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THE RIGHT HON.
SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN, K.G., P.C, M.P.

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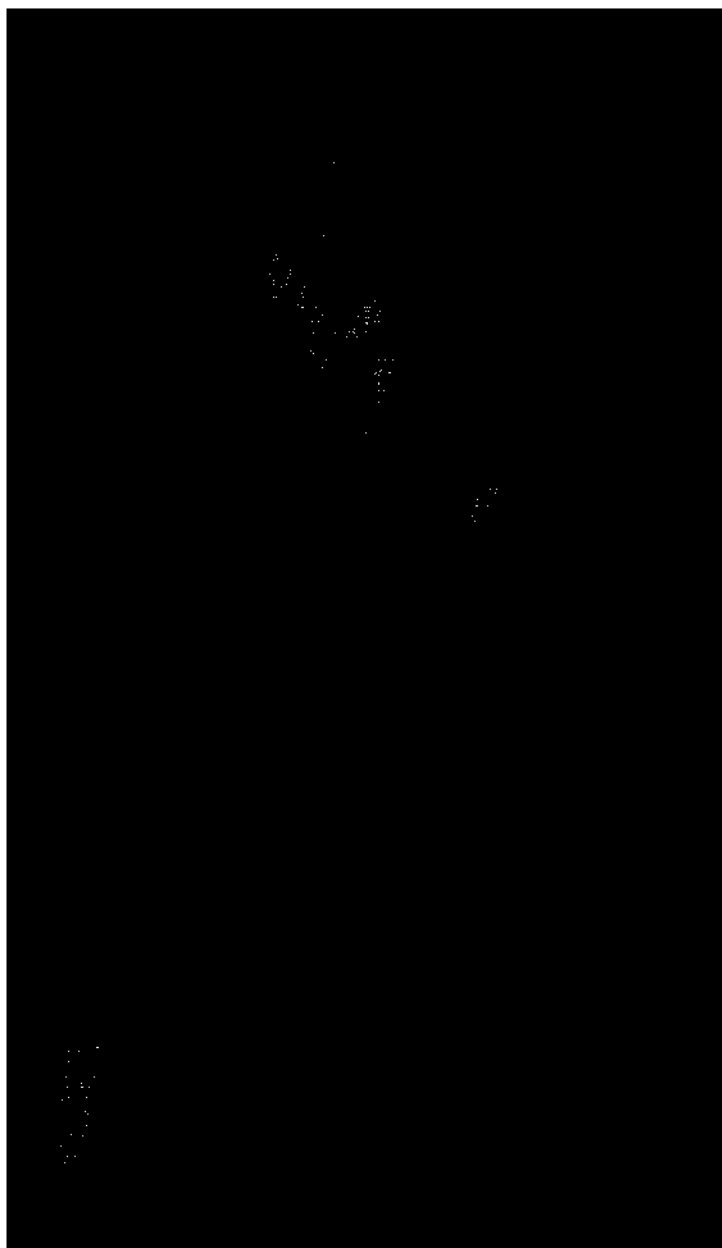
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AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN IN 1903

Barton

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
THE RIGHT HON.
SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN
K.C, P.C., M.P.

BY
SIR CHARLES PETRIE, BT.

// *half-tone illustrations*

VOLUME I



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CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

PERHAPS the most notable characteristic of the family into which the future Sir Austen Chamberlain was born on October 16th, 1863, ^{was} that its members had always been British through and through, and the most careful investigation has proved it impossible to trace one drop of foreign blood in them. The Chamberlains came originally from Wiltshire, the county which also contributed the St. Johns and the Cannings to the national life ; but they had been settled in London for several generations before, while still a youth, Joseph Chamberlain took up his residence in Birmingham, where his eldest son, Joseph Austen, was born. The family was of middle-class Puritan stock, and its members had for the most part married wives like themselves. It was not, nor had it any reason to be, ashamed of its origin. 'I boast a descent,' Joseph Chamberlain once declared, 'of which I am as proud as any baron may be of the title which he owes to the smiles of a king or to the favour of a 'Icing's mistress.' One of Austen's ancestors was burnt to death under Mary, and from generation to generation there had been a devotion to civil and religious liberty among the Chamberlains, though it was always combined with a sturdy patriotism. For very many years they were typical of thousands of families up and down the kingdom, and in this ancestral proximity to one of the main streams of English thought was to lie much of the innate strength of the great Colonial Secretary and his two sons.¹

Austen's mother was Harriet Kenrick, whom his father had married in 1861, and by whom, in addition to the one son, he had a daughter, Beatrice Mary. Among Austen Chamberlain's papers are some notes on his early years which were apparently written not long before his death.

⁶ My mother,' he wrote, 'died at my birth, and the first

¹ For a full account of the Chamberlain ancestry, cf. J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. I, pp. 3-19.

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five years of my life were spent at my grandfather Kenrick's house, Berrow Court, Edgbaston, Birmingham. His father, the younger son of a Welsh squireen, had come as a young man to West Bromwich, and established himself as a maker of shoe-buckles. Having built up a tidy business, he married a Miss Smith, of Hay Hill, near Birmingham, who, as my aunt taught us, "brought the height into the family"⁵; but almost at once fashions changed, knee-breeches went out, and with them shoe-buckles, and my great-grandfather's business disappeared. The story goes that he had to return his wife to her parents whilst he began his career over again. Swearing that he would have no more to do with a fashion trade, he established the business of Archibald Kenrick and Sons, hollow-ware manufacturers, in which he was succeeded by his sons, my grandfather Archibald and his younger brother Timothy. For a time they lived at West Bromwich within sight of the works, but they had moved into Birmingham some time before my birth, and my grandfather, in consequence of some weakness of the heart, had given up attendance at the works, which were then managed by my uncles, Arthur and William Kenrick.'

The death of the first Mrs. Chamberlain had come as a severe blow to her husband. In a letter to a friend he said : 'As I write all this, and think that I am never to know and feel her love or delight in her ways again, I declare it seems almost impossible to live.' It was not until many years later that Austen realized what the loss had meant to his father. One evening soon after the latter had become engaged to Miss Endicott he began to talk to his son about the young man's mother, and Austen observed : 'Do you know, sir, that this is the first time that you have ever spoken to me about my mother ?' 'Yes/ was the reply ; 'I know. Until happiness came again into my life, I did not dare to—and even now I can't do it without the tears coming into my eyes.'⁵ Another occasion may best be related in Austen's own words: * It was one day in my 'teens that I spoke critically to him of a friend of his, left early a widower with an only child. "He doesn't seem to

THE EARLY YEARS

care much for the boy," I said, " or to see much of him " ; and my father, quick as always in a friend's defence, blurted out before he saw the implication of what he was saying, " You must remember that his mother died when the boy was born "—and in a flash I saw for the first time what he had so carefully concealed from me, that in my earliest years I had been to him the living embodiment of the first tragedy of his life.'

Austen, of course, knew nothing of his mother save by hearsay. To quote his own manuscript recollections once again : ' My sister and I were brought up by our unmarried aunt, who gave us all a mother's love. My father had a bedroom in the house, and a study in a cottage at the foot of the drive whither he retired after the half-past six dinner to work and smoke, for no smoking was allowed in the house except in the kitchen after the maids had gone to bed. My earliest memory of my grandfather is of a tall man—he was over six feet two inches, I believe—dressed always in a black swallow-tail coat, black trousers, low waistcoat with wide shirt front and black tie. I seem to see myself a small child in a short white frock hiding under the grand piano when his step was heard in the hall coming to the drawing-room for afternoon tea, and chuckling with delight as he searched for me everywhere except where he knew that I was.'

There was one incident of these childhood years which ' should have left a sharper impression' but was entirely forgotten by the boy until reminded of it by his aunt in later years. Austen had got into the habit of screaming every night as soon as he had been put to bed and found himself alone in the dark. His father took great pains to find out whether the boy was really frightened, but though this was actually the case, the other was ashamed of what he did, and stoutly denied that he was at all afraid of the dark. Accordingly he was made to promise that he would not offend in this way again, and when, that very evening, his yells echoed through the house as usual, his father came to the night nursery and spanked the child for the first and

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only time in his life. Years later, when he was over thirty, Austen made a jocular allusion to the incident one night at dinner at Highbury; but as soon as he had spoken he saw that his father was hurt. Joseph Chamberlain said gravely, almost apologetically : * I was very inexperienced then. It is the only time I ever struck one of my children.' He had, indeed, a lively horror of physical punishment, as he showed later when, as a new Member of the House of Commons, he led a successful attack on the system of flogging in the Army. He even threatened to take Austen away from Rugby on learning that there was a chance he might be flogged for some trivial offence.

The son shared the father's views, and this episode prompted him to some reflections on the whole subject of corporal punishment : ' It has been my fate in later years when acting for Home Secretaries away on business or holiday to have to decide that the law must take its course and men must be hanged. It is an odious responsibility, but I have discharged it without a qualm of conscience, certain that it was right and necessary ; but when once I had to decide whether a sentence of flogging with the cat was to be carried out I could not bring myself to sanction it, though the offence was a peculiarly brutal one. In truth I had a justification in this instance, for I was advised that the criminal was a pathological case, and there was no hope of even the cat proving an effective deterrent, but the prisoner would have escaped his flogging in any case. I would gladly have had him put in a lethal chamber if the law had allowed such treatment, but order him to be flogged I could not. I can argue that death is punishment, and that flogging is torture, but it is not reason that governs my action in this matter. It is a physical repulsion stronger than my will. I often wonder whether, if I had been birched three or four times at school, I should have felt differently. Very likely, but then I was never beaten except once by a big boy at a preparatory school. I must say that he did it thoroughly with a stout walking-stick, and was rather frightened when he afterwards discovered the results on my

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poor thigh, which by accident or design had borne the effects of his wrath. I think he himself carried me off to the Dame to have the leg dressed.⁵

Other early, and more pleasant, memories were of his sister and himself being roused from sleep at their own earnest request and brought down to the drawing-room to see a hedgehog which was in the habit of crossing their grandfather's lawn every evening at the same hour. That was when Austen was three, and a year or two later the children were taken from bed again to see a particularly brilliant *aurora borealis* which appeared on two or three nights : this must have specially impressed itself upon their imagination, because at first their elders thought the light proceeded from a fire at Smethwick, where Joseph Chamberlain's principal factory was situated. A few years later came the Franco-Prussian War, and Austen and his sister were set to work to pick lint for the French wounded. To the end of his life the boy had the most vivid recollection of the pictures of the fighting which appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. After midday on Sunday their father was in the habit of devoting half an hour to the children, when he either talked to them about the war or told them stories, sometimes of his own invention and at others derived from the novels of Marryat or the *Arabian Nights*.

By that time Austen and his sister were living at Southbourne, whither their father moved on his second marriage. Their stepmother was the cousin of their mother, and Austen was to write a charming tribute to her memory : ' I still see her as, on our arrival with my father at his new home, she came running from the rockery where she was planting the ferns they had gathered on their honeymoon in the Lakes, pulling off her gauntlet gloves, with the trowel still in her hand and a loving welcome for her new children which never failed in her short life. She bore my father four children. Between them and us she made no distinction, and amidst all the cares of this growing family and of my father's public life—for he soon became Mayor of

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Birmingham—she always found time to play with us, to read to us, and to watch over us with all a mother's love.' Yet 'she was never very strong, and had a delicate and spiritual look which sometimes made me anxious ; but her spirit was indomitable, and she did not know what idleness was.' That courage and industry she was to transmit in full measure to her son Neville. In February, 1875, ^{5A}^C died within twenty-four hours of giving birth to a child, who followed its mother so soon afterwards that both were laid in the same coffin.

The widower's dejection at this fresh loss alarmed his friends, and to him the future seemed to offer no hope. 'There is not a fibre in my whole being which has not been roughly torn asunder. You can judge how desolate and solitary I feel, and how dark and difficult my future life seems to me.' He was thus left with six young children, of whom the eldest was not yet sixteen and the youngest was under two. His second sister came to live with him, and took charge until her own marriage, when a still younger sister succeeded her. All the Chamberlains bear witness to the loving care which they received at the hands of their aunts, but it could never be the same as a mother's devotion. Their father, too, was of necessity not much with them, but the young people were always a happy and united family, and had no serious differences.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the influence of Joseph Chamberlain over his children, and in particular over Austen. 'We never knew your father,' an Irish Member once said to the younger Chamberlain, 'until we saw him with you. I can only say I wish that my son's relations with me were like yours with your father.' Throughout his political career, during the long years that father and son sat in the House of Commons together, when they were in the same Cabinet, there was no disagreement, and during every crisis of the older man's career his son was by his side. The paternal influence was the greater for not being too obvious. When Mr. Joseph Chamberlain entered Austen for Rugby he said a good deal to Mr. Lee Warner,

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the boy's prospective housemaster, about his health, but nothing about his religious instruction. Knowing that the other was a strong Unitarian, the master asked him whether he had any special instructions to give on that subject. Mr. Chamberlain replied in the negative, saying that he was quite content Austen should attend the services in the school chapel and the ordinary Bible teaching ; then he added : ' If his family have not put their ideas into him yet, it is time that someone else tried.' When Austen was in the Sixth Form his housemaster told him this story, and observed : ' I have often been surprised to find how little your father ever seems to have said to you on the subject.' ' But,' came the reply, ' you don't observe that he has failed to put his ideas into me ? ' ' No, indeed ! ' laughed Mr. Lee Warner. ' But how was it done ? '

Mr. Joseph Chamberlain always kept one bookshelf with the glass front locked. When Austen was about seventeen he asked his father for the key, and the other enquired which was the book that he wanted to read. Austen mentioned a French book which he had noticed on one of the shelves, and his father, after thinking for about half a minute, put his hand on his son's shoulder and said he would rather not lend it to him, but that if he, Austen, really wanted to read it he was quite old enough to do so, but he had better buy it. Narrating this incident in later life, Austen remarked : ' You can imagine that I never read it.'

' He taught the obligations of duty to his children,' Austen was to write of his father ; and again : ' My father was a good talker—one of the best of his day—and a good listener. We learned much from his conversation, for he talked freely to us of all that he was doing, and he encouraged us to talk as freely of all that interested us.' When it is remembered that in 1876 Mr. Joseph Chamberlain became Member of Parliament for Birmingham, that four years later he entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade, and that he had to divide his time between Birmingham and London, his influence over his children is the more remarkable.

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There was one other factor in Austen's life which played a greater part than was often suspected, and that was Birmingham. He was never in business or in municipal politics there like his father or brother, but he was as proud of the city as either of them. It is difficult for one who has not known the fierce local patriotism of a provincial town to understand what this can mean, but Austen shared it to the full, and it was no small source of satisfaction to him to feel that his father had made Birmingham a pattern for other English cities. In spite of many claims upon his time, he always took the keenest interest in the housing problem in his native city. One day he made a very moving speech in Parliament on housing, and was congratulated by a friend. 'Yes,' he replied, 'I think I spoke with more emotion in the House than I have ever done before, and [at this point he smiled] emotion from a Chamberlain is considered to be somewhat remarkable.' Birmingham possessed a devoted son in Austen Chamberlain.

The boy's first school was at Hampstead, and from there Austen went to a preparatory school at Brighton, where he does not seem to have been particularly happy ; this was probably due to the somewhat intolerant attitude of the headmaster, one Hanbury by name, a clergyman of the Church of England, but of a type which is fortunately now nearly extinct, who continually referred to the boy as 'a little heathen' owing to his Unitarian upbringing. On leaving Brighton he went, in September, 1878, to Rugby,¹ then under the headmastership of Dr. Jex-Blake, and entered the house of Mr. Henry Lee Warner, with whom he formed a close friendship which lasted until the other's death many years later ; indeed, Austen was wont to say that he owed more to Mr. Lee Warner than to any other man save his own father. With the other boys in the house he won his way to popularity by rather slow degrees. There were several reasons for this. In the first place he had entered the school rather later than was usual, for he

¹ I am indebted to Mr. Simey, who was with Sir Austen Chamberlain at Rugby, for these particulars of his schoolfellow's career there.

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was close on fifteen, and he was somewhat overgrown and short-sighted. Then, the atmosphere at Rugby was predominantly muscular and Conservative, while Austen was already an uncompromising champion of his father's Radical views. Lastly, he was never a classical scholar in the strict sense of the term, and in those days there was no Modern side at Rugby. In these ways he had, during his first few terms, to face obstacles with which the majority of boys are not called upon to deal.

Austen's subsequent popularity represented a triumph of character over very considerable difficulties. Before he left the school in the summer of 1882 he had fully established his position. He had taken his part in games, having played for his house XX in the strenuous form of football then in vogue at Rugby, and he had been a remarkably successful head of his house ; less remarkable, since he was his father's son, is the fact that he was prominent in the debating society, where another leading member was Michael Sadler, later Master of University College, Oxford, who was his senior by two years. Austen was also allowed to forgo a portion of the ordinary classical routine, and instead he read deeply in history and English literature. By the time he left he had been in the Sixth Form for two years, but he never learnt to write Greek iambics.

There is one incident in connection with Austen's career at Rugby to which allusion has already been made, but which deserves elaboration, and that is his father's threat to have him removed sooner than that he should suffer corporal punishment. In the summer of 1879, when Austen was still a relatively insignificant member of the school, repeated complaints were received by the head-master from a neighbouring landowner that some of the boys were trespassing on his coverts during the course of their walks ; accordingly, Dr. Jex-Blake announced that the first time the offenders were caught they would be flogged, though as a rule this particular form of punishment was only meted out at Rugby in the case of heinous offences. Whether this threat ever reached Austen's ears, and, if so,

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whether he realized to what land it applied, it is impossible to say ; but, however this may be, Austen was the next boy to be caught, together with a companion called Moody, who was in the same house. In view of the fact that the conduct of both had until then been exemplary, Mr. Lee Warner besought the headmaster not to flog them ; but Dr. Jex-Blake was adamant on the point.

Austen's housemaster was under no illusions as to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's views on the subject of corporal punishment, so he telegraphed to the boy's father telling him of what was threatened and asking for instructions. Back came the reply, also by telegram: ' Remove Austen from the school.' Armed with this Mr. Lee Warner went to the headmaster, and represented to him that as Austen was no longer a member of the school he could not be flogged. Rightly or wrongly, this line of reasoning induced Dr. Jex-Blake to abandon his original intentions, and the sentence was commuted into one of detention in the school for two days at the end of term. Even this was mitigated by the clemency of Mr. Lee Warner, who took Austen out riding, possibly to the place responsible for the crisis which had arisen.

Among Austen's friends in those days was Charles Dixon, son of that George who was so great a power in contemporary Birmingham. On one occasion, a few days after Austen had gone back to school, he received a letter from his father, enclosing one to himself from Charles Dixon. The enclosure ran as follows : ' Will you meet me behind our haystack, and smoke paper cigars ?' Mr. Joseph Chamberlain wrote :

DEAR AUSTEN,

Never leave your private correspondence about.

Your affectionate father,

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—I don't admire your taste in smokes ! !

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Yet his company was valued by parents for their sons : one parent, for example, wrote to his boy during the latter's first term at Rugby : ' I told Mr. Warner that being Liberal in politics I was glad to find that you had made young Chamberlain your confidant, and I hope he will instil Liberal sentiments into your mind.'

In spite of the trespassing incident which brought Austen into conflict with Dr. Jex-Blake, he became a firm friend of the latter, who even left him a small legacy. Austen always retained a warm affection for Rugby, and for his house ; indeed, as late as Christmas, 1936, he attended a house supper to celebrate its centenary. In due course, too, he became a member of the governing body of the school, and eventually succeeded to its chairmanship.

Chamberlain went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1882, and a contemporary of those days recalls his appearance as a freshman : ' He was my *vis-d-vis* at dinner in hall during my first term, and I could not help noticing his appearance : a young replica of Joe Chamberlain—a veritable "chip of the old block" if ever there was one. Hair brushed the same way, collar, eye-glass, all to pattern, and a somewhat grim look. One day there was a group of our men discussing politics, and one speaker let himself go, saying some rather rude things about Joseph Chamberlain ; whereupon Austen, who had heard, went up to the speaker, saying, " Excuse me, sir, but let me inform you that I do not allow anyone to speak disrespectfully of my father in my presence." '

One of his closest friends at this period of his life was John Kelsall, who was afterwards for many years Rector of New Milton, in Hampshire ; the two young men first met at Hanbury's, and were afterwards at Rugby together. Chamberlain's letters to Kelsall afford considerable insight into his habits and opinions.

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Shandon Hydropathic Establishment
near Helensburgh, N.B.
*Aug. 28th*¹

DEAR KELSALL,

Wonders never cease, and here am I taking up my pen to write without first having received a letter from you. I hope you will appreciate the miracle, for you know what a bad correspondent I am generally.

You will see that I am not at home. We² have been here for about three weeks, and shall stay another fortnight or so. If you do not feel inclined to write before that, please address to Highbury. This hydro is a very gay place—dances, acting, etc., go on nearly every evening—but as you may imagine we keep clear of that, having come for the sake of the country. We are on the Gareloch, a sea loch which joins the Clyde a little before it reaches the sea. The scenery all around is lovely, and we have had some splendid excursions. One day I walked over the hills at the back to Loch Lomond, reaching that loch at its lower end, where lovely islands are scattered about it. I then walked along it for some distance towards the fine hills at its head, Ben Lomond amongst them; then I cut off through Glen Douglas, a long desolate glen shut in by heather-covered hills, and came home down Loch Long and Gareloch—some twenty-seven miles in all. The prettiest part of the walk was down Loch Long, where the road ran through a wood, amidst pretty birches and quantities of luxuriant ferns. On the other side of the loch were fine rugged deep-blue hills lit up here and there by the evening sun. I wish any description of mine could give you an idea of it, but you will need a great deal of imagination. At other times we take a row on the loch or go somewhere by steamer. Bute and Arran—the latter is especially fine—we hope to visit this way before we leave.

How is natural history getting on with you? We do not see much here, but I found the caterpillar of an emperor

¹ 1883.

² He and his brother Neville.

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and of an oak egger, crossing the road in search of a place to chrysalize in, and they have since spun themselves up in captivity. Neville keeps an aquarium, chiefly of anemones, which breed freely and seem happy, except that one day they all turned inside-out. Can you explain this? We thought they must have indigestion, and Neville remarked he should want a hospital for inside-out patients. He had three young eels at one time, but they jumped out of the water and died in the sulks when put back.

What a glorious failure Lord Salisbury has been at the end of this session. Think of his being thrown over by the Duke of Richmond, the very model of a thorough-going, steady, old-school Conservative! And then the bills the Lords have thrown out! The Pigeon-shooting Bill, the Irish Registration and the Scotch Local Gov. Bills—the rejection of these will not make their lordships' house more popular. Even the *Standard* confesses that the Gov. is as strong as when first returned. What a pity it is that John Morley has given up the *Pall Mall*! I doubt whether a seat in Parliament is worth such a sacrifice.

I suppose you have heard that Lee Warner came back the day after the Rugby term ended. I hope he is much better for his holyday [*sic*], but I have not heard anything of him. That is the worst of his letters, he will not speak of himself.

Have you read any of Howells' novels published in a shilling pocket edition? They are slight, but very clever and amusing sketches of character. Let me recommend *A Chance Acquaintance*, *Their Wedding Journey*, *A Foregone Conclusion*, or *Out of the Question*. But I don't think you can go wrong in getting any of them.

I have also come across the *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* (Fanny Burney). Get them from the Union Library when you go to Oxford. They are intensely interesting. She lived all through Hastings' trial and the French Revolution, and was at Brussels during Waterloo. She describes everything so vividly, and it is curious to meet, as it were, Fox, and Burke, and Wyndham, and

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George III, and Hastings, and many more historical characters in private life, and hear them talk. I wish I had had time to read them right through. I must do so some time.

Let me know all you are doing and thinking and seeing ; also when you go to Oxford.

Yours very sincerely,

J. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

This undergraduate epistle foreshadowed the whole career of the writer, for what he was at twenty he was for the rest of his life. Scenery, natural history, politics, and literature continued to be his chief interests, and to the end he remained a very simple man in his habits and tastes. Even in youth, as we have seen, there was a certain austerity in his appearance, and in age this was thought by many to be his most prominent characteristic. Had they really known Austen Chamberlain they would have held a very different opinion. At the height of his fame, when he was Foreign Secretary, he wrote to his daughter from Geneva not of statesmen and statecraft but of mountains and flowers :

We had a lovely drive up into the Jura. We started at three, and only got back just in time to dress for dinner. It was beautiful country, first plain, then mountains with lovely Alpine meadows and woods of beech and spruce. The meadows were starred with the little blue gentians and pink primulas : in the woods we picked lilies of the valley, and in one place in a high valley we gathered a great bowl of the honey-scented *Daphne cneorum*. This was the object of our drive, but the whole drive was lovely.

In his sixties Austen Chamberlain was as unspoilt in his love of nature as he had been in his twenties.

Two more letters to Kelsall throw further light on his interests and activities as an undergraduate :

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Trinity College, Cambridge

Feb. 28 1

MY DEAR KELSALL,

Many thanks for your very kind present, which arrived shortly before your letter. I could not think what it was—but I shall soon make a closer acquaintance with it.

The only address for Lee W. now is his home one—Thorpland Hall, Fakenham, Norfolk—from which letters will be forwarded. I heard from him some time ago, when neither he nor Mrs. Lee W. had got over the strain of parting with the house. He will like immensely to receive letters, tho' he may not be able to answer them.

I trust Mar . . ,² lose his seat, but there is little hope of that before the General. I am rather excited about the Cambridgeshire election, where I fear the Liberal will be beaten. I think I am going to do some electioneering for him.

I am in delightful rooms in the Big Court of Trinity now, and am longing to receive visits from all my Oxford friends. Is it quite impossible to get away from Balliol for a Sunday? Keep was down last week, staying with Manley, and was in rattling form, tho⁵ he seemed hard worked. I think, however, he likes his office business.

Only yesterday I was asking Manley for Oxford news and saying that if I ed. not get any I shd. go over to Oxford and make enquiries on the spot. But I am too busy for that just now.

Is it at the end of this term that the fritillaries are out at Oxford? If so, I should be very grateful if you ed. send me a bunch by post. I am very curious to see what they are like. Lee Warner used to talk so much about them.

C. W. Stubbs was lecturing here a week ago on 'The Labourer's Ideal'—a good house and a bit of land. What a fine man he is! He gave us a splendid lecture.

Please excuse haste and believe me, with many thanks,

Ever yours,

J. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Neville writes cheerfully of morice (?).

¹ 1884. * Letter torn.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

MY DEAR KELSALL,

It is so long since I wrote to you that I am almost ashamed to begin this letter with a begging request. However, the fact is that Neville and I are going to start this year with a new burst of activity in the lepidoptera-collecting line in order to fill up some of the many gaps in our collection. Unfortunately, as you know, there is very little to be found here, and many of the things which are quite common with you we never see at all. So if you are still enough interested in these things to be breeding for your own amusement, will you please let us have some chrysalids later in the year. I can only offer in exchange what I have indeed already promised you—and what I almost expected to have been asked for this vac.—viz. the loan of my microscope slides. Any time when I am at home and you would care to have these I shall be delighted to send them—either the whole number, which in truth is not very many, or those of one sort only, according as you wish.

I suppose you will be going up to Oxford soon. I go up on Tuesday, and am hoping to get over to Oxf. for a Saturday and Sunday some time during the term.

What a horrible affair all this Egyptian business is. I do wish we were well out of it, but that I fear cannot be for a long time to come. At home I think things seem pretty flourishing ; a majority of 130 on the second reading of the Franchise Bill is at any rate a thing not to be despised. It is a strange comment on the independence of the House of Lords that everyone should be asking not what they will do but what Lord Salisbury wishes. At present he seems pugnacious. Some people are never satisfied with one beating.

My sister has just come back from a tour in Italy, including Rome, Naples, and Venice. She is very full of all she has seen, and makes me quite envious, as I had not the good fortune to go.

Yours very sincerely,

J. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

March 20th.*

¹ 1884.

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These letters show that their writer held his father's political views, and the records of the Cambridge Union tell the same story. On May 29th, 1883, he proposed the motion 'That in the opinion of this House the existence of the House of Lords is injurious to the welfare of the country.' The opposer was Mr. E. A. Goulding, of St. John's, who was subsequently created Lord Wargrave, and was to be a life-long friend of his opponent that evening. On this occasion Mr. Goulding had the better of it, for the motion was defeated by a two to one majority. Austen spoke regularly at the Union, and he was to be found 'regretting the disintegration of the Conservative Party and the inability of its leaders to control its action'; opposing proportional representation on the ground that it would 'create such a balance of parties as would place it in the power of small sections of interested and immoral men to sway the balance between them, and make their own advantage out of the necessities of parties'; and, in June, 1885, declaring his 'confidence in the present Government,' when he asserted of his political opponents that 'military glory was their bane, by which they moved and lived, and had their being, and without which a Tory administration would be a thing unknown in the future history of this country.' As the Cambridge Union was at this time a predominantly Conservative body, Austen generally found himself on the losing side.

The late Sir Edmund Gosse, in a letter to a friend dated October 25th, 1884, writes of a visit to Trinity: 'You will want to know how my affairs went off. I had a splendid audience, of about 200, in the hall, and was very well received. The Master came, and sat aloof in a kind of remote silver grandeur, and smiled benignly. The young men were particularly sympathetic, and, as far as I can gather, approved. I have had one great conquest, in young Chamberlain, the eldest son of the Birmingham tribune, who upheld to me, all the hours through, a luminous face of attention, adorned with dimples whenever I approached the confines of a joke. He came this evening,

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in the dusk, like Nicodemus, and talked in the most engaging way. He seems the cleverest young fellow here, by what people say.'

Austen took his degree in the summer of 1885, and in the following September he went to France for nine months. He had been brought up with the friendliest of feelings for that country since those childhood days when he and his sister picked lint for the French wounded during the war of 1870. His father was always a great lover of, as well as a frequent visitor to, that country, where he had many friends, notably M. Clemenceau. Austen's experiences in France at this impressionable age were never forgotten by him, and it may even be claimed that one day they were not to be without their influence upon the foreign policy of Great Britain. When he had only another two years to live he summed up in these words the deductions of a life-time : ' It was a wise saying that in Europe every man is born two thousand years old. We cannot escape from our past. Frenchmen and Englishmen alike are what history has made them. The French Constitution has been made and remade. The British Constitution has grown. The one is a structure carefully planned, where every stress and strain has been calculated by the builders and provision made against it in advance—a classic building begun and finished in a single style. The other is a Cothic building bearing evidence, in the varying styles of nave and clerestory, of transepts and choir, of its slow development, and still resting on the rounded Norman arches of an earlier structure which themselves, not improbably, rise on Saxon foundations.^{5 1}

He went to stay with the Aumaitre family, of which the father was a *repetiteur-en-droit*, who coached pupils for the Law examinations ; there were also in the house Madame Aumaitre, three children, and the mother-in-law, and their young foreign visitor described them as * a delightful family.' When Austen first arrived in France they were on

¹ *Down the Years*, pp. 227-8.

THE EARLY YEARS

holiday in Brittany, and there he joined them, living over a barber's shop in a village street. It was a new experience, and one that he welcomed, for he was peculiarly receptive to fresh impressions. In later years a somewhat austere external appearance often gave those who did not know Austen Chamberlain the idea that, like the younger Pitt, he had become set in his outlook very early in life, and that in this lay at once his strength and his weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it can be said of him with confidence *nihil humani alienum*. To the end of his life he took the keenest interest in all that went on round him. Some young men, just down from one of the older universities and with a father who was a Cabinet Minister, might not have taken very kindly to the circumstances in which Austen found himself in this Breton village, but Joseph Chamberlain had brought up his son differently from that, and he settled down in his unfamiliar surroundings at once. There never was a Chamberlain yet who was a snob.

When the Aumaitre family returned to Paris, young Chamberlain attended the École des Sciences Politiques, where, among the lecturers, was M. Albert Sorel, author of *UEurope et la Revolution Française*. His acquaintance with contemporary France was not, however, confined to the academic world, for he carried with him a letter of introduction from his father to M. Clemenceau, and the latter took care to acquaint him with the course of contemporary French politics. Joseph Chamberlain was still the rising hope of the English Radicals, and between him and the Tiger there was a great natural affinity. He soon enlisted the sympathies of Austen, as the following extracts from the latter's letters to his sister Beatrice bear witness ;

5.XU885

Did I tell you I dined with the Ribots on Sunday? M. R. was not very talkative, but he asked after the chances of the Radicals **in England**, and said he found Father's

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land projects alarming. Monsieur Clemenceau called here and assured me of his wish to do everything in his power for me. He was delighted to hear how sanguine Father is of a Liberal majority, which, apart from questions of internal policy, he considered necessary in Europe to balance Germany. He spoke of his position as being very difficult, and one in which he could not afford even a single mistake ; said he agreed with the English Radical programme, but dare not propose it here at present ; and then he began to contrast the two countries. If the Government closed a newspaper office in London, there would be almost a revolution ; here in Paris it might be done without anyone thinking anything of it. On the other hand, you would have a revolution here if you excluded cabs from the Bois de Boulogne ; whilst in London nobody troubles himself about their exclusion from Hyde Park. He left me again expressing his desire to do all he could. For the moment he has left Paris again.

11.xL 1885

As to French politics, you will have noticed that I have made no remarks of my own up to the present time. I have indeed been attempting to occupy that position of strict impartiality in which one sees nothing but the virtues of one's foes and the vices of one's friends. But I am tempted to make some remarks by your letter. That the French Radicals differ from the English very considerably is, I should think, quite true, but it is accounted for by the differences between the two nations. They talk more wildly perhaps, but up to the present time it is not in Clemenceau's paper ¹ that I have seen any but reasonable articles. He calls (or rather his friends—I have seen no article by him) for the evacuation of Tonkin and the separation of Church and State as the immediate programme. The first move seems to me at once politic and right. The second is a more difficult question, but I think

¹ *La Justice*.

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the balance is in favour of his solution. You may say that France is at bottom a Catholic country, and that such a policy alienates all Catholic support from the Republic. I should answer that the maintenance of the State payments as supported by the moderates irritates the vast majority of Republicans without conciliating in the least the Catholics. It is in short subsidizing a great organization which is at heart hostile to the Government.

It is sacrificing the convictions of friends without securing the adhesion of foes. The game is not worth the candle. For the rest, the moderates as a party appear to me contemptibly weak. I can't criticize M. Ribot's views because he makes no speeches now, has no paper, and when I saw him was not talkative. But take the *Temps*. I see it regularly. It is a second-rate *Times*. For a fortnight after the elections it was proclaiming the establishment of a great Republican organization to restore the moderates to power. And when at length, after much blowing of trumpets, it produces, its scheme, it proves ludicrous and contemptible to the last degree.

Now, as to who are an English Radical's natural allies in this country. Allowing all you wish for differences in the circumstances of the two countries, there is one remark I have to make. What would you say if you learnt that the moderates here look with horror on the English Radical programme and associate themselves with our Whigs? That seems to me an argument worth something. There is M. Ribot, who confessed himself alarmed by the distinctive points of the Radical programme. There is the *Temps*, which is never tired of pointing out the wise moderation of the Whigs, the folly and obstinacy of the Radicals. It even the other day prophesied the immediate fusion of Whigs and Tories against Radical and Socialistic programmes 'such as would take place in France between moderate Republicans and Conservatives also if we were not divided from the Conservatives by the question of the form of government.'⁵ If I regard French moderates as foes and French Radicals as friends, I only take them at their own valuation.

Then again I have been to the Chamber twice, but have not as yet been fortunate enough to hear any interesting discussion. There was talk in the lobbies the other day of an interpellation on Tonkin, where Brisson is pursuing the twice condemned Ferry policy, but it has been postponed indefinitely. M. Clemenceau seems a little afraid of destroying another ministry, having already obtained a giant-killer reputation in that respect. Did I tell you I met in the lobby Blowitz of *The Times*, and also the correspondent of the *Standard*, who considered the Conservative cause hopelessly lost in England, and was already anticipating the erection of guillotines out of the rates to simplify the redistribution of land ?

The writer of this letter would have been very much surprised had he been told that within twelve months the English Radicals, led by his own father, would have formed an alliance with the Conservative followers of Lord Salisbury, and that he would himself be assisting in the fight ; but such are the vicissitudes of politics. He showed, on the other hand, more than ordinary prescience in his distrust of M. Ribot, for more than thirty years later it was the latter .who deliberately wrecked the attempt of the Emperor Charles to terminate the Great War by negotiation.

During these months in Paris young Chamberlain met many of the leading figures in contemporary France, mostly, of course, on the Left, with the notable exception of the Comte de Mun, for the son of the champion of the Unauthorized Programme was hardly likely to be popular in the Faubourg. He was introduced to Gambetta, who said to him of Blowitz that he had 'all the vices : he is Slav, Jew, Baron, and decorated/ It was Blowitz who presented Austen to Jules Ferry, but' of my interview with him I have to confess that I remember nothing but my amazement at his long Dundreary whiskers.' Many years afterwards, during the Peace Conference in 1919, Austen was asked one

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evening by a hostess, 'Do you know Monsieur Clemenceau?' 'Yes,'⁵ he replied; 'I have known him and Monsieur Ribot for thirty-five years.' 'It is not possible,' came the reply; 'you must have been a child at that time.' 'No, Madame; to prove it, I will tell you what each of them did for me: Monsieur Ribot lectured me on the French Constitution and Monsieur Clemenceau introduced me to the *premiere danseuse* of the Opera.'

Unlike many of his fellow-countrymen Austen frequently visited the Chamber of Deputies, and one debate there remained in his memory. 'I can still picture the scene in the Chamber,' he was to write, 'when, stung to interruption by Clemenceau's fierce invective, Ferry interrupted him: "And the honour of France, monsieur?" "The honour of France! I will show you how you have smirched it," retorted Clemenceau; and the invective continued more fiercely than ever till, roused to fury, the whole Left of the Chamber sprung to their feet, shook their fists at Ferry, and shouted to him: "Down on your knees, traitor! Down on your knees!"'

In May, 1886, Austen returned to England to find a very different political scene from that which he had left nine months before. Then the 'Government of Caretakers,' as Lord Salisbury's first administration was contemptuously dubbed by its opponents, had just come into office, and although his father by no means always found himself in agreement with Mr. Gladstone, yet the latter was still his leader, and Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was the idol of the progressive section of the Liberal Party. In December a General Election had taken place with the most unsatisfactory consequences. The boroughs, where Mr. Gladstone's policy had become thoroughly unpopular, rallied to the support of the Government, but the agricultural labourer voted for those who had given him the franchise in the previous year. Ireland, except for the north-east, was swept by Mr. Parnell, and not a Liberal was elected for the whole country. The result of the election was to return to the House of Commons 250 Conservatives, 334 Liberals,

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and 86 Irish Nationalists. Mr. Parnell was master of the British Parliament. In view of the uncertain attitude of the Irish Party, which had on more than one occasion of late voted with the Conservatives, the Prime Minister felt justified in meeting Parliament : this he did on January 2 ist, 1886, but a cleverly worded amendment brought the Liberals and Irish into the same lobby a few days later, and after being defeated by a majority of 79 the Government resigned.

While Austen was studying the Constitution of France, that of his own country appeared to be on the eve of transformation. In a new Liberal administration Mr. Joseph Chamberlain became President of the Local Government Board, but not for long. Mr. Gladstone's proposals for Home Rule went too far for him, so in March he resigned ; in his letter to the Prime Minister he said that the Bill was * tantamount to a proposal for separation. My public utterances and my private convictions are absolutely opposed to such a policy, and I feel that the differences which have been disclosed are so vital that I can no longer entertain the hope of being of service to the Government.'

In view of the important part which Ireland was destined to play in the life of the younger Chamberlain it may not be out of place to give the details of the measure which Mr. Gladstone put before the House of Commons in April, 1886, and which caused Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and his son to sever their connection with Liberalism. There was to be an Irish Parliament sitting in Dublin which was to legislate for Ireland, and to control the executive. Irish peers and M.P.s were no longer to sit at Westminster. The Dublin Parliament was to have no voice in questions concerning the Crown, the Army and Navy, and foreign and colonial relations, but within a period of two years the constabulary was to pass under its control. With the exception of so much of the customs and excise as was necessary to meet liabilities to England, taxation was also placed in its hands. The Irish share of the imperial burdens was settled at one-fourteenth instead of the two-seventeenths fixed by the

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Union. Safeguards were provided for the protection of the Protestant minority, while the establishment or endowment of any religious denomination was expressly forbidden. To solve the social problems of Ireland a Land Bill was also introduced by which landowners could sell their property to a certain State authority at twenty years' purchase, to be retailed subsequently to smallholders. The first cost to the English taxpayer was calculated to be not less than £120,000,000, which was to be raised by the issue of new stock.

Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was by no means opposed to some form of local government for Ireland, but, as has been shown, this scheme went too far for him. Thereafter he threw himself into the fight against his old leader, and with such success that when the vital division was taken, on June 8th, shortly after Austen's return from Paris, the bill was defeated by 343 votes to 313, while no less than 93 Liberals and Whigs had followed Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Hartington against Mr. Gladstone. Amid the cheers and counter-cheers which followed the announcement of the result, Mr. Parnell, pointing to Mr. Chamberlain, remarked quietly to a colleague : ' There goes the man who killed Home Rule.'

Mr. Gladstone at once applied to the Queen for, and obtained, a dissolution of Parliament, and Austen had his first experience of an election in one of the bitterest contests of modern times. It is not easy after the lapse of more than half a century to realize the intensity of feeling which was aroused by the proposal to grant Home Rule to Ireland, and which continued for nearly a generation. To those who opposed Mr. Gladstone's project the question seemed one of right or wrong, and to the very end the majority of English people rejected Home Rule on principle. Nor was the question to many merely academic. Relations between Great Britain and Ireland were very much closer in the 'eighties than they were to be by the time of Austen Chamberlain's death : there were thousands in England and Scotland who had relatives in Ireland ; the fighting

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services contained a very high proportion of Irishmen ; and there was a steady migration of sportsmen across the Irish Sea to hunt, shoot, and fish. English and Scottish homes had for years been horrified at the crimes of the Fenians, and by stories of ' murder done by night ' and ' treason taught by day . ' Yet it was to the perpetrators of these atrocities that Mr. Gladstone, the ' people's William , ' who had himself denounced the activities of the Land League in no measured terms on more than one occasion, proposed to hand over the loyalists of Ulster.

Much of this was unfair and much of it was exaggerated ; it is also possible to argue that even from a Conservative point of view the opposition to Home Rule was a blunder, but that the majority of English people held such views the voting was soon to show. Above all, the question soon came, in the eyes of many, to possess a religious significance. Home Rule, they argued, must mean Rome Rule, and once again, as so often in the past, the Protestantism of two of the Queen's kingdoms began to range itself against the Catholicism of the third, stimulated as it was by the resistance of the Protestants in Ulster.

In the election campaign Austen acted, as he described it, ' as a sort of A. D. C to his father. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was not himself opposed in West Birmingham, but the other seats in the Midland city had to be held for the Liberal Unionists, as the dissident Liberals had come to be called. Austen never seems to have had the least doubt that the line his father took was the right one, and the older man found the support of the younger a great consolation in a battle in which so many of his oldest friends were ranged on the opposite side. Rarely has any man been the object of so much abuse as was Mr. Joseph Chamberlain during the General Election of 1886, and personal as well as Party feeling was roused to an extent since unknown. Even his intimate Mr. John Morley compared him with Casca. Indeed, he was probably more hated by that section of the population which was opposed to him than any British politician of modern times, with the possible exception of

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Lord Castlereagh, Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Parnell, and Mr. Lloyd George, and they were certainly not more abominated. Yet, if Austen was shown on this occasion how vindictive the political animal can be at an election, he also had the satisfaction of seeing his father as triumphant at the polls as he had been in the House of Commons. When the final results were announced the magnitude of Mr. Gladstone's defeat was apparent. The Conservative strength had risen from 250 to 316, while of the Liberal Unionists 78 had come through the fight successfully ; but the number of orthodox Liberals had fallen from 334 to 191, to which must be added the 85 Irish Nationalists. Mr. Chamberlain carried all the Birmingham seats, as he was to do for the rest of his life, and the control of the House of Commons had passed to him from Mr. Parnell.

In the autumn of that same year Austen went with his father and his sister Beatrice to the Near East ; they visited Constantinople and Athens, as well as Bulgaria, and got home again twelve days before Christmas. It was a further widening of the horizon for the young man, and was another instalment of that training in statesmanship which the elder Chamberlain had mapped out so carefully. A few weeks later it was carried a stage further, for in February, 1887, Austen went to Germany, and stayed there for twelve months, save for one short visit home. He was never in Germany again, although, curiously enough, he had arranged to go there with Mrs. Chamberlain in the summer of 1914.

Berlin did not attract him as Paris had done ; he found it 'slightly provincial.' What was true of the German capital equally applied to the Germans themselves : his preference was always for the French. In later life he wrote : * By contrast with the first approach of Englishman and Frenchman, generally uneasy and constrained, the first meeting of German and Englishman is usually easy and deceptively cordial. For one thing, the Englishman in general is no great linguist, and knowledge of the English language is far more general among Germans than among

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Frenchmen. At first sight, too, their habits and modes of thought seem not very dissimilar ; it is only as one goes deeper that the profound differences appear. Our growth is rooted in a different soil and watered by different rivers. The deeper Englishmen and Frenchmen penetrate into each other's nature, the more they will find they have in common ^ the deeper Englishman and German go, the greater the divergence of faith and spirit which will be revealed between them. It is not without significance that it was precisely those Englishmen who knew Germany best, who had lived there or had formed German connections, who first foresaw and warned their countrymen of the coming peril.'

Among those who were alarmed at the trend of certain sections of German opinion was Austen himself. William I, who had fought against Napoleon, might be still on the throne, and Berlin very much what it was when only capital of Prussia, but ideas were stirring which augured ill for the future. Austen regularly attended Treitschke's lectures on Prussian history, and they disquieted him. On October 31st, 1887, he wrote :

Treitschke has opened to me a new side of the German character—a narrow-minded, proud, intolerant Prussian *chauvinism*. And the worst of it is that he is forming a school. If you continually preach to the youth of a country that they stand on a higher step of creation to all other nations, they are only too ready to believe it, and the lecturer who descends to this will be popular and draw big audiences. But it's very dangerous. I fear my generation of Germans, and those a little younger, will be far more high-handed and will presume far more on the victories of '66 and '70 than those who won them. There is a school growing up here as bad as the French military school, and if they come to the front, why, *gare aux autres*. They are likely to find a friend in Prince William, who is said to be thirsting for warlike distinction and is the idol of the military party and the youth.

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For the rest, Austen met those who then governed Germany. He dined with the Iron Chancellor, who unbent to him considerably, and afterwards remarked to Sir Charles Dilke : [£] ' A nice boy, that young Chamberlain. Pity that he's such a poor drinker.' At one dinner a companion was the notorious Holstein, who, to quote Austen, ' did, perhaps, more than any other man to prevent an Anglo-German understanding '—though the Englishman did not then realize how important the other was subsequently to become. Moltke was another figure to be seen taking his daily walk in the Tiergarten, where Austen used to go and skate with his friend Mr. Rennell Rodd, later Lord Rennell. Life was not all politics, even for Joseph Chamberlain's son, for there were frequent visits to the theatre and to a small but celebrated oyster bar, where the young men ate cold partridge and washed it down with Greek wine. Once there was very nearly serious trouble. Austen, Rodd, and a friend were bathing at Potsdam from a villa by the lake which the Councillor of the Embassy had rented ; they * bathed from a boat instead of from a bathing-shed, and with less clothing than was expected, and were surprised by a boating party of the Royal Family, and the commotion which followed. Mrs. Scott, the Councillor's wife, was able to disclaim having seen anybody bathing, but the road in front of her villa was picketed by the police for a fortnight.' Yet, in spite of such lighter moments in the German capital, Austen never forgot Paris in Berlin, and his first love on the Continent was destined to be also his last.

In 1888 a new factor came into the young man's life. His father went that year to America as head of the British delegation at a conference between Great Britain, the United States, and Canada regarding fishery rights off the coasts of Canada and Newfoundland. While he was there he became engaged to Miss Mary Endicott, daughter of the Secretary for War in Mr. Cleveland's Cabinet, whom he subsequently married as his third wife, and who was destined to survive him. The engagement had to be kept secret for some months, for the Presidential election was

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about to take place, and had it become known that the daughter of one of Mr. Cleveland's ministers was about to marry the arch-enemy of Home Rule, the Irish vote would have been lost to the Democrats in advance. As it happened, there was no real need for the postponement of the marriage, since the President was beaten by Mr. Benjamin Harrison, the Republican candidate.

There can be few parallels for the position which the new Mrs. Chamberlain soon attained in her husband's family. It is no exaggeration to say that almost at once she became Austen's best friend, and she was the Mary to whom so many of his letters were addressed. 'She was younger,' he wrote, 'than my eldest sister and myself, and she came from a different world, but she stepped so naturally into ours that soon she became the centre of our family life almost as much as my father himself. I like to recall that when my father on his first return from his American mission told me of his engagement my first words were "This is the best news, sir, that you could have brought us," and that when, eighteen years later, I returned from Algiers, where I had met and become engaged to my wife, he reminded me of those words, and added: "and now I repeat them to you." My sister said of her: "She brought his children closer to him." . . . It would be impossible to exaggerate the debt we all owe to her, or the love that she inspired.' Two letters from Austen Chamberlain, the one to his stepmother and the other to his father, testify to the sincerity of this remark:

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

14.3.92

MY DEAR MARY,

Many happy returns of your birthday. I wish I could be with you to-morrow and celebrate with you. Do you remember how I wrote to you when Father first told me of his engagement saying how glad I was for his sake? Now my feelings are more selfish. You have taken so large a part in our life, helped us so much by your sympathy, and

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shared so fully all our joys and troubles that it is hard to think how we could ever have done without you. Many, many thanks for all you have done for us : once more many happy returns of the day.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Nov. 14th, 1899

MY DEAR FATHER,

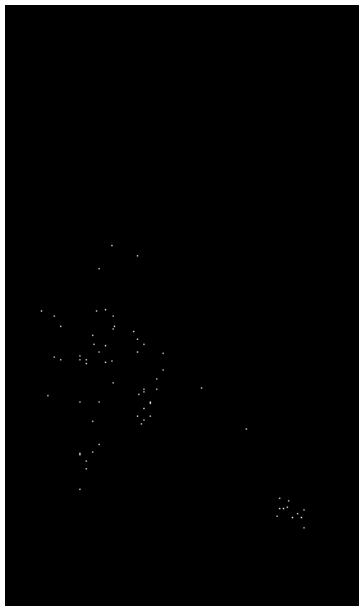
Though I cannot be with you to-morrow night, I shall be thinking of you, and shall drink your health and Mary's at my lonely dinner.

You reminded me not so long ago that when you told me of your engagement I said that was the best news you could have brought us home from America. I could not know then how true a prophet I was ; but I like to think that that was how the news first appeared to me, and that in the years that have since passed there has been nothing for any of us to change or regret. And now I have only to thank you for the present you brought to us, and to wish you and Mary many, many happy returns of your wedding day. I don't think there was ever a happier or a more united family, and to you and Mary we owe it all.

Ever your affectionate son,

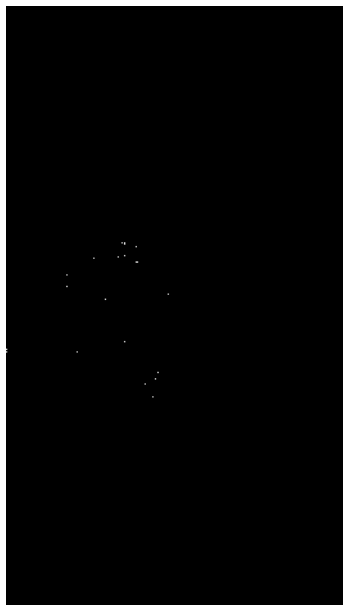
AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Early in 1888 Austen Chamberlain was adopted as prospective Liberal Unionist candidate for the Hawick district, which comprised the boroughs of Hawick, Gala-shiels, and Selkirk, with a total electorate of between five and six thousand. It was not, from the new candidate's point of view, a very promising constituency, for when Sir George Trevelyan, the sitting Member, had parted company with Mr. Gladstone over Home Rule, he had been defeated at the subsequent election, though previously unopposed, by a small majority. Still, it was just the sort of seat to give a young man the experience he needed on first entering public



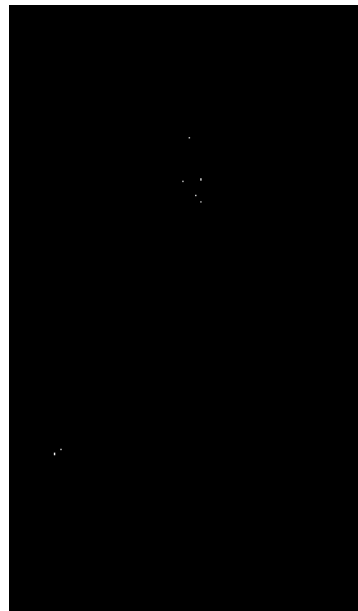
Thrupp

With his sister, in 1866, aged 3



Whitlock

In 1872, aged 9
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Thrupp

In 1874, aged 11

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Sir George Trevelyan now had the face to represent himself as the upholder of Liberal traditions (laughter) and he attempted to drum the Unionists out of the Liberal Party because they would not gulp down their professions with the same readiness that he had shown to swallow his own. (Laughter and applause.) Why, because the Gladstonians had been caught in the Parnellite trap and lost their tails, were the Unionists to cut off theirs? (Laughter.) Why were the Unionists to give up the old policy, which a little time ago the Gladstonians were united with them in maintaining and advancing? That was a policy of steady and progressive reform.

During a long course of years the Liberal Party had devoted itself to removing all the grievances of which the Irish people could complain. During all the struggles to which those measures gave rise there was one thing which was above all party dissensions and quarrels, and that was their determination, come what might, to maintain intact and inviolable the unity of the United Kingdom. (Applause.) What had occurred to alter that determination? (A voice—'Nothing,'⁵ and applause.) All the tendency of the age had been the other way. The inventions of this century had only served to bring Ireland closer to our shores; her position, her history, the character of her people, and the ties of kinship and of blood which united us to the Irish people had made it a necessity of the case that Ireland should be bound for ever to Great Britain. (Applause.)

This had been a democratic age. Wherever they turned they would find that the people had been struggling towards freedom, and as they had struggled to, and attained to, freedom, they had attained also to union among themselves. That was so in Germany, in Italy, and the greatest democracy that the world had ever seen—the democracy of the United States (applause)—had made itself for ever memorable by its great struggle to maintain its union. (Applause.) If they wanted to find a parallel to the policy which was now submitted to them, to find a case where similar demands

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had been granted, and if they wanted to see what was the result of such concessions, they must seek it not among the free peoples of Europe or America—they would have to look for it in the effete despotism of the Turk. There they would find in the concessions extorted from their weakness, after a disastrous war, by the threats of a united Europe, the only parallel to the base and degrading policy which was now submitted to them in regard to Ireland. (Applause.)

What other nations had only done in the hour of their deepest distress, in the hour of defeat and disaster, we were asked to do in the height of our prosperity and in the plenitude of our power, without a shot being fired or a blow struck. There was no change in the circumstances which would justify this extraordinary change in our policy. (Applause.) This country had passed through great difficulties and crises before, and we had been saved by the consistency and courage of our statesmen. But now we had to deal with a different race of men. Because we were not at once successful, because we could not at once bring the struggle to a happy termination, we were bidden to give it up in despair, to throw up the sponge and declare ourselves vanquished, and to surrender to our foes.

They saw late Ministers vying with each other in their eagerness to stand before their countrymen in a white sheet, with a taper in their hands, to recant all that they had ever said in their lives. (Laughter and applause.) Difficult as it was to see exactly what the Gladstonians were aiming to be at, this much was clear, that if ever Mr. Gladstone was returned to power the days of our Imperial Parliament at Westminster would be numbered. We would have a new Parliament created in Dublin, to which the fortunes and the lives of all the inhabitants of Ireland were to be handed over. We would have two Parliaments within this United Kingdom, two executives, two sources of government, two fountains of justice, and he did not hesitate to say that in a short time we would have two distinct and independent countries too. (Applause.)

Separation and independence had always been the claim of the Parnellite Party. It was that question they had to face sooner or later. They could not confine the issues upon which their judgment was now asked to Ireland alone. The principles and rules of conduct they adopted in this case would spread to this side of the water and to all our possessions. Our colonies were now bound to us only by ties of love, affection, and respect. Do not let us undermine those ties which alone secured to us a continued Colonial Empire. But, above all, we had to consider the effect which a surrender to Irish lawlessness and disorder would have upon our great Indian Empire. (Applause.) Democracy was now upon its trial. Almost exactly 200 years ago twelve young men, some of them of Scotch descent, shut the gates of 'Derry. Once more we were in the crisis of our country's fate. This time the enemy was within the gates. The struggle would be long and arduous. It was for them, the young men of this city and district, to show that they had not lost the great qualities of their ancestors, and that they, too, could do and dare, and, if need be, suffer and endure, in such a noble and magnificent cause. (Applause.)¹

This early speech has been quoted at some length, for it was in many ways prophetic, though the results which the young orator foresaw were to be attained by methods very different from what he envisaged that December night over half a century ago. By the irony of fate, too, Austen Chamberlain was one day to be called upon to deal with the danger which he then adumbrated. He was to be Secretary of State for India during the greatest war in history, when nationalist aspirations in that country forced themselves upon the attention of the world, and he was to serve on a Select Committee which recommended the meeting of those aspirations ; he was to support the Government which enacted the Statute of Westminster ; and he was one of the most prominent members of the administration which was

¹ *Glasgow Herald*, December 8th, 1888.

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responsible for the establishment of the Irish Free State. All this lay before the young candidate for the Hawick district, while if democracy seemed to Austen Chamberlain to be on its trial in 1888, it was, at the moment of his death, to be subjected to a far greater strain than was dreamed of in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century.

Politics, however, did not occupy the whole of young Chamberlain's time, for he paid a visit to the New World in somewhat curious circumstances. When his father retired from business to enter public life, he sold out, and a good deal of his capital was invested in South American securities. About the end of the 'eighties there was a slump in Argentina, and he suffered severely. It was then that he met in Montreal the Governor of the Bahamas, who was full of the possibilities of that colony with the cultivation of the sisal plant. It would, he felt, give a hemp equal to the best Manila, and if grown on a sufficiently large scale would develop the islands and enrich the capitalist who was bold enough to undertake the venture. As a rising Imperialist Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was interested, and as a man, in view of his financial position, he was attracted, so he sent his two sons, Austen and Neville, out to investigate the possibilities.

Their experiences afforded plenty of evidence of the difficulties that lay ahead. The brothers made a tour of the outer islands in a twelve-ton cutter, of which the only cabin was just large enough to allow one person to sleep on the floor and another on the seat, while it was but four feet high. To make matters worse the weather was execrable, and the boat shipped water continuously, so that the cabin came to resemble a lake. One of the crew was washed overboard, but was fortunately recovered. To add to their discomfort both Chamberlains were terribly seasick, though usually good sailors. Still, it is astonishing how little such things count in one's twenties, and the young men completed their mission. They fixed on the island of Andros as the best site for the projected sisal plantation, and then reported to their father. In due course he took their advice, and exercised an option he had secured in Andros. Then, as

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so often with him, he proceeded to do the unexpected, and sent Neville out to the island to look after his interests.

Soon after his brother had settled in, Austen, by this time an M.P., went out to visit him, and took the opportunity of coming home by the United States :

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec, 25th, 1892

MY DEAR MARY,

Many thanks for your letter of the 21st. How vexatious it is that Father's holiday should again be interrupted by gout. I was rejoicing that you seemed to be having such a successful tour, and now comes the old enemy again with his pain and annoyances of all kinds.

We received your Xmas greetings last night, and at the same time a similar cable from Neville. It was very pleasant to get them both. I found the girls all looking well, and still very busy and gay. B. went off on Friday in good spirits, and as there was a prospective bonnet to worry over I really think she will enjoy herself.

From some of our friends the news is, I am sorry to say, not so good. Aunt Mary went up to see Cecily, who is laid up with jaundice, and returned to find Millicent had caught the mumps. Edith Beale has got them too, and worst of all Auntie fell down yesterday and broke her collar-bone. It has been set again, and she is doing well, and I am glad to say suffers no pain, but how provoking it is.

I left Neville very well and in the best of spirits. I feel much more comfortable about him and his way of life now that I have seen him 'at home' ; my admiration for the tact and skill he has shown is increased. The Colonial Secretary, *not* a gushing man, said to me : ' He is exactly the kind of man we want. His example is invaluable for the native whites. He shows them both what can be done and how to do it.' It was very pleasant to see the feelings of the darkies towards him, and how much he has improved their work and discipline. They respect him and they trust

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him, and that is a good deal to be able to say without dwelling on their affection for him, which I believe to be genuine, tho' it would not stand much of a strain.

I passed ten days very pleasantly in Boston and Salem. Everyone was very kind, and would have made me welcome had I stayed much longer. Poor William got a return of his rheumatism just before I left. It was a sharp attack, so they hoped it would not last long, but it was very discouraging. I shall have more to tell you of all the family when I see you, and I am overloaded with affectionate messages for you, but I will only add now that Mrs. Endicott seemed very well, and I thought Mr. Endicott particularly well and in excellent spirits. I lunched with Mrs. Sears. She and Miss Sears were on the whole looking better than I expected, and talked with more spirit.

There will be a good show of *Lalias* soon, after you come home. At present we have not much but *Sophronites grandiflora*, *L. autumnalis*, and the pink *Calanthes*, which look pretty in a mass but are poor individually. Earp has been very busy. The garden everywhere shows signs of his labours, and I shall look for great results next year. The new pits are finished, and look grand, but there is some trouble about the heating, so they are empty at present.

Please give my love to my father.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—The *Majestic* arrived on Thursday morning only having had 'heavy gales' for three days. The 'crow's nest' was smashed up and some passengers badly bruised, but I escaped unhurt, and never even began to feel ill !

In one way and another the years were very full between Austen Chamberlain's return from the Continent and his entry into the House of Commons in 1892. Unlike his father and brother he never had any business experience, and in later years this was to prove somewhat of a disadvantage ; nevertheless, he touched life at many points at this time, as his letters to his stepmother clearly show.

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Baskerville House, Harborne ¹

19.2.91

MY DEAR MARY,

Thanks for your note and enclosures. I have accepted the Duchess's invitation for March nth.

We too have much fog here, but this afternoon is very pleasant. I have spent the morning making up farm statistics.² Here are some results :

Amount of milk used by household during the year (as milk, cream, or butter), 4,500 gallons ! Eggs consumed, 6,000. Average yield of milk per cow, 760 gallons. Last year it was 725. Prof. Long in his book speaks of 600 as a fair average.

I find there have been complaints—or let me say there has been friction—about the hay for the horses. Ours is not good enough really and, the land being what it is, cannot be made good enough. The horses waste perhaps a third of what is given them.

I propose therefore to give up pretending to supply the stables—to make only what I require for the cows—and to keep more cows. Bridget has just been sold for £16 5^s. (Between ourselves we only gave £16 for her !) I have therefore now only five cows, one heifer, which will have her first calf this year, one yearling, and two very young calves, one of which is pure Jersey and the other is the calf of my Ayrshire, who ought to be photographed.

Thus at the end of this year we shall have six cows in milk if all goes well. But this is not quite enough, and ^c 'all' may not go well. I therefore propose to buy one more cow, unless Father objects. I have heard of a good one, and shall try to see it to-morrow.

The dairy tiles are being laid ! The incubator is crazy, and requires a week's careful watching at least.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—I sent you three squabs.

¹ Occupied by Mrs. Frederick Ryland, the youngest sister of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.

² At Highbury.

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That summer Austen and his sister went to Eastbourne, which they seem to have found rather dull :

Grand Hotel, Eastbourne

17.6.91

DEAR MARY,

Beatrice has a good deal of writing to do to-day, and so asks me to give you the news . . .

The weather has much improved the last two days, and yesterday we hit on a splendid ride across the downs. We have been out each day for two hours on horseback, besides lounging on the beach in the morning. But we find it pretty dull, so I expect it is very healthy.

The hotel is fairly full, but the visitors are what at college we called 'awful bounders'—Jews and vulgarians of all sorts. I believe there are besides an Earl and a Dean, but they apparently keep themselves to themselves—and so do we.

I am very glad to hear of the American visitors. I hope we shall see them all somehow. It would be too bad if you missed William and Louise.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

In spite of these various distractions time passed slowly for the ambitious young politician, and his father was no less anxious than he was himself that he should enter the House of Commons at the earliest possible moment. There was no chance of a by-election in the Hawick district, and it seemed as if Austen would have to wait until the General Election, when fortune suddenly favoured him. The Liberal Unionist Member for East Worcestershire, a Mr. G. W. Hastings, was expelled from the House after trial and conviction for breach of trust. Close to Birmingham, it was an ideal constituency for Austen Chamberlain, and when he was asked to stand his Hawick supporters at once released him.

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There had, however, been difficulties before this consummation was reached. Although the seat was clearly a Liberal Unionist one the Conservatives in the division began to grumble when they were asked to support a young man whose chief claim to their votes seemed to be that he was the son of his father. At any rate he must conform to their views on the question of the Church, and the following correspondence passed between Colonel Milward, the Chairman of the East Worcestershire Conservative Association, and Austen Chamberlain :

The Holloway, Redditch
Jan. 20th, 1892

DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

With reference to our visit yesterday and to the meeting of our Divisional Committee, I think it best to write and ask how far you can advance towards meeting the wishes of the Conservatives.

The circumstances of this constituency are peculiar. Bromsgrove, Redditch, Beoley, Alvechurch, The Lickey, King's Norton, Yardley, and Acock's Green contain 6,000 out of the 10,000 voters, and I am assured that in those places Liberal Unionism does not, practically, exist, and the Liberal Unionists have, of course, no machinery for canvassing or for bringing voters to the poll. The present Member also pledged himself, in a letter we can show you, upon Church questions, in 1886, in the sense in which they have now been raised. When these facts are weighed I hope you will not deem unreasonable our anxiety that you should undertake not to vote upon motions for Church Disestablishment while you are supported by the Conservative vote.

Even with this pledge our work will be sufficiently difficult, because the great preponderance of the Conservative vote, in this division, has led the voters to hope that upon a change they might have a Member of their own wing of the Unionist Party, but there is a strong desire, on the

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part of our Committee and friends, to observe the compact, and I trust that when you are personally known, personal popularity and a sense of the great services of your father may effect the rest.

Believe me

Yours faithfully,

VICTOR MILWARD.

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

21.1.Q2

DEAR COLONEL MILWARD,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 20th, asking me to state my position in reference to the question of Disestablishment.

Your request places me in rather a delicate position. You are aware that I am not at present a candidate for East Worcestershire, and that I am, on the other hand, the accepted candidate for the Border Burghs. Not only have I no desire to force myself on the East Worcester constituency, but I should be unwilling to break my connection with my Scottish friends unless it were absolutely clear to me that the interests of the Unionist Party demanded it ; and if either section were doubtful on this point I certainly should not allow my name to be brought forward.

This being clearly understood, I recognize that in writing to me you have been actuated by a perfectly single-minded desire to make the situation clear, and I therefore feel bound to comply with your request as far as lies in my power.

I am myself in favour of Disestablishment, which I believe would actually strengthen the Church. But in view of the present political situation and the importance of maintaining the Unionist alliance, I have no hesitation in saying that I would give no vote on this question, or indeed on any question which would endanger the existence or policy of the Unionist Government.

I trust that this expression of my intentions will be satisfactory to yourself and your Conservative friends.

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Further than this I could not go without discrediting myself in the eyes of the electors, who know my views, and without a loss of self-respect, which you, I am sure, would not wish me to incur.

But quite apart from any personal considerations, I cannot help being impressed with the danger to the Unionist cause which would arise from any attempt to place secondary questions in the forefront, and to exact from Liberal Unionist candidates a surrender of their views on these points. If such a determination were to prevail among the Conservatives of East Worcestershire I fear that the example could not be confined either to their section of the Unionist Party or to that constituency, and the result would be disastrously felt throughout the country. It is only by showing the same conciliatory spirit as our leaders in Parliament that we can hope to secure the complete triumph of our views in the country whenever a fresh election takes place.

I do not wish to enter into any discussion with you as to the strength of the Liberal Unionist Party in East Worcestershire, but from all the information I have received I am convinced that, with proper organization and a good candidate, a far larger measure of Liberal support can be secured for the Unionist cause than you at present anticipate.

You are at liberty to read this letter at the meeting of your Divisional Committee if you think it well to do so.

Believe me yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen's forebodings were not without foundation, for the dispute between the two sections of the Government's supporters in East Worcestershire was in danger of becoming a national affair. The more extreme of the local Conservatives threatened to run their own candidate, and this brought Mr. Joseph Chamberlain into the field. In the end Mr. Balfour brought pressure to bear on his co-religionists,

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who thereupon gave way; but the incident is an excellent illustration of the difficulties attendant upon such an alliance as that between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists. In these circumstances the young candidate's election address, though somewhat lengthy for its purpose, may perhaps be reproduced at the outset of his Parliamentary career, and it also reflects the hopes and fears of the Party of which he was a member :

GENTLEMEN,

In response to a cordial invitation from the East Worcestershire Liberal Unionist and Conservative Associations, and to a requisition largely signed by the electors of the division, I beg to offer you my services to fill the vacancy which has occurred in your representation in Parliament.

I am strongly opposed to Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy, which I believe must lead to separation and be no less disastrous to Ireland than to this country. Recent events have completely justified the action of the Unionists in rejecting the Home Rule Bill. It is now clear that nothing but an entirely independent Parliament in Dublin will satisfy the majority of the Irish Members, without whose concurrence Mr. Gladstone has declared that it would be hopeless to attempt a settlement of the Irish problem. I should resist the creation of such a body. I believe that the Imperial Parliament is both willing and able to redress any real grievances in Ireland, and I am convinced that without the control of the Imperial Parliament there would be no security for the due administration of justice or for the rights and property of the loyal minority in that country.

If elected I shall therefore heartily support the policy of the Unionist Government. For more than five years they have administered the affairs of the nation with conspicuous success. During this period they have maintained unbroken peace with foreign Powers, whilst they have extended and strengthened the influence of England abroad.

Thanks to the courageous and impartial administration

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of the law by Mr. Balfour, agrarian crime has almost disappeared in Ireland. A failure of the potato crop in the poorer districts of the western seaboard has been met by exceptional relief works likely to prove of lasting advantage to the country ; and at the same time, by a large and generous measure of land purchase, the way has been opened for a permanent solution of the Irish land question.

But Ireland has not been allowed to block the way to reform in Great Britain. England and Scotland have shared with her the benefits of Unionist Government.

By a prudent administration of the finances the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been able to diminish taxation, and especially to lighten the burdens which fall on the industrial classes.

An unexampled list of reforms bears witness to the activity and liberality of the Government in domestic legislation. They have established a system of popular self-government on the widest basis in the counties, and they are prepared to complete this great measure by the creation of district councils and by the reform of parish administration. They have made elementary education free, and have thus relieved the poor from a burden which pressed most heavily on those who were least able to bear it. They have carried measures providing additional security for the safety of miners and sailors in the pursuit of their dangerous occupations. They have passed two Allotments Acts, of the value of which my intimate connection with the Rural Labourers' League has given me ample proof.

Much still remains to be done, and I am confident that, if the Unionist Government retain the support of the country, they will proceed with the good work. They have already introduced a Bill into Parliament for the creation of small-holdings. I desire to see it supplemented by a measure facilitating and cheapening the transfer of land, and by such changes in the law as may be necessary to secure the provision of proper cottage accommodation in the country districts.

I am in favour of a scheme of old-age pensions, and

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consider that the State may well be called upon for a contribution to an object of such vast national importance. In connection with the reform of parish administration, I desire to see local charities placed under the control of local representative authority

I am convinced that these and other reforms may be obtained from the Unionist Party. From the Gladstonians there is no such hope. For them it is true that 'Ireland blocks the way,' and if they were to obtain a majority the time of Parliament would be wasted in a barren struggle for an impossible scheme of Home Rule which its authors do not venture to disclose to the electors, but to which all chance of reforms in Great Britain would for years be sacrificed.

Five years ago you decided without hesitation against the Home Rule Bill. Everything which has happened since then has gone to prove the soundness of your judgment. I appeal to you now to reaffirm your decision, and to place beyond a doubt your unalterable attachment to the Unionist cause.

Living as I do in your midst, your local interests will receive careful attention at my hands. I shall take every opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with you and of learning your wants and wishes ; and if you do me the honour of electing me as your Member I shall be proud to represent my neighbours and friends in Parliament.

I am, gentlemen,

Yours faithfully,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, *March 21st, 1892*

On March 30th Austen Chamberlain was returned unopposed as Member for East Worcestershire.

CHAPTER II

PARLIAMENTARY APPRENTICESHIP

THE Parliament in which Austen Chamberlain made his first appearance was moribund. Members were thinking more in terms of their constituencies than of Westminster, and in spite of the efforts of the Whips the attendance had grown slack. Contrary to what was then the usual custom, the House of Commons decided to sit on Derby Day ; but when that date arrived there were not enough Members present to form a quorum. Since it was first returned in the memorable General Election of 1886 that Parliament had seen more than one notable event : the Golden Jubilee, the failure of the Round Table Conference to reunite the Liberal Party, the Pigott forgeries, and the O'Shea divorce were in themselves events sufficient to relieve the period of any accusation of tameness. If the output of legislation was not comparable with that of other Parliaments before or since, good work had been done, notably in the passage of the Local Government Act and the provision of free education. The Liberal Unionists had certainly no cause to be dissatisfied. So early as the beginning of 1888 the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, had told a meeting of his followers at Liverpool that they must expect to find a strong flavour of Liberalism in the proposals of his administration, and he urged them, for the sake of the great Imperial object which they all had in view, to consent to any compromise that might be necessary. On the whole his advice was scrupulously followed. There were, as has been shown, the usual storms in a tea-cup about the allocation of seats, but they died down, and the leaders of both wings of the coalition very wisely allowed nearly a generation to elapse before the fusion of the two organizations was attempted. Liberal Unionism under the inspiration of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain thus saved Conservatism during this Parliament by compelling it to return to the true sources of its faith, the preaching of Mr. Disraeli and the practice of Mr. Pitt.

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The result of the by-elections could be interpreted in different ways. There had been a net loss to the Government of twenty seats in six years. This was in no way exceptional, for in his first administration Mr. Gladstone had lost twenty-four seats, and in his second administration nineteen seats, in the same period. Moreover, the rate of Liberal progress had slowed down considerably during the past eighteen months, while in the Midlands the Gladstonians had not advanced at all. In 1891 there was a by-election in Aston Manor, and the Liberal Unionist majority was nearly quadrupled by comparison with that of five years before. Such was the political situation when, escorted by his father and his uncle, Richard Chamberlain, Austen took the oath and his seat. 'I remember,' he has recorded, 'that the strong feeling stirred in me by the occasion made my hand tremble so violently that I could scarcely sign my name on the Roll.'

He did not speak in that Parliament, which was dissolved four months later, and 'my first House of Commons has left only one abiding impression on my mind. It is of the greatness of Mr. Speaker Peel.' The youngest son of Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, he was Speaker from 1884 to 1895, ^at is to say, during some of the most troubled years that the House of Commons has ever known. The young Member for East Worcestershire never forgot, during his first weeks at Westminster, the reprimand which Speaker Peel addressed to the directors of the Cambrian Railway for having dismissed the stationmaster of some small Welsh station on account of the evidence he had given before a Select Committee of the House of Commons. 'Mr. Speaker Peel spoke for less than ten minutes. . . . The bald words of what he said, recorded in *Hansard*, convey no idea of the devastating effect of that short allocution. The men who had come to the Bar so defiantly a few minutes earlier wilted under his admonition ; beads of perspiration stood out on their foreheads and, when he dismissed them, they crept away like whipped hounds, while the rest of us shook ourselves like dogs coming out of the water and

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thanked Heaven we had not been in the position of poor Maclure.' ¹ If Austen was himself to be one day a great champion of the privileges of the House of Commons it was to no small extent due to the impression made upon him by such events as these when he was a young Member.

The preoccupation of the House of Commons when Austen first entered it was, as has been said, not legislation but its own impending demise, and on this subject Austen heard a great deal, for the views of his father and those of the Conservative leaders did not coincide. On May 25th there was a meeting at Devonshire House to discuss the date of the dissolution, and except for Mr. Chamberlain the feeling was unanimously in favour of an immediate appeal to the country. The Liberal Unionist leader wanted to place the Irish Local Government Bill on the statute-book first, and he felt that for various reasons it would not be possible to mobilize the full strength of the Government supporters in the middle of the summer ; he believed that if the election were postponed until the autumn this would make a difference of some twenty seats to the Government's advantage. All the same, he found himself in a minority of one, and the decision went in favour of an immediate dissolution.

The main issue of the General Election was Home Rule, for it was clear that if Mr. Gladstone obtained a majority of any sort he would at once introduce legislation to that end. On this occasion Austen had to fight for his seat, and his Liberal opponent was Mr. Oscar Browning, the famous historian. Mr. Browning had been defeated at Norwood at the previous General Election, and he was not a very formidable antagonist in a popular constituency. He did, however, make a strong bid for the Liberal Unionist vote on this occasion by asserting that under the Home Rule Bill of 1886 the Queen would have had a veto on all legislation emanating from the Parliament at Dublin. Austen at once challenged this, and Professor Dicey supplied him with a great deal of

¹ M.P. for Stretford. One of the directors of the Cambrian Railway.

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information, which was used with deadly effect. When the poll was declared the result was :

Chamberlain ..	..	5,111
Browning ..	..	2,517
Majority ..		2,594

Another fourteen years were to elapse before Austen was again challenged in East Worcestershire. As for his opponent, Mr. Browning made one more attempt, in 1895, to enter the House of Commons, but was defeated by Mr. Walter Long in the West Derby division of Liverpool.

The result of the General Election confirmed the prognostications of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain. The Liberals had gained a number of seats, but they were still in a marked inferiority in England itself, and it was only with the help of the eighty-one Irish Nationalists that Mr. Gladstone had any hope of regaining office. To make it quite clear to the country that control of the House of Commons was once more in the hands of the Irish the Prime Minister met Parliament, and was duly defeated on a vote of no confidence. Mr. Gladstone thereupon formed his fourth, and last, administration; but although he advocated extensive reforms in every sphere of the national life in what was known as the Newcastle Programme, it was clear that the Irish Nationalists would demand the immediate introduction of a Home Rule Bill as the price of their support—and so it proved. There was no autumn session, and it was not until January, 1893, that the new Parliament really met for business.

Austen has left an account of the impression which was made upon him. ^c Of all the Parliaments in which I have sat . . . that of 1892-5 was by far the most exciting. Passion was at fever heat from the very first ; parties were very evenly divided, the Government majority was small, and the Opposition was determined to use its rights to the uttermost and to give no quarter.' As proof of this it may be remarked that the debate on the Address was only concluded by the unusual expedient of a Saturday sitting.

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Forty-seven Liberal Unionists had been returned at the General Election, and of these Austen was appointed junior Whip, with Mr. H. T. Anstruther as his chief. The first question was to decide where the group was to sit. In the previous Parliament the Liberal Unionists had sat with their old Liberal colleagues, but as the alliance between the former and the Conservatives grew more close this arrangement was subject to obvious inconveniences. It was therefore agreed that Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's followers should take their places below the gangway on the Opposition side where the Irish usually sat; but the latter refused to consent to this new arrangement, saying that although they intended to support the Government, to sit on its benches would compromise them too much. The rumour then went round that the Gladstonians were preparing a manoeuvre to occupy all the seats on their side of the House, so at six o'clock in the morning on the day Parliament was to meet Austen and a few friends met, and in due course effectively occupied with an imposing array of hats the greater part of the third and fourth benches below the gangway on the Government side. This jockeying for position was more important than may at first sight appear, for the result of Austen's manoeuvre was that Ministers were exposed to a crossfire of criticism ; that is to say, from the Conservatives in front of them and from the Liberal Unionists on their flank. The effect of this was very noticeable in the ensuing debates.

On February 13th the Prime Minister introduced the second Home Rule Bill, which proved to differ considerably from its predecessor. The Irish Legislature was to consist, like the English, of two bodies, a Council and an Assembly. They were, however, to be elected by different constituencies: the first by those rated at £20, and the second by the existing voters. The Dublin Parliament was to concern itself exclusively with Irish affairs, for questions relating to war and peace, treason, aliens, and external trade were withdrawn from its jurisdiction. The Viceroy was to be appointed for a period of six years, and he was to be advised

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by an executive committee drawn from the Irish Privy Council, which was to act as his Cabinet ; subject to the approval of the Queen, and on the advice of this Cabinet, the Viceroy had the right to veto Irish Bills. In the event of disagreement between the two branches of the Legislature they were to meet together. An appeal lay to the Privy Council in London should the Irish Parliament overstep its constitutional rights. As for the constabulary, they were to remain under English administration during the period of transition, and were afterwards to be gradually absorbed into a local police. So far as the relations between Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom were concerned, Mr. Gladstone departed considerably from his proposals of seven years before. Eighty Irish Members were to remain at Westminster, but they were not to vote on questions which expressly concerned Great Britain, on taxes not levied in Ireland or on the appropriation of money for anything except Imperial services. The financial arrangements were also modified, and the payment of a lump sum by Ireland disappeared from the Bill.

