Moscow . . . I had rather Germany made it than ourselves " ; these words quoted by Henderson himself are prefaced in the German minute by the remark that " he personally had never believed in an Anglo-French-Russian Pact ". Nor was he alone in holding that view.

On June 26th, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, a long cable was received at the Foreign Office from Sir William Seeds, detailing points on which agreement had not been reached and making recommendations; whereupon the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy met and agreed on new instructions which were completed by the night of the 27th.

> It is understood [wrote *The Times* on the 29th] . . . that the French and British Governments . . . are willing to give the Russian Government a reciprocal guarantee for automatic assistance in case both of direct aggression and of aggression directed against any State whose integrity is considered of vital importance by any one of the three signatories to the agreement.
>
> This provision clearly covers the Baltic States, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland.

The same day a letter appeared in *Pravda*, signed by Andrey Zhdanov, member of the Political Bureau, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and head of the Kremlin Press Bureau ; he claimed to express only his " personal opinion ", but it was hardly customary for

high Soviet officials to write letters to the Press — and of this one the full text was immediately cabled abroad by the Tass Agency. Zhdanov's contention was " that the British and French Governments have no wish for an equal treaty with the U.S.S.R." Negotiations had now been going on for seventy-five days, of which the Soviet Government took sixteen, " while the remaining fifty-nine had been consumed by delays and procrastination on the part of the British and the French ". He next described the problem of the Baltic States as " an artificially invented ' stumbling block ' to the negotiations " — " when . . . Great Britain believes it to be in her interest to guarantee this or another country, she finds proper ways for it without waiting for these countries to demand guarantees for themselves " ; *e.g.* the Anglo-Polish Agreement had apparently guaranteed Holland and Lithuania without reference to either. He quoted Beck's public declarations declining the guarantee for Poland which the U.S.S.R. was pressed to give. Nor was anything known of Rumania, Greece, Turkey, and Belgium desiring one from Russia; or Holland and Switzerland, " with which the U.S.S.R. does not even maintain ordinary diplomatic relations ". He finished by insinuating that the Western Powers in talking about a treaty merely tried to make Russia appear " unyielding " so as to render it easier for themselves to make a deal with Hitler.

On July 1st the two Ambassadors and Strang again spent two hours with Molotov ; but for once there was no unfavourable comment in the Soviet communiqué about the meeting. Indeed, that day exceptional affability was shown : three columns in *Pravda* were filled with the speech delivered by Halifax at Chatham House on June 29th. On July 3rd another hour and a half was spent in conference, over the Soviet reply.

> . . . it is known [wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* of July 5th] that agreement had . . .

> been reached on the fundamentals of a three-Power defensive pact and on the principle of immediate military co-operation if certain other States were made victims of aggression. The three Powers are also agreed on the way in which reference should be made to the League principles ; on the need for immediate military conversations ; and on the provision against a separate armistice or peace.

But just as rumours were spreading that the Pact was about to be signed, reported the *New York Times* correspondent from London on the 4th, " still another hitch . . . became apparent ". There were two long meetings of the Committee on Foreign Policy to discuss Russian objections. The exact points of disagreement were not disclosed, but " a clue to the nature of the trouble could be found . . . in yesterday's communiqué from The Hague protesting that the Netherlands did not want to be mentioned in any guarantee by the Great Powers and wanted only to remain neutral ". In fact, the smaller States, both east and west, were to have been named " but in a separate document that would not have been published ". Russia did not take kindly to the idea of guaranteeing Holland and Switzerland, and put up new demands. " The nature of Russia's additional demands was not made known here today, but it was clear enough that the Russians had again raised their price and had raised it beyond the capacity of Britain, France, and their Eastern European allies to pay."

" The negotiations ", wrote *The Times* on July 5th, " now stand like an iceberg : the eight-ninths that is agreed lies submerged and at times forgotten ; the ninth still defying agreement, sticks out in a remarkably craggy formation." And the next day its diplomatic correspondent gave a comprehensive, clear survey of the course the negotiations had taken :

> As many guesses at the causes of the delay have been made it may be well to state exactly the position.

All seemed to be going forward fairly easily until two or three weeks ago. The Governments had agreed on the principles of a three-Power defensive agreement, and had agreed that it was in their common interest to defend certain States against direct or indirect aggression.

The difficulties began as soon as the negotiators began listing these other States. A kind of competition was immediately begun. The British, as is well known, suggested Belgium, Poland, Rumania, Greece, and Turkey. The Soviet Government agreed —provided that we allowed them to add the States on their north-western frontier, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. We said that in that case we should have to consider our special interests in the maintenance of Swiss and Netherland independence. The Soviet Government replied that, if we brought Western Europe more clearly into the picture, they would have to consider means of ensuring their immediate help to the West, and suggested that they ought first to open negotiations for military agreements with Turkey and Poland. At the same time they defined what they meant by " direct or indirect aggression " in terms so far-reaching that, on the British side, there are misgivings that they amount to potential interference in the internal politics of other States.

According to Gafenco, the following text of Article I of the draft Treaty was proposed by Molotov on July 4th :[1]

Great Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R. undertake to render each other full, immediate, and efficacious assistance should one of the three countries become engaged in war with any European State either in consequence of aggression by that Power against one of the three countries or aggression by that Power, direct or indirect, against any other European State, if one of the three interested Powers considers itself obliged to defend the independence or neutrality of that State.

[1] *Op. cit.* page 21.

In an explanatory letter, "indirect aggression" was to be defined as "an internal *coup d'état* or a political change favourable to the aggressor". Remembering the way in which the Germans had destroyed Austria and Czechoslovakia from within (and perhaps also Chamberlain's original reaction to such "internal disruption" [1]), the Russians were justified in wishing to name it as a form of aggression against which provision should be made under the Treaty; but in view of the way in which the Soviet Government is apt to intervene in the internal affairs of neighbouring States, the Western Powers were justified in feeling that the clause required careful consideration and drafting. A search now started for a formula which would satisfy the Russian demand, while allaying the suspicions and doubts of the Western Powers. The French suggested that "indirect aggression" should be defined as any action "which would result in an internal *coup d'état* clearly involving an alienation or alteration of sovereignty to the profit of the aggressor".[2] The Foreign Office proposed the following text: "The word 'aggression' is to be understood as covering action accepted by the State in question under threat of force by another Power and involving the abandonment by it of its independence or neutrality". Meantime, Molotov proposed to the British and French Ambassadors to define "indirect aggression" as "action intended to use the territory of one of the States in question for aggression against it or against one of the Contracting Powers". In giving these three formulae, Gafenco does not supply their exact dates, but he writes that Molotov's, "the best of the three", crossed the proposals of the Western Powers. "M. Bonnet hastened to accept it by wire. He was too late." The British formula had meanwhile suggested a new idea to Molotov, who consequently thus

[1] See above, pages 69-70.

[2] For this and the further formulae, see Gafenco, *op. cit.* pages 222-3.

amended his own: "In case of indirect aggression which tried to use the territory of one of the States in question, under threat of force or without such threat, for aggression against it or against one of the Contracting Powers".

Daladier, in the account he gave to the French Chamber on July 18th, 1946, of the Russian Note of July 4th, 1939, again stressed, and it would seem overstressed, the new and surprising character of the Russian demands:

> When we thought that everything was complete, and that nothing was left but to sign, we were on July 4th faced by a new demand: it was not enough to impose military assistance on unwilling nations, but the military alliance of the three Great Nations was to come into action also in case of what the Russian Government called "indirect aggression".

Possibly the Russian formula gave a new and wider scope to the conception; but the problem of "indirect aggression" and "political penetration" had already reached the Press in the first half of June.[1] According to Daladier, France was again the first to accept, and pressed Great Britain to do likewise:

> We insisted once more; I insisted personally. Great Britain accepted, and at last, on July 17th, after so many vicissitudes . . . we thought that we were making for port,—as M. Molotov declared that the outstanding divergencies were of very minor importance,—and that the political agreement was virtually concluded. But when we asked . . . that it should be signed, he refused, and would not agree to a communiqué being issued, which, at that time of European tension, would have had a very great and beneficial influence for the pacification of our Continent. We therefore limited ourselves to initialling the agreement.

[1] See above, pages 180-86.

In an article on " The Nuremberg Trial and the German-Russian Pact ", published in *Minerve* on April 5th, 1946, Daladier gives the date of the alleged initialling of a political agreement as July 24th. Were one to accept Daladier's statements the problem of " indirect aggression " would by now have been solved.[1] But Halifax, referring to it, said in the House of Lords on August 3rd, 1939:

> . . . it is no secret that the proposals that the British and French Governments have made have appeared to the Soviet Government insufficiently comprehensive, whilst the formula favoured by the Soviet Government has seemed to His Majesty's Government and the French Government to go too far in the other direction.

And he mentioned that the Military Missions were being sent to Moscow " before full agreement has been reached on political issues ". Perhaps in Daladier's statement that " the political agreement was virtually concluded ", the emphasis should be on " virtually ": that in fact it was not concluded.

Here is the course of the negotiations during the fortnight July 5th to 19th, as seen in contemporary British and American newspaper reports. Consequent on the Russian demands of July 4th a feeling of despondency was admitted in London and even in Paris ; none the less another draft of the wider treaty was being prepared in London — some observers numbered it as the fifteenth. On July 8th the two Western Ambassadors and Strang had a conference of two and a quarter hours with Molotov, and on the 9th one of almost three hours — according to a Tass communiqué this " produced no definite results ". The differences were reported to turn on the formula of " indirect aggres-

[1] See also Gafenco, *op. cit.* page 224: " The Soviet definition of ' indirect aggression ' . . . was in fact accepted in the first fortnight in July ". Gafenco seems to have derived most of his knowledge about the course of these negotiations straight from Bonnet.

sion " and the time for opening military talks : before starting these Britain desired to see the political problems settled at least in principle, while Russia argued that a political treaty was valueless without concurrent military arrangements. On the 17th there was a further conference of nearly two hours — the ninth of the series — and this time it was the British Embassy which announced that it had " produced no definite result ". " It needs a keen legal brain and a rare patience to follow the intricacies of the negotiations ", wrote *The Times* on the 12th ; and a week later spoke of them as having entered " a curious and baffling stage ". " It is coming to be realised here that Russian procrastination is methodical ", wrote the diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* from London on July 13th. And on the 19th, *The Times* remarked that after twelve weeks the negotiations are " a dispiriting theme, lacking now even the joy of the chase " ; and added :

> It seems that reports from Paris are well-founded in declaring that the three outstanding questions are still :
>
> (*a*) How exactly " indirect aggression " is to be defined. . . .
>
> (*b*) What States shall be recognised as vital interests of one, or all, of the three Powers.
>
> (*c*) How exactly a military agreement shall be incorporated in the political agreement.[1]

While these discussions were going on — and Britain was gradually giving way on the question of military conversations — an official Soviet communiqué announced on July 23rd that Russian-German commercial talks,

[1] Łukasiewicz was informed by Bonnet on July 13th that the Western Powers had waived their demand for a Soviet guarantee for the Low Countries and Switzerland, but refused the Soviet formula of " indirect aggression " ; and that the Soviets insisted on tying up the political with a military agreement : see *Remarks and Recollections*, " Military Negotiations ", in the *Dziennik Polski* of November 26th, 1946.

interrupted in February, had been resumed (this disclosure may have been a counterblast to the Hudson-Wohltat talks in London). " The Soviet-German trade discussions ", wrote the Moscow correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* on the 23rd, " are attracting more attention in foreign quarters than are the Anglo-French negotiations, now that the Soviet quarters have officially admitted that they are going on " ; and on July 27th, when the Russian-German talks were reported to be held up once more : " Although commercial in form, [they] are political in fact ", the Germans hoping to neutralise Russia, and some even to conclude an alliance with her. (Rumours of Germany having offered Russia a partition of Poland were current, and were noted, for instance, in the *News Chronicle* on July 11th.)

On July 21st new instructions were sent from London to Moscow, and on the 25th it became known that the British Government now considered making the pact (to quote the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times*) what " the Russians term an ' organic politico-military whole ' ".[1] " This ", in the words of a London correspondent of the *New York Times*, would " provide Russia with a new and dramatic proof of the genuineness of Britain's desire for an anti-aggression agreement ". " If the final decision is in the affirmative," he continued, " Britain plans to make sure of wounding no Russian susceptibilities by sending out a little-known officer — as when William Strang instead of Viscount Halifax went to Moscow." Either Sir Edmund Ironside or Lord Gort would go. Similarly, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* stated that " if the precedents of the talks with Poland and Turkey are followed, a strong British mission

[1] It appears from the Russian *Istoria Diplomatii*, edited by the late Deputy-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Potemkin, vol. iii (1945), p. 685, that the Russian proposal of military negotiations was actually accepted by the Western Powers on July 25th.

will go to Moscow " ; and if Ironside was deemed unsuitable because of his having commanded the Archangel expedition, still " an officer of high rank would lead it ".

On July 27th there was a further conference in Moscow, on " indirect aggression " and the correlating of political and military problems. " Discoveries " continued meantime to be made by newspaper representatives. Thus the special correspondent of *The Times*, discussing, in a despatch of July 27th, " how Russian assistance is to be given to East European States whose independence Britain, France, and Russia desire to defend ", reached the following conclusion :

> Until Soviet Russia makes arrangements with some at least of these countries, it is difficult to see how her assistance could be made effective. . . . Even the formidable Soviet Air Force would not be able to do much damage to the Axis unless it operated from bases beyond its own territory. As things are, the Eastern States are reluctant to bind themselves to admit Soviet forces. . . .

And H. Denny, in a despatch to the *New York Times* on the 29th, wrote about " the slow motion negotiations " :

> Sometimes foreign observers here are not really sure that the British and French themselves know just what are the prospects. . . . To many minds here it has occurred that besides the inherent difficulties of negotiating an all-round acceptable pact that must include guarantees to States that wish only to be let alone and in which the definition of indirect aggression against such States is necessarily delicate, there is an element of mutual mistrust. . . . Everybody knows Mr. Chamberlain and his intimates view Soviet Russia with acute distaste and the belief is general here that he undertook negotiations with Russia only because of the pressure of opinion in his own country. This basic mistrust has not been diminished by the Hudson-Wohltat conversations regarding a possible huge British loan to Germany. . . .

But in the next few days there was a change in the tone of the Soviet Press. On July 30th, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the First World War, *Izvestia* published a strong anti-Fascist article stating that the Second World War had already begun, and that the U.S.S.R.

> stood for the establishment of a general peace front capable of halting the further development of Fascist aggression, namely, a peace front erected on a basis of full reciprocity, full equality, and honest, sincere, and resolute repudiation of the fatal policy of " non-intervention ".

Denny, pessimistic only a few days earlier, wrote on August 2nd :

> The tone of the Soviet press . . . is so definitely pro-French and pro-British and anti-German that neutral diplomats believe Moscow really will sign the pact if that last gap — the definition of indirect aggression — can be bridged by a formula fully satisfying Moscow's strict demands.

And the Moscow correspondent of *The Times*, on the same day, thus explained Russian suspicions and hesitations :

> The Kremlin has been a critical spectator of the helplessness over Manchuria, the failure of " sanctions ", the " farce " of non-intervention, and the " perjury " of Munich, and, while recognising that there has been a change of heart in the West, will not forget these painful lessons. Hence the difficulty about " indirect aggression ".

Were the Soviet Government deliberately blowing hot and cold in a game of which the various phases still remain shrouded, or was there genuine vacillation? It is easier to attempt *ex post* a reasoned integration, for that can be logically elaborated in broad, bold outlines, whereas to explain day-to-day meanderings and fluctuations would require a most intimate acquaintance with the actors, their motives and misconceptions. Still, it is dangerous

to assume the rule of conscious design and purpose in human actions — " for the wicked are more naive than we think ; and so are we ourselves ".

On August 1st the names of the British mission to Russia were published : Admiral Sir Reginald Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax, Air-Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, and Major-General Heywood. The Russians appointed as their representative Marshal Voroshilov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, for more than ten years a member of the Political Bureau, and one of the most influential political figures in the Soviet Union; Shaposhnikov, Chief of the Soviet General Staff; and Admiral Kuznetsov, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Fleet. " A more impressive team could not have been made ", wrote *The Times* correspondent from Moscow. The previous day, in the House of Commons, Dalton, while paying due tribute to Strang, had described him as " not exactly the opposite number of M. Molotov ". Nor were this time the British representatives, after all that had been said, quite the counterpart of the Russians.

The British mission's " natural wish ", wrote the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* in its issue of August 3rd,

> had been to go by air. But as the British and French missions are each taking at least twenty advisers, to travel by air would mean chartering a small armada. . . . And as the two missions wish to compare notes before arriving in Moscow it is thought better to begin the journey as soon as possible to compare notes on the way.

It was clear that the next few weeks would decide the question of war or peace — and a couple of big seaplanes could not be found or spared. The liner *City of Exeter* (a vessel said to have been capable of a speed of thirteen knots) was chartered, and it was only on August 10th — more than a fortnight after it had been agreed to send

the mission — that it reached Leningrad. (When on August 23rd Ribbentrop started for Moscow, he took with him a suite of thirty-two persons in a Focke-Wulf Condor.) The Chamberlain Government seem to have suffered throughout of a singular *gaucherie* in their dealings with Russia, which naturally did not escape scrutiny and strictures from their critics at home. One could wish that similar material were available for a study of Soviet policy and actions.

William Strang left Moscow on August 7th. "It is unfortunate", wrote the diplomatic correspondent in *The Times* of the 5th,

> that the political agreement has not been concluded before the two military missions leave; an agreed formula on "indirect aggression" still eludes the negotiators. . . . Actually there is little or no difference in attitude to this problem. All three Governments are agreed that they should co-operate if States of vital concern to any of them are in danger of being made the victims of aggression on the Austrian or Czecho-Slovak model; aggression, that is, after the victim had been so undermined — or its leaders had been faced with such overwhelming odds — that in the end it appears to come by invitation. The difficulty is in defining so subtle a process. If the definition is too loose the aggressors are left a loophole. If it is too tight the Peace Front Powers might be accused of interfering with the sovereignty of other States. . . .

The task of the military missions would have been difficult even without the overhanging political disagreement. The Soviet Union suspected the Western Powers of trying to manœuvre it into fighting their battles and bearing the burden which they had assumed in Eastern Europe, and that without offering it any commensurate gains. Further, as the Moscow correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote on August 6th, the Kremlin experts were

convinced that the campaign " waged by the Western Powers would be at least in its early stages mainly confined to a ' war of positions ' ", whereas in the East they expected a " war of movement " — and they had no desire " for Russia to occupy the rôle of ' the wing of sacrifice ' ". Seeing the fate which befell Poland in September 1939, while the French were engaged in patrol reconnaissances in the Saar and the R.A.F. was dropping copies of Chamberlain's speech, like confetti, on Berlin, Russia's caution can hardly be described as altogether unjustified, and would have been even more comprehensible had Russia been as weak and unprepared as she was thought in the West.

The British guarantees to Poland and Rumania had been essentially political moves designed to stop them from surrendering to Hitler, and little thought seems to have been given at the time to the question how they could be effectively implemented. Next, a Russian endorsement was sought for those guarantees : again a political move designed to stalemate Hitler — but once more there was little eagerness to express political obligations in concrete military terms. Russia had been asked to strengthen the " peace front " by a political agreement and announce it before a military convention had been even considered ; it was only with much reluctance that her demand for military talks, pressed since June 3rd, was now acceded to. But this meant facing new and serious difficulties : for clearly the Western Powers must have realised that in these conversations the attitude of Poland and Rumania towards the U.S.S.R. was bound to be discussed. Even if otherwise complete agreement had been reached between the Western Powers and Russia, and confidence had been established between them, the question would still remain what form her action should take while Poland and Rumania adhered to their refusal to allow her troops to enter their territory ; and surely

Russia, before undertaking to fight, was justified in asking where, how, and in what circumstances she would have to do so. Perhaps the fears and suspicions of Poland and Rumania were no less justified ; but if there was no way of overcoming them, the commitments of the Western Powers to those two countries could hardly be harmonised with a new Triple Entente.

Shortly before the French military mission had started for Moscow, Daladier sent an urgent summons to General Musse, French Military Attaché in Warsaw, and instructed him to press on Marshal Smigly-Rydz the necessity of accepting military co-operation with the U.S.S.R.[1] Musse failed completely. "After that", writes Noël, "there would have been no excuse for the Daladier Cabinet and for our Army chiefs truly to believe in the possibility of a Polish-Soviet military agreement. This they understood so well that apparently General Doumenc,[2] before leaving Paris, was warned that he would have to try to avoid letting that question be put by the Russians." Nor, it would seem, was this the only question which Doumenc had to dodge : perhaps there was a valid explanation for the missions' slow progress towards Moscow.

They arrived in Moscow on August 11th and, according to newspaper reports, were "received with a blend of cordiality and formality". The conversations opened the next day, and at first were said to be proceeding quickly and well. But Noël writes that "from the very outset Marshal Voroshilov . . . enquired of the French and British what engagements their countries were prepared to assume on land, sea, and in the air. General Doumenc answered with prudent generalities. Voroshilov — I have it from a witness — replied with haughty insolence that Doumenc's declaration was meaningless." [3]

[1] See *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne*, pages 422-3.
[2] Chief of the French military mission to Russia.
[3] *Op. cit.* pages 420-21.

And next followed, in Gafenco's words, a *coup de théâtre*, and in Daladier's presentation, one of that series of extraordinary surprises which he was made to suffer at the hands of the Russians : " . . . suddenly, on August 14th ", he said in his speech of July 18th, 1946, " . . . Marshal Voroshilov raised the question of the passage of Russian troops across Polish territory and declared that unless it was agreed to, further military negotiations would not be possible.[1] We were informed of it on August 15th. Poland had often stated that she was prepared to seek an understanding with the U.S.S.R. once war had broken out, but refused to commit herself in peace time, for, she said, Germany hearing of such an engagement would attack her forthwith. . . ." And then Daladier added : " It is certain that Poland's rulers had also some other ideas at the back of their minds ". (No doubt, the Russians had chosen their own time for asking their highly inopportune question.)

The French now returned to the charge. Bonnet, according to Gafenco,[2] summoned the Polish Ambassador, Łukasiewicz, and asked him to transmit the Russian query to Beck.

> " A negative reply ", observed M. Bonnet, " would lead to a breakdown of negotiations, with all its consequences. It would end in catastrophe." M. Łukasiewicz replied that he would transmit the message without comment ; but he thought he could say in advance that M. Beck would flatly refuse.

[1] Here is Gafenco's description of the scene which he presumably had from the French : " . . . in the middle of a ' technical ' conversation Marshal Voroshilov asked : ' In case of aggression against France and Great Britain, would the Soviet troops be free to enter Polish territory on the line of Vilna and Galicia, and also Rumanian territory ? ' . . . When the political character of the question was pointed out by the Allied Missions, the Marshal declared that ' unless that question was solved, the Soviet delegation considered further discussions to be doomed to failure ; and that they could not recommend to their Government to engage in such a patently hopeless enterprise '."

[2] *Ibid.* pages 230-31.

"What would you say if you were asked to let Alsace-Lorraine be placed under German protection?"

Łukasiewicz relates that on August 16th he was informed by Bonnet of the Russian demands and the reply of the Western representatives: that these were not in a position to discuss the matter, which the Soviet Government should take up direct with Warsaw; the Russians answered that the idea of such a pact had originated with the Western Powers, and that it was up to them to remove those difficulties — the Soviet Union had no basis for approaching Poland with such demands. "In communicating to me the above", writes Łukasiewicz, "M. Bonnet tried to persuade us, but rather diffidently, to accept the Soviet demands; I replied that the matter was too grave for me to discuss it on my own, and that I had to await instructions from Warsaw. But from what M. Bonnet said I had not the impression that he counted on our agreeing, but rather that he expected the U.S.S.R. . . . to be satisfied with further concessions regarding the Baltic States."[1]

Meantime Noël and Musse were instructed to take up once more the matter with Beck and Smigly-Rydz.[2]

> Russian help must be accepted under the strictly limited conditions under which it is offered [Bonnet told Noël].[3] You will not fail to insist emphatically that Russo-Polish co-operation on the Eastern front is indispensable if our common resistance to Axis aggression is to be effective. . . . We cannot believe that Poland, by refusing to admit any discussion of the strategic conditions of Russian intervention, will assume responsibility for a failure of the military negotiations with Moscow, and for all its consequences.

But Beck was adamant in face of French and apparently also British demands. "This is a new Partition which

[1] See *Dziennik Polski* of November 26th, 1946.

[2] Noël, *op. cit.* page 423.

[3] Gafenco, *op. cit.* page 231.

we are asked to sign ; if we are to be partitioned, we shall at least defend ourselves. There is nothing to convince us that the Russians, once they are installed in the Eastern districts of our country, will take an effective part in the war." " All that I could obtain from him ", writes Noël, " . . . was that after hostilities had started, Poland would probably agree to re-examine the question and to consider the possibility of Polish-Soviet co-operation." [1] Gafenco tells the story at greater length : Beck asked for a few days before giving his final reply ; but he said that Russia was manœuvring to throw the responsibility for failure on the Poles ; if Poland accepted, the Russians themselves would inform Germany, and then war would ensue ; and the Soviet Union neither would, nor could, fulfil its military engagements, but would seek political advantages.[2] Łukasiewicz reports Beck to have given, on August 18th, a purely formal reply : that relations between Poland and Soviet Russia were normal and friendly, and that he did not feel called upon to enter into the question unless directly approached by the Soviet Government.[3]

On Thursday, August 17th, the military conversations were adjourned till Monday the 21st. Friday was Soviet Aviation Day, etc. " Our next meeting ", reported Naggiar from Moscow, " has been fixed for the 21st, to give us time to obtain a reply concerning the Polish problem. I confirm that failing a favourable solution, official, semi-official, or merely tacit, the military talks will be

[1] Noël, *op. cit.* page 423. Daladier in his speech of July 18th, 1946, mentions that such views had been "often stated" before.— One may well wonder of what value would have been talks on military co-operation started after hostilities had begun.

[2] *Op. cit.* pages 231-2.

[3] See article quoted above from the *Dziennik Polski* of November 26th, 1946. Łukasiewicz adds that Bonnet was pleased with Beck " having avoided a negative attitude in the matter itself " : but later he learnt that Beck's reply was never transmitted to the Soviet Government (which seems hardly surprising seeing what its representatives had previously said about a direct approach to Poland).

suspended." [1] Bonnet instructed Noël to try again. On the 14th Voroshilov had been told that the problem raised by him was political, now Beck was asked to envisage it from a " technical point of view . . . as an essential part of the general problem of organising a defensive front in Eastern Europe ". Bonnet added : " If the Polish Government are determined to refuse all practical aid from the U.S.S.R., they should not have let us engage, without warning, in political conversations, nor should M. Beck have told you, as he did several times, that he wished them to succeed ". And he emphasised once more the urgent and crucial character of the problem and " the full measure of responsibility " which rested on the Polish Government. On the night of August 19th, Beck gave Noël his reply : " This is for us a question of principle : we neither have, nor wish to have, a military agreement with the U.S.S.R. We concede to no one, under any form, the right to discuss the use of any part of our territory by foreign troops."

The same day, a commercial treaty was signed in Moscow between the Soviet Union and Germany, and hints appeared in the Russian Press about possible political consequences. On the 20th, Naggiar and Doumenc suggested to their Government that " M. Beck's objections should not be taken altogether literally, and that perhaps he merely wishes not to know anything about the matter " ; and that the negotiators should therefore be authorised to assent in principle to the passage of Russian troops through Poland, which assent should, however, become operative only after hostilities have commenced.[2] And here is the further story as told by Daladier in his speech in July 1946.

> Then, in the morning of August 21st, I summoned the Polish Ambassador ; I explained to him that the pact which we were about to conclude offered the

[1] This as well as the other documents in this paragraph are quoted from Gafenco, *op. cit.*

[2] *Ibid.* pages 233-4.

only possible guarantee of peace or . . . a good hope of victory. . . . If Poland persisted in her blind refusal, France would be compelled to reconsider her treaty of alliance. 'If early in the afternoon,' I concluded, 'after having telephoned to Warsaw, you come to tell me that Poland maintains her previous attitude, I shall summon a Cabinet and put to them the problem of the Franco-Polish Alliance. If, on the other hand, you offer no further opposition, I shall, as time presses, authorise General Doumenc by wire to append the French signature to the proposed military convention.[1]

I sent the telegram authorising Doumenc to sign. He received it on August 21st at 10 P.M., and I have always thought that it was delayed in transmission, *mais qu'importe*.' [2]

The same night the news was given out in Berlin that Ribbentrop was going to Moscow to sign a non-aggression pact with the U.S.S.R. This was the end of the Anglo-French negotiations with Russia, and the rest of the story has to be told in its proper context.

[1] Łukasiewicz writes in his *Remarks and Recollections* ("The 'Ultimatum' of Premier Daladier", *Dziennik Polski*, December 9th, 1946):

> I must state that no such or similar conversation ever took place between Premier Daladier and myself. Nor does M. Daladier say anything about my reaction to his alleged declaration. Had he addressed such an ultimatum to me, I should either have refused to receive it, or suggested that it should be presented direct at Warsaw through Ambassador Noël, or I should have threatened to resign and make the fact public, which, seeing the state of French opinion, might have been very inconvenient for M. Daladier.

[2] In the article in *Minerve* of April 5th, 1946, Daladier states that "the French Government had succeeded in overcoming Polish objections". His speech explains the sense in which that statement is to be understood, at least with regard to August 21st, to which date it refers: for there is no reason to suppose that Poland had by that day changed her attitude in the matter. In fact, Zay's report of the meeting of the French Cabinet on August 22nd, accepted by Noel, suggests that at that time Daladier himself thought differently about the matter (see below, pages 290-92).

CHAPTER VI

GERMAN-POLISH RELATIONS
(May–July 1939)

HITLER's speech of April 28th and Beck's reply of May 5th disclosed a crisis in German-Polish relations ; it was to be kept simmering till August 22nd. Among the onlookers fear mingled with hope : did Hitler plan war or was it bluff and blackmail ? Every Nazi pronouncement or measure was anxiously scrutinised and interpreted, every story or rumour was picked up and examined — seldom have men of so poor a moral and mental calibre so much engrossed the attention of the world. It was realised that so-called " incidents " were intrinsically unimportant, and that they were provoked, exploited, or closed in accordance with a German policy whose trend the world was straining to discern : for in the absence of an Anglo-Russian understanding, Germany had a wide choice in striking out her own line. Still, there were manœuvres, meanderings, and vacillations which only an extensive publication of Nazi documents might explain in detail. Of the collections of documents published during the war, the French Yellow Book alone, in some eighty reports from the Embassies in Berlin and Warsaw and the Danzig Consulate, supplies a full and coherent account of those tense three and a half months ; the British Blue Book produces some twenty-five documents, mainly concerned with Danzig — as if that had been the core of the problem ; the Polish White Book contains only eight items for the period May 6th–August 22nd : possibly the material was lacking in the Embassy archives from which the collection had to be compiled ; while the German White Book, dishonest as usual, ceases even to be interesting : some

twenty-five documents are to show up British attempts to "encircle" Germany, half a dozen are to bear witness to Germany's "endeavours to establish friendly relations with her neighbours" (for instance, with Denmark, Yugoslavia, and Russia), and some eighty to depict the "sufferings" of the *Volksdeutsche* under Poland — together over a hundred documents uncorrelated to reality.

Hitler decides to Attack

Certain landmarks in Hitler's Polish policy established at the Nuremberg Trial now point the scene. In a document issued by Keitel, Chief of the General Staff, on November 24th, 1938, preparations were ordered "for the surprise occupation of Danzig by German troops", to be achieved through a "lightning seizure" under favourable political conditions — apparently total war against Poland was not as yet an immediate objective. By April 1939 hopes of Danzig being extorted from Poland, as Memel was from Lithuania, were waning, and although "the annexation of Danzig" continued to figure as a possible separate operation in the Directive to the armed forces for 1939–1940, issued by Hitler on April 11th, the Annex headed "Political Hypotheses and Aims" looks further ahead and, while enjoining "that quarrels with Poland should be avoided", adds: "Should Poland, however, change her present policy . . . and adopt a threatening attitude towards Germany, a final settlement will be necessary. . . ." In that case the German aim must be "to limit the war to Poland". Thus eleven days after Poland had accepted the British guarantee, and five after the Anglo-Polish Declaration of Mutual Assistance had been published, a change in Polish policy was treated as a mere future possibility — but on April 28th it was to be Hitler's thesis that Poland, by her understanding with Great Britain, had infringed her agreement with Germany

and committed herself to an anti-German policy.

Perhaps the most instructive of Hitler's *exposés* of which a record is available, is that which, on May 23rd, the day after the " Pact of Steel " had been signed, he addressed to his Commanders-in-Chief at the New Reich Chancellery : it dealt with " the situation and the aims of German policy " and " the consequent tasks of the Wehrmacht ". Those present included Göring, Raeder, Brauchitsch, Keitel, Milch, Halder, and Bodenschatz ; the minutes [1] were kept by Lieutenant-Colonel Schmundt, Hitler's A.D.C. (killed in the attempt on Hitler's life on July 20th, 1944). It opens with a general survey :

> During the period 1933–1939 progress in all fields. Our military position improved enormously.
>
> Our position with regard to the outer world has remained unchanged. Germany had been eliminated from among the Great Powers. A balance of forces had been established without her.
>
> Enforcement of Germany's vital claims and her re-entry as Great Power disturb balance. All her claims looked upon as an " incursion ". The English

[1] At the Nuremberg Trial some of the defendants and their counsel tried to impugn the value of these minutes. On May 16th Admiral Raeder stated that no official minutes of Hitler's speeches were made and that it was only in later years — " I believe in 1941," he added — that shorthand writers were present. His counsel, Dr. Siemers, made great play with the fact that the day on which Schmundt drew up the minute is not given : " In the case of the Hoszbach notes the conference was on November 5th [1937], but they were written down five days later from memory on November 10th. In the case of Schmundt, we do not know whether the minute was written down after one day, five days, or four weeks." Raeder tried to argue against the validity of Schmundt's minutes from the contradictory character of some of the statements ; and Admiral Schulte-Moenting, 1939–1943 Chief of Staff to Grand Admiral Raeder, testified that Raeder's " impressions " of Hitler's speech " contradicted the so-called minutes ".

It is obvious that a summary in headings, as is that of Schmundt, cannot rank for accuracy on a par with a verbatim shorthand transcript. None the less, such a record prepared by Hitler's A.D.C. can be taken to supply as close a rendering of his mind and intentions as anything which we are likely to obtain. Contradictions in the speech are not surprising ; they reflect Hitler's mentality and can be found even in his carefully-prepared written statements.

fear an economic menace more than one of force alone.

The consolidated mass of eighty millions has solved the ideological problems (*die ideellen Probleme*). Economic problems await solution. . . . This requires courage. It is inadmissible to sheer off by adapting oneself to circumstances. Much rather circumstances have to be adapted to our demands. This is not possible without invading foreign States or attacking foreign property.

Lebensraum, commensurate with the greatness of the State, is the basis of all power. Renunciation possible for a time, but then problems demand solution. The choice remains between ascent or decline. In fifteen or twenty years solution will be imperative for us. No German statesman could evade the problem longer than that.

At present Germany in a state of patriotic fervour which is shared by Italy and Japan.

The period which lies behind us has been put to good use. All steps towards our goal have been taken in the proper order.

After six years this is the present situation :

National and political union of Germans completed with small exceptions. No further successes can be achieved without sacrifice of blood (*ohne Bluteinsatz*).

Frontier configuration (*Grenzziehung*) is of military value.

The Poles are no additional enemy. They will always side with our opponents. In spite of Treaty, Poland always harboured the intention to exploit every opportunity against us.

Danzig is not our object. Our aim is to round off our *Lebensraum* in the East and secure our food supply. Opening of the Baltic problem.[1] Food supply only obtainable from thinly populated areas. Fertile land

[1] In German : *Ostsee- und Baltikum-Problem*, which means " the problem of the Baltic Sea and of the Baltic provinces ". The two mean practically the same, and one wonders, in view of what is said further on about the fertility of the land and the great possibilities of more intensive agriculture, whether it should not read *Ost- und Baltikum-Problem*.

and thorough German agriculture will increase surplus several times over.

Colonies : beware of gifts of colonies. No solution of food problem : blockade.

If fate forces us into war with the West, more space in the East will be useful. In a war, even less than in peace-time, is it possible to count on record harvests.

The population of non-German territories will perform no military service but supply the necessary labour.

The Polish problem is inseparable from conflict in the West.

Poland's inner power of resistance to Bolshevism doubtful. Therefore Poland a doubtful barrier against Russia.

In war against the West quick decisive success doubtful ; similarly doubtful is Poland's attitude.

The Polish régime cannot withstand pressure from Russia. Poland sees in German victory over the West a danger for herself, and will try to deprive us of it.

There can therefore be no question of sparing Poland, and the decision is

at the first suitable opportunity to attack Poland.

We cannot expect a repetition of the Czech affair. There will be war. It is our task to isolate Poland. Success in isolating her is of decisive importance.

The Führer must therefore reserve to himself the issuing of the final order to attack. There must be no simultaneous conflict with the West (France and Britain).

It is not certain that in the course of a German-Polish conflict war with the West can be avoided ; then struggle is primarily against Britain and France.

Basic outlines :

Conflict with Poland —
starts with an attack against Poland —
only successful if West does not intervene.
If this impossible, it will be better to attack the West, and incidentally (*dabei*) liquidate Poland.

It is a matter of skilful policy to isolate Poland.

The last paragraphs concerning a possible intervention by the Western Powers are confused and contradictory; and similarly those which follow. So much, however, emerges from them : that while Hitler did not think it " out of the question that Russia might disinterest herself in a smashing of Poland ", he felt in no way certain of the line she would take, and even reckoned with the possibility of a Franco-British-Russian alliance ; that he did not belittle Great Britain as an opponent ; and that from the outset he contemplated invading the Low Countries. " No value can be attached to declarations of neutrality. . . . A war with England and France is a struggle for life. . . . We must burn our boats, and it is no longer a question of right or wrong, but of life or death for eighty million people." A short war must be aimed at, but it is necessary to prepare for one even of ten or fifteen years. " England is the driving force against Germany. . . . The Briton is proud, courageous, tough, stubborn, and a good organiser ; he knows how to utilise new inventions (*jeden Fortschritt*)." "He has the tradition and consciousness of power." Hitler recognised that England could be conquered from the air only if her fleet was first annihilated. Much could be achieved by a surprise attack, which might, however, miscarry owing to betrayal, accidents, human insufficiency, or the weather. " None the less it must be our aim to start with a shattering blow. In doing so no account can be taken of right or wrong or of treaties. But this is only possible if we do not slither through Poland into a war with England."

Hitler went on to discuss a situation in which England, after a defeat of France, would be cut off from the Continent, and subjected to daily attacks by the *Luftwaffe* and U-boats operating from French bases ; the German armies would be saved the heavy losses of land war, while industrial production, freed of the enormous drain of such a war, would concentrate on supplies for the air force and navy.

The army must therefore be ready to take up the necessary positions. A *planned attack* must be prepared.

To study this is the foremost task.

The *aim* will always be to force England to her knees.

Every weapon decides battles only so long as the enemy lacks it.

This applies to gas, submarines, and air force. To the latter, so long as the British fleet possesses no adequate counter-defence, which will no longer be the case in 1940 and 1941. *E.g.* against Poland tanks will be effective, as the Polish army lacks anti-tank weapons.

Where no decisive effect can be counted on, it must be replaced by surprise and masterly handling (*der geniale Einsatz*).

This is the programme of attack (*Angriffsprogramm*).

The concluding part of the address contained directions for studying the various aspects of the programme, and preparing it technically. "War will not be forced on us, but we shall not be able to avoid it." Most of all, Hitler insisted on preserving the strictest secrecy, surprise being of the very essence of his plan.

Directive for the work :

1. No one must be informed who need not know.
2. No one must know more than he needs to know.
3. When at the latest must he know? No one must know anything earlier than he needs to know it.

It is in the light of this programme that the transactions of the following three months have to be appraised.

As Henderson saw It

How much did the Western Powers, and especially their representatives in Germany, know or gauge of what was going on behind the curtain? So far only three despatches from Sir Nevile Henderson have been published for the period May 22nd–August 22nd, 1939 : and

not much enlightenment can be expected from the rest. Rigid and self-centred, though industrious, energetic, and indeed restless, Henderson seemed neither to listen nor observe, but to adhere with finality to his preconceived ideas. " The Beau Brummel " of diplomacy, he prided himself on his social *savoir-faire*, and attached the utmost importance to intercourse with the great, but was hardly happy even in his diplomatic contacts. Self-conscious, irritable, and vain, he oscillated between the wish to please and the urge to instruct, and was as irritating to his colleagues as he is now to his readers. At the outset of his *Failure of a Mission*, he describes his feelings when in January 1937, at Buenos Ayres, he received Mr. Eden's offer of the Berlin Embassy :

> In the first place, a sense of my own inadequacy. . . . Secondly, and deriving from the first, that it could only mean that I had been specially selected by Providence for the definite mission of . . . helping to preserve the peace of the world. And thirdly, there flashed across my mind the Latin tag . . . that the Tarpeian rock . . . is next to the Capitol. . . .

Here is sham modesty, self-elation, and self-dramatising ; no sense of humour or proportion : the one thing which did not occur to Sir Nevile Henderson was that his appointment may have been just a mistake of Mr. Eden.

Even in retrospect, Henderson seemed incapable of a coherent view of the events and transactions of the crucial months May–August 1939, and his comments on them in the *Failure of a Mission* are as self-contradictory as they are trite : " For my part in Berlin, I was preaching patience and giving solemn warnings to all and sundry ". On May 31st he " urgently represented to the Polish Ambassador the desirability of resuming conversations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ". On what basis and with what chance of success ? (Lipski, on his return to Berlin, on May 15th, had taken steps to ascertain whether there

was any desire for conversations with Poland, and was given to understand that the moment was not considered suitable.) But such questions do not seem to have troubled Sir Nevile when he exhorted a Czech or Polish colleague to run to the Wilhelmstrasse and ask to be spanked. This was, in May, Henderson's " estimate of the situation " : Hitler would " prepare for all eventualities " ; if he could get Danzig without war, " that would satisfy him for the moment " ; otherwise he would wait and fight at a " propitious " moment.

> I was convinced that no solution which fell short of his offer or ultimatum to Poland on April 28th would ever be a lasting one. For, as I pointed out at the time to His Majesty's Government, the Polish question was not one of Hitler's making. . . . The Corridor and Danzig were a real German national grievance, and some equitable settlement had got to be found . . . if there was ever to be genuine peace . . . between Germany and Poland. This was . . . fully appreciated by His Majesty's Government . . . and in every conversation which I had later with Hitler or any of the Nazi leaders, our desire to achieve an equitable settlement was emphasised no less frankly than our resolution to resist force by force. (Page 224.)

And then on pages 228-9 : " It could be taken for granted " that Hitler " would never be contented with less than, or even as much as, he had offered to Poland on April 28th " (" offered to " or " demanded from " ?). Indeed, he " never meant that offer to be a final solution " ; he wanted " Posen and Silesia and freedom itself, which the Poles would never surrender without war ".

To sum up : H.M. Ambassador showed sympathy with the " real German national grievance " concerning the Corridor and Danzig ; he urged the Poles to seek fresh negotiations ; for without " an equitable settlement " there could be no " genuine peace " ; Hitler would not

accept less than he demanded ; this would " satisfy him for the moment " ; but would be no " final solution " ; he would follow it up by impossible demands.

Even in talking to the Germans, Henderson did not disguise his mixed feelings about Poland : as is shown, for instance, by Weizsäcker's minutes of two interviews in May and June 1939.

> Having presented a *note verbale* about Memel [he writes on May 15th], the British Ambassador started talking about the general political situation. He was visibly anxious to make us see that England did not desire war and wished to avoid it through a German-Polish agreement, but that she was ready and determined to keep her promise and come to Poland's assistance should we try by force to change the *status quo* in Danzig and thereby make Poland go to war. He did not contest my criticisms of the strange British policy which left the decision concerning war or peace to the Warsaw Government, or even to some subordinate Polish officials. He also admitted that this procedure put a premium on Polish rashness. But he said that our sudden entry into Prague had produced a complete revulsion in London ; and England, having pledged her word, would adhere to it, not from a desire to preserve the German City of Danzig for Poland, but in order not to let down Poland in a conflict. He said that . . . British public opinion . . . was now prepared even to enter a European war on behalf of the Poles, on whom he bestowed little praise (*denen Henderson kein lobendes Attribut zuteilte*). He believed that the Polish Foreign Minister Beck wished anything rather than war, which boded no good for Poland, although, like the British Government, he was convinced of the ultimate victory of the British-French-Polish arms. In the war, added Henderson, the Western Powers would remain on the defensive. We would bomb each other's houses, but the final victory, in the British view, did not lie with Germany and Italy, for the Axis was shorter of breath. I gave him the obvious reply.

It is not possible, so far, to check Weizsäcker's account by Henderson's own minute, and probably some of the " admissions " are coloured. But the general tenor reproduces what is known of Henderson's attitude : his resigned dislike of the promise given to the Poles, his general impatience with them, his belief in Germany's good right to Danzig, and his drooping optimism for the future. Such talk could hardly impress the Germans with Britain's determination, of which Henderson himself was firmly convinced, but which, emotionally, he only half shared.

The second minute is of a talk on June 13th. Henderson expressed his fears of a conflict that summer ; he said that while negotiations were going on between London and Moscow, talks with Berlin were not possible, but that these could be opened once the pact with Russia was concluded (Weizsäcker here recalls the contention of *The Times* that strength and readiness to negotiate were compatible). Weizsäcker replied that a pact with Russia would be an incitement to war, especially for the Poles.

> British policy [he went on to say] was diametrically opposed to a thesis which Henderson himself had repeatedly propounded in public : " England desired to retain the sea ; the European Continent could be left to Germany ".[1] But now England was engaging deeper and deeper on the Continent, and let Poland, for instance, play with Britain's fate. The only logic, if any, discernible in Britain's policy points to a determination to make preventive war towards which she seems to be working.
>
> Henderson seemed stung by that remark : there could be no talk of a desire for war. He did not defend the Anglo-Polish agreement as such, nor deny Poland's rashness and obstinacy ; but, as usual, ascribed the revulsion in London to the German invasion of the Czech rump-state. Finally he reverted to the danger period this summer.

[1] This seems an astonishing quotation which would require substantiating.

> Henderson talked of London's readiness to negotiate with Berlin. Halifax apparently would like to relieve the tension by conversations. Neither England nor Germany could, or wished to, continue piling up armaments. Talks between London and Berlin should deal with stopping the armament race and promoting trade. The question of colonies could also be discussed. I . . . merely said that similar hints had already reached us from London through another channel, but that I could not deduce anything concrete from such vague remarks.
>
> From Henderson's loose, conversational discourse I could gather that he felt ill at ease with regard to Britain's relation to Poland, that he had no opinion of the pact with Russia, and that altogether he is very worried about a possible conflict this summer, for he feels the weight of responsibility which rests on him as Ambassador in Berlin.

It is a relief to turn from Sir Nevile's politics to royal visits and diplomatic parties, and to the successes he scored in that field. In September 1937, during Mussolini's stay in Berlin, he had found that he was " not to be asked to any of the parties given in the Duce's honour " ; he protested and left Berlin. Such firmness was remembered in May–June 1939, during the visit of Prince and Princess Paul of Yugoslavia. Sir Nevile was asked to " a gala performance at the opera ", and when they went to spend

> the last two nights of their visit at Karinhall . . . Göring was good enough to ask me down there to pass an afternoon with them. It was a tactful thought inspired by the knowledge that the Prince and Princess were old friends of mine. . . .

German Manœuvres

The French Embassies in Berlin and Warsaw kept a close watch on German manœuvres. " Germany, by a clever propaganda, is trying to persuade the world that

the present risk of war is due principally to Poland's intransigeance over Danzig ", wrote Noël from Warsaw on May 15th. But Poland rightly fears " being caught in the network of successive concessions and renunciations ". Moreover, vital economic interests are at stake : Gdynia alone " would not suffice to ensure Poland's access to the sea ". And on the 25th he reported the language which Moltke was holding to foreign diplomatists in Warsaw : " Three months hence England and France and even Poland will be tired and will not think of fighting for Danzig. Then we shall settle the problem under favourable conditions." The *conduit de langage* issued about that time to German diplomatists by Ribbentrop went even further — as quoted at Nuremberg, he declared " that the Polish problem will be solved by Hitler in forty-eight hours ; the Western Powers will be unable to give any assistance to Poland ; the British Empire is doomed within ten years ; France will bleed to death if she tries to intervene ".

Meantime " incidents " were multiplying, especially on the frontier between Poland and Danzig. At Kalthof, on May 20th, S.A. men drove out Polish customs officials and sacked their house. The Polish Deputy Commissioner was sent to inspect the place ; the Danzig authorities, though asked, failed to supply a police escort ; and while he was in the house, his chauffeur, attacked by a German crowd, fired in self-defence, killing an S.A. man. The Danzig Senate now demanded compensation, apologies, the recall of the Polish Deputy Commissioner, etc. ; affected in its Notes to treat the Polish Commissioner-General as the Envoy of a foreign Power (implying that Danzig was an independent German State) ; and vastly magnified trifling incidents. Gauleiter Forster attended the funeral of the S.A. man, and Hitler sent a wreath.

A German *coup* in Danzig being generally feared, every such collision was looked upon as a possible prelude. On May 27th Mr. Clifford Norton, in Sir Howard Kennard's

absence British Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw, made a statement[1] to Count Łubieński, Beck's Chef de Cabinet, enjoining extreme prudence on the Poles, and warning against " precipitate action ". Should, for instance, " the Danzig Senate . . . vote for union with the Reich and display force, without actually resorting to violence ", restraint on the part of the Poles would " give Great Britain time to demonstrate clearly to Germany that in the event of a conflict she would support Poland ", and accompany it " by certain preparatory military measures ". The statement concluded : " It would be well if Poland could consult with her Allies before taking any irrevocable decisions in doubtful cases ". Three days later Łubieński replied with a statement on behalf of Beck, moderate in tone and reasonable in substance : Beck called attention to the restraint hitherto shown by Poland in spite of repeated provocations ; agreed that an exchange of views and common action were desirable in case of a German *coup*, though it might not be possible to wait so long ; and enquired what " preparatory military measures " were contemplated — in Germany these should leave no doubt of Britain's determination to support Poland with all her forces, and in Poland should " remove all suspicion that the diplomatic intervention of the United Kingdom might lead to the suggestion of a compromise unacceptable to Poland ". The British answer has not been published ; but it would appear from the question that two months after the guarantee had been given not even the first military measures had been co-ordinated.

The militarisation of Danzig was proceeding apace, and the local police was growing into a small army : the Statute of the Free City prohibited the manufacture of war material, but set no limit to the number of men enlisted in the police. Besides, a numerous local S.A. was raised, organised, and equipped with arms smuggled from

[1] About this statement, see also above, page 177.

Germany, and various rallies were held, with the participation of crowds of uniformed visitors from the Reich. The re-armament may have originally been started with a view to a *coup*, and might still serve a subsidiary purpose in a war against Poland ; but first and foremost this was now a war of nerves and a provocation meant to drive Poland into taking measures which could be represented as " aggression ". The Poles, on their side, were reinforcing their custom guards in Danzig, whose number, too, was unrestricted by Statute or any agreement, and whose task it was to check the smuggling of arms ; and on June 10th the Danzig Senate was told that their strength would be increased still further if there was continued interference with their activities.[1] Baron Guy de la Tournelle, French Consul in Danzig, reported on June 14th :

> An anti-Polish campaign of incredible violence and vulgarity is being conducted by the two [Danzig] dailies, which accuse the Polish customs officials of the most unlikely offences. The reduction of their number . . . is demanded. . . . Perhaps the Press wishes to prove to the numerous visitors who have come from the Reich for the Cultural Congress and the S.A. exercises that conditions are unbearable for the German population of the Free City.

The Cultural Congress was attended by Dr. Goebbels, who delivered two speeches on June 17th and 18th (a Sunday). Violent in tone and calculated to fan " chauvinist passions in the Free City to the utmost ", they are described by Coulondre as intended " to mark a date and an epoch in the development of the German-Polish problem " (that such a performance should have been possible in Danzig shows great restraint on the part of the Poles). Goebbels asserted once more the German character of Danzig and blamed Poland for the crisis : the

[1] For the distinction drawn by the Germans between customs officials and " frontier-guards ", see below, page 252.

Danzigers merely felt " the understandable, clear, definite, and unshakeable desire " to belong to the Reich. Next he inveighed against Poland and Great Britain, imputing intentions which were not entertained then, but were ultimately to materialise as a riposte to German violence :

> The Polish bullies now claim East Prussia and German Silesia. They say that in future the Polish frontier should be on the Oder. Why not on the Elbe or the Rhine? There they would meet their new allies, the British, whose frontier, as is known, is also on the Rhine.

He went on about " the blank cheque " which the British Government had drawn in favour of Poland ; and finished by declaring that the Führer does not recede before threats nor give way to blackmail. The next day, Goebbels added that while political frontiers were of limited duration, those of language, race, and blood were immovable and eternal.

Still, Hitler did not mean to show his hand prematurely — " in periods of fermentation ", writes Coulondre on June 27th, " Hitlerian policy usually envelops itself in an artificial fog " ; aggressive declarations and growing claims against Poland were accompanied by diplomatic assurances of a somewhat equivocal character. On June 16th, in a private talk with Coulondre, " outside the Office ", Weizsäcker volunteered the statement that " all was quiet for the present, and that he saw no reason why the situation should deteriorate in the near future. As regards Danzig, he repeated that . . . Polish provocations alone could bring about a conflict." He added that " he intended to take a holiday during the month of July ". From these declarations (not reproduced in Weizsäcker's minute) Coulondre drew the comforting conclusion that " no immediate action on the part of the Reich would follow on Goebbels's speeches ". The talk then turned to

the negotiations between the Western Powers and Russia : when Coulondre remarked (as Henderson had done) that a pact and a clearly defined position should facilitate conversations between the Western Powers and the Axis, Weizsäcker answered that the Germans were " an unsuitable object for threats ". " Intimidation produces with us the opposite of what is intended." Coulondre replied that intimidation was not practised by Paris or London, but that the cause of peace would gain if Berlin " was equally convinced that it will no longer work with the other side either ".

For a long time past, Beck had been ready to replace the Statute and League control over Danzig by a Polish-German agreement which, while securing Polish rights, would have left Danzig internally independent ; [1] what he could not admit was its incorporation in the Reich. Poland was further prepared to offer Germany lines of traffic across the Corridor free of Polish Customs and passport control (such a scheme was carefully studied in Warsaw) though she could not have admitted German sovereignty over that belt (it would have had to remain, for instance, under the jurisdiction of the Polish law courts). But the importance of Hitler's demands was symbolic : they were to be the thin end of the wedge. By the end of June 1939, the talk in German official and diplomatic circles, both in Berlin and Warsaw, adumbrated claims to the entire Corridor and even to Upper Silesia. As there was no limit to Nazi claims, " a settling of the Danzig problem would be of no avail ", wrote Coulondre on June 22nd ; and therefore, he argued (in

[1] Noël, in a despatch dated June 21st, asserts that " since early last winter, Poland has always been ready to give up the foreign representation of the Free City " ; and he repeats the statement in his book *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne*, p. 369. But this is a mistake : Danzig's independence in foreign relations, which would virtually have meant their being taken over by Berlin, would have soon put an end to the customs union with Poland and to Polish control over Danzig harbour.

contradistinction to Henderson), " there is nothing to be gained by compromising oneself over it. On the contrary, there would be serious disadvantages." So far Hitler had not burnt his boats, and would hardly do so unless he was prepared to fight under any conditions or believed that blackmail would succeed once more.

> That is why I remain convinced that we should . . . abstain from all initiative liable to be interpreted as a weakening of the Allies in their determination to meet force by force. It seems to me almost certain that we shall not escape a serious and tense situation this autumn. But perhaps, if there is no break in the peace front, there will be no repetition of the ultimatum of September 1938. What must at all cost be removed this time is a risk of war arising from a manœuvre aiming at intimidation.

Coulondre saw that Hitler's purpose was to isolate Poland by combining intimidation with clever manœuvring: he would try to put the Poles seemingly in the wrong, and hoped thus to enable, and persuade, the Western Powers to leave once more a free field to him. To Nazi disclaimers of any intention to " attack Poland " a rider was sometimes added that should Danzig proclaim its union with the Reich war would ensue " if we are obliged to defend ourselves against aggression ". Hitler, wrote Coulondre on June 27th, is " a past master at organising and exploiting internal crises ". What if " spontaneous action " from inside Danzig forced Poland to take military measures ? — for instance, in order to relieve the small Polish garrison at the Westerplatte or customs guards trapped in the Free City. Germany must be convinced that whatever form her attempts to capture Danzig might take, Western support for Poland would be " automatic " — such " useful precision " might succeed in destroying the edifice of pretence " which Germany's rulers seem to be laboriously constructing ".

On June 30th Weizsäcker, acting under instructions (*auftragsmässig*), asked Coulondre to come to see him. Coulondre had requested an interview with Ribbentrop ; but the wish to present to him apologies from Ribbentrop, who was ill, could not have been the sole reason for Weizsäcker's invitation. Much of the talk covered painfully familiar ground ; still there was careful reconnoitring on both sides. Weizsäcker once more repeated that British attempts to encircle Germany were not conducive to peace ; but that " we were not, in my opinion, on the eve of a great *éclat*, unless it was produced by Polish excesses ". Coulondre warned once more against any illusions that France would not fight for Danzig. Weizsäcker said he believed that France would stand by her old alliance with Poland.

> But to hear more [writes Weizsäcker] I expressed doubts whether Britain can have suddenly handed over the decision of war or peace to some people in Warsaw or in the Corridor. Coulondre insisted that ever since March, Britain and France no longer felt sure of peace being preserved and had therefore entered engagements which they would not have considered previously.

Coulondre mentions that Weizsäcker, after having complained of Polish fire-eaters, professed to have noticed some faint indications of a desire on the part of Beck " to seek a basis for solving our difficulties ". Coulondre showed great interest in that remark and asked permission to make use of it, which was given. But on July 4th Lipski, asked by Coulondre, replied " that he had no cognisance of any new development in M. Beck's attitude ", and in saying this he was not " evasive ", as Coulondre seems to have thought : Weizsäcker's remark was probably one of the *ballons d'essai*, frequent in the diplomatic conversations of those days, but of which it is often difficult to gauge the purpose.

Bonnet and Ribbentrop

At this juncture Georges Bonnet thought fit to make a show of firmness ; it was concerned with the past no less than with the future, and therefore unconvincing with regard to either. On July 1st he asked the German Ambassador to call on him ; Count Welczek had just returned from Berlin and, according to a rumour reported by Coulondre, was charged by Ribbentrop to inform Bonnet of Germany's determination to seize Danzig. But Welczek merely recited Ribbentrop's complaints about the " ill-treatment " of Germans in Poland, and his discourses on " reasonable " Poles and others out to provoke Germany. He made a show of optimism : he would spend the coming three months in Paris, and then go stag-hunting in Hungary ; but he added that in Ribbentrop's estimation " incidents may over-night bring about war between Poland and Germany, which war would be most popular in Germany ". He talked of Danzig being " truly the last claim of the Reich, though no one will believe it " ; but also of Germany's legitimate claim to a sphere of influence in the East. Bonnet, who always seemed to feel ill at ease over December 6th, replied that after Munich France was prepared to acknowledge Germany's greater economic interests in certain Central European countries,[1] but that " at no time would France have entertained the idea of giving Germany authority to violate the frontiers of all her neighbours and establish herself at Bucharest, Budapest, or Warsaw ". He expressed uneasiness about German activities in Danzig, and when Welczek spoke of " self-defence " for the Danzigers, Bonnet warned him against illusions : " France had precise engagements towards Poland, reinforced by recent events, and she would come out on the side of Poland as soon as the latter

[1] Cf. above, page 74, Bonnet's talk about these matters with Łukasiewicz.

took up arms ". Here Bonnet read out a Note which he asked Welczek to wire *in extenso* to Ribbentrop ; just because he had signed with Ribbentrop the Franco-German Declaration, he was anxious to avoid any misunderstanding concerning France's attitude. Welczek replied that he was constantly warning the Führer, but hardly managed to convince him, for it was difficult to understand " how England and France could commit the folly of plunging into war " over the admittedly untenable Danzig Statute. The war would be catastrophic and long, for neither the Siegfried nor the Maginot Line could be forced, etc.[1]

The Note which Bonnet gave to Welczek started by referring to the Declaration of December 6th, 1938 ; recalled article 3 which reserved the " particular relations " of the two Governments to third Powers, and related it to " the European East " ; and concluded with the following warning :

> I . . . consider it my duty clearly to state that any action whatever its form, which by trying to change the *status quo* in Danzig provoked Poland's armed resistance, would bring the Franco-Polish agreement into operation and oblige France to give immediate help to Poland.