If, as is improbable, Mr. Gladstone thought he would convert any of the opponents of his previous measure, he was soon disappointed. Criticism fastened on the position of the Irish Members at Westminster and the ' In and Out ' clause, as it came to be called, and tempers were not long in rising. ' The Government,'⁵ said Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, ' are using their opportunity to betray the interests of the country, sacrificing them to men who have been the bane of their own country, but who shall not be the ruin of ours.' To this the Prime Minister replied by accusing Mr. Chamberlain of using ' language of habitual, gross, and enormous exaggeration ' ; he * constantly and deliberately, and with the utmost confidence and infallibility, ascribes to men who have a right to stand on a level with him, and who were at one time his colleagues and supposed to be his friends, motives for their acts the direct contrary of that which they state themselves, and motives which they indignantly disclaim.⁵ Nor were the Conservatives backward

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in abuse. 'An intolerable, an imbecile, an accursed Bill,' was what Lord Salisbury termed it; while Lord Randolph Churchill declared that the Irish leaders were 'political brigands and nihilists' and that the Government had been * as capricious as a woman, and as impulsive and passionate as a horde of barbarians.' So bitter were the feelings aroused that the debate on the introduction of the Bill, a purely formal stage, lasted for five days.

All this meant much to the young Member for East Worcestershire, for it gave him the invaluable opportunity of serving the early years of his Parliamentary apprenticeship on the Opposition benches. Had his Party been still in office he would have been deprived of this invaluable experience. It is by no means easy for a Government back-bencher to catch the Speaker's eye, and even if he does it is not particularly thrilling for a young man merely to get up and echo what some Cabinet Minister has just said before him. On the other hand, independence on the part of the Government's supporters is not encouraged, and it is certainly not the path to promotion. In Opposition every chance is given by his leaders to the back-bencher to show what he can do, and if he can strike out a line for himself, provided it does not clash with the official policy of his Party, so much the better. This was Austen's happy position in his second Parliament.

Hitherto he had contented himself with asking a few questions, but on April 18th he made his maiden speech during the debate on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill. He rose soon after six-thirty in the evening, and his speech fills eight columns of *Hansard*. His criticism of the Government measure was based upon the assumption that it was a beginning, not an end. 'What guarantee is there,' he asked, 'that when the Dublin Parliament meets there will not grow up within it a more extreme Party? Again and again Nationalist members have said that they are greatly misunderstood in the House, that they are in reality in the moderate Party, and that they are always struggling to restrain the Party of violence and force. Might not the

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moderate Party be out-voted by the Party of force ? ' From this Austen proceeded to criticize, with even more justification than he or his hearers then realized, the Prime Minister's plea that once the Bill was passed relations between England and Ireland would come to resemble those between Austria and Hungary or Sweden and Norway. In this connection he drew on his own knowledge of foreign affairs, and he declared that when Mr. Gladstone quoted ' the opinions of the civilized world ' in his support the Premier was giving but ' a Bowdlerized edition ' of those opinions. In conclusion Austen denounced the Bill as ' a cowardly surrender.'

What Austen felt when he began his speech can be imagined from a couple of sentences he wrote more than forty years later. ' To this day I never rise to address it [i.e. the House of Commons] without trepidation and that uncomfortable feeling in the pit of the stomach which in our childhood we used to call " bath-pain " because we associated it with the first sudden plunge into cold water. I doubt whether anyone has ever made a lasting success in the House of Commons of whom this is not in some measure true, for no man ever wins the respect of the House unless he himself respects it.' Mr. Gladstone thought highly of Austen's first effort, for he wrote to the Queen : ' A little later in the evening Mr. Austen Chamberlain, son of Mr. Chamberlain, took part for the first time in the debates of the House. He delivered one of the best speeches which has been made against the Bill, and exhibited himself as a person of whom high political anticipations may reasonably be entertained.'¹ Three days later the Prime Minister, inclining in the direction of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, gracefully observed that ' it was a speech which must have been dear and refreshing to a father's heart.' The older Chamberlain had already received a very flattering letter from the Speaker :

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria, Third Series, vol. I I, p. 249.*

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House of Commons
Wed., April 19th, 1893

MY DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

I desire to write and congratulate you upon the success of your son's speech last night.

Within a few minutes of its delivery both Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Whitbread came to me in the Chair, and each of those competent and impartial judges used the term * remarkable ' in reference to it, and otherwise expressed admiration of its quality. As I entirely concur in this opinion I have thought that I might give myself the pleasure of saying so to you.

Believe me

Very truly and faithfully yours,

ARTHUR W. PEEL.

On April 21st the second reading of the Home Rule Bill was carried by 347 votes to 304, and the measure went into committee on May 8th, from which stage and the discussion on report it did not emerge for nearly four months. There was no doubt who was the spearhead of the attack on the Bill. To quote Sir Henry Lucy: 'Anybody who closely watches the course of events in committee knows that the real leader of the Opposition, the life and soul of obstruction, is Mr. Chamberlain. It is he that sets the battle in array, sends out skirmishing parties, and is ever ready to lead an attack in person. The rank and file are already tired of a business that interferes with their social arrangements. . . . Needs must when Mr. Chamberlain drives. He sits there in constant attendance, relentless, implacable. . . . It is only when Mr. Chamberlain steps into the arena and Mr. Gladstone swiftly turns to face him that benches fill, drooping heads are raised, eyes brighten, and the chamber resounds with cheers and counter-cheers, and the dry bones of the debate rattle into strenuous life.'

Apart from his duties as a Whip, Austen found his time generally occupied in acting as A.D.C. to his indefatigable

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father ; but of his work in this latter capacity one instance will suffice. Mr. Chamberlain had charged Mr. Dillon with direct incitement to violence in a speech, but when challenged to substantiate the allegation he had not provided himself with the particulars of time and place. ' I will send the honourable gentleman the reference,' he said. ' I will reply when the right honourable gentleman can produce it,' replied Mr. Dillon ; but when this had been done he still remained silent, so Mr. Chamberlain raised the matter again a few days later. The Irishman thereupon confessed to having made the remarks in question, but said it was just after the police had shed the blood of innocent people at Mitchelstown, that he was under the emotions roused by this scene, and that in the circumstances it was not fair to taunt him with a few rash words. ' Austen,' whispered his father, ' get me the date of Mitchelstown. I know he's lying.' The younger man did as he was bid, but before he had found the necessary information someone else had supplied it, and Mr. Chamberlain was able to prove that the Mitchelstown riot had taken place nine months after Mr. Dillon had spoken. ' The House rang with cheers ; Dillon's face, always pale, went white ; for once the Irish were silenced.'

It was an admirable training, and to these years Austen owed it that he became in later life so expert a Parliamentarian ; when, in his turn, he had, as so often during the years between 1906 and 1914, to take a leading part in obstructing the measures of the Government, he showed how greatly he had profited by his father's teaching.

In face of Mr. Chamberlain's tactics progress was slow, and in order to expedite the passage of the Bill the Prime Minister introduced the guillotine. This still further embittered the situation. Mr. Balfour stigmatized it as an attempt to silence the voice of Great Britain, and Mr. Chamberlain declared that Ministers were 'the slaves of the Irish Party.' ' There,' said he, pointing to the Irish Members, ' sit the men who pull the strings of the Prime Minister of England.' The position of the Government was

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further weakened by a modification of the original provisions of the Bill so as to allow the unconditional admission of the Irish Members to the Parliament at Westminster. All through the summer of 1893 the debates continued, while Members became every day more exasperated as night after night they tramped through the lobbies, until in August there took place a scene of violence probably unprecedented in the history of the House of Commons. Mr. Chamberlain, in committee, had sneered at the regularity with which Liberals followed their leader. 'The Prime Minister calls "Black," and they say, "It is good"; he calls "White," and they say, "It is better." It is always the voice of a god; never since the time of Herod has there been such slavish adulation.' At the name of Herod a furious storm arose, all the pent-up feelings of the past weeks were unloosed, and there were shouts of 'Judas.' It was in vain that the Chairman tried to enforce the closure. In the middle of the uproar blows were exchanged, and for some minutes there was pandemonium, to which only the return of the Speaker put an end. It is generally believed that Members were also called to a realization of the disrepute into which they were bringing the Parliamentary system by the sound of hissing in the gallery, and that some person or persons hissed is undoubtedly true; however, this is said to have been the act, not of democratic purists, horrified at such a degradation of representative institutions, but of boxing enthusiasts, disgusted at the lack of pugilistic skill displayed by the combatants in the chamber.

On September 1st the Home Rule Bill passed its third reading by a majority of 34 in a House of 568, and an examination of the voting shows that the Irish alone saved the measure from defeat. This justified the Upper House in its determination to force the issue by rejecting the Bill, and thus challenge Mr. Gladstone to go to the country as he had done seven years before. In the Lords the debate lasted only four days, at the end of which the Bill was rejected by 419 votes to 41. For the present the verdict was decisive, since the Prime Minister did not ask for a dissolution; but

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the Irish realized that before they could hope for Home Rule the claws of the House of Lords would have to be cut, and when next the Liberals required Irish help that was the price they were called upon to pay : as it happened, the majority of them were quite willing, for reasons wholly unconnected with Ireland, to pay it when the occasion arose.

It had been a hard, if valuable, spring and summer for Austen, and he had certainly done his part, for of 418 divisions he had voted in 350 ; the moment the fate of the Home Rule Bill was sealed he took a holiday, for he had to be back at Westminster for the autumn session, which began on November 2nd. It was mainly occupied with the Parish Councils Bill and the Employers' Liability Bill. The former of these measures was hardly contentious, and Austen denounced his attitude towards it in a speech to his constituents :

It was one of great intricacy, very complicated, and very lengthy. It was not a measure which divided the two sides of the House in the same way as Home Rule, and it was acknowledged by the Minister who had charge of the Bill that he received great assistance from many members of the Opposition. He (the speaker) did not expect the extraordinary and exaggerated advantages that some of its promoters appeared to expect from it. He did not think it was going to make a millennium at once, but, if properly used, he did think it might be of great service in developing country life, and so work a change for the better in many of the country districts.¹

The storm roused by the Home Rule Bill had thus died down, and the Opposition was able to consider Government measures in a more objective spirit.

The details of the Employers' Liability Bill of 1893 are not, with the passing of the years, of importance, but Austen's

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 20th, 1894.

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views of the principles upon which they were based well show the bent of his mind in such matters. He was not, like his father and brother, called upon personally to deal with questions of social policy, but his opinions were identical with theirs.

The proposal of the Government in the latter [i.e. the Employers' Liability Bill] was to extend further the liability of the employer and to abolish the doctrine of common employment. It was only in course of the discussion that certain classes, such as domestic servants and workmen in government factories, were included in the Bill. As far as it went in the directions he had indicated he heartily approved of it. But in its present form it would not provide for more than one-third of the accidents that took place. Legislation ought to provide that wherever there was an accident to a man through no fault of his own he or his family should receive some compensation. . . . The insurance schemes now in vogue in some of the largest works were perhaps the most hopeful symptoms in the industrial outlook. They gave a hope of better relations between employers and employed—of a wider and more generous recognition of the duties of the employer to the employed.¹

In taking this line Austen proved himself to be his father's son as well as Neville's brother.

A few weeks earlier he had made the acquaintance of Admiral, later Lord, Fisher, who then held the office of Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy. There had been a struggle between the Admiralty and the Treasury over the Navy Estimates for 1893-4. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, insisted on a reduction, and was supported by the Prime Minister. The Sea Lords refused to give way,² and the situation was further

¹ *Ibid.*

² Cf. Sir R. H. Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher*, vol. I, pp. 112-14.

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complicated by the fact that in the House of Commons the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that the Admiralty had agreed to a reduction, which was not the case—and this produced a threat of resignation on the part of the entire Board. Mr. Chamberlain had not spared the Government in debate on the subject of the Navy, and his son received the thanks of Admiral Fisher :

Admiralty

22.12.93

DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

In reply to your kind letter (and please excuse my strong language) Sir William Harcourt told an unmitigated lie when he said that the professional officers of the Admiralty were satisfied with the present condition of the Navy. We gave Lord Spencer to understand that unless Sir W. Harcourt explained we would resign.

Sir W. Harcourt tried to wriggle out by private notes and messages, and Mr. Campbell-Bannerman was sent to the Admiralty yesterday to endeavour to avoid a public statement by Sir W. Harcourt, but we would not have it, and we were very loth to accept the statement he did make, but Lord Spencer¹ was in such distress that out of pity for him we did not really like to rub his nose in it any harder, but Lord Spencer has, however, been given distinctly to understand that we don't intend to stand any repetition of such gross misrepresentation of our views, and further that we will not stand much longer delay in dealing with pressing naval requirements.

Now let me ask you to thank your father for his splendid speech. I began a letter of thanks to you the moment I had read it, but then I thought I should only be bothering you and gave it up. Sir C. Dilke's speech was also magnificent. I hope if ever Sir W. Harcourt quotes the Naval Lords again (*I don't think he will* /) he will at once be asked if he has their direct authority to do so.

¹ First Lord of the Admiralty.

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I believe he is coming to the Admiralty next Wednesday to settle the future naval programme, and I have suggested that we don't meet him without a shorthand writer being present ! . . .

It's an immense advantage to us that you and your father take an interest in the Navy.

Yours very truly,

J. A. FISHER.

The upshot of the dispute was that the Sea Lords got their way.

Compared with its predecessor the year 1894 was politically uninteresting, and the most notable event by which it was marked was the retirement of Mr. Gladstone from public life at the beginning of March. This event was marked by those courtesies which always do so much to soften the asperity of Party strife in England. At a meeting in Huddersfield, for example, Austen paid a warm tribute to the statesman from whom he and his father had of late years come to differ so fundamentally :

We are all of us, no matter to what Party we belong, regretting Mr. Gladstone's retirement from the great position that he has filled for so many years in the House of Commons. We regret still more the causes which have led him to retire. I am sure I am speaking the wishes of every man and woman in this room when I express the hope that the rest which he has so well earned may quickly restore him to health, and that many years of life and of activity may still remain to him. At such a moment we don't care to dwell upon the many points of difference which have arisen between him and us. We would rather recall his stately eloquence, his commanding and unique position in the House of Commons ; above all, his high sense of the dignity of that body, and his constant efforts to maintain it true to its great traditions. For my part I don't need the

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reminder which the Chairman had addressed to me, to recall the generosity which Mr. Gladstone has shown to his opponents—the generosity with which he, a veteran of sixty years, could welcome a new recruit in the House of Commons.¹

Mr. Gladstone was succeeded as Prime Minister by Lord Rosebery, who undertook to carry on the Government on the same lines as his predecessor; but the ministerial majority was too small to be effective. A Bill for the disestablishment of the Welsh Church was dropped after the first reading ; a Registration Bill, chiefly aimed at plural voting, did not get beyond its second reading ; the Evicted Tenants Bill, for the purpose of re-establishing in their farms in Ireland those who had been driven from them, was indeed carried in the Lower House by stringent use of the closure, but it was at once rejected by the Lords ; and on one occasion the Government was defeated on the Address by its own followers. Ministers were only able to claim a real success in the Budget of 1894, when what are known as the death duties were imposed in their present form. Austen took no prominent part in these controversies, but he assisted in the application, both in the House of Commons and in the country, of continuous pressure on an administration that every day provided added proof of being divided against itself. Yet when the end came he was among those who contributed to the victory. Notice had been given that the Opposition would call attention to the shortage of small-arm ammunition and move a reduction in the War Office vote. It was a thin House, but Austen had, in accordance with his father's instructions, whipped up the Liberal Unionists; and when the division was taken the voting showed a majority of seven against the Government. ' Our pent-up feelings,⁵ wrote Austen, ' burst forth in a roar of cheering, with difficulty suppressed as the Speaker repeated the

¹ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, March 14th, 1894.

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figures from the Chair.' This was on June 21st, 1895, and the Government immediately resigned; whereupon the Queen sent for Lord Salisbury.

A few extracts from Austen's letters to his stepmother, who was in the United States at this time, show that hard work in the House of Commons had in no way weakened his intense interest in life in all its phases :

40 Prince's Gardens, S.W.

Feb.3rd.1895

MY DEAR MARY,

I am very sorry to hear from Father and from your letters to the girls that Mrs. Endicott has been so unwell, and even now is unable to shake off her cold. It is cruel that you should have fallen on such a spell of bad and impossible weather. It is an odious season, and the only thing to hope with bad seasons, as with bad governments, is that they should break up as quickly as possible.

It is odious here too. Hilda, however, has just marched Beatrice out for a walk and would have carried me off too, but I alleged that I was 'buried in papers,' and as I had a fair sprinkling of them about me the excuse passed muster.

I have been very busy since you left. Indeed at one time I had not a free night up to the meeting of Parliament, which I was looking forward to as affording a much desired rest from public speaking. However, some of my engagements fell through, and so I got a night or two to tidy up before leaving Highbury. . . .

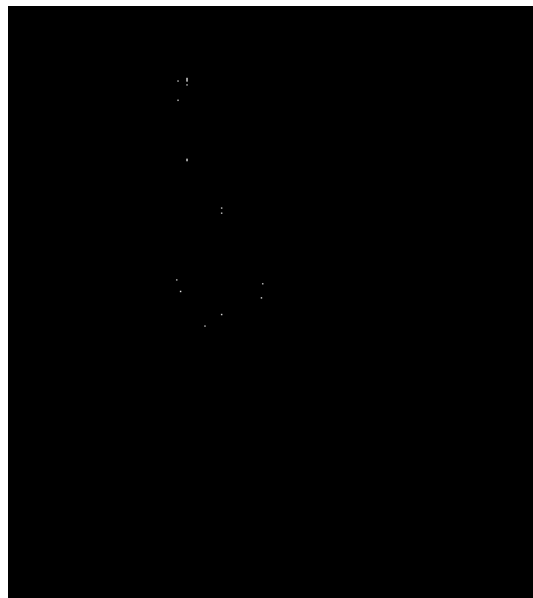
Your new drawing-room decoration here is a great success. It makes the room look bigger, and brings the two parts more together. And the flowers! They are quite a different thing with this new background. Your dress also looks very well! The whole house is vastly improved and brightened by the new decoration in the hall. . . .

Ida and I stayed down at Highbury till yesterday afternoon, and in the morning toiled over to Sugden's, where we bought two cows. One is a particularly pretty one ;



H. Roland White

At Cambridge



Fritz Leyde & Co.

In Germany, after Cambridge

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN AS A YOUNG MAN

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both look very promising. I have given Wileman orders to try to sell Primrose. We shall not want her any longer now, and she is not a beauty.

Sugden was feeding all his dairy cows on ensilage ranker and blacker than mine, and the cowhouse smelt strongly of it, but he says he has had no complaint of the milk.

It took the poor old cob an hour and a quarter to get over there—the roads were so heavy with snow—and we were really afraid in the morning that it would be impossible to go. But there was no wind, and the sun shone brightly for a couple of hours or so, so that we were not badly off.

When you go to Highbury again you will find all the paths ashed and be able to walk right round in comfort. We have ordered two large loads of ashes from Birmingham, and they are being delivered to Uncle Arthur's wharf at Stirchley Street, whence we draw them. It is a long job, but with what we get this way and those already obtained, we shall pretty well finish the work, I think.

We have a letter from Neville in reply to Father's offering more white help. He writes in excellent spirits; all is going well again, Knowles is back and beginning to get over the worst of his trouble, and N. thinks that there can never be such a conjunction of circumstances as produced the strain he has just gone through, and says if he had another man he would not know what to do with him ! But Father is probably going to tell him to take Greenwood all the same. It is pleasant to know that N. himself is quite well, and in the best of spirits. . . .

Believe me

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

40 Prince's Gardens, S.W.

March iotk, 1895

MY DEAR MARY,

I am very glad to learn from Father that you are taking your homeward tickets again, and that before very long we

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may expect you back home again. When one fills so large a place in the life of a family as you do in ours, one cannot be away for weeks without being badly missed, and the news that you are coming home is the best news that Father can give us now, as the news of your first coming was the best he could bring from his American visit. . . .

We seem at last to have got rid of the frost here, and everyone is hoping now for a warm genial spring as will be good growing weather and will make up for the long spell of winter that we have had. Farm and garden alike need it, for all work has been stopped by the hardness of the ground, and not a few of the shrubs have been sadly cut about and need to make a big growth this year to make up for the old wood that the frosts have killed. The lambs and chickens too, which are beginning to arrive, will benefit by warmer weather, and we shall want to see the young grass sprouting soon if the former are to have plenty to eat and to do well.

I went with Ethel yesterday to see a collection of etchings (dry-points) at Dunthorpe's Gallery. They are by Hellen, a very clever, refined, and graceful French artist. They are all of them sketches of women and children, some of them very charming ; I picked out one of a child for you which I am going to ask you to accept as a birthday present. I think you will like it, though it is not the one I would have chosen if I could have had my pick of all I saw. But the lines of these dry-points are so delicate that the plates soon wear out; only a very few impressions of each can be taken, and I unfortunately came too late to secure the first favourite. The one I have got is very slight, but it is pretty and charming, I think.

Here is Ethel come to take me out for a Sunday morning * grind,⁵ as we used to call our walks at Cambridge. It is a lovely day, and I know you would order me out if you were here.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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The spring of this year also saw Austen involved in one of those disputes concerning the allocation of seats which are inevitable between the two wings of a coalition. Speaker Peel had been created a peer, and at once a struggle began between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists for the representation of his constituency of Warwick and Leamington. It was East Worcestershire over again, and with the same result. Mr. Peel had been a Liberal Unionist, and another Liberal Unionist was elected in his place in the person of Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, who was to be Austen's colleague in Mr. Balfour's administration a few years later.

The reward, however, for so much hard work was not long delayed, and a few days after the fall of the Liberal Government a letter arrived from the new Prime Minister :

Hatfield House, Hatfield, Herts

June 30th, '95

DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

Your father has encouraged me to hope that you would accept the post of Civil Lord of the Admiralty in the new administration. The office is interesting in many ways, but specially in the fact that it has on many occasions been the first step in the ladder to many who have afterwards achieved for themselves a considerable name, such for instance, in our time, as the Duke of Devonshire and Mr. W. E. Forster. I have no doubt you will like your chief, Mr. Goschen, whom you know well.

Believe me

Yours very truly,

SALISBURY.

The most notable among the senior appointments in the Government of which Austen thus became a member was that of his father to be Colonial Secretary. The new Cabinet was, indeed, a composite body, for it contained not

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only Conservatives but also Liberal Unionists, of whom the most important were the Duke of Devonshire, who became Lord President of the Council, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Goschen, who, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was Austen's immediate chief. In 1886, when Lord Salisbury formed his second administration, the Liberal Unionists had refused to take office, as they felt that they could give the Government more effective support from outside, since in this way they would not lay themselves open to the reproach of having lost nothing by their opposition to Home Rule. Nine years later this argument was no longer operative, and Conservatives and Liberal Unionists had worked so well together, in spite of occasional friction in the constituencies, that there was no reason why they should not sit in the same Cabinet. Nevertheless, it was not until many years later that the respective electoral organizations were amalgamated.

The Cabinet, with a few exceptions, consisted of men who were safe rather than brilliant, but nearly all its members had established their reputations as sound administrators. The Prime Minister, who was also Foreign Secretary, had during the first decade acquired a prestige both at home and abroad which it is no exaggeration to say that few of his successors have yet equalled. Many stories were told of his aloofness and frequent absence of mind, but he towered over his contemporaries like a Colossus, and his strength was that of England. His nephew, Mr. A. J. Balfour, was First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons, and few would have recognized in the *dilettante* of the 'Fourth Party' the finished statesman who now sat on the Treasury Bench. Mr. Balfour's career was one of alternating success and failure, but there can be no doubt that during the years he served under his uncle, both as Chief Secretary for Ireland and as Leader of the House of Commons, he was at his best. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, and within the four walls of the Treasury 'Black Michael' was an autocrat such as no Chancellor was to prove until the days of Austen's

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own brother nearly forty years later. At the Board of Agriculture was that competent administrator Mr. Walter Long, who was soon to give proof of the courage that was in him by his attitude towards the opposition raised by his Muzzling Order. To the populace the outstanding figure in the Cabinet was Mr. Chamberlain. His forceful personality ensured for him the centre of the stage during the whole of his political life, and in 1895, at the age of fifty-nine, his energies were completely unimpaired.

The first task of the new Government was to seek a mandate from the electors, and Parliament was accordingly dissolved on July 8th. Austen was, as has been said, not himself opposed, but his election address has more than passing interest :

GENTLEMEN,

Parliament has at length been dissolved, and in response to a unanimous invitation from the Liberal Unionist and Conservative Associations of this division I have the honour again to offer you my services as your representative in Parliament, and to ask for a renewal of the support which you have already accorded me on two previous occasions.

After a vain effort to carry a Home Rule Bill by which the interests, and even the safety, of the United Kingdom were recklessly sacrificed to the demands of a disloyal Irish faction, the late Government sought to conceal their failure and to secure your support by the advocacy of vast and destructive Constitutional changes which their leader now admits they had at no time any chance of passing into law. Meanwhile your interests have been sacrificed to their Party exigencies, and the time of Parliament has been wasted in barren controversies from which the country has reaped no advantage.

The return of a Home Rule majority to the new Parliament could only result in a continuance of this state of things.

On the other hand, the newly formed Unionist Government are determined, if they secure a majority, to lay aside

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these great Constitutional changes, and to devote themselves to practical measures of social reform.

The prolonged depression of agriculture, the condition of the aged poor, the housing of the working classes, and the provision of compensation for workmen injured in the course of their employment—these are among the questions to which the new Government will direct their attention, for it is by the promotion of measures like these, and not by attacks on the Constitution, that the welfare of our people and the greatness of our country may best be secured and increased.

I have only to add that, if you do me the honour of again choosing me as your Member, I shall give my hearty support to the policy which I have thus indicated, and shall endeavour in all ways to the best of my ability to promote the interests of this great constituency.

I am, gentlemen,
Your faithful servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, *July gth*, 1895

Lord Rosebery attempted to rally his followers by a great attack on the House of Lords, but he evoked little response, and the Liberals met with a crushing defeat. The Conservatives and Liberal Unionists had a majority of 152 in the new Parliament, which was greater than that which any administration had enjoyed for sixty years.

Thus began the decade of Unionist rule, during which Constitutional problems were in abeyance and public attention was directed to the world without. To no inconsiderable extent this was due to Mr. Chamberlain, who taught his fellow-countrymen during these years to 'think Imperially.' All the same the old controversies were only dormant, and the time was not far distant when Home Rule, the reform of the House of Lords, and the disestablishment of the Welsh Church were once more to be the burning topics of the hour.

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The Civil Lord of the Admiralty was not concerned with the framing of general policy, though in the autumn of 1896 he was subjected to a flood of letters from his constituents calling for drastic action on the part of the Government against the Sultan of Turkey, who was engaged in one of his periodic massacres, this time of Armenians. Much as Austen sympathized with the wretched victims of the Turks, he was in full agreement with Lord Salisbury that the Armenians were not worth a European war :

To interfere without the agreement of the Powers, without harmony having been first secured amongst the European Cabinets, would be to expose not only ourselves but the whole of Europe to the disaster of a great war, the loss of life, and the suffering that would follow from it, which would far outdo anything that had occurred in the Turkish Empire. He advised them to be content with the wise and prudent action of the statesmen at the head of our foreign affairs. That such a state of things as existed could continue he did not believe, but it could not be brought to an end except by the agreement of the Great Powers, and it was for that agreement that they must work and wait.¹

The cares of office did not prevent the young Minister from living that full and varied life to which he was always devoted, and he also went out a good deal socially. He tells his stepmother that he had been at a week-end party where one of the guests had just come from Windsor, where ' apparently H. M. had exhausted her vocabulary in praise of you.' An official position had certainly done nothing to repress his native high spirits : ' I have spluttered black ink all over my shirt, so I have now painted it over with red ink. Woe to Mr. Wilson if he is wrong.'⁵ As in the days when he was an undergraduate his letters were full of allusions to

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 27 th, 1895.

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the most diverse topics, and his information was encyclopaedic, like, it may be added, that of all his family.

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Sept. ?th, 1896

MY DEAR MARY,

I said I should not write to you, but here I am sitting down to do so in spite of my prophecy ; though having got so far, I feel inclined to adopt the finish so much used by boys of¹ 'nothing more to say.'

I have been busy farming since you left, looking at my cows when out of doors and trying to make my accounts balance and find a vanished 12[^]. *lod.* when indoors. But after all my efforts there was an 'irrecoverable balance' of 115. for which there was no accounting. I bought two cows and a calf at the Lea End sale. They are pretty animals, and you will like them when you see them. If you see Mr. Shaw, don't forget to tell him that we copied his plans and put up one of his Dutch barns.

I go up to town on Wednesday for my bank,¹ there being no other director available. To tell the truth, I am not sorry to have to do so. I think I shall be glad of the change. I shall stop out the week, and go up again on Thursday for three or four days. I think there will be enough at the Admiralty to occupy me, and one night I shall spend with Dighton's people at Woking. I may have to hold an enquiry into a dispute between two professors at the Naval College. Sir F. Richards² wants me to do so, and if he persists I shall consent. But I don't think myself that it is a matter for enquiry by the Board at all, and hope to convince Sir Frederick that there is another and better course.

I have been reading Miss Austen's *Emma*. It forms a constant subject of dispute between the girls and me. I

¹ Bank of Africa, Ltd. : he had become a director in 1892.

² First Sea Lord.

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think she is an odious creature, whilst Ida and Hilda (the latter especially) profess a great regard for her. If I am to choose at all, I prefer Jane Fairfax. But I think Miss Austen is more successful with disagreeable than with pleasant people.

I sail with Dighton¹ on the 26th, and have taken our passages to and from Madeira. I shall be very glad when we get away. He wanted to put it off for a week more, but I have stood out against this.

It seems ages since you and Father left. If it is any consolation to him for absence from Highbury, tell him the weather is odious and there are hardly any orchids out.

All the debentures of the A.F. Co. will be paid *off at par* on the 15th of this month. If he is thinking of the matter at all while he is away, he will probably be glad to know this.

Write to me some time.

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

At any rate Austen had managed to get through *Emma*. He was once confronted with one of those books of questions of one's loves and hates, likes and dislikes that used to be fashionable in country houses, and asked to name 'three books of undoubted merit which you have been unable to read': he confessed to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and *Paradise Lost*.

While his father was dealing with the repercussions of the Jameson Raid, Austen was quietly doing his work at the Admiralty. Junior Ministers often show their worth by their success in avoiding publicity, which rarely does them good and may do them harm. As the First Lord of the Admiralty was also in the House of Commons there was not much for Austen to do there. The work of the Admiralty interested him from the beginning. 'I have had,' he wrote on December 16th, 1895, * a very busy but also

¹ Dighton Pollock.

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interesting time at the Admiralty. I sent my memo on the Gib. breakwater to Goschen, who this time has taken it up seriously and told me I was quite right to put the matter forward. My secretary tells me that I am in very good odour with the Naval Lords, and I hope and think it is true.* At times his enthusiasm was almost boyish :

Devonshire Club, St. James's, S.W.

Jan. 28th, 1896

MY DEAR MARY,

I got up to town by seven o'clock to-night, just called at No. 40 to leave my luggage (I beg your pardon—to dump my baggage, I meant) and get my letters, and came on here to dine. I have had a most interesting and useful trip. People were glad to see us ; whatever institution or place we went to, the staff turned out to meet us and was all eagerness to show us everything and tell us all that was going on.

We got to Torquay late on Saturday ; dined comfortably and should have slept well but for the mice, whose name was legion. We were off at 8.30 next morning—the sunrise was beautiful—spent the morning on the *Britannia* and looking at a possible site for a college ashore, lunched with the Captain onboard and then drove to Totnes—thirteen miles of lovely country—and took the train to Devonport. There we stayed with the Admiral—Sapt, a very cheery old admiral. Our day and a half there were well filled up inspecting everything. Last night we dined with the Commander-in-Chief, and to-day was again a lovely day. I like very much the new Director of Works, who was with us and of whom I see a great deal. He is, like his predecessor Major Pilkington, a Major R.E.

This is very scrappy, but you will see I have had a good time. But alas ! I can't come down before Thursday at the earliest—most probably Saturday. Papers are coming in again. On Saturday morning I got a telegram from Goschen asking me to settle *before I left town* with Macartney

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all the points in two years' dockyard petitions, the papers on which only arrived at the same time as the telegram ! i.e. about a dozen questions of first-rate importance and any number of points of detail. Of course, it was out of the question, but I must do it before I leave town. . . .

Please thank Ethel for a very delightful letter, and tell her to sell a pig *pour encourager les autres*.

Ever your affectionate

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen's work at the Admiralty was, then, congenial, and he found interesting such routine duties as serving on a committee to examine the training of medical officers and the drawing up of reports on fuel and the construction of new docks. It was also relatively easy in that, while there was as yet no fear of German sea power, limited expansion was the order of the day. Not long, therefore, before he was transferred to another department, and on the eve of the South African War, the Civil Lord was able to point with pride to the state of the Force with which he had been, in however minor a capacity, connected :

It might be, and they must all hope it would be, that the Peace Conference ¹ would find some means of staying the progressive increase of armaments—perhaps even of lightening the burdens which already pressed upon the countries of Europe—but he did not think they must be too hopeful or expect too much. Our Government at any rate had intimated its willingness to reconsider the proposals it had made if other countries were willing to do the same, but we could not go further than that. We had for years past built for our navy upon a principle which had been accepted by all Parties in this country, and it was in our opinion the minimum required for the maintenance of the safety and

¹ At The Hague.

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honour of our great empire. We could not allow ourselves to fall behind in our defensive proposals, though he thought we might point to the past, and might cite the knowledge that every man in this country had of the feelings of the people, to show that we cherished no hostile intentions towards our neighbours.

He was glad to be able to say that he thought there never had been a time when the naval forces were in a better or more satisfactory condition—never since the Napoleonic wars had the Navy been so strong in comparison with the navies of other Powers, and never had the spirit of the officers and men they got to enter the Queen's service been stronger than it was at the present day.¹

The justice of this claim was to be proved during the three succeeding years, when the strength and efficiency of the Navy alone prevented the intervention of certain Continental Powers, possibly even of a coalesced Europe, in the South African War.

The year 1897 witnessed further trouble in the Near East. In consequence of an insurrection in Crete, the revolutionaries there proclaimed the union of the island with Greece. As has been seen, in the case of the Armenian massacres Lord Salisbury had refused to take action without the co-operation of the other Powers, but where Crete was concerned it was possible for Great Britain, through her fleet, to act alone. Recognizing that in rejecting the proposals of Nicholas I in 1853, a rejection which led to the Crimean War, 'we put all our money on the wrong horse,' a sentiment in which both Chamberlains heartily concurred, the Prime Minister determined that the mistake should not be repeated. In the Cretan question he gave a lead to Europe. Greece, however, in spite of the restraining influence of her king, was impatient of delay, and sent troops to the island, with the not unnatural result that in April war broke out

¹ *Messenger*, May 27th, 1899.

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between her and the Porte. The 'Thirty Days War' was an almost unbroken series of Greek disasters, and when the Turkish troops were on the point of invading Attica, the Greeks were saved by the Powers from the consequences of their own folly. They had nevertheless to abandon their pretensions to Crete, which had in the meantime been occupied by an international force, and where an autonomous government was set up with Prince George of Greece as High Commissioner.

It cannot, of course, be pretended that Austen Chamberlain played any part in the formulation of British foreign policy at this period, though in view of the position of his father in the Cabinet he obviously knew more of what was going on than does a junior Minister in the ordinary way ; all the same, it is not, perhaps, wholly fanciful to detect in his attitude towards Lord Salisbury's action in the Near East the germ of his own foreign policy a quarter of a century later :

The Government had set before itself in the first place the giving to Crete of effective autonomy. It was their policy to secure to the Cretans a government of their own, with which the Sultan should not in future be able to interfere, and in the meantime to preserve peace, to prevent bloodshed, and to limit and narrow the suffering which was inevitably involved in such a state of things as had been going on in Crete. There was one thing which ought to be spoken about, and that was that some protest should be made against the readiness with which many Englishmen believed the best of everyone except their own countrymen, who were acting under circumstances of great difficulty. It was time to make a protest against the readiness to attack those who were doing the hard work which had been imposed on them, and to ask our countrymen at home, if they did not approve, at any rate to reserve their judgment until the whole facts were before them on evidence which no one could dispute.

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The second object of the Government was to preserve the peace of Europe, and they had thought that the best and probably the only way to do that was by acting in common with the other Great Powers, and showing them that we had no singular purpose of our own to serve, but were actuated by common motives of humanity and the interests of Europe—and by thus using our influence to lead the Powers on the way which English people would desire. A concert, whether of the Powers of Europe or of a few men round a table, could not be conducted without some give and take, and it sometimes happened that the British Government were not able to secure everything as readily as could be wished.¹

A few weeks later he said :

It was not to be supposed six Powers acting together could act with the rapidity any single Power could do. It would be the experience of any of them who had sat on a council, a board, or a committee that it took longer for twelve men to come to a decision than it did one man, but if they could combine the whole number in that decision, how much greater was the force it commanded and the respect it ensured.²

During these years Austen was in increasingly close contact with Mr. F. S. Oliver, whose biography of Alexander Hamilton will long be remembered. The two men had both been at Trinity, though Austen was slightly the senior, and during a very important period of his political career he placed great reliance upon the opinions and judgment of his friend, with whom he was in constant communication.

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 26th, 1897.

² *Messenger*, May 1st, 1897.

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Mr. Oliver was not well known to the world at large, and he never sought to enter the House of Commons ; all the same he influenced those who exercised power, and there is a strong vein of common sense running through his writings, in spite of their somewhat affected style. The footing upon which he stood with Austen is sufficiently indicated in the following letter :

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

Sept. 12th, 1898

MY DEAR MARY,

B. and I are off the day after to-morrow, so I send you a parting word. She came home to-day, having left the Dexters at Penrith, and from her accounts I judge that their trip was very successful and thoroughly enjoyed by all of them.

I had a 'rippin' time,' if you will pardon the expression, with the Olivers and Beachs; I saw as much as anyone did of the manoeuvres, hobnobbed with all my friends among our generals, attended one of their 'pow-wows' by Sir E. Wood's invitation, attached myself on another day to the Commander-in-Chief's Staff, quartered myself on the country, or in other words took two lunches at Lord James's expense, whose place was in the neighbourhood of the earlier fights, cycled or rode from twenty to thirty miles a day, and came back on Friday last very fit and very burnt and feeling rather ashamed of starting off for another holiday of which I stand in no need.

The party at Beachs' were the Brodricks, Lady Londonderry and her sister, Lady G. Little, and the Beach family—all very good company. Lady L. was in great form, and Sir Michael trying not to be restless in face of her restlessness was a study ! To my great joy I heard him at dinner talking of Egypt (has not the Sirdar done magnificently by the way? i), and this is what I caught: 'Well, I wish they'd

¹ Sir Herbert Kitchener had won the battle of Omdurman on September 7th.

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been Frenchmen.⁵ Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! ' Well, I'd sooner be killing Frenchmen than Dervishes at any rate.' My confidence in the Government is restored, and I await further news of the white force reported to be at Fashoda with comparative equanimity—the more so as it is simultaneously announced that the Sirdar has ordered all Pressmen back to Cairo.

At the Olivers' were Captain Furse and Vereker Hamilton ; the latter is the artist who was guilty of the ' Piper Findlater at Dargai' in this year's Academy. I fancy he paints pictures for Service Clubs and Regimental Messes of about the same artistic merit as the sea pieces which you see in any shipping-office. His ' chief title ' to fame, however, is that having once come into £1,000 or so, and being sure he would never have so much again, he took a grouse moor and entertained his friends royally as long as the money lasted. It is told that on this occasion Bill Furse and his brother Charles the artist at the close of their visit were gently chaffing him. Everything had been well done and so forth, but there was one blot on his hospitality. In such an establishment there ought to be men servants. Maids were *infra dig*. ' Well,' said Hamilton, ' I have found everything else ; you had better find the men.'

No sooner said than done. It was just after dinner, but a fresh guest was momentarily expected. Bill and his brother donned some black silk stockings, rolled up their trousers over their knees and powdered their hair, and arrived in the hall just in time to admit the new guest, whilst Hamilton rushed out of the dining-room crying, ' Where the deuce is Thompson ? He really is intolerable.' There was some difficulty about serving dinner, as the maids in the kitchen fell back in their chairs, threw their aprons over their heads, and became hysterical at sight of the Furses. But things went on pretty well until the Furses broke down over Hamilton's objurgations on the absence of his imaginary butler, Thompson.