Ribbentrop's reply, dated Fuschl near Salzburg, July 13th, is incisive, brutal, even contemptuous (" The German Government ", said that day Weizsäcker to Coulondre, " is preparing a reply, and I can tell you that it will not lend itself to any misunderstanding "). The reservation in article 3 of the Franco-German Declaration of December 6th, declared Ribbentrop, did not refer to

[1] In the conference of May 23rd, Hitler declared his conviction that the Maginot Line would be broken, which must have been the opinion of the German General Staff. One wonders whether Welczek was uninformed about it, or whether the intention was to confirm the French in their trust in the Maginot Line.

Poland : in preceding negotiations it was made perfectly clear that " it referred to the special relations of friendship of France with Great Britain and of Germany with Italy "; and " reciprocal respect for vital interests was to be the pre-condition and principle of the future development of good Franco-German relations ".

> On that occasion I expressly pointed to Eastern Europe as the sphere of German interests, and you, contrary to what is asserted in your Note, then stressed that the attitude of France towards East European problems had undergone a radical change since the Munich conference.
>
> It is in direct contradiction to the point of view established between us early in December that France should have turned the generous offer of the Führer for settling the Danzig problem and Poland's rather peculiar reaction to it into an occasion for new strengthened engagements with that country, directed against Germany.

In reply to the concluding paragraph of Bonnet's Note, Ribbentrop declared that " Germany's relations with her Eastern neighbours, whatever form they take, in no way affect French interests ", and he therefore refused to discuss German-Polish problems with France.

> For your personal information I wish to tell you what follows concerning the view taken by Germany of the Polish question.
>
> The Polish Government has replied to the historic and unique offer of the Führer for settling the question of Danzig and definitely consolidating German-Polish relations, with a threat of war which can merely be described as strange. It is impossible to say at present whether the Polish Government will give up this peculiar attitude and recover its senses. But while it persists in its unreasonable attitude, I can only say that any violation of Danzig soil by Poland, or any Polish provocation incompatible with the prestige of the German Reich, would make the Ger-

mans march immediately and annihilate the Polish army.

French threats " could only strengthen the Führer in his resolve to safeguard German interests by all the means at his disposal ".

Bonnet replied on July 21st, marking the letter " personal ". It is a feeble reaction to Ribbentrop's bouncing performance ; embarrassed, argumentative, and lacking dignity, it gives the feeling of shifty *malaise*. Bonnet denies it having been possible " at any time, either before or after the Declaration of December 6th ", for the German Government to think that France had disinterested herself in Eastern Europe. He claims to have reminded Ribbentrop in Paris of the treaties which France had with the U.S.S.R. and Poland, and recalls the assurances which he had given to the Russian and Polish Ambassadors ; he quotes Ribbentrop as saying that the Franco-Polish alliance could not disturb Franco-German relations as Germany's own relations with Poland were excellent, and reproduces long extracts on that subject from Hitler's speeches of September 26th, 1938, and January 30th, 1939 ; and he even adduces the reminders he had given Ribbentrop of the promised guarantee for Czechoslovakia as evidence of France not having disinterested herself in Eastern Europe. And this is Bonnet's reply to Ribbentrop's advice that France should keep to her own business :

> France bears no responsibility for the turn which German-Polish relations have taken. She has always refrained — and will continue to refrain — from meddling in questions between the two neighbouring countries so long as they do not affect the general international situation and the maintenance of peace.
>
> As I had the honour to declare to Count Welczek, we greatly desire a negotiated agreement between Germany and Poland. But I was bound to remind you, even because of what passed between us on

> December 6th and 7th, that France has a treaty of alliance with Poland and that, faithful to her word, she will scrupulously carry out all her engagements.

If the aim of this correspondence was to convince Germany of France's firm and calm determination, it could hardly have served the purpose ; while as evidence for the line adopted by Bonnet in December 1938, it is equally unconvincing. Ribbentrop does not hesitate flatly to contradict Bonnet ; Bonnet makes no direct reply to Ribbentrop's allegations but prefers to argue what he could, or could not, have said or thought. No doubt, in two days' conversations Poland must have been mentioned ; but her name does not occur in Bonnet's own report on those talks, given on December 14th, 1938, in the circular note to the French diplomatic representatives in six European capitals — a note which significantly was not sent to the French Ambassadors in Warsaw and Moscow.[1] Further, while the promised guarantee to Czechoslovakia is recalled in the second letter, Prague is tactfully omitted from the enumeration of capitals in which France could at no time have thought of letting Germany establish herself — " Bucharest, Budapest, or Warsaw ". Lastly, the impression which the Polish Ambassador in Paris received of the December conversations and of the assurances offered him can hardly be dismissed as immaterial.[2] Munich was a slippery slope which it would have required a strong, skilful, and determined man to re-ascend.

Further Manœuvres

As early as April 3rd, Keitel had in his Directive ordered preparations which would allow an invasion of Poland to be carried through " at any time from the 1st September onwards " ; and in June further dispositions

[1] See above, pages 49-50. [2] See above, pages 73-4.

were made for " heavy surprise blows . . . to achieve quick results ". On June 22nd Hitler sent the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces his remarks on " the preliminary time-table " submitted to him for operations against Poland. " In order not to disquiet the population by calling up reserves on a larger scale than is usual for the manœuvres ", Hitler ordered reassuring replies to be given to enquiries. But there could be no real secrecy about such matters, and as early as June 27th Coulondre speaks in his despatch of the great and growing number of reservists called up, and of " rather marked anxiety " among the middle classes. He reverts to the subject on July 11th — " reservists continue to be called up and, according to our military Attaché, their number will reach a million by the end of August ". Two days later, just before going on leave, he writes a long despatch on " the numerous indications of abnormal activity in the German Army and of obvious preparations for the possibility of an imminent war ". He calls attention to the curious way in which the movements are disguised and yet announced — perhaps with a view to an ultimate covering up of " the transition from this state of semi-mobilisation to a state of war ". And here are his singularly accurate conclusions :

> . . . all the measures preparatory for war are being taken. The German General Staff is acting as if they were to be ready by a fixed date which, it would seem, falls in the course of August, after the harvest has been gathered, the fortifications have been completed, and large numbers of reservists assembled in the camps.

Another long and detailed despatch on the subject was sent by M. de Saint-Hardouin, French Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin, on July 25th : by August 15th, Germany will have " about two million men under arms ", and it looks as if the Reich aimed at reaching " an advanced state of mobilisation " by that date. But when in a talk

with Weizsäcker, on July 14th, Henderson " mentioned as symptomatic the calling up of reservists in Germany ",

> I replied [writes Weizsäcker in his minute] that in France and Poland the number of men with the colours exceeds the normal by half a million, while the calling-up notices of reservists in our newspapers represent merely what is usual in every standing army in the summer. I added that British foreign policy seemed to me to be preparing for war and looking out, wherever possible, for allies, though without signal success.

The more than usually acrimonious tone adopted by Weizsäcker towards Henderson reflected the irritation felt in Berlin at public declarations recently made by British statesmen. Halifax, in a speech at Chatham House on June 29th, emphasised once more Britain's resolve " to stop aggression "; her recent diplomatic arrangements " have no purpose other than defence ", but are denounced as aiming at the isolation or encirclement of Germany and Italy.

> What are the facts? . . . Germany is isolating herself, and doing it most successfully and completely . . . economically by her policy of autarky, politically by a policy that causes constant anxiety to other nations, and culturally by her policy of racialism.

Halifax concluded with an extremely fair and moderate summary :

> British policy rests on twin foundations of purpose. One is determination to resist force. The other is our recognition of the world's desire to get on with the constructive work of building peace. If we could once be satisfied that the intentions of others were the same as our own, and that we all really wanted peaceful solutions — then, I say here definitely, we could discuss the problems that are to-day causing the world anxiety. In such a new atmosphere we could examine the colonial problem, the questions of raw materials, trade barriers, the issue of *Lebensraum*, the limitation

> of armaments, and any other issue that affects the lives of all European citizens.
>
> But that is not the position which we face to-day. The threat of military force is holding the world to ransom, and our immediate task is — and here I end as I began — to resist aggression.

On July 10th, in the House of Commons, Chamberlain repeated the warning : he spoke about Danzig, about Poland's vital need of that outlet to the sea, and the full freedom which she left to its inhabitants in internal affairs. " The present settlement, though it may be capable of improvement, cannot in itself be regarded as basically unjust or illogical ", and up to March 1939 Germany did not consider the question either urgent or likely " to lead to a serious dispute ". Chamberlain pointed out that " certain defensive measures were taken by Poland on the 23rd March ", and that the German demands were refused on the 26th : which disproves the assertion freely made in Germany that it was the British guarantee of March 31st which encouraged the Polish Government to adopt that line. " Recent occurrences in Danzig have inevitably given rise to fears that it is intended to settle her future status by unilateral action, organised by surreptitious methods, thus presenting Poland and other Powers with a *fait accompli.*" Should this happen,

> the issue could not be considered as a purely local matter involving the rights and liberties of the Danzigers, which incidentally are in no way threatened, but would at once raise graver issues affecting Polish national existence and independence. We have guaranteed to give our assistance to Poland in the case of a clear threat to her independence, which she considers it vital to resist with her national forces, and we are firmly resolved to carry out this undertaking.

The declaration was specific and unequivocal, and meant to forestall German manœuvres in Danzig : hence the annoyance.

When, on July 13th, Coulondre called on Weizsäcker to take leave before going on his holiday and to introduce the Chargé d'Affaires, M. de Saint-Hardouin, Weizsäcker once more repeated his " personal conviction that nothing would happen in Danzig which could cause serious complications " ; and, after having touched on the Bonnet-Ribbentrop correspondence,[1] spent most of the time criticising Chamberlain (in fact, Weizsäcker's own minute, as published in the German White Book, is limited to that one subject). Here is Coulondre's report :

> " While it may be useful ", he said, " clearly to define one's position, nothing but harm can arise from continually repeating the same thing in public manifestations as is done by the British Government."
>
> I remarked that the Prime Minister's speech was very calm and objective, and that, to my knowledge, this was the first time that he defined the British attitude with regard to Danzig.
>
> But Herr von Weizsäcker would not have it : such a speech could only reduce the chances of a friendly understanding by stiffening the attitude of the parties. What hope was there of the Poles, thus encouraged, showing themselves conciliatory? Moreover, intimidation would not work with the Reich.

And these are Coulondre's conclusions :

> The language of the State Secretary shows the impression which the clear and determined attitude of the Western Powers over Danzig has made on the German Government.
>
> Mr. Chamberlain's declaration has been an unpleasant surprise especially for those who, like Herr von Ribbentrop, tried to cast doubt on England's armed intervention in a German-Polish conflict.
>
> Now that the positions are clearly defined and are known to the German Government, it would seem to me advisable to keep silent about Danzig, in so

[1] See above, pages 230-34.

far as this depends on us. Anything which fosters polemics on that subject could merely render a waiting attitude or an eventual retreat more difficult for the Reich.

It was the next day, July 14th, that Henderson, having returned from a short visit to England, saw Weizsäcker. There is a brief minute of the conversation by Weizsäcker, and a much longer by Henderson.

> I took the opportunity [writes Henderson] . . . to mention . . . that I had been informed that one of the Under-Secretaries at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Keppler, had said that Herr Hitler was convinced that England would never fight over Danzig.
>
> . . . That sort of remark would be repeated in London, and would once more make His Majesty's Government wonder what further steps they could take to convince Herr Hitler that they were in earnest. It was solely because they doubted whether Herr Hitler was correctly informed on this point that they continued to reiterate their determination to resist force by force in future. If Herr Hitler wanted war, it was quite simple. He had only to tell the Danzigers to proclaim the re-attachment of the Free City to Germany. Obviously that would put the onus of action on the Poles, but not even that would cause us to hesitate to support them, if Germany attacked them, since we would realise quite well that the Senate at Danzig would only adopt such a resolution on the direct order of the Chancellor.

This was clear though petulant. After some sparring Weizsäcker replied with involved refinements.

> There were, Baron von Weizsäcker said, so many distinctions about a statement to the effect that England would not go to war over Danzig. Anybody, including Herr Hitler himself, might well say that England did not wish to fight about Danzig, and it would be true. Nor did Germany. Anybody, includ-

> ing Herr Hitler, might say that one day Danzig would revert without war to Germany, and that might equally be true as the result of a pacific settlement with the Poles in their own true interests.

Henderson answered that facts could be twisted, but that " His Majesty's Government could never be reproached this time, as they had been in 1914, of not having made their position clear beyond all doubt ". And he repeated once more : " If Herr Hitler wanted war, he knew exactly how he could bring it about ". Weizsäcker replied that the fault in 1914 had been not to have made British intentions " known privately to the German Government before it was too late ". And he added :

> Why did His Majesty's Government to-day insist all the time upon these public utterances ? If something had to be said to Herr Hitler, why could it not be said privately without all the world being kept informed ? That had been the mistake last year during the Czech crisis. Public warnings only made it more difficult for Herr Hitler to heed them.

Henderson explained that it was feared in England lest " disagreeable facts " were withheld from Hitler ; to which Weizsäcker replied that he could not say what reports were read by Hitler — he was

> influenced by nobody, but regarded situations as a whole and was guided solely by his own appreciations of them.

Weizsäcker's minute suppresses Henderson's sharp remarks and makes him conclude with expressions of " confidence in the political genius of the Führer to solve difficulties and conflicts at the right moment without bloodshed ". Thus each in his minute puts a sharp edge on his own remarks, and reproduces those of the other side in an attenuated form : which is symptomatic both of the situation and the men.

It is difficult to say to what extent the clear and firm declaration of British intentions made Hitler reflect and hesitate for a while. But about the middle of July despatches from the French Embassy in Berlin record signs of uncertainty. On the 11th Coulondre reported statements made to a member of his Embassy by a prominent Nazi, close to Ribbentrop: he alleged that Ribbentrop no longer enjoyed the absolute confidence of the Führer, who felt himself let in for a difficult affair over Danzig, fit to compromise German prestige if no satisfactory solution was found soon.[1] He further pointed to a certain toning down of the German Press campaign against Poland, and suggested that the Poles would be well advised to try to negotiate about Danzig. But it was clear to Coulondre that a return to the frontiers of 1914 was Germany's aim, and from this he drew practical conclusions contrary to those of Henderson.

> To avoid playing the German game [wrote Coulondre on July 11th] the problem of Danzig must not be treated separately but in the light of the Czechoslovak precedent and of the Reich's real ambitions. What use would it be to cede Danzig when Germany desires very much more? And if there were a chance of this satisfying her, why risk weakening Polish morale when obviously the Reich, if this is all it desires, will not plunge into a general war for so limited an objective.

On July 21st Saint-Hardouin reports from "a very good source" that during the previous week a change had occurred in Hitler's outlook, and that he was now convinced of the determination of the Western Powers to stand by their promises to Poland; and on the 22nd he

[1] Cf. in Hassell's diary (*op. cit.* page 67) entry under date of August 7th, 1939: Nostitz, of the German Foreign Office, told him that "Ribbentrop had for weeks been out of favour with Hitler, (1) because he had misinformed him about England; (2) because it had been his advice to deal *first* with Czechoslovakia, and *next* with Danzig".

writes about an apparent *contretemps* over Danzig between Goebbels and Ribbentrop. On the 22nd Dr. Bömer, Chief of the Press Section of the Ministry of Propaganda,[1] acting on instructions from Dietrich who had just returned from Berchtesgaden, declared in a conference with the foreign Press correspondents that the German Government continued to claim the return of Danzig to the Reich, but desired to see it effected by negotiation ; that such a solution could not be postponed indefinitely, and that Poland would give way as the result of mediation — perhaps by Great Britain. Ribbentrop, who was at Fuschl, obviously rattled by Goebbels's intervention, made Braun von Stumm, of the Foreign Office Press Department, explain that there was nothing new in Bömer's declarations : while the Reich insisted on the return of Danzig, this was not regarded as a problem fit to provoke a war. Thus the rival Offices were agreed in trying, for the present, not to push matters any further. None the less, anxiety in diplomatic circles did not subside. " The end of the harvest, *i.e.* August 15th–20th ", wrote Saint-Hardouin on July 25th, " is expected to mark the opening of an extremely grave crisis which may lead to a European war." And whatever the moods or manœuvres of German political circles, German military preparations were unremittingly pressed forward.

Preparations and Illusions

In Poland, the man in the street looked upon war with the Reich as inevitable, reported Noël on July 9th. " Whether or not the Government share this view, they are determined to do their utmost, if the conflict cannot be avoided, at least to postpone it as long as possible." On June 30th Halifax, obviously much disturbed by developments in Danzig, instructed the Embassy to

[1] About him see above, page 139.

enquire " how the Polish Government propose to deal with the situation which appears to be impending ", and suggested that the time had come for consultations between the Western Powers and Poland " in order that the plans of the three Governments may be co-ordinated in time " (no doubt as much with a view to holding back, as to upholding, Poland). Beck, to whom Norton had communicated the gist of the telegram, " was fully in favour of an exchange of views ", but not of " a joint *démarche* in Berlin ", which might unduly force the pace ; asked him to assure Halifax that " despite some people's ideas of Polish rashness, the Polish Government were determined not to be scared by any psychological terrorism into imprudent action " — the Germans would not succeed in provoking or intimidating Poland ; but " he still desired peaceful and normal relations with Germany ". Similarly reassuring were Noël's reports. On July 5th, in a conference of four hours between the President of the Republic, the Marshal, the Prime Minister, and Beck, it was decided not to react to developments in Danzig unless " Poland's essential interests (the use of the railway, of the Vistula, or the harbour) were directly affected ", and then to start with measures of an economic order ; and unless an emergency rendered it impossible, the Polish Government proposed previously to consult the Western Powers. Lastly, Beck told Noël that in his view to give excessive prominence in the Press to Danzig would be playing the German game.

In fact, so far from being rash, provocative, or bellicose, the Polish Government can much rather be accused of behaving like people who reacted to air raids by falling asleep. Even had the Polish Government clearly envisaged the situation, it might have been too late to remedy it — but they would not face it. Originally the date of Germany's full rearmament, and thus of action, seems to have been fixed for 1943–1944, and the Poles had laid

their own plans accordingly ; they still adhered to that time-table, despite the acceleration which successes, unexpectedly easy, and the improved strategic position had produced in Hitler's plans. The Polish Military Intelligence, no less than that of the other Allies, reported German preparations and concentrations ; and yet neither Beck nor the General Staff, whatever acknowledgment they made in words of the possibility of war, truly envisaged it. It is reported that when M. Kwiatkowski, Minister in charge of the Economic Departments, inquired of the highest military authorities whether he should continue his long-term policy with regard to foreign trade, currency, exports (even of war material), and the work of building factories in the new Central Industrial District, or whether he should count on an imminent war, he was told that it was merely Hitler's " bluff " and that there would be no war.

When war broke out Poland was wholly unprepared for it. Her population was almost half that of Greater Germany ; but of the available man-power only about half had received military training, and for only half of these was equipment available. Thus Poland, a State of about 35,000,000 inhabitants, run by the military, entered the war with forces which could have been raised in one of 10,000,000. But even these forces were poorly equipped for modern war : they had fair prototypes of planes, tanks, armoured cars, but all as yet in an experimental stage. They had excellent guns, anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, but in quite insufficient numbers. Poland entered the war with 272 first-line aeroplanes, and with one mechanised brigade consisting of two motorised cavalry regiments and one tank battalion (a second such brigade was nearly ready and was completed in the course of the campaign). Poland's military position had hardly been improved during the five and a half months which elapsed between Hitler's entry into Prague and his in-

vasion of Poland. It was the heroism of the officers and men, and the work of a few first-class commanders, which enabled her to hold out even the short time she did.

A new military agreement with France was concluded on May 19th and signed by Generals Gamelin and Kasprzycki: the French air force was to open action against Germany immediately on the outbreak of war; smaller operations with local objectives were to be undertaken by the land forces starting with the third day of mobilisation; and by the sixteenth day, France was to open an offensive with her main forces (*déclencherait une action offensive contre l'Allemagne avec les gros de ses forces*).[1]

With Britain military conversations were not started till much later. General Ironside came to Warsaw on July 19th; but it would seem that neither side had much to offer beyond assurances and comfort on the political plane. The French Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw reports on July 20th a conference which, on the previous day, was held by Ironside and Norton with Smigly-Rydz and Beck. Ironside "started by giving the Marshal an assurance that Poland could absolutely rely on Great Britain", and next asked the Poles a series of questions. "What would Poland do if the *Anschluss* of Danzig was proclaimed" unaccompanied by military action on the part of Germany? Answer: Poland would favour a joint *démarche* in Berlin by the three Powers. What if units of the Reichswehr entered the Free City? Answer: the Polish General Staff would send officers to demand explanations. And when Ironside enquired about the present state of German military activities, Smigly-Rydz described them as aiming, to some extent, at intimidation, but, so far, not as dispositions "with a view to an imminent conflict".

Even with regard to the British armament loan to

[1] For Gamelin's account and interpretation of the agreement see below, pages 456-63.

Poland both sides showed singular supineness. First, Beck delayed the despatch of the Polish financial representative, the late Minister of Finance and Governor of the Polish Bank, M. Adam Koc ; and it seems that only under strong pressure from Koc did Beck finally send him to London. Thus the Polish delegation, which had been expected early in May, did not reach London till June 14th. Estimates of the credits to be granted ranged as high as £50,000,000 ; though, according to the *Financial News* of June 21st, " well-informed opinion expected that the final figure will be no less than £25,000,000 ". The Poles were asking for substantial sums to buy war material from Great Britain and raw materials from British overseas possessions, and to develop the C.O.P. (Central Industrial District — to which they meant to remove industries from Silesia and other districts too close to the German frontier). Difficulties soon arose, and by the end of the month there seemed little hope of agreement. The Press still talked about a credit of £20,000,000 ; but by July 14th this dwindled to a loan of £5,000,000, and £8,000,000 export credits. Then another hitch occurred. " The Poles are in a mood to refuse a loan altogether and get it elsewhere if they can ", cabled on July 19th the London correspondent of the *New York Times*. On July 25th Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated, answering Mr. Dalton in the House of Commons, that export credits of £8,000,000 would be negotiated but that it had not been found possible to agree on the conditions on which a cash loan could be made available. On July 26th Koc left by aeroplane for Warsaw, and when he returned, on August 2nd, an Anglo-Polish Guarantee Agreement for a loan of £8,163,300, to finance Polish purchases in Britain was signed by Mr. R. S. Hudson, Secretary of the Overseas Trade Department, and Count Raczyński, the Polish Ambassador.[1] It seems

[1] About July 20th took place the well-known talk between Hudson and Herr Wohltat (Hudson's opposite number in Berlin) in which Hudson spoke

extremely doubtful whether even the most generous loan would have made much difference at that late hour ; but the way in which the negotiations were handled by both sides did considerable harm. Hitler, in his speech to the Commanders-in-Chief on August 22nd, specially referred to these negotiations as proving that Britain was not serious about her guarantee to Poland.[1]

No less curious than the procedure over the loan was that with regard to converting the Anglo-Polish Declaration of April 6th into a regular treaty. When asked about it in the House of Lords on June 8th, Halifax replied : " It is my hope that this permanent Agreement will shortly be concluded ". But on August 3rd : " . . . the formal agreement with Poland is still being agreed, it is still not concluded ". Difficulties in drafting the Treaty must have arisen when it had to be co-ordinated with the arrangements discussed with Moscow — signs of it can be traced in the secret Protocol annexed to the Mutual Assistance Agreement as signed on August 25th, 1939. Moreover, there was the fear of upsetting Hitler — regard for him continued to be entertained both in Warsaw and in London.

about the possibility of a very considerable international loan to Germany should the Nazis prove their peaceful disposition. In an interview published in the *Daily Express* on July 24th, he admitted that such a loan had been talked about but denied any figure having been mentioned — that currently reported in London put this disarmament loan to the Germans at £1,000,000,000. " One despairs of the political mentality of Ministers ", wrote the *News Chronicle* on July 25th, " who do not realise the futility as well as the folly of making such overtures at the present time." Chamberlain in the House of Commons on July 24th denied that the Cabinet had known anything about this conversation — " nor did any other Minister than the Minister concerned, and it is not the intention of H.M. Government to initiate any discussions of the kind referred to ". None the less, the harm was done.

[1] See below, page 301.

CHAPTER VII

PROLOGUE TO CRISIS

Danzig Once More

In the second half of July there was the semblance of a *détente* also in Danzig : it was part of the turn or manœuvre carried out by Berlin at that juncture. About the middle of the month, Gauleiter Forster was summoned by Hitler to the Obersalzberg, and having returned to Danzig, on the 19th called on the League High Commissioner, M. Burckhardt. The Chancellor, he said, while upholding his claim to Danzig, would do nothing to provoke a conflict — the question could wait a year, or even longer. But to ease the situation the Poles should give way on some minor points, like that of the Customs inspectors. The war of notes, which the Danzig Senate had carried on with the Polish Commissioner-General since the Kalthof incident, should be closed, and the friendly mediation of the High Commissioner was invoked. Forster himself would publish an article restating the German view, but if there was no violent repercussion, the subject could be dropped. He spoke of a *détente*, and promised his loyal collaboration ; and mentioned Hitler's wish for a talk with the High Commissioner — but Ribbentrop had raised objections, and Hitler had concluded evasively : " Well, it will be a little later, I will let you know ".

Burckhardt, to enlist British help, informed the Acting Consul-General, Mr. F. M. Shepherd, of the conversation ; and on July 21st Halifax instructed Norton to plead with Beck for restraint and circumspection — " I hope that if the Senate show any sign of desiring to improve the atmosphere by discussing concrete questions, the Polish

Government . . . will not be slow to respond in a friendly and forthcoming manner". Further, Norton was to try to ensure calm treatment of Forster's article. Halifax himself was arranging to be informed "when any concrete question is to be taken up by the High Commissioner at the request of the Senate . . . in order that we may have an opportunity of discreetly urging moderation on the Polish Government". Beck, in conversation with Norton, agreed that "it was in everyone's interest that the temperature should be allowed to fall"; he had instructed the Polish Commissioner in Danzig "to deal with each question in a purely practical and objective manner"; but he did not see any real evidence of a change in German policy, and suspected in the talk of appeasement a new German manœuvre to separate Poland from Great Britain.

The attitude of the Polish Government remained a mixture of suspicions, hopes, and illusions: but deep down they continued to underrate the danger. On July 31st, after a visit to Gdynia, Beck told Kennard that he saw no indications of the Danzig Senate intending to behave more reasonably; but possibly "the remilitarisation of Danzig was not proceeding so actively", and he had "no information of a serious increase in German concentrations on the Polish frontier", though he was somewhat perturbed by certain German propaganda moves and by the calling up of reservists for the second fortnight in August. Arciszewski was similarly in two minds when he spoke to Kennard on August 2nd. "He admitted that the general situation might become critical towards the end of this month", and might pass within a few hours "from the political to the military phase"; but he "felt that the military preparations at Danzig were to some extent exaggerated". And he thought that Germany "would hesitate before going to the length where a serious crisis must develop".

By the end of July there was a new deterioration of atmosphere in Berlin. " The ingredients for a formidable explosion were . . . being gathered ", writes Henderson, in his *Failure of a Mission.*

> I decided, at the end of July, to seek for myself the opportunity of a personal meeting with Hitler. He was at Bayreuth . . . attending the Wagner festival. Though absolutely unmusical, I like Wagner. As a young man I studied German in Dresden, which was then the proud possessor of the best opera in Germany. Thanks to Gerald Tyrwhitt, now Lord Berners, who was in the same pension as I was, I had learnt there by heart all the *leit-motifs* . . . of the *Ring*. . . . I had twice attended the whole of the *Ring* in Berlin, and I used this as an excuse to pay a visit to Bayreuth on the 29th of July.

But the attempt was " a complete failure " (though Henderson had the satisfaction " to hear a marvellous performance of the *Valkyrie,* to see a few personal friends, and to make the acquaintance of the English wife of Siegfried Wagner "). Hitler

> was away inspecting the Siegfried Line, accompanied by Ribbentrop. . . . He got back on the last afternoon of my visit, but I only saw him at a distance in the opera-house. . . . Even so, if he had wanted to speak to me, Hitler could have done so. . . . But contact with the British Ambassador was not part of the game for him.

Still, is this the way, one may well ask, in which a British Ambassador, at a time of serious crisis, needs to, or should, seek " contact " with the head of the Government to which he is accredited ?

" It appears no longer merely from conversations but from articles in the Press ", writes Saint-Hardouin on July 30th, " that the limited problem of Danzig is about to be superseded by the problem of the Corridor, or even

of Poland's structure." The 25th anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1914 was officially commemorated in Germany, and was made the occasion of proclaiming her "vital" needs and claims. And in a further despatch, of August 1st, Saint-Hardouin, having mentioned the apparent *détente* during the second half of July, speaks of a new revulsion "in the soul of the all-powerful master of the Third Reich".

> The German Press (as also the Nazi newspaper in Danzig), which had, round about July 22nd, emphasised Germany's desire to obtain satisfaction by peaceful means, of recent days has been trying to show that Germany had no reason to fear even a general conflict, which, they maintain, would develop under conditions much more favourable than those of 1914. . . .
>
> At the same time there occurred a widening in the Press of the field of the German-Polish dispute. It is no longer a question of Danzig, but of the Corridor and even of Posnania and Upper Silesia. The change of approach is rather curious, the German tactics having hitherto been to minimise the dispute between Berlin and Warsaw so as to make it appear that German claims were limited to a city whose German character no one contested.

Saint-Hardouin may be touching the root of the new developments when he says that

> the slow course of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations may perhaps tempt the Germans to revert to the idea of a lightning action which in the course of a few weeks would "liquidate" the Polish army and place the Western Powers before an accomplished fact. The German military do not consider the plan free of danger, but do not think it unrealisable if Russia's neutrality is assured.

Many people, especially in the provinces, think the catastrophe inevitable: preparations for war are too notice-

able. Others still believe that Hitler will once more "work miracles" and secure Danzig without war. "Those usually best informed admit ignorance. The Führer, they say, himself does not know as yet what part he will take. Everything depends on circumstances."

In the same despatch Saint-Hardouin reports a revival in the Nazi Press of the campaign against the Polish customs and frontier guards in Danzig. As the Danzig authorities continued to obstruct them in the discharge of their official duties, Warsaw, by a note of July 19th, threatened to impose economic sanctions by stopping the Danzig export of margarine and herrings to Poland: these perishable goods formed together more than one-sixth of Danzig's total export trade. The Danzig Senate appealed to the League High Commissioner; negotiations were started; the Danzigers denied Poland's right to impose such sanctions, but were prepared to stop measures against the customs guards, provided some, whom they accused of being disguised agents of the Military Intelligence, were withdrawn. The Poles denied the Danzig interpretation of the existing trade agreements, and the charge against the guards. On July 29th Greiser, President of the Danzig Senate, sent a Note to Chodacki, with a threat of "economic counter-measures", and another one, drawing a distinction between Polish customs officials and "so-called" frontier-guards (*Grenzer*). The Poles objected to the tone of the Notes, and on August 1st sanctions were imposed. According to Shepherd, the President of the Danzig Senate subsequently

> complained to the High Commissioner that the Gauleiter had not passed on to him the desire of the Führer to terminate the war of Notes and to work towards a *détente*. Herr Greiser was incensed at having been placed in a false position, and said that he would not have sent his Notes of 29th July had he been kept *au courant*.

A curious light is thrown by this complaint on Forster's peace move and his promise of " loyal collaboration ".

On August 4th, at four customs posts on the frontier between Danzig and East Prussia, the Polish inspectors were informed that one " part of them " (presumably the frontier guards) would be prevented by force from carrying out their duties after August 6th, 7 A.M. The news reached Warsaw in the afternoon ; a Note was drafted to be delivered by the Polish Commissioner-General to the President of the Senate ; and at 10 P.M. the British and French Embassies were informed of its contents : it assumed that the order, unprecedented in the history of Polish-Danzig relations, was due to a misunderstanding ; declared that such a violation of " the fundamental rights of Poland " could not be tolerated ; and demanded by August 5th, 6 P.M., a reply to the effect that the order would be cancelled. In the meantime the Polish customs officials would be instructed as from August 6th to do service in uniform and armed, and any interference with them would be " regarded as an act of violence against Polish State officials in the discharge of their official duties ", and would call forth immediate reprisals against the Free City. (According to Burckhardt, it was explained verbally that the frontier was to be closed to all foodstuffs). The Note, marked August 4th, 11.40 P.M., was presented to Greiser on August 5th, 1 A.M. Burckhardt, informed of it by Chodacki at 8 A.M., got into touch with Greiser who denied that such an order had ever been given (and told a complicated story of the original letter bearing the signature of Herr Beyle, President of the Danzig Diet, having been sent by " an irresponsible namesake "). Still, because of " the tone of the ultimatum " and the threat, he refused at first to send any reply ; though finally he let himself be persuaded by the High Commissioner to telephone to Chodacki to whom he repeated the same explanation, but adding that " for

technical reasons " he could give no written reply before Monday, the 7th. Chodacki answered that he would ask his Government's permission to treat Greiser's explanations as a *note verbale* and not adhere to the prescribed time limit, but a written reply was insisted upon ; and in a letter on August 5th (misdated " August 4th ") Chodacki expressed " surprise at the Senate finding technical difficulties in giving an answer on so simple a matter ". Obviously instructions from the Reich were awaited, and in the end, contrary to Forster's original reaction, a written reply was given. It denied the alleged order having been issued ; expressed surprise that " at a time of political unrest ", and on the basis of a mere rumour, a " short-term ultimatum " should have been sent to the Danzig Government " whereby dangers of incalculable consequence may be provoked " ; and protested " with the utmost energy " against the threatened reprisals. This was the end of the storm in the tea-cup : it was to have repercussions outside. " Unfortunately ", writes Burckhardt, " the world Press, commenting on the whole affair, proclaimed that Danzig and National-Socialism had yielded all along the line to the threat of Polish reprisals." Perhaps even more unfortunate was the fact that these developments confirmed leading Polish circles in the belief that Hitler's " bluff " could be called, when in reality he was making his final political preparations for the attack.

On August 7th Forster was again summoned to the Obersalzberg, and on his return told Burckhardt that Hitler " had reached the extreme limits of his patience ". On the 10th, a great demonstration in Danzig, " to protest against Polish threats ", was addressed by Forster who declared that the Führer would find means to realise the unanimous desire of Danzig's population for reunion with the Reich ; and he proceeded to deny even Poland's right to an independent political existence. It was clear that he

had been briefed by Hitler. An anti-Polish campaign was now started in the German Press, very much on the lines of the anti-Czech campaign of the previous year : about the incapacity of the rulers, the nationally mixed character of the population, the " sufferings " of the *Volksdeutsche*, and, most ominous, about " German honour ". Meantime on the Polish side the first measure of resistance to long-endured encroachments and provocations released repressed feelings. On August 6th, at a rally of the Pilsudski Legionaries held in Cracow to commemorate the 25th anniversary of their entry into Russian Poland, Marshal Smigly-Rydz declared that Poland would " repel force by force " and oppose any attempt directly or indirectly to infringe her rights or interests ; he spoke of the importance of Danzig, which had for centuries been united to Poland. The Cracow *Czas*, a serious and independent Conservative daily, in commenting on the address, declared that should the Nazis try to create a *fait accompli* in Danzig, " the Polish guns would speak ". That article was to become the *pièce de résistance* of indignant Nazi discourses — " experience shows ", remarked Kennard, " that the Germans can wax indignant with anyone and on any subject if Goebbels so desires ". Was the new German campaign the prelude to an attack against Poland or a smoke-screen for the retreat in Danzig ? An unmistakable danger sign was to come from the German Foreign Office.

On August 9th Weizsäcker asked the Polish Chargé d'Affaires, Prince Lubomirski, to call on him, and then read to him a statement indicting Poland for her treatment of Danzig : another Polish ultimatum to Danzig or threat of reprisals " would lead to an aggravation of Polish-German relations ", for which the entire responsibility would fall on Poland ; further, restrictions on Danzig exports to Poland, of a nature to cause severe losses, would force Danzig to seek other trade channels (a hint at a

possible opening of the German frontier). When Lubomirski asked Weizsäcker for a copy of the *note verbale*, it was at first refused to him, but then he was allowed to make one himself — a piece of buffoonery which seems to bear Ribbentrop's hall-mark. Next day Herr Wühlisch, German Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw, was asked to call on Arciszewski who read out to him the Polish reply : it expressed surprise at Germany interfering in relations between Poland and Danzig, for which there was no juridical basis — any previous exchanges of views between the two Governments about Danzig " were solely based on the goodwill of the Polish Government and arose from no obligation of any sort ". The Germans were warned that the Polish Government

> will react to any attempt by the authorities of the Free City which might tend to compromise the rights and interests which Poland possesses there in virtue of her agreements, by employment of such means and measures as they alone shall think fit to adopt, and will consider any future intervention by the German Government to the detriment of these rights and interests as an act of aggression.

When Wühlisch asked for a copy of the note, he in turn was permitted to make one himself — a tit-for-tat characteristic of Beck.

Next day Wühlisch reported that before he saw Arciszewski, Beck had spoken to the British and French Ambassadors — " obviously he attached importance to obtaining the *placet* of his Allies before the declaration was made ". In reality Beck saw them after it had been made. He drew Kennard's attention " to the very serious nature of the German *démarche* " : it was the first time that the Reich had directly intervened in a dispute between Poland and the Danzig Senate ; he asked whether London " could take any useful action in Berlin to reinforce the Polish attitude " ; and said that

he expected a serious crisis to develop " during the last fortnight of this month, which while it need not necessarily lead to war would require very careful handling " ; but that " no further military measures were being taken by the Polish Government for the moment ", and that he would at once inform Kennard if they became necessary. Halifax shared Beck's optimism. " I have the impression ", he wired to Kennard on the 15th, " that Herr Hitler is still undecided, and anxious to avoid war and to hold his hand if he can do so without losing face." Kennard should therefore advise Beck to try to settle local Danzig affairs amicably through the mediation of Burckhardt, and to moderate the Polish Press ; but before speaking to Beck he should concert his action with his French colleague who would receive similar instructions. Beck, when these views were put to him, expressed himself generally in agreement with them, and remarked, as regards the Press, " that it was not the Poles but the British and other foreign Press who first suggested that the firmness of the Polish Government had caused the Senate to yield. . . ."

Meantime, on August 10th in the afternoon, Burckhardt had been warned by Forster that an urgent invitation would reach him from Hitler ; and at 10 P.M. he was asked to come to the Obersalzberg the next day, at 4 P.M., Hitler's private aeroplane being put at his disposal. He arrived at the appointed hour and stayed till 6.30 P.M. Hitler accused Beck of having boasted that he had won a victory at Germany's expense, and the Press of saying that Germany had lost the war of nerves, and that last year the bluff had come off because it was not with the Poles that Germany had had to deal. He then said that Weizsäcker had told Lipski " that time was up and that a new hour had struck ". (Lipski had not even seen Weizsäcker.) If the Poles attempted the least thing, averred Hitler, he would fall upon them like lightning with all his

powerful arms of which they had not the slightest idea. When Burckhardt remarked that this would lead to a general conflict, Hitler replied that he would not conduct war like William II, who always had scruples in employing his forces, but would fight to the last, without mercy. He claimed to have said to Lloyd George : " If you had been a corporal in the last war and I had been a Minister, believe me, our respective countries would be in quite a different position to-day ". He could count on Italy and Japan, contain the West with some 60 divisions (which were not available, as Keitel's and Jodl's evidence at Nuremberg was to show), and in three weeks liquidate Poland with the rest of his forces. Attempts were made to impress him with the size of the air force of other countries, but he knew that Britain had 135,000 men in the R.A.F., France 75,000, while he had 600,000 on a peace footing, and a million in war-time ; and his " was the best in the world, as it proved in Spain ". He said that the Russian Army had no offensive power. And next he discoursed on the German need of living space, and of cereals and wood : German agriculture could feed the people owing to its intensity which in time would exhaust the soil. Burckhardt said that the Western Powers would be willing to settle matters by negotiation ; Hitler accused them of inciting the Poles. Then again he got on to the subject of the "offer" which he had made to Poland in March. He drew a comparison between the Czechs and the Poles, and said that the Czech methods and order had filled the German officers with admiration, their war material had been plentiful, in excellent condition and admirably maintained, and the plans of their General Staff had been precise ; whereas the Polish plans, which he claimed to possess, were inferior, and their technical equipment inadequate. The Germans were astonished at " Poland's impudence ". But a reasonable solution was still possible — he would refrain

from interfering provided the Poles left Danzig alone, and ceased to " molest " the German minority in Poland.

The same afternoon, while Hitler was talking to Burckhardt, Ribbentrop received Ciano at Salzburg ; and on August 12th and 13th the talks with Ciano were continued by Hitler at the Obersalzberg. A very different view of the future was developed in those talks.

Informing the Italians

Hitler was not in the habit of consulting the Italians, or even of informing them beforehand, about his *coups* ; thus, in March 1939, they were not apprised beforehand of Germany's plans with regard to Czechoslovakia. Hitler then tried to reassure Mussolini that no further immediate action was intended. Ciano in his *Diaries* [1] reports that Göring's talk during his visit to Rome, April 14th to 17th,[2] seemed to suggest " that even Germany intends to keep the peace ", though the tone in which he talked about Poland was harsh and contemptuous. And the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Attolico, an able and upright diplomat,[3] was looked upon as a panic-monger when even at that time he warned his Government of an

[1] *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943*, ed. by Hugh Gibson (1946).

[2] Excerpts from German " Notes on the Conference between General Field-Marshal Göring and the Duce in the presence of Count Ciano ", dated April 15th, 1939, and produced at the Nuremberg Trial, seem to bear out the impression that Göring spoke of war as a rather more distant contingency, though perhaps not quite as distant as is suggested by Ciano. Thus, for instance, when talking about the date at which Germany would be best prepared for a major test of strength, he emphasised that Germany was of course " ready for action if suddenly a conflict arose ", but taking into account her insufficient armament at sea and certain changes which were being made in the Air Force, " he came to the conclusion that in nine months or one year the situation for the Axis, from a military point of view, would be more favourable ".

[3] On April 24th, 1940, Ciano was informed that Berlin would welcome Attolico's recall, and thereupon obtained from Mussolini his transfer to the Vatican. " I communicate to Attolico Hitler's stab in the back,"

impending German attack against Poland. On May 6th Ribbentrop, on a visit to Milan, "for the first time" appeared to Ciano "in a pleasantly calm state of mind". He would talk about where they must go and what they must take, but this "within a few years"; "the slowing-down of the speed of German dynamism is a very significant symptom", notes Ciano with obvious relief. Thus the Italians, thinking themselves on velvet, agreed to the "Pact of Steel"; and when on May 21st Ciano came to Berlin to sign it, Ribbentrop repeated that it was Germany's intention "to ensure for herself a long period of peace — at least three years". Even Hitler seemed to Ciano "quite serene" and "less aggressive" — this was on May 22nd, the day before his decision to attack Poland was taken.[1] In June and July, "tension" over Danzig is occasionally noted in the *Diaries*; but neither Mussolini nor Ciano expected war in the near future. Therefore when on July 7th Sir Percy Loraine, the new British Ambassador, brought Mussolini a message from Chamberlain, "a sort of charge in a minor key against German claims to Danzig", Ciano thought it "of no special moment". He dwells with pleasure on the "truly brilliant" arguments which the Duce used with Loraine, and on his bold and emphatic declarations (obviously based on trust in Germany's pacific assurances): "Tell Chamberlain that if England is ready to fight in defence of Poland, Italy will take up arms with her ally Germany". When Ciano related the scene to the German Ambassador, Mackensen seemed "particularly satisfied with the attitude taken by the Duce on the British move". Next, a meeting at the Brenner Pass between Hitler and Mussolini was planned for August 4th: the Italians meant to launch

writes Ciano in his *Diaries* on April 27th. "He takes it with a great deal of dignity and comes to the conclusion that it is an honour to him to end his mission in this manner. He is glad to go to the Vatican — from the Devil to Holy Water."

[1] See above, pages 213-17.

" a proposal for an international peace conference " with a view to blackmailing the " democracies " without risk of war. But Attolico continued to warn " of the imminence of a new and perhaps fatal crisis " : the Germans, he reported, were preparing " to strike at Danzig by the 14th August ". Ciano would not believe it — could this happen " without our knowing it . . . after so many protestations of peace by our Axis allies " ? Again Attolico was accused of having " lost his head ", and his reactions were ascribed to his being " a rich man " (but, in fact, his wealth was very much smaller than that of Ciano).

The proposal of an international peace conference was declined by the Germans,[1] and on July 31st the meeting at the Brenner Pass was postponed. But even on July 26th Ribbentrop still affirmed " the German determination to avoid war for a long time ". A week later, a significant series of entries appears in Ciano's *Diaries*. *August 2nd* : " Attolico . . . still insisting on the bugbear of a sudden decision that will be made by Hitler for the 15th of August ". *August 3rd* : " Roatta, the new Military Attaché . . . informs us of concentrations of forces and movements on the Polish frontier ". *August 4th* : " Attolico's alarmist bombardment continues ". Ciano now begins to think of a meeting with Ribbentrop, but does not state what it was that convinced him of the impending danger. *August 6th* : " . . . we must find some way out. . . . If the crisis comes we shall fight to save our ' honour '. But we must avoid war." Mussolini approved the proposed

[1] Nevile Henderson writes referring to Ciano's visit to Berchtesgaden on August 12th-13th, 1939 (*Failure of a Mission*, pages 252-3) : " It seems probable that Ciano there proposed, as he did in September, some form of international conference. Ten days earlier it might have been difficult for Hitler to refuse to take such a suggestion into serious consideration. But, once again, the fatality of the Greek tragedy theme and Hitler's responsibility therefor were in striking evidence." In fact the proposal was made a fortnight earlier and Hitler found no difficulty in refusing to take it into serious consideration — but when Sir Nevile starts on his " Greek tragedy " *motif*, he is usually *malaprop*.

meeting, and on the 9th it was settled that Ciano should start for Salzburg the next day. The Duce, the man of heroic decisions and pronouncements, now descanted on the need for peace with a warmth and lack of reserve such as was never before observed by Ciano — he was instructed " to prove to the Germans, by documentary evidence, that the outbreak of war at this time would be folly " ; that a conflict with Poland must be avoided, for it could not be localised, " and a general war would be disastrous for everybody " ; that preparations were not sufficiently advanced to assure victory ; and that its chances were now 50 per cent, but would be 80 in three years' time.

Of the three days' conversations at Salzburg and the Obersalzberg the Italian minute is not available, and in the *Diaries* Ciano limits himself to " some impressions of a general character ". The most dramatic statement appears in a later note, written by him in the Verona Gaol on December 23rd, 1943, shortly before his execution. He related how on August 11th at Fuschl, near Salzburg (a castle stolen from Herr von Raemitz who died in a concentration camp), Ribbentrop and himself were walking in the garden while " waiting to be seated at the dinner table " : [1]

> " Well, Ribbentrop," I asked . . . " what do you want ? The Corridor or Danzig ? "
>
> " Not that any more," he said, gazing at me with his cold metallic eyes. " We want war ! " [2]
>
> I felt that the decision was irrevocable. . . . The conversations . . . lasted ten hours that day. Those . . . with Hitler lasted for as many hours on the two successive days. My arguments made absolutely no

[1] It must have been before lunch, for the two continued talking that day for " ten hours ".

[2] At the Nuremberg Trial on April 1st, 1946, Ribbentrop denied having said it : " . . . one does not say things like that even to one's best and most faithful ally — and certainly not to Count Ciano ".

> impression on either of them. . . . Every objection was ruled out even if it was not ridiculed.

In the entry in the *Diaries* of August 11th, Ciano describes Ribbentrop as " evasive " when asked for particulars of the German plan, but " implacable " in the decision to fight. " I am becoming aware of how little we are worth in the opinion of the Germans." The next day Hitler was " very cordial ", but equally " impassive and implacable ".

> He speaks in the large drawing-room of his house, standing in front of a table on which some maps are spread out. He exhibits a truly profound military knowledge. He speaks with a great deal of calm and becomes excited only when he advises us to give Yugoslavia the *coup de grâce* as soon as possible.

The main outlines of Ciano's account are confirmed by the detailed minute found among captured German documents and offered in evidence at Nuremberg. The Führer opened the conversation by showing Ciano " with the aid of maps . . . the present position of Germany from a military point of view ". The traditional " breakthrough points " were closed against France, even Luxembourg and Belgium were covered by Germany's frontier fortifications, and the French, both for strategic and political reasons, could hardly attempt an invasion across Holland. A close blockade by the British Navy would be prevented by the great range of the latest German bombers. The Scandinavian countries and Switzerland would certainly remain neutral. " In the east Germany had also erected strong defences."

Britain, on the other hand, had only started re-arming and was highly vulnerable from the air. Of her own Air Force only a few bomber squadrons could intervene on the Continent, as " the British fighters would be urgently needed for the defence of their own country " ; and if Britain kept

the necessary troops at home, " at the most two infantry divisions and one armed division could be sent to France ". But once Poland was destroyed, Germany could assemble hundreds of divisions in the west, and France would have to concentrate all her available forces against them. " The Führer also thought that the French would find it no easier to overrun the Italian fortifications than to overrun the West Wall. Here Ciano showed signs of extreme doubt."

" The Polish Army was most uneven in quality ", and weak in anti-tank and anti-aircraft defence. The population was mixed and the genuine Poles were less than 20 millions out of a total of 34 million inhabitants. " Poland could be struck to the ground by Germany in the shortest time " ; and since the Poles had clearly shown that in a conflict they would side against Germany and Italy,

> a quick liquidation at the present moment could only be of advantage for the unavoidable conflict with the Western democracies. . . . Generally speaking, the best thing would be for the neutrals to be liquidated one after another. This could be done more easily if on every occasion one partner in the Axis covered the other, while this one was dealing with an uncertain neutral. Italy might well regard Yugoslavia as a neutral of this kind.

Prince Paul, on his visit to Germany, seemed inclined to form a closer connexion with the Axis and to withdraw from the League of Nations, but changed his attitude when he reached London. Yugoslavia would remain neutral only while it was dangerous to come out openly on the side of the Western democracies, but would do so if the position of Germany and Italy deteriorated. Rumania was afraid of Hungary, and was weak and corrupt. Bulgaria and Hungary were friendly, and Slovakia under German control.

As for Danzig, it was impossible for the Führer to go back. The withdrawal of the Germans from the Southern Tyrol had been justified on the plea that the east and north-east were the German sphere of interest, and the Mediterranean that of Italy. But the case of the Southern Tyrol must not be made into a precedent for other countries.[1] Further, Germany stood in need of the food-stuffs and timber from these eastern regions. Lastly, " Danzig was a Nuremberg of the North, an ancient German city " of great sentimental value to the Germans — Hitler adduced as comparison that Italy would not suffer Trieste to remain in Yugoslav hands and a large Italian minority to be treated brutally by the Yugoslavs.

Count Ciano in replying

> expressed great surprise . . . at the completely unexpected seriousness of the position. Neither in the conversations in Milan nor during his Berlin visit had the Germans in any way signified that the position with regard to Poland was so serious. On the contrary, Ribbentrop had said . . . that the Danzig question would be settled in the course of time.

The Duce, convinced " that a conflict with the Western Powers was unavoidable ", had made his plans for a period of two or three years. If an immediate conflict were unavoidable he would certainly stand by the Germans, but he would welcome the postponement of a general conflict to a later time. Italy believed that a conflict with Poland would develop into a general European war.

The Führer replied that " personally he was absolutely certain that the Western democracies . . . would shrink from entering into a general war ".

Next, Ciano developed the Italian case against risking such a war " at the present time ". The Abyssinian and Spanish Wars had exhausted Italy's supplies, her military equipment required modernisation ; her fleet

[1] Cf. Ciano's *Diaries*, entry for September 12th, 1939.

was unequal to those of the Western Powers. Italy was highly vulnerable in her colonies ; Abyssinia " was almost pacified ", but the pacification was superficial and in case of war the 200,000 Italians in the country would be in serious danger. The position in the Dodecanese would be difficult. Albania was as yet undeveloped. The question of Italians in foreign countries, " who should be brought back to Italy according to plan ", was a further serious consideration. In France alone there were a million Italians, of whom 700,000 could still be looked upon as belonging to Italy. " Finally the Duce himself set great importance upon carrying through the Rome Exhibition in the year 1942, for which large-scale preparations had been made " and from which in the economic sphere, and particularly in the matter of foreign currencies, " favourable results were expected ". Ciano proceeded to pile on further arguments : he spoke of the present intense feeling in England and France which could not endure, of the position of Japan, etc. And next he reverted to the Duce's idea of an international conference. Hitler replied that Russia could not be left out any more, and that Poland and Spain would also have to be admitted, so that Germany, Italy, and Spain would be ranged against Britain, France, Russia, and Poland — an unfavourable position. Ciano replied that the side would win which was ready to let the conference fail and to face war. But in deference to the Führer's views, the Duce had dropped his proposal and merely favoured " a peaceful gesture on the part of Italy and Germany " which would offer the Western Powers " an honourable way of avoiding war ". Poland would then be isolated and have to accept a reasonable settlement.

Hitler answered that because of climatic conditions action with regard to Poland could not be postponed any longer. " From September to May, Poland was a great marsh and entirely unsuited for any kind of military

operations " ; [1] in fact, Poland could " occupy Danzig in September and Germany would not be able to do anything about it " (a different story is told on this point the next day). Ciano asked how soon the Danzig question had to be settled ? Hitler replied " by the end of August ". To Ciano's further question what solution the Führer proposed, Hitler replied by a highly coloured account of his offers to Poland, alleged that Poland's refusal was the result of British intervention, accused the Poles of aggressive intentions with regard to Germany, and argued that it was intolerable to have such a neighbour less than a hundred miles from Berlin. He had therefore decided to use the occasion of the next Polish provocation — an ultimatum, some brutal ill-treatment of Germans in Poland, or an attempt to starve out Danzig or to invade German territory — for the invasion of Poland and the final settlement of the problem. To the question when " action of this kind against Poland was to be expected ", Hitler replied that it " must be reckoned with at any minute ". (Throughout the conversation it was taken for granted that it was for Hitler to fix the exact time when " intolerable provocations on the part of the Poles " were to occur.)

> During this exchange of conversation [the German minute continued] the Führer was given a telegram from Moscow and a telegram from Tokio. The conversation was interrupted for a short time and Ciano was then told the text of the Moscow telegram. The Russians agreed to the despatch of a German political negotiator to Moscow. Ribbentrop added that the Russians were fully informed of the intentions of Germany with regard to Poland.

(The alleged text given to Ciano was a concoction, for the Russians did not agree to receive a political negotiator

[1] Potatoes are lifted in Poland in the first half of October, and work on spring sowings starts in April — neither could be done in a marsh.

till August 21st ; [1] and the statement that they had been informed of Germany's intentions with regard to Poland was a lie — for even during Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow on August 23rd these were merely adumbrated, but never fully stated ; [2] though of course the Russians must have been fully aware of their nature.) Hitler further said that the Russians would not do the work of the Western Powers, and would not interfere on behalf of Poland whom they hated. Then the discussion was adjourned to the following day.

When it was resumed it was agreed to conclude the talks without a communiqué: "The door was therefore open, no one was committed, and no course was blocked". Hitler once more explained the danger which would arise from too long a delay. After the autumn had set in, the Poles would be in a more advantageous position. They could ruin Danzig by an economic blockade, or occupy the place. This would be followed by a German reconquest of the Corridor and Danzig, but further military operations would be impossible at that time of the year, when "the heavily motorised German forces which were necessary for deep penetration into Poland could not be used. . . . It was therefore necessary that within the shortest time Poland should clearly state her intentions, and no further provocation should be endured by Germany. . . . It should not be forgotten that the test of nerves which the Poles had begun by means of constant provocations had now lasted for three months." There must be no sign of weakening on the German side ; it would encourage the Western democracies not to wait but to attack the Axis : the best way would be to forestall them by dealing quickly with Poland. One by one the Axis operations — of Italy in Abyssinia, Spain, and Albania, and of Germany in Austria and Czechoslovakia — had strengthened their joint position. The Western democracies "sat like misers with their heaps of gold and

[1] See below, pages 283-4. [2] See below, page 286.

deluded themselves about their riches " ; they desired to rule the world and looked down upon Germany and Italy. " This psychological element of contempt was perhaps the worst thing about the whole business ", and could only be settled by a life-and-death struggle. The Mediterranean was Italy's ancient domain, Germany must take the old road to the East — there was no conflict of interests between them. Here Ribbentrop added that if the Polish and Yugoslav problems were settled, " Italy and Germany would have their backs free for work against the West ". " Ciano thanked the Führer for his extremely clear explanation of the situation ", to which he himself had nothing to add ; he would report to the Duce. There might be no decisions for the Duce to take " as the Führer believed that the conflict with Poland could be localised " and " so far the Führer had always been right in his judgment of the situation ". Mussolini might, however, have " to take certain precautionary measures ". The Führer envisaged attacking Poland in case of " serious provocation " or if she " did not make her political position clear ". " Ciano therefore asked what was the date by which Poland must have satisfied Germany about her political position. He realised that this date depended on climatic conditions." Hitler replied " that the last date on which he could begin to take action was the end of August ". The German minute concludes with a discourse by Hitler on German-Italian collaboration.

> He was personally fortunate to live at a time in which, apart from himself, there was one other statesman who would stand out great and unique in history; that he could be this man's friend was for him a matter of great personal satisfaction, and if the hour of common battle struck, he would always be found on the side of the Duce.

Coulondre's despatch on the Berchtesgaden talks shows how much good observers could gather at that juncture :

. . . the situation, as seen from Berlin [he wrote on August 15th], is far from clear. It is not possible to discern with any certainty the immediate intentions of the Reich Government, nor the way in which they propose to get out of the present impasse nor to what extent they are really prepared to run the risk of a general conflict.

But these are the outstanding facts :

1. The military preparations of the Reich are gaining in speed and weight, and Germany can be taken to have reached an advanced stage of mobilisation. War psychosis is spreading among the German population.

2. The Reich has committed itself still further over Danzig, and . . . the problem of the German-Polish frontiers, and indeed of the European East, has been placed before the German public.

3. Despite categoric declarations in the German Press, it is as yet impossible to gauge the degree of effective understanding and solidarity now established between Rome and Berlin.

4. While certain signs call for the greatest vigilance, others suggest that Berlin is not yet decided to precipitate matters or to stop temporising.

. . . . . .

The German Press has given no precise information about the Salzburg and Berchtesgaden talks. . . .

From what one can observe in Berlin, the predominant impression . . . seems to be that Italy has tried to exercise a moderating, restraining influence on the Reich ; but the result is uncertain.

Outside observers were not the only ones in the dark about the outcome of the talks. Admiral Canaris, Chief of the Foreign *Abwehr-Bureau* (Counter-Intelligence), on August 17th reported to Keitel a conversation with General Roatta, Chief of the Italian General Staff : Roatta wished Mussolini would clearly tell Hitler " that he would not enter the war ". Keitel thought Mussolini " would join anyhow ". Canaris was of the opposite opinion " by

reason of Ciano's conference with Ribbentrop, which ", writes Canaris in his minute, " I reported to him once more in detail ". Keitel replied " that the Führer had told him the contrary ", and concluded that " the Führer does not tell him everything ".

Ciano returned to Rome on August 13th — according to his *Diaries*

> completely disgusted with the Germans, with their leader, their way of doing things. They have betrayed us and lied to us. . . . I think that our hands are free, and I propose that we act accordingly, declaring that we have no intention of participating in a war which we have neither wanted nor provoked.

But Mussolini was in two minds : first he agreed with Ciano ; then he said that honour compelled him to march with Germany : moreover, he wanted his share " of booty in Croatia and Dalmatia ".[1]

August 14th : Ciano found Mussolini " worried " ; talked to him " of his diminished prestige and . . . the none-too-brilliant rôle of second fiddle " ; and turned over

[1] Marshal Badoglio, in his book *L'Italie dans la guerre mondiale* (1946), states that a letter from Hitler brought by Ciano was communicated to him by Mussolini, but notes that Ciano " did not allude to it " when he " made a detailed report " on the Salzburg conference to the Chamber of Deputies ; nor is it mentioned in Ciano's *Diaries*, or in the German minute, and I am informed by Miss Elizabeth Wiskemann. who enquired into the matter, that no letter from Hitler was brought by Ciano in August 1939. The alleged letter is thus summarised by Badoglio (pages 28-9) :

> War against Poland is inevitable. It will solve the problem of the Corridor and put an end to the ill-treatment of Germans in Poland. I am absolutely convinced that England as well as France will take care not to jeopardise their future from love of the Poles. But whether they intervene or keep out, the problem remains exclusively Nordic. Italy does not come into it at all. Moreover, the present state of her military preparations is such that her intervention would serve no useful purpose. Let therefore Italy preserve peace and her friendship for us.

Mussolini added that he knew from previous talks with Hitler " that he was against sending Germans to the South or Italians to the North ", as the respective climates would lower their " fighting qualities ".

to him " documents which prove the bad faith of the Germans on the Polish question ".

August 15th : The Duce " is convinced that we must not march blindly with Germany ", but he does not want to break with her " brutally and suddenly ". After all, the democracies may give in : therefore a solution has to be found which would enable Italy, should the democracies fight, " to free herself ' honourably ' from the Germans " ; but should they " swallow it ", to take advantage of the situation and " settle accounts once and for all with Belgrade ". " For this purpose it seems useful to put down in writing the conclusions of Salzburg " in a document which could be pulled out or left " buried in the archives, as the case may require ".

August 16th : In the afternoon a long discussion whether to send a note to the Germans ; but it is thought preferable to make a verbal communication, since a written might induce Germany to ask for clarification of Italy's position in case of war.

August 17th : The Duce " wanted Attolico to confirm to Ribbentrop that, in spite of everything, Italy will march with Germany " against the Western Powers, but is persuaded to " say nothing until the Germans have renewed their request ".

August 18th : " The Duce still thinks it possible that the democracies will not march, and that Germany might do good business cheaply, from which business he does not want to be excluded. Then, too, he fears Hitler's rage." If abandoned, Hitler might leave Poland aside, and square accounts with Italy.

August 19th–20th : Ciano went across to Albania. In his absence, Mussolini veered round once more, and wished to assure the Germans of his support. Meantime Britain " made an appeal to the Duce to settle the controversy peacefully ". But he thought it " too late to go back on the Germans ". It would be said " that Italy is

cowardly, that it is not ready, and that it has drawn back " at the sight of war.

August 21st : Ciano claims to have told Mussolini that at Salzburg he had been confronted by a German *diktat*, and that the Italians had been treated not like partners, but like servants ; and to have offered to go to Salzburg once more and " speak to the Germans as they should be spoken to ". It was decided " to ask von Ribbentrop to come to the Brenner Pass, to speak frankly to him, and to reaffirm our rights as Axis partners " : Italy would not intervene " if the conflict is provoked by an attack on Poland ". But Ribbentrop could not be got on the telephone till 5.30 P.M. ; and then he said that he could not give an answer at once as he was waiting for an important message from Moscow, and would telephone to Ciano in the evening. He did so at 10.30 P.M., and said he would prefer to see Ciano at Innsbruck as later he was to leave for Moscow " to sign a political pact with the Soviet Government ". Ciano reported to Mussolini, and it was agreed that the trip to Germany " would no longer be timely ". " There is no doubt ", writes Ciano, " the Germans have struck a master blow. The European situation is upset." Ribbentrop was told that the projected meeting had better be postponed till his return from Moscow.

At the Wilhelmstrasse, August 15th

In the morning of August 15th Coulondre, who had returned from a month's leave in France, called on Weizsäcker — " with whom it seemed to me useful to resume contact on my return to Berlin ". He stayed an hour, and the two accounts of the interview tally to such an extent that they can be freely used to complement each other ; the French minute is about twice the length of the German, which itself is fairly full — Weizsäcker, " contrary

to his habit ", writes Coulondre, " took copious notes of my *exposé* ". Coulondre's manner was courteous, but, as Weizsäcker writes, " calm and determined " ; Weizsäcker's discourse was long-winded and elaborate,[1] yet clearly pessimistic, and, as he indicates in his own minute, he spoke " as instructed ". Coulondre's endeavour was to convey the conviction to the State Secretary (and perhaps also to his own chiefs) that France must and would stand by her pledges to Poland, Weizsäcker's to insinuate to the Ambassador that surely France would not let herself be dragged along by Polish pranks. With Germany's course set for war, but her Russian move as yet undisclosed, the talk was bound to be inconclusive in its very nature — yet in its suspense there was an element of warning.

Weizsäcker started off by asking what impression of the international situation Coulondre had carried away from Paris. Coulondre replied that he had found " France at work, calm and peaceably inclined, but ready for any sacrifice in defence of her honour and the place she holds in the world ". " We have taken up our position, and done it emphatically. The engagements of mutual assistance entered into by France, England, and Poland will operate automatically in case of aggression against one of them." But the French Government wished for a *détente* and a freely negotiated agreement between Germany and Poland. In Berlin he found, on the contrary, the atmosphere rather changed since July. " The Gauleiter of Danzig, in between two visits to Berchtesgaden, had made two violent speeches in Danzig and Fürth " ; and the Press was producing columns of " Polish incidents " and invoking " German honour ". Weizsäcker agreed that there was a change, and entered into a long discourse on the Poles and on the British and French guarantee —

[1] Coulondre speaks of " la façon enveloppée avec laquelle s'exprime le Secrétaire d'État " ; and Weizsäcker himself writes : " Alsdann holte ich ziemlich weit aus und zog die nötigen Argumente heran " (" thereupon I went fairly far afield and adduced the necessary arguments ").

" that ' automatic ' guarantee . . . born of the policy of encirclement " gave the Poles, " versatile and *exaltés* ", an orientation not originally envisaged in Berlin. He spoke of the Polish " ultimatum " to Danzig, of the recent exchange of notes, of the " sufferings " of the German minority : he produced a sheaf of typewritten reports which he described as about each morning's budget. And here he reached the core of his dissertation — the passage reproduced below from Weizsäcker's minute is confirmed by Coulondre's :

> Like all stupidity, also that of the Poles has its merit : in that it shows Poland's friends the harm they have done, and releases them from their obligations, for it is not to be assumed that either France or England would risk her existence for the sake of a friend who has run amok.

" This direct hint and the *arrière-pensées* which it disclosed " made Coulondre speak in even more explicit terms than at the beginning of the talk. " The absorption of Bohemia and Moravia ", he said, had produced a real revolution in the minds of the French : they felt that their own freedom and independence were in danger unless a balance of power was re-established in Europe. (Were France to let Poland be overrun by the Germans, Weizsäcker's minute makes Coulondre say, " her own turn would not be far distant, or else she would sink to the level of Belgium or Holland ".) This was not a policy of " encirclement " ; the ties with Poland could not be loosened. The " automatism " of which he had spoken, had a " realistic " basis. Here Weizsäcker interrupted : but what if the aggression was not " unprovoked " ? Coulondre warned him not to lose himself in subtleties : if one of the three Allies was attacked, the other two would stand by him. As for the Polish Government it had shown great restraint and put up with the re-militarisation of Danzig, though this was forbidden by its Statute.

(" Undoubtedly," retorted Weizsäcker, " but the Statute could not foresee that the Free City would have to be defended against its guardian.") France, added Coulondre, while urging prudence on Poland, " will not exert on her, who forms an integral part of our defensive system, a pressure which might impair her morale. We have had one such experience which shall not be repeated." Then, reverting to the German attitude, he enquired whether Weizsäcker could state what were the intentions of his Government : in June and July he had said that " the revendications of the Reich could wait if the Polish attitude admitted it. Had the position changed ? ' It has changed,' replied Weizsäcker, showing some embarrassment, ' I can't say more at present ; I merely wish to add that I am glad to see you back at this moment.' " Coulondre assured Weizsäcker that he would employ all his strength in the service of peace, which was particularly precious to his country. " A European war ", he says in Weizsäcker's minute, " would end in disaster for all, including present-day Russia. Not Stalin would be the winner, but Trotsky."

Summing up his impressions, Coulondre says that more than once he had the feeling that Weizsäcker meant to convey to him that things might move quickly. Possibly " without being exactly informed of his master's secret, he knows that important decisions are being taken or discussed ". Hitler presumably tries to attain his objectives in Poland without a general conflict — but these extend by now beyond Danzig, and include at least the Corridor and Upper Silesia. As his anger rises against the neighbour who dares defy him, Hitler may almost consciously be minimising in his mind the risk of an extension of the conflict. The French Government should therefore be absolutely firm about the automatism of its military assistance ; keep the Allied forces, and especially her own, up to the German level which is rising steadily ; hasten

the conclusion of the agreement with the Soviets; and urge on Poland the utmost prudence and measures for avoiding local incidents.[1]

On the same day Weizsäcker received Henderson — according to Weizsäcker's minute in the afternoon, and according to Henderson's in the evening; neither gives the length of the interview. The two minutes, the British about double the length of the German, tally again in substance, but not in sequence or structure; and as it seems to have been a rambling talk — " I told the State Secretary that we were talking in a circle ", notes Henderson — it is sometimes difficult to say whether similar passages in different contexts are identical or repetitions. Weizsäcker's language, as retailed in his own minute, was rude and violent,[2] while in Henderson's version the conversation was ill-tempered on both sides. " I adhered to the line of argument ", writes Weizsäcker, " which, following instructions, I had pursued this morning in talking to the French Ambassador. But the expressions which I used to Henderson about the policy of Poland were perhaps still somewhat sharper." And Henderson in one context : " We disputed with acrimony the rights and wrongs of the case without either apparently convincing the other ". M. Roger Cambon reported from London that Henderson seems " at no moment to have had the feeling of interesting his interlocutor ", and that Weizsäcker had been " particularly aggressive and even brutal in speaking about Poland ". But in fact not about Poland only : he just let himself go with Henderson. It is remarkable what dislike and irritation the Germans habitually displayed towards

[1] Four points only are enumerated in Coulondre's despatch as published, but the fourth is marked " 5° ", which makes one wonder whether this is a printer's error or whether point " 4 " has been deleted without a consequent change being made in the numeration. The Yellow Book is known to have been severely pruned before publication.

[2] His style in this conversation can best be described as a continuous *anschnauzen* — the English language possesses no word which could do justice to that charming, animal, approach.

him — they never showed such rudeness to the French, American, Russian, or even to the Polish Ambassador.

Weizsäcker reports Henderson to have opened the talk with " a fairly direct enquiry concerning the outcome of Ciano's visit to Salzburg ", which he left unanswered.[1] Then Weizsäcker plunged into a long discourse on the grave turn which the international situation had taken since August 4th, piled up accusations against Poland, spoke of her " unmistakable set policy of persecution and extermination of the German minority " — " there was a limit to everything and that limit had now been reached ". Hitler's patience was exhausted. When Henderson pointed out that the last sentence of the Polish reply of August 10th (with which Weizsäcker made great play in both talks that day) " only described as aggression ' acts to the detriment of Polish rights and interests ' ", Weizsäcker replied that this " meant asking Germany to disinterest herself in the Free City " where it was her aim " to modify the position . . . in favour of Germany " ; and he held up against Henderson previous British admissions " that there might be modifications to be made ". After further wrangling, Henderson used a sentence which occurs repeatedly in his talks with the Germans — that " what was done could not now be undone " (apparently a regretful re-assertion of the British guarantee to Poland) ; assured Weizsäcker that His Majesty's Government, no less than the Germans, could not be intimidated ; and

[1] It is not certain that Weizsäcker himself was by then fully informed. Ulrich von Hassell, who had been German Ambassador in Rome from 1932 till 1937 when he retired from active service, notes in his diary on August 14th, 1939 : " In the afternoon to tea with the Weizsäckers. . . . He was fairly worn out. His chief Ribbentrop causes him great worry. About what happened at Salzburg, Ribbentrop but inadequately informed him over the 'phone. . . ."—Hassell was strongly anti-Nazi but remained in touch with his previous colleagues. He was executed by the Nazis on September 8th, 1944, in connexion with the July plot against Hitler. His diary was published in 1946 by his son under the title, *Vom anderen Deutschland* (*The Other Germany*).

suggested that Germany should take the initiative of reopening negotiations with Poland. This provoked a further harangue from Weizsäcker, who again used the argument about Polish behaviour and Allied obligations :

> Germany believed that Poland was deliberately running with her eyes shut to ruin : Germany was convinced that His Majesty's Government did not realise whither their policy of encirclement and blind assistance to Poland were leading them and Europe : and that finally his own Government did not, would not and could not believe that Britain would fight under all circumstances whatever folly the Poles might commit.

And when warned against such " a very dangerous theory ", he replied, writes Henderson,

> that he would put it differently (and he gave me to understand that the phrase was not his own). Germany believed that the attitude of the Poles would be or was such as to free the British Government from any obligation to follow blindly every eccentric step on the part of a lunatic.

(According to his own account, Weizsäcker spoke of the *Narrenfreiheit* — freedom to play the fool — which Britain had given to the Poles and of which they were making full use ; and said that she must now see " whither her so-called policy of encirclement was leading her, and presumably would hardly feel inclined or obliged to let herself be dragged into disaster by her Polish friends gone wild ".)

Henderson said that Poland would " take no major step " without consulting Britain, and that to speak of Britain blindly following her was therefore " hypothetical ". Weizsäcker retorted that to talk of Britain controlling Poland's actions was " pure theory " — had Britain been consulted about the ultimatum to Danzig or the Note of August 10th ? [1] The position was " no longer

[1] See, however, above (page 256) the — inaccurate — suggestion by the German Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw that the British and French representatives had been consulted beforehand.

tenable " and " extremely grave ". " Things had drifted along . . . but . . . they could drift no longer." Hitler would attend the Tannenberg celebration on August 27th. " But he hinted that things might not only depend on a speech." If nothing happened earlier, Henderson feared a " warlike pronouncement on that occasion ". " As Baron von Weizsäcker himself observed, the situation in one respect was even worse than last year as Mr. Chamberlain could not again come out to Germany." (Weizsäcker quotes the same thing as said by Henderson.)

The conclusions drawn by the two men from the talk are both correct. Weizsäcker writes : " Henderson left me feeling the seriousness and urgency of the situation ". And Henderson :

> I was impressed by . . . Baron von Weizsäcker's detachment and calm. He seemed very confident, and professed to believe that Russian assistance to the Poles would not only be entirely negligible, but that the U.S.S.R. would even in the end join in sharing in the Polish spoils. Nor did my insistence on the inevitability of British intervention seem to move him.

Three days later, on August 18th, Henderson called again — only Weizsäcker's minute of the talk is available. Henderson had come to tell him that on Tuesday next (August 22nd) he proposed to fly to Salzburg to attend the races of motor-cyclists in which a number of Englishmen were competing. Weizsäcker once more declared that Britain " completely mistook Poland's attitude towards the Germans ", and Henderson that " Germany should not delude herself with the idea that Britain would not give military aid to Poland ". The same day (it does not appear whether it was before or after the talk with Weizsäcker), Henderson sent a telegram to the Foreign Office (not reproduced in the Blue Book but summarised in his *Final Report*) that if peace was to be preserved, " some immediate and mediatory action " was required.

> I repeated a suggestion which I had made some time previously, namely, that a personal letter should be addressed by the Prime Minister to Herr Hitler and be delivered by some emissary from London. Two days later I again telegraphed to the same effect. . . .

In other words, while Coulondre advised increased military preparedness and a quick closing with Russia, Henderson favoured the idea of renewing direct contacts between British statesmen and Hitler; and as appears from his talk with Hitler on the 23rd, he at least seems to have thought that his suggestion was being favourably considered in London.

But before there was time for any move of that kind, the Russian bomb-shell burst, creating an absolutely new, and extremely acute, situation.

The Russian-German Agreement

Of the documents so far available for tracing the course of Russian-German negotiations in the summer of 1939, the most helpful is the affidavit of Friedrich Gaus, late Legal Adviser to the German Foreign Office, dated Nuremberg, March 15th, 1946; though even this, made from memory without the help of notes and documents, fails to supply some of the crucial dates. "In the early summer of 1939 — it must have been in the second half of June", he writes, Weizsäcker and he were summoned by Ribbentrop to his estate, Sonneburg near Freienwalde-on-Oder, and were told that Hitler had been thinking for some time of an attempt "to establish more tolerable relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R." For that purpose "some innocuous current problem should be raised with the Soviet Government in the normal diplomatic way, in order to ascertain whether they would be prepared to discuss business with the German Govern-

ment ". If so, this might be made the occasion for more material political talks exploratory of whether a *modus vivendi* could not be brought about between the two countries. " A question of Soviet consular representation in Prague was thought of for subject of such a first tentative conversation." Weizsäcker and Gaus went immediately to work and drafted instructions for the German Ambassador in Moscow; these, revised by Ribbentrop, were submitted to Hitler but were not sent " as Hitler found them, after all, ' too explicit ' ".

Next, about the middle of July, and in connexion with some other business, Gaus was recalled from leave by Ribbentrop, then at Fuschl, and was asked to hold himself in readiness at Salzburg. " Some time later, Herr von Ribbentrop, to my surprise, showed me the draft of a special message from the German to the Soviet Government suggesting negotiations for a political pact." The argument was put forward that the interests of the two States closely touched without cutting across each other. And Gaus, a highly trained official of the old school, adds in a caustic manner: " I was not told who had written the draft; but judging by its style, it was not, or at least not wholly, the work of the Foreign Minister ". The despatch was sent, and " not long afterwards " a reply was received from the Soviet Government which, while it did not reject in principle the idea of seeking a new basis for Russian-German relations, stated that a more thorough diplomatic examination of a preparatory character was required.[1]

[1] Cf. entry in Hassell's diary under date of August 7th, 1939 (*op. cit.* page 67): Nostitz, of the Foreign Office, told him that " with the Soviets nothing serious was as yet proceeding, though there were many indications that Hitler desired an understanding. When Schulenburg in conversation with Molotov clearly hinted that ' normalisation ' was desirable, Molotov showed great reserve ". — See also evidence by Neurath and Göring in the American quarterly review, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1946, page 142, in article " Light on Nazi Foreign Policy " by DeWitt C. Poole, based on interrogatories of leading Nazi statesmen and officials.

> There followed a second German message to Moscow [writes Gaus] urging an immediate opening of negotiations. . . . This second message — but possibly also the first — contained the offer of an early visit of the German Foreign Minister to Moscow for political negotiations. Then — I believe on August 21st — a favourable reply was received from the Soviet Government, which produced, as by chance I was able to observe myself, the greatest joy in Hitler and the people round him. If I am not mistaken, both messages took the form of personal communications from Hitler to M. Stalin, and this was all there was in the way of written preparation.[1]

Gaus's account bears out the argument developed above [2] that political negotiations between the U.S.S.R. and Germany are not likely to have started in earnest before August — which does not preclude broad and mutual hints having been dropped during the commercial negotiations; these had been going on for some time, and towards the end of July were officially avowed by the Soviet Government: a move not without significance. But allegations, subsequently made by Germans and eagerly canvassed by some Poles, of negotiations for a Russian-German Non-Aggression Pact having been carried on for months,[3] must be treated with the utmost caution,

[1] Even accepting Gaus's statement, it would still seem reasonable to assume that Hitler's second message to Stalin was accompanied by concrete suggestions for a treaty orally transmitted through the usual diplomatic channels; for, in the first place, the Russians would hardly have committed themselves to such negotiations without some certainty of what they could expect, and next, it seems technically almost impossible for a treaty of that kind, with its secret protocol, to have been negotiated and drafted in less than twelve hours without any previous preparation.

[2] See pages 189-90.

[3] See, for instance, Szembek's wire to Raczyński, dated August 29th, 1939, and published in the Polish White Book:

> On the strength of instruction from Berlin, the German representative at Bucharest recently told Rumanian political circles that German-Soviet conversations regarding a Non-Aggression Pact had been in

or even suspicion. The dates of the messages cannot be fixed from Gaus's statement. But two other reliable sources name the night of August 4th-5th as the date of Hitler's final decision to seek a political understanding with the Soviets — it was immediately communicated over the telephone from Berchtesgaden to Berlin. Further, a sentence in Hitler's address to his generals, on August 22nd,[1] helps to date the second German message: "Four days ago I took a step, which resulted in Russia answering yesterday that she is ready to sign". This places Hitler's second message on August 18th, and confirms Gaus's date of August 21st for Stalin's reply agreeing to receive Ribbentrop in Moscow. But "the text of the Moscow telegram" as communicated by Hitler to Ciano at the Obersalzberg on August 12th,[2] is thus proved a German concoction and a wishful, though intelligent, anticipation.

Gaus accompanied Ribbentrop to Moscow, where they arrived on August 23rd, about 1 P.M.[3] The first interview between Ribbentrop and Stalin took place the same afternoon, with Hilger, Counsellor to the German Embassy, acting as interpreter; Gaus was not present. Ribbentrop returned "from that long conversation very

> progress for some two and a half months, and that all the details of the Pact had been settled for some time.
>
> Please utilise this information, in view of Marshal Voroshilov's statement that the understanding with Germany was brought about only by Poland's negative attitude towards the Staff conversations between the Soviets and Great Britain and France.

Germany had a clear interest in thoroughly discrediting the Soviets in the eyes of the Western Powers so as to render difficult for them a change of sides, while Poland had a similar interest, both in order to excuse her past reluctance to come to an understanding with Russia and to prevent a *rapprochement* between her and the Western Powers in the future.

[1] See below, page 302.

[2] See above, pages 267-8.

[3] Ribbentrop is sometimes erroneously stated to have arrived in Moscow on August 22nd (even in his own evidence at Nuremberg — see below, page 288). But while he left Berlin late on the 22nd, he arrived in Moscow on the 23rd, having spent the night at Konigsberg.

satisfied and declared that the conclusion of the agreement desired by Germany was as good as assured ". A second talk followed that night, at which the documents were to be discussed and prepared for signature ; there were present : Stalin, Molotov, and a Russian interpreter Pavlov, Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador Count von der Schulenburg, Gaus, and Hilger. " Into the preamble of the draft-treaty prepared by me, Herr von Ribbentrop had inserted a rather effusive sentence about future friendly German-Russian relations. M. Stalin objected, saying that the Soviets, after the National Socialist Government had for six years ' emptied its pails ' on them, would not suddenly appear in public with assurances of Russian-German friendship." The Treaty was signed by Ribbentrop and Molotov, presumably in the early hours of August 24th, though it is dated August 23rd. It contained the usual non-aggression, consultation, and arbitration clauses ; an assurance that should either of the Contracting Parties become involved in war with a third Power, the other " will in no way support the third Power " ; a further assurance that neither " will join any group of Powers formed, directly or indirectly, against the other party " ; the agreement was to run for ten years, and to be ratified " within the shortest possible time ", but to come into force " immediately it has been signed ".

To this a Secret Protocol was added containing a delimitation of spheres of interest. Negotiations concerning it, says Gaus, had been started in the first talk between Stalin and Ribbentrop. From the German declaration of political *désintéressement* in Latvia and Estonia, Ribbentrop tried to exclude certain districts which Stalin refused to yield as they contained the ice-free ports. Ribbentrop thereupon put through a telephone call to Hitler, but obtained the connexion only during the second conversation : he was authorised to comply with the Russian demand. It was agreed that should political or territorial

changes occur in the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the northern frontier of Lithuania was to form the demarcation line between the German and the Russian sphere of interests, but Lithuania's claim to Vilna was acknowledged by both sides ; should such changes occur in the territories of the Polish State, the line of the Rivers Narev, Vistula, and San was to form the demarcation line between the two spheres — " whether the maintenance of an independent Polish State is in the interests of the Contracting Parties and what should be its frontiers, can be determined only by the further political developments, but it shall be done through an understanding between the two Governments ". In South-Eastern Europe, Soviet Russia registered her interest in Bessarabia ; Germany declared her political *désintéressement* in that region. (Subsequently, on Russia's initiative, changes in the spheres of interest were made by an additional secret treaty signed on September 28th, 1939 : Lithuania was included in the Russian sphere, while in Poland the frontier was moved further east, and made to coincide approximately with the Curzon Line — obviously Russia began to look upon it as a permanent frontier for which the previous line, cutting across ethnic Polish territory, was less well suited.)

Gaus mentions that Ribbentrop in talking to the Russians did not treat war with Poland as a fixed decision but as something possible in the near future ; the Soviet statesmen took note of the German communications, but refrained from saying anything which could have been interpreted as approval of such a conflict or as encouragement. While the documents were being made out for signature, Ribbentrop in conversation over refreshments, in spite of the previous rebuff over the preamble, continued his attempts to ingratiate himself with the Russians. Referring to Stalin's speech of March 10th, 1939, he said that " it contained a sentence which although it did not

name Germany, was understood by Hitler to imply that the Soviet Government considered it feasible or desirable to achieve better relations also with Germany ; Stalin's reply was extremely brief and was translated by Pavlov as ' This was the intention ' ". The sentence in Stalin's speech referred to by Ribbentrop presumably was : " We stand for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries " — and it is hard to see how Stalin could now have given a different or curter reply to the irrepressible Ribbentrop, who continued to chatter about Hitler having recently seen a Moscow film and found the Soviet statesmen in it *sehr sympathisch.*

And here is Ribbentrop's own account of the Moscow negotiations as recorded in the minutes of the Nuremberg Trial on March 29th, 1946 — like all his evidence, it is vague and inaccurate even in matters devoid of political importance :

> Marshal Stalin, in March 1939, delivered a speech in which he made certain hints of his wish to have better relations with Germany. At that time I informed Hitler of this speech and asked him whether or not we could not see whether this hint on Stalin's part had something real behind it. Hitler was at first hesitant ; he then, however, became more and more receptive to this idea. Negotiations for commercial treaties were under way, and during these negotiations I, with the permission of the Führer, conducted investigations . . . whether there could not be brought about a definite reconciliation between National Socialism and Bolshevism, and whether we could not agree at least on the interests of the respective countries.
>
> *Question* [by Ribbentrop's counsel] : How did these negotiations between the negotiators for the commercial treaty continue ?
>
> *Answer* : Negotiations of Ambassador Schnurre in a very short . . . time made clear to me . . . that Stalin had meant this speech seriously. There was

> an exchange of ideas and exchange of telegrams with Moscow which, in the middle of August, led to Hitler's sending a telegram to Stalin, and Stalin in his answer . . . invited a plenipotentiary to Moscow. The conclusion of this was the Russian-German pact.
>
> On the evening of the 22nd of August, I arrived in Moscow. The reception given me by Stalin and Molotov was very friendly. We had at first a two-hours discussion . . . the entire complex of Russian-German relations was discussed.
>
> I told the Russian gentlemen that Germany would do everything to ameliorate the situation in Poland and to settle it peacefully . . . but I left no doubt that the situation was very serious and that it was possible that war might break out.

On August 24th, at 1.20 P.M., Ribbentrop left from the Moscow aerodrome. His face, writes Gedye, " wore a self-satisfied and almost triumphant expression " ; he " shook hands all round, exchanged the Hitler salute with each member of the Embassy staff, and entered the 'plane ".

On the signature of the Russian-German Pact, the British and French Military Missions requested the Soviet authorities to expedite preparations for their departure. But at night it became known that they had postponed their departure — Soviet officials insisted that there was nothing to prevent Russia's joining " in any peaceful combination of Powers ", while the British and French Governments wanted to get a definite statement whether the Soviet Government was or was not prepared to continue negotiations for joining an Anglo-French combination. After an unsatisfactory interview with Voroshilov on the 25th, at 1 P.M., the Allied Missions left the same night, at 12.30 A.M. ; but on the 27th, in an interview with the *Izvestia*, Voroshilov argued that " the military talks with Britain and France were not broken off because the U.S.S.R. had concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany ", but

that the U.S.S.R. concluded the treaty, " among other reasons, because the military talks with France and Great Britain had got into a blind alley of indefinable discordances ".

On August 25th Molotov saw the French Ambassador and made to him the following rather disingenuous declaration : [1]

> The Soviet Government, having found that despite the endeavours of the three Governments Poland's obstinate refusal rendered impossible a tripartite Treaty of Mutual Assistance, had on their side to settle the problem by signing a non-aggression pact with Germany. . . . A great country like the U.S.S.R. could not go and beg Poland to accept help which she did not desire at any price.

When asked by Naggiar whether the Soviet Government had not by secret clauses engaged themselves to leave a free hand to Germany, Molotov replied that he " would not enquire whether there were secret clauses in treaties signed by France ".[2] On the 28th Naggiar further asked whether the Soviet-French Pact of Mutual Assistance was still operative, and is reported to have been told that the Soviet Government considered it to have been rendered void by the Franco-German Non-Aggression Pact of December 1938.

[1] See Gafenco, *op. cit.* page 235.

[2] See Daladier, " Le Procès de Nuremberg et le pacte germano-russe ", in *Minerve*, April 5th, 1946.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRISIS

Reactions in London and Paris

The British Cabinet met on August 22nd, at 3 P.M., and " considered the international situation in all its bearings " — reports had reached them of German military movements and " that a non-aggression pact between the German and the Soviet Governments was about to be concluded ".

> They had no hesitation [declared the official communiqué] in deciding that such an event would in no way affect their obligation to Poland, which they had repeatedly stated in public and which they are determined to fulfil.
>
> Parliament has been summoned to meet on Thursday next, when the Government propose to invite both Houses to pass through all its stages the Emergency Powers (Defence) Bill.

Other precautionary measures were announced. Still, the Government

> remain of the opinion that there is nothing in the difficulties that have arisen between Germany and Poland which would justify the use of force involving a European war. . . .
>
> . . . there are indeed no questions in Europe which should not be capable of peaceful solution if only conditions of confidence could be restored.
>
> His Majesty's Government are . . . always . . . ready to assist in creating such conditions. . . .

The French Cabinet met at 5 P.M.[1] Daladier gave a review of the Moscow negotiations, finishing with Russia's

[1] For the meeting of the French Cabinet on August 22nd, see *Carnets secrets de Jean Zay*, pages 60-64.

demand of a passage for her troops across Poland and Beck's final refusal on August 19th.[1] The Russians, he said, learnt of it "through an indiscretion, probably committed by the Poles themselves". "Yesterday", he continued, "the Russians presented a Note to our military mission making us responsible for the delay in concluding an agreement and expressing surprise that our missions should have come without adequate powers and without having previously obtained Poland's consent." Bonnet, on hearing of Ribbentrop's forthcoming visit to Moscow, had instructed the French Ambassador to ask for an interview with Molotov, but none had been fixed yet. Beck, whom Noël went to see immediately on receipt of the news during the night of August 21st–22nd, said "as if to console himself: 'It is now Ribbentrop's turn to experience the bad faith of the Soviets'".[2] But Daladier did not give up hope of still reaching some agreement with Russia. According to Zay, he proposed "(1) a threatening diplomatic *démarche* in Warsaw to force Poland into accepting the passage of the Russians;[3] (2) important military measures". Some of the Ministers seemed shaken by the Russian defection: this was the collapse of the "peace front"—should Frenchmen "die for Danzig"? They were reminded that French commitments to Poland were not conditional on Russian support and were not modified by what had happened. The British assurance to Poland was quoted. "'This is not so formal', remarked Bonnet, 'for the political agreement between them is not signed yet.'" Daladier spoke of a general mobilisation. President Lebrun did not think it necessary for the moment; but Mandel and Reynaud desired it on political grounds.

[1] See above, page 209.

[2] See Noël, *op. cit.* page 424, and Zay, page 61.

[3] Apparently Daladier himself did not think at that time the Polish objections so truly overcome as the reader of his article in *Minerve* might be led to believe; see above, page 210, *n.* 2.

" I don't ask for it ", declared Bonnet, and silence ensued. Finally Daladier's original proposals were accepted, while the question of mobilisation was deferred to the next Cabinet meeting on Thursday.

Meantime, early in the morning on August 22nd, Doumenc, having received the previous night Daladier's order to sign a military agreement which would have conceded the passage of Russian troops through Poland, conveyed to Marshal Voroshilov " the favourable reply of the French Government, and consequently [as Daladier put it [1]] of the British Government whom we had informed of our decision ".[2] He asked Voroshilov to call a meeting of the delegations for the afternoon. But, Daladier went on to say in his speech of July 18th, 1946, " Marshal Voroshilov merely asked General Doumenc to come to see him at 6.30 P.M., that is . . . after a whole day had passed. When General Doumenc came, a new demand was put to him. . . . He was told : ' We require an assurance that the Polish and Rumanian Governments have agreed. Then, if political circumstances remain unchanged, the military convention will be easily drafted.' "

That same afternoon Bonnet, in talking to Łukasiewicz, did not take " too pessimistic a view " of the situation,[3] but apparently said nothing to him about the order given to Doumenc the previous night. It was the next morning (August 23rd) that he surprised the Polish Ambassador by informing him of a communication received through the French Military Attaché in Warsaw and agreeing to the question of Russian military help to Poland being

[1] See *Journal Officiel* of July 19th, 1946, page 2681.

[2] The British Government may have been informed, but it does not follow that it concurred in Daladier's action. They would have undoubtedly welcomed it if Poland had agreed to the passage of Russian troops, but no communications were made by them of the kind addressed by the French to Łukasiewicz and Beck.

[3] See Łukasiewicz, *Remarks and Recollections*, " After the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact ", *Dziennik Polski*, December 5th, 1946.

discussed with the U.S.S.R. At night Łukasiewicz, in reply to an enquiry, obtained telegraphic confirmation from Beck, who added for Łukasiewicz's information that "he had no trust whatever in the good-will of the Soviet Government, and that the line adopted by us could have only tactical significance". One would have thought that even for that, consent given while Ribbentrop was already on his way to Moscow came too late.

On August 23rd, at Bonnet's request, Daladier summoned a conference attended by the Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff of the three Services. A minute (*procès-verbal*) of the meeting was drawn up by General Decamp, chief of Daladier's military cabinet. It was used at the Riom Trial and published by Henriot in 1942. Gamelin contests its validity as a *procès-verbal* as it had not been submitted for confirmation to those present, and certainly not to him. His remarks on the text, in the first volume of his memoirs,[1] amplify certain statements and, while correcting them in detail, confirm the main outlines. Gamelin admits having at the conference kept silent about some vital matters.

> As for the Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Georges Bonnet [writes Gamelin],[2] I admit that in his presence I hesitated to call to mind some of our deficiencies. At a later date, while recalling with Premier Daladier the conference of August 23rd, I took the opportunity of saying to him: 'You will understand that I did not think fit to indicate the deficiencies which there were still in our armament and in our industrial mobilisation. You knew them as well as I did, and they did not regard M. Georges Bonnet who was merely concerned with the basic question: whether the military chiefs considered that we could, or could not, face a war.' Premier Daladier replied: 'You did right. Had you indicated

[1] See General Gamelin, *Servir — Les Armées françaises de 1940* (1946).
[2] *Ibid.* page 24.

them, the Germans would have known about them the next day.' I wish to be understood : the Premier did not mean to suggest that the Foreign Minister was betraying France, but that he thought Bonnet capable, in his zeal for peace, of talking about these matters in political circles. Such conversations would not fail to be reported to our enemies, for we lived in a very uncertain atmosphere : as has been shown since. Lastly, certain incidents connected with the Munich crisis . . . had put me on my guard against M. Georges Bonnet.

The conference met at 6.5 P.M. and lasted till 7.30. Daladier put to them the following questions :

1. Can France remain inactive while Poland and Rumania (or one of them) are being wiped off the map of Europe ?
2. What means has she of opposing it ?
3. What measures should be taken now ?

Bonnet stated that, at the best, Poland will find no support with the U.S.S.R. ; that Rumania will probably deliver supplies to the Germans ; and that Turkey will keep out of the conflict.

Taking stock of the situation [he said] had we better remain faithful to our engagements and enter the war forthwith, or should we reconsider our attitude and profit by the respite thus gained to increase our military strength, while facing the fact that France risks being attacked in turn perhaps after a delay of a few months only ?

The answer to this question is essentially of a military character.

General Gamelin and Admiral Darlan point to the importance of securing the absolute neutrality of Italy.

M. Georges Bonnet replies that something can be attempted in that direction.[1]

[1] Monzie, *op. cit.* pages 140-41, states that on August 26th, at noon, Bonnet, after a conference with Daladier, warned him that in all prob-

General Gamelin, asked how long Poland and Rumania could resist, says that he believes Poland would honourably resist, which would prevent the bulk of the German forces from turning against France [1] before the next spring ; by then Great Britain would be by her side.

As for Rumania, it is more difficult to answer the question, for it depends on the attitude of Hungary and Yugoslavia.

In the course of the discussion it is pointed out that if we are stronger a few months hence, Germany will have gained even more, for she will have the Polish and Rumanian resources at her disposal.

Therefore France has no choice.

The only solution which can be envisaged is to adhere to our engagements to Poland assumed before negotiations were started with the U.S.S.R.

In a discussion on the state of French armaments,

General Gamelin and Admiral Darlan said that the Army and Navy were ready.[2] In the early stages of the conflict they can do little against Germany. But the French mobilisation by itself would bring some relief to Poland by tying down some considerable German units at our frontier.

In further observations, recorded by Gamelin in his book, he pointed out that if Germany annihilated Poland, as she had annihilated Czechoslovakia, and turned against France with the entire weight of her forces, and especially if she attacked across Belgium, France would find great difficulty in mobilising and concentrating her armies. " In this case it would no longer be possible for

ability he would be asked to go to Rome immediately ; at 6 P.M. he notes that the Italian Ambassador had called at the Quai d'Orsay with assurances of Italian good-will ; and at 7 P.M. that there is no longer any question of his going to Rome.

[1] Gamelin corrects the statement to " attacking us ".

[2] Gamelin explains that no army is ever absolutely " ready " and that all he meant was that the necessary preparations in given circumstances had been made. He protests that what he said should not be taken as a repetition of Marshal Lebœuf's unfortunate pronouncement in 1870.

her to enter upon the struggle." But "by the spring, with the help of British troops and American equipment, I hoped we should be in a position to fight a defensive battle (of course if necessary [1]). I added that we could not hope for victory except in a long war. It had *always* been my opinion that we should not be able to assume the offensive in less than about two years . . . that is in 1941–2 (I mean an offensive calculated to bring about a more or less rapid *decision*)." He further adds that in the early stages France could bring almost as much help to Poland by mobilising and concentrating her armies as by entering the war, and that she had an interest in doing so "as late as possible so that her concentration should be as far advanced as possible". Gamelin explains in footnotes that a "strategically defensive war" does not preclude counter-strokes and counter-offensives calculated to create a diversion for an ally.

All this may have been sound reasoning from the French point of view — but how did it tally with the terms of the Franco-Polish Military Protocol of May 19th, 1939, signed on behalf of France by Gamelin and stipulating that by the sixteenth day of war France should open an offensive with her main forces? [2] The minor operations indicated in Gamelin's footnotes are hardly what the Poles were led to expect, and even these were not carried out on a scale fit to relieve the hard-pressed Polish forces. The conclusion seems to impose itself on the reader that the French military chiefs, for the sake of their own armies and country, encouraged the Poles to offer "honourable resistance", while they clearly realised how little they would be able to do to preserve the Poles from annihilation. Henriot claims [3] that Bonnet learnt

[1] In the original: *bien entendu s'il le fallait.* General Gamelin does not explain what it was that he thought might absolve France from the need of fighting in the spring.

[2] For the Protocol, see below, page 460.

[3] *Op. cit.* page 21.

of the Franco-Polish military convention only on May 18th, which would mean the day before it was signed ; while Noël says that " Bonnet learnt by chance of the existence of that document ",[1] which would mean *ex post facto*. Henriot further asserts : Gamelin, " on instructions from Bonnet . . . immediately informed the Poles that the validity of the convention depended on the French Government signing an agreement — which it never did — including Danzig in the ' vital interests ' of Poland ". Noël writes : " Bonnet considered that any new military agreement ought to be conditional on a new political agreement, and he had this view accepted by the Cabinet. There was sense in it, but as the political agreement was not signed till September 4th . . . the technical protocol drawn up by the generals remained a dead letter and was not followed by any further conversations between the French and Polish General Staffs." [2]

But, indeed, did the military convention of May 19th intrinsically require a new political agreement, or did it not much rather lay down how the existing French obligations to Poland were to be implemented ? These obligations dated back to the treaty alliance and military convention of 1921, to the Treaty of Mutual Assistance concluded at Locarno, and to the guarantee of March-April 1939, parallel to that of Great Britain. " Poland is our ally ", declared Daladier on September 2nd, 1939. " We accepted engagements towards her in 1921 and in 1925. These engagements have been re-affirmed." The

[1] *Op. cit.* page 273.

[2] Since the above paragraphs were set up the second volume of Gamelin's memoirs, *Servir. Le Prologue du drame (1930 — août 1939)*, and further three instalments of Łukasiewicz's *Remarks and Recollections*, in the *Dziennik Polski* of March 10th, 14th, and 24th, 1947, have supplied abundant fresh material about these transactions. It was no longer possible to utilize it in this part of the book, but it has been done in the Chapter on " France and Poland (1935–1939) ", in Part II ; see below, pages 456-66. A " Stop Press " would be required to keep up with new publications.

convention of May 19th could be reasonably looked upon as the most recent indication given to the Poles by the highest French military authorities of how they meant to proceed in case of war. But Gamelin's remarks of August 23rd disclose that its stipulations in no way entered into the actual plans of the French High Command; Noël is undoubtedly correct when he says that " the technical protocol drawn up by the Generals remained a dead letter ".

There is yet another question raised by Gamelin's account of the meeting on August 23rd. He refrained from giving information about the deficiencies in the French armament for fear that it might percolate to the Germans. But what he did say disclosed a fatal weakness in the position of the Poles : that they could count on no serious military action by the French. Only with that conviction could the Germans take the risk of going to war with their Western Front denuded.[1] The mobilisation and concentration of the French armies did not, in fact, afford to the Poles even that modest measure of relief which Gamelin forecast in his *exposé*.

Hitler's Address of August 22nd

On August 22nd Hitler convened his Commanders-in-Chief in order to give them " a picture of the political

[1] General Jodl said at the Nuremberg Trial, on June 4th, 1946 : " . . . if we did not collapse in 1939, that was due only to the fact that during the Polish campaign roughly 110 French and British divisions in the West, facing 23 German divisions, were completely inactive ". Field-Marshal Keitel, on April 4th, asserted that " an attack on the part of the Western Powers would have met only a show of defence, which would certainly not have been effective. . . ." At first he said that the Germans had but five divisions on the Western front ; afterwards he corrected himself — he had got " mixed up with the year 1938. In 1939 there were approximately 20 divisions, including reserves in the Rhineland and behind the West Wall."— Undoubtedly both Jodl and Keitel were out to prove a thesis : even so, they could hardly have ventured on deliberate misstatements of an extreme character, seeing that the prosecution was in possession of the facts.

situation " and of the factors on which he had based his decision to act.[1]

His original plan had been to " turn against the West in a few years, and only afterwards against the East ". He had therefore tried to establish acceptable relations with Poland.[2] But it became clear to him that Poland would attack Germany in case she should be engaged in a conflict with the West. He had therefore to change the sequence.

There were personal factors which influenced his decision to fight now :

> My own personality and that of Mussolini.
>
> Essentially it depends on me, and my existence, because of my political activities. Furthermore, the fact that probably no one will ever again have the confidence of the whole German people as I have. There will probably never again be a man with more authority than I possess. My existence is therefore

[1] Again the German defence at the Nuremberg Trial attempted to impugn these documents. On May 16th, 1946, Dr. Siemers, counsel for Grand Admiral Raeder, formally objected to the two reports of Hitler's speech of August 22nd, 1939, being used in evidence. " This document ", he said about the second report, " is nothing but two pieces of paper headed ' Second Speech by the Führer on 22nd August 1939 '. The original has no heading, no number, and no notice that it is secret ; no signature, no date. . . . It is headed ' Second speech . . . ', although it is certain that on this date Hitler made only one speech, and it is hardly one and a half pages long. . . . It is known that Hitler spoke for two and a half hours. I believe it is generally known that Hitler spoke very fast." Raeder put in another summary of that speech made for him by Admiral Boehm who was present at the meeting. Lord Justice Lawrence asked the prosecution to ascertain where and how these documents had been obtained, and on May 17th, Mr. Dodd, one of the American counsel, stated that they were found in a file of the O.K.W., at Solfelden in the Tyrol.

[2] Ulrich von Hassell noted in his diary on December 16th, 1938, a talk with Weizsäcker who " gave a rather disquieting account of the policy pursued by Ribbentrop and Hitler, obviously steering towards war : they merely hesitate whether to turn straight against England while retaining Poland's neutrality, or first against the East in order to settle the German-Polish and the Ukrainian question, and of course also that of Memel, which according to Hitler calls for no armed intervention, merely for a registered letter to Kaunas " (see *op. cit.* page 37).

a factor of great value. But I can be eliminated at any time by a criminal or an idiot.

The second personal factor is the Duce. His existence is also decisive. If something happened to him, Italy's loyalty to the alliance would no longer be certain. The basic attitude of the Italian Court is against the Duce. Above all, the Court sees in the expansion of the Empire a burden. The Duce is the man with the strongest nerves in Italy.

The third factor favourable to us is Franco. We can ask only benevolent neutrality from Spain. But this depends on Franco's personality. He guarantees a certain uniformity and steadiness of the present system in Spain. We must reckon with the fact that as yet Spain has not a Fascist party of our internal unity.

On the other side presents itself a negative picture as far as decisive personalities are concerned. There is no outstanding personality in England or France.

For us it is easy to make decisions. We have nothing to lose, we can only gain. Our economic situation is such, because of our restrictions, that we cannot hold out more than a few years. Göring can confirm this. We have no other choice, we must act. Our opponents risk much and can gain only a little. England's stake in a war is unimaginably great. Our enemies have men who are below average. No personalities. No masters, no men of action.

Politically also this time was more favourable than it might be two or three years hence — here Hitler went once more through the list of European Powers and the catalogue of their weaknesses.

The creation of a Greater Germany was a great political achievement, but open to question on the military side, since it was achieved through the bluff of the political leaders. It has now to be tested in war : if possible . . . by solving the tasks one by one.

Relations with Poland have become unbearable. My Polish policy was hitherto contrary to popular

> feeling. My offers to Poland (Danzig, the Corridor) were thwarted by British intervention. Poland changed her tone towards us. The initiative cannot be relinquished to others. . . . One cannot stand indefinitely facing each other with cocked rifles. Compromise would have required from us a change of convictions and making agreeable gestures. They talked to us once more the language of Versailles. There was danger of losing prestige. The chances still are that the West will not interfere. But the risk must be accepted with reckless resolution. A politician must accept risks as much as a military commander. The alternative for us is to strike or to be destroyed sooner or later.

He went on to talk about the risks he had previously taken : the greatest was when he re-entered the demilitarised zone. " Now, too, the risk is great. Iron nerves, iron resolution." Next, he reviewed the military position : British re-armament is in its initial stages and requires two or three years to develop.

> The following is characteristic of England. Poland wanted a loan from England for re-armament. England, however, only gave credit to make sure that Poland buys in England, although England cannot deliver. This means that England does not really want to support Poland. She does not risk eight million pounds in Poland, although she put half a billion into China. England's position in the world is very precarious. She will not accept any risks.

The Western Powers could only fight Germany either through a blockade, which would not work because of Germany's autarchy and her sources of supply in the East ; or through a direct attack. But an attack from the Maginot Line is not possible, and the Western Powers will not violate the neutrality of the Scandinavian or the Low Countries, or of Switzerland, who would fight to defend it. Nor can they attack Italy. Britain cannot help Poland.

We will hold our position in the West until we have conquered Poland. . . .

The enemy had another hope, that Russia would become our enemy after the conquest of Poland. The enemy did not reckon with my great capacity to take decisions. Our enemies are little worms. I saw them at Munich.

I was convinced that Stalin would never accept the English offer. Russia has no interest in maintaining Poland, and Stalin knows that it is the end of his régime no matter whether his soldiers come out of a war victorious or beaten. Litvinov's replacement was decisive. I brought about the change towards Russia gradually. In connexion with the commercial treaty we got into political conversation. Proposal of a non-aggression pact. Then came a general proposal from Russia. Four days ago I took a step, which resulted in Russia answering yesterday that she is ready to sign. The personal contact with Stalin is established. The day after to-morrow von Ribbentrop will conclude the treaty. Now Poland is in the position in which I wanted her.

In the concluding part of his address Hitler declared that the beginning was now made " for destroying Britain's hegemony ", that the way was " open for the soldier, after I have made the political preparations ", and the only thing of which he was afraid was that " at the last minute some *Schweinehund* will make a proposal for mediation ".

There is among the Nuremberg documents another record of Hitler's speech [1] on the same day — obviously following on the previous one. Things might take a different turn with regard to the Western Powers : the possibility of having to fight them must be faced from the outset. " Absolutely iron determination on our side.

[1] Its exact correlation to the first is not clear ; originally it was thought by the prosecution that there had been two speeches that day — perhaps one in the morning and the other in the afternoon ; but the defence asserted it to be a well-known fact that there had been only one.

Retreat before nothing." " Mental factors are decisive." It is men who fight, not machines. The strongest nerves will win. Contrast between Germany in 1918 and Frederick the Great.

> Destruction of Poland comes first. The aim is elimination of living forces, not reaching a certain line. Even should war break out in the West, destruction of Poland remains first objective. Quick decision required because of season.
>
> I shall give a propagandist reason for starting the war — no matter whether plausible or not. The victor will not be asked whether he told the truth. In starting and making war, Right does not matter but Victory.
>
> Have no pity, be brutal. Eighty million people shall get their due. Their existence has to be secured. The strongest is right. Greatest severity.
>
> Quick decision necessary. . . . Our technical superiority will break the nerve of the Poles. . . . Pursuit until complete elimination. . . . The start shall be ordered, probably for Saturday morning (August 26th).

The following entry appears in the Diary of General Jodl under date of August 23rd :

> Received order from *Wehrmacht* High Command [1] to proceed to Berlin and take over post of Chief of the Operations Branch of the *Wehrmacht* (W.F.A.).[2]
>
> 11.00-13.00 hours : Discussions with Chief of *Wehrmacht* High Command. X day has been fixed for August 26th, Y time for 4.40 A.M.

Chamberlain's Letter and Hitler's Reply

The same day (August 22nd), shortly before 9 P.M., Henderson received " instructions to convey without delay a personal letter from the Prime Minister to Herr Hitler ",

[1] O.K.W.

[2] *Wehrmacht Führungsstab Abteilung.*

explaining that the steps taken by His Majesty's Government had been

> rendered necessary by the military movements which had been reported from Germany, and by the fact that apparently the announcement of a German-Soviet Agreement is taken in some quarters in Berlin to indicate that intervention by Great Britain on behalf of Poland is no longer a contingency that need be reckoned with. No greater mistake could be made. Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly, and which they are determined to fulfil.

It had been alleged, the letter goes on to say, that had Britain's position been made clear in 1914, "the great catastrophe would have been avoided". Anyhow this time "there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding". If war once starts, it will be long and will not be settled by "a success on any one of the several fronts". It "would be the greatest calamity"; it is not desired by either nation; and there is no reason why the questions arising between Germany and Poland "should not be resolved without the use of force", if only a proper atmosphere of confidence could be created. It would then be also possible "concurrently to discuss the wider problems affecting the future of international relations, including matters of interest to us and to you". Chamberlain called for a truce "to press polemics and to all incitement" and for direct negotiations between Germany and Poland, with the aid of a neutral intermediary if desired by both sides; "any settlement reached would, when concluded, be guaranteed by other Powers". "At this moment I confess I can see no other way to avoid a catastrophe that will involve Europe in war."

Henderson got in touch with the German Foreign

Office and, in the absence of Weiszäcker who was seeing off Ribbentrop, spoke to Hewel ; and later on to Weizsäcker, who asked whether the matter could not await Ribbentrop's return : Henderson replied by quoting his instructions. After about an hour he was rung up by Weizsäcker who asked for the gist of the letter and complained of " some private letter addressed to Herr Hitler last year " having been published ; Henderson could not recall anything of the kind, but assured Weizsäcker " that there was no intention of publishing this one ", and gave him its main points. (Such was the care taken in dealings with the German maniacs that henceforth any British communications of the correspondence to the French were accompanied by imprecations to preserve secrecy, while the Germans gave out the documents at pleasure.) It was not till the next morning (August 23rd), at 8 A.M., that the final reply to Henderson's request for the interview with Hitler was received, and at 9.30, accompanied by Weizsäcker and Hewel, he left by aeroplane for Salzburg, and from there by car for Berchtesgaden where they arrived at 1 P.M. " Once again," he writes in the *Failure of a Mission*, " on the way down . . . I was deeply conscious of the *motif* of the Greek tragedy. A week earlier [*i.e.* when he had first made the suggestion] my message might have made some impression, but now the whole position had been compromised by the Russian Treaty." [1]

Henderson saw Hitler twice, once for forty-five minutes, and next under half an hour. The talks are reported separately in the Blue Book, but as one in the German White Book : to have recalled Henderson (which Henderson singled out to Coulondre as " the only favourable sign " that day) may have been considered afterwards not in the proper Führer style. Henderson tried to convince Hitler of Great Britain's resolve to fulfil her pledges to Poland ; Hitler's discourse was recriminatory and futile :

[1] For the " Greek tragedy *motif* " see above, page 261, *n.*

in fact, so empty were the two talks that they look about the same in the minutes of both sides, though these differ widely in detail. Henderson expected that the atmosphere at Berchtesgaden would be " most unfriendly " and the interview " exceedingly brief ". To " forestall this ", he started off with thanks for being " so promptly " received, and with an explanatory rigmarole :

> I asked his Excellency to read the letter, not from the point of view of the past, but from that of the present and the future. What had been done could not now be undone, and there could be no peace in Europe without Anglo-German co-operation. We had guaranteed Poland against attack and we would keep our word. Throughout the centuries of history we had never, so far as I knew, broken our word. We could not do so now and remain Britain.

The German minute makes Henderson say that someone " more worthy " was to have brought the letter, but that now quick action was required, " the British Government having been greatly surprised by the news of the German-Soviet Pact " (this sounds as if Henderson had pressed for a leading statesman to fly to Berchtesgaden, but must not be taken for evidence of such having been the intentions of His Majesty's Government). Hitler, according to the German minute, said at the outset that he had already " a translation of the letter ",[1] and " was about to draft a reply, but would in the meantime develop some of the points to the Ambassador ". Not Germany but England was responsible for the consequences of the guarantee she had given. He had informed the Polish Government that " any further persecution of Germans in Poland would bring on immediate action by the

[1] It is not clear how the text of Chamberlain's letter had reached Hitler in advance — only its gist was given by Henderson over the telephone the previous night. Obviously a textual message of this kind would not have been sent in a very secret cypher : still, Governments do not usually admit reading each other's cypher wires.

Reich ". He had learnt of military preparations in England ; Germany had taken merely defensive precautions ; should he hear of such further measures on the part of Great Britain, he would immediately order general mobilisation. To Henderson's remark that this would render war unavoidable, Hitler replied by repeating his statement. Next followed a tirade about Britain being responsible both for last year's difficulties with Czechoslovakia, and this year's with Poland ; about the " blank cheque " ; about " hundreds of thousands of *Volksdeutsche* being ill-treated, put into concentration camps, or driven out of the country " ; " he could not admit that for a whim of Great Britain tens of thousands of *Volksgenossen* should be massacred " ; settlement by negotiation was not possible because the British Government did not care in the least for such a settlement ; he had done all that was in his power ; " but England had made the man who wanted to be her greatest friend into an enemy " ; now England would come to know a different Germany, etc. (it is hardly worth while to reproduce more of Hitler's conscious lies or self-engendered hysteria).

> Finally the Führer assured the Ambassador [records the German minute] that he had no reproaches to make to him, and that he had always appreciated Henderson's endeavours in favour of Anglo-German friendship. . . .
>
> Henderson said that he had done his best. He had recently written to a Reich Minister that it had taken the Führer ten years to win over Germany, and that he had also to allow England more time.
>
> The Führer stated that England's opposition to Germany over Danzig had deeply shaken the German people.
>
> Henderson remarked that she had merely opposed the use of force, whereupon the Führer asked whether England had ever found a solution for any of the Versailles idiocies by negotiation.
>
> To this the Ambassador had no reply, and the

Führer quoted the German proverb that two are required for love.

Henderson thereupon emphasised that he personally had never believed in an Anglo-French-Russian Pact. He thought that Russia had meant by procrastination to get rid of Chamberlain, and then to profit by a war. He himself preferred Germany rather than Britain to have a treaty with Russia.

The Führer replied: "Make no mistake. It will be a treaty of long duration."

The conversation closed with the Führer saying that the written reply would be transmitted to the Ambassador in the course of the afternoon.

The remarks about Henderson's mission and failure, and about the treaty with Russia, are clearly taken from the second talk (other remarks are more difficult to place because of constant repetitions): which proves that the German minute is not merely a summary of the first talk, leaving the second unreported, but that it is a deliberate concoction. The handing to Henderson of the written reply was the occasion of the second talk.

Henderson's minutes do not add much to the record of these puerile and wholly unreal wranglings (the reader when considering Hitler's interview can hardly help wondering at the level to which the talk of so-called great men can sink since social levelling has wide "opened the road to talent"). "During the whole of this first conversation", writes Henderson in his first report of August 23rd, "Herr Hitler was excitable and uncompromising." "I contested every point and kept calling his statements inaccurate but the only effect was to launch him on some fresh tirade." "I stuck firmly to . . . our determination to honour our obligations to Poland; Herr Hitler . . . kept harping on . . . the Polish persecution of German nationals"; [1] while the British offer to

[1] Presumably Hitler said *Volksdeutsche*, which would mean members of the German minority in Poland, and not "German nationals".

discuss all problems affecting the two countries as soon as a peace atmosphere was restored " was not referred to at all and apparently did not interest him ". When Hitler discoursed that he could not stand any longer the persecution of Germans in Poland,

> I interrupted by remarking that while I did not wish to try to deny that persecutions occurred (of Poles also in Germany) the German press accounts were highly exaggerated. He had mentioned the castration of Germans. I happened to be aware of one case. The German in question was a sex-maniac, who had been treated as he deserved. Herr Hitler's retort was that there had not been one case but six.

(Even the case of which Henderson " happened to be aware " was an invention. But it was noticed by other diplomats in Berlin that when some of the people round Hitler wanted to drive him stark mad, they would invent castration stories.)

It was settled that Henderson would return to Salzburg ; if Hitler wished to see him again, he would come back ; otherwise the reply to Chamberlain's letter would be sent to him by hand. He was asked to return. Hitler " was quite calm . . . and never raised his voice once ", but the conversation " produced little new ", except categoric declarations that he was determined " to attack Poland if ' another German were ill-treated ' ". England " was determined to destroy and exterminate Germany. He was, he said, 50 years old : he preferred war now to when he would be 55 or 60." " In referring to Russian Non-Agression Pact he observed that it was England which had forced him into an agreement with Russia. He did not seem enthusiastic over it but added that once he made the agreement it would be for a long period." [1] " I . . . expressed regret at the failure of my

[1] Here Henderson refrains from reproducing his own comment, but he does so in the *Failure of a Mission*, pages 247-8 ; see above, page 191.

mission in general to Berlin and of my visit to him." (But when subsequently the attack against Poland was postponed — for quite different reasons — Henderson concluded that " the visit to Berchtesgaden may, after all, have postponed the disaster for a week ".)

Hitler's reply to Chamberlain follows lines which by that time were more than familiar : " Germany has never sought a conflict with England and has never interfered in English interests ", but possesses interests which she cannot renounce ; to these belong the problems of Danzig and the Corridor ; Germany was prepared to solve them by " negotiation on the basis of a proposal of truly unparalleled magnanimity " ; England's intervention " dispelled Polish inclination " to negotiate on that basis ; " the unconditional assurance " of assistance produced in Poland " a wave of appalling terrorism " against her Germans ; the German Government has informed Poland that it would not tolerate further ultimata to Danzig, " persecutions of the German minority ", customs blockades destroying Danzig's economy, or " further acts of provocation directed against the Reich ". " Apart from this, the questions of the Corridor and Danzig must and shall be solved." The prospect of British assistance to Poland " can make no change in the determination of the Reich Government " ; they had learnt of British and French intentions to mobilise against Germany which " has never intended, and does not in the future intend, to attack England or France ". " *I therefore inform your Excellency that, in the event of these military announcements being carried into effect, I shall order immediate mobilisation of the German forces.*" He had all his life " fought for Anglo-German friendship ", but has now been convinced " of the futility of such an attempt ". Judging from a third telegram from Henderson, Hitler, after giving him the document, " readjusted " it by inserting the sentence in italics, and added a rather con-

fused explanation that if the French and British mobilisations convinced him " that the Western Powers meant to attack him he would mobilise in self-defence ". Hitler thus meant, in Henderson's view, to show that Germany could not be intimidated, and to provide himself with an excuse for general mobilisation if and when he decided on it.

Henderson, before starting for Berchtesgaden, had told Coulondre that his mission was " an absolute secret ". But at night Coulondre was asked to call at the Wilhelmstrasse where Herr Woermann, State Under-Secretary, read out to him Chamberlain's letter and Hitler's reply. When the British Foreign Office communicated the documents to the French next day, again " particular precautions were taken to preserve their strictly secret character ". On the 24th, at noon, Henderson saw Coulondre, informed him of the talks with Hitler, expressed doubts whether " the worst could still be avoided ", but saw the only chance in establishing " immediate contact between Warsaw and Berlin " ; said that he had suggested to his Government to advise Beck to seek without delay contact with Hitler ; and expecting the final decision to be taken on Ribbentrop's return, considered that " there were only a few hours left for this last attempt ".