I don't know how this reads, but it made us laugh till we cried as Bill Furse told this story.

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Here is another of Furse's stories illustrating regimental history as she is told in the regiments.

He had noticed at a field day at Aldershot that the Cheshire Regiment all had a sprig of oak leaves embroidered in their tunics. Seeing a smart-looking cockney sergeant, he asked him why. The sergeant, bursting with pride, came to ⁱ 'attention' at once and answered: 'Please, sir, the Regiment always wears the hoak leaves on Stait occasions.'⁵ 'Yes, but *why*?' asked Furse, 'Please, sir,' was the reply, 'His Majesty King Charles the First, flying from the French chassoors at the battle of Dettingen, took refuge in a hoak tree. The Cheshire Regiment surrounded the hoak tree, since which it has always worn the hoak leaves.'

The grounds for the new college at Dartmouth are getting on well. Milner is having a good time, and is writ large all over the hill. I do *not* propose to bring down either the 1st Lord or the Ch. of the Exch, until he has turfed over his earthworks and obscured his traces. 'Someone must look after economy' the 1st Lord says, and I fear he would think the someone had not been consulted at Dartmouth. It is really going to be a splendid place, and everyone is delighted. The primroses were lovely, *laurustinus* in full bloom. We spent the morning ashore, and the afternoon in going up the river to Totnes.

Then we visited Falmouth, a damp relaxing pretty harbour with a damp training-ship full of pasty-faced boys, which did not meet with our approval. . . .

Yours affectionately,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—Extract from Health Report of the cruise—Thursday, 4 p.m. : Civil Lord indisposed.

5 p.m. : Civil Lord all right again, and since then as jolly as he can be in spite of the roll.

One other event of these halcyon days, before war and a renewal of political controversy came to trouble the

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national life, may be recorded. In July, 1896, Austen had been admitted a Cordwainer by patrimony. It was a reminder of the old connection between his family and the City of London, for when his father unveiled a stained-glass window in Cordwainers' Hall he was reminded that 'six generations of your ancestors filled the office of Master of this Company . . . the mutual goodwill which existed between your ancestors and the other members of this ancient Guild is evidenced by the legacies of plate given by them on two occasions, which remain among our most valued possessions.' First and foremost a son of Birmingham, it was to London that Austen owed his second loyalty, and the hereditary connection with the City was especially pleasing to him.

On October 9th, 1899, the Boer republics sent their ultimatum, and three days later the South African War began. Owing to the fact that Great Britain possessed the undisputed mastery of the seas no Continental Power, as has been mentioned above, ventured to intervene in the struggle, and the Admiralty was thus not immediately concerned in the conduct of hostilities. All the same, the outbreak of the South African War was an important landmark in Austen's career. The carefree days which had preceded it were never to return. To some extent this was the case with all his fellow-countrymen, and the year 1900 was the last occasion on which the Income Tax was to stand at eightpence. Yet for those in public life, and not least for Mr. Chamberlain's son, the change was even more abrupt. The war itself revived the bitterness which had been dying down since the days of the second Home Rule Bill, while a year after peace was signed with the Boers the commencement of the campaign for Tariff Reform added fresh fuel to the fire. From then until 1914 there was a savagery in British politics for which it is necessary to go back to the closing years of the reign of Queen Anne to find a parallel. The Great War was a severe strain on Austen, and the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission was a cruel blow to one of his high principles. Indeed, it was not until that Indian

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summer of post-War Europe, namely the years which immediately followed the conclusion of the Locarno Pact, that Austen again knew any real repose of mind. Then the sky became overclouded once more, and when he died it was with the knowledge that the danger threatening his country was as great as it had ever been.

In addition there were to be personal difficulties and disappointments. The period of the South African War was characterized by violent attacks upon Mr. Chamberlain and his elder son which, although easily repulsed, were none the less galling to bear. The years of Mr. Balfour's Premiership were ones in which Austen was every day in danger of drifting into a false position owing to the differences between the Prime Minister and Mr. Chamberlain in the matter of Tariff Reform, and after the General Election of 1906 loyalty to principle and loyalty to the leader of the Party were by no means always easy to reconcile. When Mr. Balfour did resign, the cup of the succession was dashed from Austen's lips, and three years followed during which more than once his allegiance to official Conservatism was severely strained. The Great War and its aftermath have already been mentioned, but even the General Election of 1929, when Austen only retained his father's old seat in West Birmingham by the narrow margin of forty-three votes, was not the last of the blows which fate had in store for him: the Invergordon mutiny was yet to come, and although he is now cleared at the bar of history of all responsibility for that unhappy episode, he was in the public mind under a cloud for a period on account of it. Lastly, as will be told in the proper place, there were difficulties with Mr. Baldwin, none the less real because they were not widely known. All this lay ahead in that autumn of 1899, while behind, and gone for ever, were the happy days which have been described in the preceding pages. One unknown blessing alone was in store—his marriage.

If Austen's lines had hitherto been cast in pleasant places there was no lack of courage on his part when the bad times came. Indeed, he was greater in adversity than

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in success. A recent writer¹ was struck 'by his gentleness of expression' towards the end of his life. 'Chamberlain, he adds, 'at close quarters, was a most gracious figure, but I fancied that I detected in his face an expression of weariness. He seemed, or so it appeared to me at the time, to belong to other, happier days.' There is much truth in this, for doctors are trained to see a great deal that is hidden from other men. Yet, whatever he felt, he showed no trace of it to the outside world. The old zest of life never forsook him, and he kept himself young by frequenting the society of youth. Self-important back-benchers may have thought that he treated them too superciliously in the lobbies and smoke-room of the House, though in taking offence in this way they forgot the badness of his sight in later years, but the young men at Oxford and Cambridge found him a most delightful companion. On such occasions he gave no sign of any disappointment which he might be feeling, and he was always the centre of a group of eager, almost importunate, questioners whose curiosity he was only too delighted to satisfy.

This has led us far from the autumn of 1899, and there can be no question but that that date was of the first importance in Austen's career. Up to then life had been exceptionally easy for him; henceforth it was to be a struggle in which there were at least as many reverses as triumphs. What enabled him to make head against a succession of difficulties was the happiness of his family life, first with his father, step-mother, and sisters, and afterwards with his wife. It was this that enabled him to emerge unscathed from the storms of his public career, and that was responsible for the fact that he never despaired either of his country or himself.

During the closing months of 1899 the Civil Lord of the Admiralty was much in demand on Government platforms, and he spoke in Dover, East Dereham, Glasgow, Eastbourne, and Birmingham, as well as in his own constituency, between the outbreak of war and Christmas.

¹ R. McNair Wilson in *Doctor's Progress*, pp. 261-2.

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His attitude towards the conflict can be gauged by an extract from his speech at Eastbourne :

It was not a war of their seeking. The Government had shown a patience which might lead—which did lead in some cases—to a misapprehension of the firmness of its intentions, of its resolve to see right done in the end, but which now left no shadow of excuse to any man to accuse it of having precipitated that unfortunate result. Even at the last moment they were seeking, by the formulation of new terms in place of those which President Kruger and his officers had rejected, to bring about a peaceful result to these negotiations, when that unparalleled ultimatum was launched, which left but one reply possible from a British Government of whatever Party. He further claimed that if the need was little for justification of the war, there was less need to defend the negotiations that preceded it. Presidents Kruger and Steyn had appealed to force rather than to reason, and by the issue of that appeal they must be judged. But the more they knew of those negotiations, and of the minds of the Boer negotiators, the less difference of opinion there was among Englishmen of every shade of opinion as to the inherent justice of their cause, or the tact with which it was urged upon the Boers.¹

Those were the days when, in spite of many obstacles, Mr. Chamberlain, who had never been a believer in that doctrine of 'splendid isolation' which was so popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was endeavouring to bring about a working agreement between Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. His son cherished the same hope :

The Colonial Secretary had . . . been subjected to criticism for what he had said concerning this country's

¹ *Sussex Daily News*, December 7 th, 1899.

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relations with the United States and Germany. These remarks seem to have startled some people, but they only represented what many had been thinking. He pointed out that the interests of these three Powers in the open markets of the world, and in other respects, were largely identical, and, while he insisted upon the ability of this country to look after herself and her own possessions and interests, there was no reason why they should reject an alliance with Germany and with the United States which would promote a peaceful solution of any difficulty which might present itself in relation to affairs of common interest. As to the policy of speaking out their thoughts on this matter, if they did not express any desire for it, or make any attempt to bring it about, it was quite certain such an alliance would never be secured. He deprecated the doubt which existed as to the possibility, or even the probability, of that alliance.¹

It is, perhaps, permissible to suppose that this advocacy of an alliance with Germany and the United States was not only due to filial piety, but was also connected with an unpleasant experience which Austen had undergone a short time before. A French newspaper, the *Libre Parole*, published a letter purporting to be written by Austen, in which he was alleged to have said that in its foreign and colonial policy the Government counted upon the introduction of anti-clerical legislation by the French Ministry to divide France to such an extent as to render her powerless, and that, in addition, the German Emperor had promised to terrify her into quiescence. This letter, the newspaper stated, had been written to a Scottish M.P., and had been found on a table in the smoke-room of the North-Western Hotel in Liverpool. It was clearly a forgery to rouse French public opinion against M. Waldeck-Rousseau, and it produced the following letter from its reputed author :

¹ *Ibid.*

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SIR,

I received from a correspondent this morning the enclosed cutting from a Paris newspaper.

I need hardly say that there is not an atom of foundation for the statements made in it. I never wrote the letter it professes to quote, nor anything even remotely resembling it. But it is interesting to see how public opinion is manufactured in France.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.¹

As has been shown in the previous chapter, Austen never had much sympathy with the French Right, and he probably welcomed this opportunity of vindicating himself and striking a blow on behalf of his friends on the other side of the Channel at the same time. He has often been accused of being unduly Francophil, but where the interests of his own country and of France seemed to clash there was no question on which side he was to be found. At the turn of the century he was, like the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen, probably more out of sympathy with the French than he had been before or was to be again : like his father he had come to feel of the attacks of the French Press on the Queen and her Ministers that they ' will have serious consequences if our neighbours do not mend their manners.'⁵ He was thus peculiarly receptive to the idea of an understanding with Germany and the United States.

The following year brought a General Election, the so-called 'Khaki Election'⁵ of 1900. It was marked by considerable bitterness, for the opponents of the Government maintained that Ministers were taking an unworthy advantage of the patriotic feelings roused by the war, and they particularly resented the slogan ' A vote for the Liberals is a vote for the Boers.'⁵ Austen's election address may once again be quoted as evidence of his attitude towards the issues on which Lord Salisbury had gone to the country :

¹ *The Times*, November 19th, 1899.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

GENTLEMEN,

In response to a joint invitation from the Liberal Unionist and Conservative Associations of this division, I have the honour to offer my services again as your representative in the House of Commons.

The circumstances under which Parliament is dissolved make the verdict of the country upon this occasion one of exceptional importance. Lord Roberts and the troops acting under his orders have brought to the eve of a successful termination the greatest war of our generation. It remains for the country to confirm the policy pursued by the Government and the terms of settlement which they have announced their intention of securing as its result.

This war was none of our seeking. The English Government pushed forbearance to its utmost limits in their desire to preserve peace, and only had resort to arms when British territory was invaded by the forces of the Boer republics. It is now our duty to protect our Colonies for ever against a recurrence of such attacks, and to render impossible a renewal of the hostile intrigues which have proved a standing menace to the peace of South Africa ever since the restoration of the independence of the Transvaal.

With this object in view, the territories of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State have been annexed to Her Majesty's Dominions in accordance with the wishes of the great majority of Englishmen at home, and with the cordial approval of all our great Colonies. Under British government the Transvaal and Orange River Colony will share henceforth the fortunes of the British Empire, and will receive in due course the free institutions which prevail in all our great self-governing Colonies.

I invite you, gentlemen, to give your approval to the action taken by Ministers. It is essential for the peace of South Africa that their policy should have the unmistakable support of the people and that all concerned should know that, whatever changes the future may have in store, it is the fixed determination of this country that the territories now added to the British Crown shall never again be

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restored to the independence which they have forfeited by their unprovoked aggression. The successes won by the courage of our sailors and soldiers must not be thrown away by any weakening of our counsels after peace is restored.

This war will always be memorable as the first instance in our history of the active co-operation of all the great self-governing Colonies with the Mother Country in a common struggle in defence of British rights and British honour. The Empire, hitherto little more than an aspiration, has thus become a reality, and a great step forward has been made towards that closer union upon which are founded our best hopes for the future of the British race.

Under the present Government our position in Egypt has been consolidated, and the Soudan won back from barbarism to civilization. Our possessions in West Africa have been defined and developed. The long-standing dispute with Venezuela, which threatened to involve us in dissensions with the United States of America, has been peacefully settled, and the country has enjoyed a period of unexampled prosperity in trade.

Meanwhile Parliament has passed many useful domestic measures. By the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897, in particular, the workpeople in the most dangerous industries of the country have been assured against the worst results of the accidents inseparable from their daily labour, and by a further Act of the present year this great boon has been extended to those employed in agricultural labour. Other Acts have been passed to give increased safety to workmen in mines and on railways, to protect English labour against the unfair competition of foreign prison-made goods, and to give facilities to the poorer classes to purchase the houses in which they live.

These are only a few of the many measures of reform passed by the present Government. It would be difficult to name a Parliament in which so much has been done for the amelioration of the social conditions prevailing among the masses of our countrymen.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

I have had on many occasions to acknowledge your generous support. I have now to ask for a renewal of the confidence which you have unfailingly given me ever since I first became your Member more than eight years ago.

I am, gentlemen,

Your faithful servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, *Sept. 24th, 1900*

The Civil Lord of the Admiralty was once more returned unopposed, and the result of the election was generally to leave the situation unchanged. The Conservative strength fell from 341 to 334 and the Liberal Unionist from 70 to 68, while the Liberals had a net gain of nine seats. The voting strength of the Government in the House of Commons was thus to all intents and purposes unchanged, and the Ministry was entitled to claim that it had received a vote of confidence in its policy.

Satisfactory as this result was to Austen both on political and private grounds, it was to no inconsiderable extent offset by the attacks which were made against his father and himself, for it was freely alleged by the Opposition that they were making money out of the war. As early as September 21st the following item appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post* :

THE CHAMBERLAIN FAMILY AS ADMIRALTY CONTRACTORS.

Letter from Mr. Austen Chamberlain, M.P.

Mr. Austen Chamberlain, M.P., has addressed the following letter to Mr. Alfred Jones, of Leicester :

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. (Copy.)

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

Sept. 20th

SIR,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, with a copy of the *Morning Leader* of the 18th inst., and in reply to inform you that, as therein stated, I hold six hundred shares in Hoskins and Son (Limited). When the company was formed the firm was doing a small trade in certain ship's fittings with the Admiralty, and this has been continued by the company; but this is only an infinitesimal proportion of the company's business, and does not consist of warlike stores. It is absolutely untrue that it is, as alleged by the *Morning Leader*, any part of my duty as Civil Lord of the Admiralty to deal with such contracts. They never come before me, and I have never expressed any opinion upon them. The article in the *Morning Leader* is the latest, but doubtless not the last, attempt on the part of certain people, whose policy has discredited them in the eyes of their countrymen, to avenge themselves by a campaign of slander against their political opponents.

Yours faithfully,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

This answer did not even serve to allay criticism so far as this particular company was concerned, for the allegation was then made that there was something irregular about its formation. On this point Austen sought guidance from his brother :

Hoskins & Son, Ltd., Neptune Works, Trinity Street,
Birmingham
Dec. yth, 1900

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I received your letter at Cruckton, but of course could not do anything until my return.

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As regards the formation of this company, there were seven original shareholders, five being clerks in Pinsent's office, the other two being Hall and Hoskins. The clerks were taken, as often in the case of new companies, for convenience in signing documents, etc., and also because at that time it was uncertain who the shareholders would be. There certainly was no question of evading the clause about M.P.s, for I did not know of its existence, and Pinsent says he never thought of it, and he believes he was not aware that you intended to take any interest in the Co.

Pinsent says the clause was framed before limited companies existed, and that it applies to them, as no exemption was ever made.

You are quite right in saying that we have *never* supplied *any* racks whatever to the Admiralty. I wish we had ! . . .

Yours affectly.,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN.

This, however, is to anticipate. During the election every sort of insinuation of a personal nature was made against Austen and his father, and on more than one occasion when the former got up to speak he was greeted by his opponents with shouts of ^c Kynochs.⁵ To his constituents he opened his mind on the subject :

There was a certain section of the Party opposed to them who had sought to discredit their political opponents by personal charges of a base and malignant character. His whole life had been spent in their close neighbourhood. They knew the stock of which he came, and they knew whether it was likely that they or he would do a dishonourable action or misuse the confidence which their countrymen placed in them. It was a fact that nearly all his relations were occupied in the great industries of this district. It would have been a natural thing that he also should have been engaged in the same task, but he was able, and he

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preferred, to devote whatever ability he had to the service of his fellow-citizens in that division and to his fellow-countrymen, and he thought it was a poor return for the sacrifices which a public man was called upon to make under any conditions that he should be exposed to charges of that base, personal character.

It was apparently suggested that one of two alternatives was to be offered for their acceptance : either that all those with whom he was connected were to give up their occupations and their industry, or that he was to be debarred from giving such service as he could render to his country. The seat of a holder of office in the service of the Crown was at no time a bed of roses, and he appealed to them not to make it more difficult for good men to accept it, nor to make a public career too distasteful to men who ought to serve them, by listening to charges which reflected more discredit on those who brought them than on those against whom they were brought.

The honour of the public men of this country had for many years past stood above reproach. He urged them to guard it, for it was their most precious possession. There were other countries less happily situated, where charges of personal dishonour might perhaps be brought. They could not be brought against the statesmen of this country, to whatever Party they belonged, and it was only weakening the weapons which the people of this country had in their hands and destroying the influence of the nation by circulating these charges and to give credence to them. But after all, this was only a red herring which some of their opponents sought to draw across the track of the great issues before the country, and not a very savoury red herring either. He was content to leave his honour in their hands, and he knew they would justify him in the course he had taken.¹

There have been few men to whom attacks of this nature could be more distasteful than to Austen Chamberlain, who

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, September 27th, 1900.

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was the soul of honour throughout his life. Moreover, in his holdings in public companies concerned with Government contracts he had precedent on his side. Lord Spencer, while he was First Lord of the Admiralty under Mr. Gladstone and Lord Rosebery, held 2,300 shares in the London Trust Co., Ltd., which in its turn was interested in the Fairfield Shipbuilding Co. Sir Thomas Brassey, Civil Lord of the Admiralty from 1880 to 1884, held 687 shares in the Castle Mail Packets, and substantially increased his holding while he was in office. These are only two instances among the many which Austen's advisers put before him, and neither Lord Spencer nor Sir Thomas Brassey was made the object of hostile criticism.

When the new House of Commons met, the Opposition, chagrined at its failure to improve its position at the polls, determined to push home the personal attack on the Colonial Secretary and his son, and Mr. Lloyd George accordingly, on December 10th, moved the following amendment to the Address :

And we humbly beg to represent to Your Majesty that Ministers of the Crown and Members of either House of Parliament holding subordinate office in any public department ought to have no interest direct or indirect in any firm or company competing for contracts with the Crown, unless, the nature and extent of such interest being first, declared, Your Majesty shall have sanctioned the countenance thereof and when necessary shall have directed such precautions to be taken as may effectually prevent any suspicion of influence or favouritism in the allocation of such contracts.

Mr. Lloyd George moved his amendment in a manner consonant with its spirit, but when, after a few intervening speeches, the Colonial Secretary referred to the * dreary flow of petty-malignity,' it was clear that he had the House with him. Austen made a short statement after his father had

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sat down. Mr. Balfour poured scorn on the tactics of the Opposition, and the amendment was rejected by 269 votes to 127. In view of the fact that the Liberal strength was 186 and the Irish (of whom hardly any voted) 82, the result of the division was the more significant. Among those who voted with the minority were Messrs. Asquith, Reginald McKenna, and Charles Trevelyan.

Before this debate took place Austen Chamberlain had ceased to be Civil Lord of the Admiralty, for some changes had taken place in the Ministry and he had been promoted to the office of Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a post which is generally given to those who have made good and are regarded as certain of early elevation to Cabinet rank. His chief, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, had been Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1895, ^and 'Black Michael,'⁵ as he was generally called, had established a reputation at the Treasury as an autocrat which has rarely been equalled and never surpassed. There had been, too, some changes in the Cabinet itself. Mr. St. John Brodrick had become Secretary of State for War, and Mr. Walter Long had left the Board of Agriculture for the Local Government Board. Mr. Ritchie went to the Home Office in place of Sir Matthew Ridley, Lord Selborne became First Lord of the Admiralty in succession to Austen's old chief, Mr. Goschen, while one of the most brilliant of the younger men, Mr. George Wyndham, was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland at the age of thirty-seven, though without a seat in the Cabinet. The Prime Minister felt that he could no longer combine the Foreign Secretaryship with the other exalted office which he held, but it was not without some misgiving and no little astonishment that the country saw the vacant post given to the Marquess of Lansdowne, whose management of the War Office had certainly not been generally regarded as a successful piece of work; time, however, was soon to justify Lord Salisbury's choice.

CHAPTER III

TARIFF REFORM AND THE EXCHEQUER

THE reconstructed administration had as its primary task the winning of the war in South Africa, but that conflict was having repercussions elsewhere which were ominous of what the future held in store. One of these was the growing Anglophobia in Germany as evidenced by the attitude of the Press in that country. It has already been shown how fully Austen shared his father's hopes that it might be possible to bring about an Anglo-German alliance, but those hopes now began to fade. By the end of 1901 the Financial Secretary to the Treasury had come to hold very different views from those to which he had given expression two years before :

In a country with the Government of which our Government had been able to maintain perfectly friendly and correct relations throughout this war, whose people were allied to us in blood, and between whom and ourselves there was no reason why there should be other than cordial and good understanding—there had been within the last few weeks an outburst of Anglophobia and an outburst of scurrilous charges against our troops which no Englishman could read without pain, and which it would not be easy to forget or forgive.

The Opposition at home was divided on the subject of the war, but this did not prevent the use by one section of it of an intemperate language which did not a little to exacerbate Party feeling. In the middle of the year 1901 Lord Kitchener, who had succeeded Lord Roberts as Commander-in-Chief some six months before, erected, with a view to arresting the guerilla activities of the Boers, a long series of blockhouses along the railway lines and on the banks of

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the rivers. At the same time he removed the dependents of the enemy to concentration camps in Natal, and this policy became the object of the most violent criticism from the 'Pro-Boer' Party in the British Isles. On May 31st, for example, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, at a meeting in Edinburgh, denounced 'the most unworthy policy of enforcing unconditional surrender upon those who were to be their loyal and contented subjects in the new Colonies'; a fortnight later, in London, he taunted the Government with having lately described the war as 'not yet entirely terminated.' and added: 'A phrase often used is "war is war"; but when one came to ask about it one was told that no war was going on—that it was not a war. When was a war not a war? When it was carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.' It is hardly surprising that Austen should have said of this assertion that 'a more foul libel on his countrymen was never uttered by a responsible statesman.'

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury dealt with the Opposition campaign in a speech at the Liverpool Conservative Club in December:

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was very angry when they condemned his language, and asked whether the Government was so sacrosanct that no man was to criticize it. So preposterous a claim was never made. They only asked that in his criticism of the Government he should not forget that he owed a duty to his country as well as to his Party—that in his eagerness to advance his political opinions he should at least be careful not to inflict a stain on the banner of his country. . . .

When foreign opinion was excited against them, fed by lies so monstrous that it was difficult for them to conceive of their finding credibility with any reasoning being, was it too much to ask that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman should have guarded his language so that he might lend no colour by his words to those gross charges against the Army? . . .

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That was the opportunity which the leader of the Opposition took to denounce his countrymen and his country for employing * methods of barbarism ' in the war. . . ,¹

In his official capacity Austen did not attract the attention of the public, and this was proof that he was doing his work properly. The functions of a Financial Secretary to the Treasury, like those of a Civil Lord of the Admiralty, are to prove an efficient second to his chief, and, when necessary, to keep a debate going in the House of Commons while the Whips are collecting a sufficient number of the Government's supporters to ensure a majority in the division. Austen performed these tasks to perfection, and he was, too, better qualified for his new post than many who have held it. His experience as a bank director had provided him with an invaluable knowledge of finance, while he had, as is shown by the extracts from his letters quoted above, considerable aptitude for business, although, unlike his father and brother, he was never himself a business man in the strict sense of the term. Austen was, too, lucky in his immediate superiors, for both Mr. Goschen and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach were old Parliamentary hands and capable administrators from whom a young Minister could learn a good deal that would be of benefit to him in and out of the House of Commons.

Hardly had Austen taken up his appointment at the Treasury when the Queen died. She had long abandoned her old resentment against Mr. Chamberlain, and had rather come to look upon the Colonial Secretary as the statesman upon whom the mantle of Lord Beaconsfield had descended. With the new sovereign, King Edward VII, the relations of the Chamberlain family had always been friendly ever since those far-off days when, as Prince of Wales, he had been entertained by the Radical and Republican Mayor of Birmingham. One of the new monarch's

¹ *Liverpool Courier*, December nth, 1901.

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first acts was to send Mr. Chamberlain a souvenir of the late Queen, which the other acknowledged as 'a striking proof of the kind thoughtfulness and consideration which have ever marked Your Majesty's relations with all who have had the honour of approaching you.'⁵ Nevertheless, the bond between the two men was always political rather than social.

In the autumn of that year Austen paid another visit to the Near East, this time in company with Mr. (later Sir) George Duckworth, who was to become his private secretary in the following year. 'George,⁵ wrote Austen to his step-mother, 'is a first-rate travelling companion, always in good spirits, very keen, and liking at times, as you know I do, to take his pleasure silently. So we agree beautifully.'⁵ The two men went out to Constantinople by way of Budapest and Belgrade, which later Austen described as 'rather like a small provincial French town,'⁵ and Sofia. While at Constantinople he met the Khedive, Abbas IL

When I was introduced, he at once spoke of the pleasure he had had in seeing Father in London. . . . I sat next him at lunch, and he chatted pleasantly of the progress Egypt was making, of his desire to see the new dam and his liking for Aird, of the Sirdar and their entire and complete accord in all things, and his wish to show his regard for him by visiting the Soudan, next year at latest.

When I told him I was staying with the President of the Commission of the Debt, he said with many chuckles that in that case my friend must be a very busy man ! Then he talked of his receptions official and unofficial by the Sultan, and was evidently much pleased because he had been given the *pas* over the Grand Vizier this year for the first time. Sir N. O⁵C[onor] ¹ says he does not know why he should be so pleased. He would not be if he could hear how the Sultan talks of him. * I don't care what the Khedive says,⁵

¹ British Ambassador in Constantinople.

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says the Sultan to Sir N. 'It's what you say and what Ld. Cromer says. He is a boy, and a foolish boy too.'

The future Foreign Secretary carefully recorded the changes he noticed since his previous visit:

The great feature of the present reign here has been the transfer of power from the Porte to the Palace. The Sultan now directly controls all questions of principle. About details it is useless to talk to him, but he argues shrewdly and cunningly about principles.

A few days later Austen had an audience of Abdul Hamid, and it is best related in his own words :

The Sultan was in a small room in a kiosque behind that from which we witnessed the ceremony [i.e. the Selamlik], He received us [the British Ambassador and Austen] at the door of the room, shook hands, and through his interpreter welcomed me and said (what his interpreter had just told him) that he had had the pleasure of seeing my father. I (primed thereto by Sir Nicholas) paid him a little compliment apropos of Father's interview. He then sat down on one side of a small oval table, and motioned us to take chairs on the other side. The rest of the conversation was wholly between him and me, except when Sir N. interposed : '*Sa Majesty sait combien nous avons apprecie sa sympathie au commencement de la guerre.*'

The conversation was wholly of Father and the war, as thus :

Interpreter.—H.I.M. says that he has followed with great interest what has been and is passing in South Africa. *Sa Majesti trouve que votre pfoe a bien conduit les affaires . . .*

A. C. expresses his appreciation, and will have the

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honour to convey this to his father, who will much appreciate it.

Interpreter.—H.I.M. says that your father must have worked very hard lately.

A. C. admits that this is indeed the case.

H.I.M. says that your father has added to the glory of his country, and that when you would add to the glory of your country you must indeed work hard.

A. C. acknowledges H.M.'s graciousness by a bow, which H.M. returns.

H.M. talks of the war itself, and enquires how much longer it will last.

A. C. replies that it is difficult to say, but it is not really war now. It is an affair of police or gendarmerie rather than war.

H.M. assents and says it is brigandage. It reminds him of what happened in Montenegro, where after much trouble and fighting all is now quiet.

A. C. (forgetful for the moment of history and making a bad blunder) says the comparison is just, and we hope soon to have the same perfect success as crowned His Majesty's arms.

The interpreter hesitates for a moment, and then saves the situation by making it appear that I alluded to his victories over the Greeks.

H.M. gives a little bow, and says he thinks it cannot last more than six months longer.

A. C. assents, and says the difficulty is to catch such small bands of marauders in a country as big as all France and Germany put together.

H.M. says the proper course is, after seizing the strategic points, to send out flying columns.

A. C. replies that H.M. has perfectly reason. That is now being done.

H.M. thinks 40,000 men will be necessary to hold the country for *plusieurs annies*. A. C. thinks for *quelques annies seulement*, and gives reasons of which our dragoman says the interpreter gave a rather imperfect account.

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H.M. says in flowery language that with so wise and courageous a Minister all will go well, and A. C. bows again. H.M. begs the Ambassador to express, etc., to the King, rises and shakes hands again, and then takes two or three steps to the door as we retire, stopping us to ask if I have seen everything and inviting me to visit his stables.

Altogether we were with him about a quarter of an hour or a little more. I was interested to see him so near. He talked easily, but with little pauses between each sentence. His expression was pleasant, especially when he smiled, which he did often, and there was little or no trace in it of that haunting fear which is one of the great mainsprings of all he does. Sir N. says he has great control of his features, and will chat and laugh at times as if he had not a care in the world. But his eyes flash when he is angry, and he fidgets and wriggles like a shy schoolgirl when the subject of the interview is unpleasant.

His favourite reading is stories of crime. He told Sir N. they were the only thing that sent him to sleep at nights.

From Constantinople the Financial Secretary and his companion went for a short tour in Asiatic Turkey. After visiting Broussa they proceeded to Nicaea, and had what was a unique experience for a British Minister :

We arrested a murderer, triced him up, and marched him into Nicaea with his arms tied behind him and a slip noose round his neck. It appeared he had been 'wanted' for a year and a half for a murder and various robberies at Broussa. All this time he had lived at a little village on the lake of Iznek, and by bad luck for him was passing down its street just as we went through. Our chief Zaptieh recognized him, had seized him in a moment, stripped off his belt to search him for arms, and tied his arms behind him with it before you could—well, say Jack Robinson.

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After returning to Constantinople the two travellers went down the coast to Smyrna, then across to Athens, and, after a week in the Peloponnese, back to England by Brindisi.

Austen was not destined long to remain Financial Secretary to the Treasury, for the political scene was changing rapidly in the early years of the century, and he was necessarily involved. On May 31st, 1902, the long struggle in South Africa came to an end with the complete surrender of the Boers, and on July 10th Lord Salisbury resigned. It had long been known that he intended to take this course as soon as victory was won, and the announcement that his resignation was an accomplished fact in consequence roused no surprise, but it was widely felt as another break with a past near in point of time, but which was rapidly receding into the remote distance. Rarely has the turn of a century so definitely marked the beginning of a new era. The protracted campaign in South Africa, due to the unexpected powers of resistance displayed by the Boers, had shaken the national complacency to its foundations, while the death of the Queen, the only British monarch whom the vast majority of her subjects had ever known, seemed almost a breach in the continuity of history. In the East, Near and Far alike, the clouds were gathering, while the naval ambitions of Germany were every day becoming more obvious. The spirit of the Diamond Jubilee, only five short years before, could no longer be recaptured even in imagination ; security and commercial supremacy were clearly soon to be menaced as never before in living memory. As if the fates had decided to emphasize the changes that were taking place, the old national leaders were rapidly leaving the stage. Mr. Gladstone had died three years before the sovereign whom he had served so long, though not to her satisfaction, and now Lord Salisbury had resigned. The new problems were to be faced by new men.

The new Prime Minister was Mr. Balfour, the nephew of the old. He is one of the most difficult characters in contemporary history to assess. A man of great charm, a

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philosopher, and a scholar, he has undoubtedly added to the lustre of the office of British Prime Minister by having held it. As Chief Secretary for Ireland he was beyond question an outstanding success, for he combined firmness and tact in just the proportions which the circumstances required. Yet as Prime Minister he shares with Lord Bolingbroke the dubious distinction of having led his Party to one of the two greatest disasters it has known, and under his leadership it lost three General Elections in succession. When he laid down the office of leader in 1911 it was generally assumed that his political career was over, but during the war, and afterwards, Mr. Balfour held high office, not without great benefit to his country. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that he was an admirable second-in-command but a bad leader. He was constitutionally incapable of looking at any question as the ordinary man in the street looked at it, and he could not understand the other's point of view. He was incapable of working up crowd emotion in his favour. He could only state the issues as he saw them, not as they might appeal to the average man, which is the secret of successful propaganda. In this lay one of the principal causes of his failure as a leader.

It is given to few men to rouse such different feelings as those expressed in the nicknames 'Prince Arthur' and 'Bloody Balfour,' yet the fact is illustrative of the paradoxical nature of Mr. Balfour. No man was so far-sighted, but on more than one occasion he proved unable to see what was close at hand. At the same time it must be admitted that as leader of the Conservative Party he had difficulties to face which might well have proved too much for one who possessed greater talents in that particular direction. The division of opinion among the ranks of his followers on the subject of Tariff Reform more than once threatened to disrupt the Conservative Party altogether, and he felt it his duty to prevent this at all costs. The not unnatural consequence was that he came to be distrusted both by the Protectionists and the Free Traders. That he did prevent a split on the tariff issue must now be conceded, but in

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doing so he was very often the despair of his collaborators, and not least of Austen Chamberlain. In the House of Commons his qualities showed to greater advantage than in the country, for he was brilliant in debate, whereas on the platform he too often gave the impression of not having made up his own mind.

After Lord Balfour was dead Austen wrote of him : ' Things which seemed important to him often appeared of little consequence to his followers, and to his opponents (at for instance in the tariff controversy) a mere splitting of hairs, a quibble unworthy of the ingenuity with which he sustained it and of the serious issues at stake. He was not content to make a broad statement of his views without at the same time giving expression to all the qualifications which to his mind he required.' Perhaps there was in his character too much of those ' damned Scotch metaphysics ' to which George III had so strong an objection. Above all, he was never a man's man, and his biographer tells us that he was continually surrounded by a chorus of admiring nieces, ' as always observant of his conversational mood.' Adulation of this nature is dangerous for one in public life.

Such was the new Prime Minister in whose administration Austen was appointed Postmaster-General with a seat in the Cabinet, while on August nth he was sworn a member of the Privy Council. Most of his colleagues had sat in Lord Salisbury's Cabinet, for Mr. Balfour had made the smallest possible number of changes in the personnel of the administration which he took over from his uncle. As Austen's brother was to discover thirty-five years later, it is sometimes more difficult to inherit a Cabinet than to construct one afresh, and it was possibly with the memory of 1902 in his mind that Austen pointed out to Mr. Neville Chamberlain, when the other was about to succeed Mr. Baldwin, that he was in reality under no sort of obligation to the existing Ministers. In spite of Mr. Balfour's desire there was one change of importance, and that was the replacement of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach by Mr. Ritchie at the Exchequer, ' Black Michael' resisted every effort to

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persuade him to stay, and both on personal and political grounds his resignation was a definite blow to the Government. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer carried great weight in the country, and was possessed of considerable industrial experience, but he was a dogmatic Free Trader, and he and the Prime Minister never wholly understood one another. Lord Cadogan retired from the Vice-Royalty of Ireland, and his successor, Lord Dudley, was not a Cabinet Minister. This made room for Mr. George Wyndham, who already held the Irish Chief Secretaryship, but without membership of the Cabinet. Neither of these appointments was destined to make the Prime Minister's task any easier.

As will be seen, Austen was not long at the Post Office, but he made his mark during the brief period that he was there. His two immediate predecessors had both been peers, and there was general satisfaction that a business department once again had its chief in the House of Commons. The main problem that confronted the new Minister was that of the grievances of the Post Office employees and the position of the Postmen's Federation. The latter expected him to take action at once, but he gave no indication at first of his own views, preferring to wade through an apparently endless amount of personal and other grievances and to document himself in matters of detail. Never was his capacity for hard work more abundantly displayed. This delay roused the ire of those who had formed the most sanguine expectations, and Austen soon found himself described as 'a gradgrind of the worst possible description,' while he was freely stigmatized as a mere tool in the hands of Sir George Murray, the Secretary to the Post Office. From the beginning he was far more sympathetic than his critics were always prepared to allow. 'The staff,' he wrote in December, 1902, 'are aware that towards all organizations in the nature of trades unions my attitude is one of absolute impartiality. The men have full liberty to combine in any way they please.' A few weeks later he gave further expression to his views on the public platform :

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He was the head, wholly or in part, of something like 170,000 people. So vast a staff may well have some grievances, which it should be his study to redress when they were brought to his notice. For his part he did not profess that he could always see eye to eye with the representatives from the staff who came to put their case before him ; but when he differed from them he thought it best to tell them so straight and frankly, and not to raise hopes which he knew he could not fulfil. But this he would say—so long as he held the office he would make it his endeavour personally to investigate all the memorials they sent to him in a proper way, calling attention to what they considered were infringements of their rights, and he would give his best consideration to every one of those cases.

There was a tendency in some quarters among the staff—which he deeply deplored, and which was certainly not calculated to serve the best interests of the service as a whole—there was a tendency in some quarters to turn to outside influence of one kind or another, and, if possible, to approach the Postmaster-General through somebody else instead of coming to him direct. He did not wish it to be supposed that with so large a body of public servants it was possible for the Postmaster-General to receive personally everyone who thought that he had something that he ought to be allowed to speak about. He did not pretend that any Minister, in the time he had at his disposal, could undertake to do that. But when members of the staff wished to see him upon subjects upon which he thought there was good reason for the interchange of views, he was glad to see them ; and they did not suffer by their coming to him in person, direct, or by addressing memorials in writing to him. He ventured to think it was very much better for them, very much better for the service at large, very much more conducive to the public interest, and better, too, for the Postmaster-General if he was striving to do his best for the service over which he presided, if direct communications should pass between him and his staff, rather than that the

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staff should seek to have their case put forward by third parties, in Parliament or out of it. . . .

His mind was very full of these matters at the present time. It was a huge organization for which he was responsible. It was not easy to grasp at once all the details of its working ; it required time to get to the bottom of the many intricate problems that were brought to them, and when, as was unfortunately the case last year, the time which they ought to have for quiet work in their offices in the autumn was broken into by an autumn session of Parliament, the strain became very great, and it was increasingly difficult for a new Minister to make himself master, as he ought to be, of the work of the department over which he was called upon to preside. . . .¹

This statement by no means appeased those ' quarters ' to which the speaker referred during the course of it, and the Postmaster-General was told that his critics would⁶ be driven to measures more aggressive, though of quite a constitutional and legitimate character.^{5 2} This left Austen unmoved ; he was determined to have all the necessary information before he took any action, and if any section of the postal workers wished in the interval to abuse him they were at liberty to do so to their hearts' content. In any event the time and place to announce policy was during the debate on the Post Office Estimates in the House of Commons.

This took place on April 30th, and it was at once clear that he was far more sympathetic towards the workers' claim, as the result of a careful examination of their grievances, than their representatives had supposed. He promised a committee of five business men to enquire into the question of wages, and on May 8th he told a deputation of the Post Office employees :

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, February 5th, 1903.

² *Postman's Gazette*, April 4th, 1903.

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Your Union is recognized. You are under absolutely no disadvantage in any way in regard to the officers of the department by reason of your belonging to a union, and the fact that you are here to-day, and that you asked to be allowed to come here as the representatives of the Union, shows that beyond all doubt your Union is recognized by the Postmaster-General.

Shortly afterwards he once more reassured the Postmen's Federation as to its status by receiving a communication on the grievances of its members through its Parliamentary Secretary, and by answering this direct.