The same day, Lipski was instructed to ask for an interview with Weizsäcker, and, if his attitude was not provocative from the outset, to remind him that the Polish Government was always ready to engage in discussions under normal conditions. But Weizsäcker was said to be still at Berchtesgaden ; [1] at 5 P.M. Lipski saw

[1] " L'Ambassadeur de Pologne à Berlin n'a pu joindre M. de Weizsäcker qui serait parti pour Berchtesgaden ", reported Noël on August 24th, 10.12 P.M. And Beck told Kennard the same night " that Herr von Weizsäcker would probably not return until the end of the week, but that M. Lipski had asked for an interview and was awaiting a reply ". Seeing that Ribbentrop was returning from Moscow to Berlin that day, Thursday, August 24th, and that Hitler was coming up from Berchtesgaden to meet him, the prolonged stay of the State Secretary at Berchtesgaden would indeed have been remarkable.

Göring, who had just sent off a Swedish friend, Hr. Birger Dahlerus,[1] on a good-will mission to London (with the ultimate aim of detaching Great Britain from Poland). Göring was friendly, even cordial, but the conversation, which lasted more than an hour, was of a private rather than an official character,[2] and (writes Lipski) " Göring laid particular emphasis on this circumstance ". He expressed his regret that his policy of maintaining good relations with Poland should have foundered, and admitted that he no longer could do much in the matter : in fact, he clearly let it be seen that he anticipated war. The question of Danzig and so forth were, according to him, " relatively small matters, but the main obstacle to any diminution of tension between the two countries was Poland's alliance with Great Britain " — without that " we would have had our tussles, but things between us would never have got so far " (*wir hätten uns gerauft, aber es wäre nicht so weit zwischen uns gekommen*). He admitted that the pact with Russia was a *volte-face* of 120 degrees, but explained that Germany had to choose between Great Britain and Russia. Lipski replied that Poland had followed a consistent policy towards both Germany and Russia, and that Moscow " desired to provoke war in Europe, which Göring did not deny ". " I said ", writes Lipski, " I was at the Chancellor's disposition if that would help to find a way out of the situation. Herr Göring assured me he would inform the Chancellor accordingly." From the interview with Lipski, Göring went to meet Ribbentrop who was returning from Moscow, and Hitler who was coming up from Berchtesgaden. But Lipski was never again to see Hitler, or even Weizsäcker, and Ribbentrop only for a short and wholly negative talk on August 31st, at 6.30 P.M., less than twelve hours

[1] For a detailed analysis of the " negotiation " through Dahlerus see below, essay on " An Interloper in Diplomacy ", pages 417-33.

[2] The pretext for it was supplied by an invitation from Göring to a shoot.

before the attack was opened against Poland.

On receipt of Lipski's report of his talk with Göring, Beck immediately consulted President Mościcki and Marshal Smigly-Rydz, and late the same night saw Kennard whom he told about Göring's hint concerning the Anglo-Polish alliance and about the decision the Polish Government had reached —

> that if the German Government should put forward this suggestion in any other way the answer would be categorically in the negative. M. Beck feels that the German Government may make every effort to secure a free hand in Eastern Europe by such methods and he feels that it should be clearly understood that Poland will not be drawn into any intrigue of this nature.

The British Parliament, which on August 4th had risen for the summer recess, re-assembled on the 24th; Chamberlain and Halifax addressed the two Houses in terms so closely co-ordinated that, for practical purposes, the speeches can be treated as identical. They reviewed the course of German-Polish relations during the preceding three weeks, drew attention to the striking resemblance between the present German campaign against Poland and that against Czechoslovakia the year before, dealt with the "bomb-shell" of the German-Russian Pact and the way in which His Majesty's Government had tried to remove "the dangerous illusion" that this would make any difference to their view of their own obligations to Poland, and mentioned the measures so far taken in face of the vast German military preparations: those measures were "of a precautionary and defensive character", and any suggestion that they implied "an act of menace" was emphatically repudiated. An account was given of the Prime Minister's message to the German Chancellor, and of the reply which included "what amounts to a restatement of the German thesis that

Eastern Europe is a sphere in which Germany ought to have a free hand ". Both speeches closed with the demand for " an international order based upon mutual understanding and mutual confidence ", which cannot be established except on " the observance of international undertakings " and " the renunciation of force in the settlement of differences ". Chamberlain's speech included the following statement :

> The Polish leaders, while they have been firm in their determination to resist an attack upon their independence, have been unprovocative. They have always been ready, as I am sure they would be ready now, to discuss differences with the German Government, if they could be sure that those discussions would be carried on without threats of force or violence, and with some confidence that, if agreement were reached, its terms would be respected afterwards permanently, both in the letter and in the spirit.

He referred to the guarantee treaty with Poland as " at present in an advanced stage of negotiation ".

The same night, at 11.20, Göring telephoned to Dahlerus, whom he was despatching to Halifax, and informed him that Chamberlain's speech had made a " favourable " impression. What he did not tell Dahlerus was that the attack against Poland was timed for August 26th, 4.30 A.M.

" INCIDENTS "

Hitler kept on repeating that Germany would march in case of " another Polish provocation " or if " another German were ill-treated in Poland " ; and on August 13th Ciano asked him, almost in so many words, for the date when that provocation would occur.

On August 17th Canaris talked to Keitel about an action ordered by the Führer.

> The Führer had not informed him (Keitel) about it [writes Canaris] and had only let him know that we were to furnish Heydrich with Polish uniforms. He agrees that I instruct the General Staff. He says that he does not think much of actions of this kind. However, there is nothing else to be done if they have been ordered by the Führer, and he could not ask the Führer how he had planned the execution of this special action.

The operation, which " took place just before the Polish campaign, was given the name Himmler ", explained, on November 30th, 1945, at the Nuremberg Trial, Major-General Erwin Lahousen, an Austrian who after the *Anschluss* entered the German *Ausland-Abwehr* and served under Admiral Canaris and Colonel Pieckenbrock. It was " the most mysterious action " in which they had been concerned. They were instructed to provide Polish uniforms, equipment, identification cards, etc. He did not know " whence the request originated ", nor " what in the last resort it was about, but the name Himmler was eloquent enough ". One day, " some man from the S.S. or the S.D." fetched the things. When the first bulletin was received of Polish units having attacked German territory, " Pieckenbrock, who had the report in his hand, remarked that it was the uniforms which we had provided that appeared in this action " ; and Canaris subsequently discovered that people from concentration camps had been thus dressed up and made to feign a military attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz (the attack appears in the list of frontier incidents printed in the German White Book, page 443, under date of August 31st at 8 P.M., but the attackers are described as " Polish insurgents ", not as soldiers).

It is in the light of such disclosures that one must read the indignant German tales of "intolerable provocations", and watch the pathetic endeavours of the Western Powers to avoid " incidents ", by restraining " Polish rashness ".

On August 20th Greiser informed Burckhardt of an impending change in Danzig. Gauleiter Forster, supported by Ribbentrop, had prevailed on Hitler to appoint him Head of State (*Staatsoberhaupt*) of the Free City of Danzig (that means that Hitler gave orders to the Danzig Nazis to carry through the change). On the 23rd, a decree to that effect was passed by the Danzig Senate, and Greiser, as President, notified Forster of it by a letter dated August 24th : the Senate asked him to accept the office " in order in these difficult but wonderful last decisive days to give outward expression to the unity between party and State ". Forster replied :

> It . . . goes without saying that . . . as Leader of the N.S.D.A.P. of the Danzig district I am prepared in days which are so fateful . . . to conduct the affairs of the State . . . A condition of affairs is thus officially sanctioned which, since the accession to power of the National Socialists in 1933, has in practice been in force.

A report from M. de la Tournelle about this *coup* reached the French Foreign Office on August 24th at 10.15 P.M. But even before it was received, the appeasers had gone to work : at 1.25 P.M. Bonnet wired to M. Roger Cambon, French Chargé d'Affaires in London, that " a most urgent *démarche* will be made asking the Polish Government to abstain from military action should a re-union with the Reich be proclaimed by the Senate of the Free City ". Poland, " by taking up the position of aggressor . . . might impede the entry into force of some of our pacts " ; she should limit herself to diplomatic action. In the wire despatched to Noël the same day, at 6.40 P.M., the somewhat cryptic point about other " pacts " is repeated in a form which suggests that it may refer to the pact with the U.S.S.R. ; Bonnet further refers to the answers given by Smigly-Rydz to Ironside

on July 19th ; [1] and concludes with an involved paragraph which states that such restraint is dictated by tactical considerations, and in no way compromises Poland's position or France's adherence to her engagements. Noël in turn took action before he had received these instructions ; for at 8.25 P.M. he reports having told Arciszewski that the French counted on the Polish Government taking no irrevocable steps without previous concert with them, and asked him to convey this to Beck ; thirty-five minutes later, he reports having drawn Beck's attention to " the imperative need of avoiding incidents or rash actions " — " M. Beck fully concurred ". At 10.15 Noël wired again that Beck had informed him that Chodacki had been instructed to lodge a protest to the Danzig Senate against the appointment of Forster. A fourth wire, dated August 25th, 3.15 A.M., reports action taken in consequence of Bonnet's instructions — Noël saw Beck a second time late in the night : [2] Beck told him that the expressions ascribed to Marshal Smigly-Rydz were really his own ; that in case of an *Anschluss* in Danzig, the Polish Government would immediately get in touch with its Allies and avoid all military action, provided there was no aggression, direct or indirect, on the part of the Reich — but Danzig would not proclaim its *Anschluss* except by order from Hitler, and German action could be expected to follow. In the forenoon of the 25th, General Faury, Chief of the French Military Mission in Warsaw, much esteemed by the Poles as a sincere friend, called on Smigly-Rydz, drew his attention to the frontier incidents alleged by the Germans, and recommended giving the strictest orders to the troops to avoid any rash action. (In fact, " incidents " were multiplying at a remarkable rate as the Germans were preparing grounds for the attack timed for the next morning.)

[1] See above, page 245.
[2] About that " nocturnal visit " see Noël, *op. cit.* page 439.

Thus good advice was lavished on the Poles, who seemed to receive it with exemplary patience. On August 26th Szembek, in Beck's name, repeated to the British and French Ambassadors what Beck had told Noël in the second talk during the night: the Polish Government appreciated the motives and soundness of the advice and would not confront its Allies with a *fait accompli* but would consult them before taking any grave decision; still events might occur which would force the Polish Government to act after having informed its Allies, but without being able to consult them. Noël replied that he looked upon this as a reservation applying "to some quite unforeseeable event, and made, in a way, *par acquit de conscience*". His report reached the Quai d'Orsay on August 26th at 4.30 A.M., which but for an event unforeseen by the Germans, would have been their zero-hour — "time Y" — for attacking Poland.

The Anglo-Polish Treaty

Negotations for the formal Anglo-Polish Agreement, which on August 3rd was "still being agreed",[1] were resumed with greater vigour a week later, and on Saturday, the 19th, the text was almost ready. On the 23rd, Raczyński, conscious of the significance which its conclusion might have at that moment, called on Halifax and found him of the same mind; but the consent of the two Governments had still to be obtained. On August 25th, Raczyński was informed by the Foreign Office that His Majesty's Government were prepared to sign the Treaty the same afternoon. He then got into telephonic communication with Beck, and at 5.20 P.M. obtained authority to sign it as settled between him and the Foreign Office. A quarter of an hour later, the Agreement of Mutual Assistance between the Government of

[1] See above, page 247.

the United Kingdom and the Polish Government was signed by Halifax and Raczyński. Almost five months had been allowed to elapse since Beck's visit; that the Agreement should have been completed on the second day after the conclusion of the Russian-German Pact was the clearest re-affirmation of the British pledge to Poland. It was published immediately, but the interpreting Protocol not till April 5th, 1945, after it had been mentioned in a speech in the House of Commons on December 15th, 1944. Article 1 of the Agreement stipulated that —

> Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter . . . the other Contracting Power will at once give . . . all the support and assistance in its power.

Article 2, paragraph 1, extended these provisions to " any action by a European Power which clearly threatened, directly or indirectly, the independence of one of the Contracting Parties, and was of such a nature that the Party in question considered it vital to resist it with its armed forces "; and paragraph 2 extended them to action " which threatened the independence or neutrality of another European State in such a way as to constitute a clear menace to the security " of one of the Contracting Parties. It was stated in the secret Protocol that " a European Power " meant Germany; [1] that Article 2, paragraph 1, referred to Danzig, and that the countries contemplated in paragraph 2 were Belgium, Holland, and Lithuania. To these Latvia and Estonia were to be added " from the moment that an undertaking of mutual

[1] It was against Germany alone that the British guarantee was given. On October 19th, 1939, replying to a question in the House of Commons, Mr. R. A. Butler, then Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, stated: " During the negotiations which led to the signature of the agreement, it was understood between the Polish Government and His Majesty's Government that the agreement should only cover the case of aggression by Germany, and the Polish Government confirm that this is so ".

assistance between the United Kingdom and a third State covering those two countries enters into force"; and should one of the Contracting Parties give new undertakings of assistance against aggression to a third State, "their execution should at no time prejudice either the sovereignty or territorial inviolability of the other Contracting Party". This obvious proviso concerning the passage of Russian troops across Poland, as well as the clause about Latvia and Estonia, must have stood over from an earlier draft prepared while the negotiations for an Anglo-French-Soviet Pact were still proceeding, and were probably left unchanged in the hurry and uncertainty of the situation created by the Russian-German Pact.

August 25th in Berlin

The same day (August 25th) about 12.45 P.M., Henderson received a message that Hitler wished to see him at the Chancellery at 1.30. The interview lasted at least an hour,[1] and Ribbentrop and Schmidt were present. Afterwards, a document purporting to reproduce what Hitler had said to Henderson was sent to him by Ribbentrop. It appears in the German White Book under the heading "Declaration made by the Führer to the British Ambassador, 25th August 1939, at 13.30", and is all which that Book contains about the interview. In the Blue Book the document is published as a "Supplementary Communication from the German Chancellor handed to His Majesty's Ambassador . . .", and in an introductory paragraph is described as "the text of a

[1] Henderson reported on August 25th: "Conversation lasted an hour"; in his *Final Report* he writes "over an hour"; while Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons, on August 29th, ". . . we were told by telephone that Sir Nevile Henderson had had an interview lasting about an hour and a half with Herr Hitler".

verbal communication made to Sir Nevile Henderson by Herr Hitler at his interview on the 25th August". Henderson, in his report on the interview, explains: "After I had left, Herr von Ribbentrop sent Dr. Schmidt to the Embassy with the text of the verbal statement . . ." (this account was confirmed by Schmidt and Ribbentrop in their evidence at the Nuremberg Trial). But neither Henderson nor Schmidt names the time when the document was delivered [1] — which on an afternoon so crowded with events is not a matter of indifference; nor is the hour when it reached the Foreign Office given in the Blue Book.[2] Even worse: Henderson nowhere states whether the whole, or any part, of that communication was read out to him during the interview; [3] if so, why it was not given to him immediately; whether he was told that it would be sent to him later; or, if it was not read, how it compares with what Hitler had actually said to him. This cannot be inferred from his own account: having already despatched the text of the "verbal communication", he had no need to traverse the same ground; moreover, his reports very seldom can be used for purposes of careful comparison; and

[1] Ribbentrop vaguely said "in the evening", which with him may mean anything.

[2] Starting with August 24th, the Blue Book as a rule marks the hour at which "telegraphic" communications were sent out or received by the Foreign Office, but only in two cases when they were despatched, and never when they were received, by an Embassy. Moreover, the mark "telegraphic" in the Blue Book does not necessarily mean that the communication was telegraphed, but merely that it was drafted as a telegram, and it may actually have been despatched by telephone, wireless, or even by aeroplane. The Yellow Book in some seventy wires, between August 20th and September 2nd, gives both the hour of despatch and receipt; besides, it marks during that fortnight fifty-seven communications as sent across the telephone — these increase in number as the crisis becomes more acute.

[3] But Horn, Ribbentrop's counsel at the Nuremberg Trial, in examining Schmidt, referred to the Note as "prepared during the interview" — still it is not certain whether this was a carefully considered description based on real knowledge, or just a casual assumption; more likely the latter.

if by any chance he had been told that the "text" would be sent to him, he is likely to have only half listened to, and very imperfectly taken in, what was said to him.

According to the German "text", Hitler started by recalling a hope expressed by Henderson on August 23rd "that, after all, an understanding between Germany and England might yet be possible". On further consideration, he now "desired to make a move as regards England" as decisive as that which had produced the recent agreement with Russia. Yesterday's speeches by Chamberlain and Halifax had added to his wish "to talk once more to the British Ambassador". He next compared the vast territories held by the British Empire, the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R., with the exiguous area of Germany. "It is quite clear who it is who desires to conquer the world", he declared (other people might think that it is the "have-nots" who are out to "conquer" rather than the lucky holders). He then proceeded to make "the following communication" to Henderson (this part might be presumed to have been read out if it was ready at the time of the interview):

1. "Poland's acts of provocation[1] have become intolerable." Twenty-one frontier incidents during the preceding night, all provoked by the Poles, showed at least that the Polish Government had lost control over its military subordinates.

2. "Germany was absolutely determined to put an end to these Macedonian conditions on her Eastern frontier . . ."

3. "The problem of Danzig and the Corridor must be solved." Chamberlain's speech would not change Germany's attitude, and could merely produce a war

[1] In the translation printed in the Blue Book these words read "actual provocation", which is hardly a correct rendering of "*Akte der Provokation*". Some other passages had similarly to be retranslated above.

bloodier than that of 1914. " Germany would not have to fight on two fronts . . . Russia and Germany would never again take up arms against each other." Germany would be economically secure. " War between England and Germany could at the best bring some profit to Germany, but none at all to England."

Having solved the German-Polish problem, the Führer means " to approach England once more with a large comprehensive offer ". He is a man of great decisions, and here, too, will be capable of acting in a great manner. " He accepts the British Empire and is prepared to pledge himself personally for its continued existence and to place the power of the German Reich at its disposal " if his colonial demands, which are " limited " and not urgent, are fulfilled, and his obligations towards Italy respected, as he is prepared to respect those of England towards France. Further, he repeats " Germany's irrevocable determination never again to engage in a conflict with Russia ". He would " also be ready to accept a reasonable limitation of armaments which would correspond to the new political situation and be economically bearable ". The document closes with a renewed assurance that he desires no frontier modifications in the West, with a repetition of what the war would entail for Great Britain, a description of himself as " a man of great decisions " which " are binding on him ", and with the statement that " this is his last offer ". The document does not name Germany's demands on Poland and is, even for Hitler, vague, repetitive, and blatant.

According to Henderson, during the interview Hitler " was absolutely calm and normal, and spoke with great earnestness and apparent sincerity " ; he showed " signs of excitement " only when speaking of the " Polish persecutions ". He suggested that Henderson should fly to England and put the case to His Majesty's Government. When Henderson remarked that the offer would not be

considered unless it meant a negotiated settlement with Poland, Hitler protested that " Polish provocation might at any moment render German intervention to protect German nationals [1] inevitable " ; and when, later on, Henderson repeated his warning, he replied : " If you think it useless then do not send my offer at all ". A suggestion of Henderson's that " provocations " should be discussed with Lipski, and a further " entirely personal suggestion that M. Beck and Herr von Ribbentrop should meet somewhere and discuss the way out ", were brushed aside : Lipski " had not been able to propose anything new " in his interview with Göring, and Beck, when invited " to come and talk the matter over last March " had " flatly refused ". Here Ribbentrop made his only contribution to the discussion by saying that Lipski, when he conveyed the message, had " to put it in other words " to soften its abruptness (no such divergence can be traced between Beck's instructions and Ribbentrop's own minute of how it was conveyed by Lipski [2]). There was also Hitler's usual prating : " he was by nature an artist not a politician ", and would end his life as such " once the Polish question was settled " ; he did not want to turn Germany into " a military barracks " ; " he had no wish to be small-minded in any settlement with Poland " and " all he required for

[1] See page 308, *n.*

[2] Beck's " Instructions " of March 25th were to be embodied in a *note verbale* except for the last three paragraphs, of which the gist was to be conveyed orally. In the second of these paragraphs Beck wrote that he regarded personal contact with Ribbentrop " as a factor of immeasurable importance " for Polish-German relations and European policy, but that " in the present difficult situation " such a meeting would require a previous elucidation of the questions at issue, " at least in outline ", or otherwise it might do more harm than good, which the Polish Government " would desire to avoid ". According to Ribbentrop's own minute, Lipski said that Beck " would gladly pay a visit to Berlin, but that it would seem advisable first properly to prepare the questions through diplomatic channels ". If anything the reply as reported by Ribbentrop is less cordial than in Beck's original instructions.

an agreement with her was a gesture from Britain to indicate that she would not be unreasonable ".[1]

Even now, after a good many Nazi documents have been published in connexion with the Nuremberg Trial, it is by no means clear what Hitler's purpose was in summoning Henderson, making the " offer ", and asking him to fly with it to London ;[2] Henderson could hardly have been expected to start before the next morning, on which the German surprise attack against Poland was to have opened at dawn. But it would perhaps be too much to assume that Hitler himself was invariably clear about the sense or purpose of what he was doing.[3] With the text of the " verbal statement " the message was sent by Ribbentrop " that Herr Hitler had always and still wished for an agreement with Britain ", and an appeal to Henderson that he should " urge His Majesty's Government to take the offer very seriously ".

The most important points of Henderson's conversations sometimes appear in subsequent reports or have to be gathered second and third-hand ; "*vive la bagatelle !*" — trifles seemed uppermost in his mind. The same night, Henderson informed Coulondre, who at 12.5 A.M. sent his account of the conversation to Paris ; it is fuller and more lively than anything in Henderson's telegram to the Foreign Office. " I want colonies," Hitler is quoted to have said, " but I can wait three, four, or even five years ; this will not produce war. Moreover, they need not necessarily be the previous German Colonies. What

[1] The meaning of this sentence becomes clearer in a telephonic communication sent by M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London, on August 26th, 8.46 P.M., after a talk with Halifax who had received Henderson's oral report: *Ce qu'il (Hitler) désire, c'est que le Gouvernement anglais fasse un geste qui incline la Pologne à ne pas se montrer déraisonnable.*

[2] Halifax told Corbin that Henderson interpreted that suggestion as " a sign of goodwill " on the part of Hitler.

[3] For the way in which things were done in Berlin during those days, see below, essay on " An Interloper in Diplomacy ", especially pages 422-3.

is essential for me is to find fats and timber." [1] Coulondre enquired whether Hitler had mentioned Poland. Henderson replied that Hitler " adhered to the demands formulated in April, that is Danzig and an access to the Free City across the Corridor ". (Nothing to that effect appears in Henderson's report to the Foreign Office and, by what Halifax told Corbin, Hitler's language might equally well have denoted that " he merely meant to solve the problem of Danzig and the Corridor, or that he was thinking of more extensive changes ".) Coulondre further reported Hitler having told Henderson that he had decided to do away with the dangerous condition produced on his Eastern frontier by the presence of racial minorities, and when asked by Henderson whether he meant " to proceed, as in the Tyrol, by an exchange of populations " [2], not to have answered either way. Still, Henderson and Coulondre thought this an interesting idea which might lead to a resumption of German-Polish talks, and they were in favour of Poland making a proposal on these lines to Germany. Coulondre pressed that the Polish suggestion should reach the German Government within forty-eight hours, which may have been an echo of Henderson's remark : " he had not the impression that hostilities were likely to start in the next forty-eight hours which his mission would take ". They had in fact been timed for 4.30 A.M., but the order was countermanded after the news about the Anglo-Polish Treaty and Attolico's declaration, that Italy was not in a position to enter the war, had reached Hitler.

[1] Hitler had told Burckhardt on August 11th that Germany needed grain and timber : for grain she required *Lebensraum* in the East, and for timber colonies. To Ciano he said on the 12th that Germany needed food-stuffs and timber, and had to find them in those " eastern regions ". And to his generals on August 22nd, he spoke about Germany having to obtain food from Eastern Europe, and warned them even against a " gift of colonial possessions ".

[2] No " exchange of populations " was planned in the Tyrol, only a transfer of Germans from the Italian part to Germany.

Mussolini, as appears from Ciano's *Diaries*, was in a state of agonised indecision, or rather was continually changing his mind. On August 23rd he authorised Ciano " to present to Percy Loraine a plan for a solution based on a preliminary return of Danzig to the Reich, after which there would be negotiations and a great peace conference ". But later on he became warlike and talked " of armies and of attacks ". During the night of August 24th-25th Ciano had a telephone conversation with Ribbentrop who, by Hitler's order, announced that the situation was becoming " critical " on account of " Polish provocations ". Again Mussolini turned " furiously warlike " ; but next approved " a communication to Hitler announcing our non-intervention for the time being ", till the Italian preparations for war were completed ; [1] and then recalled Ciano : fearing " the bitter judgment of the Germans ", he wanted to intervene at once. At 2 P.M. a message came from Hitler; and Ciano, together with Mackensen, carried it to Mussolini. " The ambiguous message is couched in abstract language but gives one to understand that the action will begin in a short time and asks for ' Italian understanding '." Now Mussolini had to make a final decision and agreed to inform Hitler that Italy could not go to war, unless furnished with " all the *matériel* and raw materials " which she needed. " I personally telephone it to Attolico who will relay the information to Hitler " writes Ciano.

At 5.30 P.M. Coulondre called on Hitler by invitation. " In view of the gravity of the situation ", he said to Coulondre, " I want to make to you a declaration which I ask you to transmit to M. Daladier." He felt no hostility to France, he had renounced Alsace-Lorraine ; the idea that he might have to fight France because of Poland was

[1] A communication to this effect seems to have been made on August 25th, at 9 A.M., but probably as yet not in a decisive form ; and the message from Hitler, received at 2 P.M., may have been his reply.

painful to him. But Polish provocations had created an untenable situation. He had made " extremely reasonable " proposals to Poland demanding the return of Danzig and a transit belt across the Corridor. But Poland, emboldened by the British guarantee, had rejected his proposals and " inflicted the worst treatment on the German minority ". Here he burst into a long tirade about Polish " cruelties ", and raising his voice, discoursed on German honour. He would " reply by force to new provocations ". He would not attack France, but if she entered the war he would fight to the bitter end. " The blood of two nations, equally brave, will flow. I say once more, it is painful to think that it may come to that. Please say this from me to M. Daladier." Hitler got up to close the interview : Coulondre could make but a brief reply. He again assured Hitler that France would come with all her forces to Poland's support if attacked, but also that the French Government would do all that was in their power to preserve peace, and would not spare moderating advice to the Polish Government. Hitler replied that he believed it, and that he even believed men like Beck to be reasonable, " but they no longer control the situation ". The argument continued along well-worn tracks. Finally Hitler repeated how much it pained him to think that he might have to fight France — " but this does not depend on me. Please say it to M. Daladier." And with this Coulondre had to take leave.

Hitler's concluding words seem to confirm that the decision to attack Poland next morning still stood. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, when cross-examining Schmidt at the Nuremberg Trial on March 25th, suggested that the order for the invasion of Poland was issued at 2 P.M., " after the interview " with Henderson, and countermanded at 6.15, after that with Coulondre. Attolico's communication, he said, came through about 3 P.M. " This may be so," re-

plied Schmidt, " but with the number of conferences which took place at the time, the question of hours and dates is a bit mixed up." Next, Maxwell Fyfe asked Schmidt whether he remembered the news of the Anglo-Polish Treaty coming through at 4? " Yes, certainly I remember that." " And do you remember . . . at 4 o'clock M. Coulondre . . . having an interview with Hitler? " " Yes, I remember that." In fact the order for invasion could not have been issued after the interview with Henderson at 2 P.M., as that interview lasted at least till 2.30; if Ciano is correct, it would have required extremely quick work for Attolico's declaration to have been received at 3; the news about the Anglo-Polish Treaty having been signed could not have come through at 4, as it was signed at 5.35; and Hitler saw Coulondre at 5.30, and not at 4. The only document so far given out concerning the order countermanding the invasion of Poland is, to my knowledge, the following entry in a German Admiralty Register: " The '*Incident Weiss*' [1] *already started will be stopped at 20.30* (8.30 P.M.) because of changed political conditions ". To this the explanation is added in brackets: " Mutual Assistance Pact between Great Britain and Poland of August 25th noon, and information from the Duce that he would be true to his word but has to ask for large supplies of raw materials ".

Evidence at Nuremberg given by defendants from memory is mostly of little value for establishing the time, sequence, or nature of events.[2] Three defendants have

[1] Code name for war with Poland.

[2] A passage in the interrogation of Göring on August 29th, 1945, may serve as an example: he says that Hitler did not attach much importance to the British guarantee to Poland because " England was also guaranteeing Rumania, but when the Russians took Bessarabia nothing happened, and this made a big impression on him ". Britain went to war over Poland on September 3rd, 1939, and the Russians " took Bessarabia " at the end of June 1940. The defendants seemed, on the whole, ready to accept any dates suggested to them. Thus, for instance, Göring when asked whether " the final issuance of the order for the campaign against Poland came some

supplied their account of the cancellation on August 25th, 1939, of the order for invading Poland the next morning. Ribbentrop said in interrogation on August 29th, 1945 :

> When I heard about this British guarantee signature, I went at once to the Führer — I heard from the Press it was signed in London — . . . and hearing that military steps had been taken against Poland, I asked him to withdraw it and stop the advance. The Führer at once agreed to do it. He gave orders to his military adjutant, who was Schmundt ; he gave orders at once to the military people to stop the advance into Poland.

The same day Göring said, similarly under interrogation :

> On the day when England gave her official guarantee to Poland, the Führer called me on the telephone and told me that he had stopped the planned invasion of Poland. I asked him then whether this was just temporary or for good. He said, " No, I will have to see whether we can eliminate British intervention." So then I asked him, " Do you think that it will be any different within four or five days ? "

Perhaps the most reliable of the three statements is that by Keitel made at the Nuremberg Trial on April 4th, 1946. He said that on August 25th he was called by Hitler to the Chancellery and ordered " to stop everything at once, and to call Brauchitsch. ' I need time for negotiations ', he said. . . . I telephoned to the Commander-in-Chief, Brauchitsch, and he was called to the Führer. Everything was stopped." The hour at which this happened is not given. So much, however, appears from the evidence of these three men : that Ribbentrop went to see Hitler immediately the news of the Anglo-Polish

time between the 15th and 20th August 1939, after the signing of the treaty with Soviet Russia ", replied, " Yes, that is true ". The treaty with Soviet Russia was signed on August 23rd. As for Ribbentrop, his confusion even when examined by his own counsel is such as to render most of his evidence valueless.

Treaty having been signed reached Berlin ; that Keitel was summoned next, with a view to stopping the order for invasion ; and that Göring was informed *ex post* of this having been done. An attempt at reconstructing the time-table of that fateful afternoon yields the following approximate result : Henderson was with Hitler from 1.30 till about 2.45 P.M. ; after he had left, the final order for the invasion of Poland was issued. Soon after 3 Attolico arrived with Mussolini's message. At 5.30 Hitler saw Coulondre who left probably about 6. The Anglo-Polish Treaty was signed in London at 5.35, and the news reached Hitler between 6 and 6.15.[1] After he had seen Ribbentrop and Keitel, the countermanding order was issued about 6.30. Then he telephoned Göring about 6.45 P.M.

A Wild-Goose Chase

Coulondre, as a rule clear-sighted and discriminating, seems for a while to have lost himself in the mists of wishful thinking over population transfer as a way out of the desperate position. He had just listened to Hitler ranting about the " sufferings " of the *Volksdeutsche* as the foremost problem stirring his feelings and affecting " German honour ". Hearing next from Henderson of Hitler's remark about the intolerable " Macedonian conditions " on Germany's eastern frontier and Henderson's suggestion of an " exchange of populations ", Coulondre snatched at that straw — he reported to Bonnet " this idea, which at least in its principle accords with the views of the Führer ". How much importance Henderson himself attached to it, it is difficult to gauge — in his report to the Foreign Office he did not even mention the question which he had put to Hitler, but in talking to Lipski he seems to

[1] As Great Britain had Summer Time and Germany had not, this cancelled out the difference between Greenwich and Central European Time.

have given it sufficient prominence for Lipski to report it to Warsaw, even before Coulondre had spoken to him about it. The same night at 2.20 A.M., Noël was instructed to give the proposal " urgent and emphatic " support (*d'extrême urgence et de façon pressante*). Beck being unable to see him in the morning, Noël called on Szembek,[1] who was " personally favourable to the suggestion ", reinforced by Noël with new arguments : to shift the problem into the field of national problems would safeguard the territorial *status quo* ; Hitler could not easily reject the scheme ; and Italy, because of the Tyrol, might be made to interest herself in such a solution.

Noël received Beck's reply in the afternoon : the Polish Government favoured the idea but for tactical reasons did not think a direct approach to the German Government advisable — Lipski would be asked to launch it through a neutral diplomat or perhaps through someone in Göring's circle. The same afternoon, August 26th, at 5, Halifax telegraphed to Kennard : could not the Polish Government approach the German with an enquiry whether they would contemplate making an exchange of populations an element to be considered in any negotiation ? Although this remedy " would take some time to apply ", the suggestion would show that the Poles recognise the difficulty and seek to overcome it, and give them " some definite and new point on which to open up a negotiation ". In the morning of August 27th Kennard talked about it to Beck, who was prepared to convey his readiness to consider such a proposal to the German Government, " possibly not directly to the State Secretary, but in such a manner that he was sure it would reach the

[1] According to the French Yellow Book, Noël saw Arciszewski, but from a minute in the Polish White Book it appears that it was Szembek ; presumably Noël in his telephonic report spoke merely of the " Under-Secretary of State ", and this was wrongly interpreted as Arciszewski. Also according to the Yellow Book it was Szembek who, in the afternoon, gave Noël Beck's reply on that subject.

highest authorities" ; and as the Pope had just asked "if there was anything he could do", Kennard suggested that he should be informed about the idea. But still on August 26th, at 10 P.M., a telephonic report reached Paris from the London Embassy, of Henderson having explained that in his talk with Hitler the question of an exchange of populations had been only "very vaguely" alluded to : Hitler having said that "Macedonian conditions" complicate ethnic problems on the German-Polish frontier, Henderson remarked that this is even worse while national feelings are so strong that one can understand certain countries resorting to an exchange of populations. "This remark, which, strictly speaking, did not amount to a suggestion, was not taken up by the German Chancellor."

So ended the wild-goose chase which was carried on by serious men on no better clue than a vague remark of Henderson's, and which presupposed that Hitler, after having made the most extensive diplomatic and military preparations, could be pinned down to a fair and reasonable arrangement.

Daladier's Appeal

The preparations for immediate war were too marked on August 25th-26th to escape attention. Henderson writes in his *Final Report* :

> In the afternoon of the 25th August itself all telephone communication between Berlin and London and Paris was unexpectedly cut off for several hours. The celebrations at Tannenberg were cancelled on the 26th [1] and the Party Rally at Nuremberg on the 27th August ; all Naval, Military and Air Attachés

[1] At that time Henderson seems to have put the opposite interpretation on the cancelling of the Tannenberg celebrations — Corbin reported on August 26th, after his talk with Halifax : "It also seemed to him (Henderson) that the postponement of the Tannenberg ceremony indicated that the Fuhrer meant to delay the execution of his plans and that he would await at least the replies from Paris and London".

> at Berlin were refused permission to leave the city without prior authority being obtained from the Ministry of War. All German airports were closed from that date, and the whole of Germany became a prohibited zone for all aircraft except the regular civil lines. All internal German air services were also suspended. Moreover as from the 27th a system for the rationing of foodstuffs and other commodities throughout Germany came into force.

In fact, there was full financial and economic mobilisation; and some military units, whom the order countermanding operations as from 8.30 P.M. failed to reach in time, crossed the Polish frontier, but were immediately recalled. Perhaps the incidents at Marienwerder, in East Prussia, were part of the measures to be taken on the outbreak of war : the telephone lines of the Polish Consulate were severed, and while the Consul was out of the building — he had gone to protest to the German authorities against the deportation of the teaching staff of the local Polish High School — the Consulate was occupied by the police.

In spite of such symptoms the Western Powers continued to treat seriously Hitler's outburst about frontier incidents and ply the Poles with suggestions how best to avoid them. Thus Kennard reported on August 24th : " There would seem from M. Beck's attitude no necessity for the warning which, nevertheless, I and my French colleague have given him to do nothing which would further aggravate the present critical state of affairs " (that Polish uniforms and identification cards had been prepared by order from Hitler for use in " incidents " was naturally not known to them). On the 25th, at 11 P.M., Halifax cabled to Kennard to " sound the Polish Government on the proposal for a corps of neutral observers " to come into operation if negotiations were started ; such supervision, judging by the more explicit supporting wire from the French Foreign Office to Noël, was to have referred primarily to the treatment of the German

minority in Poland. Beck did not reject Kennard's suggestion, but undertook to submit it to his Government; and when talking to Noël in the afternoon of August 27th, said that "in spite of fresh incidents, German aggressiveness on the Polish frontier seems to have rather decreased in the last twenty-four hours" (no doubt as a result of the countermanding order). Beck added he had the impression that Hitler "had not yet taken the decision to go to war". But the same afternoon Ribbentrop said to Coulondre that the situation had "taken a turn for the worse since yesterday. The Polish Government is no longer master in its own country. Perhaps better so, or otherwise we should have to hold it responsible for the provocations from which we suffer. But I must warn you that at the first incident we shall strike."

These amiable words were uttered while handing to Coulondre Hitler's reply to an appeal from Daladier. In the interview on the 25th Hitler had charged Coulondre with a message for Daladier,[1] who replied to it the next day by a personal letter — "personal" in that peculiarly egotistic style which was introduced by the Dictators, and has been continued by others ever since. The letter starts with the assertion: "No Frenchman has ever done more than I myself firmly to establish not merely peace between our two nations, but a sincere collaboration which is in their own interest as well as in that of Europe"; and it closes with the peroration: "You, like myself, have fought in the last war. You know, as I do, the horror and reprobation of its disasters which live for ever in the consciousness of nations." In

[1] Henderson writes in his *Final Report*, and again in his *Failure of a Mission*: "At 5 P.M., on that day (August 25th), Herr Hitler had received the French Ambassador and given him a letter for communication to M. Daladier". The interview was at 5.30 and there was no letter, only a verbal message — see above, page 328: "Please say it to M. Daladier", and preamble to Daladier's letter of the 26th: "The French Ambassador in Berlin has communicated to me your personal message".

between come various assurances : " I personally vouch for Poland's steady inclination to have recourse to the method of free conciliation . . ." ; " I can attest upon my honour that in the clear and loyal solidarity of France with Poland and with her other Allies there is nothing which would impair the peaceful attitude of my country " ; etc. It was a call to negotiate, padded with flattery at Hitler's address. One wonders what effect such stuff was expected to have on a man like Hitler.

The same night, August 26th, Coulondre carried the letter to him and, after the interview, wired to Bonnet at 12.15 A.M. :

> I deeply regret to have to report to Your Excellency that the Prime Minister's proposal did not receive favourable consideration from the Chancellor. For 40 minutes I commented on his moving letter. I said all that my human and French heart could suggest to make the Chancellor agree to a last attempt at a peaceful settlement of the Danzig problem. I entreated him before history and in the name of humanity not to dismiss this last chance. For the peace of his conscience I begged him, who has built an Empire without bloodshed, not to shed blood — the blood of soldiers and also of women and children — unless he first made sure that it could not be avoided. I confronted him with the terrible responsibilities which he would assume towards Western civilisation. I told him that his prestige outside Germany was sufficiently great not to suffer by an appeasing gesture ; men who feared him would perhaps be astonished but would admire him, mothers would bless him.

Undoubtedly an oratorical performance of a high order — but historically inaccurate, and what is much worse, psychologically ill-suited to the man and the situation.

> I may have moved him ; but I failed to determine him. His stand was taken.

> Herr Hitler, having read the Prime Minister's letter and rendered homage to its noble thoughts, said that since Poland had received the British guarantee, it was vain to try to make her take a sensible view of the situation. She is fixed in a morbid resistance ; she knows that she is heading for suicide but persists in the belief that, thanks to British and French support, she will re-arise once more.
>
> Moreover things have by now gone too far. No country which cares for its honour could stand the Polish provocations.

After this the two argued in a circle. When Coulondre remarked that Germany and Poland had not talked to each other for a long time, that the distance between them may have been reduced in the course of the crisis, but that this could only be ascertained if they talked before resorting to arms, Hitler replied : " It's no use. Poland will not cede Danzig ; and I want the return of Danzig to the Reich — it is one of its ports." Coulondre on leaving said that he hoped this was not the Führer's last word, and Hitler that he would reply to Daladier in writing.

Coulondre was no doubt horror-stricken at the prospect of a Second World War, and in these crucial days did not always display his usual clear judgment. Perhaps as a diplomat true to the rules of the Service, he had tried to express the thoughts of his chiefs, and in so doing forgot to some extent his own opinions and warnings. On consideration he seems to have felt uneasy, perhaps even about his own performance. At 1.20 P.M. he sent Bonnet his further reflections : " The *démarche* made by me yesterday had to be made " ; and after some slightly embarrassed argument why it had produced no favourable result and might yet do so, Coulondre added significantly that such a result could not be expected unless the utmost care was taken not to give the impression of being on the

look-out for a compromise, however burdensome. " I feel certain that this is not the intention of the French and British Governments. I merely mean to emphasise the importance which attaches to the appearances being made to fit the facts to the end." Still, by the manner in which he himself had talked, he let it be seen that the French were filled with horror at the thought of a new war. Hitler was not, and must therefore have felt that he was winning the war of nerves. He spoke of Danzig : Coulondre had realised for some time past that Hitler wanted far more, and that this sacrifice, while destroying Polish morale, would merely excite him to further aggression.[1] But both Coulondre and the British Government, though firm in their conviction that violence must be resisted, tried their utmost to prolong conversations, apparently without any clear idea of what could be expected to emerge from them. What they seem to have felt was that if the talks stopped, there would be an explosion. One is reminded of a story told in the days of the V1 " doodles " : A cat sat down on a parrot's cage and purred. The parrot got uneasy. " I am only purring," said the cat. " Then for God's sake don't stop," replied the parrot.

Did Hitler hesitate ? What was he waiting for ? And what was it which determined him in the end to attack ? On August 28th a German journalist told Coulondre that the Führer was undecided — " it would have been better if we had attacked on the 26th ". Did Hitler still hope to detach the Western Powers from Poland ? Unless at the bottom of it all there was sheer mental chaos — which cannot be ruled out with him — a link is still missing in the story of those days. But if anything could have

[1] The same day in the small hours of the morning Coulondre had wired to Bonnet : " Danzig is merely the point of least resistance at which the Reich tries to break into Poland. M. Lipski said to me last night : 'What the Germans want is to place their hand on Poland and to have one day the Polish army at their disposal '."

stopped Hitler, it was not adjurations, flattery, or appeals to conscience, but the certainty that while invading Poland he could not risk leaving his Western frontier denuded of troops, as he did in September with impunity. And that certainty could not have been produced by reviving the memories of Munich and December 6th, but by the Munichers relinquishing office to men of a different calibre.

On August 27th Hitler replied to Daladier with a long rigmarole most of which any student of Hitlerology could compose.

> As an old front soldier I know the horrors of war. . . . I have tried loyally to eliminate all causes for conflict between our two nations . . . after the return of the Saar, I have solemnly confirmed my renunciation of all further claims against France. . . . But this voluntary limitation of German vital claims in the West cannot be looked upon as an all-round acceptance of the Versailles *Diktat.* I have therefore tried hard, year after year, to obtain by negotiation at least a revision of its most incredible and intolerable clauses.

And here in the midst of hackneyed stuff, a new and original argument makes its appearance, adjusted to the mentality of the men to whom it was addressed, and showing what Hitler thought of them :

> Whatever may be held up against my methods . . . it must not be overlooked nor denied that in a number of cases they have rendered it possible without new bloodshed to find a solution satisfying Germany, and moreover relieved statesmen of other nations of the obligation which it would often have been impossible for them to assume before their own people : responsibility for such treaty revisions.

In other words, Hitler thought himself entitled to the gratitude of Western statesmen for the way in which he

had staged the re-armament of Germany, the re-militarisation of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss*, the annexation of the Sudetenland, and the liquidation of Czechoslovakia. And now, as was hinted in previous talks, he obviously hoped to find a way to "free" them of their self-assumed obligations to Poland :

> I have made a proposal to the Polish Government which shocked the German people. None but I could have publicly made such a proposal. Nor could it be made more than once.

But Britain, "instead of engaging Poland to be reasonable", started "the lie about German aggression", confused the ideas of the Poles, and by her guarantee made them reject the German "offer". "And now an unbearable reign of terror set in. . . ." (Here follows the old story about Polish atrocities.)

> As old front-line soldiers, we find it much easier to understand each other on many points. . . . I ask you to understand me also on this : that it is impossible for a nation with a sense of honour to give up almost two million human beings and see them maltreated on its very frontier.[1] I have, therefore, formulated a precise demand : Danzig and the Corridor must return to Germany ; an end must be put to the Macedonian conditions on our eastern frontier.

[1] About their "sufferings", Noël reported from Warsaw on August 28th : "The ill-treatment, murders, etc., of which Herr Hitler accuses the Poles, are sheer calumnies. . . . It would be impossible for Germans to be killed on the outskirts of Danzig or at Bielsko, and for Frenchmen inhabiting those districts to know nothing about it. Besides, it should be noted that the Germans have cited no precise facts, no names, no dates. No protest has been lodged with the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs by the German Ambassador." But when they did cite names, the results were apt to be unfortunate. In a later wire of the same day, Noël, dealing with some specific charges, quotes the reply given by the Polish Telegraphic Agency : The Vice-Voivode of Silesia, accused by the German wireless of ill-treating women and children, had for the last month been seriously ill and under treatment in Warsaw, while Captain Blaha, accused of directing "pillaging bands", had been dead for two years.

Indeed, why do people talk and argue, and repeat for the hundredth time the same story? Why do they go to the trouble of telling lies known as such to others? The total German population of Poland was under a million (according to the Polish census of 1931 : 741,000). In Danzig the Germans enjoyed complete self-government. In the Corridor there were in 1939 about 100,000 Germans. Therefore "two millions" could not "suffer" on Germany's "very frontier", and only one-twentieth of that number would have been affected by the "precise demand".

On August 27th, at 9.35 A.M., Coulondre telephoned to Paris that he had agreed with Hitler until further notice to give no publicity to Daladier's letter and Hitler's forthcoming reply. At 4 P.M. the reply was communicated to him by Ribbentrop with the remark quoted above, "at the first incident we shall strike". And the same night, at 11 P.M., the following circular wire was sent to the French Ambassadors in London, Warsaw, Washington, Istambul, and Bucharest :

> In the evening of August 26th, the Reich Chancellor verbally declared to our Ambassador in Berlin that he could not accept M. Daladier's suggestion and agree to a last attempt at a peaceful settlement with Poland.

THE BRITISH REPLY, AUGUST 28TH

In an account given to the House of Commons, on Tuesday, August 29th, Chamberlain said :

> On Saturday Sir Nevile Henderson arrived by plane from Berlin shortly before lunch, and we understood from him that in Berlin it was not considered to be necessary that he should go back the same day, as the German Government were very anxious that we should give careful study to the communication

> he had to make to us. Accordingly, we devoted the whole of Saturday and the Sunday morning to a very careful, exhaustive and thorough consideration of the document. . . .

Moreover, on Sunday at 12.20 P.M., Dahlerus arrived at Croydon with a different and more precise set of terms expounded to him in the middle of the night by Hitler in presence of Göring — without permission to take notes.[1] It was difficult to treat altogether seriously such a way of transacting business of that importance, and the answer through Dahlerus was given the same day, of course again verbally. Dahlerus suggested that he should be allowed to go ahead of Henderson and test Hitler's reaction to the British attitude before the official reply was sent. Chamberlain answered that the British Government had undertaken to give their reply that day, Sunday the 27th. Dahlerus offered to consult Göring, who had to ask Hitler, who kindly agreed to a delay in Henderson's return.[2] Dahlerus went back the same night, and at 11 P.M. saw Göring, who professed satisfaction with the reply ; Göring went to see Hitler, who seemed equally well-disposed. For a short while an idyllically happy mood was said to prevail in Berlin — which, however, does not appear to have unduly impressed London. " The German reply to M. Daladier ", wrote Corbin on August 29th, " has produced a pessimistic reaction in the Foreign Office. Sir Alexander Cadogan told me this morning that he failed to see how the Chancellor, after having

[1] For the night interview at the Reich Chancellery from about 12.30 till probably after 3 A.M., and for Hitler's terms and the British reply, see below, pages 422-4.

[2] Ribbentrop in his evidence before the Nuremberg Tribunal, on March 29th, 1946, stated that " in view of the critical situation . . . Hitler expressed a certain disappointment to me that the British Ambassador had not returned more quickly with his answer, for the atmosphere was highly charged with electricity ". The remark is here quoted for record, without the least weight being attached to any uncorroborated statement of Ribbentrop's, whether important or indifferent.

stated his aims in such categorical terms, could draw back without loss of face."

The British reply covered two communications from Hitler, his answer of August 23rd to Chamberlain's letter, and his Note of the 25th. The outlines of the British reply were first given to Corbin by Halifax on the evening of August 26th,[1] and seem to have corresponded closely to the final text. This was communicated confidentially to Corbin on the 28th, late in the afternoon.[2] "A few verbal alterations had been made in the original text by the Cabinet,[3] but the general sense is unchanged." The British Note starts by reciprocating the wish expressed by Hitler for friendly relations between the two countries; Hitler's proposals to that effect "would require closer definition", but could be discussed "if the differences between Germany and Poland are peacefully composed". "Everything . . . turns upon the nature of the settlement and the method by which it is to be reached." But about this the Chancellor's "message is silent". His Majesty's Government could not consider any bargains at the expense of a State to whom they had given their guarantee, but while scrupulous about their obligations to Poland, are anxious for a settlement acceptable to both Germany and Poland. The basis laid down for such a settlement is that it should safeguard "Poland's essential interests" and receive an international guarantee: in this His Majesty's Government would be ready to participate.

[1] Corbin's account of the conversation was received in Paris by telephone at 8.46 P.M.

[2] Received in Paris by telephone at 6.15 P.M.

[3] Corbin speaks of *le Conseil de Cabinet*; the name "Cabinet Council" was used also in this country for the Cabinet in the eighteenth century. The English translation of the Yellow Book, published by Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. in 1940, by authority of the French Government, renders it as "Inner Cabinet", which seems wrong; in August 1939 such matters, if not discussed in the full Cabinet, would have gone to its Committee on Foreign Policy, but on this occasion the document was too important not to be taken to the full Cabinet.

Direct discussions should be opened between the German and the Polish Governments; His Majesty's Government "have already received a definite assurance from the Polish Government" that they are prepared to negotiate on that basis. While discussions are proceeding, it is essential to avoid "incidents" and suppress "inflammatory propaganda". A German-Polish agreement would open the way "to the negotiation of that wider and more complete understanding between Great Britain and Germany which both countries desire". Failure to reach it "would bring the two countries into conflict, and might well plunge the whole world into war".

Only a summary of the points concerned with Poland was sent on August 28th, at 2 P.M., to Kennard for communication to the Polish Government. The proposed basis was stated, and the Note was described as expressing "our clear view that direct discussion on equal terms between the parties is the proper means" ("equal terms" may be read into it, but are not mentioned); Poland was once more assured of "the protection of the Anglo-Polish Treaty", and readiness on her part to enter into direct discussions was not to be considered by His Majesty's Government "as in any way implying acceptance of Herr Hitler's demands" stated in his reply to Daladier. "His Majesty's Government earnestly hope that in the light of the considerations set forth in the foregoing paragraphs, the Polish Government will authorise them to inform the German Government that Poland is ready to enter at once into direct discussion with Germany." Kennard was asked to see Beck immediately and to telephone the reply.

Beck's reply does not appear in the Blue Book, but a wire from him to Raczyński and Łukasiewicz, of August 28th, states that he had agreed to Germany being informed of Poland's readiness to negotiate; and, according to Noël, who presumably had it from Kennard, Beck

" expressed great satisfaction at the British answer ". He asked, however, what the British Government understood by " international guarantee ". Polish doubts on the subject were probably due to historical reminiscences of foreign " guarantees " which led to the Partitions of Poland and of the recent " guarantee " promised to Czechoslovakia ; moreover, to reluctance to appear in a subordinate rôle — it had been the ambition of Poland to rank as a Great Power. Beck's reply to Kennard must have reached the Foreign Office before 5 P.M., for Henderson states that at that hour he left London for Berlin ; which seems likely, as he was received by Hitler the same night at 10.30.

Hitler had asked Henderson for 10 P.M., but Henderson replied that he could not have the translation of the Note ready before 10.30. There is only Henderson's minute of the interview which lasted one and a quarter hours, and at which Ribbentrop and Schmidt were present. After Hitler had read the German translation, Henderson started off with observations which he stated to be based on notes made during his talks with Chamberlain and Halifax. Britain was not out to crush Germany, but it was " astonishing that anyone in Germany should doubt for a moment that we would not fight for Poland if her independence or vital interests were menaced " (a curiously ambiguous construction of an emphatic assertion). Next he quoted Blücher at Waterloo for keeping one's word.[1] Hitler " at once intervened to observe that things were different 125 years ago ". Henderson

[1] Henderson writes in his *Failure of a Mission* : " I even appealed to his sentiment by quoting a passage from a book which I happened to know that he had read about the days in which England had fought side by side with Germany against Napoleon ". Here follows the school-book story about Marshal "Forward". " I reminded Hitler of this story. He may have been momentarily impressed, but it availed nothing."

It seems regrettable that it should be so difficult to divert a man who has set his heart on war and conquest from his purpose even by a story that would move the heart of any schoolboy.

replied that the British people desired an understanding with Germany, and no one more so than the Prime Minister who had a united public opinion behind him. Nor was there any disunion in the Cabinet. Britain offered Germany her friendship, " but only on the basis of a peaceful and freely negotiated solution of the Polish question ". Hitler replied with a tirade about the Poles (model 1939), and " asserted that nothing else than the return of Danzig and the whole of the Corridor would satisfy him, together with a rectification in Silesia ", to which he added a fanciful account of the Silesian Plebiscite.[1] Henderson demurred against " immoderate demands "— " the Corridor was inhabited almost entirely by Poles ". Hitler interjected that this was " because a million Germans had been driven out of that district since the war " (the German census of 1910 put its total German population at 385,000). Henderson replied that Hitler " had offered a Corridor over the Corridor in March ", and begged him " very earnestly to reflect before raising his price ". Hitler retorted that his offer had been contemptuously refused. Henderson " observed that it had been made in the form of a dictate and therein lay the whole difference ". Hitler argued that Poland " could never be reasonable " and spoke of " annihilating " her. Henderson said that, remembering Czechoslovakia, Britain " hesitated to press Poland too far to-day. Nevertheless, we reserved to ourselves the right to form our own judgment as to what was or what was not reasonable so far as Poland or Germany were concerned. We kept our hands free in that respect." Hitler had to choose between " excessive demands on Poland " and Britain's friendship. " If he was not prepared to make sacrifices on his part there was nothing to be

[1] Although only " a rectification in Silesia " was mentioned, Hitler's further claim that " 90 per cent of the population had voted for Germany " clearly foreshadowed the extent of the retrocessions which he proposed to demand.

done." Hitler replied that " he had to satisfy the demands of his people, his army was ready and eager for battle, his people were united behind him, and he could not tolerate further ill-treatment of Germans in Poland, etc." There was " a tirade about the Rhineland, Austria, and Sudeten, and their peaceful reacquisition by Germany ", while Henderson's " references to 15th March " were resented. Henderson pleaded for " a generous gesture as regards Poland ", which would gain for Hitler public opinion in England and throughout the world. At the end of the interview concrete questions were asked. Henderson enquired whether Hitler was willing to negotiate direct with the Poles and ready to discuss an exchange of populations. Hitler answered the second question in the affirmative —" though I have no doubt ", adds Henderson, " that he was thinking at the same time of a rectification of frontiers " ; but before answering the first he would have to consider carefully the British Note. Ribbentrop asked Henderson whether Chamberlain " could carry the country with him in a policy of friendship with Germany " — about which Henderson had no doubt " provided Germany co-operated ". Hitler asked whether England would accept an alliance with Germany. Henderson, " speaking personally, did not exclude such a possibility. . . ." Hitler promised a written reply to the British Note for " to-morrow, Tuesday ". Henderson said he " was quite prepared to wait ", but Hitler replied " that there was no time to wait ".[1] The question of calling a " truce " in incidents and in the consequent propaganda was not raised.

Henderson, in his report, describes the conversation as " long and earnest ", and says that it " was conducted in quite a friendly atmosphere, in spite of absolute firmness

[1] The passage is more lively and pointed in the account which Henderson gave of it to Coulondre : Hitler told Henderson that he intended " to give his reply the next day ". Henderson replied, " It took us two days to draw up our Note. I am in no hurry." " But I am ", answered Hitler.

on both sides" ; and in his *Final Report* he goes even further : "On this occasion Herr Hitler was again friendly and reasonable and appeared to be not dissatisfied with the answer which I had brought to him"— he was "non-committal . . . calm, and even conciliatory".[1] Obviously little was required in Hitler to satisfy Henderson. His demand of "a Corridor over the Corridor" was "an offer" ; his claims were refused by the Poles in March merely because of the way in which they were made ; he should not "raise his price", but if he repeated the demands rejected by Poland before she ever received the British guarantee, this would presumably count as a "sacrifice" and a "generous gesture" on his part. Britain "hesitated to press Poland too far" — which seemed to hold out the prospect of some pressure being exerted ; also the freedom to judge what was "reasonable" in spite of the Czech experience had a somewhat ominous sound. When Henderson talked Godesberg language, he counted it for "absolute firmness" in himself ; while Hitler could add the whole Corridor and Upper Silesia to his previous claims, threaten Poland with "annihilation", etc., and yet appear to Henderson friendly, reasonable, "and even conciliatory". It might be argued that these remarks refer to Hitler's manner, and do not extend to the substance of his demands. Even so, it would seem extraordinary that the mere fact that Hitler for once spoke without ranting should have met with so much appreciation.

To this communication, which was received at the Foreign Office on August 29th at 2.35 A.M., a postscript was added some fourteen hours later : Hitler had insisted that he was not bluffing, Henderson had replied that "we were not bluffing either". "In answer to a suggestion by him that Great Britain might offer something at once in the way of colonies as evidence of her good intentions,

[1] See *Failure of a Mission*, page 264.

I retorted that concessions were easier of realisation in a good rather than a bad atmosphere."

Lastly, some supplementary information concerning Henderson's talk with Hitler on August 28th can be gathered at third-hand from a despatch which Corbin sent from London on the 29th: "After having added Silesia to his previous claims, the Chancellor has clearly given to understand that what would then remain of Poland could not count on an independent existence"; further, that he could never revert to his proposals of March 23rd,[1] and "he let it be understood that he would not negotiate with Poland unless he was sure in advance that the Polish Government would give in to all his wishes". If accurate, this puts a finishing touch on the character of Hitler's discourse, and on Henderson's view of it. But then he writes in his *Failure of a Mission*: "It was, I think, the only one of my interviews with Hitler at which it was I who did most of the talking".

August 29th

On August 28th, at 1.50 A.M., Noël reported having been informed by Beck that, in view of the intentions signified by Hitler to Henderson (obviously on August 25th), "the Polish Government saw themselves compelled to complete their military measures by calling up new classes of reservists". Noël added that this seemed to refer to the "placing on a war footing of the first line divisions which have not yet been mobilised".

In reality, whatever illusions were entertained in Warsaw with regard to the possiblity of preserving peace, mobilisation measures had been taken by Poland well in advance of the Western Powers. Four divisions and a cavalry brigade had been mobilised on March 21st, and two further divisions and one brigade on August 14th.

[1] Thus in Corbin's despatch in the Yellow Book, No. 293, page 351; it should read "March 21st".

On the 21st a secret mobilisation was ordered of the main forces by means of individual summonses ; but the two Western Army Corps, on Germany's frontier, were excluded. Altogether, by that system of " card summonses ", the mobilisation was effected of 28 divisions, 11 cavalry brigades, the Air Force, artillery, and various auxiliary formations. The two Western Army Corps were mobilised on August 25th. What was intended on August 28th was a general mobilisation which would have included a further 11 divisions[1] and numerous other formations.

On August 29th, at 4 P.M., Szembek, on instructions from Beck, saw the British and French Ambassadors together, and informed them that in view of concentrations of German troops on the Polish frontier, of their entry into Slovakia, and of other indications of intended aggression, a general mobilisation had been decreed, completing the military measures already taken. Kennard remarked that the word " mobilisation " would create the impression that Poland was embarking on war, and that it would be highly desirable to delay the public announcement till the German reply to Great Britain was received. He was supported by Noël who added " that he had no objections whatever . . . to the actual fact of mobilisation ". They both asked that Beck should be informed without delay ; and in deference to their views the announcement of general mobilisation was postponed. It was finally issued shortly before noon on August 30th, with the 31st as the first day of mobilisation. This was too late — the following morning the German Air Force opened its attack against the Polish lines of communication.

Noël gives in his book a long, detailed, and somewhat apologetic account of the transaction.[2] He felt the

[1] For these eleven divisions, the system of " card summonses " was not established : they were largely recruited from Ukrainians and White Russians, and were stationed outside their home-districts.

[2] Pages 462-7.

responsibility which rested on him either way, whether he advised the Poles to postpone mobilisation in circumstances fraught with so much danger, or let them proceed with it — to his enquiry when the posters announcing the general mobilisation would be put up, Szembek replied : " Perhaps in half an hour ". Then he and Kennard urged that it should be delayed for a few hours ; and having from their Embassies sent their reports to Paris and London, they both returned to urge the matter on Beck. " Sir Howard ", writes Noël, " who . . . lived nearer, preceded me, and was leaving the Minister's room without having attained anything. My insistence, joined to that of my colleague, moved the Minister." In Noël's presence, he telephoned to the Chief of the General Staff, and asked whether these political considerations could be met by delaying the posters for a few hours. General Stachiewicz agreed.

> When in the night [writes Noël] M. Bonnet learnt from my wires of the action I had taken, he grew anxious.[1] He feared being held personally responsible for my attitude and for the result I had obtained. No doubt his anxiety would have been even greater had the French Ambassador in Warsaw merely taken note of the decision of the Polish Government, or approved it unreservedly. He was obsessed by the attacks against him which his Czechoslovak policy continued to produce ; he feared being accused of directing Poland towards a capitulation, which there was no reason to apprehend, and, in order to clear himself of responsibility, he sent me a telegram in the morning of August 30th, unique in our official relations ; it implied, without expressing it clearly, that I was to blame, and that Poland was the sole judge of how far the measure in question was opportune.

[1] The military probably told Bonnet that he must not hinder Polish mobilisation.

Noël points out once more that all he had asked for was a delay of a few hours in the announcing of the general mobilisation, and that he expected the posters to appear on the walls of Warsaw that same night. In the early hours of the morning, he sent an officer to Smigly-Rydz's office to enquire how matters stood, and to say that he " had not thought even for a moment of advising Poland against mobilising at the hour chosen by the Chiefs of her Army ". In reply he was told that the General Staff had thought it possible to go beyond what Noël had demanded, and had taken it upon themselves to postpone mobilisation by a day. " Shortly before noon on Wednesday, August 30th, the fateful white posters appeared on the walls of Warsaw." [1] What Noël does not seem to have considered at the time, nor to have envisaged when writing his book, was that a mobilisation order published too late at night to reach those concerned cannot, without danger of confusion, call them up for the next day, the day on which they will read it ; and that therefore those few hours were bound to delay mobilisation by a whole day : the men could now only be summoned for August 31st. An earlier putting up of posters would merely have given earlier notice to the Germans. This explains why the General Staff went beyond what Noël had asked for.

The same day (August 29th) Chamberlain, in the House of Commons, after reviewing the most recent diplomatic developments, spoke of Britain being " ready for any eventuality " : " the air defence . . . has been placed in a state of instant readiness . . . the Navy was in an advanced state of preparedness . . . The Civil Defence regional organisation has been placed on a war

[1] To Szembek's minute of his conversation with the two Ambassadors a footnote is added in the Polish White Book that in consequence of their observations, " the Polish Government decided to postpone the public announcement for several hours ". In reality there was a delay of nineteen to twenty hours.

footing. . . . Plans for the evacuation of school children . . . are ready." While these measures were meant to signify that Britain was in earnest, even Hitler could hardly have described them as a menace to Germany.

When, on August 28th, Henderson asked whether Germany was willing to negotiate direct with the Poles, Hitler, having said that he would first have to study the British reply, turned to Ribbentrop : " We must summon Field-Marshal Göring to discuss it with him ". According to Dahlerus, the three met after the interview, " and were visibly contented with what had been achieved ". At 1.15 A.M. (August 29th) one of Göring's staff telephoned to Dahlerus that the prospects of a peaceful settlement were excellent, and asked him to call on Göring at 10.50 A.M. Göring received him effusively, shook him warmly by the hand, and exclaimed : " There will be peace. Peace is secured." Next, Dahlerus went to see Henderson whom he had never met before, and to whom he attributes some notably sensible remarks — though it seems somewhat strange that they should have been addressed to a friend of Göring's at the first meeting. Henderson is reported to have declared that one could not believe a word of what Hitler said, that he was playing a dishonest and ruthless game, that even with Göring caution was necessary, and that Göring had lied to him " heaps of times ". None the less, because of his last talk with Hitler, Dahlerus found him slightly more optimistic. In his *Final Report* Henderson writes about August 29th : " Such information as reached me during the course of the day . . . tended to represent the atmosphere as not unfavourable [1] and to foreshadow Herr Hitler's readiness to open direct negotiations with the Poles ".

When he went to Hitler for his reply at 7.15 P.M., " nothing was left undone to enhance . . . the solemnity

[1] In the *Failure of a Mission* the description of the " atmosphere " changes to " well-disposed ".

of the occasion. . . . A guard of honour was drawn up in the courtyard . . . and I was received with a roll of drums." With Hitler was Ribbentrop, and presumably also Schmidt; but again there is no minute of the interview in the German White Book, merely the Note which Hitler gave to Henderson. "It is brutal," writes Coulondre, "and resembles a *Diktat* imposed on a defeated country rather than an agreement to negotiate with a sovereign State"; and besides, a more mendacious document has seldom been drafted. The suggestions made by the German Government, it declares, were meant to express their will for a "sincere Anglo-German understanding", but not at the price of vital German interests, or of abandoning the demands of justice and of national dignity and honour. Then follows once more the usual account of the proposals made to Poland and their rejection (with the additional mis-statement that "already in the middle of last month Poland was in effect in a state of mobilisation"), of "encroachments" against Danzig, "ultimata" and blockade, of the "barbaric maltreatment" of *Volksdeutsche* in Poland, etc. "This state of affairs is unbearable for a Great Power" and "can no longer be accepted or observed with indifference" — hence the demand for the return of Danzig and the Corridor to Germany and for the "safeguarding of the existence of the German *Volksgruppen* in the territories remaining to Poland". For achieving the settlement "there no longer remain days, still less weeks, but perhaps only hours". Next follows this rendering of the British attitude:

> The British Government attach importance to two considerations: (1) that the existing danger of an imminent explosion should be eliminated as quickly as possible by direct negotiation, and (2) that the existence of the Polish State, in the form in which it would then continue to exist, should be adequately

safeguarded in the economic and political sphere by means of international guarantees.

The German Government, " though sceptical as to the prospects of a successful outcome, . . . are . . . prepared to accept the English proposal and to enter into direct discussions ", but " in the event of a territorial rearrangement in Poland " they could no longer give a guarantee without the U.S.S.R. (the secret clauses of the treaty of August 23rd would have come into operation).

The Note closes with the following two paragraphs :

> For the rest, in making these proposals the German Government have never had any intention of touching Poland's vital interests or questioning the existence of an independent Polish State. The German Government, accordingly, in these circumstances agree to accept the British Government's offer of their good offices in securing the despatch to Berlin of a Polish Emissary with full powers. They count on the arrival of this Emissary on Wednesday, August 30th, 1939.
>
> The German Government will immediately draw up proposals for a solution acceptable to themselves and will, if possible, place these at the disposal of the British Government before the arrival of the Polish negotiator.

Henderson read the Note in presence of Hitler and Ribbentrop, and made no comment till he reached the sentence demanding the arrival of a Polish Emissary within twenty-four hours. He then remarked that it sounded like an ultimatum (he was talking German : *hatte den Klang eines Ultimatums*). This was heatedly and strenuously denied by Hitler and Ribbentrop, who assured Henderson " that it was only intended to stress the urgency of the moment when two fully mobilised armies were standing face to face ". To Henderson's protest that the time limit was unreasonably short, Hitler replied that one could fly from Warsaw to Berlin in

ninety minutes; and to the question whether such a Polish plenipotentiary would be well received and discussions "conducted on a footing of complete equality", his answer was "Of course". The interview was, on the whole, "of a stormy character", but was closed, writes Henderson in his *Failure of a Mission*, by "a brief and, in my opinion, quite honest . . . harangue on Hitler's part in regard to the genuineness of his constant endeavour to win Britain's friendship, of his respect for the British Empire, and of his liking for Englishmen generally".

Henderson warned Hitler once more that "an attempt to impose his will on Poland by force" would mean war with Britain. But on his return to the Embassy, and while still drafting his report, he asked Lipski to call, gave him an account of the German Note and the conversation, pressed on him "the need of immediate action", and "implored him, in Poland's own interests, to urge his Government to nominate without any delay someone to represent them in the proposed negotiations at Berlin". At 10.15 P.M. Coulondre sent a telephonic account of what he had heard from Henderson to Paris. It contains two points omitted in Henderson's published reports: Hitler had told him that for the suppression of "incidents" he would draft for to-morrow "a plan of an economic character"; and to Hitler's refusal of a guarantee to Poland without the U.S.S.R., Henderson had replied that in view of the German-Russian agreement "this reservation did not seem to him to raise any difficulties" (its real meaning completely escaped Henderson).

AUGUST 30TH AND 31ST

At 1 A.M. of August 30th, Bonnet was already taking action — he wired to Noël:

> However unpleasant the form in which the Chancellor expresses his thoughts, I note, none the

> less, that for the first time he agrees to a direct conversation which he had hitherto refused. At first sight this is a point which appears to me to deserve attention. It would seem to me difficult to meet it with a brutal refusal.

At 2 A.M. Coulondre telephoned to Bonnet that Henderson, though " unfavourably impressed by the conversation " and " less optimistic than the previous day ", considered that Beck should accept Hitler's invitation, " for Poland should show to the world her good-will " ; and that Henderson was wiring in that sense to London. Coulondre himself thought that Poland should accept, since Hitler acceded to the suggestion of direct negotiations made to him by the Western Powers ; but in the very next paragraph he remarks that Beck's journey to Berlin " would inevitably recall the sad precedents " of Schuschnigg and Hacha, would be exploited by German propaganda, represented as a sign of weakness, and would raise German demands. " If, therefore, the two Ministers are to meet, it should be in a town near the frontier " ; but if negotiations are to proceed in Berlin, Lipski should be entrusted with them. Also in the report sent some twelve hours later, at 1.30 P.M., after having received from Henderson the full text of Hitler's Note, Coulondre still says that " even if the conversations were to break down almost as soon as they are started ", Poland could, at least to begin with, " agree to making contact through her Ambassador in Berlin ".

At 2 A.M. of August 30th, Halifax wired to Henderson that the German reply would be carefully considered, but that it was unreasonable in the German Government " to expect that we can produce a Polish representative in Berlin to-day ". Henderson was asked " at once to let this be known in proper quarters through appropriate channels ". The message was conveyed to Ribbentrop at 4 A.M., and repeated to Weizsäcker in the morning.

Weizsäcker replied that it had already been conveyed to Hitler, but that " something must be done as soon as possible ". To which Henderson adds :

> While I still recommend that the Polish Government should swallow this eleventh-hour effort to establish direct contact with Herr Hitler, even if it be only to convince the world that they were prepared to make their own sacrifice for preservation of peace, one can only conclude from the German reply that Herr Hitler is determined to achieve his ends by so-called peaceful fair means if he can, but by force if he cannot. Much, of course, may also depend on the detailed plan referred to in the last paragraph of the German reply.
>
> Nevertheless, if Herr Hitler is allowed to continue to have the initiative, it seems to me that the result can only be either war or once again victory for him by a display of force, and encouragement thereby to pursue the same course again next year or the year after.

Kennard in a wire, early on August 30th (received at 10 A.M.), says that the Polish Government could not be induced to send a representative to discuss a settlement on the basis proposed by Hitler, that the Poles " would certainly sooner fight and perish rather than submit to such humiliation ", that " if the negotiations are to be between equals it is essential that they should take place in some neutral country or even possibly in Italy ", and that the basis should be some compromise between Hitler's March proposals and the *status quo*. " I am, of course, expressing no views to the Polish Government, nor am I communicating to them Hitler's reply till I receive instructions, which I trust will be without delay." Similarly Noël wired at 11.20 A.M. that Poland could not be expected to accept terms which would reduce her to the condition of a vassal. Whatever mistakes Beck and the Polish Government may have committed, they have

a claim to the gratitude of their own people, and not of them alone, for having stood firm and refused to take the road to Berlin. And in this they had the support of the British Government. Halifax cabled to Henderson on August 30th, at 6.50 P.M. :

> We understand that German Government are insisting that a Polish representative with full powers must come to Berlin to receive German proposals.
>
> We cannot advise Polish Government to comply with this procedure, which is wholly unreasonable.

" The normal procedure " of diplomatic negotiations had better be adopted, and should the promised German proposals offer a reasonable basis, His Majesty's Government would " do their best in Warsaw to facilitate negotiations ".

On the night of August 29th Göring again summoned Dahlerus, told him about Hitler's interview with Henderson, inveighed against the Poles and Great Britain, intimated to him that Hitler was at work on a new " magnanimous offer " (*grosszügiges Angebot*) to Poland, and asked him to fly once more to London. The interview is only interesting because of its utterly nonsensical character.[1] Ribbentrop, in his evidence at Nuremberg on April 1st, 1946, stated that the 16 points of the Note which was now drafted were " dictated personally " by Hitler ; and Keitel said on April 4th, 1946, that on August 30th, 1939, " the day of attack which was then the 1st of September, was again postponed for twenty-four hours. For this reason Brauchitsch and I were again called to the Reich Chancellery, and as I recall, the reason . . . was that a Polish plenipotentiary was expected." But the invasion did start after all on September 1st and Keitel has failed to explain how and when that reversion to the previous time-table took place.

[1] See below, pages 425-6.

"We are considering the German Note with all urgency and shall send the official reply later in the afternoon", wired Halifax to Henderson on August 30th, at 2.45 P.M. The British Government had by now done all that they could do, in their existing composition and with Henderson as their representative, to convince Hitler that an unprovoked attack on Poland would entail war with Great Britain. Further British diplomatic action had to be palliative and on a day-to-day basis; and it pursued two aims: to forfend an irremediable break over some "incident", and meanwhile to get Germany and Poland into direct negotiations. It was felt that every day which went by was an appreciable gain, and that if the chapter of accidents was prevented from bringing on war, it might in time lead to a favourable solution. This game had little chance of success: and yet it had to be played, for there was nothing else that could have been done at that stage — barring a reconstruction of the Cabinet.

After Hitler's entry into Prague, a demand arose in Great Britain for a National Government; and again early in July voices were raised that men who in the past had opposed appeasement should be taken into the Government. On July 5th the political correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* reported that a group of Conservative members "who had always given consistent and wholehearted support to Mr. Chamberlain" had made representations to him for the inclusion of Mr. Churchill in the Cabinet. "I have never been a follower of Mr. Churchill," wrote Lord Selborne in the *Daily Telegraph* on July 8th, "but I agree with those who think that the inclusion of Mr. Churchill or of Mr. Eden in the Government at this particular moment would be a gesture which even Dr. Goebbels could not fail to understand." By the end of August it may have been too late for it to have its full effect, but the unjustified fears which the Poles felt even

in those last days lest the British Government should try to force some Godesberg compromise on them, and the depression which the British declaration of war produced in the governing Nazi circles, or even the scene in the House of Commons on the night of September 2nd, show that people in the very centres of action, to say nothing of the public at large, did not altogether trust the change of heart in the erstwhile Munichers — which in itself was a serious handicap on their effectiveness.

On August 30th, at 5.30 P.M., Halifax wired to Kennard suggestions for avoiding " incidents " with members of the German minority : the Polish Government should give instructions that fugitives or *Volksdeutsche* causing trouble should not be fired upon ; that no " personal violence " should be done to them ; that those " wishing to leave Poland " should be allowed to do so ; and that " inflammatory radio propaganda " should be stopped. (Dahlerus in his book claims the credit for having suggested these measures.) Halifax added : " I realise that Herr Hitler is using reports to justify immoderate action, but I am anxious to deprive him of this pretext ". He also told Kennard of the telegram which he was simultaneously sending to Henderson : in informing the German Government of these British representations at Warsaw, he was to make it clear that the measures could only be successful if similar restraint was shown on the German side, and " if no provocation is offered by members of the German minority " in Poland. Beck replied with a touch of weariness that the Polish Government had " no intention of provoking any incidents ", and then passed to a matter which obviously weighed heavily on his mind : he felt sure that in answering Hitler's Note of the 29th, " His Majesty's Government will not express any definite views on problems concerning Poland without consulting the Polish Government ". Ribbentrop's answer to the British representations was only to be received when at midnight

Henderson called with the British reply to the last German Note.

That reply tried to pick out and feature anything on which, with effort and twisting, it was at all possible to put a favourable interpretation. " His Majesty's Government appreciate the friendly reference " made by the German Government to the " desire for an Anglo-German understanding " ; they " reciprocate the German Government's desire for improved relations ", which must not be sought at the sacrifice either of Germany's or of Poland's " vital interests " ; they note that the German Government " are prepared to enter into direct discussions with the Polish Government " ; that they " accept in principle the condition that any settlement should be made the subject of an international guarantee " — it would have to be discussed further whose participation in it should be sought, but that of the U.S.S.R. had always been assumed. " His Majesty's Government must make an express reservation in regard to the statement of the particular demands put forward by the German Government " ; they understand that the German Government are drawing up proposals for a solution, and these will have to be examined " how far they are compatible with the essential conditions " stated by His Majesty's Government. Direct contact between the German and Polish Governments should be established, but this could not have been done " so early as to-day ". Lastly, measures including a military standstill and a temporary *modus vivendi* for Danzig were proposed to prevent the occurrence of incidents during the negotiations.

The text of this Note was communicated to Beck in the early hours of August 31st, with a soothing commentary on the German Note of the 29th : Germany's acceptance of direct discussion, and of the proposed international guarantee, and her " assertion that she intends to respect Poland's vital interests ", were described as its " really

important part" (a pretence which had to be kept up unless the virtual breaking off of negotiations was to come from the Allies). Next, the reservations in the British reply safeguarding Polish interests were stressed; and it was urged that "so long as the German Government profess themselves ready to negotiate, no opportunity should be given them for placing the blame of a conflict on Poland". Lastly, the determination of the British Government to fulfil their obligations to Poland was reiterated. Beck, when given the Note by Kennard, seemed "greatly relieved to know that His Majesty's Government had not in any way committed themselves as regards the demands put forward by the German Government", promised to do everything to facilitate their efforts, and to give the considered reply of his Government by midday.

Henderson had arranged to see Ribbentrop on August 30th at 11.30 P.M., but as the text of the British reply reached him "shortly before the appointed time" and had to be decoded, they met "at exactly midnight". There are two communications from Henderson about the interview — the first was received by the Foreign Office at 2.45 A.M., the second only at 9.30 A.M.; next, there is Schmidt's minute in the German White Book; and there are the more graphic narratives given by Henderson in his *Final Report* and *Failure of a Mission*, and by Schmidt at the Nuremberg Trial. Schmidt's minute supplies a canvas for the other accounts; it is methodical, in the main accurate, its bias is easily discounted, and the brutality in which the Germans take pride appears undisguised. Henderson, having presented the British Note, said he was instructed to deal orally with two further points. The first concerned the treatment of the German minority in Poland who, on their side, must refrain from provocation and sabotage. Ribbentrop brusquely replied that he knew only of provocation and sabotage by the Poles, and anyhow refused to discuss the subject with the British

Government. Next, Henderson declared that the British Government could not recommend to the Polish to send a plenipotentiary as demanded by the Germans, but suggested that direct discussions should be started in the normal diplomatic way, by the German proposals being given to the Polish Ambassador ; if these offered a reasonable basis for a settlement, His Majesty's Government would exert influence at Warsaw in their favour. He enquired after these proposals. Ribbentrop replied that so far " the only result " of British mediation was a general mobilisation by Poland ; and that the German Government had waited for the Polish plenipotentiary the whole day. Their demand had not been an ultimatum, as Henderson had " erroneously assumed ", but a " practical suggestion ". Still, no news having been received from Poland by midnight, there was no longer any question of German proposals (*Die Frage eines eventuellen Vorschlags sei daher nicht länger aktuell*). But to show what Germany had intended to offer if a Polish emissary had come, Ribbentrop read out those proposals, " and explained them in detail ". Henderson replied that their withdrawal confirmed his description of the demand for an emissary as an ultimatum. Ribbentrop " energetically repudiated " that interpretation,[1] and repeated the Führer's argument about two armies facing each other, etc. Henderson suggested that Ribbentrop should summon the Polish Ambassador and give him the German proposals ; Ribbentrop, for his own part, refused to do so but said he would report the matter for the Führer's decision.

Henderson's first report on the interview in the Blue Book deals with the representations concerning treatment of the German minority which had been made to Poland the previous afternoon. " Herr von Ribbentrop replied that His Majesty's Government's advice had had

[1] According to Henderson, Ribbentrop called it a " figment " of his imagination.

cursed (*verflucht*) little effect. I mildly retorted that I was surprised to hear such language from a Minister for Foreign Affairs." And for nearly seven hours this was apparently all the information London had about the interview. According to Schmidt, Ribbentrop said: "You can see, therefore, Sir Nevile Henderson, that the situation is damned[1] serious". "When Sir Nevile Henderson heard these words . . . he got up, half raised himself from his seat, and with a sort of warning finger, he pointed at the Foreign Minister and said: 'You have just said "damned". This is not the language of a statesman in so serious a situation.'"

Only in the second report did Henderson deal with the question of direct negotiations between Germany and Poland, and with the German conditions for a settlement. Ribbentrop, he writes, produced "a lengthy document which he read out in German aloud at top speed. Imagining that he would eventually hand it to me I did not attempt to follow too closely the sixteen or more articles which it contained." But when asked for the text, Ribbentrop refused to give it: "it was now too late as the Polish representative had not arrived in Berlin by midnight". (None the less, Henderson produced a detailed and accurate account of the document.) To Henderson's suggestion that Ribbentrop should give the Note to Lipski, he replied "in the most violent terms . . . that he would never ask the Ambassador to visit him", but "hinted that if the Polish Ambassador asked him for an interview, it might be different".

"Herr von Ribbentrop's whole demeanour during an unpleasant interview", writes Henderson, "was aping Herr Hitler at his worst." His attitude "that evening was . . . one of intense hostility, which increased in violence

[1] The difference seems merely a matter of translation — the conversation was in German and the expression used by Ribbentrop was more probably *verflucht* than *verdammt*.

as I made each communication in turn. He kept jumping to his feet in a state of great excitement, folding his arms across his chest, and asking if I had anything more to say." The proposals he "gabbled through . . . as fast as he could, in a tone of the utmost scorn and annoyance". Henderson says in his wire that he asked for the text, but in his book: "I . . . asked him to let me read it for myself".

Schmidt's evidence at Nuremberg bears out Henderson's account. The atmosphere of the interview was "electric". "I never before, and only once after, saw the Foreign Minister as nervous [1] as he was during that conference." When Ribbentrop said "No, I cannot give you the document",[2] Schmidt felt "rather surprised". "I looked at Henderson, since I expected . . . him to ask me to translate the document. . . . I would have done so slowly. . . . But even upon my inviting glance, Henderson did not react." "Ambassador Henderson's knowledge of German was fairly good, but not absolutely perfect, so that it could occur that in moments of excitement he did not quite understand certain matters . . . but . . . he used to address Ribbentrop in German and preferred that language." Hardly a wise procedure.

Henderson's choice of subject for his first report seems peculiar, and so does the time-lag before despatching the second;[3] nor did he inform Coulondre of the interview till the next morning; and lastly, there is the contradiction

[1] He obviously said in German, *nervös*, which means "excited" or "irritable", and not "nervous".

[2] At Nuremberg, on March 29th, 1946, Ribbentrop said: "The Führer had specifically forbidden me to let these proposals out of my hands. He told me I could only communicate . . . their substance to the British Ambassador."

[3] The time-lag between the despatch of Henderson's two reports during the night of August 30th-31st, was not nearly as great as between their reaching the Foreign Office: for the first, received at 2.45 A.M., was telephoned, while the second, received at 9.30 A.M., had been sent by wire at 5.15 A.M. Even so, there was an interval of two and a half hours.

between his professed inability to take in Ribbentrop's gabble, which he did not "attempt to follow too closely", and the unusually accurate account he gives of the document. Henderson at first may have been truly at a loss to reproduce what he had heard, and unable to communicate it to the Foreign Office or to Coulondre. But in the early hours of the morning, the Note was read out by Dahlerus from Göring's headquarters to Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Counsellor to the British Embassy,[1] and it is perhaps the information thus obtained that Henderson incorporated in his second report. At 2 A.M. Henderson telephoned to Lipski [2] and asked him to come across ; he writes in his *Final Report* :

> I . . . gave him a brief [3] and studiously moderate account of my conversation with Herr von Ribbentrop, mentioned the cession of Danzig and the plebiscite in the Corridor as the two main points in the German proposals, stated that so far as I could gather they were not on the whole too unreasonable, and suggested to him that he might recommend to his Government that they should propose at once a meeting between Field-Marshals Smigly-Rydz and Göring.

" The British Ambassador ", writes Lipski, " could not give me any details ", but " advised the establishment of direct Polish-German contact ". In fact, he urged Lipski immediately to apply to Ribbentrop for the document. Lipski said he had to refer the matter to his Government ; and as the usual communications with Warsaw were uncertain, he also sent at dawn the Counsellor of his

[1] For a detailed account, see below, pages 426-7. Dahlerus unfortunately does not give the exact hour of his talk with Forbes, but judging by his account it must have been before 2 A.M., which is puzzling : for Henderson in his talk with Lipski never mentioned it, and possibly had not received it yet ; Lipski stayed with him till 3 A.M.

[2] Coulondre, in his report the next day, says Lipski was " waked up " by Henderson's call, which is not accurate.

[3] In the *Failure of a Mission* the word " objective " is substituted for " brief ".

Embassy, Prince Stefan Lubomirski, to Warsaw — he went by a fast car to Poznań and from there by aeroplane.

At 8 A.M. (August 31st) Henderson was again on the telephone to Lipski asking him to come across once more. Lipski could not leave his Embassy in such a crisis, and was hardly desirous of seeing Henderson; he sent his First Secretary.[1] A procession of visitors called at the Polish Embassy that morning, headed by the Papal Nuncio, and including the French and Italian Ambassadors, the Hungarian, Rumanian, and Belgian Ministers, all of them concerned to see peace preserved, even if it was to cost Poland a serious sacrifice. At 9.5 Henderson called Coulondre to the telephone. "I know from a reliable source",[2] he said, "that if the Polish Government

[1] See below, page 428.

[2] A similar warning reached the Italian Foreign Office. Ciano writes in his *Diaries* under date of August 31st: "Attolico telegraphs at nine . . . that the situation is desperate and that unless something new comes up there will be war in a few hours". Henderson's source was U. von Hassell, who as German Minister to Yugoslavia, 1930–1932, coincided there with Henderson. Hassell writes in his diary (*op. cit.* pages 81-5) that on August 31st, 7.25 A.M., he was rung up by Weizsäcker and asked to call at 8.40; he was then told about Hitler's "very accommodating proposal" and Ribbentrop's unfortunate interview with Henderson, after which Hitler had declared that his opponents having put themselves blatantly (*eklatant*) in the wrong, things could "start this afternoon" (*es könne also heute nachmittag losgehen*). According to Weizsäcker, war could now be avoided only by Henderson prevailing on the Poles to send immediately a plenipotentiary or at least to make Lipski announce to Ribbentrop before noon that one was coming — could not Hassell "privately" influence Henderson in that sense, and also warn Göring of the danger? Hassell went to Henderson whose complaint was about German methods; and about 9.30 to Frau Olga Riegele, Göring's sister. From there he had a telephonic talk with Göring who protested that the German proposals were not as yet "out of date" (*überholt*); but the Polish plenipotentiary must come immediately. Hassell went again to Henderson (who "was very much interested" in what Göring had said), and to Weizsäcker. An hour later, Weizsäcker summoned him once more, and said that Henderson had asked him for the text of the German proposals (cf. Henderson's *Final Report*, page 20, para. 62) "in order to have something in hand for the Poles". Officially Weizsäcker was forbidden to give it to him — could not Hassell do so? (Weizsäcker obviously did not know that unofficially the text had already reached Henderson through Dahlerus, and what Henderson apparently now tried

does not agree by noon to send a plenipotentiary, the German Government will consider that Poland does not mean any longer to seek a peaceful settlement and will give the German troops the order to attack." Coulondre went to the British Embassy, and learnt what had happened during the night ; hence to Lipski, and having heard his story, urged that Poland, " while careful not to seem to cede to a German ultimatum, should not expose herself to the reproach of having tried to avoid direct discussion ". After that Coulondre sent a telephonic communication to Paris, of which the sense, hedged in by safeguards and reservations, was that the Polish Government should send plenipotentiary powers to Lipski, and that he should not limit himself to receiving the German demands but present a memorandum stating the Polish view.[1]

Meantime at 10 A.M., Dahlerus arrived at the British Embassy with the full text of the " gabbled Note ",[2] which at this point can be taken to enter the story. Its proposals were as follows :

1. " The Free City of Danzig shall return to the Reich . . ."
2. In " the so-called Corridor ", of which the boundaries were named, there shall be a plebiscite.
3. Entitled to vote in it are all domiciled there on

to obtain was its official communication.) " But at that moment ", writes Hassell, " Ribbentrop telephoned, and immediately after it a second time, saying that the proposals must not be given to Henderson ", the Poles having been told " that they would be given the proposals *if* a plenipotentiary was sent ". He also said that it would be decided " in the next half hour whether to publish the proposals ". Weizsäcker therefore dropped the idea of sending the document through Hassell. It was clear that Hitler and Ribbentrop wanted war. Hassell went once more to Henderson to tell him " that everything depended on Lipski presenting himself *immediately* — not to ask questions, but to declare his readiness to negotiate ".

[1] The despatch from Coulondre, which surveys most of the day of August 31st and repeats his telephonic message, was sent by courier some time after 7.45 P.M., and did not reach the Quai d'Orsay till September 1st, 10 P.M.

[2] See below, page 428.

January 1st, 1918, or born there before that date. The Polish forces and authorities are to leave the territory, which is to be placed under an international Commission " on which shall be represented the four Great Powers—Italy, the Soviet Union, France, and England ".[1]

4. Gdynia to be excluded from the plebiscite territory.

5. The plebiscite " shall not take place before the expiry of twelve months ".

6. During that period free transit across the territory to be secured both for Germany and Poland.

7. The plebiscite to be settled " by simple majority of votes recorded ".

8. Whichever side obtains the territory should concede to the other " an extra-territorial traffic zone ".

9. Should the Corridor return to the German Reich, the Reich reserves its right to proceed to an exchange of population with Poland.

10. Reciprocal rights to be granted at Danzig and Gdynia.

11. Both towns to have an exclusively mercantile character (demilitarisation).

12. Similarly the peninsula of Hela to be demilitarised, to whichever side it goes.

13. Complaints concerning treatment of minorities to be laid before an international committee of enquiry. Minorities to be compensated for any economic damage they may have suffered since 1918, by way of expropriations, etc.[2]

14. Minorities remaining on either side to have the free development of their *Volkstum* guaranteed, and not to be called up for military service.

15. If this basis is agreed upon, Germany and Poland to demobilise their armed forces.

16. The rapid execution of this arrangement to

[1] The sequence is neither traditional nor alphabetical, but seems to express German preferences at that time.

[2] This demand contravened the freely negotiated German-Polish Liquidation Agreement of October 31st, 1929, registered at The Hague in January 1930.

be secured by agreement between Germany and Poland.

What painstaking care, what solicitude about details ! And all this Hitler's own work, accomplished in a day and wiped out at its close. " The German Government will immediately draw up proposals . . . ", stated the Note given to Henderson on August 29th, at 7.15 P.M. ; " the Führer is at work on a magnanimous offer to Poland ", intimated Göring to Dahlerus about midnight ; and Ribbentrop at Nuremberg still asserted that the Note was " dictated personally " by Hitler. It does not require much acquaintance with Hitler's works to realise that he would have been utterly incapable of drawing up, or even sketching, such a Note (obviously the product of protracted labours by first-rate experts such as Weizsäcker and Gaus), nor much acumen to guess that the story was so assiduously propagated because untrue : it was part of a comedy performed for the benefit of the Western Powers. Ten days before the Note was put to use, Lipski had learnt from a reliable source that the German Government was preparing a document of that character : conciliatory in appearance and unacceptable in substance, it was to be employed at a suitable moment to produce disunion between the Western Powers and Poland.[1] Even in the *Failure of a Mission*, Henderson still writes about these proposals : " In themselves and taken at their face value, they were not unreasonable, and might well have served as a basis for negotiation ".[2]

[1] Such importance did Lipski attach to this information that he immediately transmitted it to Warsaw in his most secret cypher.

[2] Ribbentrop made great play at Nuremberg with Henderson's description of these terms as " not unreasonable ". Thus on March 30th, 1946, he said : " England knew that the proposals made by Germany were reasonable, for we know that England was in possession of those proposals on the night of the 30th to the 31st. Ambassador Henderson himself declared those proposals reasonable." Incidentally the first sentence implicitly admits that England, to be " in possession of those proposals ", had to obtain them from a source other than Ribbentrop's *exposé* to Henderson.

Fortunately neither the British Government nor the Foreign Office shared this view. If the Western Powers had agreed to the German proposals but Poland had refused, a fatal cleavage would have opened between them. But if Poland had agreed to withdraw from territory in which 90 per cent of the population was Polish, the morale of the nation and Army would have been broken. And if the Western Powers had accepted joint control of that territory with Germany's ally, Italy, and with Russia who had her own claims against Poland (and an agreement with Germany that these claims should receive consideration if territorial changes were made in Poland), they would have found themselves as helpless as they were after having sold the pass at Munich. This would have been the beginning of a hopeless and final *dégringolade*.

When Göring, in the early hours of August 31st, let Dahlerus read out to Forbes over the telephone the cancelled German Note, he did so with apparently unfeigned hesitation. But by 8 A.M. his attitude had changed : he made Dahlerus take down the terms of the Note in case Forbes had not got them right, see to it that they reached the British Government without delay, etc. In short, proposals which had been officially withheld were being unofficially conveyed, and the Note was once more made into a " magnanimous offer " which, if eagerly pursued, might still be secured through Göring's intercession. Henderson, assured by Dahlerus that " Göring was doing all that was in his power to see negotiations started ", did not care to enquire too closely into their character, but exerted himself to break down what in his eyes was an irresponsible, obstructionist attitude on the part of the Poles. He made Dahlerus carry his transcript to Lipski, and sent Forbes with him. They came to the Polish Embassy at 11 A.M. : and Dahlerus, in the presence of Forbes, pressed Lipski to apply immediately to Göring

for the German proposals.[1] Lipski refused and, when alone with Forbes, protested against a stranger being brought to him with proposals which infringed Poland's territorial integrity and sovereignty, spoke of the disastrous effect which negotiations on such a basis might have on Polish morale, and urged the need of preserving a firm united front between the Allies — but, he said, if abandoned, Poland would fight and die alone.

To bring about the opening of direct negotiations between Germany and Poland was the main endeavour of Allied diplomacy on August 31st. Halifax wired to Kennard at noon that he should, in conjunction with his French colleague, urge the Polish Government to make it known to the German Government, " preferably direct, but if not, through us, that they have been made aware of our last reply to the German Government and that they confirm their acceptance of the principle of direct discussions ". At the same hour Beck gave Kennard a written reply to the *démarche* made shortly after midnight. The Polish Government confirmed their readiness to enter into direct negotiations with the Germans and, provided there was reciprocity, to take measures for avoiding frontier incidents ; they considered it essential that " a simple provisional *modus vivendi* " should be established in Danzig (where conditions were becoming intolerable) ; enquired once more about the meaning of the proposed " international guarantee " for a Polish-German settlement, and reserved their attitude in that matter until full explanations were received ; they concluded by expressing the hope that in the negotiations Poland could count on " the good offices of His Majesty's Government ". Beck, asked by Kennard what steps he proposed to take in order to establish contact with the German Government, replied that he would now instruct Lipski to seek an interview either with Ribbentrop or with Weizsäcker " in order to

[1] See below, pages 428-30.

say that Poland had accepted the British proposals". To a further question what attitude Lipski would adopt if presented with the German proposals, Beck replied that he "would not be authorised to accept such a document"— contact should first be made, and "then details should be discussed as to where, with whom, and on what basis negotiations should be commenced". Beck added that if invited to Berlin, he would not go to be treated like Hacha.[1]

The instructions sent to Lipski at 12.40 P.M. did not quite tally with the forecast which Beck had just given to Kennard: Lipski was not instructed to say that the Polish Government "accepted the British proposals", but that it was "favourably considering them", and would give their formal reply to the British Government "in the next few hours". And as was indicated by Beck, Lipski was told not to enter into "any concrete negotiations", nor receive or discuss any proposals, but if such were presented to transmit them to Warsaw and await further instructions — a wise precaution against a processing in the Schuschnigg-Hacha style by the Germans who always had their mouth full of the so-called Versailles *Diktat*, but considered anything legitimate when done by themselves.[2] Beck's despatch was intercepted[3] and read

[1] The text of Beck's reply did not reach the Foreign Office till 6.30 P.M., and Kennard's account of the conversation not till 7.15 P.M., and even then, according to Corbin, the end of Kennard's despatch "had to be sent by telephone". Meantime, Noël's telephonic report on Beck's conversation with Kennard reached the Quai d'Orsay at 1.50 P.M., and another one, sent after receipt of the text of the Polish reply, at 3.10.

[2] Ribbentrop, even at Nuremberg, denied undue pressure having been put on Schuschnigg or Hacha. On March 29th, 1946, he said in the morning: "During the talk which I had with Schuschnigg . . . I felt that Schuschnigg had received a very strong impression from Hitler and the Führer's personality". And the same day in the afternoon: "I believe Hacha got a strong impression of the Führer and of the things which Hitler told him. . . ."

[3] It was sent by wireless. See article by Stefan Lubomirski, "The Last Mission from Berlin", in the *Wiadomości Polskie* of September 5th, 1943.

at the German Foreign Office about the same time as it reached Lipski. Dahlerus was with Göring when, shortly after 1 P.M., a messenger from the Wilhelmstrasse brought him the decoded and translated text of Lipski's instructions.[1] Göring flew into a rage and accused the Poles of sabotaging all possibility of a peaceful settlement; and so convinced was he of the incriminating character of the Polish wire that in his own hand he made a copy of it (in which the word "favourably" before "considering" is omitted) and asked Dahlerus to give it to Henderson.

At 1.45 P.M. Halifax transmitted to Kennard Henderson's summary of the gabbled Note: he should urge the Polish Government to instruct Lipski "to say to the German Government that, if the latter had any proposals, he is ready to transmit them to his Government so that they may at once consider them and make suggestions for early discussions". It seems doubtful whether this despatch reached Kennard in time to be acted upon; but the Poles would have anyhow refused, as such an approach would have offered the Germans too much and too little. It would have meant a great deal if the Poles, apprised of the contents of the withheld Note, had invited German proposals, and yet even this would have fallen short of the mode of negotiating insisted upon by the Germans; it would merely have made them think that strong pressure of a "Munich" character was being exerted on the Poles.

Immediately on receipt of the instructions, at 1 P.M., Lipski applied for an interview with Ribbentrop. At 3 P.M. he was rung up by Weizsäcker who, though he knew Lipski's instructions, enquired whether he was coming as a plenipotentiary. Lipski replied "that he was asking

[1] The speed with which the wire reached Göring is remarkable, as in spite of Poland's more easterly position, there was no difference between the clocks: Warsaw kept Central European Time.

for the interview in his capacity of Ambassador to remit a communication from his Government ". Weizsäcker said that he would pass on the reply to Ribbentrop. It was not till 6.15 P.M. that Lipski was invited to call at once: he saw Ribbentrop at 6.30, in presence of Schmidt, and handed to him the communication in the prescribed terms (including the promise of a formal reply to the British Government within " the next few hours ", which had since elapsed); he said he had been waiting " to present this declaration since 1 P.M." Ribbentrop asked once more whether he came as a plenipotentiary, and received the previous answer. He next asked whether Lipski was acquainted with the latest Anglo-German conversations, and was told that about these Lipski had only " indirect information ". Ribbentrop concluded the conversation by saying that he had thought Lipski would come as a plenipotentiary.

When Göring had recovered from the shock which Lipski's intercepted instructions had given him, Dahlerus took him out for lunch at the Esplanade, and gorged him with excellent food and drink (the cognac was so good that Göring ordered two bottles to be placed in his car, apparently to be paid for by Dahlerus). In the course of the luncheon Dahlerus suggested that Göring should invite Henderson for a talk. Göring replied that he could not do so without Hitler's permission; but involved negotiations with both sides resulted in his asking Henderson, Forbes, and Dahlerus to tea at his house, for 5 P.M. Perhaps the best, and certainly the shortest, description of the party was given by Forbes in reply to a questionnaire sent to him at the request of Göring's counsel:

> The atmosphere was negative and desperate though friendly. . . . Göring's statement to the British Ambassador was: If the Poles should not give in, Germany would crush them like lice, and if

Britain should decide to declare war, he would regret it greatly, but it would be most imprudent of Britain.

Henderson writes in his *Final Report* :

> Inasmuch as I had heard that the text of the proposals which Herr von Ribbentrop had refused to give me was to be announced that evening, my first remark was to point out to the Field-Marshal that this procedure would probably and finally wreck the last prospect of peace and to beg him to do his utmost to prevent their publication. Field-Marshal Göring's reply was that he could not intervene, and that the German Government felt obliged to broadcast their proposals to the world in order to prove their " good faith ".[1]
>
> Instead he talked for the best part of two hours of the iniquities of the Poles and about Herr Hitler's and his own desire for friendship with England. . . . It was a conversation which led nowhere and I could not help feeling that his remarks, which from his point of view were perfectly genuine but which I had heard often before, were chiefly for the edification of his listeners. . . .
>
> . . . My general impression of this talk . . . was . . . that it constituted a final but forlorn effort on his part to detach Britain from the Poles. Nevertheless the Field-Marshal seemed sincere when, having been called to the telephone, he returned to tell us that M. Lipski was on his way to see Herr von Ribbentrop. He seemed to hope that, provided contact was only established, war might after all prove unnecessary.

[1] It was presumably during this tea-party that Göring himself gave the withheld Note to Henderson. The following question and answer appear in the questionnaire submitted by Göring's counsel to Lord Halifax :

> *Q.* Did your Ambassador Henderson tell you that Göring,— after the official discussion between Henderson and Ribbentrop in August 1939, at which Ribbentrop had only read the German demands on Poland to the Ambassador Henderson, but had not handed them to him,— invited him and disclosed to him, the Ambassador Henderson, in private the contents of the memorandum which had been read, as Göring was not sure whether Henderson comprehended the terms read to him by Ribbentrop ?
>
> *A.* Yes.

Dahlerus tells a rather different story. According to him Göring pulled out Lipski's intercepted instructions as proof that the Poles were sabotaging an understanding, and added that Lipski was shortly to meet Ribbentrop and that " it will be seen whether the meeting between them will take the course prescribed by Lipski's instructions ". Moreover, Göring, having during the first half-hour tried on his guests all the charm he could master, proposed negotiations between Great Britain and Germany in which Britain was to act on behalf of Poland. Henderson replied that he would report the suggestion to his Government, but expressed no opinion about its feasibility. They parted a few mintues before 7 P.M.

On returning from the meeting with Göring, Henderson received a message from Weizsäcker (whom in the morning he had asked in vain for the text of the withheld Note) requesting Henderson to call upon him at 9.15 P.M. But with typical courtesy the document which was to be given to Henderson at 9.15, to Coulondre at 9.30, and to the American Chargé d'Affaires at 9.45, was broadcast at 9. It started with a most disingenuous account of the negotiations of the last three days : on August 28th, the British Government had offered " their mediation towards direct negotiations between Germany and Poland " ; the German Government, though sceptical, declared themselves ready " to accept the British mediation or suggestion ", but, to avoid a catastrophe, urged immediate action — Poland was to appoint by the evening of August 30th a personage " empowered not only to discuss but to conduct and conclude negotiations ". " The first answer " to Germany's " readiness for an understanding was the news of the Polish mobilisation ", and only at midnight of August 30th-31st " did they receive a somewhat general assurance of British readiness to help towards the commencement of negotiations ". Although the British Government themselves pleaded for direct negotiations

between Germany and Poland, Ribbentrop on that occasion gave Henderson " precise information as to the text of the German proposals " ; and the German Government still awaited nomination of a Polish plenipotentiary, even if *ex post* (*nachträglich*).[1] But they could not let themselves be put off indefinitely by the Poles " with empty subterfuges and meaningless declarations ". Meantime a *démarche* by the Polish Ambassador has shown that " he was not authorised to enter into any discussion, still less to negotiate " (*oder gar zu verhandeln*).[2] The German proposals have therefore been " to all intents and purposes rejected ", although they " were more than loyal, fair, and practicable " ; it is now " timely to inform the public " about them. The situation may at any moment produce " an explosion on the part of the military forces " facing each other. And as this situation has been produced by " (1) the impossible delineation of frontiers, as fixed by the Versailles dictate ; (2) the impossible treatment of the minority in the ceded territories ", the German Government made the following proposals—here the sixteen points of the withheld Note were reproduced.

The final decision " for opening hostilities against Poland " had meantime been registered in Berlin on August 31st, at 12.40 P.M.,[3] with the time fixed for September 1st, 4.45 A.M.[4]

[1] The translation of the word in the Blue Book " at any rate retroactively " is hardly correct.

[2] The translation of the phrase in the Blue Book " or even to negotiate " is certainly incorrect.

[3] According to an entry in the German Naval Register, presented at the Nuremberg Trial as document C-170, U.S.A. 136. Henderson's statement in his *Final Report* that the invasion was ordered " that night ", and his still more specific assertion in the *Failure of a Mission* that it was ordered " immediately after Lipski's meeting with Ribbentrop ", would seem to be based on the German broadcast of August 31st, 9 P.M. But Henderson himself realised that the broadcast would " wreck the last prospect of peace ", and he knew already at 5 that it was forthcoming.

[4] Fifteen minutes later than on August 26th, owing to the difference in the hour of sunrise.

When Henderson was given by Weizsäcker at 9.15 the document which had already been broadcast, he asked " what was the point now of making these communications ". Weizsäcker replied that " he was merely carrying out his instructions ". Henderson inferred that Hitler " had taken his final decision ", and the same night, according to his *Final Report*, wired to Halifax that it would be quite useless " to make any further suggestions since they would now be outstripped by events, and that the only course remaining to us was to show our inflexible determination to resist force by force ".

But some wires, obviously drafted before the 9 P.M. German broadcast but despatched after the event, were yet to follow. At 11 P.M., a wire was sent to Henderson by the Foreign Office asking him to inform the German Government " that we understand that the Polish Government are taking steps to establish contact with them through the Polish Ambassador in Berlin ", and further to enquire " whether they agree to the necessity for securing an immediate provisional *modus vivendi* as regards Danzig ". And Henderson reports on September 1st that " a written communication was made to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs early this morning in the sense of paragraph 2 [about Danzig] of your telegram of 31st August ".[1]

At 12.50 A.M. of September 1st, another wire was sent to Kennard : Halifax expressed his pleasure at Lipski having been " instructed to establish contact with the German Government " ; agreed " as to the undesirability of a visit by M. Beck to Berlin " ; and argued that " the Polish Government should feel no difficulty about

[1] Henderson in his *Final Report* (paragraph 58, page 18) states that he transmitted a message to the German Government on August 31st, " about the middle of the day ", " notifying them that the Polish Government were taking steps to establish contact with them through the Polish Ambassador at Berlin, and asking them to agree to an immediate *modus vivendi* at Danzig," and that to this communication he " never received any reply ". But clearly he could not have transmitted at noon a message which was despatched from London eleven hours later.

authorising the Polish Ambassador to accept a document from the German Government" (there was obviously some misunderstanding about the use of the word "receive", as, in spite of what Beck had said to Kennard, the secret instructions of August 31st, 12.40 P.M., authorised Lipski to receive proposals for transmission to his Government). It was further explained that by "international guarantee" His Majesty's Government had meant "a guarantee of the full and proper observance of any settlement reached". Lastly, Kennard was informed about the wire to Henderson. He was asked to "speak to M. Beck immediately in the above sense". The wire was decyphered in the Warsaw Embassy at 4 A.M., three-quarters of an hour before the German invasion of Poland started.

CHAPTER IX

WAR

WHEN on September 1st, at 10 A.M., the Polish Ambassador, Count Raczyński, called on Lord Halifax to communicate the news he had received about the German invasion of Poland, he had little to add " except that it was a plain case as provided for by the treaty ". Halifax replied he had no doubt that, on the facts as stated by Raczyński, His Majesty's Government would take the same view. The German Chargé d'Affaires, Dr. Kordt, who came by invitation at 10.50, had " no information whatsoever ", but was warned by Halifax of the very serious view which the British Government took of the situation.

At 4.45 P.M., after a meeting of the full Cabinet, Halifax advised Henderson that the " immediately following telegram " would contain the text of a communication which, in conjunction with his French colleague, he would have to make at once to the German Government. He was to ask for an immediate reply; if asked, he was to explain " that the present communication is in the nature of a warning and is not to be considered as an ultimatum "; but for his own information it was added that, if the German reply was unsatisfactory, " the next stage will be either an ultimatum with time limit or an immediate declaration of war ". The communication itself, despatched at 5.45 P.M., declared that the German invasion of Poland had " created conditions . . . which call for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance ", and that unless the German Government suspend " all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from

Polish territory, His Majesty's Government . . . will without hesitation fulfil their obligations to Poland ".

Coulondre was instructed from Paris to associate himself with Henderson's *démarche*. They asked to be received together, but Ribbentrop preferred to see them separately, Henderson at 9.30 and Coulondre at 10 P.M. He repeated to each the same story that Poland had mobilised first, and had invaded German territory. The talks were courteous but completely meaningless. The same night at 6.5 Chamberlain addressed Parliament. He said that the time had come when action rather than speech was required. "No man can say that the Government could have done more to try to keep open the way for an honourable and equitable settlement of the dispute between Germany and Poland. Nor have we neglected any means of making it crystal clear to the German Government that if they insisted on using force . . . we were resolved to oppose them by force." The Nazi methods, "which have now become familiar in their sickening technique, . . . must come to an end". He recounted the story of the latest negotiations,[1] read out the text of the Note which Henderson and Coulondre were to hand to the German Government, and added that in case of an unfavourable reply "His Majesty's Ambassador is instructed to ask for his passports". Towards the end of his speech, he expressed satisfaction "that throughout these last days of crisis Signor Mussolini also has been doing his best to reach a solution".

[1] Speaking of the German Note of August 30th, which Ribbentrop had refused to give to Henderson, Chamberlain said : "And so, Sir, we never got a copy of those proposals, and the first time we heard them — *we* heard them — was on the broadcast last night". The statement was not quite accurate : Henderson had received the text of the Note through Dahlerus on August 31st at 10 A.M., and direct from Göring between 5 and 7 P.M. On the other hand, Dahlerus's communication was neither official nor authoritative, while news of the confirmation by Göring could hardly have reached London before the broadcast at 9 P.M. ; still, the sentence should have been more carefully worded.

Italian Attempt at Mediation

Mussolini dreaded the idea of a war in which the wretched condition of the Italian armed forces would compel him to remain neutral — " not being able to wage war," writes Ciano, " he makes all the necessary preparations so that in case of a peaceful solution he may be able to say that he would have waged it ". But a peaceful solution was necessary to cover up the truth. On August 31st, with Mussolini's consent, Ciano telephoned to Halifax " that the Duce can intervene with Hitler only if he brings a fat prize : Danzig ". Halifax replied shortly afterwards that the proposal was unacceptable. The same suggestion was made that morning by Ciano to François-Poncet, French Ambassador in Rome, in a conversation not recorded in the Yellow Book but which is mentioned both in Zay's *Carnets* and in Ciano's *Diaries*. According to Zay, Bonnet received at 12.15 P.M. a telephonic report from François-Poncet that he had seen Ciano who was " very moved ", spoke of the grave news he had from Attolico, and said that if Mussolini was to intervene, " a new fact would be required, for instance Poland's agreement to a cession of Danzig ".[1] But Ciano writes :

> I receive François-Poncet. The conversation is without purpose and, therefore, vague and indefinite. The wish for peace is repeated on both sides. . . . He is romantic, sad, and nostalgic. I must add, sincere.

After this interview Ciano saw the Duce and the idea of a conference emerged. François-Poncet was asked to call once more, which he did at 12.35 P.M., and Ciano made to him the following verbal communication :

> M. Mussolini offers, if France and Great Britain accept, to invite Germany to a conference to meet on September 5th, with a view to examining the

[1] Only the grave news from Attolico (" the situation has attained the extremest point of gravity ") and the need of a speedy reply from Poland are mentioned in Bonnet's record of François-Poncet's telephonic report.

clauses of the Treaty of Versailles which are the cause of the present troubles. An invitation would be addressed to Germany only after France and Great Britain had given their assent.

François-Poncet adds that the same communication was made to the British Ambassador, and that Ciano pressed for a reply, " for fear that in the meantime hostilities may start ".[1] According to Ciano, François-Poncet welcomed the proposal " with satisfaction but with some scepticism ", Percy Loraine " with enthusiasm ".[2] Telephonic exchanges followed between London and Paris, and a meeting of the French Cabinet was called for 6 P.M. ; it lasted till after 8.30 P.M.[3] Bonnet favoured acceptance of the Italian offer provided Poland was invited and the conference was not restricted to the Polish-German conflict, but had for its object to regulate the whole complex of problems involved in the restoration of a stable peace. There was a sharp encounter between Daladier and Bonnet, and opinion in the Cabinet was divided ; it was finally decided, on Daladier's suggestion, to await the result of the direct negotiations of which the principle had been accepted by both Germany and Poland ; and only should these fail, a conference of the character proposed by Bonnet was to be considered. By the next morning, the German invasion of Poland had started ; the Cabinet met at 10.30 A.M., and half an hour later a communication was received from Corbin giving in broad

[1] François-Poncet's despatch is marked : " Received by telephone at 1.05 P.M.", and is headed by him " Confirmation of a message telephoned to M. Georges Bonnet at 12.50 P.M. on August 31st ". Bonnet dealt personally with these negotiations, and, according to Pertinax (*Les Fossoyeurs*, vol. ii. p. 104), himself added to the Yellow Book the records of his telephone conversations with London, Rome, and Warsaw on August 31st and September 1st and 2nd.

[2] The statement about Sir Percy Loraine cannot be accepted on Ciano's uncorroborated evidence.

[3] For the Cabinet meeting see Noël, *op. cit.* page 476 ; *Les Carnets secrets de Jean Zay* (1942), pages 80-82 ; Anatole de Monzie, *Ci-Devant* (1942), pages 146-7 ; Philippe Henriot, *Comment Mourut la Paix* (1941), pages 36-9.

outline the British reply to Italy, but adding that " the British Government left it to the French Government to reply as they thought fit." At 11.45 Bonnet, leaving the meeting, telephoned to François-Poncet a message for Ciano in which he effusively welcomed the Italian suggestion of a conference, but added that in the opinion of the French Government it could not deal with problems concerning Powers not represented at it, nor should it be restricted to seeking " partial and provisional solutions for limited and immediate problems ", but much rather aim at a " general appeasement ". François-Poncet saw Ciano at 12.45 P.M. " The attitude of the French Government was obviously pleasing to Count Ciano ", reported the Ambassador ; " he said he was gratified and he thanked me for it " ; [1] but he did not know " whether the Italian proposal could still serve a useful purpose ". At 2.45 P.M. Ciano enquired of François-Poncet whether he thought Poland would still agree to a conference — if so, the Italian Government might make a last attempt with Hitler. François-Poncet replied about 5 P.M. that Poland's attitude was uncertain " but that none the less it would be worth while making the attempt suggested by M. Mussolini ". " The British are more sceptical ", remarks Ciano in his *Diaries*. " But more sceptical still are the Italians, who know how matters stand and know about the rabid determination of the Germans to fight." At 9 P.M. Ciano asked François-Poncet to call once more and told him that " the Duce was very hesitant, fearing lest Hitler, with military operations in full swing, should accuse him of trying to deprive him of victory " ; still, Mussolini did not abandon the idea and would seek a favourable opportunity for intervening. Meantime, about 4 P.M. over the telephone, and at 6.25 by telegram, Bonnet had instructed Noël to inform the

[1] From Ciano's *Diaries* it would appear that this satisfaction was largely due to the assurance which the tone of the British and French replies carried, that no action against Italy was intended by the Western Powers.

Poles that the Italian Government had offered " to summon an international conference to be attended by France, Great Britain, Poland, Germany, and Italy ", and that this conference would have to settle " the totality of problems involved in the establishment of a durable peace and not to be limited solely to the present dispute ".[1] At 9.31 P.M. Noël transmitted Beck's reply : " We are in the midst of war (*nous sommes en pleine guerre*) brought on by unprovoked aggression. Now it is not a question of a conference, but of common action which the Allies should undertake with a view to resistance. Besides, nothing has reached me from any side about the Italian proposal." And Noël added : " The atmosphere is no longer one of conciliation ".

" Yielding to French pressure," writes Ciano in his *Diaries* on September 2nd, " we suggest to Berlin the possibilities of a conference " — *à titre d'information.* The communication, presented by Attolico to Weizsäcker, was offered in evidence at the Nuremberg Trial : [2]

> Italy, while of course leaving every decision to the Führer, sends the information that she still has a chance of calling a conference with France, Great Britain, and Poland on the following basis : 1. An Armistice which would leave the armies in their present positions. 2. A conference to be called in two to three days. 3. A solution of the Polish-German controversy which, as things stand to-day, would certainly be favourable to Germany.
>
> This idea, which originated with the Duce, has now its foremost exponent in France.
>
> Danzig is already German, and Germany holds real securities for most of her demands. Moreover, she has obtained " moral satisfaction ". By accepting the plan of a conference, she will achieve all her

[1] Noël, in his book *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne*, page 478, complains that this was the first he heard of the Italian proposal of a conference.

[2] An abbreviated and expurgated version of this communication appears in the German White Book.

aims and yet prevent a war which threatens to become general and of exceedingly long duration.

The Duce does not insist on it, but urges that the above be brought to the immediate attention of von Ribbentrop and the Führer.

At 2 P.M. the British and French Ambassadors saw Ciano by invitation. He informed them of the communication made to Germany ; Hitler had not rejected it off-hand but wanted to know whether the French and British Notes presented the previous night had, or had not, the character of ultimata. " If so, he would reject them categorically. If not, he would ask for time to think them over till to-morrow noon." Next, in the presence of the two Ambassadors, Ciano telephoned to Bonnet and Halifax. Bonnet stated that the Note was not meant as an ultimatum, but as for the delay he would have to refer to the Prime Minister.[1] Halifax gave a similar reply, but added that, in his view, it would not suffice for the armies to stop in their present positions : the occupied territories would have to be evacuated ; Ciano replied that he thought there was little chance of this condition being accepted by the Germans.

In reality Hitler, when asking whether the Notes were to be looked upon as ultimata, knew the answer. For Attolico " at midday on his way to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs " had called on Henderson in order to ask him that very question. " I told his Excellency ", writes Henderson in his *Final Report*, " that I had been authorised to tell the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he had asked me — which he had not done — that it was not an ultimatum but a warning."

At 4 P.M. the two Ambassadors met again at Ciano's, but having waited an hour for the replies from London and Paris, returned to their Embassies — Ciano was to

[1] Ciano writes that, judging from Bonnet's tone and language, his own call had " produced lively satisfaction in Paris ".

inform them as soon as he received the telephonic replies. At 7.20 he told François-Poncet that, after the meeting of the British Cabinet, Halifax had confirmed acceptance of the Italian proposal on condition that the German armies withdrew to their frontier. "Count Ciano", reported François-Poncet, "told me that he did not consider it possible to address such a demand to Germany, and that M. Mussolini was of the same opinion." And as the same demand had been put forward that day by Daladier in his speech in the Chamber of Deputies, Attolico was advised by Ciano that "the Duce did not think he could follow up his suggestion" [1] — or rather, as Ciano puts it in his *Diaries*, "that unless the Germans advise us to the contrary we shall let the conversations lapse". At 9 P.M., Bonnet telephoned to Ciano confirming once more that the French Note of September 1st did not bear the character of an ultimatum, and repeated that the French Government were prepared to wait for the German reply till Sunday, September 3rd, noon. In the night Ciano was awakened because of a message from Guariglia, the Italian Ambassador in Paris: Bonnet was asking whether the Italians could not obtain at least "a symbolic withdrawal of German forces from Poland". "I throw the proposal in the waste-basket without informing the Duce", writes Ciano. But the way in which Bonnet pursued the mirage of an Italian mediation showed in what spirit he was facing the issue: and his last-hour manœuvres have left their mark on those days of fateful decisions.[2]

[1] This wire from François-Poncet, despatched on September 2nd, at 11.10 P.M., reached the Quai d'Orsay on the 3rd, at 3.10 A.M.