In consequence, there was a rapid change of attitude on the part of those who had been so outspoken in their criticisms of the Postmaster-General, and when Austen became Chancellor of the Exchequer in the autumn of 1903 the *Postman's Gazette* was loud in his praise :

He has proved beyond question that he had a mind of his own, and that he did not enter into the error of his predecessors in allowing the permanent officials to lead him by the nose. He has, on many occasions recently, proved his desire to be just, and also his willingness to give a personal hearing to his subordinates, however humble ; and the unfailing courtesy with which he listened to representations from deputations entitles him to the warmest gratitude of all Post Office employees, and especially of postmen. He has great opportunities before him. We believe he has been impressed by the fact that the postman is underpaid. We believe he recognizes that, above all branches of the service, the postmen deserve consideration ; and, should his Wages Committee report in favour of an increase of pay, we may confidently anticipate that the Treasury, of which he is now the head, will place no obstacle in the way of justice being done to a long-suffering class.

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Austen's tenure of the office of Postmaster-General was brief, and formed a relatively unimportant incident in his career, but it has here been related in some detail because of the light it throws upon his public life. His determination to make himself master of all the relevant facts, his refusal to be dominated by permanent officials within or frightened by popular clamour without, and his ready sympathy with all genuine grievances—these characteristics he retained to the end of his life, and they are reflected in his work at the Post Office.

The autumn session of 1902, which the Postmaster-General so much deplored as interfering with his quiet work in his office, was due to the introduction of a highly contentious Education Bill. Into all the details of that measure it is fortunately unnecessary to enter, though for some years the Bill was the occasion of the most violent controversy. The principle it laid down was that of rate aid for Church and other voluntary schools. In those days the antagonism between the Church of England and the Nonconformist bodies was infinitely greater than it has—fortunately—since become, and the memory of the fierce disputes over educational matters in the previous generation was sufficiently vivid to add fresh fuel to the flames kindled by the new Bill. Mr. Chamberlain, whose early career had been one long protest against everything for which the measure stood, took a great deal of converting to its proposals. He did not like them on principle, and he foresaw that the cry of 'The Church on the Rates' would prove an extremely effective weapon in the hands of the Opposition. After considerable searchings of heart the Colonial Secretary agreed to support the Bill, but he remained gloomy as to its effect upon the electorate. He certainly did not underestimate the interest it would arouse or the hostility it would evoke. Mr. Balfour's first important platform speech as Prime Minister, in Manchester, was on this topic alone, and a crowded audience listened to him with the closest attention for an hour and a half, while by the end of 1903, a year after the Bill had become law, more than 7,000 summonses had

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been issued against persons who 'passively resisted' payment of the Education Rate in England, and distraint sales of their goods had taken place in over three hundred cases. In 1904 these figures were trebled.

Austen Chamberlain followed his father in support of the Bill :

What, then, were the objects they set before them? They sought to create, as far as might be with their very complicated system of local government, one authority which should cover the whole field of education, which should be able to watch a child from the time it entered a primary school upwards through the higher learning, and see that those who were fitted to take advantage of it by scholarship and other means were enabled to benefit by all that school, or college, or university could give. Those were objects on which every reasonable man might well be agreed, and he thought if they would only look at the question a little more from the point of view of the children, and a little less from the point of view of those unfortunate religious differences which they could not overcome, but which they might at least check, there would be a good deal more agreement upon that which concerned the education of the children. He was a Nonconformist himself, and could quite understand the fears which many of them honestly held, and he sympathised with a good many of the hopes which they set before them, but he confessed that he could not understand the attitude of those who would sooner that the larger number of children went uneducated than that a penny of public money should find its way to a voluntary school. . . .

The schools remained free and open without a test of any kind, and to say that the Bill closed schools hitherto open to Nonconformist teachers was . . . a grotesque absurdity. With regard to the denominational schools, if denominational teaching was to be given in those schools surely they would agree with him that it was only reasonable that that

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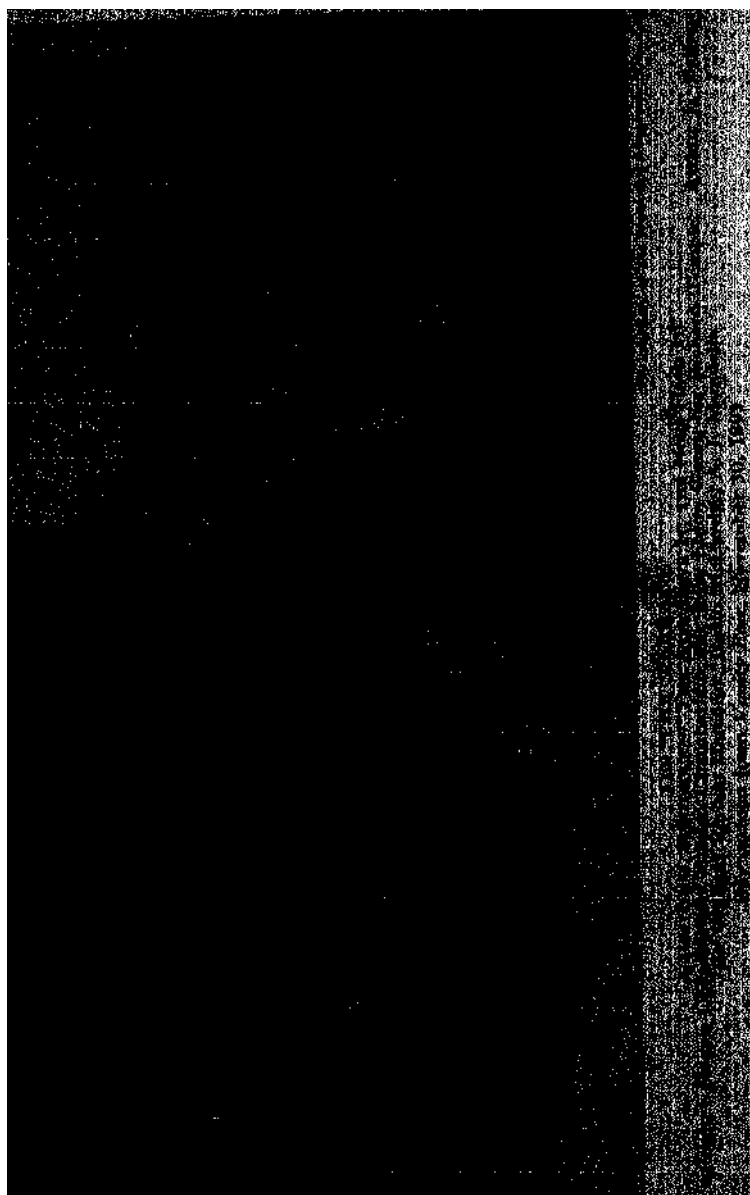
dogmatic teaching should be given by men who believed in the dogmas which they were called upon to teach. They must preserve to the managers of the denominational schools the power to find teachers of their own faith to give the religious instruction for which they maintained the schools. . . .

It was said in some quarters that this Bill handed over the schools to clerical control. If the schools had been under clerical control in the past, it was partly because the clergy were the people with most leisure and threw themselves most heartily into the work, and partly because by popular election they had been chosen to take part in the work of the school boards. . . . He believed that in the great mass of schools the religious difficulty was scarcely felt. It was felt as a great grievance by Nonconformists in many cases where they were nearly as numerous as the Churchmen that they had no voice in the management of the schools. He thought that such representation as the Bill gave would go far to check those extremes and excesses which had been responsible for much of the bad feeling that had been conjured up, to promote a more charitable and friendly intimate understanding between the different religious bodies into which the country was divided as regarded what should be the ordinary teaching of the children in the elementary schools.¹

A month later he replied again to the critics of the Bill:

In return for the use, not merely for education, but for other purposes, in return for the use of the buildings of voluntary schools, the public takes over at once the cost and the control of the whole of the secular education. The local authority is, by the terms of the Bill, to be responsible for, and have control over, not only all the money which

¹ *Redditch Indicator* November 8th, 1902.



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they thus provide, but all the money which is provided out of national resources. The managers of the school, in all matters of school instruction, are to take their directions from that local authority, and if they persistently and wilfully fail to carry out their instruction the local authority may step in and do what they have ordered to be done. Is not that sufficiently complete control over all the public elementary secular instruction to satisfy even the most exacting judge ? ¹

The latter part of the year 1902, however, did not find Austen wholly occupied with administering the Post Office and defending the Education Bill. The Coronation had, owing to the King's illness, been postponed until August, and when this was over it was deemed advisable that he should take a cruise. The Postmaster-General went as Minister in attendance, and the other members of the party were the Queen, Princess Victoria, and the Marquis de Soveral. They sailed from Cowes on August 22nd, and put in at Weymouth, Milford Haven, the Isle of Man, Arran, Colonsay, Ballachulish, Torloisk, Stornoway, and Dunrobin before arriving at Invergordon on September 8th. The weather left little to be desired, and the cruise was thoroughly enjoyed by all the party, while for Austen it was particularly valuable in that it brought him into touch with his new sovereign in the most agreeable of circumstances.

A few extracts from Austen's letters well illustrate the life of the party :

The yacht is very comfortable. I have a nice roomy cabin, appertaining of right, as I learn from the key labels, to the ' 3rd lady.' We breakfast at 9.30, lunch at 1.30 or 2, ' high tea ' at 5 with a little lobster (!), prawns, jams, etc., and dine at 9.45.

¹ *Ulverston Advertiser*, December nth, 1902.

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I sit usually next Princess Victoria, occasionally next the Queen, who sits on the King's left—our places being only varied when guests are invited, and not always then. After dinner, if we are alone, the Queen usually retires to her drawing-room; the King smokes on deck or retires to his sitting-room, and the rest of us sit about and smoke till midnight, and then turn in.

There was a complete absence of unnecessary formality. At Pembroke, for instance, Austen describes their reception during a drive while the *Victoria and Albert* was coaling :

The people had gathered everywhere at the cross-roads, and the King and Queen in their hired landau (driven by the principal butcher of Pembroke Dock) were everywhere most warmly welcomed. No police about, and at one point as many as six little boys clinging on to the back of the carriage, encouraged by the Queen.

A few days later he wrote :

After dinner we had a 'sing-song'⁵ by the men. . . . The Commander looked very anxious, and the rest of us roared with laughter. You can imagine what it was like ! It was a novel form of State Concert, and would have astonished Buckingham Palace.

And again :

Nothing could be simpler or less formal than life on board or our parties ashore. The King and Queen are both in excellent health and spirits, thoroughly enjoying

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themselves, I think, and making the trip as pleasant as possible for other people. In short, it is a very pleasant, very jolly party on a particularly fine and comfortable yacht.

Politics seemed very far away, but occasionally they obtruded themselves :

The King says I must tell Father that as I was sitting in a car some way behind the King's at Ramsey a man kept calling out ' God save the King and down with the Education Bill !' I got a small and embarrassing ovation of my own, however, in Douglas, shouts of ' good old Brum ' and ' good old Joe ' and ' Hullo, Austen ' betraying the origin of some of the trippers. Yesterday as I drove on the box of the King's carriage a small boy, aged I should think about fourteen, saluted us with ' Three cheers for Mr. Chamberlain, and God save the King and Queen,' to their great amusement.

Everywhere Austen revelled in the scenery, which was always a source of delight in itself to him.

The Postmaster-General needed such happy memories to fortify him during the critical year which lay ahead, when the Government was split from top to bottom on the question of Tariff Reform. His father had for some time gradually been coming round to the view that a change in the British fiscal system was essential, and Protection was latent in his attitude during the Colonial Conference in 1897. The South African War, however, necessarily caused a postponement of all such projects. That, however, Mr. Chamberlain still harboured them should have been plain to all when in a speech in May, 1902, while Lord Salisbury was still Prime Minister, he uttered a challenge to the ' out-worn shibboleths ' which had governed British economic policy

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for two generations. Thereafter the crisis developed slowly, but it must be related in some detail because of the effect it was to have upon Austen's career for many a long year.

There were three considerations which affected the situation in the autumn of 1902.¹ The first was the resolution of the Prime Ministers of the Colonies at the Colonial Conference in the previous July which urged 'on His Majesty's Government the expediency of granting in the United Kingdom preferential treatment for the products and manufactures of the Colonies, either by exemption from, or reduction of, duties now or hereafter imposed.' The second was the shilling tax upon corn, which had been imposed for revenue purposes during the South African War, and of which the future had now to be settled. The third consideration was that Mr. Chamberlain was going to South Africa at the end of November, and would not be back in England until the following March; naturally he required that a decision should be taken on these points before his departure. However, at a meeting of the Cabinet on November 19th it was resolved that the tax on corn should be retained, but that a preferential remission of it should be made in favour of the British Empire. Mr. Chamberlain thus left for South Africa in the justifiable belief that his colleagues were in fundamental agreement with his views.

During the winter, however, Mr. Ritchie seems to have become increasingly wedded to the principles of Free Trade, and by March, 1903, he was not only opposing the use of the corn duty for preferential purposes, but he was determined to repeal the duty itself. When the Prime Minister discovered the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer he was seriously alarmed, and refused to have a Budget Cabinet until Mr. Chamberlain could be present if the question of the corn tax was to be raised. * The Colonial Secretary,' writes Mrs. Dugdale,² 'was due back

¹ Cf. Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, vol. I, pp. 338 *et seq.*

² *Op. cit.*

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in England on March 14th. Balfour met Mr. Austen Chamberlain at a levee shortly after the conversation with Mr. Ritchie, drew him aside, and asked him whether it would be possible to communicate with his father, who was already on the high seas. Balfour desired that he should be prepared for the situation which must be met immediately after his return. Mr. Austen Chamberlain accordingly wrote a letter which caught the Colonial Secretary at Madeira, and gave him the first intimation that there was a movement among his colleagues to reverse the policy which he and Balfour had believed to have been settled in the autumn.¹ The first blow at the Government thus came from the Free Trade, not from the Protectionist, section in the Cabinet.

The day after Mr. Chamberlain's return there was a meeting of the Cabinet, and the Prime Minister succeeded in preserving temporary unity, though at the expense of allowing Mr. Ritchie to repeal the duty on corn in his Budget. It was decided to devote the summer to an investigation of the question of Imperial Preference. Unfortunately, this was one of the typically English compromises which did not work. Feeling had been roused, and one speech after another widened the breach between the Free Traders and the Tariff Reformers. In introducing his Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the abolition of the corn duty in such a way as to give the impression, to quote the Prime Minister, 'that he was resolved to make it as difficult as possible for anyone else ever to resort to a tax on corn again.' Mr. Chamberlain was not the man to lie down under this, and at Birmingham three weeks later he demanded a new definition of Free Trade, which should no longer deprive Great Britain of power to favour her friends or retaliate against her rivals. The Colonial Secretary followed up this statement in the House of Commons by saying, in a debate on old age pensions, that he could not see how funds could be forthcoming for this item of his old

¹ Mr. Garvin tells me that he is dealing fully with this episode in the fourth volume of his *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*.—C. P.

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programme except through a change in the fiscal system. A second speech, just before the House adjourned for Whitsuntide, strongly recommended preferential tariffs.

All through the summer the cleavage in the ranks of the Government's supporters grew more pronounced, while a delighted Opposition gleefully watched their enemies going through the same experience which they themselves had known seventeen years before when Mr. Gladstone had declared in favour of Home Rule. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, whose opinion carried more weight than that of many a Cabinet Minister, came out against Mr. Chamberlain, who, he said, was dividing his own Party and uniting the Liberals. This gave the signal for the formation of the Free Food League, which at its inception included no less than fifty-four Conservative and Unionist M.P.s, including such young stalwarts as Lord Hugh Cecil, Major Seely, and Mr. Winston Churchill. On the other side the Tariff Reform League, largely owing to the efforts of Mr. Amery, was already in existence by the middle of June. Meanwhile dissension was spreading from Westminster to the constituencies. No one knew what was the official policy of the Government, and the rival organizations were canvassing for recruits among the members of the local associations. When the House rose it had been decided that the final decision should be taken by the Cabinet on September 14th, and until then there was to be a truce between the rival factions in the matter of propaganda. This was honoured rather in the breach than in the observance, and from the point of view of the Government the situation steadily deteriorated throughout the holiday months.

By the time that the Cabinet met in the middle of September the Prime Minister had made up his mind to get rid of those who held strong views on the tariff question, whatever those views might be ; he was determined to preserve unity if at all possible, even at the cost of losing some of his most valued colleagues. Accordingly Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Ritchie, Lord George Hamilton (Secretary of

State for India), Lord Balfour of Burleigh (Secretary for Scotland), and, after a brief delay, the Duke of Devonshire (Lord President of the Council) all resigned ; a course which was also taken by Austen's successor as Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Mr. Balfour, to quote Sir Sidney Lee's delightful phrase, ^c 'was left with an indeterminate central body who for the moment followed his ambiguous lead of striving to steer between Chamberlain's Scylla and Ritchie's Charybdis.' ¹

Although it cannot be said that Austen played any considerable part in these events, yet the next ten years of his life were to be passed in the shadow of them. It is only recently that the full truth has become known, save to a small circle, and for nearly a generation it was commonly believed that Mr. Chamberlain, on his return from South Africa, had exploded his Protectionist bombshell beneath an unsuspecting Cabinet. The out-and-out Tariff Reformers, the 'whole-hoggers,' as they soon came to be termed, did not mind this in the least—for them the end justified the means—but the more moderate section (the 'little-piggers') did not like it, while the Free Traders resented it most strongly. During the long years from 1906 to 1914, when it seemed impossible for the Unionists to get back to power, it appeared to many that Tariff Reform was the millstone round their necks, and many a disheartened local leader was heard to declare that Mr. Chamberlain had wrecked two Parties. It was such feelings as these that, by means of procedure like the referendum, prompted those various attempts to water down his father's proposals which caused Austen almost to despair, and that in the years immediately before the Great War caused the larger section of the Party to take up so enthusiastically the anti-Home Rule agitation as a policy more likely to be a winning one than Tariff Reform.

The first result, however, of the political crisis so far as Austen was concerned was promotion. The natural

¹ *King Edward VII*, vol. II, p. 176.

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course would have been for him to have resigned with his father, but this was what the Prime Minister wished to avoid at all cost. Mr. Balfour had a long talk with Mr. Chamberlain, told him that he proposed to recommend Austen for the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, and asked him to use his influence with the other to accept the appointment. Mr. Chamberlain agreed ; and an important step had been taken when Austen bowed to his father's wishes. It was only, it may be added, with the greatest reluctance that Austen consented to remain in the Cabinet, in spite of the great distinction of becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer at forty, for he entirely shared Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal opinions, and he disliked the idea of even the appearance of a divergence in view. What persuaded him was the fact that by remaining in the Cabinet he could act as a link between the Prime Minister and his father, though it proved to be a link on which there was to be a good deal of strain. Mr. Chamberlain's own view was well expressed in a letter to Mr. Walter Long : ' I am very glad that Austen has his chance. I believe he will be worthy of it. Meanwhile even my opponents cannot represent me as hostile to a Government in which he is a prominent man. You will not, therefore, find me denouncing " my right hon. friend " from the benches below the gangway.'

There was a re-shuffle of the Cabinet, which took the following form :

Prime Minister	.	.	Mr. A. J. Balfour.
Lord High Chancellor	.	.	Earl of Halsbury.
Lord Chancellor of Ireland			Lord Ashbourne.
Lord President of the Council, and Education.			Marquess of Londonderry.
Lord Privy Seal	.	.	Marquess of Salisbury.
Chancellor of the Exchequer.			Mr. Austen Chamberlain.
Home Secretary	.	.	Mr. Akers-Douglas.
Foreign Secretary	.	.	Marquess of Lansdowne.
Colonial Secretary	.	.	Mr. Alfred Lyttelton.

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War Office	Mr. Arnold-Forster.
India Office	Mr. St. J. Brodrick.
First Lord of the Admiralty	Earl of Selborne.
Chief Secretary for Ireland	Mr. George Wyndham.
Secretary for Scotland . .	Mr. Graham Murray.
Board of Trade	Mr. Gerald Balfour.
Local Government Board	Mr. Walter Long.
Agriculture and Fisheries	Earl of Onslow.
Postmaster-General . . .	Lord Stanley.

In fiscal matters the policy of the Cabinet was based on a pamphlet written by the Prime Minister with the title of *Some Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade*. The tone was academic, and the argument sought to prove that the increase of foreign tariffs and the growth of trusts, combined with the fact that England was the only country which had adopted Free Trade, rendered it essential to the maintenance of England's foreign trade to resort to retaliation, which could alone reduce hostile tariffs abroad. On October 1st the Prime Minister developed this theme in a speech at Sheffield, and the programme thus outlined became the official policy of the Party. It was not, however, designed to be put into immediate execution.

Austen wisely remained silent in public while the crisis was in existence, but on October 13th he addressed his constituents on what had been taking place, and some extracts from his speech on that occasion well reflect his feelings, for he was never the man to say on a public platform what he did not really think. He began by dealing with his own position :

You will understand me when I say that if I had consulted only my private feelings or my personal convenience, I should have appeared before you to-night in a different capacity, in a position of greater freedom and of less responsibility. But after taking counsel with my colleagues, and with those upon whose advice and assistance I have

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been most accustomed to rely on all my public life, I have come to the conclusion that I could best serve the interests of the Unionist Party, with which I have been associated through so many years, best promote a cause which you and I have sustained in common, by giving what assistance it was in my power to give to the Prime Minister in carrying out the policy which he has proclaimed.

Austen went on to say that as Mr. Balfour was prepared to go a certain distance along the road on which he was himself travelling, he saw no reason why they should part company so early in their journey.

I believe that the programme put forward by the Prime Minister is in itself a necessary programme for the safety of our country and the prosperity of our trade. . . . I approach this question as one who was brought up a Free Trader, who had the instincts and prejudices of the Free Trader. I believed and I believe now that when Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, and Sir Robert Peel persuaded this country to adopt Free Trade they took a step which was wise and right, and in its main features necessary to the development and prosperity of the country at that time. For a time after it was adopted their most sanguine hopes seemed to be realized, and our commercial prosperity advanced by leaps and bounds.

But sixty years have passed since then, and in those sixty years much has altered. New nations have come into existence, and old nations have risen from small beginnings to be great and powerful peoples forming empires of a vast extent of which the earlier history of the world had no record. Not one of those nations has followed our example ; not one of them has moved towards Mr. Cobden's ideal. Everything is changed about us—the conditions of industry, of foreign trade, the circumstances under which our commerce is conducted, all have been altered.

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Is there a man among you who can afford to-day to carry on his private business in the manner and by the methods which sufficed amply in the time of his grandfather ? And whilst every manufacturer and every workman knows that he has had to adapt himself to those new and changed conditions, why is our fiscal system alone to be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be amended, never to be questioned, never to be altered or adapted to the times in which we live ? Is it not time after all these years that we should take a serious review of our position, that we should take stock of the conditions under which we stand, that we should see how far our hopes have been realized, or prophecies fulfilled, that we should mark the weak places and seek to adapt ourselves to the environment in which we live ? ¹

Familiar as these arguments have since become they were new then, and during the autumn of 1903 they were employed by Austen Chamberlain with effect in different parts of the country. Having made up his mind to accept, at any rate as an instalment, the Sheffield Programme, he was determined to give the Prime Minister all the support he could, and he was accordingly to be found speaking in Aberdeen, Cambridge, and Halifax as well as in his own constituency.

Fate willed that Austen Chamberlain should be responsible for two Budgets during his first tenure of office as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The circumstances in which he was appointed precluded him from applying those principles of Tariff Reform and Imperial Preference in which both he and his father had come so fervently to believe, and he had to do the best he could with the existing fiscal system. On the other hand, by taking office at the end of the holiday season he had plenty of time to consider the policy which he would adopt before the financial year

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 13 th, 1903

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came to an end, and the Budget of 1904 was thus definitely his and not that of his predecessor. He also possessed the additional advantage that the work at the Treasury was not new to him, as he had become familiar with it when he was Financial Secretary.

The twelve months which came to an end at the beginning of April, 1904, had not been prosperous ones ; the year had been bad for agriculture, and there was general depression in many of the industrial areas. Indeed, it had been widely anticipated that the year would close with a deficit of four millions, and there was considerable relief when the figure was found to be no more than £2,724,000. This deficit was not, it may be added, wholly due to the prevailing economic conditions, for it was caused to no inconsiderable extent by Mr. Ritchie's action the previous year in removing the duty on corn. For the year 1904-5 there would be a deficit, the Chancellor found when the estimates were complete, of £3,820,000, and the problem was how to meet this, the remedy of Protection being barred, in a Budget of some 143 millions. As Austen told the House of Commons when he introduced his Budget on April 19th, the easiest way out of the difficulty would be to suspend the Sinking Fund, but he refused to take this course ; the Sinking Fund had only just been revived after the South African War, and should the country become involved in hostilities again it would form the first reserve. Months before, when he first took office, the Chancellor had written to Sir Robert Giffen :

I am anxious to have the benefit of your advice upon a subject which seems to me of great importance in any review of our financial position—namely, the share of national burdens which is now borne by different classes of the community. I have not so far been able to form any satisfactory estimate upon the subject, and I know none to whom I could apply who is as likely as yourself to be able to help me in such a matter. . . .

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Since then the Chancellor had, with his customary thoroughness, been investigating this problem, and the result was seen in the Budget. He proposed to raise the Income Tax from *i id.* to *is.*, to put a duty of *3d.* a pound on tobacco stripped before importation, to raise the duty on foreign cigars and cigarettes, and to put *2d.* on tea. By these means he hoped to spread in an equitable manner over all classes of taxpayers the taxation necessary to balance the Budget.

These proposals were greeted with general approval both at Westminster and in the City, though the Opposition sharply criticized the duties on tea and tobacco. Austen, too, made a very favourable impression on the House by his defence of his Budget, and after his reply to the critics of his tobacco duty he received a note from Mr. Asquith on the Opposition Front Bench : ‘ Let me congratulate you—without prejudice !—on a most admirable speech. I have rarely heard anything better done.’ It was felt that the Chancellor had coped successfully with a difficult situation, and had creditably resisted the temptation either to tamper with the Sinking Fund or to depart from the financial traditions of the previous forty years. Needless to say, there were attempts to use the Budget as an argument in the fiscal controversy, and the *Spectator* declared it to constitute a triumph for Free Trade. In the House of Commons, however, Austen refused to be drawn into a discussion of his father's policy ; he contented himself with the statement that his Budget proposals were in harmony with the existing fiscal system, and therefore with the pledges of the Government.

Amid the many letters of congratulation which he received, one afforded him special satisfaction :

Buckingham Palace
April 23rd, 1904

MY DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

I am desired by the King to let you know that since his return from abroad he has been able to read carefully your Budget Speech, and to say that he is very much pleased

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With it in every way. It strikes him as being very clear and well put together, and he has heard nothing but praise of it from all sides.

Your financial proposals, moreover, appear to H.M. to be very practical and the best that could be devised under the difficult circumstances in which you were placed.

It must have afforded great pleasure to your father to have heard you.

Yours very truly,

KNOLLYS.

The reference to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain shows how well the writer understood Austen, for high office had done nothing to weaken family ties, as the following letter abundantly proves :

11 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.

il.1.4

MY DEAR FATHER,

I cannot close my first evening away from your roof in a house for the time at least my own without writing a line to you. It is so great a change in my life, and all about me is so strange, that as yet I hardly realize it.

But what I do realize is how much I owe to you, and how very dear to me is the close friendship which you have encouraged between us. I do not think there are many fathers who have been and are to their sons all that you have been to me ; and my prayer to-night is that the perfect confidence which I have enjoyed for so long may continue unimpaired by our separation, and that I may do something to help you in the great work which you have undertaken.

It is at once a great encouragement and a great responsibility to be heir to so fine a tradition of private honour and public duty, and I will do my best to be not unworthy of the name.

Ever your affectionate son,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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A year later, when the time came for Austen to prepare his second Budget, conditions were much more favourable : the depression had passed away and there was a surplus of £1,414,000, while for 1905-6 this was estimated at £2,972,000. Nevertheless, the Chancellor contented himself with merely taking off tea the twopence which he had imposed on that beverage twelve months before, while admitting, in reply to his critics, that at a shilling the Income Tax was far too high for time of peace. The main feature of the Budget related to the Unfunded Debt. It had originally been proposed to deal with this by issuing £25,000,000 stock at 3 per cent., but, whether because the Chancellor changed his mind or on account of discussions in the Cabinet, this eventually became a scheme for £10,000,000 Exchequer Bonds bearing 2f per cent, interest, and repayable at par by equal drawings extended over a period of ten years.¹ The critics referred to them as 'Lottery Bonds,' but there was widespread approval of these proposals, as well as of the Budget as a whole. Those best qualified to express an opinion were the most enthusiastic :

8 Bishopsgate Within, London, E.C.

April nth, igoj

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

You will be bombarded with congratulations on your Budget, but I should like to be allowed to send you this little line (to which please do not trouble to reply) to say that none of your congratulations will be more sincere than mine.

I am so gratified to think that the proposals have received such really cordial and genuine approval from every quarter ; and my regard to you, which is very genuine too, made me rejoice to know that your manly and straightforward efforts "will still more enhance your credit and reputation.

Believe me to be

Yours very sincerely,

REVELSTOKE.

¹ Cf. *Hansard*, 144 H. C. Deb. 4 s. 1045-68.

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It was in his capacity of Chancellor of the Exchequer that Austen Chamberlain first came into contact with Sir Antony MacDonnell, concerning whose appointment as Under-Secretary in Dublin there were later to be so many recriminations. The circumstances were peculiar, both in respect of the man and of his nomination. Sir Antony had had a brilliant career in India, but he held strong Nationalist opinions, though Lord Lansdowne, who first introduced him to Mr. Wyndham, does not appear to have been aware of the fact, or considered it of no importance. Sir Antony and the Chief Secretary had several discussions towards the end of 1902 as to the conditions of the former's appointment, and these conversations were embodied in two letters which Mr. Wyndham later read in the House of Commons on February 22nd, 1905. In the first of these communications, in which Sir Antony accepted 'under the colours and conditions he had mentioned,'⁵ he went on to say : ' I have been anxiously thinking over the difficulty ; I am an Irishman, a Roman Catholic, and a Liberal in politics. I have strong Irish sympathies.'⁵ He further informed the Chief Secretary that in taking office he would not only be 'abused by the Orangemen as a Roman Catholic and a Home Ruler,'⁵ but also 'denounced by the Home Rulers as a renegade.' It was certainly a curious appointment to be made by a Unionist Chief Secretary; and it was made, on October 31st, 1902, in ill-omened circumstances, for Mr. Wyndham neglected to inform the King, thereby earning a stern rebuke from his sovereign. When the Minister pleaded pressure of work as a reason for his blunder, King Edward observed : ' The excuses of the Ministers are often as *gauche* as their omissions.'⁵

If Sir Antony was hardly the man whom one would have expected a Conservative and Unionist administration to appoint as Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, the conditions of his nomination were also exceptional. ' It is understood between us,'⁵ wrote Mr. Wyndham,^c that I make and you accept this appointment on the lines and under the conditions laid down in your letter.'⁵ That these conditions

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were abnormal was admitted by Mr. Wyndham. 'These letters,' he said, 'make it perfectly plain and clear that Sir Antony MacDonnell was invited by me rather as a colleague than as a mere under-secretary to register my will.'⁵ Lord Lansdowne thought it almost a matter of course that a man of such antecedents 'could scarcely be expected to be bound by the narrow rules of routine which are applicable to an ordinary member of the Civil Service,' and he informed the House of Lords that 'when Sir Antony MacDonnell took up his appointment it was understood, both by himself and the Chief Secretary, that he was to have greater freedom of action, greater opportunities of initiative than he would have expected if he had been a candidate in the ordinary course.' Sir Antony, Lord Lansdowne added, 'was justified in assuming that he had a certain scope of action, and he certainly acted upon that assumption, and acted upon it with the knowledge and approval of the Chief Secretary.' However this may be, it does not appear that the Prime Minister, who had at first opposed the appointment, had sanctioned any extension of powers; but as he was at that time struggling to get the Education Bill through the House of Commons it may be that the matter escaped his notice.

Austen Chamberlain set his face from the first against any unauthorized change in the relations between Dublin and the Treasury. On September 21st he received an official letter from Sir Antony making proposals for the revision and increase of the staff in the Chief Secretary's office. This letter was referred in the ordinary way to the appropriate Treasury official, who wrote: 'This is really an indictment against the system which has obtained since the Union. . . . It is the most serious question which has been submitted for the consideration of the Treasury in my experience.' In consequence of this the Chancellor protested to Mr. Wyndham next time he saw him, and the original proposals were accordingly modified. All the same, Austen was not satisfied, and on December 10th, 1903, he outlined his views to the Chief Secretary in a

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memorandum entitled *Proposed Changes in the Chief Secretary's Office*.

In the course of this he said he imagined his colleague's difficulty to be that he was not sufficiently in touch with the various subordinate and semi-subordinate departments, and that he had *no one* capable 'of arranging papers for you, or of drafting answers on instructions given by you'; Austen added that he could conceive it might be necessary to provide Mr. Wyndham with a secretary of greater seniority and higher position than is usually the case with private secretaries of Ministers. Nevertheless, * the proposals originally put forward by Sir A. MacDonnell, even as modified by his subsequent letter, appear to me to go much beyond this, and, indeed, to contemplate a revolution in the machinery of Irish Government. He speaks of "the co-ordination of subordinate departments," but what he has in mind seems to me to be in reality their complete subordination to the Chief Secretary's office. But I am not prepared, without a Cabinet decision, to be a party to the subordination of all the semi-independent boards, not to the Chief Secretary, but to a staff of clerks working in his office in Dublin Castle. You will see that the question between the Treasury and the Irish Government is not now one of money, but of principle. When I left you after our conversation, I thought you were prepared to abandon, for the present at any rate, the larger changes, and that you would be satisfied with such personal assistance as would enable you to make what I may call 'Cabinet' control effective. If this is still your view, we shall have no difficulty in coming to terms; but I think you will see from Sir A. MacDonnell's letters that he has clearly misunderstood your intentions.'

Mr. Wyndham was, as always, conciliatory, but the Chancellor was coming to the conclusion, which others were to reach a year or two later, that his colleague was much under the influence of his Under-Secretary. On the last day of 1903, therefore, Austen wrote to the Chief Secretary again: 'Nothing in a small way has given me more trouble as Chancellor of the Exchequer than the

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proposals about your office. This is not your fault nor mine, but is the result of the complexity of the subject and the difficulty of dealing with matters by correspondence and at a distance from each other. And the difficulty is increased in this case by the fact, as I believe it to be, that you and Sir A. MacDonnell do not mean the same thing, whilst I perhaps differ from both of you.' He then went on to propose a joint enquiry into the work and staff of the Chief Secretary's office. Mr. Wyndham, in a very cordial letter, accepted this proposal, but Austen was not going to leave any loopholes for future misunderstanding, and on January 5th, 1904, he wrote again : ' It is understood between us that, whatever the future may have in store, you are not now trying to supersede the various boards grouped round Dublin Castle, and that the object of our enquiries should be to see what changes are required in the staff of your office in order that it may give you the assistance you have a right to expect in co-ordinating the work of these various bodies and keeping yourself in touch with the responsible heads of the different departments.'

This incident throws considerable light on two things, namely the precision which always marked Austen Chamberlain's conduct of public affairs and the relations existing between Mr. Wyndham and Sir Antony MacDonnell. In later years Austen, in referring to this incident wrote: * I asked Sir George [Murray] ¹ to take the first opportunity of ascertaining from Sir Antony MacDonnell, then Under-Secretary in Ireland, what he meant by the " co-ordination " of the Irish Office, a subject on which both he and George Wyndham were favouring us with a correspondence which was as obscure as it was voluminous. I had not long to wait for an answer : " I have seen Sir Antony MacDonnell as you desired," Murray minuted to me. " As far as I can make out, what he means by co-ordination is the subordination of everyone else to himself." ' If the Prime Minister's methods had more closely resembled

¹ Who had recently left the Post Office to become Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

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those of the Chancellor of the Exchequer he might have realized in time the state of affairs in Dublin Castle, and so have prevented a crisis which was to prove very damaging to his administration.

Austen Chamberlain played his part in the general work of the Government, and in the field of international relations, where he was one day to perform perhaps his greatest services to his country, he was by no means inactive. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in February, 1904, had raised more than one difficult question for Great Britain as a neutral, while it soon became clear that Russia was determined to stretch the definition of contraband to a point which was, in the words of Lord Lansdowne, 'inconsistent with the law and practice of nations.' Austen took the line in the Cabinet and elsewhere that now was the opportunity to examine the whole problem of contraband. The Foreign Secretary wished to discuss the present difficulties direct with St. Petersburg, 'with the object of, if possible, arriving at a reasonable *modus vivendi* during the continuance of the war between Russia and Japan, leaving the ultimate settlement of these far-reaching international questions for the deliberate examination to which they are entitled, and which they are not likely to receive while a great war is in progress.' On this Chamberlain commented :

I think this policy of leaving the principles at stake to be discussed after the war is over is fatal to any chance of arriving at a satisfactory solution.

I again press most urgently that we should invite the assembly of a conference of the Great Powers to consider the questions at issue while the war is still pending. During war the belligerents and their friends will be disposed to put belligerent rights high, and this coincides with our interests.

If we wait till war is over, we shall have suffered all the damage to which a neutral is open under the Russian

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extension, of belligerent rights ; we shall have no chance of securing redress except by ourselves going to war with Russia to obtain it, and we shall find all other Powers—inferior separately to ourselves in maritime strength—unwilling to agree to any extension of the rights of a belligerent against a neutral.

Lord Lansdowne wished to lay particular stress upon the inadmissibility of the Russian claim to class coal as contraband, but to this Austen demurred :

There is a large class of articles which we admit to be *conditionally* contraband. The Russians claim that they are *unconditionally* contraband. Ought we not to emphasize this point, which is the real ground of difference ? Shall we not make a mistake if we confine our protest so largely to coal ? Cotton is just as important, and there are countless other articles whose innocent or guilty character depends not upon their nature but upon the object to which the consignee intends, or may reasonably be supposed to intend, to put them.

These were the days when the Committee of Imperial Defence was, to quote the Report on War Office Reconstitution, being made ' the corner-stone of the needed edifice of reform,⁵ with Sir George Clarke as its secretary. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was keenly alive to the importance of this body, and not a little correspondence passed between him and Sir George with regard to its work. The Chancellor was also careful to see that any information which came his way was immediately transmitted to the Committee of Imperial Defence.

A notable example of this occurred in 1905, when the crisis over Morocco appeared by no means unlikely to result in war between France and Germany. The official

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view was that in the event of Great Britain aiding the former in such circumstances a speedy and overwhelming victory was inevitable. The French Army would be able to hold up the German ; pressure of public opinion would force the German Navy to risk a fleet action in which it would be destroyed ; and the overthrow of Germany would be completed by the landing of a British force in Schleswig-Holstein. Austen Chamberlain by no means shared these optimistic prognostications, and he put his views on record :

England can no longer give a European ally money, or find soldiers on the Continent. A Continental ally wants help in men, and that help at once. If we had 250,000 men or 300,000 men fully trained and able to move at short notice, an open alliance with us would be an absolute protection and a sure guarantee of peace. (The Franco-Russian Alliance secured peace until Russia's troubles thickened upon her.) But France might well hesitate to proclaim, as it were offensively, a solidarity with us, and bring upon herself a war in which, assuming that we supported her, we could not effectively restore the balance in point of numbers, already weighed down by an excess of 200,000 men on the German side.

He was convinced that in the event of war the Germans would violate the neutrality of Belgium : ' The Belgians are aware of the German intention, and have decided to withdraw their forces into Antwerp and the forts opposite England, not attempting to protect their frontier. This does not necessarily imply sympathy with Germany, but a conviction of their inability to resist.' Austen noted, too, that the rapidity with which modern armies come to grips had weakened the value of Great Britain as an ally, for plans of campaign had now to be worked out beforehand, and the British Government always refused to pledge itself in advance. Much of this sounds trite in the light of

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subsequent events, but it showed remarkable foresight at the time, and was also evidence of the soundness of the information which the Chancellor was receiving from the Continent.

The early days of 1904 were marked for Austen by a very flattering offer. On January 12th, Dr. Gordon Campbell, of Trinity College, Cambridge, wrote to the Chancellor asking him to stand for the University, as one of the sitting Burgesses proposed to retire at the end of the existing Parliament. 'A five-shilling duty on corn/ Dr. Campbell wrote, 'whatever its effects on the crop, will not lose you the parsons—another shilling would buy the bishops.' Austen, however, replied characteristically :

11 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.
18.1.4

DEAR DR. CAMPBELL,

I have now thought very carefully about the suggestion you were good enough to make to me in your letter of the 12th. I am very sensible of the high honour which would be conferred by an invitation to stand for the University. It is one which no man could lightly put aside, and I am very gratified by the fact that my name should even have occurred to leaders of the Unionist Party in such a connection. But I have lived all my life in B'ham and its neighbourhood, and I now represent in Parliament the division in which my home is situated. I set great value on these local associations, and I am very proud of being chosen by my neighbours as their representative. In spite, therefore, of all the attractions of a University seat, I cannot bring myself to break old ties and to sever my connection with my own district. But I am none the less obliged to you for your kind thought and none the less conscious how great is the honour implied in the proposition.

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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During his first twelve months at the Treasury, before the approaching General Election began to throw its shadow over the political scene, Austen was called upon to deal with a multitude of questions, and his handling of them proved that he came from a family of business-men. One or two examples will suffice.

The friendly relations with the Royal Family, which he had cemented during the cruise in the *Victoria and Albert* in 1902, are shown in the following letter of thanks from Queen Alexandra for what he had done to assist her nursing scheme :

Buckingham Palace
Thursday, March 14th, 1904

DEAR MR, CHAMBERLAIN,

Your wonderful promptitude and energy have saved the whole situation, and I cannot tell you what a load you have taken off my mind. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, not alone on my own account but in the name of our whole British Army, which will now reap the full benefit of our new nursing scheme, which had been left almost at a standstill ever since I started it two years ago. . . .

I see with pleasure that you are following the footsteps of your great father by never putting off anything and going straight to the end you have in view.

With renewed thanks and hoping soon to see you,

Yours very sincerely,

ALEXANDRA.

Three months later another question arose in connection with the Royal Family, to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer also gave his sympathetic consideration :

Admiralty
July ytk, '04

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

There is a matter about which I wish to consult you. The King spoke to me the other day about providing a

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second and smaller yacht to replace the *Osborne*. He pointed out that the late Queen always had three yachts, the *V. and A.*) the *Osborne*[^] and the *Alberta*[^] but that he would not require more than two. He pointed out that he used the yacht a great deal, that it was inconvenient not to have a second string to his bow, that there were many Continental ports into which the *V. and A.* could not get owing to her draft, and that the experience of the Queen's reign had shown that more than one yacht was a necessity, and that he was using and should use the yachts a great deal more than the Queen had done. All this is perfectly true, and, as the *Osborne* is very nearly worn out, we must begin to consider the question of replacing her.

The total cost of a new yacht of this kind should not, I think, much exceed £100,000, but it is not on the financial aspect of the case that I want to consult you now, because there is no great hurry in the matter and any financial provision for a new yacht must, of course, be governed by and included in our general arrangement about the next estimates. The points on which I want your advice are these. Is there any Parliamentary objection to the building of a second royal yacht? My idea is there is none. The King is so deservedly popular and he has used his yacht to such great advantage to the Empire that I do not think the House of Commons would at all begrudge him a second and smaller yacht.

The second point is this. The King wants the yacht, if built at all, to be built on the Clyde by a private builder. As to that I am in entire agreement, and nothing would induce me to build it in any dockyard. But he wants to go to a particular builder, Mr. Watson. Is there any serious Parliamentary objection to not putting such a vessel out to tender?

Again, I should greatly prefer to settle on a maximum sum with the King which the yacht should cost, to be spread over two years, and leave him the sole responsibility of ordering it and settling its details. The only responsibility the Admiralty would have in that case would be to test the

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yacht when completed for stability and speed. It would save us an infinite amount of trouble and, I believe, a considerable sum of money, because in dealing with a vessel like a yacht it is the extras which mount up the cost, the fittings, decorations, etc. These always introduce an element of uncertainty, but on the plan I suggest there would be none. Do you see any Parliamentary or financial objection to this course? My method of proceeding would be very simple. Two years running, we will say for the sake of example, £50,000 would be inserted in the estimates for a new yacht, and I would have a written agreement with the King that he would not ask the Admiralty for any more than this sum, and, if it cost any more, he would find it out of his own pocket.

Yours sincerely,

SELBORNE.

11 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.

11.7.4

MY DEAR SELBORNE,

Royal Tacht

I will not say that there are no Parliamentary objections to your proposals; but such as they are, they are not, in my opinion, sufficient reason for rejecting them. I think there is so much to be said for a second yacht, having regard to the way the King uses the present one, and that the Parliamentary difficulties in the way of its provision—assuming money to be available—are much less than they would have been ten or twenty years ago.

If a yacht is provided, I am personally entirely in favour of your method of dealing with the cost, etc.

But if the financial pressure is as strict next year as seems likely, it would not be a good opportunity for beginning work upon it.¹

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

¹ The yacht was subsequently built, and called the *Alexandra*.

TARIFF REFORM AND THE EXCHEQUER

Pressing, however, as was Austen's work at the Exchequer, and many as were the claims upon his time in other connections, the general political situation was beginning to cause him concern, for the position of the Government was every day becoming more insecure, and the catastrophe of 1906 was already looming ahead.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISASTER OF 1906

THE administration, as re-formed, had not found its path easy from the very beginning. Although the Chancellor of the Exchequer had done his best to rouse enthusiasm for the Sheffield Programme, the only people whom it really pleased were the Liberals, who closed their ranks and became every day more confident of victory at the next General Election. There was no autumn session in 1903, and when Parliament met in February, 1904, the Prime Minister was ill. The debate on the Address lasted six days, and was chiefly remarkable for the varied interpretations put on the Sheffield Programme by speakers from the Treasury Bench and for the failure of the Home Secretary to make an effective appeal to Party loyalty. Austen in the circumstances was very wisely silent. When the division was taken the Opposition amendment was, indeed, defeated, but no less than twenty-seven of the Government's supporters voted with the Liberals, while seven others abstained from voting. Further humiliations were to follow, for a few days later the Government had, under the pressure of the Tariff Reformers, at the last moment to withdraw an amendment which, although tabled in the name of a private Member, was known to have been drafted in the Whips' office.

A delighted Opposition was, of course, continually bringing forward motions calculated to drive a wedge between the two sections of the Unionist Party, and the usual method of countering this was to move the previous question. Later, even this did not always suffice to prevent a debate on the thorny subject, so recourse was had to the somewhat ignominious procedure of walking out of the House. The Prime Minister was determined, if he could, to prevent such a disintegration of his Party as had marked the leadership of Sir Robert Peel, a man whose memory was particularly odious to him ; but this imposed a strain no

THE DISASTER OF 1906

less great upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer than upon himself. As Mr. Balfour's biographer gracefully concedes :
* It is only right to observe that without the unwavering support of Mr. Chamberlain's own son the Prime Minister could hardly have carried the thing through. Had the Chancellor of the Exchequer shrunk now from the sacrifice of personal feeling involved for him in the refusal to accept battle on the fiscal motions, irrevocable schism must have appeared in the Conservative ranks, and the General Election been forced on at the bidding of the Liberals.' ¹

In the late summer of 1904 there was an interchange of letters between Mr. Balfour and his lieutenant on the general political situation : the correspondence has been published before,² but it must be recalled if the position of the two men during these difficult years is to be understood.

Highbury, Birmingham
Aug. 24th, 1904

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

. . . Everything therefore tends to confirm me in the opinion I expressed to you at our last meeting—that it is time that we had a change of Government. I do not think that we have credit or Parliamentary strength sufficient to overcome so many difficulties. I do not think that we can in any case last long enough to reach better times, and I do not believe that we shall gain strength or live down unpopularity (earned or undeserved) by attempting to carry on administration through another session.

But, if this is a correct view of the position—and it is at any rate the view taken by so shrewd an observer as Douglas³—it is more than ever important that we should use what little time we have left to bring the Party together, to unite it on a common policy which will be our platform for the future, to awaken its enthusiasm and to prepare it

¹ Blanche E. G. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, vol. I, p. 414.

² By Sir Austen Chamberlain himself, in *Politics from Inside*.

³ The Home Secretary.

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and the electors for the fight in which we shall shortly be engaged.

At the present time the Party viewed as a whole is timid, undecided, vacillating. It has no constructive policy. It does not know what is to be its future. It is exposed to a most active and dangerous attack, and it stands timidly on the defensive. Now, no Party can win on these lines, and, as things stand now, we are already disastrously beaten, and every month's delay will only make our case worse. But there is no reason why we should thus sit still and let the tide of disaster swamp us. We cannot win now, but we can lay the foundations of future victory, and even now we may profoundly modify the results of the next elections.

What is needed to work this revolution in our fate is only that our leaders should be united, and united in support of a positive future policy. You know what I think that policy should be. It need not be my father's. I am convinced that you and he could carry in a shorter period than most people suppose the whole of the Glasgow Programme ; but I can quite believe that though in general sympathy with his objects you are not prepared to adopt all his methods, and I do not propose for your adoption anything to which I anticipate that in principle you can have any objection. Let it be your own policy announced by you at Southampton, distinct from his wherever you think a difference necessary, but let it be one on which he and his friends can unite with you. I undertake that you will not find him unreasonable. You would not expect him to pretend—and it is not desirable that he should pretend—that you had given him all he asked or all he wanted. He may still think his own line the best, but I am certain that for the sake of unity and, above all, for the sake of keeping in close touch with you, he will accept less and loyally work for it.

But if we are to do any good we must get together quickly. We must plant our batteries at once and open fire on a concerted plan this autumn. I do not think that you have any conception of the results which would be achieved

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by such combined action even now, though you must see the disastrous effects which will follow from our silence or our half-hearted and discordant utterances during the next few months. The danger is, in a nutshell : if we don't get together, we shall inevitably and fatally drift farther and farther apart. It is a prospect which fills me with consternation on every ground—political and personal. And please allow me to say without offence that you have some personal responsibility in the matter. You encouraged my father to go out as a ' pioneer ' ; you gave your blessing to his efforts for closer union with the Colonies ; you assured us who remained that we too thus served the interests of Imperial Union, and we were thus induced to leave him for a time almost single-handed at his Herculean task. He undertook this work believing in your sympathy, believing that, when he had proved that the obstacles were not insuperable, you and your Government would be prepared to make some advance ; and had he not been led to believe this, I think his course would have been different, and with however profound a regret at seeing so great an opportunity lost, I believe he would never have set out on a course which in such a case could only result in bringing him in conflict with old friends, and particularly with yourself.

Are we now to tell him that we can do no more ? That because some forty Free Fooders still hesitate, we are unable to move ? You know that I cannot take that line, and, believe me, there are many of your colleagues and more of your followers who are in almost as great a difficulty as I am.

Cannot you make a bridge for us all and yet do nothing and say nothing which is not in accordance with your most profound convictions ? I think that you might ; and it is in the hope that you will that I give both you and myself the trouble involved in writing and reading this long letter.

I tried to suggest the other day what such a policy might be. The main feature of it would be to announce that, if again returned to power, you would summon

a conference of Colonial and Indian representatives to consider the question of Imperial trade and that, if you were satisfied by the result that other portions of the Empire would do their share, you would then propose to Parliament such measures as are necessary to fulfil our part of the common policy.

In this way and in this way only can your doubts as to the attitude of the Colonies be resolved ; and please remember that all the members of the late Cabinet, except those who have since resigned, agreed to consult the Colonies, and that we were only prevented from doing so by Ritchie and Co.

If the result is not satisfactory, you will not proceed further. If our doubters like Lytton and Maxwell¹ think it unsatisfactory, they will be free to act as they please. If the Colonies are unreasonable, I and others who think with me will have to recognize facts. We must surrender our hopes, and we, at any rate, shall give you no further trouble.

I put this point first because it is the concession which I ask of you—a concession not of principle, but of policy only.

On the other hand, you might fix the limit of the duty on *wheat*. You might reduce it to *is.* if you think 2s. too high. You might reject the idea of a 'scientific tariff' if that frightens people, and you might substitute for it a fixed *io* per cent, or 7½ per cent, to provide the necessary revenue ; you might have a fixed addition of 5 or 10 per cent, for retaliatory purposes where needed, or you might deal with each such case separately ; and you might graft on any such plan whatever proposals for dealing with dumping seem best to you. In short, in all these matters I think I may safely say that we should all desire to fall into line with you and to meet your wishes in every way.

This is not the Glasgow policy—still less is it the Glasgow policy in its later developments ; but if you would put

¹ Sir John Stirling Maxwell, Bt.

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forward some such policy as this, closely in harmony as I believe with all you have ever said or thought, you would rally all our scattered forces, and we should go to the country united and zealous instead of divided and half-hearted.

But I beg you not to proceed with the suggestion you made to me in Downing Street. It will not do to propose a second referendum after the Conference. The more I think of this suggestion, the less I like it ; but one practical objection is, I think, sufficient to cause you to reject it on further consideration. You cannot ask your followers to work hard and long if the only result of success is to be that the fruits of victory are at once to be put to the hazard of a fresh election. No Party can be kept together by a policy which promises at best but a succession of dissolutions, and candidates will not be forthcoming if the only result of their election is to be that, within a year or so, they are to be involved in all the chances and expense of a fresh election.

But such a policy as I have tried to sketch, if put forward by you, would give us all the opportunity we want. It would change the issue. It would be your policy, not my father's. It would make the way easy for all those who wish to rejoin the ranks, and it would be received with enthusiasm by all those who have never wavered in their allegiance to you. And if we are once united I do not think you would have occasion to complain of lack of enthusiasm or of any difficulty in getting unpaid workers. We can get them here [i.e. in Birmingham] though you know how peculiarly the Education Act has hit Unionists, and especially Liberal Unionists, in these parts. And we should get them elsewhere if we had a definite constructive policy to inspire zeal and evoke effort.

We doubtless may lose a man or two here and there, and the Party agents may always dwell on the danger of such losses. But in such matters they are the worst advisers. They think only of the few whom they know and forget the many whom they don't know. They never consider the

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enormous accession of power that comes to any Party which can raise a great ideal and touch the spirit of the nation. They overlook the importance of acting on the offensive and substituting an active policy of the future for a mere passive defence of the past. In short, they think only of possible losses, and not also of the certain gains.

Mind, I do not say that even on these lines we shall not lose seats. We must lose them after nearly twenty years of almost continuous success ; but please observe that we have had no worse defeats since May of last year than we had at Woolwich and Rye before that date ; that we have fared no better where our candidate has been a * half-hogger ' than where he has been a ' whole-hogger ' ; and that both Bridgeman at Oswestry and Touche at Lanark think they would have done worse with the more restricted policy, and the former (while blaming most of all the lack of organization) says that he attributes his defeat mainly to education, and cannot after careful enquiry find out that the labourers were influenced by dear food, though at first he was inclined to suppose that they were.

Do, I beg you, give your most favourable consideration to these suggestions before the Southampton meeting. If you cannot see your way to a policy which will unite the Party, then we are not only beaten at the next election—we are ruined. Beaten we shall be in any case ; but surely what we have to do is to prepare the way for future success. And, if you will raise the standard at Southampton, we can all close up during the autumn, and instead of our present confusion and lethargy, you will inspire us with new life and courage.

It is you and you alone who can work this change, and now is the time to do it.

I cannot tell you how deeply I feel all this. It is my only excuse for writing, and if you knew how I hate writing you would be able to measure the reality of my concern by the length of my letter.

I think we are on the brink of disaster. I know that you can save us, and I cannot rest content without at least

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trying to convey to you some part of my conviction and of the reasons which inspire it.

My present plan is to go abroad immediately after George Duckworth's wedding on September 10th, but I suppose we shall probably have to meet in London before that to consider the very unsatisfactory turn that the naval war is taking in so far as our shipping is concerned. In any case I shall stay—or return—if I am wanted. Meanwhile I shall remain here at Highbury.

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

This was certainly plain speaking, but no plainer than events were soon to show was necessary. The letter was also prophetic, for it showed that its writer had already realized how attractive a referendum in some form would prove to his leader, and how fatal this would be both to the cause of Tariff Reform and to the prospects of the Conservative Party generally. For many a long year, as will be seen, Austen was to oppose the tactics which Mr. Balfour was already envisaging in the summer of 1904. Meanwhile, over a week elapsed before the Chancellor of the Exchequer received a reply to his letter, and then it was a mere acknowledgment.

North Berwick
Sept. 1st, igoj.

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I cannot put off longer acknowledging the receipt of your letter of August 24th, and apologizing for not having answered it before. This note is *not* an answer to it ; I am writing one which will, I hope, reach you long before you go abroad.

As things are at present, it does not seem likely that we need have a Cabinet before that date ; but I want, before it arrives, to go at least one stage further in the discussion

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which we began just before we separated for the holidays. Both your conversation and your letter have been much in my thoughts.

Yours ever,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

More than another week, however, elapsed before the Chancellor received the second letter.

Whittingehame

Sept. 10th, 1904

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

The agreement between your views and mine on the present political situation is so nearly complete that the one difference which *seems* to divide us obtains perhaps an undue prominence. I hold as strongly as you do that—apart from old age—our weakness in the country is due chiefly to our divisions on the fiscal question. If it were not for the fact that the elections seem to have gone as much against us before as after these divisions made themselves felt, I should indeed have regarded them as the chief cause of our weakness. But, whether they stand first or second in order of importance, their importance is at all events certain.

Now for your remedy. You think, and I agree, that there is nothing very inspiring in the 'Sheffield' Programme. 'Liberty of negotiation' with foreign countries would, I am convinced, be a great gain. But it does not lend itself to popular treatment, and such merits as it might otherwise possess from a merely electioneering point of view have been largely discounted by the fact that both 'Protectionists'^J and 'Free Fooders' have conspired to represent it as a * compromise ' or as a 'half-way house' on the road to something else. This is not an accurate way of putting the case, since the Sheffield Programme is logical and self-contained. But even if it *were* accurate, it is not obvious why it should be damaging. There are many occasions on

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which a compromise is exactly what the public wants. The present occasion, however, is probably not one of them : if only because it requires considerable skill to ' take the offensive ' from a position of compromise, and this skill the majority of the Party do not possess. Indeed, they find it hard even ' to take the offensive ' quite apart from the fiscal question ; and so it must always be when one Party has done so much, and the other nothing, for nine years. The latter find themselves naturally in the position of assailants, the former are apt to lapse into a position of mere defence—always a dissipating one except for the best trained troops.

How, then, is this state of things to be remedied ? Remedied completely it cannot be till we have been some time in opposition. But what partial cure can be found for it ? You say, in effect, that what we want is a policy on which, with all due reservations, the Party can agree ; and a policy which, when agreed to, will tap deeper springs of enthusiasm than can ever be reached by the Sheffield Programme taken *simpliciter*. Holding the views which you and I share with respect to our Colonial Empire, there can be no doubt that it is in *that* direction we must search for what we want—even if we fail to find it.

There are other reasons lying altogether outside Party politics which tend in the same direction. It seems quite impracticable to leave the Colonial question exactly where it is. The possibility of new commercial relations between Canada and the U.S.A. ; the awakening of Australia to her increased need for the protection of a powerful, and therefore Imperial, fleet in the face of a victorious Japan ; our ignorance as to how far the Colonies are ready to make genuine gaps in their protective wall of tariffs for our benefit—an ignorance which paralyses effort on this side of the water in favour of closer fiscal union, and tends to make Imperialists rely unduly on Protectionist support—all these considerations point to the extreme desirability of having a full and free discussion with our Colonies on the present position and future organization of the Empire.

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Such a discussion may, of course, be abortive ; but, unless it is ' full and free,' it is, I think, sure to prove abortive. No relevant matter should be excluded from debate ; no preliminary fetters must be imposed either on the Colonial or the British representatives. The Colonists must not come here precluded from discussing Imperial free trade in any of its various degrees ; the British must not lay down as a condition precedent to discussion that this or that article of consumption must in no case be taxed. Liberty of suggestion and (I should be inclined to add) privacy of discussion, without which liberty of suggestion is almost certain to be a mere sham, are essential to any fruitful result.

But if I have carried you with me so far, you will see why I do not think it possible to say, as you would wish me to say, that we must go to the country pledged, if we are returned to power, not merely to summon a Conference but also to carry at once into effect any conclusions at which it may arrive, provided they are, in our opinion, reasonable. I do not for a moment believe that the Colonies would enter into a Conference if *they* were required to give any such pledge. Their Ministers would say, and with much reason, that they could not ask their respective electorates to give them a majority which might be used to carry out some new and, at present, wholly unthought of plan ; that if the Conference and the various Governments concerned were to settle the matter without any further reference to the electors, then each Government must lay down beforehand the general limits beyond which it would not go, and the delegates both of Great Britain and of each Colony must be tightly bound by their instructions to refuse even to discuss any scheme by which those limits would be transgressed. Once anything like this occurs, there is an end of ⁶ ' full and free ' discussion ; and an end also of all the benefits which such a discussion will, I believe, confer on the cause of Imperial Unity.

And is there reason to think that any greater acceleration of Colonial Union would be obtained by your plan than by mine ? I doubt it. I think yours would frighten the

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Colonies, and it would certainly frighten an important section of opinion in this country—a reflection which brings us back to the strictly domestic aspect of the problem we have to solve. Would, then, such a scheme as I have thus sketched not do more to unite the Party in respect of fiscal and Colonial policy than any possible alternative? The true Protectionists would not much like it; but then I am afraid that, so far as I am concerned, I can propose nothing they *would* much like; and, in any case, they would probably prefer it to mere Cobdenism. The bigoted Free Fooders would regard even the permission to discuss food taxation as trafficking with the 'accursed thing'.⁵ The pedantic Free Traders would regard the removal of even the greatest obstacles to freer trade as too dearly purchased if it involved the imposition of a single customs duty unbalanced by an equivalent excuse. But surely the great mass of the Party who belong to none of these sections would not only approve the motives of the policy, but would think it well worth fighting for—the reasonable 'whole-hogger' and the reasonable advocate of 'Sheffield but no further,' while not abandoning their views, would be glad to have the whole subject examined in a broader spirit, and with an increase of knowledge which is impossible so long as the Colonies are no parties to our discussions and so long as those discussions rise but rarely above the level of mere platform recriminations.

My idea, therefore, would be to take the very earliest opportunity I can find of (1) reaffirming the Sheffield Programme, both on its positive and negative sides, i.e. saying that, if returned to power, we will at once endeavour to make this change in our fiscal policy, but will in the next Parliament make no other—at least, none involving bread taxation; (2) saying that, in our opinion, the Colonial question cannot be left where it is, that we will summon a free and full conference, with power to consider *any* proposals which it may think likely to conduce to closer union, fiscal or other, between different parts of the Empire; (3) it would go without saying that if satisfactory proposals could be devised, we would do our best to induce the country

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to accept them, and the Party to embody them in its programme ; (4) the Imperial and Colonial question thus dealt with to be explicitly dissociated from Protection (true Protection), with which, indeed, it has no connection, logical or sentimental; Protection to remain what it has long been, a doctrine largely held in the Party, but with no place in its official creed.

It seems to me that this scheme is in substantial harmony with your father's views. It differs, perhaps, from some suggestions which he has thrown out from time to time in the course of his Imperial propaganda. But, unless I am much mistaken, these suggestions are not of the essence of his policy, but are in the nature of (as the schoolmen would have said) more or less 'separable accidents.' What he has fought for, what he has done more than any man to promote, is *Union*—fiscal union, military union, naval union ; union, in short, of every kind which is compatible with the self-government of our free Colonies. I believe that my plan for attaining this great object is the best which can at present be devised, both considered in itself and considered in relation to the future of the only Party in the State which is capable of taking a lead in what I hope will one day be a national policy. At present we can hardly hope to carry both Parties with us; but at least a great end will have been gained if one of them could be induced to accept it with zeal and without producing serious schism in its ranks.

Yours ever,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

To this Austen replied by return of post.

Treasury Chambers, Whitehall

Sept. 12th, 1904

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

I cannot help regretting that the very important reply which you have sent to my letter of August 24th only

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reached me to-day on the very eve of my departure. I had hoped from what you said that I should have heard from you in plenty of time to allow both for careful consideration of all you might say and for further communication with you if necessary. As it is, I must content myself with giving you briefly my first impressions on reading and re-reading your letter.

They are not cheerful. I am afraid that the difference in our points of view is greater than I had thought or than you suppose.

I believe in the policy of Colonial Preference. I believe it to be the greatest object to which we in our time can devote ourselves, not only for itself but for all to which it may lead, and which we cannot realize without it. I believe it to be worth great immediate sacrifices, if such were called for, both from the Party and the nation, for the sake of the future advantages it promises. But I do not believe that in reality such sacrifices are necessary from the Party, for I think that the mass of the Party and of the nation have a true and sure instinct in this case as in so many others, and that such doubt and hesitation as prevails is due not to the question itself but to the divided counsels of its leaders and the hesitation of its Parliamentary chiefs.

Believing this, you must forgive me for saying that I think your policy wrong alike from the national and the purely Party point of view ; and though it pains me deeply to have to say so, if this is your last word, I do not see how I can possibly come into line with you at the next election.

Looked at from the standpoint of Party, I fear that the policy you sketch means further disunion, a prolongation of the present uncertainty, a controversy over and therefore a hardening of our views wherever we disagree among ourselves. The struggle in the Party will continue, and each section will try, and will be bound to try, to make itself as strong as possible, by enforcing pledges and capturing associations and seats. As to the ultimate result of such a struggle, I have no doubt. But meanwhile it involves the Party in serious divisions, in perpetual controversy and Parliamentary impotence.

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For the nation it means, I fear, that this great question is put before them not as a noble cause worthy of all that is best in us, calling for great efforts and justifying every sacrifice, but timidly, hesitatingly, amid circumstances of doubt and indecision which obscure the greatness of the issue, which take off the edge of effort and kill enthusiasm.

Lastly the Conference itself, so summoned, will in my opinion meet, if it meet at all, in circumstances the least favourable to a successful issue of its deliberations. Whether the Colonies would accept an invitation couched in such terms is, I think, doubtful ; but that such a Conference could be successful is, I fear, more than we have any right to hope. I grant you that Colonial statesmen are timid, but what then ? We must have courage for ourselves and for them too. We must know what we want and how we mean to secure it ; and, whilst willing and active to meet their difficulties in every way possible to us, we must go into Council with clear and decided views both of the end and the means, and we must feed them with our strength and our enthusiasm. If we show doubt and hesitation we are lost, and with us goes the last chance of the permanent union of that Greater Britain of which we are still the centre and the heart.

It is because the policy you sketch appears to me, and will, I fear, appear to others, timid and uncertain that I think it will be fatal to us and our cause. I cannot bring myself thus to postpone the great issue. I do not think it wise and I do not think it right. I cannot sit while colleagues in the Cabinet—Londonderry or another—put such glosses on your utterances as he did in his speech in the North a fortnight ago. I have done my best, believe me I have done my best, and under very difficult circumstances, to keep the Party together and to give you all the loyal support which my position under you makes it a pleasure to me to render. What the future has in store, it is now too soon to say. My position in regard to autumn speeches must in any case have been difficult. It will be doubly so now. I will continue to do what I can for you, if you wish it, while this Parliament lasts ; but its days are numbered, and your

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letter deprives me of the hope that when the election comes I can issue an address indistinguishable in point of policy from your own.

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—It is hardly necessary for me to add that I write without consultation with anyone, as I wrote before. Before leaving B'ham, on my last evening at home, I told my father what I had already written to you without his knowledge. I found as I had expected that he would have acquiesced in such a compromise as I suggested, but you cannot expect him to view more favourably than I do the proposals you intend to make.

Austen showed Mr. Chamberlain a copy of this letter too, and his stepmother wrote of it : ' Your father was much pleased with your letter to A. J. B. and thought it very able.' Another ten days elapsed before the Prime Minister replied.

Bardbury Private Hotel, North Berwick

Sept. 22nd, 1904

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I will not be so unkind as to mar your trip abroad by a fiscal discussion. But I am obstinate in believing that our differences (if differences they are to be called) are neither as great nor as irreconcilable as you suppose. Time will show it. I speak in a few days at a dinner in Edinburgh—and in the sense I told you. But I do not believe that either your father or you will take exception—or at least not serious exception—to anything I have to say.

I hope you will enjoy your holiday—you have most certainly deserved one.

Yours ever,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

I go to Balmoral Monday.

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When the Prime Minister spoke at Edinburgh in October it was along the lines of his letter of September 10th. On that occasion he pledged himself, if his Party was returned to power, to summon a Colonial Conference, of which the decisions were nevertheless not to come into force until another General Election had been held. It was something, but not much, and it did little to placate the more enthusiastic advocates of Tariff Reform. Of course, Mr. Balfour could have justified his policy of preserving the unity of his Party, and of clinging to office at all costs, on other grounds. He had a deep mistrust of the Liberals in all matters relating to the Army and foreign affairs, and he wanted to see both the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Anglo-French Entente firmly established before he resigned. In later years Austen was inclined to take a more tolerant view of Mr. Balfour's tactics, and he went so far as to write : * He was not a successful Party leader, but on a calm review of the obstacles which beset his path from the first, and of his achievement, who shall deny his title to be named among our great Prime Ministers ? ' This judgment certainly errs on the side of generosity, and it is unlikely to be the considered opinion of posterity, but it is interesting as evidence of the working of Austen Chamberlain's mind.

Few administrations have gone down to disaster quite so obviously as that in which Austen was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir Edward Grey remarked that he had known Governments which had lost public favour without realizing it, and others which had realized it without admitting it, but Mr. Balfour's was the first which openly avowed that it no longer possessed the confidence of the country but nevertheless asserted its determination to continue to govern so long as it retained the support of its Parliamentary majority. The Education Act, beneficial as it was ultimately to prove, was for the moment a definite liability to the Government, and in particular it deprived the latter's Liberal Unionist wing of the great bulk of middle- and working-class Non-conformist support which had been its main source of strength in the towns and villages. Even in Birmingham

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itself the situation was only saved by the strenuous personal efforts of Mr. Chamberlain. The Tariff Reform crusade had, as has been shown, re-united the Liberal Party, which made great use of the popular fear of an increase in the price of food should there be a change in the fiscal system, while the Prime Minister's apparently undecided attitude encouraged the centrifugal forces in the ranks of the Government's supporters. Lastly, it had come to be realized that in many ways the South African War had been badly managed, and this conviction did much to contribute to the reaction that had set in against the administration which had but a few short years before obtained a new lease of office by an appeal to the patriotism of the electorate.

The growing unpopularity of the Government was well reflected in the by-elections. In 1901 only a single seat, Galway Town, was lost by the Ministerialists ; in 1902 there were three losses, namely Bury, North Leeds (which had never previously returned any but a Conservative), and Orkney and Shetland, which was really an old Liberal stronghold. Except for North Leeds, there was nothing remarkable in this, and the losses were counterbalanced by gains in North-East Lanark and Devonport; but the following year saw the beginning of the *debacle*, which continued unchecked until the resignation of the Government at the end of 1905. When constituencies like St. Albans, Oswestry, Rye, and Brighton refused to elect Conservative candidates there was clearly much truth in Sir Edward Grey's allegation, and during the three years and five months during which Mr. Balfour was Prime Minister his followers suffered a net loss of twenty seats, which constitutes a record in modern Parliamentary history.

Nevertheless, whatever may have been the defects of Mr. Balfour as Prime Minister and as leader of the Conservative Party, it cannot be denied that he was deprived of even that portion of good luck to which a man in his position may reasonably look forward. In South Africa the mine-owners asked approval of a scheme for the importation of Chinese labourers under a system of indenture in order to

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meet the acute dearth of native labour, and this was eventually sanctioned by the British Government ; at once the Opposition denounced the arrangement on moral grounds, and the cry of ' Chinese slavery ' proved a most effective weapon against Ministerialist candidates. In India there was a serious quarrel between Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, and the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, which resulted in the resignation of the former, while the choice of Lord Minto as his successor was coolly received in England.

What, however, attracted the greatest attention at the time was the resignation of Mr. Wyndham in the spring of 1905. He was one of the most brilliant men who have appeared on the political stage in Great Britain, but his very brilliance kept him apart from the mass of his colleagues in the House of Commons. In private he was the best of company, but few knew him in such intimate surroundings, and it cannot be denied that he suffered for his ability in that it cut him off from the rank-and-file of his own Party. He was thus by nature and circumstances out of touch with current opinion, and, like his friend and leader, inclined to take it for granted that the mental processes of others were as rapid as his own. His Land Act was one of the most beneficial measures that Ireland had known, but when it came to be rumoured that he was toying with Home Rule in March, 1905, he was at once suspect to a large section of the Unionist Party.

It has already been seen that the Under-Secretary in Dublin, Sir Antony MacDonnell, was a masterful personality, and Mr. Wyndham was the weaker character of the two. The cause of the trouble which led to the Chief Secretary's downfall was a scheme for devolution, with which Lord Dunraven was connected, and which was published to the world at the end of August, 1904. The proposal, however, did not originate then, for it dated back to March of the previous year, when a circular on the subject had been issued by five members of the Land Conference Committee. It was proposed that Sir Antony

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should invite certain people, with a view to forming a Moderate Party, to meet Lord Dunraven. Sir Antony objected on the ground that * if the first meeting were held in my house, or at my invitation, everyone would say that Mr. Wyndham was a prime mover in the business.' Nevertheless, he was willing to help Lord Dunraven by supplying facts and information, * but I think, and in this Mr. Wyndham agrees with me, it is better I should not appear prominently, or even to the extent of inviting men to meet you.⁵ For nearly twenty years Conservatives and Liberal Unionists had been fighting Home Rule, and there was a furious outcry when it became known that a scheme of devolution, apparently with the blessing of the Chief Secretary, was under discussion. At the critical moment Mr. Wyndham, whom Austen had for some time noted as putting too severe a strain upon his constitution, lost his nerve and resigned. Mr. Walter Long was then appointed in his place, and the storm died down.

The Government was certainly in no position to withstand such shocks, and in this case its prestige was still further weakened by the belief of many Conservatives, both in and out of Parliament, that the real responsibility rested with the Prime Minister, whom they suspected of knowing more of what was afoot than had been admitted. After Mr. Balfour's death Austen wrote : ' He was far more sensitive to any charge which touched his honour or pride than his contemptuous "I do not read the newspapers" would suggest, and I, who was at his right hand during the last two years of his Prime Ministership, know what it cost him to part with George Wyndham.' Irish affairs were, however, to embarrass the administration again, for on July 20th, 1905, the Government was defeated by 200 votes to 196 on a hostile amendment by Mr. Redmond in connection with the working of the Irish Land Purchase Act. After two days' reflection, however, Mr. Balfour decided that he would neither resign nor ask for a dissolution, but would appeal to the House to reverse its decision. The Opposition not unnaturally denounced this course as

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unconstitutional, but the Prime Minister refused to modify his attitude, and Parliament was prorogued on August nth with the Unionists still in office.

During these difficult months Austen Chamberlain supported his leader in the Cabinet, in the House of Commons, and in the country, but he was sick at heart, and was looking forward to the day when he would be free from the burden of office in what were, for his father's son, unnatural circumstances.

In August he and his sister Ida went to the Peninsula for a holiday. Their first port of call was Vigo, and Austen's letters prove that the worries attendant upon the Chancellorship of the Exchequer in a moribund administration had in no way served to diminish his love of natural beauty :

About two-thirty we anchored in Vigo Bay. The town was said to present no features of interest, so we did not land, but contented ourselves with admiring its site and the bay from the ship. It was indeed a lovely view. Seaward the entrance to the bay was blocked by a line of rocky islands forming a natural breakwater. Inside was a fine large bay with hills gently sloping to the coast. Ahead of us, as we swung at anchor, the bay ended in soft brown and blue and purple hills like a Scotch loch, and just abreast of us was the small town clambering up the hillside, and crowned with a fort.

Boats put off from the shore and sold delicacies to the steerage passengers—emigrants for the Argentine, of whom we took on 150 here, whilst the ship was to pick up another two or three hundred at Lisbon. There were bottles of olives, sardines at 2d. a box, a dozen rosy apples for 6rf. or a gigantic basket of onions for u., whilst much noise and fine language was given gratis.

From Vigo the travellers went on to Lisbon, where :



By courtesy of the National Magazine Co., Ltd.

"EAST WORCESTERSHIRE"

Spy Cartoon from *Vanity Fair*, August 3, 1899

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The ubiquitous Press at once arrived represented by *El Dia*, the organ of the Minister of Commerce, who, having, I suppose, become officially aware that I was here, sent his editor to interview me. He behaved like a gentleman, and was content with my statement that I was on holiday and leaving to-morrow.

This letter was written to Aix-les-Bains, where the rest of the Chamberlain family were then staying. 'And how are all of you, I wonder,'⁵ Austen continues to his step-mother, 'and are the patients reconciled to their cure? Don't say I called Neville a patient, or he will mentally throw a bootjack at my head!' Even on holiday, however, Austen could not completely sever himself from politics, and he concludes: 'I fired a long letter of reasons for an autumn dissolution into the P.M. on the eve of my departure.'

Austen and his sister were not to be let off so lightly by the Portuguese Press as they had fondly imagined:

We went out to see the sights of Lisbon, but I think that we were the principal sight of the town. As we stepped into our carriage six Kodak shutters snapped, held by reporters who had waited on the opposite side of the street an hour or more for this brief joy. Other Kodaks appeared at intervals, and one reporter dogged our footsteps, and was only finally shaken off by a sharp reprimand.

I have not seen his account of me! but the editor who secured admittance for a minute and a half has made a column and a half of his interview, without putting into my mouth any more compromising utterance than '*surtout pas de politique?*' You will be glad to hear that I speak French faultlessly, and that I am about thirty. I forget the exact adjectives applied to Ida, but they are all complimentary, though she is said to have written *nervosamente* during the whole interview in a diary to which she commits the thoughts and acts of every hour and every minute,

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From Lisbon they went by way of Seville and Cordova to Madrid, but for Austen the journey was marred by sciatica. He was disappointed with Seville cathedral.

It is fine as a whole internally, but when from a view of its fine and vast proportions you turn to each individual feature, you find that, though they are not bad, neither are they good. They lack all interest and charm. There are no such charming details as our English, or the French, Gothic churches afford for the eye to linger on, and your glance sweeps from column to roof and from window to wall without finding a single really fine piece of workmanship. Altogether, therefore, a disappointment—but a disappointment well worth having !

There were, however, compensations, and the most important were the pictures, especially those of Murillo.

First of all, the two Conceptions in the Prado ; do you remember I likened one to the Dresden Rafael in that it, and it alone, had something really mystic and divine about the face ? I have seen it twice again, and it scarcely bears the closer study. The other is incomparably better painted. . . . It is quite the finest of all the many pictures of the subject by Murillo which I have seen. Add to this some six of the pictures by him in the Museum at Seville, and notably an Adoration of the Shepherds, a Bishop-Saint giving alms, and a Christ on the Cross bending forward to embrace St. Anthony—and you have full proof of Murillo's claim to be a great, a very great artist.

Last time I left Spain I remember saying that the more I saw of Murillo, the less I cared for him. I beg his pardon humbly, and retract every word of it. For colour and for composition, for the grace of some figures and the wonderful vigour and truth of others, such as the beggars or the

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shepherds, the first two of these I have named at Seville would be hard to beat, whilst for the intense religious feeling and depth of love and pity in the Christ and St. Francis I can find only one other master who has left a like impression on my mind—Rubens in some of his Antwerp pictures.

Velasquez was another favourite. 'What a giant he was !' Austen wrote. 'And how much he must have known to get his effects with so slight apparent effort.' The Prado had recently been rearranged, and Austen expressed approval of the hanging of all the Velasquez pictures in the large square room opening out of the long gallery. Concerning Goya, Austen also confessed to a change of opinion.

I have changed about him too. His types are, generally speaking, as ugly as ever. He could no more paint a Church picture—a Christ or a saint—than he could fly. But his portraits, or at least some of them, are superb in force and character and atmosphere. Silly Charles IV, bad Ferdinand VII his son, and bold bad imperious Maria Luisa, Charles's wife, are there to the life, and Spain's squalid story of the years from 1789 to 1830 stares you in the face from their countenances.

Austen and his sister spent two days at Toledo, where they 'were boarded, lodged, and all found for forty pesetas a day,' though when the hotel-keeper discovered that he was housing the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'he complained that we were worth at least another twenty pesetas.' Visits to Segovia and La Granja completed the holiday, and by way of Barcelona the travellers went to Paris, where they met Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain and Neville.

The next few weeks witnessed the long-expected demise of the Government. The Anglo-Japanese alliance had been

concluded in August, so the Prime Minister felt that he had placed the external relations of the country upon a sound basis in the Far East as in Europe. At home the divisions in the Ministerialist ranks were more pronounced than ever, and there was no indication that the administration was regaining its hold upon the electorate. In November the leaders of the two sections of the Government's supporters spoke to their followers in somewhat different terms, and this helped to render the existing confusion worse confounded. At the annual conference of the National Unionist and Conservative Associations at Newcastle-on-Tyne the Prime Minister appealed for unity, and claimed that his fiscal policy as he had defined it should serve as a rallying-point for all shades of opinion within the Party. The speech did not achieve its object, and a few days later Mr. Balfour told the King that he wished to resign. On November 21st Mr. Chamberlain spoke at the annual meeting of the Liberal Unionist Council at Bristol, and it was obvious that he was irritated at the Prime Minister's failure to adopt the course suggested by Austen over twelve months before. He charged Mr. Balfour with evading the real issue ; he claimed that the majority of the Party shared his own views on the fiscal question ; and he announced active hostilities against Conservative and Unionist Free Traders. The events of the previous two and a half years had reached their logical conclusion.