[2] De Monzie (*op. cit.* page 157) relates the following story, which seems to give the origin of Bonnet's proposal (it appears under date of September 3rd, which clearly should read September 2nd). There was a meeting of the Cabinet (Zay mentions one on September 2nd, at 7.30 P.M.). "When we were leaving", writes de Monzie, "I pressed Bonnet to disregard the British *non possumus* — to demand the withdrawal of German troops from Poland was an indefensible claim. . . . Could there not be a third solution

GREAT BRITAIN DECLARES WAR

On September 2nd, at 2.30 P.M., Corbin telephoned to Bonnet that the British Government thought Hitler might be deliberately delaying his reply in order to extend his hold on Polish territory, and then make a " magnanimous " peace offer on the lines indicated on August 31st.

> Lord Halifax considers it impossible to let the present situation drag on any longer. This is why already last night he suggested that our representatives in Berlin should without delay inform the German Government that if no satisfactory answer is received within a few hours, our two Governments will be obliged to consider themselves at war with Germany.

He even contemplated an immediate declaration of war. But should Hitler give a temporising reply, the British Government favoured declaring the evacuation of Polish territory by German troops a pre-condition to negotiations. " Lord Halifax would greatly appreciate being informed as soon as possible of your opinion on this matter." No opinion is recorded in the Yellow Book.

Daladier addressed the Chamber of Deputies at 3 P.M. He announced that general mobilisation had been ordered the previous day. " The Government has thus placed France in a position to act in accordance with her vital interests and with our honour." Having reviewed the events which led up to the invasion of Poland, he declared that if the German troops were withdrawn to the frontier and a free negotiation was started, the French Government would spare no effort to secure its success. " But

intermediary between an effective withdrawal of troops and acceptance of the invasion as an accomplished fact : a symbolic withdrawal by a few miles. . . . It was agreed that when dining with Guariglia that night, I should sound him on this, after all quite honourable, proposal." Guariglia fully agreed but feared a British refusal. " I reported to Georges Bonnet by telephone at 11.30 P.M."

time presses, and France and Great Britain could not look on while a friendly nation was being destroyed, a portent of further aggression directed in turn against them." "Poland is our ally. We accepted engagements towards her in 1921 and in 1925. These engagements have been re-affirmed." Poland has suffered attack; Great Britain and France cannot, and will not, dishonour their signature. Daladier read out the Note presented to Germany the previous night. "Were France to admit of such aggression, it would earn her contempt, isolation, and discredit, the loss of allies and support, and she would . . . soon herself suffer the fiercest attack. . . . At the price of our honour we would be purchasing a precarious and revokable peace, and when the time came for us to fight, having lost the esteem of our allies and of other nations, we should be a wretched people, doomed to defeat and enslavement." "France herself is in danger." He concluded: "France rises with so much vigour because she is conscious that she is fighting for her own life and for her independence. Gentlemen, to-day France commands."

While Daladier was thus speaking a clear and determined language, Bonnet was playing for time. London wanted to press the issue without further delay: an ultimatum expiring at midnight should be presented. Bonnet was taking refuge behind the Italian plan for mediation and a promise which he claimed to have given to Ciano, that he would wait till the next day (Sunday) noon; and he continued harping on it even after Ciano had practically called off. He dished up the story when the Cabinet met at 7.30, adding that, if necessary, a shorter time-limit might then be set to the ultimatum. Lastly, it was already past eight, and midnight was too near.

> Daladier agreed [writes Zay]. There was a military interest in gaining 24 or 48 hours for our

> mobilisation (Gamelin had said so to some of us in the antechamber).[1] This reason suffices for me.
>
> The entire Cabinet is agreed, except Mandel who thinks that our mobilisation was decided upon too late, and that our action in support of Poland should have been immediate.

Monzie adds this anecdote :

> " It is regrettable," someone remarked, " that at the very outset there should be lack of synchronisation among the Allies." I replied : " If for once we are late as against England, we can well afford the luxury."

The House of Commons met at 2.45 P.M., but Chamberlain did not rise till 7.44 to make his statement. He then said that so far no reply had been received to " the warning message " of the previous night, and that

> His Majesty's Government will . . . be bound to take action unless the German forces are withdrawn from Polish territory. They are in communication with the French Government as to the limit of time within which it would be necessary for the British and French Governments to know whether the German Government were prepared to effect such a withdrawal. If the German Government should agree to withdraw their forces then His Majesty's Government would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier. That is to say, the way would be open to discussion between the German and Polish Governments on the matters at issue between them.

[1] Gamelin's remarks noted above (pages 295-6) suggest that in fact the Army chiefs were urging delay, in order to complete as much as possible of their mobilisation and concentration without interference from the Germans. But again the terms of the military convention concluded with Poland on May 19th, 1939, and the extremely grave exigencies of her situation, were being overlooked with something which can only be described as short-sighted selfishness.

Then followed a lengthy account of the incorporation of Danzig in the Reich, which had been proclaimed the previous day and whose validity His Majesty's Government refused to recognise.

This, after two full days and one night of the fiercest "total war" waged against Poland, was hardly what the House, or public opinion, expected from the Prime Minister. "Speak for England!" called out Amery to Greenwood, acting leader of the Opposition, when he rose at the end of Chamberlain's statement; and in that interjection he himself spoke for the country. Greenwood said he felt "gravely disturbed". An act of aggression had occurred thirty-eight hours ago which should have automatically brought into operation the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, and nothing had happened yet. The delay may have been justifiable, but hours went by and news came in of bombing operations, growing in intensity.

> I wonder how long we are prepared to vacillate at a time when Britain and all that Britain stands for, and human civilisation, are in peril. . . . We must march with the French. . . . I do not believe that the French . . . would dream at this juncture of going back on the sacred oaths that they have taken. . . .
>
> To-morrow we meet at 12. I hope the Prime Minister then — well, he must be in a position to make some further statement.

He hoped they would hear "what the final decision is, and whether our promises are in process of fulfilment. . . ." Sir Archibald Sinclair followed for the Opposition Liberals, and spoke in a similar sense. Then Chamberlain, taken aback at the reception which his statement had received in the House, intervened once more at 7.59 P.M.:

> I think the House recognises that the Government is in a somewhat difficult position. I suppose it always must be a difficulty for allies who have to communicate with one another by telephone to

> synchronise their thoughts and actions as quickly as those in the same room ; but I should be horrified if the House thought for one moment that the statement that I have made to them betrayed the slightest weakening either of this Government or of the French Government in the attitude which we have already taken up. . . . I should have been very glad had it been possible for me to say to the House that the French Government and ourselves were agreed to make the shortest possible limit to the time when action should be taken by both of us.

He further said he understood that the French Government were " in session at this moment ", that a reply from them may come in the next few hours, and he expected to make a statement " of a definite character to-morrow "—

> I anticipate that there is only one answer I shall be able to give to the House to-morrow. I hope that the issue will be brought to a close at the earliest possible moment so that we may know where we are, and I trust that the House . . . will believe me that I speak in complete good faith. . . .

The inexorable approach of the greatest ordeal in British history was announced in a singularly halting manner. It was not till June 18th, 1940, that the banner of the Second World War was proudly raised in Britain, in a speech through which the nadir in her fortunes will for ever be remembered as " her finest hour ".

Still, if there was delay in declaring war, it was hardly the fault of the Chamberlain Government. But the scene in the House made it clear that Parliament and the country would not stand any longer even the appearances of shilly-shallying, whatever its source and reasons, and Chamberlain, who had truly acted " in complete good faith", felt utterly taken aback and angry at being suspected of readiness to give in once more. Corbin, having received

Bonnet's instructions after the French Cabinet meeting, went in search of Halifax, who had dined at 10 Downing Street.

> He received me in presence of the Prime Minister [writes Corbin].[1] Having listened to my communication, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who seemed very worried, described to me the stormy scene in Parliament. The ill-humour of the Members at first turned against France who in the lobbies was accused of wishing to back down. Next, the anger turned against the Government, responsible for British honour which was in danger of being compromised by French hesitations. No one would listen to the Italian offer which was looked upon as a trap meant to favour the advance of the German armies. In these circumstances the Prime Minister regretted to be unable to accept the proposal of the French Government. "Public opinion," he said to me, "is so far perfectly united in Britain. But the rumours which go about, and the delay which is taken for vacillation, are deeply disturbing the country."

Corbin returned for a few moments to his Embassy. Here he was assailed with questions by Members of Parliament and journalists.

> One of the most excited was Mr. Winston Churchill; bursts of his voice made the telephone vibrate. He reminded me that he had always been a champion of a Franco-British alliance, and added that this was perhaps the last chance for France and Great Britain to join forces. . . . If they find themselves divided in such grave circumstances Britain will shut herself up in her island and will offer fierce resistance, but will not wish to be concerned any further in Continental affairs. I managed to calm him down, and he promised to do all he could to raise to a maximum the military forces of his country.

[1] Excerpts from Corbin's despatch are printed in Henriot's *Comment Mourut la Paix*, from which the above passages are taken.

Corbin apparently was again with Halifax when about midnight, after another meeting of the Cabinet, Halifax telephoned to Bonnet and told him that the declaration of war would have to be brought before Parliament at 10 A.M., and pressed the French to do likewise. Bonnet refused, pleading once more his promise to Ciano by which he would stand.[1]

On September 3rd, at 5 A.M., instructions were sent to Henderson that he should seek an interview with Ribbentrop at 9 A.M., or, if Ribbentrop could not see him, he should arrange to convey at that hour to a representative of the German Government the Note of which the terms were given. After repeating the warning of September 1st, it went on to declare :

> Although this communication was made more than twenty-four hours ago, no reply has been received but German attacks upon Poland have been continued and intensified. I have accordingly the honour to inform you that, unless not later than 11 A.M. British Summer Time, to-day 3rd September, satisfactory assurances to the above have been given by the German Government and have reached His Majesty's Government in London, a state of war will exist between the two countries as from that hour.

When Henderson telephoned to the Wilhelmstrasse [2] that at 9 A.M. he would have an important announcement

[1] Three articles under the title, " Comment mourut la paix ", appeared anonymously in the Paris *Journal* in the second week of September 1940. I have not been able to secure copies in this country, and the above passage is quoted after *Le Petit Parisien* of September 12th, 1940. I am further unable to say how far the articles tally with Henriot's book; but this passage is not reproduced in it.

Pertinax, in *Les Fossoyeurs*, vol. ii. p. 118, note, says that the difference in the timing of the British and the French ultimatum was due to the British Government having, after the scene in the House, advanced their own, while the French adhered to the hour previously agreed upon. But this is wrong : the British Government had never accepted Bonnet's decision to wait till Sunday noon.

[2] According to Schmidt, the telephone call was made by Henderson " at 2 or 3 ", while Henderson, in his *Final Report* and *Failure of a Mission*,

to make to the Foreign Minister, he was told that Ribbentrop would not be available, but that a member of the Foreign Office "would be given authority to take his place and receive the announcement". It was clear what its nature would be, but it was Schmidt, the Official Interpreter, who was delegated to receive it — a typical piece of Nazi buffoonery. "My invitation to sit down was declined by Henderson," stated Schmidt in his evidence at Nuremberg, "and standing he read to me the well-known ultimatum." Schmidt took it immediately to Hitler, who was in his office with Ribbentrop. "When I had completed my translation, there was at first silence. . . ." Then Hitler suddenly said to Ribbentrop: "What are we going to do now?" They proceeded to discuss which ambassadors would have to be recalled.[1] Some members of the Cabinet and high officials were gathered in the ante-chamber; when Schmidt informed them of the British ultimatum — there would be "no second Munich" — "a very depressed silence fell upon the room. The faces became suddenly very serious." Göring turned to him and said: "If we lose this war, then Heaven help us!" Goebbels too looked "very serious, if not depressed". Schmidt had not the impression that they had expected a declaration of war.

Similarly Grand Admiral Raeder stated at Nuremberg, on May 17th, 1946:

> On the 3rd September, I believe at 11 . . . I was called to the Reich Chancellery . . . and I came to

claims to have received his instructions at 4 A.M. It seems likely that during the night Henderson was given another, preliminary, instruction to arrange for an interview with Ribbentrop at 9 A.M.

[1] A slightly different account appears in DeWitt C. Poole's article based on Nuremberg interrogatories (*Foreign Affairs*, October 1946, page 142). After Schmidt had translated the British ultimatum, "Hitler's first words were a dismayed: 'What are we going to do now?' Then he collected himself: 'In that case I must talk to the military people.' Schmidt was dismissed."

> the study of the Führer where a number of persons were assembled. . . . Hess was present. I could not say who else was there. But I noticed particularly that Hitler was embarrassed in speaking to me when he told me that against all his hopes now war against England was imminent. . . . It was an embarrassment such as I had never noticed in Hitler.

Shortly after 11 A.M. Henderson was asked to call on Ribbentrop, and at 11.20 received from him the German reply to the British ultimatum : a document of over a thousand words which in its utter futility reads like the joint work of Hitler and Ribbentrop. " The German Government and the German people refuse to receive, accept, let alone to fulfil, demands in the nature of ultimata made by the British Government " ; " without the intervention of the British Government . . . a reasonable solution doing justice to both sides would certainly have been found between Germany and Poland " ; " the British Government have . . . given the Polish State full powers for all actions against Germany which that State might conceivably intend to undertake " ; " the British Government . . . bear the responsibility for all the unhappiness and misery which have now overtaken and are about to overtake many peoples " ; " the German people . . . above all do not intend to let themselves be ill-treated by Poles. The German Government, therefore, reject the attempts to force Germany . . . to recall its forces which are lined up for the defence of the Reich, and thereby to accept the old unrest and the old injustice " ; etc. The document closes with the following peroration :

> The German people and their Government do not, like Great Britain, intend to dominate the world, but they are determined to defend their own liberty, their independence and above all their life. The intention communicated to us by order of the British

> Government by Mr. King-Hall, of carrying the destruction of the German people even further than was done through the Versailles Treaty, is taken note of by us,[1] and we shall therefore answer any aggressive action on the part of England with the same weapons and in the same form.

Henderson's "only comment" on this document was that "it would be left to history to judge where the blame really lay"; to which Ribbentrop replied "that history had already proved the facts". The conversation concluded on the personal note, so fashionable in 1939. Ribbentrop's "last remark to me was", writes Henderson in his *Final Report*, "that he wished me personally good, to which I could only reply that I deeply regretted the failure of all my efforts for peace, but that I bore no grudge against the German people".

Meantime, at 11.15 A.M. British Summer Time, a Note had been handed to the German Chargé d'Affaires in London declaring that, since by 11 A.M. no satisfactory assurances had been received from the German Government, a state of war existed as from that hour.

At 12.6 P.M. Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons:

[1] For some time past German propaganda had been spreading the story that Lord Halifax was helping Commander S. King-Hall to compose some of his *News-Letters* in German (see letter from King-Hall in *The Times* of July 19th, 1939). But that the Germans should have included such stuff in their reply to the British declaration of war is characteristic, and so is the interpretation which they put on what had been "communicated" to them. In reality King-Hall's campaign, warning the German people of the dangers of the Nazi Government, was entirely a private venture. Before undertaking it, he had informed the Foreign Office of his intention, but had received no encouragement. Later on Henderson complained to the British Government that King-Hall's activities were jeopardising the success of his policy since the Nazi leaders "were convinced" that King-Hall was secretly receiving support and assistance from Halifax. He was requested to stop his campaign, and agreed to do so "if he received a letter from the Prime Minister asking him to refrain from communicating with the German people".

> When I spoke last night to the House I could not but be aware that in some parts of the House there were doubts and some bewilderment as to whether there had been any weakening, hesitation or vacillation on the part of His Majesty's Government. In the circumstances I make no reproach, for if I had been in the same position as hon. Members not sitting on this Bench and not in possession of all the information which we have, I should very likely have felt the same. The statement which I have to make this morning will show that there were no grounds for doubt.

He then read the Note delivered by Henderson at 9 A.M., and announced that the undertaking demanded from Germany not having been received by the stipulated time, " this country is at war with Germany ". Further, that a similar *démarche* with a time limit was at this moment being made by the French Ambassador in Berlin. Chamberlain concluded :

> This is a sad day for all of us, and to none is it sadder than to me. Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins. There is only one thing left for me to do ; that is, to devote what strength and powers I have to forwarding the victory of the cause for which we have to sacrifice so much. I cannot tell what part I may be allowed to play myself ; I trust I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed and a liberated Europe has been re-established.

On November 12th, 1940, after Chamberlain's death, Winston Churchill said, commemorating him in the House of Commons :

> It fell to Neville Chamberlain in one of the supreme crises of the world to be contradicted by events, to be disappointed in his hopes, and to be deceived and cheated by a wicked man. But what

were these hopes in which he was disappointed? What were these wishes in which he was frustrated? What was that faith that was abused? They were surely among the most noble and benevolent instincts of the human heart — the love of peace, the toil for peace, the strife for peace, the pursuit of peace, even at great peril and certainly in utter disdain of popularity or clamour.

France declares War

At midnight of September 2nd–3rd, Bonnet notified Coulondre that the terms of a new *démarche*, to be made by him the next day at noon, would be sent to him in the morning; and at 10.20 A.M. he was instructed to call at the Wilhelmstrasse at noon, demand a reply to the French Note of September 1st, 10 P.M., and, should the answer be negative, to declare that as from 5 P.M. France would have to fulfil her obligations to Poland. (Even at this stage Bonnet seems to have avoided making the declaration of war in the usual forthright terms.) Coulondre was received by Weizsäcker, who said that he was not in a position to tell him whether a satisfactory reply had been made, or even whether an answer would be made, to that Note; he insisted that Coulondre should see Ribbentrop himself. Coulondre therefore asked for an immediate interview with Ribbentrop, and saw him at 12.30 P.M. Ribbentrop started by referring to the Italian mediation which, he understood, was approved by France but was wrecked by British intransigeance, and to the ultimatum which had been handed by the British Ambassador that morning with a time limit of two hours (he gave Coulondre a copy of the German reply); if France felt bound by her engagements to enter the conflict, he said, he would regret it; still Germany would not attack France first, so that it would be an unprovoked war of aggression on the part of France. To Coulondre's

enquiry whether he was to infer that the answer to the French Note of September 1st was negative, Ribbentrop replied, "Yes". Thereupon Coulondre apprised him of the French declaration of war as from 5 P.M. that day. "Then France will be the aggressor," said Ribbentrop. "Of this history will be the judge," replied Coulondre.

The judgment of history was invoked by all alike.

PART II

EPISODES AND MEN

I. THE IDES OF MARCH, 1939

Preliminaries

Hitler, by liquidating the remainder of Czechoslovakia on March 14th-15th, 1939, entered the path of the Second World War. No authoritative Czech account of those transactions has yet appeared, but evidence produced at the Nuremberg Trial confirms, or even exceeds, what had previously been surmised about German methods. The following summary is based on these disclosures and uses older material merely for purposes of elucidation or comparison.

"It was clear to me from the first moment," declared Hitler in a meeting of his chief commanders on November 23rd, 1939, "that I could not be satisfied with the Sudeten-German territory. That was only a partial solution. The decision to march into Bohemia was made." And, indeed, after some preliminary enquiries and studies, and within a month of Munich, on October 21st, 1938, a "top secret" directive, signed by Hitler and attested by Keitel, was issued to the German armed forces, envisaging the "liquidation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia" "at any time" should her policy "become hostile towards Germany". Its dispositions, much less extensive than those of the preceding summer, aimed at a higher degree of preparedness, as a "swift occupation of Bohemia and Moravia" by surprise action and without prior mobilisation was intended. The number of units to be held in readiness "will be determined by the forces remaining in Czechoslovakia; a quick and decisive success must be assured". A supplementary order of December 17th explained —

> The preparations . . . are to proceed on the assumption that no marked resistance is to be expected.
>
> To the outside world it must clearly appear as a mere action of pacification and not as a warlike undertaking . . . the units detailed to march in must, as a rule, leave their stations only during the night before the crossing of the frontier.

When on December 22nd, 1938, Coulondre enquired about the Four-Power guarantee promised to Czechoslovakia, he was told that it was for her to claim it and that her Foreign Minister, Chvalkovsky, was not expected in Berlin till January.[1] A German minute of Chvalkovsky's talk with Ribbentrop on January 21st has been found, but only a footnote by Ribbentrop was given out at Nuremberg: "I impressed on Chvalkovsky that in our judgment a quick reduction in the Czech Army would be decisive". Compare with this the account given by Chvalkovsky on February 7th to the French Minister in Prague: he had been told in Berlin "that the Reich would be disposed to guarantee a neutral State, it being understood that such a State would in no way require a considerable army" [2] — an admirable attempt to reduce requirements under the directive of October 21st.

Even after Munich "fifth column" activities were continued through *Volksdeutsche* and Slovak separatists. A dominant and wellnigh extra-territorial position was demanded for the remaining Germans, and care was taken that numbers of the right kind should remain — for instance, Germans from the ceded Sudetenland were ordered to continue attending the German University in Prague. "The tasks of the F.S. [a camouflaged S.S.]", wrote the notorious K. H. Frank, "were transferred to the German student organisations as being compact troop formations in Prague and Brünn."

[1] See above, page 51. [2] See above, pages 62-3.

Meantime Slovak extremists, directed by Karmasin, *Volksgruppenführer* of the 120,000 Germans inhabiting Slovakia (he was heavily subsidised by various Nazi offices), were working for complete separation from Prague. Minutes of talks with two of them during the winter of 1938–1939 have been produced at Nuremberg. At a date unnamed Durčansky, Slovak Deputy Premier, was received by Göring; after expressions of Slovak friendship and gratitude for the Führer, he declared that "the Slovaks want full independence with strongest political, economic, and military ties to Germany", and suggested having it proclaimed at the meeting of the first Slovak Diet.

> The Germans in Slovakia do not want to belong to Hungary, but wish to stay in Slovakia.
>
> The German influence with the Slovak Government is considerable; the appointment of a German Cabinet Minister has been promised.

Göring's comments are that Slovak demands for independence should

> be supported in a suitable manner. Czechoslovakia without Slovakia is still more at our mercy.
>
> Air bases in Slovakia are of great importance for the German Air Force for use against the East.

The second minute is of a talk which on February 12th, 1939, Hitler and Ribbentrop had with Professor Tuka and Karmasin. Tuka, addressing Hitler as "My Führer" and boasting of having been imprisoned by the Czechs (he was tried for espionage and treason), thanked Hitler for having "opened the Slovak question", and declared that for the Slovaks a connexion with the Czechs was impossible in the future, morally and economically: they were determined to achieve independence.

> The destiny of Slovakia [he continued] rested with the Führer . . . should there be a rising, the Czechs

would immediately try to suppress it with bloodshed, but the mere word of the Führer sufficed to halt such attempts. The same applied to the aspirations of Hungary and Poland, who would be stopped by a single word of the Führer. " I entrust the fate of my people to your care."

The occasion for such care had now to be created.

Slovakia's " Liberation "

When the decision was taken in Berlin to put an end to Czechoslovakia's existence, Slovak leaders were told by the Germans that Prague intended a blow against Slovak autonomy, while in Prague hints were dropped about a separatist *Putsch* being prepared by Slovak Cabinet Ministers — Germany, it was added, considered the matter an internal affair of the Czechoslovak State. On Thursday night, March 9th, the Prague Government deposed the Slovak Premier, Mgr. Tiso, Durčansky, and two other Ministers. But when on Friday morning Tiso and Durčansky met a few friends, according to Mr. Pares, British Consul at Bratislava, Karmasin was with them, and in the afternoon the flag of the extremist Hlinka Guard was hoisted from the headquarters of the German party, while at a large meeting of that party " speakers bitterly attacked the Prague ' Bolsheviks ' ".

> How little the Slovak population of Bratislava interested itself in the first day's events [writes Pares] was indicated by the small number of persons who took part in the first demonstrations during the afternoon. The participants were an evil-looking rabble of the lowest possible type . . . and the speakers who addressed them . . . were little better. During the evening the Hlinka Guard organised processions composed of less disreputable elements, mainly students and young men.

Meantime, with German help, Durčansky escaped to Vienna and engaged in virulent anti-Czech broadcasts, while Tiso appealed to Hitler.

The sequel is told by Sir Basil Newton, British Minister in Prague, in a despatch of March 21st. On Saturday, March 11th, at 10 P.M., Buerckel and Seyss-Inquart, Nazi leaders from Vienna, accompanied by five German generals, entered

> a Cabinet meeting in progress in Bratislava and told the Slovak Government that they should proclaim the independence of Slovakia. When M. Sidor [the new Prime Minister] showed hesitation Herr Buerckel took him on one side and explained that Herr Hitler had decided to settle the question of Czechoslovakia definitely. Slovakia ought therefore to proclaim her independence, because Herr Hitler would otherwise disinterest himself in her fate. M. Sidor thanked Herr Buerckel for this information, but said that he must discuss the situation with the Government at Prague.

Early next morning, Sunday, March 12th, Tiso asked for a Cabinet meeting to be held at 8 A.M., and told them

> that he had received a telegram by the hand of Herr Buerckel inviting him to go at once to see the Führer in Berlin. He had to accept this invitation because Herr Buerckel had informed him that otherwise the two German divisions on the other side of the Danube would occupy Bratislava and the Hungarians would be authorised to seize not only Ruthenia, as had already been agreed to by Berlin, but also Eastern Slovakia. Mgr. Tiso explained that he proposed to leave by train early Monday morning. . . . This would have given time for Prague and Warsaw to be consulted, but as soon as Mgr. Tiso arrived in Vienna that day in preparation for an early departure the following morning he was escorted into an aeroplane and informed that he was to proceed in it to Berlin at once, as Herr Hitler awaited him.

Newton's time-table requires verification, for it makes Tiso reach Berlin on March 12th, when in fact he did not meet Hitler till Monday evening, March 13th.

To spice the " liberation " of Slovakia with blackmail, marching orders were meantime given to the Hungarians. " Last Sunday " (March 12th), Hitler told Hacha on the 15th, ". . . I summoned the Hungarian envoy and told him that I am withdrawing my protecting hand from that country." The Regent of Hungary replied the next day, March 13th :

> Your Excellency,— My sincere thanks. I can hardly tell you how happy I am because this Head Water Region — I dislike using big words — is of vital importance to the life of Hungary.
>
> . . . We are going into this affair with eager enthusiasm. On Thursday the 16th of this month a frontier incident will take place which will be followed by the big blow on Saturday.
>
> I shall never forget this proof of friendship, and your Excellency may rely on my unshakable gratitude at all times — Your devoted friend, HORTHY.

But things developed differently and no Slovak territory was included in Hungary's vital " Head Water Region " : for matters were settled by Hitler in two interviews with Tiso and Hacha.

Tiso's conference with Hitler in the New Reich Chancellery on March 13th lasted from 6.40 till 7.15 — thirty-five minutes in all ; there were present Ribbentrop, Keitel, Meissner, Dietrich, Keppler, and Hewel, while Tiso was accompanied by Durčansky.

Judging by the German minute, Hitler adopted from the outset a harsh, rancorous tone. He described in " a long detailed account the developments in Czechoslovakia " and said that Germany had suffered two disappointments. The Czechs had repaid his " great forbearance " and clemency by provocations and ill-

treatment of Germans. "The old spirit of Beneš had again been revived." Germany could not tolerate "a hotbed of unrest". The second disappointment concerned Slovakia. Last year he had been told that she "wished to conduct her own affairs", now, that Sidor refused to separate from the Czechs. "If the Führer had known this earlier he would not have needed to antagonise his friends in Hungary, but on the contrary would have let events follow the course they were then taking." He now wanted to make the question clear to Tiso.

> Germany had no interests east of the Carpathian Mountains. It was indifferent to him what happened there. The question was whether Slovakia wanted to conduct her own affairs or not. . . . He did not wish that reproaches should come from Hungary that he was preserving something which did not want to be preserved at all. . . . It was not a question of days but of hours. . . . If Slovakia hesitated or did not wish to dissolve the connexion with Prague he would leave her destiny to the mercy of events, for which he was no longer responsible.

Hitler concluded by expressing the hope "that Slovakia would soon decide clearly for herself".

Tiso thanked the Führer and assured him that he "could rely on Slovakia"; but he asked to be excused if

> under the impression of the Führer's words he could not clearly formulate his opinion at that moment and could hardly make a decision. He wished to withdraw with his friend and to think the whole question over at his ease; they would, however, show that they were worthy of the Führer's care and interest for their country.

The report of the conference by Newton agrees on the whole with the German minute except that Hitler is reported to have announced point-blank the opening of

military action against the Czechs on the next day (and Brauchitsch, instead of Keitel, is named as present). Some time that night (presumably after the talk with Hitler) Tiso telephoned from the New Reich Chancellery to the Slovak Cabinet, then in session, and, speaking in German, requested them to summon a meeting of the Slovak Diet for ten o'clock the next morning, Tuesday, March 14th. So soon as he was satisfied that his message had been understood he rang off. According to Coulondre, Tiso's conferences with Ribbentrop, etc., continued till 3 A.M. He returned to Bratislava at four and met the Cabinet at eight. To the Diet, writes Newton,

> Mgr. Tiso read the text of the law proclaiming the independence of Slovakia, which had been given to him by Herr von Ribbentrop already drafted in Slovak. When the deputies wanted to discuss the matter . . . Herr Karmasin warned M. Sidor that the German occupation of Moravska-Ostrava would begin that day at noon and that he should be careful lest Bratislava suffered similar treatment. The Government thereupon left the decision to the deputies, who protested in dismay and great distress at this treatment, but finally decided that they had no option but to vote in favour of the declaration of independence.

"The reception given to the declaration on Tuesday by the people of Bratislava was lukewarm indeed", wrote Consul Pares. Direction or advice, pamphlets, explosives (where required), and even a good part of the public at meetings were supplied by the Germans. Even "a week after the declaration of independence the inhabitants of Bratislava are still unable to show great enthusiasm for the present state of affairs. The general impression is one of apathy or pessimism."

PRAGUE

" It is not for the sake of Mgr. Tiso that our divisions are marching . . .", said a high German official to a French journalist on March 13th ; " we mean to settle the question finally. To-day an ultimatum will be sent to the Prague Government. The answer is immaterial. Events will have overtaken it by the time it reaches us." On Sunday, March 12th, the Germans did their utmost to provoke incidents at Brno, Iglava, etc., and, failing, even shammed casualties ; and they re-started their *Blutbad* propaganda.

On March 14th Hacha and Chvalkovsky were summoned to Berlin ; the official German minute is now available of the conference held at the Chancellery in the early hours of March 15th (1.15 to 4 A.M.). There were present Hitler, Ribbentrop, Göring, Keitel, Weizsäcker, Meissner, Dietrich, and Hewel, Hacha and Chvalkovsky :

> State President Hacha greets the Führer and expresses his thanks for being received by him. For a long time he had been desirous of meeting the man whose wonderful ideas he had often read and followed. (Everyone sits down.)

Next follows a long, abject, fulsome discourse by Hacha, gloatingly reproduced by the Germans. " He was an unknown person until recently. He had never dabbled in politics, he had been just a judicial official in Vienna. . . ." He had never been *persona grata* with the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic ; he used to meet Masaryk once a year, Beneš even less frequently, etc. " This autumn the task had been allotted to him of becoming head of the State. He was an old man. He had overcome his misgivings ", etc. " He was convinced that the fate of Czechoslovakia lay in the hands of the Führer . . . her fate was safe in the Führer's hands. He

need not deplore what had happened in Slovakia recently . . . he shed no tears over Slovakia." And then he entered a pathetic plea for what " concerned him most, the fate of his people ". All he begged was that they should be allowed " to live a national life ".

The Führer expressed regrets for having had to ask the President, in spite of his advanced age, to undertake the journey, but " Germany's attack was only a matter of hours ". He denied that Germany entertained hostility against the Czechs, but accused them of having shown it in the past against the Germans. He would defend the rights of his people " ruthlessly and without scruples ". From respect for " ethnographic principles ", and at the risk of alienating Hungary, he had spared Czechoslovakia's existence, still thinking that it was " possible to live together ". But " the Beneš tendencies " persisted. " Why had not Czechoslovakia immediately reduced her army to a reasonable size? " It was a financial and political liability, and served no useful purpose.

" Now . . . he had given the order for the German troops to march into the Czech provinces and to incorporate them into the German Reich." He would grant the Czechs " the fullest autonomy and a distinct life ", but Germany's attitude would be determined by the behaviour of the Czech people and Army towards the German troops. If fighting ensued resistance would be broken by force, but a heritage of hatred would prevent his granting Czechoslovakia autonomy. " The world would not care a jot about this." If the occupation took place in a peaceable manner the Führer would grant Czechoslovakia " autonomy and a certain national freedom ". His aim was " security for the German nation ".

The hours were passing. At six o'clock the troops would march in. He felt almost ashamed to say that for every Czech battalion there was one German

> division. The military operation was not a trifling one, but had been put in hand on the largest scale. He would advise him to withdraw now with Chvalkovsky in order to discuss what should be done.

Hacha, while admitting that resistance " would be foolish ", asked how " within four hours the entire Czech nation could be restrained from offering resistance " Hitler replied that " the military machine now in motion cannot be stopped. He should appeal to his Prague authorities." Hacha asked whether, if the purpose was to disarm the Czech Army, this could not be done in some other way. Hitler answered that his decision was irrevocable. " Everyone knows what a decision by the Führer means."

The two Czechs withdrew and in a conference with the German representatives (during which Göring uttered his threat to destroy Prague) the agreement was " settled ". Then they met " for a concluding discussion in the Führer's study ", and the agreement was signed. On March 16th Hitler's " Statute for the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia " was published.

The same day Tiso " begged " him to take Slovakia under his care. On March 23rd a German-Slovak Agreement was concluded of which article 1 read :

> The German Reich assumes responsibility for the protection of the political independence of the State of Slovakia and the inviolability of its territory.

But " Information given to the Supreme Commander of the Army by the Führer on March 25th, 1939 " contained the following paragraph :

> How long the Führer considers himself bound by the treaty concluded with Slovakia is open to doubt. It seems to the Supreme Commander of the Army as if the Führer wanted to free himself of this obligation when the time comes, and that he will use Slovakia

> as an asset for bargaining between himself, Poland, and Hungary. For the time being, however, brakes should be put on Hungary.

In case Slovakia should be partitioned the Führer meant to include Bratislava in Germany.

As it happened, Slovakia was not partitioned. But German generals obviously understood what value had to be placed on Hitler's pledged word.

II. AN INTERLOPER IN DIPLOMACY

La mouche du coche à l'envers is a fly which thinks it can stop the wheel ; and Hr. Birger Dahlerus, a civil engineer and Swedish manufacturer, in the very title of his book seems to claim that his was *The Last Attempt* [1] to avert the Second World War. When the book was published in Stockholm in the autumn of 1945 one or two London newspapers remembered " the gentleman with the carnation " who, in the closing week of August 1939, was passing to and fro between London and Berlin ; but otherwise it received little attention. It was not till Dahlerus was cited by Göring as witness at the Nuremberg Trial that he and his busy, boding journeys reached the limelight ; though neither in publishing the book nor in appearing before the tribunal did he seek publicity. Stories associating him with Göring and the Nazis had been circulating in Sweden, and he owed it to himself to state what exactly he had tried to achieve in 1939 ; his account is naive, self-important, but well-meaning, as his endeavours seem to have been. When invited to Nuremberg, Dahlerus was reluctant to come unless asked by the tribunal : he did not wish to appear solely as witness for the defence. By the time he had concluded his evidence Göring must have wished he had never summoned Dahlerus : the erstwhile believer had changed into a disillusioned critic. Had he viewed Göring in 1939 even as he did in 1945, he could hardly have put so much zeal and zest into a wild-goose chase — though the book still shows trust in Göring as " peacemaker " ; but enlightened by the Nuremberg disclosures about the way the Germans

[1] *Sista Försöket, London-Berlin, Sommaren 1939.* (*The Last Attempt. London-Berlin, Summer 1939.*) Stockholm : Norstedt, 1945. 6 kroner 50 öre.

had planned the war, Dahlerus declared in the witness-box that had he known in 1939 what he knew now he would have realised that his efforts could not possibly have succeeded. Futile and childish they were from the outset: yet they form part of the story of those fateful days.

Hr. Dahlerus had lived in England and in Germany, and had personal and business connexions with both countries. In the statement published on March 20th, 1946, by the English business men who had been associated with him in his peace-saving efforts, he is described as " a relative by marriage of Göring " ; in his book he merely speaks of services of a personal character which he and Göring had rendered each other. They met every now and then ; and on two such occasions in 1938 Dahlerus found Göring singularly ignorant and suspicious of England, yet seemingly averse from war. When a new crisis arose in 1939 the idea therefore struck Dahlerus how very useful it would be were important members of the German Government to spend a few days in free and frank conversation with prominent Englishmen. " Individuals are shaped by their profession ", he writes, disclaiming merit as an author. But while the blunt, plain-spoken business man seldom cherishes literary ambitions, he is apt to feel differently about diplomacy : this should not be left solely to straitlaced, deformed professionals. On Midsummer Eve 1939 Dahlerus crossed over to England on his quest of a summer school for statesmen.

On July 2nd, over dinner at the Constitutional Club, he met " leading men from the financial, industrial, and commercial world ". So conscious was his host of the momentous occasion that he read out a prepared address — which surprised everybody in an old, experienced " Parliamentarian " (in fact, the man had never sat in Parliament). A discussion followed, and it was decided

to communicate the conclusions to Göring. On July 6th, at 4 P.M., Dahlerus arrived at Göring's sumptuous castle of Karinhall, and stayed till six. There was a garden party, and the place teemed with film stars and officers in white uniforms ; but the guests had to wait while Göring was engaged in conversation with Dahlerus. Dahlerus said that Great Britain would stand no further German aggression ; Göring replied that it was all bluff. Dahlerus suggested a heart-to-heart talk between British and German statesmen ; Göring still wanted to be convinced that England was not bluffing. Then Dahlerus offered to summon three of his English friends who happened to be at Copenhagen : they came, confirmed to Dahlerus what he had said, were shown over the Air Ministry, had tea with a general, and were taken for a tour of Berlin. Next day, at Karinhall, Dahlerus was told by Göring that Hitler accepted the idea of a conference of statesmen to be held in Sweden, but insisted on secrecy. Dahlerus went to Stockholm and saw the Prime Minister, but the Swedish Government would not play. On July 20th he obtained an interview with Lord Halifax, always easy of access but cautious in action : he was " interested " in Dahlerus's plan, but " emphasised that he did not want any members of the British Government or Parliament to participate " in the meeting. In the end, the seven who went were, in their own words, " a small group of average British people " ; their aim was to impress Göring with Britain's determination. What Göring's purpose or delusion was in talking to them it is more difficult to guess. They met on August 7th at Mrs. Dahlerus's country place, Sönke Nissen Koog, in Northern Slesvig, where Nazi power and Dahlerus's ingenuity combined in providing elaborate cover for the conference of important Germans with well-intentioned Englishmen. Göring, accompanied by General Bodenschatz, two high officials, etc., arrived at 10 A.M. and left at 6 P.M. The talk ran

in well-worn ruts and included an assurance by Göring, upon his word of statesman and officer, that the German demands for Danzig and the Corridor would not be followed by further territorial claims. In discussing the situation, he hinted at a *rapprochement* between Germany and Russia (early in May he had sent Bodenschatz the round of Allied Embassies with a similar blackmailing warning). The meeting closed in an atmosphere of cordiality, the two sides agreeing to recommend to their respective Governments that an official conference be held on neutral soil. During the night, however, the seven Englishmen reached the conclusion that a conference *à quatre* (of the Munich Powers, without Russia or Poland) would be even more useful; and off went Dahlerus after Göring, who again agreed. On August 9th Dahlerus returned to Sweden, "tired but full of hope". "And now", he writes, "occurred an episode which is inexplicable to me . . . the negotiations came to a complete stop." But to the reader it is the one event in this part of Dahlerus's story which calls for no explanation.

The story re-starts a fortnight later, in much-changed circumstances. On August 23rd, the day the Russian-German Agreement was negotiated in Moscow, Göring summoned Dahlerus from Stockholm. He arrived at Karinhall on the 24th, and was told that even in Germany's much improved position Göring still desired an understanding with England and would use all his influence to achieve it; he asked Dahlerus to convey that message to the British Government, for he did not trust the ways of the Wilhelmstrasse. That the attack against Poland was timed for August 26th, 4.30 A.M., he naturally withheld from Dahlerus. "Ribbentrop knew nothing whatsoever about the fact that Dahlerus was being sent," declared Göring at Nuremberg on March 19th, 1946. "I never discussed Dahlerus with Ribbentrop. He did not even know . . . that there were any

negotiations between me and the British Government." And on March 21st : " Ribbentrop had no idea about what I negotiated with Dahlerus. . . . He merely knew that I used Dahlerus as a negotiator, and he was, as Foreign Minister . . . against any other channels being used." [1] This much seems credible in those two, not altogether consonant, statements: that Ribbentrop disapproved of those extra-official dealings, and was not always informed about them in detail. But Hitler was, and while through Ribbentrop he was preparing war, through Göring he was trying to arrange another Munich. At Nuremberg, Göring himself, though protesting that his aim had not been to isolate Poland, admitted that he had meant to bring about " some peaceful settlement on the lines of the Munich Agreement ".

Dahlerus flew to London on the 25th, arriving at Croydon at 1.30 P.M. At the same hour in Berlin Henderson, by invitation, saw Hitler at the Chancellery and received his " last proposals " for a peaceful settlement, with the suggestion that he too should fly to London. When at 6.30 P.M. Dahlerus saw Halifax, he was told that official conversations had been reopened through Henderson, and was thanked for his services, of which there would probably be no further need. He dined that night with the seven of Sönke Nissen Koog ; they all rejoiced at the favourable turn, but apparently still felt an active concern in the matter, and Dahlerus telephoned to Göring to ascertain the latest developments in Berlin. When at last he got through, he learnt that there had been a grave deterioration in the position, and that war might break out any moment, for Hitler looked upon the Anglo-Polish Treaty of Mutual Assistance, signed that day, as an unfriendly act and a challenge to himself. (In reality the reverse was true: the orders for the

[1] Göring denied, however, having suggested that Ribbentrop on one occasion had intended to sabotage Dahlerus's aeroplane.

invasion of Poland were countermanded after the news of the Treaty had reached Hitler.) The gist of Göring's communication was immediately conveyed to Halifax, with the result that Dahlerus saw him again the next morning, August 26th, at eleven. Dahlerus described Göring as the only man in Germany through whom war could still be averted, and suggested that Halifax should give him a personal letter to take to Göring reaffirming Britain's desire for peace. Having talked to the Prime Minister, Halifax wrote such a letter, but it was not submitted to the Cabinet, or the Committee on Foreign Affairs, or even to the Prime Minister himself, and must therefore have been wholly non-committal and have contained nothing which had not been stated a hundred times in public: a very good reason for its omission from all published official records (which is noted by Dahlerus). The same night Dahlerus reached Göring who was travelling by private train to his secret headquarters outside Berlin. He glanced at the letter, but, his knowledge of English being very imperfect, made Dahlerus translate it, with injunctions to be scrupulously accurate, for it was of " enormous importance "; and, taking Dahlerus with him, he got out of the train into a car to carry the letter immediately to Hitler. They arrived at the Chancellery at midnight; all lights were out; Hitler had retired; but Göring had to see him; and shortly two colonels turned up at Dahlerus's hotel with a summons to the Chancellery: *Der Führer lässt bitten.*

There, at the height of the crisis and in the middle of the night, Hitler started playing off for twenty minutes some of his well-known " records "; about his early struggles, his achievements, his vain attempts to reach an understanding with Britain; on hearing that Dahlerus had lived among the English working classes he engaged, for another half-hour, in a talk about the country; then,

referring to his conversation with Henderson on the 25th, he declared: *Dies ist mein letztes grosszügiges Angebot an England* ("This is my last magnanimous offer to England"). Next followed a long, and highly technical, lecture on Germany's armed forces and their invincible might. But a remark by Dahlerus about the advantages of Britain's island position upset Hitler's balance — till he "seemed more like a phantom from a story-book than a real person". He got up, paced about, then stopped and stared; he spoke in broken sentences, hardly aware of anyone's presence. "If there is war, I shall build U-boats, build U-boats, U-boats, U-boats, U-boats." His voice became blurred, but next he shrieked: "I shall build aeroplanes, build aeroplanes, aeroplanes, aeroplanes, and I shall annihilate my enemies". "I looked at Göring," writes Dahlerus, "to see how he reacted, but he did not turn a hair." In Hitler's presence he was smiling, fawning, giggling, and displaying an obsequious humility which seemed "excessively repellent and unprepossessing". ("I did not act that way," snapped back Göring in his cross-examination. "Those are the utterances made by Dahlerus after the war. If Germany had won the war this picture would certainly have been different.")

After some further rantings Hitler enquired what Dahlerus considered the reason of his failure to reach an understanding with Britain; and when told of British lack of confidence in him and his régime, he exclaimed: "Idiots! Have I ever in my life told an untruth?" He asked Dahlerus to go to England and explain matters — Henderson did not "understand" him. A discussion ensued, and Hitler's terms were summed up in six points which Dahlerus had to memorise, as Göring objected to his carrying notes (the terms differed from those given in writing to Henderson only thirty-six hours earlier):[1]

[1] See above, pages 322-3.

1. Germany wished for a pact or alliance with Britain.

2. Britain was to help her to obtain Danzig and the Corridor, but Poland was to retain Gdynia with a hinterland and a transit corridor, and be given a free port in Danzig.

3. Germany would guarantee Poland's frontiers.

4. An agreement was to be reached about colonies for Germany.

5. Adequate guarantees were demanded for the German minority in Poland.

6. Germany would promise to defend the British Empire with her *Wehrmacht* wherever it was attacked.

A German 'plane was provided, a Dutch permit was secured, Sir Kingsley Wood was advised, and on August 27th, at 12.20 P.M., Dahlerus landed at Croydon. Here the seven of Sönke Nissen Koog formed a ring round him to prevent any stranger from approaching or taking a snapshot. He reached the Foreign Office undetected, and from the Foreign Office was taken by a roundabout way to 10 Downing Street (an elaborate performance). He met Chamberlain and Halifax, Sir A. Cadogan and Sir H. Wilson. There were now two sets of proposals before the British Government, one officially presented through H.M. Ambassador, the other orally transmitted through a wholly irregular intermediary. The reply to the official Note was being drafted with the utmost care; and Dahlerus's suggestion that he should go ahead of Henderson and test Germany's reaction was accepted. The answer of the British Government through him expressed their wish for an understanding with Germany and their determination to stand by the guarantee to Poland; recommended direct German-Polish negotiations about frontiers and minorities, and stipulated that the results would have to be guaranteed by all the European Great Powers and not by Germany alone; and declined Hitler's generous offer to protect the British Empire.

With that reply Dahlerus returned to Berlin the same night, August 27th, at eleven, and went to see Göring who was attentive and appreciative; Göring went to see Hitler who was sweetly reasonable; Dahlerus, when informed of the favourable reaction, at 2 A.M. awoke Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Counsellor of the British Embassy, and stayed at the Embassy till 5.30. In the morning he rushed off to Göring's headquarters, found him in the pink of humour, garrulous and jocular, was treated to a long discourse on the strategic position, shown on the map the dislocation of the German forces, etc. At night (August 28th) Henderson returned with the official British reply, and at 10.30 P.M. saw Hitler who, for once, was " not dissatisfied with the answer ".

But when on the 29th, at 7.15 P.M., Henderson called on Hitler, he was given a Note which closed with the categorical demand for " a Polish emissary with full powers " to present himself in Berlin in the course of the next day. At 10 P.M. Dahlerus was informed by Forbes of the unpleasant turn which Henderson's talk with Hitler and Ribbentrop had taken; and shortly afterwards was summoned by Göring. He found Göring in an excited and angry mood; was now treated to a violent diatribe against Britain and the Poles, and to an impassioned harangue on Polish " outrages "; and then was given an " important " piece of inside information: Hitler was at work on a " magnanimous " (*grosszügig*) offer to Poland. Danzig was to revert to the Reich, but a plebiscite under international control was to be taken in the Corridor. When asked about the extent of the plebiscite area, Göring replied that this was still under consideration; but next tore out a page from an atlas and with a coloured pencil shaded off all late Prussian Poland, thus including also Posnania and Upper Silesia; and he finished by adding Lodz, sixty miles east of the 1914 frontier (Dahlerus remarks on the " rapidity and

recklessness " with which those decisions were taken). The upshot of Göring's discourse was a new request to Dahlerus to fly to London and impress the British Government with Germany's desire for a peaceful solution : he was to add confidential hints about Hitler's forthcoming magnanimity.

Back went Dahlerus to the British Embassy (2 A.M.), to the aerodrome (4 A.M.), arrived at Heston at 9.20 of August 30th, and (changing cars several times *en route* to avoid detection by prying eyes) reached 10 Downing Street at 10.30 A.M. There he met Chamberlain, Halifax, Cadogan, and Wilson, and found them duly suspicious of Hitler's " offer ", of Göring's manœuvres, and of negotiations with " plenipotentiaries " at Hitler's headquarters (in the Schuschnigg-Hacha style). Dahlerus was advised to return to Berlin the same night and assure the German Government of the British desire for peace ; the official reply, when drafted, would be transmitted through the Embassy. But when Dahlerus, having returned to Berlin at 11 P.M., called at the Embassy half an hour later, the reply, he writes, had not yet reached them (according to Henderson's *Final Report* it was received " shortly " before 11.30 — he took it to Ribbentrop at midnight).

Dahlerus arrived at Göring's headquarters at 12.30 A.M. of August 31st ; Göring was calm and self-possessed, and after listening for some time to Dahlerus's report, told him that Hitler, desirous of reaching an understanding with England, had drawn up proposals which were eminently " democratic, fair, and workable " ; and with a show of satisfaction, he proceeded to read out to Dahlerus the " highly conciliatory " Note which Ribbentrop was to have given to Henderson. Was Göring play-acting or was he ignorant of Hitler's orders to Ribbentrop ? And after Ribbentrop's interview with Henderson, was he uninformed about its outcome and not sufficiently interested to enquire ? But Dahlerus wanted to know :

he telephoned to Forbes and learnt how Ribbentrop, having gabbled the sixteen points of the Note to Henderson, refused to give him a copy, and said that the offer had lapsed as no Polish plenipotentiary had arrived within the stipulated twenty-four hours. Dahlerus expostulated about such a procedure and urged Göring to let him read the Note to Forbes over the telephone. Göring hesitated, but finally "took it upon himself" — still, when Dahlerus tried to read at dictation speed, hustled him, apparently uneasy about the matter. At 2.30 A.M. Dahlerus got up to return to Berlin, but Göring persuaded him to stay the night at his headquarters — which may have been not without forethought. For when they met again at 8 A.M., he, who had previously hesitated, made Dahlerus take down the terms of the Note in order to check whether Forbes had got them right; he laid stress upon the importance of the Note reaching the British Government without delay, and of their acting immediately. Possibly a new way of utilising the Note had in the meantime been agreed upon between Göring and Hitler. Dahlerus arrived at the British Embassy soon after 10 A.M. of August 31st.

Here a point is reached in Dahlerus's peace-saving activities at which his own account has to be supplemented from other sources. At 2 A.M. Henderson telephoned to Lipski, and asked him to come across to the British Embassy; he then communicated to Lipski the two main points of the gabbled Note, concerning Danzig and the Corridor (but, though Lipski stayed with him till nearly 3 A.M., Henderson did not mention Dahlerus's telephone call to Forbes). He pressed Lipski immediately to apply to Ribbentrop for the German proposals, and thus to "establish the desired contact". Lipski refused, but said he would refer the matter to his Government. Soon after eight, Henderson again telephoned to Lipski and enquired whether there was a reply from Warsaw;

said that unless Poland acted by noon there would be war; and asked him to come once more to the British Embassy. Lipski excused himself on the plea of waiting for a telephone call from his Government, and sent his First Secretary, M. Malhomme; to him Henderson gave a fuller version of the German terms, apparently based on Dahlerus's telephone conversation with Forbes; this Lipski transmitted in a cypher-wire, which reached Warsaw at 10.55 A.M. But in the meantime Dahlerus had arrived at the British Embassy with his notes of the sixteen points, and at eleven Henderson again telephoned to Lipski: he was sending to him Forbes with a Swede, and asked Lipski to receive them immediately. (Dahlerus claims to have been reluctant to go, and to have done so at the insistent request of Henderson.) In his *Failure of a Mission*, Henderson thus briefly, and inaccurately, tells the story of Dahlerus and the German Note:

> Early the next morning I obtained from another source in touch with Göring more definite, if unauthorized, details of the German proposals, and these I at once communicated through the Counsellor of His Majesty's Embassy to the Polish Ambassador. . . .

Lipski had never met Dahlerus and, in fact, did not know of his existence. According to Dahlerus, Forbes introduced him, related the events of the preceding night, and asked Dahlerus to read out the German Note. Lipski, who looked strained and over-tired, said that he could not take it in. Then Forbes jotted down in pencil the main points, but as Lipski still could not make them out, Dahlerus offered to dictate the contents of the Note to Lipski's secretary, and did so in the adjoining room. "I then returned with the typewritten copy, gave it to Lipski and, after exchanging some civilities, Forbes and I departed."

According to Lipski, Dahlerus introduced himself as a friend of Göring's and *homme de confiance* of the British Government ; declared that the extremists among the Germans demanded all late Prussian Poland, but that Göring had succeeded in reducing those demands to the sixteen points which he read out from pencilled notes ; urged Lipski to go immediately to Göring and accept the German offer ; and assured him that he would be well received and, after everything was signed, would be shooting stags with Göring. Lipski, irritated by the procedure, professed not to understand the terms, and asked Dahlerus to dictate them to his secretary in the adjoining room. When left alone with Forbes he protested against a stranger being brought to him with proposals which infringed Poland's territorial integrity and her sovereignty; warned against a moral and military break in Poland were her Government to start discussing territorial cessions ; and urged the need of preserving the united front of Great Britain, France, and Poland. Dahlerus states that on the way back Forbes quoted Lipski as having said that war would lead to revolution in Germany and that the victorious Polish army would march on Berlin ; Lipski denies having said anything of the kind. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, presumably basing himself on a report from Forbes, asked Dahlerus in cross-examination :

> . . . and didn't Sir George Forbes tell you that M. Lipski made his opinion quite clear that the German offer was a breach of Polish sovereignty, and that in his view Poland and France and England must stand firm and show a united front, and that Poland, if left alone, would fight and die alone ? That was M. Lipski's mood, wasn't it, at that time ?
>
> Answer : Yes.

In sending Dahlerus to the Polish Embassy without taking the utmost care not to seem to endorse his proposals,

Henderson, who thought the German terms " not on the whole too unreasonable ", was putting pressure on Lipski to enter into negotiations in circumstances which from the outset would have prejudged the issue. Lipski could not have known at the time that Henderson's view of the German terms was not shared by the British Government — anyhow, in sending round Dahlerus Henderson must have acted on his own authority. But come what may, Lipski would not run to Göring and beg for an ultimatum on the Godesberg-Munich pattern.

Nor would his Government have authorised him to do so — as is shown by the next incident in Dahlerus's story. At 12.30 P.M. he went to Göring and soon after one a large red envelope was brought in, its colour denoting matters of the highest importance ; it contained a translation of an intercepted and decoded Polish cypher-wire (which had reached the Polish Embassy only at 12.40). Its first part was communicated by Lipski to Ribbentrop at 6.30 P.M. (that is, as soon as he obtained an interview) and appears in the Blue Book, Yellow Book, and in the Polish White Book. As given to Ribbentrop, it ran as follows :

> Last night the Polish Government were informed by the British Government of an exchange of views with the Reich Government as to a possibility of direct negotiations between the Polish and the German Governments.
>
> The Polish Government are favourably considering the British Government's suggestion and will make them a formal reply on the subject during the next few hours at the latest.

In the text which Göring copied for Dahlerus and asked him to give to Henderson the word " favourably " (in the Polish original, *w duchu przychylnym*) is omitted, while after " and will make them " the words appear in brackets : *nicht der deutschen* (" not to the German Govern-

ment"). The omission is significant; and the remark in brackets is a German amplification or explanation — it is not in the original. Next followed "special and secret instructions for the Ambassador": he should not enter into any concrete negotiations, and if any verbal or written proposals reached him from the Reich Government, he should declare that he was not authorised to receive or discuss them, but that he had to transmit them to his Government and obtain further instructions. Such directions were only reasonable in view of the German practice of the preceding eighteen months which made every German demand for territory belonging to a neighbour into a "magnanimous offer", and any refusal to sign on the dotted line into an "intolerable provocation". The Polish Government would not have its representative exposed to extreme pressure and blackmail, nor even to excessive persuasion from friends and allies, but preferred to give to German demands proper and more detached consideration in Warsaw. But to Göring such instructions, the very negation of the "plenipotentiary" asked for in the German ultimatum, were downright "sabotage" of any peaceful settlement.

Dahlerus let him rant; and when Göring proposed himself to lunch, Dahlerus took care to improve his humour by good drink and wine; and having done so urged him to meet Henderson. With Hitler's consent, Göring invited Henderson, Forbes, and Dahlerus to tea at his house — they stayed with him from five till seven.[1] To Henderson the fact that the newly appointed President of the German Defence Council (or War Cabinet) could give them so much of his time "augured the worst"; presumably "everything down to the last detail was now ready for action".

At night Göring asked Dahlerus to come to him the next morning at eight. By that time the invasion of

[1] For an account of that tea-party, see above, pages 376-8.

Poland was in full swing. But Göring started by retailing to Dahlerus various alleged Polish attacks on German territory. "So much so," said Dahlerus in his cross-examination at Nuremberg,

> that I immediately phoned up London and got contact with the Foreign Office and informed somebody that according to the information I had received, the Poles had attacked, and they naturally wondered what was happening to me when I gave that information.

. . . . . .

What is the sum-total of Dahlerus's story? Discarding the prelude of Sönke Nissen Koog, it starts with the signing of the Russian-German Treaty on August 23rd. Göring who, rather than fight Britain, would have wished her once more employed in obtaining concessions for Germany, sent the unsuspecting Dahlerus on a very unclear mission to London. Halifax at first tried to re-direct negotiations into regular diplomatic channels, but next let himself be persuaded to give Dahlerus a personal letter to Göring: though devoid of concrete contents, it was ill-advised, for it sanctioned and prolonged irregular dealings apt to duplicate or complicate negotiations. After several hours of talk with Hitler and Göring in the middle of the night of August 26th-27th, Dahlerus returned with an oral message, to some extent at variance with the proposals received through Henderson — hardly a way of transacting business of that importance. Then on August 29th, when Germany was getting ready for action, Dahlerus was again despatched by Göring to London with confused blandishments and threats; and he returned with the most non-committal of answers, while the official British reply was sent through the Embassy. Next followed the scene of the gabbled Note, and Dahlerus, who hitherto had carried messages of very small intrinsic weight, became the channel through which

the exact contents of that Note were conveyed to the British Embassy, and by Henderson's action to Lipski. Once more Dahlerus's zealous and ill-judged endeavours merely added to the worries of over-worked and overwrought men.

While no one's account of things done, heard, or experienced under such stress (and without sleep) is likely to attain a high degree of accuracy with regard to detail, and Hr. Dahlerus's calls for careful scrutiny, there is no reason to doubt the basic veracity of his story. It shows the British Government determined to stand by the guarantee which they had given to Poland, but at the same time so anxious not to neglect any chance, however remote, of preserving peace that they even put up with a form of negotiations obviously distasteful to them. On the other side a most extraordinary picture emerges of the way in which the leading Nazis spent their time during the crucial week in history, of their behaviour, harangues, and intrigues, of their coarseness, incoherence, and hysteria. And although Hr. Dahlerus seems hardly a keen observer or critic, many, sometimes unconscious, touches delineate Göring's personality: very primitive and full of almost childish exhibitionism, confused, unstable, and excitable, shrewd yet gullible, restless and fond of bustling activity. The impression one derives is of great conceit employed in bolstering up a disintegrated personality (which would also explain Göring's addiction to drugs). Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, in cross-examining Dahlerus at Nuremberg on March 19th, asked, summing up the witness's own story:

> So . . . of the three principal people in Germany, the Chancellor was abnormal, the Reichmarshal . . . in a crazy state of intoxication and, according to the defendant Göring, the Foreign Minister was a would-be murderer who wanted to sabotage your plane?

Dahlerus nodded assent.