This speech finally decided Mr. Balfour to resign, a course which was also strongly urged upon him by *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Nevertheless, two meetings of the Cabinet were held to discuss the question, and at the second of these the Prime Minister laid before his colleagues a memorandum giving his own views. The substance of this document was contained in the speech which he made a week later, when he explained why he had resigned although unbeaten in any important division in the House of Commons. His Government would, he argued, have been bound to bring in a Redistribution Bill if it stayed in office, and, in the absence of the stimulus of an accompanying

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Franchise Bill, the Party had not the * unanimous vigour' required to carry such a measure, owing to the * continued habit of mutual recrimination on the fiscal question.'¹ In spite of this, the Cabinet was by no means unanimous, and the Chief Secretary for Ireland in particular was strongly opposed to the Prime Minister's proposal ; in this he was supported by Sir Alexander Acland-Hood (the * Pink 'Un '), the Government Chief Whip, who wrote : ' I am more than sorry about the whole thing. I have done my best, and shall feel pretty sick if my advice is utterly disregarded, and the way I have worked for the Party.' Ali the same, the Prime Minister had his way, and on December 4th, 1905, the first and last Balfour Cabinet resigned.

Immediately afterwards Austen wrote to the King to thank him for his kindness during the past few years, and received the following reply :

Buckingham Palace
Dec. nth, igos

MY DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

The King desires me to thank you sincerely for your letter and for your kind and loyal words.

He cannot at all estimate your services at the rate which you put upon them, as he knows you have carried out the duties of your important department with the zeal and efficiency which he expected of you and, he may add, of your father's son.

His Majesty has taken a special interest in your career from the knowledge that you were a friend of the Duke of Clarence's at Cambridge, and he often heard his son speak of you in warm terms of friendship.

Yours sincerely,

KNOLLYS.

For Austen the relief was great. In any event his position

¹ Cf. Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, vol. I, p. 424.

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would have been a difficult one in view of his disagreement with the Prime Minister on a vital matter of policy, but when the protagonist of the ideas which his leader Would not espouse was his own father the position was intolerable, especially for one who was so devoted to his family as Austen. Such being the case two letters which he received at this time were particularly welcome. The first was from his sister :

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec. 5th, '05

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I did not like to write to you until the resignation was actually announced in the papers, but now I must send a line to congratulate you that the worst of a very difficult time is past.

I go back to the time when you accepted the office of Chancellor, which I know was very far from being a happy time for you, in spite of the great position, which it must have been a satisfaction to fill so well as such a young man. I know that it was with the greatest reluctance that you consented to stay in a Government that Papa had left, and I think there have been many moments during these years when you have wished that you had not consented to remain, but I feel sure that now, or at any rate in a very short time, you will see how right you were to stop, and what an enormous advantage it has been to the cause and to Papa to have had you there.

You have suffered much, I know, and in nothing so much, I think, as in feeling that it has prevented your walking absolutely side by side with Papa, and that by the necessity of the case you were forced to see things at times differently, from inside, from his outside view.

This must have been very trying, but it only shows still more strongly what an enormous help you have been as a link. When slight differences of thought arise, even between you and Papa, I feel how wide would have grown the

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differences if there had been no one in the Cabinet to make Papa feel he had someone to take his side, and how absolutely unavoidable a rupture must have been.

After all, it is extraordinary how much contact does to soften down the ideas and opinions of us all, and if you had done nothing else it is everything to feel that you have tided over the time until the dissolution, and I cannot but believe that once in opposition with a more compact body, and all fighting one common foe, that the difficulties which remain, great as they are, will be adjusted.

I expect you are almost too tired now to feel that things can ever come right but I think once the General Election is over you will find that both sides are nearer agreement than you have believed. After all, they are agreed on the principle, and time will be showing more and more clearly how it must be worked out in practice.

These things are all commonplace to you, and I have no doubt seem like very surface remarks to you with all your inner knowledge of the difficulties, but I thought I would just write what I think, as I know you are indulgent to the ideas of even the most foolish of your sisters.

Anyway, you know that you have had all our sympathy and we are all rejoiced that your release has come. At the same time I must say I feel I hope I shall yet see you Chancellor in much more favourable circumstances, with a free hand. It is, however, comforting to feel that even with all the drawbacks it is generally recognized that you have been a great success in your position.

Ever your affte. sister,

HILDA CHAMBERLAIN.

The other was from his stepmother, and it throws as much light upon the feelings of the recipient as upon those of the writer and of Mr. Chamberlain.

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Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec, 6th, 1905

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

A headache yesterday prevented me from sending a few lines to you, but I cannot have you leave Downing Street without them.

Now that you no longer are a Cabinet Minister, and the end we have desired so long has come, I want to tell you once more how truly we have appreciated the difficulties with which you have had to contend, how great has been our sympathy with you, and how proud we have been of the way in which you have fulfilled the duties of your high office and the manner in which you have won the respect and affection of your colleagues.

Throughout the most trying times we have never doubted that you were doing just what your father wished you to do when he urged you to remain in the Government, and though I know you have had many moments of doubt and discouragement yourself, I hope and believe that later, if not *already*, you will feel no hesitation in acknowledging to yourself that your decision was the right one, and that you were able to accomplish what could have been done in no other way.

It is a source of the greatest satisfaction to your father and us all that you have been so important a member of the Cabinet, and that the honour came to you from your own ability and exertions younger than it does to most men. The thought that you were there to keep the road open between Mr. Balfour and your father has helped *me* through many a difficult stage in the two anxious years which have passed since he resigned.

Of course, the future is not easy, but I feel very hopeful that it may hold much that is good in store for us. It is natural that I should feel this more than you do just now. You have been too wearied by the stress not to feel that the difficulties appear well nigh insurmountable. *But I don't believe they are*, and after a little time of rest I believe some of them will vanish more easily than you expect, and with greater perspective the scene will become clearer.

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I need not tell you how we shall rejoice to have you return to our roof tree. When you left it two years ago I felt it more than likely that you would decide you must have a nook of your own when you gave up your official house, and had you so wished I could not have urged you to do otherwise, for I should have understood. But as you have decided of your own free will to come back to such limited quarters as it is only in our power to provide for you, the welcome which we give you in our hearts will, I hope, be some compensation to you for the loss of freedom which is inevitable in giving up your own establishment.

I have missed you more than I can express, and am looking forward to the resumption of our old habits with the utmost pleasure, and your father has, I know, the same feeling that I have. Indeed, it would have been a bitter blow to him had it been otherwise, even though he might have approved.

Your being at home in London will, I think, make his House of Commons work both easier and more interesting to him. This you must not forget.

My few lines have expanded into a long letter, longer than I meant to trouble you with when you must be busy winding up your affairs, but that you will forgive me.

Difficulties lived through together but tighten and strengthen the bonds of true friendship, and sometimes one likes the friend to realize that one feels this.

Ever affectionately yours,

MARY E. CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—Now I have your telegram saying to expect you to-day. I will not destroy my letter, but leave it on your table instead of posting it.

Unfortunately for Austen the relief at being once again his own political master was marred by a period of ill-health. The strain of the previous two years was making itself felt, and he was also a victim to sciatica, with which he was troubled all his life. What he needed was a rest, but

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that was for the present out of the question. A Liberal Cabinet, with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister, took office on December 8th, and it was obvious that a General Election must take place as soon as the Christmas holidays were over. Austen, however, was not to be free even until then, for he had several meetings to address in different parts of the country. On December nth he spoke in his own constituency, and three days later he was at Bradford. On both occasions he came out boldly for Tariff Reform as the only possible policy, and he ridiculed the idea that it was having a disintegrating effect upon the Unionist Party.

He heard sometimes that the Party was irreconcilably divided upon that question. What nonsense that was. He knew something of the views of the leaders of the Party on that question, and that some of them wished to move faster and to travel further than others. It would be strange if it were not so in a question of such magnitude and importance. 'But I say, and with knowledge, that between the leaders of our Party there is no difference of principle, no difference of aim, which shall prevent that loyal co-operation in the future to which we have owed our successes in the past.' There might be a handful of irreconcilables like the juryman who could not agree with his eleven brethren, and complained that never in his life had he met eleven such obstinate men.¹

Like all Unionist speakers at this time Austen endeavoured to make use once more of the threat of Home Rule, but the new Prime Minister had already given an assurance that he would not introduce a Home Rule Bill into the forthcoming Parliament, so that this particular weapon in the Unionist armoury was nothing like so effective as it had been in the past or was to be in the future.

On January 8th, 1906, the proclamation dissolving Parliament was issued, and the General Election campaign began. In those days a General Election was very different from what it was subsequently to become. No woman was

¹ *Yorkshire Daily Observer*, December 15th, 1905.

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eligible to exercise the suffrage, but an elector could exercise as many votes as he held, and this was possible in practice as well as in theory, because elections did not take place all on one day. As long a period as a month might elapse before a General Election was completed, and in each district there was much intrigue to settle the date of the poll in order that, from a Party standpoint, a good example might be set to neighbouring constituencies, or a bad one averted. A Conservative mayor in a borough likely to return a Liberal, for instance, would fix a date as late as possible so that no encouragement might be given to other towns to do likewise, while there would always be the hope that a series of Conservative victories elsewhere might cause his fellow-citizens to change their minds at the last moment. In 1906 this factor was specially prominent, and the disasters which overtook Mr. Balfour, who was himself defeated in East Manchester by a majority of nearly two thousand, and his followers during the first day's polling had an important effect upon the final result, given the natural tendency of the ordinary citizen to support the winning side.

The General Election of 1906 was bitterly contested, and there were only 114 uncontested seats, of which 82 were in Ireland, compared with 236 (71 Irish) in 1900. From the beginning it was clear that the initiative had passed to the Liberals. Mr. Chamberlain's tariff scheme was denounced as the starvation of the poor, and big and little loaves, labelled respectively 'Free Trade' and 'Tariff Reform',⁵ made their appearance at Liberal meetings, or were depicted on posters affixed to every hoarding. 'Chinese slavery' also played its part, which was not always a very creditable one. 'What would you say,'⁵ thundered Mr. Lloyd George, 'to introducing Chinamen at a shilling a day into the Welsh quarries? Slavery on the hills of Wales!' In many places there were even processions of sandwichmen dressed like Chinese and chained together. Austen Chamberlain was himself in a peculiarly difficult position. As a Cabinet Minister he had necessarily been compelled to neglect his constituency to some extent of late years, while

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the electorate had greatly increased in numbers, and there had not been a contest for fourteen years. When, therefore, a Liberal candidate appeared in the person of a Mr. John Morgan, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer was compelled, in spite of his health, to take the election very seriously.

In his address to the electors of East Worcestershire he put the issue as he saw it :

GENTLEMEN,

In response to a cordial invitation from the joint Unionist Associations of this Division, I have the honour again to offer my services to represent you in Parliament.

For fourteen years I have been your Member, and I gratefully acknowledge the confidence and support you have so generously accorded to me.

My views on public questions are thus well known to you. While resisting changes that appeared to me unjust to individuals or injurious to the nation, I have steadily sought to promote the prosperity of our country and the welfare of our people. Ten years of Unionist Government have increased our influence and strengthened our position abroad ; they have aroused a new spirit in Colonial administration, and have thus brought about united action on behalf of our common interests ; and in the sphere of home politics they have witnessed the accomplishment of great social reforms.

Two great questions are before you at the present moment. The new Government is a Home Rule Government, and, being dependent upon Mr. Redmond's support for its continuance in office, will be obliged to do his bidding. The country has twice already decisively rejected the policy of Home Rule, which is as dangerous to England as it would be injurious to Ireland. I ask for your support in resisting in the future, as I have done in the past, this cowardly surrender to the forces of disloyalty and disorder.

A second question of equal importance now presents itself.

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After nearly sixty years' experience of our present fiscal system we find our foreign trade increasingly hampered, and our home markets invaded, owing to the action of foreign tariffs. At the same time, we are prevented from adopting any measures of defence, or taking any steps towards closer commercial union with our Colonies, by the restrictions which we have voluntarily imposed upon our own liberty of action.

In the opinion of the Unionist Party and its leaders the time has come when we should abandon a policy which no longer achieves the objects for which it was adopted ; which leaves our manufacturers and workpeople at the mercy of an artificially stimulated foreign competition ; which increases the difficulty of finding employment for our growing population ; which checks our prosperity in good times and aggravates the distress in bad times.

I therefore support a change in our fiscal policy for three reasons :

- (1) That we may obtain better treatment for our trade in foreign markets and more equal conditions of competition for our own people.
- (2) That we may accept the offer of a reciprocal trade preference made to us by Colonial statesmen, and thus secure at once our position in Colonial markets and closer relations with our Colonial kinsmen.
- (3) That by developing British trade we may increase the demand for British labour and improve the position of British workmen.

I will give my hearty support to all measures likely to promote these great objects. I believe them to be both practicable and attainable at the present time, though delay might endanger their success. They require for their realization a complete change in our existing system. They may involve the adoption of a moderate general tariff on all imported manufactured articles, whilst leaving raw materials free, and they will require some redistribution of our present taxes upon food. For both these changes I

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am prepared to vote. They will not increase the cost of living to the poor, or add to the difficulties of their lives. On the contrary, by extending British trade they will enlarge the opportunities for employment and stimulate the demand for British labour ; whilst by creating new bonds of intercourse and interest between the motherland and its daughter nations across the seas they will strengthen the Empire and increase its unity and power.

For the sake alike of this unity and of fair play for British traders and workpeople, I ask for a renewal of the support with which you have honoured me in past years.

I am, gentlemen,
Your faithful servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, Moor Green, *Jan. 8th* > igo6

Austen was wise in taking the offensive in this way, for although the record of the late Government was in many ways, particularly where foreign policy was concerned, highly creditable, it had no great vote-catching value. It was a mistake, though a pardonable one, to say so much about Home Rule, and references to that topic at meetings were generally greeted with shouts of 'Bogy' and 'Red herring.' As a whole, however, the election address was a masterly document, and when it is compared with the previous ones issued by its author the growth of the latter's political stature during the previous six years can be estimated. The appeal was on a definitely higher plane.

It was not the hardest election Austen Chamberlain ever fought—that lay ahead in 1929—but it was very strenuous, and in view of the state of his health he found it a great strain. His meetings were very noisy, and on several occasions he had considerable difficulty in obtaining a hearing. He appealed to the electors on the lines of his election address, and one of the few causes of satisfaction for him during the campaign was that at last he could unreservedly champion his father's policy on the public

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platform. Although the counties polled after the boroughs, where Conservative and Unionist seats had been lost by the dozen, East Worcestershire was unaffected by what was happening elsewhere, and when the figures were announced it was seen that Austen had had far less to fear than his supporters had supposed :

Chamberlain . . .	10,129
Morgan . . .	5,763
Majority . . .	4,366

If it had been a hard fight, it had been a clean one, and the defeated candidate, in congratulating his opponent, observed that he would be much wanted in the new House of Commons.

In a letter of thanks to his supporters Austen correctly interpreted the result as a victory for Tariff Reform :

GENTLEMEN,

I thank you for the honour you have done me in once more electing me as your representative in Parliament.

This great constituency has declared itself, by an overwhelming majority, in favour of the Unionist policy. To the forefront of that policy stands our programme of Tariff Reform. Its adoption is for the time postponed by the decision of other parts of the country, but its future success is certain. Meanwhile, we in East Worcestershire have the honour of being pioneers in this great movement for the defence of British trade and the closer union of the Empire.

I take this opportunity of returning my grateful thanks to all who have contributed to the splendid victory recorded in the figures of Monday's poll.

I am, gentlemen,

Your faithful servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, Moor Green, *Jan. 23rd, 1906*

When the final results of the General Election were known

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it was found that the Unionists had met with overwhelming disaster. The Liberal, Labour, and Irish Nationalist Parties had a net gain of 215 seats, and the Liberals alone had a majority of 84 over all other Parties in the House of Commons. As for the Opposition, they returned a mere 157, of whom 132 were Conservatives and 25 were Liberal Unionists. In these circumstances there were few who would have cared to prophesy, on the morrow of the greatest triumph that the Liberal Party had ever known, that it was the last triumph that Party was ever to enjoy, and that in less than a generation its representatives at Westminster would be reduced to a mere handful. One man, however, had an inkling of what lay ahead, and that was Mr. Balfour. In reply to a letter from Austen commiserating with him on his defeat he had written :

Whittingehame, Prestonkirk, N.B.

Jan. 17th, 1906

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I am most grateful for your letter. I am, however, sorry that in the middle of a heavy contest, when your sciatica is, I hear, still troubling you, you should have unnecessarily added to your labours.

I have been much preoccupied since Saturday's declarations about your seat and others in the Birmingham district, for it is quite obvious—at least so it seems to me—that we are dealing with forces not called into being by any of the subjects about which Parties have been recently squabbling, but rather due to a general movement of which we see the more violent manifestations in Continental politics ; and I cannot help fearing, therefore, that the new Labour issue may carry away seats in the Midlands which, under other circumstances, would have been practically safe. But I trust I am wholly wrong.

I am profoundly interested in this new development, which will end, I think, in the break-up of the Liberal Party, and, perhaps, in other things even more important.

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I hope the moment your election is over you will take an absolute rest till the meeting of Parliament. They won't allow me to keep quiet, which, I think, is rather hard, considering that I am a defeated candidate ! But I hope to have only two more speeches—to-night and to-morrow !

Yours ever,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

The position of the Opposition could hardly have been more desperate, for not only was it reduced to an extent almost without precedent, but it was divided against itself, and its leader had lost his seat. After such a disaster there is always a disposition to look for a scapegoat, and on the present occasion criticism was in many quarters directed against Mr. Balfour. His defeat at Manchester exacerbated the situation, for it became necessary to find a deputy to lead the Party in the House of Commons in his absence, and there were not wanting those who suggested that it was an admirable opportunity to get rid of him altogether. The *Outlook*, for example, then at the height of its influence under Mr. Garvin's editorship, well represented the point of view of the rank and file. That journal, after observing that 'the Byzantine theory of Unionist leadership—the theory of speechless loyalty to an hereditary succession—is at an end,' went on to say : 'As a Parliamentarian, Mr. Balfour has shown extraordinary gifts. But he has shown no power whatever of moving and holding the country. Unless the ex-Premier can show himself capable of receiving and communicating inspiration by rising to the height of Mr. Chamberlain's policy the Unionist Party will never return to power under his leadership.'¹ The 'Balfour Must Go' movement had its origin at this time, although it was not so styled until several years later.

The first difficulty was clearly to find a common policy on the vexed question of Tariff Reform. On the return of

¹ February 3rd, 1906.

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Mr. Balfour from Scotland he dined on February 2nd with Mr. Chamberlain at the latter's house in Princes Gardens, when Mrs. Chamberlain and Austen were the only others present. They talked until after midnight, but without reaching any decision, and the same fate overtook a meeting of the Opposition leaders which was held at Mr. Balfour's residence the following day. It was not, however, the leadership which was at stake, for it had already been settled that Mr. Chamberlain should lead the Opposition, with Mr. Walter Long as his deputy, until such time as the ex-Premier found a seat—an event which soon occurred owing to the resignation in his favour of one of the Members for the City of London. The trouble was, as Austen himself put it, that Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain 'drew exactly opposite inferences from the result of the election. Balfour saw in it a reason for extreme caution ; my father drew from it a very different inference—that a more pronounced Tariff Reform policy would have had far greater success, and prevented a defeat, which was in any case inevitable, from becoming a rout.' For a few days, indeed, it looked as if the election might be followed by a definite schism in the Opposition ranks. 'Balfour seems to me,' Mr. Chamberlain wrote to Mr. Long on February 5th, 'to have read the lessons of the election in altogether a different sense from what we do. He seems to me to have gone back and not forward in his views, and to be entirely wrong as to the real feeling of the Party as a whole. . . . In fact, he is *non possumus* everywhere, and I confess I do not see my way out of the difficulty in which we are placed.'

Not for the first time Austen had to act as the link between his leader and his father. There was need for urgency, for, at the request of Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Balfour had reluctantly consented to summon a Party meeting, at which defeated candidates as well as Members of Parliament were to be present, and this was to take place at Lansdowne House in a few days. It was most desirable that there should be agreement of some sort before the meeting, and this, after much effort, Austen was able to effect. With the assistance

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of Mr. Akers-Douglas, Mr. J. S. Sandars (Mr. Balfour's secretary), and the Chief Whip, he drew up the two following letters, which from their date became known in political history as the 'Valentine letters.'

4 Carlton Gardens
Feb. 14th, 1906

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

The controversy aroused by the fiscal question has produced, not unnaturally, an impression which I have constantly combatted, that the practical differences between fiscal reformers are much deeper than is in fact the case. The exchange of views which has recently taken place between us leads me to hope that this misconception may be removed, and with it much friction which has proved injurious to the Party.

My own opinion, which I believe is shared by the great majority of the Unionist Party, may be briefly summarized as follows :

I hold that fiscal reform is, and must remain, the first constructive work of the Unionist Party.

That the objects of such reform are to secure more equal terms of competition for British trade and closer commercial union with the Colonies.

That, while it is at present unnecessary to prescribe the exact methods by which these objects are to be attained, and inexpedient to permit differences of opinion as to those methods to divide the Party, though other means may be possible, the establishment of a moderate general tariff on manufactured goods, not imposed for the purpose of raising prices or giving artificial protection against legitimate competition, and the imposition of a small duty on foreign corn are not in principle objectionable, and should be adopted if shown to be necessary for the attainment of the ends in view or for purposes of revenue.

Believe me yours sincerely,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

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40 Princes Gardens

Feb. 14th, 1906

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

I cordially welcome your letter of to-day, in which you have summarized the conclusions that we have reached during our recent discussion.

I entirely agree with your description of the objects which we both have in view, and gladly accept the policy which you indicate as the wise and desirable one for the Unionist Party to adopt.

In endeavouring to give effect to this policy and in defending all Unionist principles, any services that I can render will be entirely at your disposal.

I am yours very truly,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

These letters were greeted with relief by all Conservatives and Unionists who were not convinced Free Fooders, and they enabled Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain to confront the Party meeting with a common policy, so that the Opposition might be united for the fulfilment of its proper function, namely to oppose the Government. For this achievement no small measure of the credit must go to Austen.

At the annual meeting of his local association a few weeks later he gave, while speaking of his own recent victory, clear expression to his views on the situation between the two schools of thought in the Party :

As a final cause of their success he would place the fact that in the Midlands they had a definite, clear, constructive policy, which the candidates were united in placing before the constituencies, and in which the electors were educated and were already interested. He fancied that some of their friends elsewhere would have done far better had they taken a bolder course in the great controversy of the day, had they faced the great issues which that controversy

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involved from the first moment of their coming above the political horizon, and had they left in the minds of their constituents, whether friends or foes, no doubt of the attitude which they were going to adopt. . . .

And they might find no less satisfaction in the fact that owing to the brief but frank and clear exposition of his views upon the fiscal question which Mr. Balfour embodied in his * Valentine letter ' to Mr. Chamberlain of February 14th, there could be no doubt in any man's mind what was the first constructive policy of the Unionist Party, or what line candidates who wished to support the Party should take in educating their constituents.¹

Shortly after making this speech Austen went abroad for a holiday upon which his doctor had latterly become very insistent, and not without good cause. He chose Algiers, and there he met Miss Ivy Dundas, daughter of Colonel Dundas, and within ten days they were engaged. In his own words he thus found ' the help and support to which I have owed everything in subsequent years.' His marriage took place at St. Margaret's, Westminster, on July 21st, and it only remains to add that this event created for Austen a household of his own which was soon to be as happy as that from which he had sprung, for he and Mrs. Chamberlain became in due course the parents of a girl and two boys. Among the letters of congratulation which Austen received on his engagement there was one in particular, a holograph, of which he was justly proud :

Marlborough House
May 16th, 1906

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

I wish to send you a line of hearty congratulations on your engagement to be married which I see announced in the newspapers.

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 24th, 1906.

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I trust that every happiness may attend you and your wife to be in the years to come.

I hope your father and Mrs. Chamberlain are quite well ; please remember me very kindly to them.

Believe me

Very sincerely yours,

GEORGE.

CHAPTER V

OPPOSITION

THE period which began with the General Election of 1906 and ended with the outbreak of war in 1914 was marked in the political field by developments of which the origins had hardly been detected, but of which the results were very soon to make themselves felt. Superficially there was less to distinguish the era from what had gone before than from what was to follow. The great struggles at Westminster were in the main still concerned with politics rather than with economics, and they were carried on between the historic Conservative and Liberal Parties. Home Rule, the disestablishment of the Welsh Church, and the position of the House of Lords continued to be the questions chiefly before the electorate down to the moment when the Germans crossed the Belgian frontier; but underground there were forces at work which were one day to produce a very different England, and from time to time there were subterranean rumblings which augured ill for a peaceful future. Towards the end of the period, as we shall see, from being latent they became patent, but even so they were generally regarded as of secondary importance, and politics continued—apparently—along the old lines until August, 1914.

It was those physically or mentally most remote from what was taking place who seem, curiously enough, to have been possessed of the greatest vision. The letter which Mr. Balfour wrote to Austen on the morrow of his own defeat was almost prophetic. At the same time Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister of Canada, was writing to Professor Hewins : ' The recent elections have undoubtedly opened a new era in the history of England. The England of the past may survive partially yet for a few years, but it is a democratic England which now takes its place. The Labour element will count henceforth as a very important factor, and it is difficult to foresee exactly to what extent,

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but certainly to a very large extent, it will control legislation.¹ If this statement was in some respects an exaggeration, subsequent events have shown that there was much truth in it, and although the turning-points in the life of nations are not so clearly defined as some authorities would have us believe, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the year 1906 represents a very definite landmark in the annals of Great Britain. In that year the nineteenth century really ended, though its ghost was to walk until 1914 ; social and economic rather than political problems became the more important ; while abroad the *status quo*, which had existed relatively intact for nearly two generations, began to give evidence of its approaching collapse. The writing was on the wall, even if it was noticed by comparatively few.

The dust raised during these years by the combatants in the political arena was so considerable that it was by no means easy to see what was going on. Both Parties were to some extent untrue to their traditions, while loudly proclaiming their devotion to them. The Liberals, driven to the Left by the loss of the Whigs in 1886, increasingly adopted Socialistic methods which would have horrified their former leaders, though fate had willed it that this policy should benefit, not them, but the nascent Labour Party. The Conservatives, on the other hand, seemed to have lost the impetus which they had received by the accession of Mr. Chamberlain and his Liberal Unionists, and to have forgotten what Lord Beaconsfield had taught them in the matter of social reform. It was, in effect, an era of many political paradoxes, not the least of which was the fact that while it culminated in a catastrophe, that catastrophe was not the one which had been generally anticipated. English eyes were for the most part turned to the west, in the direction of Ireland, rather than to the east, in the summer of 1914.

These developments were still in the future when Austen

¹ W. A. S. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist*, vol. I, p. 159.

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Chamberlain returned from Algiers with his new-found happiness. His fiancée did not come from a political household ; indeed, she has confessed that at the time of her marriage she hardly knew the difference between a Conservative and a Liberal ; but she took from the beginning the closest interest in all Austen's activities, and she soon became very popular with his friends and associates. One of the first ceremonies which the engaged couple attended together was the celebration in Birmingham of Mr. Chamberlain's seventieth birthday at the beginning of July. On the 7th there was a banquet in the statesman's honour, and this was followed on the 9th by a meeting in Bingley Hall. At the close of this latter demonstration there were repeated calls for Austen, who was forced to get up and say a few words :

I do not know how it is, but lately there seems to be some confusion in the public mind between those shows which are my right honourable friend's and those which are mine. This is not mine. Yet since you call upon me to say a few words there are two thoughts that have been chiefly present in my mind in these days, to which I would like to try to give expression. You, the citizens of Birmingham, have placed every member of my family under new obligations. You have bound us to you by even closer ties of interest and affection, by the heartiness of the welcome that you have given to my father, by your generous recognition of his long and faithful service, and by the warmth of the welcome that you have given to all who are connected with him, or who are about to be connected with him. For my brother and myself I would say that we recognize the obligations that you have laid us under, and that if, at any time and in any capacity, we can render any service to the city of our birth we shall be proud to obey your summons.

There is another thought, perhaps less personal, or at any rate taking a slightly different direction, which has dwelt much in my mind. It is that we who have met to

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celebrate this period in the career of a man who has given his life to his city and his race, if we mean, as we do mean, what we have been saying and feeling in these days, are pledged by every tie of honour and of gratitude to support him to the utmost of our power, and we are pledged that, come what may to any individual in the fight, we will never rest till victory crowns the cause for which he has laboured so long.¹

During the course of this meeting there had been one or two indications that Mr. Chamberlain was unwell, and two days later he had a stroke which rendered it impossible for him ever to speak in public again. This blow necessitated the assumption by Austen of the leadership of the campaign for Tariff Reform. It meant a change in his position. 'Through my father's illness,' he wrote to Mr. Walter Long, 'I am necessarily forced more into the position of a protagonist. I cannot be so much the "link" between the more and the less advanced as I was while he was active.' Henceforth his advocacy of the Protectionist cause was stimulated by filial piety.

Hardly had these new responsibilities, and those incurred by matrimony, descended upon Austen than he was involved in a crisis within the Unionist Party owing to a revival of the controversy regarding the appointment of Sir Antony MacDonnell. On August 29th Mr. Walter Long addressed the Irish Unionist Alliance in Dublin, and referred to statements which had recently been made to the effect that when he became Chief Secretary in succession to Mr. Wyndham he had been prevented by Mr. Balfour, owing to the existence of certain correspondence, from making changes in the personnel of the Irish administration: if such letters existed, he demanded that they should be produced. Sir Antony took this as a reference to himself, and wrote next day pointing out that Mr. Balfour had refused to produce the

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, July 10th, 1906.

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correspondence relating to an unsuccessful attempt to deprive him of office in 1904-5 ; he also indignantly repelled the imputation that he had based threats on the correspondence, and added a sentence which seemed to indicate that the wide powers conferred on him when he took office had been left undiminished by Mr. Long. The ex-Chief Secretary, in reply, denied that he had referred to Sir Antony, and stated that he had retained the other's services after satisfying himself that he could count on his conscientious co-operation, but he again pressed for the production of the correspondence. This demand was supported by Colonel Saunderson, the Ulster Unionist leader, and, in a series of articles, by *The Times*,

Meanwhile Mr. Balfour was taking the matter quite calmly, and writing to Mr. Long : ' I find it very difficult to understand what all the row is about, or what it is that wants clearing up.' Further pressure from Mr. Long, however, induced the ex-Premier to modify his attitude and to draft a long letter to the Irish Unionists. This was submitted to his colleagues, and Austen in particular was outspoken in his criticism. By this time the suspicion, never really dead, that Mr. Balfour and Mr. Wyndham had been toying with Home Rule had become widespread, and Austen demurred to a rebuke being addressed to the Ulstermen for a distrust which was general throughout the Party. He wrote of the draft :

It begins with an apparent refusal to meet the request for information emphasized and developed through three pages. It implies that in the writer's view any request for information—not merely a request for publication—is unreasonable and fit subject for resentment. It is so drawn as to lay exaggerated stress on what the writer will not do, and to conceal that which he is ready to do, and in fact does a few pages further on. . . .

We owe much of our present trouble to the fact that Sir Antony MacDonnell misunderstood the ordinary functions of

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a civil servant, and that the letters in which his appointment was made appeared to endorse his view that he was going to receive exceptional and extraordinary authority. . . .

The draft . . . above all shows a complete failure to grasp the serious nature of the situation, and an entire want of appreciation of what is being said or thought in Unionist circles everywhere.

The original draft was, in the face of such criticism, withdrawn, but the comments of Austen indicate how closely he was in touch with the rank and file. For them the crux of the matter was : Was Sir Antony a suitable appointment ? Did he insist on a special position ? How much was told to the Cabinet ? As the controversy progressed Mr. Long came to consider that the ex-Premier was shielding Mr. Wyndham, and thereby both alienating the Party and sacrificing him, Mr. Long. Austen clearly sympathized with the ex-Chief Secretary, but he tried to act as the peacemaker.

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham

5.io.'06

MY DEAR WALTER,

Yours of the 4th received to-day.

I saw Lansdowne on Wednesday evening, and had a long talk with him ; I also went through with him a memo he had prepared giving an abstract of all his correspondence and conversations about the affair. On the whole they were satisfactory, but they are terribly voluminous, and I fear Arthur has as much more.

Under the circumstances I agree with them that they cannot at once publish the whole—still less make selections, which would at once be challenged as unfair. But I think Arthur should publish the most concise and definite statement of the facts that he can make, prefaced with a single sentence to say that, whilst he will not take the responsibility

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of publishing private correspondence between colleagues or between Ministers and their subordinates, he makes this statement on behalf of himself and his Cabinet, and he waives once for all on their behalf and his own the shelter of privacy and privilege, and challenges anyone who doubts or questions his facts to publish any letters in their possession whether marked private or not.

I believe that in this way, and in this way only, can he justify himself and his late colleagues.

Unfortunately his draft letter as shown me by Lansdowne is verbose and diffuse ; it contains a disquisition on the difficulties of writing biography, and an attack on the Ulstermen's want of trust which would have a deplorable effect if published.

It would produce on the mind of any reader the very opposite impression to that we desire, viz. that he wants to conceal instead of reveal the whole of the facts.

I spoke very strongly to Lansdowne about it, and will write to Arthur in the same sense. I was glad to hear that Jack Sandars, who had seen it at Lansdowne's house, agreed that it would not do. So there is some hope of altering it.

The first draft was deplorable. It is amazing that neither Arthur, nor Gerald or Alfred, whom he consulted, should have seen how bad an effect it would have.

I am bound to say that George Wyndham appears much better in the Lansdowne correspondence than I had feared might be the case.

One word more, and that a personal one : Do not, I beg, be too susceptible as to your own position. You are and must remain our spokesman on Irish affairs. No one dreams of throwing you over or questioning your authority. Our fortunes are bound up with yours—not with Wyndham's—in this matter ; but it is natural that we should save Wyndham as much as possible and, given Arthur's character and friendship for W., certain that Arthur will do his utmost to protect him. We must not allow Arthur to ruin the Party in the effort to shield a friend, but I am sure on full consideration you will not quarrel with Arthur for making it.

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Forgive this adjuration. It is at least very sincere, and dictated by an earnest desire for the good of the Party, and by much good will and friendship for yourself.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Two days later Austen sent to Mr. Balfour the memorandum mentioned with a covering letter :

y.io.'06

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

I have written and now enclose a memorandum and the draft letter you sent me.

I fear I have written strongly, for I feel strongly ; and I do not know how to convey to you in more moderate language the strength of my conviction of the gravity of the crisis in the Unionist Party and of the widespread character of the misconceptions which prevail.

I do not think you realize what is the depth of feeling you, as chief and spokesman of your Cabinet, have to deal with on behalf of your colleagues and the Party. Here in the Midlands I have been arranging for some autumn meetings. I was at once met at my Comtee. by the question : 'What about Ireland ? Until the situation is cleared up our men won't and can't fight.' Yesterday I met S. Crossley, Pike Pease, and Parker Smith in London. They asked the same question. They felt themselves unable to deal with public audiences till the situation is cleared up. They feared trouble at Nottingham this week, and though they personally were much relieved by what I felt it possible to say to them, everything now depends on your own and Lansdowne's utterances.

Do, I beg you, forgive any undue frankness or even brutality of statement in my paper. You know, I hope, my feeling for you and how entirely loyal I am to you. If I did not care so much for your authority, and was not thus devoted to you, I should not write as I have done. But I

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cannot let you proceed on a course which I know leads to disaster without doing my best to make you see the truth of the situation as I see it. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Mr. Balfour replied by return of post :

Whittingehame, Prestonkirk, N.B.

Oct. 8th, 1906

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

. . . I do not at all minimize the gravity of the crisis. If I did, I certainly should not take the trouble to write heaven knows how many folio pages in the middle of my holiday. . . .

I think it perfectly outrageous that I, for instance, should be suspected of tampering with Home Rule upon evidence on which you would not hang a cat. If I seem to tolerate or condone such relations as this suspicion implies between a leader and his Party by concealing the views which I really entertain, I am not sure that I do not go some distance towards justification of the attacks which have been made upon my colleagues and myself. These attacks could not, and would not, have been made if there had been any semblance of loyalty among the Irish Unionists, and it is only because they have 'set the ball rolling' that anything in the nature of a 'grave crisis'⁵ has arisen on this side of the Channel. . . .

Yours ever,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

On October 12th the Marquess of Lansdowne spoke at Nottingham, and dealt very fully with the circumstances and conditions of Sir Antony MacDonnell's appointment. He declared explicitly that neither Mr. Balfour nor any of his

colleagues ever promoted, or took part in promoting, proposals either for Home Rule or for measures of devolution leading up to it ; but he refused to publish any more letters, on the general ground that it would be fatal to the conduct of public business if private correspondence were made liable to publication. At the same time he challenged anyone to produce a single document which seemed to establish the charge against members of the late Cabinet of coquetting with Home Rule ; if there were such documents there was no objection to their publication. On October 23rd the ex-Premier spoke even more strongly at Manchester. He denounced as a 'preposterous legend' the notion that he and his colleagues had ever tolerated the idea of devolution for Ireland ; they might as well be accused of horse-stealing ; there were no compromising letters ; but, if there were, let them be produced. With this the incident passed into history,¹ and it has only been related here, not for its intrinsic importance, but for the insight which it affords into the position of Austen Chamberlain in the Party and into his relations with his leader.

At Westminster the bone of contention during the year 1906 was the Government's Education Bill. It abolished all tests for teachers, and gave public authorities full control of all religious education, seeking to bring denominational schools into harmony with the national system. It was introduced into the House of Commons on April 9th, and from the beginning it roused the hostility of Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The opposition to it was led by Mr. Balfour with a skill which has rarely been surpassed, and the Government was forced to adopt the procedure of [£] closure by compartments ' in order to get the Bill through the Commons by the end of July. The Upper House proceeded to amend the measure drastically, and an autumn session became necessary, when the Bill passed to and fro between the two Houses. Austen had not taken a prominent part in the debates, but when on December 17th the Lords

¹ All the relevant documents are to be found in the *Quarterly Review* for January, 1932.

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adopted Lord Lansdowne's motion that ^c the Lords do insist on their amendments/ he took part in some conferences to discuss the line to be adopted. Lord Lansdowne had had a meeting that day with the Ministers to see if any compromise was possible, and he naturally reported the conversation to a gathering of his colleagues, which consisted of Mr. Balfour, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord St. Aldwyn, Lord Goschen, Lord Salisbury, Mr. Walter Long, Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, Mr. George Wyndham, Lord Cawdor, Lord Edmund Talbot, and Austen Chamberlain.

As a result of this meeting there were further discussions between the Opposition, represented by Lords Lansdowne and Cawdor and Mr. Balfour, and the Government, and the situation which resulted is best described in a memorandum which Austen wrote :

The conference met at Crewe House next morning, the 18th, the Archbishop of Canterbury being also present. They went through the Bill with Crewe and his colleagues, and afterwards at 5 p.m. reported the results to us. The Government had suggested some concessions, and had intimated that these were not their last word. They seemed anxious for compromise.

The points touched by the
Govt.'s proposed con-
cessions were :

(A) Clause III schools. Per-
mission to teachers to give
religious instruction if they
volunteered to do so.

1. No teacher to teach
without permission of the local
authority.

2. No head teacher to teach
under any circumstances.

3. Assistant teachers not to
teach in any country single-

Our decision upon
them was :

(A) All teachers must be al-
lowed to teach in all schools
everywhere if they volun-
teered. This is to be a *sine*
qua non. The Duke of Devon-
shire alone dissented,

I did not dissent, but said I
regarded this as the most diffi-
cult point for the Govt, to yield.
It touched the special griev-
ance of the Nonconformists.

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school district unless there were over 250 children in the school, and then only subject to the assent of the local authority.

(B) Transfers of schools. Add to the securities for schools not being unreasonably refused that they should not be reckoned redundant 'if the present redundancy appeared only temporary.'

(c) Obligation of local authority to take over a future Clause III school. The Govt, were determined that the decision of the local authority must be final, irrespective of the wishes of parents.

(D) Clause IV schools.

1. The Govt, would accept the decision of a smaller fraction of the whole of the parents, but would not take any fraction of the 'parents voting.'