III. FRANCE AND POLAND (1935–1939)

" IT is not *Memoirs* that the reader will find in this book ", writes M. Léon Noël, French Ambassador to Warsaw, 1935–1939.[1] " Nor is it a *History* covering even in part the origins of the last war ", but merely " notes and reflections " — " testimony which I think it useful to add to the *dossier* of one of the most dramatic, and saddest, periods of our history ". The Yellow Book of 1939 could supply but " a very incomplete idea " of the work of the Embassy, and it suffers from suppressions imposed by policy or *convenance*. Thus the mistaken course " too long pursued by Colonel Beck " is covered up, nor does anything appear about Poland's relations with the Soviets, or even with Italy. " Care was taken to remove my frequent reports on the insufficiency of Polish armaments and the urgent need of redressing it. Moreover, while the Yellow Book was being prepared, certain influences saw to it that too much prominence should not be given to the counsels of prudence and moderation incessantly lavished by me in Warsaw." But by now, " after the large-scale incinerations on May 16th at the Quai d'Orsay, in June 1940 on the banks of the Loire, and lastly at Bordeaux, nothing remains of a great part of the French diplomatic documents for that period ".[2] And a similar fate has befallen M. Noël's own papers :

> A bag containing the most valuable part of my personal archives, entrusted to an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was burnt with all its contents in the furnace of a ship anchored in the

[1] Léon Noël, *L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne. Une Ambassade à Varsovie.* Flammarion, Paris, 1946 : 195 frs.

[2] Still documents, like cats, have more than one life, or rather exist as a rule in more than one copy.

> Gironde during those hours of excessive scare which followed the armistice and preceded the entry of the first German detachments into Bordeaux.

In fact only one new document, of considerable importance, appears in the book : excerpts from a long letter on the Franco-Polish alliance which Noël wrote to Bonnet on October 25th, 1938. Part of it was to have been included in the Yellow Book, but was not : " a simple technical error, no doubt, but which resulted in other warnings acquiring a priority which is not theirs ".

The material rendered accessible by the Nuremberg Trial came too late for M. Noël ; there are but three or four references to evidence given in November and December 1945, based on Press reports : the preface to the book is dated January–July 1944, and states in a postscript that only a few notes have been added " to take account of recent publications ". A large part of the book consists of a digest of diplomatic documents published early in the war, while lengthy excursions into the past testify to the " taste for history " avowed by the author. But the real importance of the book derives from his account of Franco-Polish relations between the wars, the way in which the two practised their alliance, and the sense in which he tried to influence it : for even now an Ambassador is more than a mere link between two Governments.

Noël seems to have been sceptical of the value and justification of a close Franco-Polish alliance, wherein he was probably right ; the disparity of numbers between France and Germany was not remedied by an alliance which was apt to add Russia to the other side. But the position of a French Ambassador in Warsaw acutely aware of that fact would at any time have been delicate and difficult, and still more so when the close treaty alliance was visibly breaking down in practice. Mutual good-will and forbearance, tact and frankness, but above

all a clear, steady purpose would have been required on both sides safely to continue, or honourably to dissolve, the alliance. But from the very first M. Noël was out of sympathy with Colonel Beck and, judging by his own book, frequently out of harmony with his official chiefs.

Formally Franco-Polish relations were governed by the political treaty and the military convention concluded on February 19th and 21st, 1921. Millerand was at that time President of the Republic, Briand Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Barthou for War; "without any hesitation they seem to have concluded these treaties which, they thought", writes Noël, "would reconstitute 'a barrier in the East' and make Franco-Polish collaboration against both Bolshevist Russia and Germany an essential element of European stability". It was only in November 1938 that Noël learnt of Marshal Foch having opposed a military convention with Poland.

> According to what General Weygand told me, the outlines of the military convention were fixed after a reception given at the Élysée in honour of Marshal Pilsudski. . . . The President of the Republic took Pilsudski and his collaborators to his study, together with Aristide Briand and Louis Barthou. Foch and the French generals . . . were left at the door, and the agreement was made without them. The French Government disregarded the categorical objections of the chief of our Army: France and Poland were now bound to each other.

Foch bowed to the decision, though, according to Noël, he did not change his outlook; while General Weygand considered French commitments "far too extensive". One would wish for the contemporary testimony of these men; but the way in which Noël quotes them is fully expressive of his own attitude and views.

Under the military convention France and Poland owed each other "efficacious and rapid" help, which,

except for the Parliamentary sanction required in France, was to have been " automatic ". But by the Treaty of Mutual Assistance concluded at Locarno on October 16th, 1925, mobilisation and military help were to be regulated by art. 16, or at least art. 15, para. 7, of the League Covenant. How such restrictions would work in practice naturally depended on those who would have to apply them. But to M. Noël that treaty " completed " the previous agreements, while to the Poles it seemed an unsettling complication — Locarno, which drew a distinction between Germany's Western and her Eastern frontiers, and co-ordinated French policy more closely with that of Great Britain, in itself marked a recession from the Treaties of 1921. Then in 1926 the Pilsudski dictatorship was established ; it " had nothing but distrust, contempt, and pity for our Parliamentary and democratic system ", nor did it share " a single idea which France stood for and tried to carry in the world ". This is eloquent but hardly convincing. French Cardinals had worked with Sultans and Protestant princes, French Republicans with Tsars, and after 1933, the real problem before France was whether to work with the Dictators or with the Bolsheviks : but for either policy the Polish alliance was an encumbrance.

Franco-Polish relations deteriorated still further after Beck had become Polish Foreign Minister. Noël, while protesting his " objectivity " (" rendered easy " by Beck having always observed " the deference which he owed to the representative of France "), starts off with a severe indictment against him :

> . . . during too long a time he imparted to Polish foreign policy, to say the least, the appearance of being frankly anti-French.
>
> Under guise of " independence " . . . his diplomacy incessantly countered most of our moves and opposed our theses, at Geneva and elsewhere,

> even when Poland had no reason to intervene ; I go further : sometimes even in circumstances where Poland's support of our action, or at least her abstention, would have been to her own interest.

So it was, says Noël, with regard to the League of Nations, collective security, the Little Entente, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. It looked as if reserve towards France, and friendship for her opponents, had been enjoined on Polish diplomatic representatives. " Poland's relations with any State improved as soon as difficulties arose between it and ourselves." " It was only too constantly that I had reason to complain of Colonel Beck's dissimulations and manœuvres."

A good many of Noël's criticisms of Beck are probably justified. He lacked Parliamentary and diplomatic training, having been reared in the school of the Military Intelligence ; like Ciano, he was still a young man when placed at the head of the Polish Foreign Office by the favour of a dictator, and could vie with Ciano in conceit, self-assurance, and the aping of his master. Though brazen and overbearing, he " had *finesse* pushed to extremes by temperament and method " ; secretive, and that by predilection, he would disguise and obscure his meaning and skilfully elude being pinned down to anything. The extent of Noël's dislike of Beck is shown by a quotation from an unnamed colleague, relegated, it is true, to a footnote : " If it happens to him to have said the truth, one notices it immediately ".

In January 1934 Poland concluded her Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler. Even some of the highest officials at the Quai d'Orsay, writes Noël, wondered whether, besides the Declaration, " there was not a secret pact . . . which, in the case of a European war, would have placed Poland on the side of Germany ". " One of them thought that Beck had signed with Germany and Hungary a treaty for the partition of Czechoslovakia. . . ." Noël

disclaims having believed it, but quotes himself as writing some time before 1935 from Prague, where he was French Minister : " It looks as if Poland wished and worked for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia ". Poland's attitude towards Czechoslovakia forms, to say the least, a deplorable chapter in her inter-war history. But while Noël lays on his own paint and that of other (anonymous) diplomats, he nowhere mentions that twice in 1933 (in March and November) Poland had suggested to France armed preventive action against Hitler, and both times had met with a refusal — after which she concluded her treaty with him.

Pilsudski died on May 12th, 1935, but his régime was posthumously continued by a group of followers ; and while Prime Ministers changed, three men gradually emerged as fixtures in their respective, interlocked, spheres : Mościcki, who in 1926 had been raised by Pilsudski from political insignificance to the Presidency of the Republic ; Smigly-Rydz, Pilsudski's presumed successor-designate at the head of the Army ; and Beck, since 1932 Foreign Minister. By 1939 that triumvirate had established themselves in the place of Pilsudski ; but when Noël first arrived in Warsaw, about a fortnight after his death, things seemed fluid. The circumstances of Noël's arrival were hardly favourable to easy relations with the régime ; he carried, as it were in his suitcase, the Franco-Soviet Pact and the project of an Eastern Pact, and he came after three years at Prague " where I was known to have been on very good terms with our Czechoslovak allies, *si mal vus* in Warsaw ". And he thus defines his own frame of mind on taking over the Warsaw Embassy : " I had no clear idea about the real state of Polish-German relations, nor consequently about the extent to which the Franco-Polish alliance could still be considered a political reality ". But it clearly appears from his own account that he had started off on the wrong

foot with Beck. "It was . . . very necessary", he writes, "to see to it that France was respected in Poland." Therefore, at the very first interview which he had with Beck after presenting his credentials, he expostulated about the "intolerable tone" of the semi-official Press with regard to France. "I ask you to make your Press extend to my country the treatment accorded to Germany; I claim for it the most favoured nation treatment." It further appears that Noël soon formed connexions with certain Opposition leaders — "among them were most of the men whose friendship for France . . . was least doubtful"; and that after he had been a year in Poland, he was busy working for Beck's overthrow. Success in these endeavours might have benefited Europe; but failure could not improve Noël's position or raise his influence in Warsaw.

"The Franco-Polish Alliance was essentially a military alliance, and yet relations between the two armies had practically ceased for some time." "The military convention of 1921 settled no details . . . it was a political rather than a technical agreement." "Strange as it may seem, never in the course of the fourteen years had the two General Staffs tried to fix it in concrete terms." (Here Noël overlooks the military talks of 1924–1925.) Pilsudski, a self-taught soldier with obsolete ideas, and in the last years of his life a very sick man, had left the Polish Army in a miserable condition from which Smigly-Rydz tried to retrieve it. He turned to Noël, who seems to have been throughout on friendly terms with him. Noël secured for him an invitation to France for the summer of 1936, and in the meantime negotiations were to be started for military credits and deliveries.

But before long a decisive point was reached in Hitler's ascent: on March 7th, 1936, he announced the re-militarisation of the Rhineland. The same day, at 5 P.M., Beck, after consultation with the President of the Republic,

the Commander-in-Chief, and the Prime Minister, informed Noël that Poland would stand by her treaty obligations to France. She meant to keep pace with France in mobilising. At first the French Premier and Foreign Minister seemed determined to act, but receiving little encouragement from the Press, Parliament, and public opinion, and none from Great Britain, and meeting with " prudent reservations " in General Gamelin and " hesitations and timidity " in the Service Ministers, let the last opportunity slip when Hitler could still have been easily checked. No blame for that most gratuitous blunder attaches to Beck and the Poles. And yet the crisis becomes with Noël the occasion for criticisms and innuendoes : those days showed that Beck " persisted in his unfriendly feelings towards France ". Noël recounts how, anticipating Hitler's *coup*, he himself had urged that France should either assent to it beforehand and cash in on it, or, if prepared to resist, should convey a discreet warning to Hitler. " In that case I proposed to confide French intentions to Joseph Beck with the conviction that he would not fail to inform Berlin." Next, he registers the story that Beck's firm language was due to his expecting France to capitulate, but adds that anyhow the other Polish leaders were convinced that she would not — and later on he concedes that, " on that day at least ", the conviction was shared also by Beck. Lastly, he charges Beck with a manœuvre " as unpleasant as it was symptomatic ". A communiqué, issued on March 8th by the semi-official telegraphic agency *Iskra*, gave the German case only. Noël, encouraged by Beck " in these grave circumstances not to hesitate and call on him at any time ' even in the night ' ", immediately went, " newspapers in hand, to address lively reproaches to him ". Beck disclaimed knowledge, but Noël believes that the note " had been inspired, if not drafted, by the Minister himself ". An interview between Noël and Opposition journalists

followed ; this produced criticism in a Governmental newspaper ; and again Noël hurried to Beck to declare that he " would not tolerate being taken to task by newspapers notoriously controlled by his Press service ". In short, the grave crisis became the occasion for petty mutual cavilling. Noël concludes : " French Government circles and the Quai d'Orsay did not thank Beck for his declaration of March 7th, but, rightly or wrongly, retained from the episode the memory of a piece of Polish double-dealing ". It seems possible that when France, contrary to her previous assurances, started backing down, Beck tried to cover up his tracks towards Hitler by methods none too choice. But if, as Noël puts it, " official relations between Paris and Warsaw were not improved " by that crisis, his own way of interpreting Beck's attitude and actions may well have contributed to it.

In May 1936 the *Front Populaire* took office. Noël, summoned to Paris, was informed that, for military reasons, they set store by the Polish alliance ; the invitation to Smigly-Rydz was to be renewed, and Poland was to be helped to re-arm. Noël would have the French Government insist on two conditions. The Poles meant to use the best part of the credits not for immediate re-armament but to build up war industries : for this he thought the position too acute.[1] The second condition concerned Beck.

> He was at that time much attacked in his own country. General Smigly-Rydz did not trust him : this was common knowledge, and various remarks which he let drop convinced me of it. I therefore

[1] But in May 1939, according to Łukasiewicz (see *Dziennik Polski*, March 24th, 1947), Gamelin urged the Poles to develop their own war industries as with the fall of Czechoslovakia the biggest Allied arsenal in East-Central Europe had passed into the hands of the Germans, and in case of war the Poles might easily find themselves cut off from the West. Moreover, by that time the French were loath to let equipment and supplies be exported, of which they themselves were very short (see below, page 452, *n.*, letter from Gamelin to Daladier, October 12th, 1938).

> suggested that he should be told: "The French Government is very willing to help you, but you know, rightly or wrongly, the French have no confidence in M. Beck; the French Parliament and public opinion might, we fear, refuse to have a big loan given to Poland, so long as he retains the Foreign Office". I had prepared the ground with General Smigly-Rydz: the way in which he received my hints sufficed to prove that he would not have been sorry to hear such language.

Both suggestions were accepted, and "it was agreed in the most formal manner" to insist on Beck's removal. Early in August Noël suddenly learnt that first Gamelin was coming to Warsaw to obtain clarification of Poland's attitude to France and Czechoslovakia (and to military collaboration with the U.S.S.R.[1]); but, according to Noël, he merely "exchanged generalities" with Smigly-Rydz. Gamelin himself states that in discussing common operations against Germany, he kept, as much as possible, to general formulas; as Germany could no longer be knocked out at one blow, he felt the need of reserving the French forces "for the further stages of the war", and he claims to have tried to convey to Smigly-Rydz that Poland should aim "at placing herself in a position to resist an initial German attack". To his offer to mediate in negotiating military co-operation with the Czechs, Smigly-Rydz replied by a general acknowledgment of its need and a recital of grievances concerning Teschen, while in the matter of collaboration with the U.S.S.R., temporary landing places for Russian aeroplanes (*atterissage passager*) was the limit to which Poland would go.[2]

When, on August 30th, Smigly-Rydz came to France, he was given, writes Noël, "a particularly solemn and cordial reception", and re-armament credits up to two milliard

[1] See Gamelin, *Servir*, vol. ii. *Le Prologue du Drame (1930–août 1939)*, page 227.

[2] *Ibid.* pages 228-30.

francs were accorded to Poland, without counterpart or conditions. " The agreement was hurriedly signed at Rambouillet, after an official luncheon." France was represented by the Premier, M. Blum, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance, MM. Delbos and Auriol, and Generals Gamelin and Colson; and Poland by Smigly-Rydz, General Stachiewicz, Chief of the General Staff, and her Paris Ambassador. " The French Ambassador in Warsaw, though present at the luncheon, was excluded from the conference." In these talks Delbos never raised the question of Beck, and, relates Noël, when Smigly-Rydz fished for it by asking " And what about M. Beck ? ", he replied: " I know him, I meet him at Geneva; he is an intelligent man "— then he changed the subject; and in spite of Noël's expostulations, would not take it up again. Nor, according to Noël, was the occasion used for discussing Poland's attitude to Czechoslovakia. " Naturally the French Ambassador in Warsaw was by no means delighted with the Rambouillet Agreement. . . . Colonel Beck and his policy were strengthened by an act which should have been conditional on his retirement and on the policy being radically changed. . . . Even on the purely technical plane our generals completely failed to take advantage of the occasion. . . ." The prospect of Smigly-Rydz's journey to France had filled Beck with anxiety and, according to Noël, Beck had worked against it. Now he met Smigly-Rydz at the station, " his face wreathed with smiles ". A week later Smigly-Rydz was made a Marshal; and next was given rank immediately after the President of the Republic.

Gamelin admits having been inclined to favour Noël's " manœuvre " against Beck whom he thought " too complex a man to be altogether trustworthy "; though he claims to have felt from the outset that Noël was deluding himself as to what could be expected from Smigly-Rydz in that matter. Still, he did not wish to discourage Noël,

and therefore kept his doubts to himself; and while he did not raise the question of Beck with Smigly-Rydz direct, he apparently let some of his *entourage* do so with their Polish opposite numbers. And this was the reply they received: "Our chief has no blind confidence in M. Beck, but we need him. To get rid of him might look like wishing to break with Germany. . . ." A similar view is ascribed to Delbos who, having praised to Gamelin "Beck's qualities as a diplomat, added: 'We need him in order to remain on good terms with Germany . . . we must gain time . . . neither you nor I want to provoke a war. . . .'" Yet even Delbos seems to have made some approach in the sense desired by Noël: "I learnt later on from M. Léger", writes Gamelin, "that M. Yvon Delbos came up against the same lack of response as myself, and that he did not think fit to insist". In short, there was a good deal of hesitant, half-hearted manœuvring.

As regards Poland's relations with Czechoslovakia, Gamelin communicated to Smigly-Rydz a memorandum which Beneš had transmitted to him through the Czechoslovak Legation in Vienna when Gamelin was returning from Warsaw: it is a remarkable document, and is reproduced in full in Gamelin's memoirs. Beneš declared that Czechoslovakia had always conducted her policy with a view to an ultimate understanding with Poland, and had therefore avoided any commitments towards a third party contrary to Polish interests; she had refused a Russian guarantee against Poland, and had no agreement with the Soviet Union, political or military, directed against her; still less with Germany; in fact, the Czechoslovak Government had since 1933 three times proposed to the Polish Government negotiations for a permanent far-reaching treaty of friendship without receiving either a reply or counter-proposals; but the offer stood, and if assured that the Polish Government had neither any engagements nor any intentions directed against Czecho-

slovakia, the Czechoslovak military authorities were ready to resume collaboration with the Poles; lastly, the Czechoslovak Government had repeatedly offered to negotiate with Poland about minority questions, but again the offer was not accepted. Smigly-Rydz, when returning Beneš's communication to Gamelin, declared that it was not for him to give a reply on political matters, but he would report to his Government, and that he realised the need of " solidarity " with the Czechs; and to Gamelin's remark that the Czechs wondered whether to extend their fortifications to cover their frontier with Poland, Smigly-Rydz replied that this was an " unnecessary precaution ". A year later he participated in stabbing Czechoslovakia in the back.

In the autumn of 1937 M. Delbos visited Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest, and Belgrade. Noël again urged him to raise the question of Polish-Czech relations. He failed to do so. The visit was a public " amnesty " for Beck. Noël now asked himself whether " seeing that Beck pursued a policy contrary to that of France, that no serious effort had been made to deflect him from it, and that there was no longer any prospect of his being removed . . . it was in the French interest to continue the alliance with Poland ". But in view of the good relations as yet persisting between Poland and Germany, it seemed more likely that the *casus foederis* would occur over French interests in Czechoslovakia or Spain : " prudence therefore bids us, in spite of all the detriment and annoyance caused to us by Colonel Beck's policy, to do nothing which would have put an end to the alliance ".

Soon after Delbos had left, Beck announced his forthcoming visit to Hitler. He went in January 1938, and returned well satisfied. " Hitler had given him clearly to understand that he was resolved shortly to ' settle ' the Austrian question." When this happened, Beck pulled off his own *coup*. Since Zeligowski's seizure of Vilna in

1920 there were no diplomatic relations, not even traffic connexions, between Lithuania and Poland. A frontier incident occurred in March 1938, and a "totalitarian" propaganda storm was promptly and effectively unleashed in Poland. Beck informed the foreign diplomats in Warsaw that "Poland's patience was exhausted, and that she would . . . compel Lithuania henceforth to entertain more normal relations with her". An ultimatum was sent demanding that a Lithuanian Envoy should present himself in Warsaw by April 1st; Lithuania had to submit but sought to save her self-respect by choosing her own date: April 15th. Great Britain and France recommended moderation; but Beck was adamant, and Polish troops were preparing to march in at midnight. At the last moment, intervention by the Western Powers made Kaunas give in. M. Noël does not seem to be fully aware of the *dessous des cartes* [1] in that transaction, but his account of the form given to it is correct.

Sordid and sinister, and not merely brutal and blatant, was the part which Beck played in the destruction of Czechoslovakia. The main responsibility for the Czech tragedy rests with France — this is frankly admitted by M. Noël. President Beneš had been "a loyal partner . . . always inclined to second France's policy, when she had one". He was misled and deserted. Had Poland stood by Czechoslovakia, the two together could have held up Germany's impact — the Opposition in Poland understood it but was helpless; [2] and then the Western Powers would have been forced to adopt a more sensible

[1] Poland's move in Lithuania, aimed at securing her northern flank against the Germans, was carried out without their knowledge, and at a time when they were not in a position to intervene — it roused considerable anger in Berlin. The wish to settle things before the Germans could take a hand in the matter was one reason for Beck's haste. These facts place his action in a rather different light than if it had been undertaken in an understanding with Hitler, though they are no excuse for his methods.

[2] The Opposition favoured a common front with the Czechs against Germany. Contact was made with Witos, the leader of the Polish Peasant

and worthy policy. But Beck was moving *pari passu* with Hitler, was doing all he could to undermine Czechoslovakia, engaged in wild propaganda against her, incited the Polish minority in Teschen, and raised territorial claims. When the crisis became acute, Polish troops were massed on the Czechoslovakian frontier — " a great part I learn ", writes Noël, " came from Western garrisons ". Noël, realising that " Polish official circles . . . were intent on securing success and prestige at the expense of unfortunate Czechoslovakia ", used his own influence in Prague to urge concessions. Beneš sent a message to Mościcki accepting in principle the Polish demands and agreeing to enter immediately into negotiations (Noël dates the message September 26th — it should be September 22nd) :

> Joseph Beck, whom I had advised beforehand of the favourable Czech reply, should have been satisfied. But it would have been mistaking his character to expect it. The acquiescence of Prague did not suffice ; he meant . . . to give his success the most spectacular character. He required from Czechoslovakia a kind of solemn capitulation which would be an event and enhance the prestige of his policy.

He cavilled, expressed doubts concerning the constitutional validity of Beneš's action, etc.[1] The Munich

Party, then an *émigré* in Prague ; and Marian Kukiel, a friend of General Sikorski (and subsequently Lieutenant-General in the Polish Army in Britain and Minister for War) secretly met him in Slovakia. Witos spoke very highly of Czechoslovakia's preparedness and determination, and felt certain that, as the price of an alliance, the Czechs would be ready to agree to frontier rectifications in Teschen and Slovakia. He said that, if authorised, he would undertake to bring about an immediate agreement. This information was passed on indirectly to the Polish Government. Even in the days before Munich it was believed in Polish Opposition circles that if France stood by the Czechs, the Polish Government would have to follow suit.

[1] See Georges Bonnet, *Défense de la Paix. De Washington au Quai d'Orsay* (1946), pages 256-60, for an account of Polish action September 20th-26th, and Appendix IV, pages 362-6, for wires exchanged between Bonnet and Noël on September 24th and 25th.

Conference intervened from which Beck was excluded. Others were setting themselves up as judges between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Beck again resorted to an ultimatum (its exact date is September 30th, 11.40 P.M.) : by October 1st midday Czechoslovakia had to concede the totality of the Polish territorial demands or accept the responsibility for the consequences (eleven months later Beck received a very similar document from Hitler). Outraged, the Czechs hesitated a while. But then they asked for an hour's extension, and accepted. This was the last " triumph " of Beck's policy. It earned him the highest Polish decoration, the Order of the White Eagle. On October 24th Ribbentrop offered Poland Germany's friendship, and for the first time demanded the cession of Danzig and of a corridor across the Corridor.

Noël knew nothing of those demands : his relations with Beck hardly invited confidences. But he was determined that France should not place herself " because of Poland in the situation from which we had extricated ourselves for the present by the Munich Agreement ". On October 25th he addressed a letter of fourteen pages to Bonnet, with a copy to the Political Department, (while his Military Attaché, General Musse, wrote in a similar sense to his own chiefs) :

> It is essential for our security as well as for our position in the world [says Noël] that we should at this time measure exactly the full bearing of our commitments, and that our agreements should be allowed to stand only to the extent to which we have the means and the will to face, if need be, the obligations devolving from them. . . .
>
> Till the September crisis I did not think that the time had come for re-examining our agreements with Poland. She did not seem in immediate danger from Germany, and therefore the *casus foederis* was not likely to play at short notice in her favour. . . .
>
> Since a few weeks, this reasoning no longer holds

> good to the same extent, and it seems to me indispensable forthwith to face the problem of our relations with Warsaw.

He reviewed French commitments to Poland in case of unprovoked German aggression, and concluded that they could hardly be " more precise or more extensive ". He foresaw that Danzig and the Corridor would be the next item on Hitler's programme, and that Poland would not cede them voluntarily. Hitler would then proceed as he had done in the case of Czechoslovakia.

> The reactions of French public opinion can be easily foreseen . . . they are indicated by the object of the German-Polish conflict, to say nothing about the feelings aroused in most Frenchmen by the policy pursued by Poland during the last few years, and more especially the last few weeks.

Indeed, this consciousness in itself vitiated Franco-Polish relations — the following paragraph in Noël's letter throws light on Beck's policy :

> Many Poles have realised for a long time past what to expect from French public opinion were our country exposed to war because of the Corridor. M. Beck repeatedly said to me in the early days of my stay in Warsaw : " We have no illusions, we know that our alliance with you is unilateral ; if you were attacked by Germany, Poland would march, because it would be in her interest ; but the opposite does not hold ; we do not forget the Press campaigns in France with the slogan : 'We shan't fight for the Corridor' ".

But this is to Noël a further argument in favour of loosening the bonds between the two countries — were France attacked by Germany, Poland, for the sake of her own security, would have to fight, treaty or no treaty ; whereas in peace-time the Franco-Polish Agreements " never prevent her from doing things harmful to us, and do not

protect us against surprises or ' bad turns ' from her. . . ." He concludes that " the maintenance of the *status quo* could not be justified ".

Noël did not wish to see the alliance broken off completely, for this might have forced Poland, in order to escape being partitioned between Germany and Russia, to enter Germany's orbit. But he wanted it reduced to a treaty of friendship and consultation, and the military help shorn of " automatism " (restored, in a way, with the fading out of the League of Nations and Locarno) : the French Government should be entitled to consider the object of the dispute, the trend of Polish policy, the state of French military preparedness and of French public opinion, and the interest France would have, and the dangers she would face, in intervening. In short, he wanted the agreements made more elastic, and thought it essential " to define and limit our risks which are too vague and too wide ". He also urged that concrete military dispositions should at long last be agreed upon between the two General Staffs (but again limiting French commitments). For although the military convention of 1921 prescribed " constant consultations on the necessary means and preparations " for carrying it out, next to nothing had been done in that direction during the past seventeen years. Noël repeatedly suggests that it was the Poles who avoided such technical discussions, fearing lest the French tried to circumscribe their commitments ; but one wonders whether it was not rather the French who tried to avoid translating their obligations into concrete terms.

In November 1938 Noël went to Paris. He talked to Weygand and Gamelin, and found both in complete agreement with his views. Weygand's approval was clear and without reservations ; he wanted automatism replaced by more prudent and more practical provisions. Similarly Gamelin, who urged, however, the need of

conducting the negotiation " with the greatest prudence so as to avoid a complete break with Poland ", and insisted on " the strictly confidential character of his reply ".[1] " M. Bonnet, as soon as I started speaking, set out to prove to me that our agreements with Poland contained enough fissures in all circumstances to place our country *à l'abri de la guerre.*" He had examined them under a magnifying glass and felt reassured. Noël warned him against excessive legalistic cleverness, but felt at least enlightened about Bonnet's *arrière-pensées.* Finally Bonnet declared himself convinced and anxious to get rid of the agreements both with Poland and Russia. Noël tried to see also Daladier, who eluded him. But he spoke to a number of other leading politicians — actual or potential Ministers — who, though otherwise differing in outlook, " all unanimously approved of my proposal to revise the Franco-Polish Agreements ".

Weeks went by, Ribbentrop and Bonnet signed the Franco-German Pact, and Beck declared himself delighted with it, but the promised instructions for negotiating a revision of the treaties failed to materialise. In December Beck went to the Riviera. " He was angling for an invitation from M. Bonnet. . . . I did nothing to facilitate it." Noël feared that in a personal talk " our Foreign Minister, whose firmness seemed very problematic ", might endorse all the French commitments to Poland, or else convey that France meant to leave Poland to her

[1] Gamelin mentions in his memoirs (vol. ii. p. 414) having, on October 12th, 1938, addressed a letter to Daladier as Minister of National Defence, which contained the following paragraphs:

> The importance of Poland remains considerable for us from the military point of view. Still, under the present conditions one is justified, without openly breaking our alliance, in wondering whether it would not perhaps be advisable not to seem any more to seek the co-operation of Poland, who would thereby be made aware of the dangers of her present policy.
>
> Anyhow, in the military sphere, the question arises whether we should continue supplying Poland with modern equipment at the expense of our own requirements. . . .

fate : " either would have encouraged Beck to pursue his tortuous policy fraught with danger for France ". By January 20th Noël, " tired of waiting ", again went to Paris. Bonnet excused himself : " If at this moment I touched our agreements with Poland, I should be accused of acting under German pressure. Ribbentrop's visit is still too recent ; I must wait a while." (" *M. Bonnet n'a pas l'esprit combattif* ", remarks Noël in another connexion.) But in fact, according to Noël, he had already started talks with M. Łukasiewicz, the Polish Ambassador in Paris, which " remained a mystery " for Noël. The Daladier Government " was moving towards reinforcing our commitments to Poland " — Noël's advice had not been accepted. But " perhaps M. Daladier and certainly M. Bonnet . . . reassured themselves with the thought that if our rich collection of pacts did not deter Hitler from a general war, they would at the last moment, by some ingenious formula, manage to elude our most precise and most formal engagements ". Noël at no point stops to consider to what extent the attitude of the French statesmen which he now discloses tends to justify a good deal in Beck's policy towards France, tortuous, rash, and ill-advised as it may have been in other directions.

" The Government did not think fit to consult me, or even to inform me, when they learnt of Great Britain's intention to give a guarantee to Poland — an unlimited guarantee. . . ." Next Daladier added to it a French guarantee, and talks for " an extension of the Franco-Polish alliance were started by M. Bonnet with the Polish Ambassador in Paris, again without the French Ambassador in Warsaw being informed. . . ." In these altered conditions —

> I imposed rules of conduct upon myself which I faithfully observed till September 1st, 1939 . . . :
>
> 1. To lavish on the Poles counsels of prudence and moderation. . . .

2. To refrain from confirming to Poland the engagements assumed by France, and to avoid most carefully anything which might remove among the Poles the doubts which still subsisted in some minds concerning France's will to stand by her engagements.

3. To harp with the French Government on the unpreparedness of the Polish Army and to demand from France and Great Britain maximum help in the form of credits and material. . . .

4. To recommend immediately increased contacts between the General Staffs. . . .

And Noël here adds a pleasing and well-deserved remark : " Much as I had previously to suffer from the policy and methods of Colonel Beck, from this time onwards, I am in a position to pay tribute to the dignity, prudence, and calm evinced by Poland's rulers and by the entire Polish nation ". Anyone acquainted with the facts from the British angle can subscribe to these words : whatever Beck's previous record, Great Britain had no grounds for complaint during the months which followed the conclusion of the Agreement of April 6th.

About the middle of May 1939, General Kasprzycki, Polish War Minister, came for a few days to Paris . . . for talks with our Army chiefs. . . . I had contributed to this journey from which I expected favourable results for defining the application of the Franco-Polish Military Convention. The Polish Minister had conversations with Generals Gamelin and Colson, which resulted in a " protocol " initialled by Generals Gamelin and Kasprzycki. M. Bonnet learnt by accident of the existence of that document. He was then discussing without my knowledge a new political agreement with M. Łukasiewicz, designed to confirm the new engagements assumed by France who followed the British lead. The Minister for Foreign Affairs considered that any new military agreement should be subject to the previous conclusion of a new political agreement, and he had his

> view accepted by the Cabinet. There was sense in it, but as the political agreement was not signed till September 4th — after war had broken out — the technical "protocol" remained a dead letter and was not followed up by any further conversation between the French and Polish General Staffs.

Noël further relates: "At the end of April [should be: beginning of August] 1939, when General Doumenc's mission went to Moscow, I learnt by chance that the French and Polish General Staffs had exchanged no information about their respective operational plans". And he further learnt from Polish sources that Kasprzycki had been authorised by Smigly-Rydz to communicate the outlines of the Polish plan, but that "our army chiefs did not raise the subject and limited the conversations to generalities so carefully that General Kasprzycki did not think fit to assume the initiative and talk to them about operational plans".

To the story of the last months and weeks before the outbreak of war, Noël has little to add, except on points of detail. Warsaw was not the chief arena for the transactions of that period, and Noël repeatedly complains of the way in which he was left in ignorance even of facts of vital importance to the French Embassy in Warsaw. There is something poignant about his account of the last night before France entered the war:

> In the middle of the night of September 2nd-3rd, I had a talk with Joseph Beck, and afterwards with Mme. Beck . . . which could not fail to be painful. I could well understand their growing anxiety, and, left without instructions, and almost without information from Paris, I could not reassure them. . . . Despite the general mobilisation ordered in France, I was not free of apprehension. I knew the state of mind of several members of the Government, and especially of M. Bonnet, who, in accordance with his temperament, must have preserved the *arrière-pensée*

> of finding *in extremis* some ingenious means of eluding the formal obligations to which the signature of France was appended. One can guess how I felt: anxious and sad, like all Frenchmen, at the thought that war was coming down once more on our country, but fearing, on the other hand, lest it escaped that scourge by a shameful and inexcusable default.

When at last the news came through of the French declaration of war, shouts of "*Vive Beck!*" mixed for the first — and also for the last — time with those of "*Vive la France!*"

The French remained inactive while the Germans were smashing Poland; and the men who in 1939 were responsible for the policy of France, can now hardly admit that, hiding a weakness such as few would have surmised, they tried to keep up Poland's determination by half-promises in which the Poles failed to perceive the "fissures". Nothing more authoritative than Gamelin's account of how the military Protocol was negotiated can be expected from the French side; and it gives also a good deal of the political background which will presumably be fully discussed in the second volume of Bonnet's memoirs. Meanwhile from the Polish side, Łukasiewicz has supplied his account of those political negotiations.

Gamelin claims to have been "much annoyed (*très contrarié*) by the arrival of General Kasprzycki", having wished to avoid any "precise conversations with the Poles" before discussing matters with the Russians, without whose support "a prolonged Polish resistance was unthinkable". (Is it to be understood that Kasprzycki was invited without Gamelin's consent or even knowledge? Daladier, Bonnet, Gamelin, Noël, etc., seem to have continually experienced "surprises".)

> General Kasprzycki arrived on Sunday May 14th. He came to see me late in the morning of Monday

> the 15th, after having called on the Prime Minister,[1] and he told me that the two Governments had drawn up a political agreement securing automatic intervention should the vital interests of either side be endangered. " France has agreed to consider Danzig a vital interest of her Ally."

The military talks started the next morning, May 16th, the chief French representatives being Gamelin, Admiral Darlan, and Generals Vuillemin, Georges, and Dentz; on the Polish side, Kasprzycki and Colonel Jaklicz, Deputy-Chief of the General Staff. Gamelin explained that " the French plan had to be very flexible ", as many unknown factors entered into the calculation. " It should therefore be agreed that whichever of the two States — France or Poland — is not faced by the main German forces, shall try to pin down a maximum of these on its front." Kasprzycki argued that the initial German effort would be against Poland, and would take the form of a surprise attack led by motorised forces. Gamelin remarked that France herself, if attacked first, did not ask for " a decisive effort which might exhaust her ally prematurely ". The discussion then turned to naval problems; and when those of air operations were reached,

> General Vuillemin [writes Gamelin] to my surprise, and without my having a chance of moderating in the presence of our allies his intervention, committed himself much further than seemed to me reasonable or than I would have wished: " The French Air Force ", he said, " can from the outset act vigorously with a view to relieving Poland . . . ".

Later on, Gamelin told Vuillemin that in his opinion " it was dangerous to go so far, and that the present state of our Air Force did not seem to admit it ". In the final agreement Gamelin " adhered to a formula which lacked

[1] Daladier, who was also Minister of National Defence and for War.

precision but reserved the future" (*je me tins à une formule imprécise mais reservant l'avenir*): "France will undertake immediately action in the air according to a plan fixed beforehand".[1] And even for that formula he made Vuillemin shoulder the responsibility.

Next, Dentz and Jaklicz discussed the probable distribution of the German forces. Jaklicz envisaged Germany employing 70-80 divisions against Poland, and only 20 against France; 8-10 as cover for Holland, Denmark, etc., and 10 for Switzerland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Gamelin expected larger forces on the French front, but said that should things turn out as anticipated by Jaklicz, new possibilities would, "at least temporarily", open for French action; and he insisted again on the need of elasticity in their plans. Then followed a discussion here quoted from the official minute:

> H.E. General Kasprzycki asks whether under these conditions the mass [of the French forces] could undertake an offensive sooner than in a fortnight?
>
> General Gamelin replies that this is more or less the period envisaged.
>
> General Georges gives certain particulars about the strength of the Siegfried Line and the artillery which would be required for attacking it. He estimates that an attack designed to break through it could not be undertaken before the 17th day.
>
> Colonel Jaklicz asks whether, if the main German effort is directed against Poland, she can count on the French forces crossing the frontier and opening (*pour entamer*) an offensive against Germany?
>
> General Gamelin assures him of it (*en donne l'assurance*).

This, one would think, clinched the question of the attack previously discussed; and in the final Protocol the 16th day was fixed for starting the major French operations.

[1] The Poles, who were conscious of the weakness of their own Air Force, seem to have attached much weight to that promise.

But General Gamelin having interlarded his quotations from the minute with comments which break its coherence, and having blamed Georges for going too far (like Vuillemin) " in the obvious desire not to discourage our allies whom he no doubt felt to be disturbed by my *réticences* ", reaches the conclusion that Jaklicz, " in fact, did not insist on an attack against the Siegfried Line. . . . I therefore thought it necessary to give immediately the assurance for which he asked." Does Gamelin suggest that Jaklicz, because he used the phrase about the French forces crossing the German border, could be taken to say that Poland expected from them nothing more than a symbolic gesture after which they were free to sit down on the other side of the frontier posts ?

Indeed, Jaklicz further enquired about the size of the French forces which could undertake the offensive against Germany,[1] and Gamelin replied : " Three-fourths of the French army hold the north-eastern front ; and half of these forces can take part in the offensive ". And he adds : " We had indicated to the Poles that we should put into the field the equivalent of about a hundred divisions. As a matter of fact, I was anxious not to be more precise than was necessary : half of the three-fourths was about 35 to 38 divisions."

On May 17th, the drafting of the " final Protocol " was started. Kasprzycki produced a draft which began : " In case of German aggression against Poland, or of a threat to her vital interests in Danzig which would lead to armed action on her part, the French Army will automatically open action with its various armed forces . . .". Gamelin insisted on adding the following preamble which was accepted by Kasprzycki : " The French and Polish

[1] When asking such questions, the Poles were moved by fears of the French forces being diverted against Italy, should she enter the war immediately, rather than of French inaction, which they seem hardly to have anticipated.

High Commands acting within the framework of decisions taken by the two Governments . . .". Kasprzycki further asked for a promise to attack the Siegfried Line and to deploy *le gros* of the French forces; but Gamelin claims to have replied that the attack against the Siegfried Line will depend on what German forces will hold it, and that he had not spoken of *le gros* of the French forces, but of about one-third. Next Gamelin in his memoirs proceeds to make great play with the words *les gros* in the Protocol, used, according to him, merely in opposition to the *avant-gardes* which would have to undertake the preliminary operations. And here is the French text of the two military clauses:

> *Dès qu'une partie des forces françaises sera prête (vers le troisième jour après le jour initial de la mobilisation générale française), la France déclenchera progressivement des actions offensives à objectifs limités.*
>
> *Dès que l'effort principal allemand s'accentuerait sur la Pologne, la France déclencherait une action offensive contre l'Allemagne avec les gros de ses forces (à partir du quinzième jour après le jour initial de la mobilisation générale française).*

Still, no interpretative ingenuity and quibbling about words can change the fact that an offensive with 35-38 divisions was promised for the 16th day of the French mobilisation (to the Poles, a regrettably long delay) and even an attack on the Siegfried Line, unless this was held in great force (which it was not); and that in September 1939 nothing was undertaken beyond patrol activities in the Saar. Therefore yet a different argument has to be resorted to: that the military Protocol was not binding unless and until a new political agreement was concluded.

Thursday, May 18th, being Ascension Day, and Gamelin requiring authority from the Government to sign the Protocol, he told Kasprzycki that he hoped to do so on Friday. Kasprzycki replied that he ought to start

for Warsaw on Saturday, or at the latest on Sunday, and that by then the political agreement would have been signed — " they had Bonnet's promise ". Still on the 17th, Gamelin went to see Daladier, made to him a full report, and found him labouring under the same double pre-occupation as himself: " not to undertake more than we could do ", yet " not to discourage our allies ". Daladier asked for 24 hours to consider the matter, and on Friday morning, May 19th, authorised Gamelin to sign the Protocol. To cover himself in every direction, Gamelin over the telephone informed M. Léger, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about the matter.

> I found he had grown very reticent. " It is clearly understood ", he said, " that the military agreement must be made to depend on the political. M. Georges Bonnet insists on it." I replied that this had always been my view, and that as a matter of precaution, I would attach to the Protocol a letter which I was going to draft immediately, and which would formally express that dependence.

He did so in a letter approved by Daladier and sent to Kasprzycki with the Protocol.

The next day, May 20th, Gamelin called on Kasprzycki at the Polish Embassy, and found him disappointed at the political agreement not having been signed yet. Meantime Łukasiewicz returned from the Quai d'Orsay, " extremely violent about Bonnet who had refused to sign the agreement ".

> I was, I must admit, much embarrassed. I myself knew from experience how very uncertain and changeable our Minister for Foreign Affairs was in his approach to problems, but I always acted on the principle that Frenchmen, especially those who, directly or indirectly, form part of the Government, should present a united front towards foreigners.

Next day Gamelin accompanied Kasprzycki to the station, " in order to soften the impression of uncertainty about our basic intentions which — he did not hide it from me — he was carrying away from Paris. Nor did I hide from him, though I was very friendly, that we could not forget the attitude adopted by Poland at the time of Munich. . . ."

In the course of the week Gamelin learnt that the Government had set aside the draft. " I therefore considered our military Protocol of no validity and not binding on us " — which pleased Gamelin, " especially because of the Air Force clause ". For to his own clauses he could always have given the proper interpretation — *je pourrais donner une suite logique.* Finally Gamelin reproduces a letter of May 18th, addressed by Bonnet to Daladier; the text was enclosed in it " which following your public declarations, was unanimously approved by the Cabinet on May 12th ", and was " to be signed shortly by the Polish Ambassador and myself ". Its purpose was formally to restore the automatic character of the Franco-Polish mutual obligations and to bring them into line with the Anglo-Polish Declaration of April 6th: France and Poland were to render each other immediate aid and assistance if the vital interests of either were endangered, directly or indirectly, and the Power so threatened had recourse to arms; in addition, the Polish Ambassador was to declare that Poland considered Danzig a vital interest, and the French Foreign Minister was to take cognisance of that declaration. Gamelin supposes that it was this letter which caused Daladier to authorise the signing of the military Protocol. But on the 19th, Bonnet changed his mind. " It is difficult for soldiers to adjust themselves to so versatile a foreign policy ", writes Gamelin. And he asks: " Was this worthy of France ? "

What Gamelin does not examine is the significance

and bearing of the proposed political agreement: it was " to assure the full efficacy of the Franco-Polish Alliance " by fixing more clearly how and when the *casus foederis* would arise — but once this was acknowledged to have arisen, it became superfluous. Yet in the conference of August 23rd, 1939, when contemplating a war waged in common by France and Poland, Gamelin still seems to have treated the Protocol of May 19th as void and non-existent; and so he did after the war had broken out.

Łukasiewicz in his memoirs explains the origin and nature of the new treaty and the course of the negotiations.[1] His first conversations with Daladier and Bonnet took place immediately after Beck's visit to London, and on April 13th, Daladier, speaking in the Chamber of Deputies, brought the French-Polish Treaty into line with the London Declaration. On April 28th, Łukasiewicz presented to Bonnet a draft protocol received from Warsaw, and after some further negotiations its text was settled on May 12th, but Poland suggested the additional declaration concerning Danzig; Bonnet was not unfavourable to it, and promised his reply within a few days. The same day, May 12th, Łukasiewicz was instructed to start negotiations for credits and war supplies, and through the Military Attaché was informed of Kasprzycki's impending visit.

On May 17th, Bonnet, having accepted the additional declaration on Danzig, proposed signing the agreement on Friday, May 19th, at 4 P.M.; on the 19th, pleading great pressure of work, he suggested postponement to the 20th; on the 20th, he asked that it should wait till his return from Geneva [2] on May 24th; he was much rushed — there was a Cabinet meeting that day, and Halifax was arriving in Paris. Łukasiewicz, because of the military negotiations and Kasprzycki's impending departure,

[1] In the *Dziennik Polski* of March 10th, 14th, and 27th, 1947.

[2] For the Geneva meeting, see above, page 163.

protested against such further postponement; and it was agreed that Bonnet should speak to him again after the Cabinet. Meantime M. Frankowski, Counsellor to the Polish Embassy, went to the Quai d'Orsay, and the last technical details preparatory to the signing of the new agreement were settled.

At 1 P.M., Bonnet telephoned,[1] asked once more for a postponement to the 24th, and incidentally mentioned that, having the previous day enquired from the French Ambassador in London whether Danzig appeared in the minutes of the Anglo-Polish conversations, he had received a negative answer. Łukasiewicz replied that Beck had left the British Government in no doubt concerning the Polish attitude about Danzig, and that the British attitude had been stated by Chamberlain in Parliament. Bonnet concluded by saying that he would communicate with Łukasiewicz once more before leaving for Geneva, but failed to do so.

> A few hours later, when accompanying General Kasprzycki to the station, I met General Gamelin, and from the talk with him I gathered that the Quai d'Orsay intended to propose to us a different text of the declaration about Danzig and that this prevented at the last moment the signing of the political Protocol as had been previously settled.

Having returned from Geneva, Bonnet, on May 25th, told Łukasiewicz that he had obtained from Halifax information about the London talks of April, that he now wished further to consider the draft agreement, and could not sign the one previously approved by the two Governments. "As M. Bonnet spoke in an exceedingly vague manner and gave no concrete reasons for questioning the

[1] According to Gamelin, Łukasiewicz returned from the Quai d'Orsay, while Gamelin was with Kasprzycki at the Polish Embassy (see above, page 461); but from Łukasiewicz's account one would gather that both his talks with Bonnet, and most certainly the second, were over the telephone.

results of our previous negotiations, I declared, after almost an hour's conversation, that nothing was left to me but to treat our negotiations as adjourned and await his further initiative." No sooner had Łukasiewicz returned to his Embassy than Bonnet telephoned that he wanted to talk to Łukasiewicz and would immediately call on him. " Our conversation was not a pleasant one; still, I learnt from M. Bonnet that he had prepared a new draft which he was trying to settle with the British Government ". Danzig had not been the stumbling-block, and Bonnet's amendments were " comparatively unimportant ". But he " would not admit ", writes Łukasiewicz, " that the formula concerning the Franco-Polish Alliance should be settled with Warsaw first, and not with London ". As a result of that conversation, there was an exchange of official letters between Bonnet and Łukasiewicz confirming the French engagements analogous to those accepted by Britain, and following the line indicated by Daladier in his speech of April 13th. Bonnet further stated that the proposed declaration concerning Danzig met with no objections from the French side. " Thus, although the drafting and signing of the political protocol was delayed, the points which mattered to us most were in principle favourably settled." Łukasiewicz adds that he never got to the bottom of what had caused " the unexpected fluctuations of M. Bonnet ", but he surmised that they originated in London (which is most unlikely) and were connected with the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations.

But while there are certain obvious connexions between these and the Anglo-Polish Treaty as signed on August 25th, less apparent are any between them and the Franco-Polish draft agreement (which is published in Gamelin's memoirs). It almost looks as if the refusal to sign had been meant to provide loop-holes and " fissures " for evading obligations, not least those just assumed in the military Protocol. The Poles seem not to have realised

how little the French military leaders thought themselves able or bound to do when the weight of the German forces would hit Poland. This was prudently withheld from them, lest they might be discouraged from " offering honourable resistance ".

IV. CIANO AND MUSSOLINI

"I FIRST knew of the existence of this Diary [1] . . . from Count Ciano himself", writes Mr. Sumner Welles in his Foreword. "He showed it to me and read me excerpts from it in my first conversation with him. There is no question of its authenticity." This is confirmed by internal evidence. No forger, however painstaking and ingenious, could compose a diary so convincing in its day-to-day recordings and in its human flimsiness, vanity, and contradictions. Moreover, it can be collated with German minutes produced at the Nuremberg Trial, with the published correspondence between Mussolini and Hitler, etc.; while an attempt to reconstruct the story, say, of the Italian mediation, August 31st–September 2nd, 1939, shows how well the entries in *Ciano's Diary* fit into that crossword puzzle and what valuable clues it supplies for fixing the rest.[2]

The foreground is held by Mussolini — massive, brutal, unprincipled, frustrated, and well-nigh tragic in his failure, for human traits are not lacking; and behind him stands his son-in-law Ciano (born in 1903, since 1936 Foreign Minister): like the secretary in eighteenth-century portraits, subservient yet convinced of his own importance, registering silent criticisms or voicing as much of them as befits the occasion. A mass of trivial anecdote fills parts of the diary: but that too — gossip from the dictator's servants' hall — is characteristic of the writer, the time and

[1] *Ciano's Diary, 1939–1943*. Edited with an Introduction by Malcolm Muggeridge. Foreword by Sumner Welles. Heinemann, London, 1947. 21*s*. (This is the British edition of *The Ciano Diaries* which were published in the United States in 1946; quotations from the diary in Section I of this book reproduce the text of the American, but this essay that of the British edition).

[2] See above, pages 383-9.

its atmosphere. In a final entry, dated " December 23rd, 1943, Cell 27 of the Verona Gaol ", Ciano says that " these hasty notes " were but " raw material " to be worked up with the help of other documents. " If Providence had granted me a quiet old age, what excellent material for my autobiography ! " The diary refers some forty times to stenographic notes and reports " to be found elsewhere ", or entered in " my book containing an account of my conferences ". Such *pièces justificatives* are naturally missing ; that the rest should appear in its original form is a gain.

The *Diary* covers four years, from January 1939 till Ciano's dismissal from the Foreign Office on February 3rd, 1943 (there are two gaps in 1941 : January 27th–April 23rd, due to absence on active service, and July 23rd–September 21st, caused by illness, while a few pages, states the editor, had been removed). But the first entry does not read like the opening of a newly started diary — what has become of the previous volumes ? Mussolini knew of the diary, and took an interest in it ; on three occasions he is quoted referring to it. When Neville Chamberlain died, his tasteful comment was : " This time he definitely missed the bus " — " and he was so pleased with his own remark ", writes Ciano, " that he asked me to include it in my diary ". And this is the last reference, on November 6th, 1942 :

> Mussolini asked me if I was keeping my diary up to date. When I answered affirmatively, he said that it will serve to prove how the Germans, both in military and political fields, have always acted without his knowledge. But what does his strange question really hide ?

Ciano's discloses anxiety. What if Mussolini had asked to see the diary which he was showing about to others ?

In the final entry Ciano claims that he had always opposed the German alliance, and for a long time " had so contrived that the persistent German offers were

allowed to drift ". The statement is not borne out by contemporary entries. On January 1st, 1939, Ciano notes, without demur, that Mussolini wanted the pact signed during the last ten days of January : the Duce considered a clash with the Western democracies inevitable, and wished to effect a military alignment in advance. Ciano telephoned the decision to Ribbentrop, who agreed that everything could be ready by then, " even on the Japanese side "— Germany meant to start off with a Tripartite Alliance. Ciano notes that Attolico, Ambassador in Berlin, who had opposed the German alliance, was coming round, while Grandi did not expect any very serious repercussions in London ; even the King seemed satisfied —" he does not like the Germans, but he detests and despises the French ". After Chamberlain's and Halifax's visit to Rome (January 11th-14th) — which was kept in a minor key since the Duce did not believe in its utility — anti-French hatreds were to be fanned among the populace : " France is a bourgeois state, defender of bourgeois privilege ". The delay was caused by the Germans, not by Ciano, and Mussolini was vexed, for he favoured signing immediately, without Japan.

The Axis was " becoming popular ", wrote Ciano, who bustled with activity and over-bubbled with admiration for his chief. He exulted in the glory of those " dynamic " days. A message from Franco was appreciated by Mussolini for it read like " the report of a subordinate ". François-Poncet, the new French Ambassador, tried at a dinner to approach the Duce, " who ostentatiously turned his back on him ". On January 27th, when Lord Perth had brought the gist of a speech which Chamberlain proposed to make in Parliament, Mussolini remarked : " I believe this is the first time that the head of the British Government has submitted to a foreign Government the outline of one of his speeches. It's a bad sign for them." The same day, on a report that the Greek military

attaché at Bucharest had made insulting remarks about the Italian army, the Greek Minister was summoned, and he " trembled like a leaf when Mussolini, with a face as hard as metal, told him that if, within three days, full satisfaction was not given us, there would be serious complications ". He had nothing to say " during this stormy scene . . . except to congratulate us on the capture of Barcelona ", and on January 30th brought an answer " of abject submission " which showed " the Greeks' fear of us ". The Turkish Ambassador was told by Ciano what he had read in a decoded Turkish telegram, and " became as red as a lantern ". The Dutch Minister made representations about the treatment of Dutch Jews — " imagine the Dutch trying to be tough with us ! " And when King Zog of Albania asked Italy to intercede with the Yugoslavs on behalf of the Albanian minority — " I shall certainly give Zog the mediation he asks for ! " Ciano was discussing a partition of Albania with his friend Stoyadinovich, the semi-Fascist Premier of Yugoslavia. Besides arrogance there was wile : " Every possibility of dissolution and breakdown of other peoples should be encouraged and assisted by us at the proper moment ", wrote Ciano ; " like the octopus we must darken the waters ", declared Mussolini.

It was a blow to Italy when in the first days of February Stoyadinovich was forced to resign. The Duce saw in it " another proof that we can do business with one country alone, that is, Germany, which, like ourselves, is not changeable in its directives and in the obligations it assumes ". Towards Berlin there was intimate solidarity. Mackensen, the German Ambassador, was shown the record of talks with the British Ministers in Rome, and when Daladier tried to negotiate with Italy through Baudouin (according to Ciano, behind the back of François-Poncet) Mackensen was again kept " secretly informed of everything ". There was admiration and

imitation of Germany, but no feeling of inferiority. Mussolini, convinced that " a smart soldier is a good soldier ", introduced the Prussian goose-step in the Italian Army, and called it " the Roman step " (*passo romano*). Yet he considered the Germans " a military people, but not a warrior people " (the Italians presumably were the warriors). Ciano, after a visit to Poland in February 1939, complained that the Poles " love in us our artistic nature rather than the strength of our arms in which they still do not completely believe ".

Then came the Ides of March, with the Italian Axis partners as much in the dark as British Ministers delivering " sunshine talks ". On the 13th, Göring having left San Remo to attend a Cabinet meeting, Ciano begins to wonder " what can be Germany's intention ? "— there had been merely " vague expressions of dissatisfaction with the Prague Government ". On the 14th he notes that for the first time Ribbentrop has informed Attolico of the German programme for Czechoslovakia :

> It is not known as yet when all this will take place, but such events are bound to produce the most sinister impression on the Italian people. The Axis functions only in favour of one of its parts which . . . acts entirely on its own initiative, with little regard for us.

As he was writing the events were taking place. " It is useless to deny that all this worries and humiliates the Italian people." The Prince of Hesse, Victor Emmanuel's son-in-law, arrived " with the usual message " from Hitler, and the usual list of reasons why he found himself forced to act. " Such pretexts may be good for Goebbels' propaganda, but they should not use them when talking with us." The Italian people now needed some satisfaction, be it in Albania. The Duce was

> unhappy and depressed. . . . He did not wish to give Hesse's news to the press (" the Italians would

> laugh at me ; every time Hitler occupies a country he sends me a message "). He continued to talk about Albania. . . .

But Albania was not an equivalent for Bohemia, " one of the richest territories of the world ". Next day Mussolini again " looked sullen. . . . He now believes that Prussian hegemony in Europe is established . . . a coalition of all other powers, including ourselves, could check German expansion, but could not undo it." He therefore continued to favour a German alliance. It is on March 16th that Ciano for the first time expresses " misgivings " about it ; and he writes on the 19th : " the events of the last few days have reversed my opinion of the Führer and of Germany ". Foreign diplomats he let, however, infer " that we were in agreement or had at least been informed, but it is such a nuisance to lie ". Therefore, while pressing for a military expedition to Albania, he denied any such intention to the Yugoslav Minister ; and he started plotting with Croats for the destruction of Yugoslavia.

For a few days Mussolini continued " anxious and gloomy " — " it was the first time that I had seen him thus ". But " attempts to constitute a 'democratic bloc' . . . hardened the Duce in favour of the Germans ". Moreover, a letter from Ribbentrop solemnly recognised " exclusive Italian rights in the Mediterranean, in the Adriatic, and in adjacent zones " : with objectives fixed, spheres of influence established, and the Germans from the Alto Adige removed to Germany, Mussolini meant to continue the Axis policy. And here is a passage, of March 21st, typical of the pre-war Ciano :

> The Grand Council met. . . . The Duce talked about the necessity of adopting a policy of uncompromising loyalty to the Axis. He made a marvellous speech which was argumentative, logical, cold, and heroic. Balbo and de Bono were derisive. . . . Balbo permitted himself to make an unfortunate

> remark : " You are licking Germany's boots ". I protested violently, and I demonstrated to them that Mussolini's policies had always been those of a proud man. The Duce approved of what I had done. . . .

Action in Albania was to ensue. A letter from Chamberlain reinforced Mussolini's decision, being " another proof of the inertia of the democracies " (its text was communicated to Mackensen). And when on March 28th Madrid fell, the Duce,

> pointing to the atlas open at the map of Spain, said : " It has been open in this way for almost three years, and that is enough. But I know already that I must open it at another page." He has Albania in mind.

The Duce, writes Ciano on April 5th, is

> calm, frightfully calm, and more than ever convinced that no one will want to interfere in our affair with Albania. However, he has decided to march, and he will march even though all the world may be pitted against him.

Heroic when convinced that he will not be opposed : and herein he judged rightly. " The memorandum which Lord Perth left with me in the course of a cordial visit might have been composed in our own offices ", notes Ciano on April 7th, the day the occupation of Albania was started, largely under his own direction. Bribery and " compensations of a personal nature " played a conspicuous part ; but it was all very fine —" our successes have been greater than could have been thought possible ". Ciano felt that he had " given Albania to Italy " ; and the Albanians, while averse to personal union with Italy, would all agree to " having a prince of the House of Savoy or, better still, they would like to have me ". He now busied himself with the Albanians in Yugoslavia — a fit diversion for Albania and " a dagger thrust into the back of Yugoslavia " ; he also hastened to assure her Minister

of Italy's *désintéressement* in those districts.

On May 6th Ciano met Ribbentrop in Milan, " to discuss common policies ". In Verona gaol he wrote :

> The decision to conclude the Alliance was taken by Mussolini, suddenly, while I was in Milan with von Ribbentrop. Some American newspapers had reported that this city of Lombardy had received the German Minister with hostility, and that this fact was proof of the diminished personal prestige of Mussolini. Hence his wrath. I received by telephone the most peremptory orders to accede to the German demands for an alliance, which for more than a year I had left in a state of suspense and had thought of leaving there for a much longer time. So the " Pact of Steel " was born.

Mussolini's telephone call is recorded in a contemporary entry, but there is no trace either of Ciano's dissent or of pressure from Ribbentrop.

> The Alliance, or rather the immediate announcement of the Alliance [writes Ciano on May 6th], was decided on Saturday evening immediately after dinner . . . following a telephone call from the Duce. After the conversation I reported to Mussolini the satisfactory consequences from our point of view.

And on May 7th :

> Mussolini, when he has obtained something, always asks for more ; and he has asked me to make a public announcement of the bilateral pact which he has always preferred to the triangular alliance. Von Ribbentrop . . . at first hesitated, but then yielded, pending Hitler's approval of the proposal.
>
> Hitler, when reached by telephone, gave his immediate approval, and has personally collaborated in drafting the agreement. When I informed the Duce on Sunday morning he expressed particular satisfaction.

An alliance was thus hastily announced which Mussolini was determined to conclude. But Ciano's subsequent allegation that Italy's fate was settled entirely by " the spiteful reaction of a dictator to the irresponsible . . . utterances of foreign journalists " is just a story. Impending death does not necessarily induce historical accuracy or perspective; notes and documents are more helpful.

By May 21st the text of the treaty was settled, and Ciano arrived in Berlin. Ribbentrop assured him of " Germany's interest in a long period of peace and intention to ensure it for herself — at least three years ", and the " Pact of Steel " was signed — there is no trace of misgivings or protest in his diary. Hitler was pleased; Ribbentrop was awarded the highest Italian decoration; only Göring " had tears in his eyes when he saw the collar of the Annunziata around Ribbentrop's neck ", and not around his own. And here is a " conversation piece " of the Führer and his *entourage* :

> I found Hitler very well, quite serene, less aggressive. A little older. His eyes are more deeply wrinkled. He sleeps very little. In fact less and less. And he spends a great part of the night surrounded by colleagues and friends. Frau Goebbels, who is a constant member of these gatherings and who feels very honoured by them, was describing them to me without being able to conceal a vague feeling of boredom on account of their monotony. It is always Hitler who talks! He can be Führer as much as he likes, but he always repeats himself and bores his guests.

And here is another piece from Rome in the pre-war *genre* — a description of the Duce's reception, on May 27th, of Sir Percy Loraine, the new British Ambassador :

> The Duce, who ordinarily is courteous and engaging, was very stern; his face became absolutely

> impenetrable ; it looked like the face of an Oriental god sculptured in stone.

He asked Sir Percy whether " any tangible value " was left in the Anglo-Italian agreement ; countered him harshly ; criticised the Anglo-Polish pact ; and with " a brief and cutting comment on the Anglo-Russian alliance ", brusquely ended the conversation.

> During . . . the long walk between the table and the door, Loraine sought for some human contact with the Duce. But it was impossible. He walked slowly and gravely, with his eyes on the floor and his mind elsewhere. His leave-taking was icy.

Immediately after this interview Mussolini gave Ciano a memorandum to carry to Hitler — its text is among the Nuremberg documents : extremely aggressive, but at long range ; the great offensive against the democracies should start (in a few years' time) with territorial seizures in the Danube area (where Italy would be the recipient). Bismarck once said that the Italians " have such a big appetite and such poor teeth ".

As early as February 19th, Ciano notes the Duce's dissatisfaction with the army and aviation —" but naval preparation is perfect " ; and on March 31st mentions " disquieting impressions " connected with the Albanian expedition : " they cannot . . . put together a battalion of trained motor-cycle troops " for a surprise arrival in Tirana. On April 29th he speaks of the great number of divisions which " scarcely have more than the strength of regiments " ; ammunition is short, the artillery is out-moded, " anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons are alto-gether lacking ". " There has been a good deal of bluffing in the military sphere ", and also in aviation. On May 2nd :

> . . . our armament situation is disastrous. . . . But what is the Duce doing . . . there is trouble . . . if an officer doesn't know how to do the goose step,

but he seems little concerned about the real weaknesses of which he certainly is very well aware.

No wonder, then, if the tin god of war is now found working for peace.

Since April Attolico had been foretelling a German attack against Poland, but his warnings were not heeded.[1] At last early in August Ciano became uneasy, and was sent by the Duce to plead with Hitler and Ribbentrop for delaying the conflict. The story of the talks of August 11th-13th is fully told in a German minute produced at Nuremberg.[2] And here is Ciano's account in a nutshell : " The decision to fight is implacable. . . . The fate that might befall us does not interest them in the least."

> I return to Rome completely disgusted with the Germans, with their leader, with their way of doing things. . . . Now they are dragging us into an adventure which we do not want and which may compromise the régime and the country as a whole. . . .
>
> The Duce's reactions are varied. At first he agrees with me. Then he says that honour compels him to march with Germany. Finally, he states that he wants his part of the booty in Croatia and Dalmatia.

Now the real Mussolini appears from behind the monumental marble mask : impressionable and easily swayed, full of doubts hidden under exuberant bravado, highly sensitive to criticism and afraid of it, therefore vulnerable. But energetic, ambitious, and creative he cannot bear the tension of his own contradictory emotions and, though critically aware of a situation, is apt to rush into action ; and then he reels back, or, aloof and isolated, stubbornly and perversely sticks to the course he has mapped out for himself. And gradually, as things go from bad to worse, his tragedy unfolds : he has tried to

[1] See above, pages 259-61.

[2] See above, pages 263-9.

force his own conception of greatness on the Italian people, to mould them like plastic material in his own ideal image — and he has found them putty. Defeat and failure re-awaken in him the aggressive, violent, ill-adjusted rebel. He blasphemes against God, inveighs against religion and the Church, attacks the monarchy ; reviles the middle classes, the generals, the army, the entire nation. Is that the Duce? The man who burdened the world with the *Führer-Prinzip* and devised its trappings? The descent to the ridiculous is seen even by those sufficiently crude ever to have thought him sublime.

Among them was Ciano, devoid of deeper feelings (except for a melodramatic attachment to his dead " heroic " father), but very intelligent and quick in sensing an atmosphere or gauging a situation. He had been aping Mussolini through half-unconscious identification : but he soon realised that his idol was disintegrating, and having been bound to him in a high degree by fear (" I have seen him quail . . . when the Dictator showed irritation ", writes Mr. Sumner Welles), he gradually disengaged himself from the Duce : a bitterly hostile critic. To himself this liberation felt like growth — which it was not : for in his more serious work or thoughts he had merely reflected Mussolini, and henceforth nothing was left but a plotting, gossiping, disloyal servant — for a servant he remained, registering to the very end the moods of the master whom he no longer respected. None the less he seems plausible, and may have been charming, so long as he chose to keep from view his arrogance and self-seeking vanity. But as he was naive, in spite of all his would-be Machiavellianism, he is seen in the end as a playboy whom circumstances had enabled to climb in the footsteps of a greater man.

When the Duce learnt that there was to be war, his

face — that face " of an Oriental god ", metallic in its hardness — " fell with anxiety and doubt ". August 14th-21st he vacillated ; one day he was convinced that he " must not march blindly with Germany ", but gradually " prepare the break " ; another day he feared incurring Hitler's wrath and vengeance if Italy backed out, or losing a chance of doing " good business cheaply " if there was no war. Again he wanted to tell the Germans that Italy will march ; but was persuaded to wait till asked. Next he reverted to his previous idea : he must " support Germany at any cost ", or else the Press of the whole world will say that Italy was cowardly, unprepared, and has shirked war. On the 21st, he decided to send Ciano for a further talk with the Germans : and then they learnt of Ribbentrop's forthcoming journey to Moscow — a complete change of scene. On the 25th Hitler, having fixed the invasion of Poland for the next morning, sent an " ambiguous message . . . couched in abstract language " but indicating that action would start shortly. Mussolini had to show his colour : he replied that Italy could not go to war unless furnished with " all the war supplies and raw materials " she required. Asked what was needed, the Italians compiled a list. " It's enough to kill a bull — if a bull could read it." But Hitler replied that he was going to war, and merely asked Italy not to make known her decision, to continue military preparations " in order to impress the French and British ", and to send workmen to Germany. The Duce agreed.

But he was " out of his wits ". His instincts " and his sense of honour were leading him to war ". Unable to wage it, he worked for a second Munich, because the position of a neutral was " not at all to his liking ". But his " mediation " failed because Britain insisted on a previous withdrawal of German troops from Poland.[1]

[1] See above, page 388.

Yet he had to remain inactive. Ciano writes on September 18th :

> . . . our first-line forces amount to only ten divisions. The thirty-five others are patched up, under strength and ill-equipped. The Duce . . . uttered bitter words about the real condition of the Army. . . . He boasts about our Air Force . . . I advised him to . . . count the planes in the hangars and then add them up.

And on October 9th :

> I have never seen the Duce so depressed as he was this morning. . . . He did what is for him an exceptional thing : unburdened his feelings to me. " The Italians," he said, " after having heard my warlike propaganda for eighteen years, cannot understand how I can become the herald of peace, now that Europe is in flames. There is no other explanation except the military unpreparedness of the country, but even for this I am made responsible — me, mind you — who have always proclaimed the power of our armed forces."

Hitler let him down lightly ; wrote to him kindly ; and the Duce when mentioned twice in a speech by the Führer, felt flattered. Yet he was " somewhat bitter about Hitler's sudden rise to fame " ; " the idea of Hitler waging war, and, worse still, winning it, is altogether unbearable for him ". " He would like to do something that would get us into the game. He feels left out, and this pains him." Fundamentally, he was still pro-German, believed in Germany's victory, hence in the need of fighting by her side. But on November 20th he instructed the Italian Consul in Prague to advise the Czechs to side with the Communists ; and on December 26th, having learnt of the intended German invasion of Belgium and Holland, had Ciano inform their diplomatic representatives of it.

Mussolini continued to vacillate. When early in March Britain stopped coal ships for Italy, " this display of

force " angered him. " It is not possible that of all people I should become the laughing-stock of Europe." He was " brooding over his exasperation ". On the 10th Ribbentrop arrived in Rome with a letter from Hitler who was going to fight and expected Italy to join him. Mussolini replied that he would, but reserved to himself the choice of date. When Ribbentrop proposed a meeting with Hitler, " the Duce quickly accepted ". The next day he thought he had gone too far in his commitment to fight against the Allies, but hoped to dissuade Hitler from his land offensive. And when on the 13th Ribbentrop telephoned from Berlin suggesting the 18th for the meeting, Mussolini exploded : " These Germans are unbearable ; they don't give one time to breathe nor to think matters over ". An offensive was clearly imminent — until now he had " lived under the illusion that a real war would not be waged ". He now thought of asking Hitler for " a communiqué which would give him a certain latitude . . . to stay out ".

> He said : " I shall do as Bertoldo did. H accepted the death sentence on condition that he choose the tree on which he was to be hanged. Needless to say, he never found that tree. I shall agree to enter the war, but reserve for myself the choice of the moment. I alone intend to be the judge, and a great deal will depend upon how the war goes."

And on another occasion he explained that he would not enter the war till he had " a quasi-mathematical certainty of winning it ".

> It is snowing at the Brenner Pass [writes Ciano on March 18th]. Mussolini is waiting for his guest with anxious elation. Recently he has felt more and more the fascination of the Führer. His military successes — the only successes that Mussolini really values and desires — are the cause of this. . . .
>
> The Hitler meeting is very cordial on both sides.

> The conference . . . is more a monologue than anything else. Hitler talks all the time, but is less agitated than usual. . . . Mussolini listens to him with interest and with deference. He speaks little and confirms his intention to move with Germany. He reserves to himself only the choice of the right moment. . . .

But in fact

> Mussolini resented . . . that Hitler did all the talking ; he had in mind to tell him many things, and instead he had to keep quiet most of the time, a thing which, as dictator, or rather the dean of dictators, he's not in the habit of doing.

Even now Mussolini refused to believe that Hitler would launch a land offensive. But on April 2nd there was a new change of mood ; in the Council of Ministers the Duce talked war : " If we remain neutral Italy would lose prestige ". " He speaks of a Mediterranean Empire and of access to the Ocean." On the 5th, Dingli, of the London Embassy, arrived with a message of goodwill from Chamberlain, " destined . . . to remain unanswered ; still, Dingli was told to try " to bring about a compromise peace ". But on the 9th, a secretary from the German Embassy turned up at Ciano's house at 2 A.M. : Mackensen would call at 7 A.M.

> He arrived at 6.30, pale and tired, and communicated Hitler's decision to occupy Denmark and Norway, adding that this decision had already been acted upon. . . . Then we went to the Duce to give him a written message from Hitler — the usual letter, in the usual style, announcing what he had already done. Mussolini said : " I approve Hitler's action whole-heartedly. It is a gesture that can have incalculable results, and this is the way to win wars. . . . I shall give orders to the Press and to the Italian people unreservedly to applaud this German action."

But Ciano rejoiced when he heard of Norwegian resistance — " there are still people who know how to fight in defence of human dignity " ; he himself " showered . . . felicitations and eulogies " on Mackensen, " since there is now nothing else to do ".

On May 9th he dined at the German Embassy.

> A long and boring after-dinner conversation. . . . Not a word on the situation. When we left at 12.25 von Mackensen said that " *perhaps* he would have to disturb me during the night about a communication that he expected from Berlin ", and took my private telephone number. At 4 A.M. he telephoned me to say that within three-quarters of an hour he would come to see me, and together we would go to the Duce, as he had had orders to confer with him at exactly 5 A.M. . . . When he arrived at my house he had with him a large package of papers which certainly could not have arrived by telephone.

The Duce, having read Hitler's list of reasons for invading Belgium and Holland, and carefully examined the papers, again declared his whole-hearted approval of Hitler's action.

" We Italians are already sufficiently dishonoured," he said to Ciano on May 13th. " Any delay is inconceivable." It was his dream to lead the country in war : " even if he were to obtain by peaceful means double what he claims, he would refuse ". " To make a people great it is necessary to send them to battle even if you have to kick them in the pants. This is what I shall do." Italy entered the war on June 10th, but on the 17th France surrendered. Mussolini saw " that unattainable dream of his life : glory on the field of battle fading once again ". " His reflections on the Italian people, and, above all, on our armed forces, are extremely bitter." On June 19th he ordered to attack the French in the Alps ; Ciano thought it both " inglorious " and dangerous — it might end in " a howling failure " ; the generals

felt " absolutely unprepared ". June 21st : " Mussolini is very humiliated, because our troops have not made a step forward ". " It is the material that I lack," he said. " Even Michelangelo had need of marble to make statues. If he had had only clay he would have been nothing more than a potter."

He now offered to Hitler an Italian expeditionary force against Great Britain ; it was politely declined. He wanted to attack Egypt : Graziani pleaded water shortage — it would mean disaster. In August he began talking of " a surprise attack against Greece toward the end of September ". But Berlin would not have it. Therefore Egypt once more : " Never has a military operation been undertaken so much against the will of the commanders ". It started on September 13th. " The British are withdrawing. Mussolini is radiant with joy." The advance, he declared, affords Italy " the glory she has sought in vain for three centuries ". And then it stopped. Meantime the Germans had, without any warning, occupied Rumania. Mussolini was indignant.

> " Hitler always faces me with a *fait accompli*. This time I am going to pay him back in his own coin. He will find out from the papers that I have occupied Greece. In this way the equilibrium will be re-established." I ask if he has come to an agreement with Badoglio. " Not yet," he answers, " but I shall send in my resignation as an Italian if anyone objects to our fighting the Greeks." The Duce seems determined to act now. In fact, I believe that the military operation will be useful and easy.

The three heads of the General Staff unanimously declared against it. Mussolini raged he would go to Greece himself " to witness the incredible shame of Italians who are afraid of Greeks ". He planned an attack which would smash the Greeks at the first impact. It started on October 28th ; by November 5th it had

collapsed and the initiative had passed to the Greeks. A week later the situation seemed " re-established " but " success, when it does come, will no longer be of the first magnitude ". " Our soldiers have fought but little, and badly ", writes Ciano on November 29th. " This is the real, fundamental cause of all that has happened." Meantime the Italian Navy had suffered a crippling blow when several ships were sunk by the British in Taranto harbour.

December 3rd : " Greek pressure has started again ". December 4th : " The Greeks have broken through our lines ". " Is it possible that we are defeated ? " asks Ciano. But an emissary and letter from Hitler bring comfort and reassurance : the Germans see the Albanian affair as a mere episode " in the great picture in which the prospects are good ". And then the tale of disaster restarts. December 10th : The British attack Sidi Barrani — " telegrams from Graziani confirm that we have had a licking ". December 11th : " Things are going really badly in Libya ". " Something is the matter with our Army if five divisions allow themselves to be pulverized in two days." The next day, a catastrophic telegram from Graziani, " a mixture of excitement, rhetoric, and concern ". He talks of withdrawing to Tripoli, and complains of having been obliged to wage a war " of the flea against the elephant ". " Here is another man with whom I cannot get angry," says Mussolini, " because I despise him." On January 5th, 1941, the fall of Bardia :

> The resistance of our troops was brief — a matter of hours. And yet there was no lack of arms. . . . Why didn't the fight continue longer ? Is this still a case of the flea against the elephant ? " A peculiar flea," says Mussolini, " one that between Sidi el Barrani, Bardia, and Tobruk had at its disposal more than a thousand guns. One day I shall decide

> to open the dykes and tell the whole truth to the Italians, who have been befuddled by too many lies."

And further, " I must recognise that the Italians of 1914 were better than these. It is not flattering for the régime, but that's how it is." " If anybody had predicted on October 15th what actually happened, I would have had him shot," was Mussolini's comment on Greece.

More than ever he now ranted against the King, the Church, and the middle classes. " If Hitler had to deal with a nincompoop of a King," Mussolini had said in March 1939, " he would never have been able to take Austria and Czechoslovakia." And in May : " I envy Hitler who need not drag with him so many empty baggage cars "; which, moreover, " very often have their brakes on ". He would some day liquidate monarchy by a manifesto ; or tell Hitler after the war to do away with " these absurd anachronisms " of monarchies. And in May 1940 : " The Pope need not think that he can seek an alliance with the monarchy because I am ready to blow both of them up to the skies at the same time ". In 1939 the death of Pius XI, with whom Mussolini had signed the Lateran Treaty, left him " completely indifferent " ; but when Pacelli was elected, he promised to send him " some advice on how he can usefully govern the Church ". He delighted " in calling himself ' an unbeliever ' ". On December 2nd, 1940, he made Ciano discuss with the Nuncio

> the abolition of holidays on New Year, Epiphany, and St. Joseph's Day. This is the Duce's bright idea and he is very proud of it. At my insistence he relented as to the celebration of St. Joseph's Day, but he holds firm on the other two holidays, and especially on New Year's Day, " since it is no other than the day of the circumcision of Christ, that is, the celebration of a Hebrew rite, which the Church itself has abolished ".

Three days later :

> I succeed in persuading the Duce to restore the New Year and Epiphany holidays. I inform the Nuncio of it. It was not worth while to create a crisis with the Vatican in times like these.

Another bright idea in December 1941 :

> Mussolini has again attacked Christmas. He is surprised that the Germans have not yet abolished this holiday, which " only reminds one of the birth of a Jew who gave to the world debilitating and devitalizing theories, and who especially contrived to trick Italy through the disintegrating power of the Popes ". He has prohibited newspapers from mentioning Christmas.

And on December 25th :

> The Duce increasingly reveals his anti-religious attitude. . . . " For me ", he has declared, " Christmas is nothing more than the 25th of December. I am the man who in all this world feels these religious anniversaries least."

The Duce's contempt for the Italian people was growing. When Britain cut off Italy's coal supply, " a good lash of the whip ", he said, will teach the Italians self-dependence. When in July 1941 air raids hit Naples : " The breed will harden " ; and he ordered false alarms to be sounded in Rome, to bring the war home to them. But by March 1942 he despaired of " the maturity " of the Italians to stand the test : " This war is for the Germans and the Japanese, not for us ".

He raved against the middle classes, " the well-to-do who are the worst type of Italians ". Thus in August 1940 :

> " After the war . . . I shall . . . attack . . . the middle class, which is cowardly and despicable. We must destroy it physically, and save perhaps 20 per

> cent, if that much." And he added : " I shall strike at it, and I shall say, like St. Dominic : ' God will choose his own ' ! "

And on December 6th :

> " If, when I was a Socialist I had had a knowledge of the work of the Italian middle class . . . such as I have now, I would have launched a revolution so pitiless that, by comparison, the revolution of Comrade Lenin would have been child's play."

But all he could do now was to deliver threatening tirades against them, and abolish restaurant and sleeping cars and first-class compartments on the railways.

On January 17th, 1941, he decided to mobilise for active service " all the high Fascist officials — Government, Grand Council, Chamber, and Party ". Ciano, who disliked this experiment " on the home front ", had to rejoin his air group at Bari. January 25th : " I say goodbye to the Duce. . . . He was not so cordial as he should have been."

By the time Ciano returned to the Foreign Office and his diary re-starts (April 24th, 1941) there was a complete change of scene. Yugoslavia and Greece overrun by the Germans, and Rommel successful and in control of Libya. Mussolini was saved. But he who in January had been " more grateful than ever " to Hitler for his solidarity and friendship, now was jealous. When after Hess's flight to Britain Ribbentrop came to Rome, Mussolini comforted him

> but afterward told me that he considers the Hess affair a tremendous blow to the Nazi régime. He added that he was glad of it because this will have the effect of bringing down German stock, even with the Italians.

There is also a marked change in Ciano's attitude to Mussolini. For some time past he had been critical of

the Duce's policy and war adventures, but now he begins to smudge and smirch his diary with scandal from Mussolini's private life, dragging in Mussolini's wife, Donna Rachele, and his mistress, Clara Petacci. On May 26th, 1941, he quotes a Fascist Minister, Bottai :

> . . . our internal situation . . . is characterized by the formation of two extra-legal groups asserting a strong and dangerous influence on the Duce. On one side are Donna Rachele and Pater (and people in all quarters are talking a great deal about his affair), and on the other the Petaccis and their satellites. Like all outsiders, such people intrigue against those who hold some legal and constitutional power, and it is in this way that Bottai explains the cold and almost hostile attitude which Mussolini has assumed towards the highest Fascist officials.

And here is another sample of what Bottai would say and Ciano record in his diary :

> " I remember . . . Balbo called Mussolini ' a product of syphilis ' and . . . I used to object. . . . I wonder now if this judgment . . . wasn't correct. . . . The Duce has decayed intellectually and physically. He doesn't attract me any more. He is not a man of action ; he is presumptuous and ambitious and expects only to be admired, flattered, and betrayed."

There would be no point in quoting more of this kind of stuff or any of the stories of shady transactions which make much of the second part of the book distasteful reading. Aristotle defines a slave as one who understands reason but does not possess it ; Ciano had appreciation for men who preserved their dignity in disaster (see his description of Sir Percy Loraine when Britain suffered defeats, of Churchill's messages and speeches in the darkest days —" dignified and noble ", denoting " a will and a faith "— or of the French showing " neither pride nor

humiliation when signing the armistice "). But he himself dropped to a level which forms a suitable counterpart to his earlier arrogance.

Nor did Mussolini, a vainglorious man humiliated, manage to preserve his self-respect. He had come to hate Hitler and the Germans, and continued to serve them. He resented Hitler's victories and power, and felt humiliated by his help and friendship. He blamed the Germans for his own plight and wished them ill, and yet knew that their defeat would be his end. He said : " I have a thorn in my heart because the vanquished French still have their empire, while we have lost ours ". He was annoyed when on May 31st, 1941, he received an urgent summons to a conference with Hitler, but returned from it satisfied and with the impression that Hitler had " no precise plan of action ". Then on June 10th :

> " I've had my fill of Hitler and the way he acts. These conferences called by the ringing of a bell are not to my liking ; a bell is rung when people call their servants. And besides, what kind of conferences are these ? For five hours I am forced to listen to a monologue which is quite fruitless and boring. He spoke for hours and hours . . . but . . . he did not go to the bottom of any problem, or make any decisions. . . ."

But on June 22nd, at 3 A.M., the Counsellor of the German Embassy brought Ciano " a long missive from Hitler to the Duce " announcing his invasion of Russia. Italy had to follow suit, and declared war ; and Mussolini, though offended by the way in which he had been treated over the Russian question, started pressing his offer of an Italian expeditionary force on Hitler.

> There was absolute silence on their part and only a " night alarm " to inform him of the accomplished fact. " Even I do not disturb my servants at night ", said the Duce, " but the Germans make me jump

> out of bed at any hour without the least consideration." The Duce realizes that Hitler did not welcome the participation of our troops on the Russian front, but he insists on sending them just the same. . . . The Duce hopes for two things : either that the war will end in a compromise which will save the balance of power in Europe, or that it will last a long time, permitting us to regain our lost prestige by force of arms. Oh, his eternal illusions !

The Italians continued to suffer defeat on their own fronts. In Abyssinia, notes Ciano on June 29th, " there was the usual surrender in great numbers, with generals at their head, despite a large amount of arms and equipment at their disposal ". On July 15th : " In eight weeks our losses amounted to two killed and four wounded ", and 4000 taken prisoner. December 7th, at Gondar : 67 casualties and 10,000 prisoners. And when a " grotesque " war broke out between Italy and Montenegro, he hoped that the military " will settle it without having to call for German intervention ".

Meantime the Duce hoped that in Russia the Germans would " lose a lot of feathers ". And he now wondered whether an English victory would not be preferable to a German. " Even if they should ask for Trieste to-morrow, as part of the German *Lebensraum*, we should have to bow our heads." " The German people are dangerous because they dream collectively. But history teaches that all attempts to unify Europe under a single rule have failed." Early in November Kesselring was sent to Italy to " assume command of the joint forces ". And then, November 9th, " the most humiliating day since the beginning of the war "— a strong Italian convoy, carrying supplies to Libya, was wiped out by a weaker British force.

> An engagement occurred [writes Ciano] the results of which are inexplicable. All, I mean *all* our ships

> were sunk, and one or maybe two or three destroyers. The British returned to their ports after having slaughtered us. . . . Under the circumstances we have no right to complain if Hitler sends Kesselring as commander in the south.

German reverses and Japanese victories equally rejoiced the Duce.

> " The Japanese are not a people ", he said, " with whom the Germans can take liberties such as calling the Emperor or the Prime Minister out of bed at two o'clock in the morning in order to announce to them decisions that have already been made and carried out."

A last gleam came to him in the summer of 1942, when Rommel was expected to reach the Nile Delta : Mussolini went to Africa for the occasion, but returned rebuffed by Rommel and fate. " The German marshal . . . did not pay him a visit during the three weeks and more Mussolini spent there ", and failed to advance. Early in November followed the collapse of the Libyan front, and a few days later Allied landings in North Africa. Mussolini's doom was approaching.

In December 1942 Ciano went to what was to be his last meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop ; France was to be discussed.

> Laval has made a journey that he could have spared himself. After two days on the train they first sat him at a tea-table, then at a dinner-table, and did not let him open his mouth. The moment he tried to speak the Führer would interrupt him and deliver a long dissertation. (I believe that at heart Hitler is glad to be Hitler, because this permits him to talk all the time.) Laval is a filthy Frenchman — the filthiest of all Frenchmen. To get into the good graces of the German bosses he doesn't hesitate to betray his own compatriots and to defame his own unhappy country. . . .

> Still, how the Germans respond to the charm of the French ! Even of this Frenchman. Except for Hitler, all the others were crowding around trying to talk to him, or to get close to him ; it looked like the entrance of an erstwhile great lord in a circle of new-rich parvenus.

Here Ciano, the Latin, has explained why his *Diaries*, with the meanness of their " politically empty days " and often even of those in which he had gloried, are more fascinating than the diary which any German is likely to have produced in this war ; just as none of the twenty-odd Nazis at Nuremberg could compare with Laval at his trial.

When Tripoli was reached by the British forces, Mussolini wished for " a desperate house-to-house defence like that of Stalingrad " and knew " that this will not happen " ; and when Tripoli fell he had rage in his heart and suffered.

> I have lunch with Bottai and Farinacci [writes Ciano the same day, January 8th, 1943]. Both are furious. In speaking of the loss of Libya, Bottai says : " After all it is another goal that has been reached. In 1911 Mussolini uttered his ' away from Libya '. After thirty-two years he has kept his word."

And on January 15th :

> Mussolini telephones, wishing to know if it is true that I went to a luncheon at Farinacci's home with Bottai. . . . Evidently somebody is trying to sow distrust and suspicion in the Duce's mind.

On February 5th, Ciano was informed by Mussolini that he was " changing his entire Cabinet ". Now appointed Ambassador to the Holy See, he did not say, as Attolico had in April 1940, when transferred from Berlin to the Vatican, that he was going " from the Devil to Holy Water ", but ". . . I like Mussolini, like him very much and what I shall miss most will be my contact with him "

With these words closes the diary — except for the entry written by Ciano in gaol, awaiting execution by Mussolini's order.

Mr. Sumner Welles believes *Ciano's Diary* "to be one of the most historical documents of our times". Certainly so far no other single book about the Second World War equals it in interest; and its value will be still further enhanced when the missing *pièces justificatives* will have been supplied from other sources.

INDEX

Abyssinia, 11, 118, 265-6, 268, 491
Alba, Duke of, 156
Albania, xiii, 118, 266, 268, 272, 470-73, 476, 485
Alsace-Lorraine, 55, 207, 327
Alto Adige, 472
Amery, Leopold S. (1873–), 106, 393
Anglo-German Naval Agreement (June 18th, 1935), 128, 129
Anglo-Italian Agreement (April 16th, 1938), 118, 476
Anglo-Polish Agreement (August 25th, 1939), xviii, 182, 247, 318, 326, 329-31, 344, 392, 421, 465
Anglo-Polish Pact (April 6th, 1939), 128, 134, 174, 192, 212, 221, 247, 462, 476
Anschluss, xi, 78, 315, 340
Anti-Comintern Pact (November 1936), 40, 57
Archangel, 200
Arciszewski, Mirosław (1892–), 113, 115, 171-5, 249, 256, 317, 332
Arciszewski, Tomasz (1877–), 171
Attlee, Clement R. (1883–), 35, 159
Attolico, Bernardo, 85, 259, 261, 272, 326-9, 331, 368, 384, 387-9, 469, 471, 477, 493
Auriol, Vincent, 444
Austria, 11, 17, 32, 33, 128, 138, 195, 203, 268, 347, 438, 486

Badoglio, Pietro (1871–), 271
Balbo, Italo (1896–1940), 472, 489
Baldwin, Stanley (now Earl Baldwin of Bewdley) (1867–), 23
Bari, 488
Barthou, Louis (1862–1934), 18, 97, 146, 436
Bartlett, Vernon (1894–), 92, 105, 164
Baudouin, Paul, 470
Bavaria, 37
Bayreuth, 250
Beck, Joseph (1894–1944), xiii, 14, 16, 19, 22, 26-30, 36, 39-44, 52-3, 55-7, 59, 84, 86, 90, 92, 94, 97-8, 101-2, 104-5, 107, 111-16, 118, 125, 132-4, 136-8, 170-77, 182, 192, 206-9, 211, 220, 224, 227, 229, 243-6, 248-9, 256-7, 291-3, 311, 313, 317-19, 324, 328, 332, 334-5, 344-5, 349-51, 357-8, 361-3, 373-4, 380-81, 387, 434, 436-50, 452-6, 464
Beck, Mme., 455
Belgium, 7
Beneš, Edward (1884–), 14, 64, 66, 148, 411, 413-14, 445-8
Berchtesgaden, 33, 38-9, 47, 53, 130, 191, 242, 248, 254, 257, 259, 261-2, 269-70, 274, 284, 305-6, 310-12
Bessarabia, 286, 329
Beyle, 253
Bielsko, 340
Bismarck, Prince Otto von (1815–1898), 9, 476
Blaha, Silvestr (1887–), 340
Blomberg, Werner von (1878–1945), 32
Blücher, Gerhard von (1742–1819), 345
Blum, Léon, 444
Bodenschatz, Karl Heinrich (1890–), 141, 189, 213, 419-20
Boehm, Hermann (1884–), 299
Boemer, Karl (1900–1942), 139, 242
Bohemia and Moravia, 58, 64, 69, 71, 275, 405, 415, 460
Bonnet, Georges (1889–), 41, 46, 47-51, 59, 61, 63, 73-4, 80, 91

103, 148-9, 153, 157, 169, 182, 195, 197-8, 206-9, 230-34, 238, 291-4, 296-7, 316-17, 331, 336-8, 351, 356-7, 384-6, 388-9, 391, 395-6, 401, 435, 448-9, 452-6, 461-5
Boothby, Robert (1900–), 170-171
Bottai, Giuseppe (1895–), 489, 493
Bracken, Brendan (1901–), 106
Brauchitsch, Walter von (1881–), 140, 213, 330, 359, 412
Braun von Stumm, Gustav, 242
Brenner Pass, 260-61, 273, 469
Briand, Aristide (1862–1932), 436
Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), 100, 102
Brünn (Brno), 406, 413
Buenos Ayres, 218
Buerckel, Josef (1895–1944), 409
Bullitt, William Christian (1891–), 94, 96
Burckhardt, Carl (1891–), 24, 27, 28, 248, 252-4, 257-9, 316, 326
Burnett, Sir Charles (1882–), 202
Bute, John Stuart, Earl of (1713–1792), 153
Butler, Richard Austin (1902–), 319
Bydgoszcz (*see* Bromberg)

Cadogan, Sir Alexander (1884–), 122, 342, 424, 426
Caldecote (*see* Inskip)
Cambon, Roger, 277, 316
Canaris, Wilhelm (*d.* 1945), 270-71, 314-15
Carol II (1893–), 82
Carpatho-Russia, 37-8, 40, 53-4, 56, 58, 64, 66, 72, 89
Chamberlain, Neville (1869–1940), xvi, 6, 34-6, 41, 45, 48, 51, 58-62, 65, 69, 74-9, 82-3, 86, 93, 95-7, 104, 106, 108-9, 111, 113, 117-19, 121, 125-8, 146, 149, 152-4, 158, 160, 162-4, 167, 170-71, 175, 182-5, 189, 195, 200, 203-4, 237-8, 247, 260, 280, 303-4, 306, 308-11, 313-14, 320, 322, 342-3, 345, 347, 352, 360, 383, 392-4, 399-400, 424, 426, 464, 468-9, 473, 480
Charles VI (1685–1740), x
Chodacki, Marian, 252-4, 317
Churchill, Winston L. S. (1874–), 34, 36, 41, 60, 69, 79, 106, 109, 119, 123, 127, 143, 168, 181, 360, 395, 400, 489
Chvalkovsky, Frantisck Karel (1885–), 51, 62, 64, 67-8, 406, 413, 415
Ciano, Count Galeazzo (1903–1944), 89, 175, 259-67, 269, 271-3, 278, 284, 314, 326-7, 329, 368, 384-9, 391, 396, 438, 467-94
Cincar-Markovitch, Aleksander (1889–), 126
Cocks, F. Seymour (1882–), 171
Colson, 444, 454
Cooper, Alfred Duff (1890–), 81, 106
Corbin, Charles (1881–), 325-6, 333, 342-3, 349, 374, 390, 394-6
Coulondre, Robert (1885–), 4, 35, 37, 47, 50-51, 61-4, 66, 69, 72-3, 80-81, 84, 125, 128, 130, 135-42, 225-31, 235, 238, 241, 270, 273-7, 281, 305, 311, 325-9, 331-2, 335-8, 341, 347, 354, 356-357, 366-9, 378, 382-3, 401-2, 406, 412
Cracow, 255
Croatia, 271, 465
Csaky, Count Stephen, 72, 126
Curzon line, xvi, 162, 286

Dahlerus, Birger, 312, 314, 342, 353, 359, 361, 367-9, 371-2, 375-6, 378, 383, 417-33
Dahlerus, Mme., 419
Daladier, Édouard (1884–), 35, 41, 45-6, 51, 136, 149, 163, 169, 181, 196-7, 205-6, 208-10, 289-94, 297, 327-8, 335, 337, 339, 341-42, 344, 385, 389-91, 452-3, 456, 461-3, 465
Dallin, David J., 155

Dalmatia, 271, 477
Dalton, Hugh (1887–), 78, 111, 120, 164, 188, 202, 246
Danzig, xii, xvii, 7, 8, 10, 12, 17, 23-30, 33, 38-40, 42-4, 52-8, 88-91, 97-101, 103-5, 109, 111, 125, 130, 132-7, 139-41, 173-4, 177, 211-12, 214, 219-21, 223-32, 237-43, 245, 248-57, 259-62, 265, 267-8, 270, 274-6, 278-9, 291, 297, 301, 307, 310, 312, 316-17, 319, 322, 326-8, 336-8, 340-41, 346, 354, 362, 367, 369-70, 373, 380, 384, 387, 393, 420, 424-5, 427, 449-50, 457, 459, 462-5; *see also* Gdynia; Hela; Westerplatte; Polish Corridor
D'Arbonneau, General, 15
Darlan, François (1881–1942), 294-295, 457
De Bono, Emilio (1866–1944), 472
Decamp, General, 293
Delbos, Yvon (1885–), 444-5
Denny, Henry, 158, 200-201
Dentz, General, 457-8
Dietrich, Otto (1897–), 135, 139, 242, 410, 413
Dingli, 482
Dirksen, Herbert von (1882–), 75-6, 81
Dodd, 299
Dodecanese, 266
Doumenc, General, 205, 209-10, 292, 455
Duranty, Walter, 148, 158
Durazzo, 118
Durčansky, 66, 407-10

East European Pact of Mutual Assistance (May 18th, 1934), 18, 47, 49, 146, 289
East Prussia, x, 13, 17, 31, 54, 88, 98, 100, 130, 173, 226, 253, 334
Eden, Robert Anthony (1897–), 106, 218, 360
Erkko, Julio Eljas (1895–), 183
Estonia, 164, 169, 180-82, 185, 194, 285-6, 319-20

Farinacci, Roberto (1893–), 493
Faury, General, 317
Finland, xv, 143, 154, 164, 180-84, 194, 286
Flandin, Pierre Étienne (1889–), 23
Foch, Ferdinand (1851–1929), 436
Forster, Albert (1902–), 223, 248-9, 254, 257, 274, 316-17
Four-Power Pact (July 15th, 1933), 146
Fox, Henry, Lord Holland (1705–1774), 153-4
Fox, Lady Caroline, 153
Franco, Bahamonde Francisco (1892–), 161, 300, 469
Franco-German Declaration (December 6th, 1938), 231, 289, 252
François-Poncet, André (1887–), 38, 41, 45-6, 52, 384-6, 389, 469-70
Franco-Polish Agreement (1936), (*see* Rambouillet Agreement)
Franco-Polish Alliance (February 1921), 16, 47, 112-13, 297, 390, 435-6, 442, 448-51
Franco-Polish Military Convention (May 19th, 1939), 296-7
Franco-Russian Pact (May 18th, 1934), 18, 47, 49, 146, 289
Frank, Karl Hermann (1898–1946), 406
Frankfort-on-Oder, 112
Frankowski, 464
Frederick the Great (1712–1786), 303
Fritsch, Werner von (1880–1939), 32
Fuschl, 231, 242, 262, 282
Fyfe, Sir David Maxwell (1900–), 328-9, 429, 433

Gafenco, Grigore (1892–), 82, 114-15, 122, 152-3, 156-7, 194-5, 197, 206-9, 289
Galicia, 37
Gallacher, William (1881–), 159
Gamelin, Maurice Gustave (1872–), xiii, 245, 293-8, 392, 442, 444-6, 451-2, 454, 456-64

Gardner, 61-2
Gaus, Friedrich (1881–), 281-6, 371
Gdynia, 42, 223, 249, 370, 424
Gedye, George Eric (1890–), 288
Geneva Agreement on Upper Silesia (May 15th, 1922), 11, 28
Georges, General, 457-9
German-Danish Non-Aggression Pact (May 31st, 1939), 7
German-Estonian Non-Aggression Pact (June 7th, 1934), 181
German-Italian Alliance (May 22nd, 1939), 175, 213, 260, 462-3
German-Latvian Non-Aggression Pact (June 7th, 1934), 181
German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact (January 26th, 1934), 16, 21, 39, 42, 54, 112, 115, 128, 130-32, 134, 155, 173, 438
German-Soviet Treaty (August 23rd, 1939), 141, 197, 285, 288, 304-6, 309, 319-20, 432
Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–1898), 147
Gleiwitz, 315
Godesberg, 41, 78, 348, 361, 430
Goebbels, Frau, 463
Goebbels, Joseph (1897–1945), 8, 20, 70, 139-40, 225-6, 242, 360, 397, 471
Göring, Hermann (1893–1946), xvii, xviii, 8, 17, 20, 21, 31-3, 38, 45, 68, 76, 85, 141-2, 162, 189, 213, 222, 259, 282, 300, 312-14, 324, 329-32, 342, 353, 359, 367-8, 371-2, 375-8, 383, 397, 407, 413, 415, 417-23, 425-33, 471, 475
Gort, Viscount (1886–1946), 199
Grandi, Count Dino (1895–), 469
Graziani, Rodolfo (1882–), 484-5
Greenwood, Arthur (1880–), 108-109, 393
Greiser, Arthur (1897–1946), 24, 252-4, 316
Grenville, George (1712–1770), 153
Grynszpan, 47
Grzybowski, Wacław, 155, 177-8
Guariglia, Raffaele (1889–), 389-90

Hacha, Emil (1872–1945), 64, 67-9, 76, 78, 87, 357, 374, 410, 413, 415, 426
Hacha, Miss, 68
Hailsham, Viscount (1872–), 6
Halder, Franz von (1884–1946), 181
Halifax, Viscount (now Earl) (1881–), 48, 59, 70-71, 74-6, 81-2, 85, 93, 104, 110-11, 125, 153, 155, 160, 162-4, 169, 175, 181, 184, 188, 192, 197, 199, 222, 236, 242-3, 247-9, 257, 313-14, 318-19, 322, 325-6, 332-4, 343, 345, 357, 359-61, 373, 375, 377, 380, 382, 384-5, 388-90, 395-6, 399, 419, 421-2, 424, 426, 432, 457, 463-4
Hassell, Ulrich von (1881–1944), 241, 278, 282, 299, 368-9
Hela, 370
Henderson, Sir Nevile (1882–1942), xviii, 61-2, 64-7, 74, 76-7, 79-81, 85, 125-8, 135-6, 162, 191, 217-22, 228, 236, 239-41, 250, 261, 277-81, 303-11, 320-26, 328-9, 331, 333, 335, 341-2, 345-9, 353-69, 371-2, 375-83, 388, 396, 400, 421, 423-33
Henriot, Philippe, 48, 293, 296-7, 385, 395-6
Hess, Rudolf (1894–), 8, 398, 488
Hesse, Prince Philip of (1896–), 471
Heston, 41
Hewel, Paul, 38, 305, 410, 413
Heydrich, Reinhard (1904–1942), 315
Heywood, T. G. G. (1886–), 202
Hilger, G., 284-5
Himmler, Heinrich (1900–1945), 136, 315
Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945), *passim*
Hlinka Guard, 58, 408
Hoare, Sir Samuel (now Lord Templewood) (1880–), 65, 86-87, 108, 185

Horn, Herr, 321
Horthy, Nicolas (1868–), 410
Hudson, Robert Spear (1886–), 65, 67, 76, 199-200, 246

Iglava, 413
Innsbruck, 273
Inskip, Sir Thomas (now Lord Caldecote) (1876–1947), 52
Ironside, Sir Edmund (now Lord) (1882–), 199-200, 245, 316

Jaklicz, General, 457, 459
James, Archibald W. H. (1893–), 165
James, Edwin L. (1890–), 186
Jodl, Alfred (1885–1946), 258, 298, 303

Kalthof, 223, 248
Karmasin, Herr, 66, 407-8, 412
Kasprzycki, General, 245, 454-64
Kaunas (Kovno), 457-8
Keitel, Wilhelm (1882–1946), 85, 140, 213, 234, 258, 270-71, 298, 314-15, 330-31, 359, 405, 510, 412-13
Kellogg Pact (August 27th, 1928), x, 16, 134
Kennard, Sir Howard (1878–), 92, 107, 176, 223, 249, 255-7, 311, 313, 332-5, 344-5, 350-51, 358, 361, 363, 373-5, 380-81
Kennedy, Joseph P. (1888–), 93, 96
Keppler, Wilhelm, 239, 410
Kerrl, Hans (1887–1941), 85
Kesselring, Albert (1885–), 491-492
King-Hall, Stephen (1893–), 399
Kirke, Sir Walter (1877–), 183-4
Koc, Adam, 246
Kordt, Erich, 382
Kremlin, 158, 191, 201, 204
Krock, Arthur, 93
Kuhn, Ferdinand (1905–), 186
Kukiel, Marian (1885–), 448
Kuznetsov, Nicolai G. (1902–), 202
Kwiatkowski, Eugenjusz, 113, 244

Lacroix, Victor Leopold de, 62
Lahusen, Erwon, 315
Lateran Treaty (February 11th, 1929), 486
Latvia, 164, 169, 180-82, 185, 194, 285-6, 319-20
Laval, Pierre (1883–1945), 492-3
Law, Richard (1901–), 106
Lawrence, Lord Justice (now Lord Oaksey) (1880–), 299
League of Nations, xv, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 24-9, 42, 45, 54, 56-7, 60, 98, 111, 131, 134, 145, 158, 163, 179-80, 182, 227, 248, 252, 264, 437-8, 451
Lebœuf, Edmond (1809–1888), 295
Lebrun, Albert (1870–), 91, 291
Léger, Alexis (1889–), 80, 445, 461
Lenin, Vladimir Ilyitch (1870–1924), 147, 488
Leningrad, 203
Libyan Campaign, 485, 488, 493
Lindbergh, Charles A. (1902–), 166
Lindley, Sir Francis (1872–), 190
Liniewo, 102
Lipski, Joseph (1894–), 13, 15, 20-22, 28, 30, 32, 38-44, 53, 85, 88-91, 97-103, 107, 112, 115-16, 123, 131-2, 141, 171, 218, 229, 257, 311-13, 324, 331-2, 338, 356-7, 365, 367-9, 371-81, 427-30, 433
Lithuania, xiii, 33, 54, 88, 98, 117, 130, 169, 181-2, 192, 286, 319, 447
Little Entente (1920), 10, 438
Litvinov, Maxim Maximovich (1876–), 8, 18, 97, 137-8, 146, 151, 156, 158-9, 161–2, 177, 302
Lloyd George, David (later Earl Lloyd-George) (1863–1945), 6, 106, 109, 149, 165, 167, 258

Locarno Treaty (October 16th, 1925), x, 8, 10, 15, 16, 23, 437, 451
Lodz, 425
Loraine, Sir Percy (1880–), 260, 327, 385, 463-4, 489
Łubieński, Count, 53, 224
Lubomirski, Prince Stephen, 255-6, 368, 374
Łukasiewicz, Juliusz (1892–), 47, 73-4, 94-6, 155, 177, 182, 198, 206-8, 210, 230, 292-3, 344, 442, 453-4, 456, 461-5

MacDonald, James Ramsay (1866–1937), 10, 23, 146
Mackensen, Hans Georg von (1883–), 260, 327, 470, 473, 482-3
Macmillan, Harold (1894–), 106
Maginot Line, 150, 231, 301
Maisky, Ivan Mikhailovich (1884–), 82, 111, 122, 155, 164, 169, 184, 188
Malhomme (1894–), 428
Manchuria, 201
Mandel, Georges (1885–1944), 47, 291, 392
Marienwerder, 334
Masaryk, Thomas G. (1850–1937), 148, 413
Meissner, Alfred, 410, 413
Memel, xiii, 53-4, 86-8, 90, 93, 117, 128, 174, 212, 220, 299
Merekalov, 155
Milan, 260, 484
Milch, Erhard (1892–), 213
Millerand, Alexandre (1859–1943), 436
Minority Declarations (November 4th, 1937), 31-2
Mirabeau, Honoré, Conde de (1749–1791), 9
Molotov, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich (1890–), 137, 155, 158, 176-80, 183, 186-7, 189, 192, 194-7, 202, 282, 285, 288-9, 292
Moltke, Hans Adolf von (1884–1943), 6, 14-16, 19, 20, 26, 28, 29 44, 52-3, 84, 101-2, 113, 115-16, 123, 171-5, 177, 223
Montbas, Vicomte de, 103
Montenegro, 491
Monzie, Anatole de (1876–), 294, 385, 389, 392
Moravia (*see* Bohemia and Moravia)
Moravska Ostrava, 68, 85, 412
Mościcki, Ignacy (1867–1947), 28, 30, 57, 107, 112, 243, 313, 439, 448
Munich, xi, xii, xviii, 6, 23, 34-6, 41, 45-6, 48-9, 51, 55, 58-60, 69-75, 77-8, 80-81, 85-6, 109, 117, 121, 146, 148-9, 161-2, 201, 232, 234, 294, 301, 339, 361, 372, 375, 397, 405-6, 420-21, 448-9, 462, 479
Munters, V., 181
Musse, General, 205, 207, 449
Mussolini, Benito (1883–1945), 37, 60-62, 85, 118, 120, 124, 145, 160-61, 165, 188, 222, 259-60, 262, 266, 269-73, 299-300, 327, 329, 331, 383-4, 386-9, 467-94
Mussolini, Donna Rachele, 489

Naggiar, Paul Émile (1883–), 187, 208-9, 289
Naples, 487
Napoleon I (1769–1821), 166
Neurath, Baron Konstantin von (1873–), 12-14, 28, 30, 32, 71, 129, 282
Newton, Sir Basil (1889–), 409-412
Noël, Léon (1888–), 14, 56-7, 81, 84, 104, 108, 116, 205, 207-10, 223, 227, 242-3, 291, 297-8, 311, 316-18, 334-5, 340, 344, 349-52, 356, 358, 374, 385-7, 434-56
Noel-Baker, Philip (1889–), 170
Norton, Sir Clifford John (1891–), 177, 223, 243, 245, 248-9
Nostitz, Gottfried von, 241, 282
Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946), 32, 66, 81, 91, 197, 212-13, 223, 258-9, 262-3, 281, 284, 287, 298-9, 302,

315, 321, 325, 328-30, 333, 342, 359, 363, 366, 371, 374, 379, 387, 396-7, 405-6, 417, 421, 432-3, 453, 467, 476-7, 493

Oaksley, Lord (*see* Lawrence, Lord Justice)
Oderberg (Bohumin), 103
Ogilvie-Forbes, Sir George (1891–), 367, 373, 376, 425, 427-9, 431
Olsa, 37, 43, 53
Owens, John W. (1884–), 160

Pares, Peter (1908–), 408, 412
Paul, Prince of Yugoslavia (1893–), 222, 264
Pavlov, 285, 287
Perth, Earl of (1876–), 469, 473
" Pertinax ", (Gérauld, André) (1882–), 80, 162-3, 185, 385, 396
Petacci, Clara (*d.* 1945), 489
Pétain, Henri Philippe (1856–), 48
Phipps, Sir Eric (1875–), 157
Pieckenbrock, Hans, 315
Pilsudski, Joseph (1867–1935), xiv, 10, 14-16, 20-21, 39, 42, 59, 97-8, 131, 150, 172, 175, 255, 436, 439-40
Pitt, William, Earl of Chatham (1708–1778), 153
Pius XI, Achille Ratti (1857–1939), 333, 486
Pius XII, Eugenio Pacelli (1876–), 486
Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax, Sir Reginald (1880–), 202
Polish Corridor, xxi, 7, 13, 17, 22, 31, 39-40, 43-4, 54, 56, 58, 90, 100, 104-5, 130-33, 137, 219, 227, 229, 250-51, 262, 268, 271, 276, 301, 310, 322, 326, 328, 340-41, 346, 348, 354, 367, 369-70, 420, 424-5, 427, 449-50
Polish-German Liquidation Agreement (October 31st, 1929), 370
Polish-Rumanian Alliance (1921), 114, 155
Polish-Russian Declaration (November 26th, 1938), 55
Portsmouth, 111
Potemkin, Vladimir P. (1878–1946), 114-15, 133, 163, 176, 186, 199
Potsdam, 162
Poznań (Posen), 219, 251, 368, 425
Pragmatic Sanction (1713), x
Prague, xiii, xvi, 65-6, 68-71, 75, 85, 111, 121, 125, 127, 243, 360, 406, 408, 411, 413, 415, 439, 446, 448, 471, 480
Prussia, 8, 9, 17, 138

Raczyński, Count Edward (1891–), 93-4, 96-7, 104, 106, 109, 121-2, 246, 283, 318-19, 344 382
Raeder, Erich (1876–), 32, 213, 299, 397
Raemitz, von, 262
Rambouillet Agreement between France and Poland (September 1936), 444, 450, 452-3, 463, 465
Rapallo Treaty (April 16th, 1922), 8, 144
Rath, Ernst vom, 47
Reynaud, Paul (1876–), 291
Rhineland, xi, xiv, 23, 32, 36, 78, 97, 298, 340, 347, 440
Ribbentrop, Joachim von (1893–1946), xvii, xviii, 5-6, 25-6, 33, 38-41, 43-5, 47-53, 55-8, 62, 66, 68, 73, 74, 80, 82, 85, 87-91, 97-103, 116-18, 123, 125-6, 131-2 134-8, 140-42, 162, 171, 173, 175, 203, 210, 223, 229-34, 238, 241-2, 248, 250, 256, 259-63, 265, 267-9, 271-3, 278, 281-2, 284-8, 291-3, 299, 305, 311-12, 316, 320-21, 324-5, 327, 330-31, 335, 341-42, 345, 347, 353-5, 357, 359, 363-9 371, 373-9, 383, 388, 396-9, 401-2 406-7, 410, 412-13, 420-21, 425-7 430, 449, 452-3, 469, 471-2, 474-5 477, 479, 481, 488, 492

Richthofen, Freiherr Manfred von (1892–1918), 141
Riegele, Olga, 368
Riga, Treaty of (August 11th, 1920), xiv, 150, 170, 175
Riom Trial (1942), 293
Riviera, 53
Roatta, Mario, 261, 270
Rockingham, Charles Wentworth, Marquis of (1730–1782), 154
Rommel, Erwin (1891–1944), 488, 492
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano (1882–1945), 124, 128
Rosenberg, Alfred (1893–1946), 37
Ruhr, x
Rushcliffe, Lord (1872–), 160
Ruthenia, 409

Saar, 13, 41, 150, 204, 339
Saint-Hardouin, de, 235, 238, 241-2, 250-52
Salzburg, 259, 262, 270, 273, 278, 280, 282, 305, 309
San Remo, 471
Schleicher, Kurt von (1882–1934), 20-21, 31
Schmidt, Augustus, 181
Schmidt, Paul, 53, 100, 320-21, 328-329, 345, 354, 363, 365-6, 376, 397
Schmundt, Lt.-Col., 213, 330
Schnurre, Erich, 287
Schulenburg, Count von der (1875–1944), 282, 285
Schulte-Moenting, Admiral, 213
Schumann, Frederick L. (1904–), 181
Schuschnigg, Kurt von (1897–), 33, 357, 374, 425
Seeds, Sir William (1882–), 151, 156, 162, 187, 191
Selborne (*see* Wolmer)
Selter, Karl (1898–), 181
Seyss-Inquart, Artur von (1892–1946), 409
Shaposhnikov, Boris M. (1882–), 202
Shawcross, Sir Hartley (1902–), 32
Shepherd, Francis Michie (1893–), 248, 252
Sidor, K., 409, 411-12
Siegfried Line, 458, 460
Siemers, Dr., 213, 299
Sikorski, Władysław (1881–1943), 448
Silesia (*see* Upper Silesia)
Simon, Sir John (now Viscount) (1873–), 70, 108, 111, 120, 185, 246
Sinclair, Sir Archibald (1890–), 109, 393
Skirpa, K., 86
Skoda, 84
Slovakia, 37, 38, 58, 64-6, 71-2, 85-6, 88-90, 98, 123, 130-34, 174, 264, 406-12, 414, 416, 448
Smigly-Rydz, Edward (1886–), 31, 57, 108, 112, 205, 207, 243, 245, 255, 313, 316-17, 352, 367, 439-40, 442-6, 455
Smith, Howard K., 139
Souritz, Jakob (1881–), 47-8
Southby, Sir Archibald (1886–), 75
Stachiewicz, General, 351, 444
Stalin, Iosif Vissarionovich (1879–), 25, 159, 162, 168, 187, 190, 276, 282, 284-5, 287-8, 302
Stalingrad, 493
Stanley, Oliver (1896–), 65, 67, 76
Stettin, 17
Stoyadinovich, Milan (1888–), 470
Strang, Sir William (1893–), 184, 186-8, 192, 197, 199, 202-3
Streicher, Julius (1885–1946), 71
Stresa Agreement (May 2nd, 1935), x, 11, 17, 19
Sudetenland, 17, 43, 58, 71, 78, 138, 340, 347, 405-6
Szembek, Count J. (*d.* 1946), 24-5, 28, 31, 94, 283, 318, 332, 350-52

Talleyrand, Charles Maurice, 184
Tannenberg, 280, 333

Tass Agency, 163, 187, 192
Teheran, 162
Teleki, Count Paul (1879–1941), 126
Templewood, Lord (*see* Hoare)
Teschen, 33, 36-7, 53, 443, 448
Teutonic Knights, 9
Tilea, Viore Virgil (1896–), 82, 109
Tirana, 476
Tiso, Joseph (1887–1947), 66, 71, 123, 408-13, 415
Tournelle, Baron Guy de la, 225, 316
Toynbee, Arnold (1889–), 10
Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (1879–1940), 276
Troyanov, Peter, 172-3
Tuka, Professor Bela (*d.* 1946), 407
Tyrol, 39, 55, 265, 299, 326, 332
Tyrwhitt, Gerald (now Lord Berners) (1883–), 250

United States of America, 62, 64, 81, 128
Upper Silesia, x, 11, 28, 30, 107, 173, 219, 226-7, 246, 251, 276, 340, 346, 348-9, 425
Urbsys, Juozas (1896–), 86-7

Vansittart, Sir Robert (now Lord) (1881–), 164
Vaux Saint-Cyr, de, 103, 116, 123
Verona, 474
Versailles, Treaty of (June 28th, 1919), 6, 7, 13, 14, 17, 18, 49, 77, 88, 128, 129, 170, 301, 307, 339, 374, 379, 385, 398
Vichy Government, 48, 59
Victor Emmanuel III (1869–), 118, 469, 471, 486
Vienna Award (1939), 63-4
Vilna, 88, 286, 446
Vitkovice, 68, 85, 412
Voroshilov, Klementij Efremovich (1881–), 202, 205-6, 209, 284, 288, 292
Vuillemin, General, 457-9

Wagner, Siegfried (1869–1930), 250
Waterloo, 345
Weimar, 144
Weizsäcker, Baron Ernst von (1882–), 50-51, 66-8, 73-4, 79-80, 85, 87, 115-16, 126-8, 135-6, 171, 220-21, 226-7, 229, 231, 236, 238-240, 255-7, 273-82, 299, 305, 311-312, 357-8, 368-9, 371, 373, 375-6, 378, 380, 387, 401, 413
Welczek, Count Johannes von (1878–), 80, 230-31, 233
Welles, Sumner (1892–), 467, 478, 494
Westerplatte (Danzig), 228
Weygand, Maxime (1867–), 436, 451
Wilhelm II (1859–1941), 9, 258
Wilhelmshaven, 102, 118
Wilson, Sir Arnold (1884–1940), 104
Wilson, Sir Horace (1882–), 424, 426
Wilson, Woodrow (1856–1924), 144
Witos, Wincenty (1874–1946), 447-8
Woermann, Ernst (1888–), 311
Wohltat, Helmuth (1893–), 82, 199-200, 246
Wolmer, Viscount (now Earl of Selborne) (1887–), 106, 360
Wood, Sir Kingsley (1881–1943), 424
Wuehlisch, J. von (1891–1943), 256
Wysocki, Alfred, 12-13, 129

Yalta, 162

Zay, Jean, 48, 210, 290-91, 384-5, 389, 391
Zeligowski, Lucjan (1865–1947), 446
Zhdanov, Andrey A. (1896–), 191-2
Zog (1895–), 470

THE END

PRINTED BY R. & R. CLARK, LTD., EDINBURGH

ہے۔ اس کی ایک نقل ہر طالب علم کے پاس ہونی چاہیے۔

۲۔ ہر طالب علم کو ایک کاپی رکھنی چاہیے جس میں وہ اپنے نوٹس لکھ سکے۔

۳۔ ہر طالب علم کو ایک ڈائری رکھنی چاہیے جس میں وہ اپنے اسائنمنٹ اور امتحانات کی تاریخیں لکھ سکے۔

۴۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک پنسل، ایک ربڑ اور ایک قلم لانا چاہیے۔

۵۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک بستہ لانا چاہیے جس میں وہ اپنی کتابیں اور کاپیاں رکھ سکے۔

۶۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک پانی کی بوتل لانی چاہیے۔

۷۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک رومال لانا چاہیے۔

۸۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک چھتری یا برساتی لانی چاہیے۔

۹۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک جوتا یا چپل لانی چاہیے۔

۱۰۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک کنگھی لانی چاہیے۔

۱۱۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک آئینہ لانا چاہیے۔

۱۲۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک تولیہ لانا چاہیے۔

۱۳۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک صابن لانا چاہیے۔

۱۴۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک ٹوتھ برش اور ٹوتھ پیسٹ لانا چاہیے۔

۱۵۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک کنگھی لانی چاہیے۔

۱۶۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک آئینہ لانا چاہیے۔

۱۷۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک تولیہ لانا چاہیے۔

۱۸۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک صابن لانا چاہیے۔

۱۹۔ ہر طالب علم کو اپنے ساتھ ایک ٹوتھ برش اور ٹوتھ پیسٹ لانا چاہیے۔