2. Parents of the children in any school dissenting from the proposed teaching would be sufficient to stop its becoming a Clause IV school unless there were available

St. Aldwyn was strong for insistence on this point. It was the only one he regarded as vital. The Archbishop also attached great importance to it.

(B) See below under (c). St. Aldwyn pointed out that many of these schools ought to go. They were ill-built, costly, redundant, etc.

(c) We agreed to waive our views on (B) and (c) if the Govt, would give us an amended form of Salisbury's amendment, i.e. right of entry in single-school Cowper Temple districts. This decided to be vital—the Duke and St. Aldwyn alone dissenting. I said I thought it more important than anything else. It was my suggestion, and would meet St. Aldwyn's point.

(D) 1. Agreed to accept two-thirds of whole. The Archb. was satisfied. The Duke of Norfolk, who now replaced Talbot, was less so.

I rather urged a simple majority.

2. We contended that this would reduce Clause IV to a nullity. It must be modified—made, say, 20 per cent, of parents.

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places in a Cowper Temple school¹ for them.

Govt, offered to put the onus of moving on the dissenting parents instead of assuming their dissent as the Bill does.

to

(E) In this connection we discussed the proposed plan of State-aided schools, i.e. Clause IV extended facility schools, which the local authority unreasonably refuses to take over. Birrell's Bill proposes that they should have their facilities and State aid, but no rate aid, i.e. that they should be penalized because the local authority is contumacious.

We said this was intolerable. Compulsion must be exercised on the contumacious authority (i.e. insert *shall* instead of *may*) and/or the State-aided school clause should be struck out of the Bill.

(F) The Welsh Home Rule clause was to be dropped.

Our representatives met Crewe, etc., again at 9.30 p.m. They got no further than the question of the teachers. The Govt, at once intimated that they could not go any further. Our proposal was quite inadmissible. They had got to the 'extreme edge' of concession. Birrell hinted that perhaps the head teacher might be allowed to teach, but only if every other contention of ours were dropped, and

¹ i.e. a Board School in which "no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught."

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only if the local authority in each case gave permission for him to do so. The Govt, representatives appeared to think they had gone too far at the first meeting, and seemed inclined to draw back from what they had said. Their attitude was distinctly less conciliatory.

We met again at Lansdowne House at noon on the 19th. Lansdowne and Cawdor reported to the above effect. The Archb. added that, being very reluctant to abandon the idea of a settlement, he had seen Crewe again that morning to ask if in return for any modification of our demands the Govt, would give the teachers a statutory right to teach not dependent on the good will of each individual local authority. Crewe absolutely refused any limitation of the discretion of the local authority to refuse their assent.

The general feeling was that this settled the fate of the Bill, and discussion began among the Lords as to their procedure, when I asked to say a few words. I recalled my observation about the question of the teachers at the meeting the day before ; repeated that I thought this the most touchy point for Nonconformists as raising the idea of tests for teachers—the fear that at any rate teachers would in fact be selected or rejected because of their willingness or the reverse to teach dogmatic religion. It was therefore not our best fighting point, and it was the most difficult one for the Govt, to yield on. St. Aldwyn had yesterday said I was all for killing the Bill. This was not quite correct, and I now suggested an alternative, viz. to waive our claim that the teachers should be allowed to teach and to substitute a good right-of-entry clause. I feared I stood alone, but I thought such a clause would be an invaluable precedent for the future, and would in fact be more valuable to the Church than the concession asked in relation to teachers.

St. Aldwyn said curiously enough his mind had been travelling on somewhat the same lines. Could we not make it an alternative, i.e. where permission was refused by the local authority to the teacher to teach, there the right of entry should automatically come into force.

Devonshire feared *he* stood alone. He would abandon

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every other point if he could get a satisfactory ' transfer ' clause. The refusal to take over schools would be immediate and final. Its results could not be remedied by subsequent legislation. All other points could be reversed or altered by a Unionist Govt, at some future time.

A general discussion followed. None agreed with the Duke. I pointed out that he would compromise the whole future for the sake of saving a handful of schools now. I regarded a good precedent, which, though now something of an exception, we might hereafter apply universally, as of much more value.

The Duke said if you reject this Bill the Govt, will produce a worse one. I said they might produce the B'ham plan, and I should be sorry to see them introduce a solution which set the Bishop of B'ham against the Archbishop, and myself against friends at that table.

Acland-Hood said Birrell had told him : ' You will not have another Education Bill till after a dissolution.'⁵

Balfour of Burleigh was afraid that the Govt, would try to squeeze out the voluntary schools administratively.

Lansdowne and Cawdor emphasized the unyielding character of the Govt.'s attitude at the second conference, and were entirely averse from any attempt to reopen negotiations.

I said I saw the meeting was opposed to me, and did not desire to press the matter further—especially in view of what Lansdowne and Cawdor had said.

It was decided to insist on the Lords' amendments *en bloc*—the Duke of Devonshire alone dissenting.

Balfour was not present owing to illness. Long, who had been very hot against any compromise on any point at our first meeting, was also absent.

In view of this decision the Government had no alternative but to abandon their Bill.

No field is so arid as that of past educational controversy, but the discussions occasioned by the Bill of 1906 showed

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where Austen stood with regard to a subject which his father had, in his early days, made so peculiarly his own.

Politics, however, were not Austen Chamberlain's sole concern, as they were certainly not his principal interest, that autumn. When he and his wife returned from their honeymoon they had made the Hans Crescent Hotel their headquarters while the house which they had taken in Egerton Place was being prepared. How greatly Austen looked forward to having a home of his own can be seen in his letters. His excitement was positively boyish. 'If all goes well,' he wrote to his stepmother on December 16th, 'and we are neither of us detained by a chill, we make our move to-morrow, and I feel pretty much as I did when a child on the eve of Christmas Day. What shall I find in my shoes to-morrow? A new honeymoon, I think, in still more glorious circumstances, though I fear with inevitably greater interruptions.'⁵

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain were in Birmingham during these months, and Austen wrote regularly to his stepmother so that his father might be kept in close touch with all that was happening on that political stage on which he was never again to play a part. On October 22nd he wrote :

Last night Dr. Jameson dined with us, and we had the Ivor Maxses to meet him. . . . He says Elgin¹ is better fitted to govern the 'Wee Frees' than the Colonial Office, and relies entirely on Graham to settle affairs, which he explains are [£]difficult for me to understand.' Winston² understands fast enough, but is evidently not consulted, does not see the papers (office papers, I mean), and no one at the C.O. knows anything of his movements, except the hall porter, with whom he corresponds ! . . .

Ivor Maxse raged at A. J. B. and would not hear a word of reason. Grant, I urged, for the sake of argument, all

¹ Colonial Secretary.

² Under-Secretary for the Colonies.

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you say, still he is our only leader. My father won't, no one else can, hold a candle to A.J. B. To destroy his influence, therefore, is to destroy ourselves. He is our spearhead (Think of Balfour for a spearhead ! interjected Maxse, and I winced but went on), and you are doing all you can to blunt it, instead of trying to sharpen it and give momentum to its thrust.

But I own it is being jolly under creditable circumstances when you pin your faith hopefully on B.'s doing the right thing. After Lansdowne's speech a few words from him uttered promptly would have done much good. He does nothing for a time and then—snubs the Irish Unionists.

In addition to all his other work Austen found time to address two big meetings before Christmas, one in Canterbury and the other in Dublin. The former was held under the auspices of the Tariff Reform League, and was a remarkable triumph. 'The meeting was a great success ; the hall was crowded—6,500 people, they say—quite the biggest meeting I have ever addressed. They were very keen and interested, and far quicker to take the points than I had expected. Hardinge¹ is very keen, and had certainly worked very hard and to good effect. They say they are making converts. The Radical foreman of a tannery, for instance, has come over, and brought over his 600 men.'

He did not look forward to the Dublin meeting. 'For an Englishman, at any rate, a speech on Home Rule is like flogging a dead horse. My last three speeches came very easily, as ease goes in such matters, but this time I feel fairly stuck.' Even when it was over he was none too satisfied with his performance. 'As to my speech, I think the delivery was good and its reception was all I could desire, but its matter was stale. There was no new argument and no fresh treatment of old ones, and so, though it served the

¹ Viscount Hardinge.

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purpose of the moment, it is not an effort of which I feel proud ! * After the conferences on the Education Bill, described above, Austen and his wife spent Christmas at Highbury, and so ended by no means the least eventful year in the ex-Chancellor's life.

The hard work which Austen and others had done in 1906 began to bear fruit in the following year, for a decided reaction soon manifested itself against the Government. The municipal elections of the previous November had showed that the Liberal tide was already on the ebb, but in March there took place an event of which the significance could not fail to be observed. The London County Council had for a considerable period been under Progressive control, but in the spring of 1907 the Municipal Reformers, thanks in no small measure to the organizing ability of the late Sir William Bull, won a crushing victory by the net gain of no fewer than forty-four seats. Austen had no doubt as to the programme which would repeat this triumph at Westminster. He had told the Liberal Unionists of Dublin that the democracy wanted two things—Imperialism and Social Reform—and on January 5th there appeared in the *Outlook* an article by him along these lines which attracted a great deal of attention :

The year 1906 will be memorable in our Party annals for the magnitude of the disaster which at its very commencement overtook the Unionist Party. What has the New Year in store for us ? The fortunes of Parties, like those of individuals, are apt to be very much what their owners make them. Have we done anything to retrieve our position, to lay the foundations of future success, to rebuild the city which the earthquake of last January laid in ruins at our feet ? . . .

The people of this country have two dominant political ideals. Sometimes the one is uppermost, sometimes the other ; but neither is for long distant from their thoughts. They are Imperialist and democratic. They desire a

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domestic policy of social reform directed to the improvement of the condition of the masses, and the wider diffusion of comfort and well-being ; they desire a national and Imperial policy, which recognizes the kinship of our race and the greatness of the destiny which our fathers have prepared for us. . . .

To the steady pursuit of both ideals concurrently—neither neglecting Imperial interests in the daily hurly-burly of domestic politics, nor allowing domestic progress to be stayed by the absorbing interest of national and Imperial development—the Unionist Party owes the long spell of power which it enjoyed with one short break for twenty years. So long as it succeeded in advancing these two great objects, it secured and retained the confidence of the country. When it ceased to serve them, it lost that confidence.

From 1896 to 1900, or later, the Unionist Government represented to the people the embodiment of their double aspiration for social progress and national greatness. From 1903 onwards, in spite of Lord Lansdowne's brilliant successes in the domain of foreign affairs, the members of that Government appeared to the onlooker to have exhausted their mission and put an end to their own usefulness. They lost the initiative, which is half the battle. They ceased to guide events, and seemed rather to wait upon them ; and their tardy resignation came too late to avert any of the mischief caused by the paralysing hesitations of the previous two years. . . .

We must take up the thread at the point where it was broken off. We must recombine the two ideals of Social Reform and Imperialism. . . . And it so happens that one great movement combines them both. Tariff Reform both offers the direct road to closer union with the Colonies and provides without robbery or jobbery the necessary financial basis for further social reforms. It is our answer alike to Socialism and Separatism, the great twin forces which menace the safety of all we value. . . . Just in proportion as we hold fast to it and champion it will be our success in

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the battle which lies before us. But there must be an end of doubt and hesitation, of reticences and reserves. For the future let Union be our watchword ; but let it be union on a policy that is worth fighting for—' Union of the Party, union of the Kingdom, union of the Empire.'

Austen's immediate task was thus to encourage Mr. Balfour to give the Government no quarter, and to impress the country with the fact that in Tariff Reform the Opposition had an alternative policy. His position was the more difficult in that he was subject to divided loyalties, namely to his leader and to the enthusiastic Tariff Reformers, who looked to him now that his father was laid aside. It was a conflict which was to continue for several years, and it had a permanent effect upon his character. Indeed it was no mere coincidence that the man who spent so much of his time reconciling differences between colleagues and followers was the author of the Locarno Pact.

Hardly had the year 1907 begun than he received the following letter from Lord Ridley, the Chairman of the Tariff Reform League :

Blagdon, Cramlington
Jan. 13th, '07

DEAR AUSTEN,

At to-day's meeting of the T.R. League we were unable to come to any final decision on a secretary, as we couldn't finally settle with Cox.

Various matters were raised, and on one of them I have to write to you. Sir J. Lawrence raised his motion as regards urging Parliamentary action ; and the outcome of it was that a committee was appointed to confer with you and B. Law on the possibility of raising fiscal questions constantly in the House, and possibly of sending an influential deputation to Balfour on the subject, perhaps urging him to talk of T.R. in his speeches, etc.

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Very strong views were expressed—surprisingly so from men like Herbert Maxwell, Dixon-Hartland, Whitmore, and indeed all who were there—and I very much gather that the feeling (of want of leadership) in the Party is growing very fast indeed ; and it is certainly one which will have to be reckoned with, as it has now spread far beyond the Maxses and Wares.

The Committee, which met after the executive, desired me to write you and tell you of their views, as also to Bonar Law ; and I was to find out if there was any chance of your being in town before the opening of Parit, so as possibly to meet then.

Could you let me know (at Blagdon) if you are to be in town at all ? I think this may prove of importance, as the feeling is growing very strongly, and there is talk even of treating Balfour in the City as Clarke was treated.

Yours sincerely,

RIDLEY.

To this Austen replied :

Highbury, Birmingham

Jan. 16th, 1904

DEAR RIDLEY,

What you say is very important, and I think I had better talk it over with you and others before expressing any opinion upon it.

My own idea had been that we must meet the Budget with a Tariff Reform amendment, but that we probably should not move Tariff Reform resolutions before the second reading of the Budget Bill unless we could agree upon a good amendment to the Address.

But the whole subject is very difficult—not so much on account of its intrinsic qualities as because of the attitude of prominent members of the Party. Between ourselves, I believe that there is no ex-Cabinet Minister on whose assistance I

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can confidently count in an *uphill* fight except Arnold Forster. Akers-Douglas is always sympathetic, but of course he is a Party man before all things and never takes the lead. Walter Long is with us, but he is more and more engrossed, as is only natural, by the Irish question, which for him as an Irish Member overshadows all others. Balfour seems to me very impracticable, and Alfred Lyttelton besides being impracticable will not move at all unless it is agreeable to Balfour.

On the front bench, therefore, we have only Arnold Forster, Bonar Law, Lee, Cochrane, and myself on whom any real reliance can be placed.

I have not said this to anyone except yourself because I do not want to discourage our men, and because I feel that if we can keep the pot boiling in these difficult times, sooner or later the tide will set our way and we shall carry the weaker brethren along on the crest of the wave. But you can see the difficulty of going into battle with such allies.

I do not, however, exclude the possibility of having to take an independent line and to insist upon moving our own amendment, letting who will follow us and leaving those who will not to go their own way. But before we decide on such a course as this, people like yourself who understand and can reckon up the Parliamentary forces must consider what it means and whether it would be wise. Some of our very good friends are not practical politicians and under-rate the difficulties of the course they suggest.

I am rather bothered with sciatica, and was not intending to come to London, but I think the questions at stake are so important that I had better meet you and any or all of those whom you name to talk the matter over. . . .

Believe me

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Negotiations ensued, and Austen put the matter before his leader, who replied at some length, but an extract will suffice to make clear his point of view :

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. . . Now my whole object is to restore the Unionist Party to the position of an effective fighting machine, which is the necessary preliminary to our being able either to resist the disintegrating forces of modern Radicalism or to carry out a constructive policy of our own. I am confident that this cannot be done by a general policy of ostracism. If such a policy succeeded in making the Party unanimous it would be at the price of keeping it small. The wise course for us to adopt is on the one hand to make it quite clear what are the ideals at which we aim, and then to make it as easy as possible for the varying elements of the Party to fall into line. This there is every hope, I think, of their doing, especially when they begin more fully to realize how great is the danger to vital national interests arising from our present divided condition. But everything which induces people overtly to proclaim themselves in different camps, everything which drives them into different lobbies, everything which tends to the formation of sharply defined and antagonistic sub-organisms within the great organism of the Party must, in my opinion, militate against the ultimate triumph of fiscal reform, as well as against every other policy to which we wish to give effect. Men's minds are on this question in so irritable a condition that every wise physician would desire to make his medicines as soothing as possible, consistently, of course, with the final recovery of the patient.

Austen described this letter as ' very unsatisfactory.'

Nevertheless the Unionist leaders suffered from a further disadvantage, namely that the initiative lay not with them but with the Government. When Parliament met in the second week of February the first rumblings were heard of the storm which three years later was to make Tariff Reform take a second place even in Austen's mind. The King's Speech contained the significant words : ' Serious questions affecting the working of our Parliamentary system have arisen from unfortunate differences between the two Houses.

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My Ministers have this important subject under consideration with a view to a solution of the difficulty.⁵ A Cabinet committee was then appointed to consider the question of the Upper House. There had, indeed, been some discussion in Ministerial circles as to the desirability of appealing to the electorate on the issue of the House of Lords when the Education Bill was rejected, but that measure aroused such fierce resentment in Anglican and Roman Catholic quarters that it was deemed inadvisable to use it to test the feeling of the country.

Instead, the Government contented itself in 1907 with a very modest programme of reform, of which the two chief measures were a Licensing Bill and an Irish Councils Bill. Neither of these was of particular interest to Austen, and for him the year 1907 was far quieter than any of its immediate predecessors or than most of its successors. The Irish Bill soon proved to involve a severe shock to the Government's prestige. It was introduced in May, and was at once greeted with a storm of derision in Nationalist Ireland. A Convention to consider it was held in Dublin, but this body refused to accept the scheme, and by June the Bill was dead. Austen hailed this decision with relief:

The more I think of it, the more deeply grateful I am for the Irish rejection of the Irish Councils Bill. Of course the country was not deeply excited about it either way, and its rejection by the House of Lords would not have weighted us seriously ; but one does not want a heavier burden than necessary put on that House ; nor, if things go badly with us, does one want a measure of devolution included in the general mandate 'to make the will of the people prevail over the will of the Peers,' which is, I suppose, the form that the Government's appeal to the electors will ultimately take. To my mind, Redmond was right from his point of view in wishing to take the Bill for what it was worth. It would have given him the plant of a peaceful revolution, and the lever for raising fresh difficulties and extorting further

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concessions, besides providing him with a vast amount of patronage. But his inability to persuade his people even to look at it, besides relieving us of a great danger, or at least a most difficult fight, will further irritate and disgust the moderate men in the Home Rule ranks—meaning by 'moderate men'⁵ those who swallow the medicine but dislike the taste and disbelieve in the cure. There are many such in all Parties ! Thank goodness if the Tariff Reform pill chokes a few, the Government powders turn the stomachs of a good many more !

He nevertheless saw that the fate of the Bill was a useful stick with which to beat the Government :

Even the tender care of Mr. Redmond could not keep that little bantling alive. It had departed unwept, unhonoured, and unsung, and as its advent was undesired so its departure was unregretted. It reminded him of the story of the man who after long absence came back to his native village and asked a neighbour about the old squire. He was told that the squire was dead. 'What was the complaint?' he asked. 'There was no complaint,'⁵ said the villager ; 'everyone was perfectly satisfied.' That might well be the epitaph of the Irish Bill.'¹

In later years Austen was to express his regret that he voted against the grant of self-government to South Africa, but there was, at this time, another measure on which he came to change his mind, and that was Mr. Haldane's⁵ scheme for the reorganization of the Army :

I have been reading Haldane's great Army speech. It seems to me a bad exposition of his intentions, very difficult

¹ *Morning Post*, June 7th, 1907.

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to follow. If I understand it, I dislike many features of it. It seems to me that he will never get his new voluntary force, and, meanwhile, he begins by destroying what exists, instead of by building up the new. And even if he gets this new 'Territorial Army,' he relies for a successful campaign on its volunteering for service abroad by battalions and even brigades. That seems to me a risky speculation.⁵

Anyhow, he erred in distinguished company, for on March 5th he wrote : ' Balfour regards his [i.e. Haldane's] scheme as already dead.⁵ Years later Austen retracted : ' I never understood till the Great War came what a magnificent achievement Haldane⁵'s army reorganization was. Confession of my error is the only amends I can offer to his memory.⁵

To such errors of judgment can Party feeling lead, and Party feeling was beginning to run high again, though not so high as it was shortly to run. The Conservatives and Liberal Unionists in the House of Commons, whatever their domestic differences on the matter of Tariff Reform, were far removed from the spiritless body which had gone down to disaster at the beginning of the previous year. Goliath, in the shape of the enormous Government majority, was nothing like as formidable as had been feared, and the Walton division of Liverpool had provided the Opposition with a veritable David in the person of Mr. F. E. Smith. The by-elections afforded further ground for optimism. As the year 1906 drew to its close, the Government majorities showed an increased tendency to drop, and Labour candidates began to appear in the field against the Liberals : that old Radical stronghold Cockermouth was even won by the Opposition for this reason. In 1907 this development became more marked, and the Liberals lost one seat to the Conservatives and two to Labour. As it happened there were few by-elections that year in constituencies which the Opposition had much chance of winning, but nearly everywhere they increased their poll while that of the Government



H. Walter Barnett

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sharply declined. If the Opposition, being committed to Tariff Reform, did not act wholly in accordance with Tierney's famous maxim of 'Oppose everything, propose nothing, and turn the Government out,'⁵ it was inspired by these sentiments. Unhappily this meant at times that measures admirable in themselves, like Mr. Haldane's Army proposals, were inclined to be viewed through Party spectacles.

The fact that a Colonial Conference met in London in 1907 was a very powerful weapon in the hands of the Opposition, and Austen was not backward in using it. At this Conference all the members except the Government of the United Kingdom voted for a resolution in favour of Imperial Preference, but the British Government refused to admit either the necessity or the expediency of a change in its fiscal system.

We know that the Prime Minister of Australia and his colleagues came here not merely offering, but urging with all the magnificent strength that Mr. Deakin displayed, that we should take no insular view of our trade interests, but we should try to combine the Empire in peace as the great war in South Africa had combined it in a more sinister emergency.

And what answer did they get? The hall porter, as he is called—I should not like to use this language, but it is an example set me by a member of the Government—shut, banged, and slammed the door in their faces, and then the office boy thought it becoming, thought it decent to exult that not even on a peppercorn should any preference be given to any Colonial product so long as the present Government remained in office.¹

One of the difficulties with which the Opposition had to contend was the fact that they were carrying on their

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 16th, 1907.

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campaign during a period of prosperity. Unemployment was falling rather than rising, and the man in the street saw no particular reason why there should be a change in the fiscal system. Wages might or might not rise under Tariff Reform, he argued, but prices would almost certainly increase ; as the matter was not urgent, he was content with things as they were. It was this attitude, rather than fierce opposition, that Austen and his friends were called upon to combat.

Meanwhile the Government was taking care that the question of the House of Lords should not be forgotten by the electorate. On June 24th the Prime Minister proposed a resolution, which was to precede a Bill, declaring that the power of the Upper House to alter or reject measures which the Commons had passed ' must be so restricted by law as to secure that within the limits of a single Parliament the final decision of the Commons should prevail.'⁵ The resolution was carried by 432 votes to 147 two days later, but for the time nothing further followed. Austen made one or two incidental references to this question in the speeches which he was continually delivering up and down the country, but for the most part, outside the House of Commons, he confined his activities to the campaign for Tariff Reform.

The Austen Chamberlains spent the spring of this somewhat uneventful year in London, and the summer and autumn at Highbury, where their eldest son was born.

The next year, 1908, was to prove a false dawn for the Opposition. It witnessed a long series of Government defeats at by-elections, and seats were lost at Ashburton, Ross, Peckham, North-West Manchester, Pudsey, Haggerton, and Newcastle-on-Tyne. The quality of these victories was no less impressive than the quantity, and at North-West Manchester Mr. Joynson-Hicks defeated Mr. Winston Churchill, who was seeking re-election on his appointment as President of the Board of Trade, as was necessary under the existing law. Those were the days when an early return to office seemed assured. In January, 1909, the Conservative

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Central Office predicted a majority of twenty if an election came immediately, and the atmosphere radiated optimism. The Liberals, however, had a trick or two up their sleeve, and another seven years were to elapse before the Conservative leaders, in circumstances unthought of in 1908, once more took their place upon the Treasury Bench.

To no inconsiderable extent these reverses indicated the natural swing of the pendulum after the triumph of the General Election, but there was more to them than that. The Government's legislative record had not been brilliant, and it had dissatisfied some sections of opinion, while alarming others. The Old Age Pensions Act was certainly an item on the asset side, but the substitution of the Territorials for the Volunteers, justifiable as it was soon to prove, was not a measure calculated to make a wide appeal, and the same observation may be applied to the measure which permitted marriage with a deceased wife's sister. In the matter of Ireland, of education, and of licensing the Government had definitely failed, either owing to the lack of support for its own Bills or to the opposition of the House of Lords. On the other hand, the Trade Disputes Act was decidedly alarming to moderate opinion. Abroad, too, the situation was not such as to assist Ministers, for the rapid growth of the German Navy placed them on the horns of a dilemma ; if they did nothing to reply to this menace they provided their opponents with a very powerful argument, while if they accepted the challenge they would alienate their own Left Wing. As if this were not enough, the agitation for the enfranchisement of women (to which Austen Chamberlain was, incidentally, strongly opposed) was beginning to assume a violent form, and although this campaign cut across the ordinary Party lines it was sufficiently embarrassing to those who were responsible for the government of the country. In effect, the administration appeared to be floundering in a sea of difficulties, with which it was unable or unwilling to deal, and the electorate, as usual in such circumstances, was turning to the Opposition, divided though the latter was on the subject of Tariff Reform.

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Austen shared the optimism of his colleagues to the full:

A notice to quit has been served on the present Government. After all, we must be fair to everyone. We must not take all the credit to ourselves. The Government are doing their best to help us. I was wondering the other day what it was that caused the country to give them such a sweeping majority at the last election, and a friend of mine, a member of the House of Commons, said to me : ' The other day, when. I was shooting, I found I was missing all the pheasants, and I wondered how it was, and then I bethought how I was paying too much attention to their long tails, and thinking too little of their small heads.' It seems to me that pretty well summarizes what a good many electors were doing at the last General Election. The Government gained a great and overwhelming majority by suppressing for a time the deep-seated differences of opinion which are now beginning to break out, and by calling to their camp all who were distressed and all who were discontented ; they gained it by wild statements about the motives and the policy of their opponents . . . and which we can describe in Parliamentary language as ' terminological inexactitudes,' but which has been called by a shorter Anglo-Saxon word.¹

Such was the situation when, in early spring, Mr. Asquith succeeded Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister, and although his views were no more advanced than those of his predecessor his position was not so secure ; consequently he had to be careful not to offend Mr. Lloyd George and the more Radical section of his supporters. Furthermore, as the momentum which had carried Liberalism to victory in 1906 was clearly dying down, it was necessary to revive it by some popular appeal.

¹ *Western Morning News*, March 25th, 1908.

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In short, a move had to be made ; and with the Whigs gone a move to the Right was out of the question, so a move to the Left it had to be. Such being the case, the obvious course to pursue was to direct the Party's activities against the House of Lords, as this would unite the various elements that made up the Government's majority. The Liberals had no use for an Upper House which presumed to reject or amend their favourite measures ; the Socialists objected to it on principle ; and the Nationalists knew that they would never obtain Home Rule while the Lords' veto remained unimpaired. For the moment, however, no action was taken, and, as has been shown, the Government continued to lose ground.

Meanwhile Austen Chamberlain was going about socially and politically in the way that so greatly delighted him. On January 4th he wrote to his stepmother :

I called on Lord Knollys this morning by appointment. . . . He asked very kindly after Father, who, he said, has always been very kind to him. He observed that C. B. had a difficult task before him this session, and said he was told by Liberals that if anything happened to C. B. the Party would go to smash in six months. I became communicative, and was rewarded by Knollys' observation that of course Grey was the best man to succeed him, that the choice lay with the King, and that of course he might send for Grey, and overrule Grey's personal objections. ' Personally,' he added, ' I like Asquith, and I like Mrs. Asquith, though some people don't ; but I don't think he is quite the right stamp of man for Prime Minister.'

Oratorical style, in the pulpit as well as on the platform, always interested Austen :

I went to church this evening with Ivy to hear Mr.

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Gough¹ preach. He was dramatic, though Ivy says less so than he often is. I fear I disturbed the devotions of a footman in a neighbouring pew who was quite obviously pointing me out to the coachman who sat next to him, and thereafter entirely occupied in persuading the coachman (who twisted and turned to get a good look at me) that I was I and no other—which the coachman as evidently doubted.

I think it was a good sermon and, to people who could accept the Bible story as literally as he did, a moving one ; but I felt myself unduly critical, regarding it too much as a work of art, and I wished I could *feel* as he did. The rest would follow. I mean, if I have time, to go next Sunday to hear Lang,² Bishop of Stepney. I have always heard that he is a very fine and, if I may use the phrase, a very practical and manly preacher, and I am curious about him.

His interest in pictures, too, remained one of the most pleasant distractions of his life, and on May 29th he is found writing :

Beatrice and Mr. Collings lunched with us, and B. and we went afterwards to see Sargent's watercolours. The room was not large enough for them, being indeed little more than a passage, and crowded, so that it was impossible to see them from the proper distance. I was rather disappointed with them, though there were one or two Arab scenes which were admirable—particularly the two figures which B. says are engraved as a frontpiece to *The Desert and the Town*. Balfour was just leaving as we entered, and commended the pictures for their 'impudence, force, and cleverness.' I liked the choice and order of the epithets !

I hear that Tweedmouth³ is really 'off his head,' or 'under restraint' as another informant puts it.

¹ The late Prebendary Gough. ² Now Archbishop of Canterbury.

³ The second Baron. He had been First Lord of the Admiralty until a few weeks before, and was Lord President of the Council.

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The next day Austen went down to Cambridge to do honour to his opponent in 1892, Oscar Browning :

We got down here about four-thirty yesterday afternoon, and though there was a heavy storm just before our arrival, the weather soon cleared up again, and we were able to take a pleasant walk around the Colleges and Backs before dinner. Ivy dined with Shipley in his rooms in Christ's—perhaps the best rooms I know in any college, with fine old oak panelling and Grinling Gibbons carvings. I attended the dinner in King's Coll. Hall in honour of O. B., and made them a short speech which satisfied me, though I had found it very difficult. For whilst I have a very friendly feeling towards O. B., and a great deal of sympathy with his ideas about what the History Tripos ought to be, one cannot conceal from oneself that O. B. with all his gifts has been a failure, and one sees only too clearly the reason why. However I managed to say enough without saying anything more than I felt to be true. It was a pleasant and successful dinner, but oh ! it was long. We met at eight, sat down at eight-fifteen, finished dinner at ten, and rose at a quarter past midnight.

Austen had need of all his powers of endurance during this visit to Cambridge, for the next morning he breakfasted at King's with the Slade Professor, Sir Charles Waldstein, to meet Count Metternich, the German Ambassador. It was clear from the beginning that the German envisaged a return of the Opposition to power in the near future, and he wished to avail himself of this opportunity of discovering their attitude towards his own country. It must also be taken into account that the German Emperor's letter to Lord Tweedmouth, denying that the latest German Naval Bill was a threat to British supremacy at sea, had been written only three months before, while a few months ahead lay the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Germany's

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ally, Austria-Hungary. Anglo-German relations were clearly in a stage which might at any moment become critical.

The conversation lasted for over two hours and a half, and covered most of the points at issue between the two countries. The German Ambassador laid great stress on British objections to the Baghdad railway, which he did not profess to understand, and this part of the discussion possesses an added interest from the fact that it is the first recorded occasion on which Austen expressed an opinion concerning a region with which he was one day to become distressingly familiar. In reply to Count Metternich he pointed out : ' What Englishmen fear is that without excluding other trade *ex nomine* all your influence would be used to favour German trade at the expense of British trade. And your influence would be immense and most powerful for this purpose. In any proposals you have made hitherto for French and English co-operation, you will admit that you have always maintained a predominant influence for yourselves. You control absolutely the Anatolian railway and its port. . . . At present you are constructing the railway from the north only. Our people fear that as you get to the Tigris and Euphrates you will tap and divert the trade which at present goes south to the Gulf. This would not happen if the railway were built simultaneously from both ends. Of course, we should expect the same kind of predominating interest at the Gulf that you have at the Anatolian end.'

The German then stated his belief that there was nothing substantial about the Entente, and asked : ' Why are you trying to isolate us ? ' This gave Austen a chance of recalling his father's efforts to come to terms with Germany ten years before,¹ and, to quote his own words : ' I had the pleasure of telling him once again that Biilow had missed his market in this country, and that " He who will not when he may, etc." ' Austen called the Ambassador's attention to the teaching of Treitschke, and to its influence upon the German youth. Count Metternich demurred : ' Now listen, Mr.

¹ Cf. J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. III, pp. 254-95 and 496-517.

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Chamberlain. Till I came to this country I never heard of Treitschke. He was nothing in Germany. He was a firebrand, and he insulted everyone. But he had no influence.' The Englishman replied :

That is not my experience. Certainly he was a firebrand. I listened to his lectures and, as you say, he insulted everyone, but especially the Coburgs and the English. But he was a most popular firebrand. With every physical defect a public speaker could have, he was the most popular professor at the University of Berlin. His 'insults' were received with loud applause at crowded classes. And that is not all. The same thing went on in the public schools. I know it from the stories brought home and the questions asked by the fourteen-year-old son of the man in whose family I boarded. Well, my experience is twenty years old. But my friends who know Germany to-day tell me that the same thing is going on throughout the whole educational system of Germany, from top to bottom. . . . There lies the danger—in the growing belief, deliberately planted in the whole youth of Germany, that a conflict is inevitable. And when such a belief takes hold of the German mind the whole Bismarckian policy is there to warn us of what may come. I do not criticize Bismarck's action with Austria in '66 or France in '70. I note it. A nation which has thus twice preached the doctrine of 'the inevitable conflict/ which has prepared for it with such patience and endurance, which has even gone to meet the heavy sacrifices which it entailed, and has twice provoked the conflict with extraordinary skill at the most favourable moment to itself, whilst leaving to its opponent the odium of appearing at the time the aggressor—such a nation is indeed a formidable opponent when it begins to preach and prepare for a third * inevitable war.'

The conversation terminated with the statement on the

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part of Count Metternich that 'I have sometimes been optimistic. I am not optimistic now.'

In Parliament the main controversy of the year centred round another Education Bill, which was introduced by Mr. McKenna, who had not yet succeeded Lord Tweedmouth at the Admiralty. It was hoped by the Government that the religious objections which had wrecked the earlier measure had been met by a provision that, while all schools would be placed under the local authorities, denominational teaching could be provided for children whose parents desired it at the expense of the denomination in question. In entertaining such a belief Ministers deceived themselves, and one of their foremost critics was Austen Chamberlain :

The Education Bill, in his view, was not intended to promote education, but to punish the Church. . . . He pleaded . . . that they might have a little less consideration of the Churches, and a little more consideration of the interests of the children. The Government Bill, he declared, openly flouted the interests of the children. He, as a born and bred Nonconformist, acknowledged his sympathy with Nonconformists, and recognized their grievances in connection with education, but he urged that they should not seek redress of their own grievances by creating exactly the same grievances in the breasts of other people.¹

In face of such criticism the Government withdrew the Bill in the autumn, and introduced another which it was hoped in Liberal circles would prove more generally acceptable. This new measure was, in Austen's view, definitely preferable to its predecessor :

It was the Government's Bill, but they said, and he

¹ *East Anglian Daily News*, May 15th, 1908.

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thought said rightly, that the negotiations which preceded its introduction had shown such an advance from both sides that there really seemed to be an opportunity which it would be criminal to neglect for finding an enduring solution of the question that would rally to its side the great mass of moderate opinion in all parts of the country. . . .

He did not underrate the sacrifice which the Church was asked to make, but equally he begged Churchmen not to underrate on the other side how far Nonconformists came to meet them in the conditions which their representatives had made, and which were embodied in the new Bill. He did not say that the Bill as it stood could be a solution, but he did believe that the intentions expressed by the Government, and by the parties to the negotiations, indicated a possible path by which we might move to such a solution. The Bill must be so amended that the right of entry granted to Churchmen to follow their children into all schools should be a real right, easily accessible by any parent who wanted to exercise it, and not subject to the caprice or malice of some hostile local educational authority.¹

Not all of the opponents of the Bill, however, shared these sentiments, and the Church Council pressed for concessions as to contracting out far beyond the limits to which the Government was prepared to go. Accordingly the measure was withdrawn, and many years were to elapse before another Education Bill was presented to Parliament.

Other measures which occupied the time of the House of Commons during 1908 were a Licensing Bill and an Old Age Pensions Bill. The former, described by Austen as 'not an attempt to promote temperance but to punish the "trade" for voting against them,' i.e. the Government, aroused considerable feeling throughout the country, and was eventually rejected by the House of Lords. Old age pensions had long been advocated by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, but

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 28th, 1908.

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the proposals of the Government did not commend themselves to his son for financial reasons :

He had always desired to see old age pensions, but the chief difficulty in their way had been to provide the money. The Government scheme began at the age of seventy, and required no contribution from the people who were to be the recipients of pensions. Now, if they could get a contribution from the beneficiaries the Government contribution would go much further round, enabling a beginning to be made at an earlier age, or spreading it over a greater number of people. The Government chose to adopt an entirely non-contributory scheme, which was the most costly scheme, and they necessarily had to surround it with conditions, limitations, and qualifications which would certainly work in many instances very unequally, and which would produce cases of great hardship, and which would often leave unaided some who had an equal, perhaps a higher, claim to assistance than many of those who got a pension.¹

When the third reading of the Old Age Pensions Bill took place Austen was not in the House, but he wrote a letter to *The Times* saying that he would have voted for it, but reiterating that 'the financial arrangements . . . are unsound in principle and dangerous in practice to our national security.'⁵

There was one other subject, of which mention has already been made, upon which Austen was at this time called to express an opinion, namely the enfranchisement of women. He did so in no uncertain terms :

He was not in favour of women's suffrage. He did not believe the great mass of the women of this country either

¹ *Redditch Weekly Messenger*, December 5th, 1908.

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desired or would readily accept the franchise. He was not in favour of it because he believed it might easily bring men and women into conflict and rivalry when they ought to be engaged in friendly co-operation and agreement, and because he thought the influence which women could and ought to have in politics could be better exercised in other ways. . . . There were a great many questions in regard to which the opinions of women would rule supreme, and those were just the questions upon which it was least desirable that such divisions as there were amongst them should fall into the ordinary Party lines and be treated in the ordinary Party way.¹

Twenty-eight years later he wrote of women's suffrage : ' I am bound to admit that, if the results of its adoption have not realized all its promoters' hopes, neither have they justified my fears.'

For the rest Austen devoted his time to preaching Tariff Reform and to enforcing its acceptance upon candidates and local associations. In this he and his friends were so successful that by the end of 1908 a Conservative Free Trader was definitely a *rara avis*, though in different parts of the country Conservative enthusiasm for Tariff Reform varied greatly in intensity, and in Lancashire in particular, in spite of the strenuous advocacy of Mr. F. E. Smith, there were many searchings of heart. One disappointment there was for Austen this year, and that was the defeat of Mr. Amery in May by eight votes in East Wolverhampton. An extract from a letter Austen wrote at that time well illustrates the intensity of the interest taken by the electorate of those days in the issues at stake :

Alas ! I have misled you and misled myself. On

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, June 12th, 1908.

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getting Vince's telegram yesterday afternoon that our promises were 5,645, I estimated our pool at 80 per cent, of that figure, or 4,516. I was only ten votes wrong in this, but those ten votes made the difference between victory and defeat. Of course, my real error was in estimating the total poll at 85 per cent, of the electorate or less. I thought this a safe calculation, but it was 87½ per cent., and that made all the difference.

It may be noted that this poll, though certainly high for a by-election, was not exceptional. At the five General Elections before the Great War the average was 84 per cent., while the highest recorded poll was at the General Election of January, 1910, when no less than 92 per cent, of the electorate recorded their votes ; but although this may be said to constitute the high-water mark, the General Elections of 1906 and of December, 1910, were not far behind with 89 and 87 per cent, respectively. In any event, Mr. Amery had no cause for dissatisfaction, since he had been faced with a hostile majority of 2,865, and that in a constituency which had never returned any other but a Liberal to Westminster.

So 1908 passed into 1909, and, as has been shown, Opposition hopes ran high. A General Election could not much longer be delayed, it seemed, and there was much speculation as to the size of the Conservative and Unionist majority. No long time appeared likely to elapse before Austen would be introducing a Tariff Reform Budget. To quote his own words : ' The year 1909 saw a determined movement to bring the Unionist Party into line on Tariff Reform . . . so that a Unionist Government might not again be rendered impotent, if we won a General Election, by internal divisions on this vital article of its programme. A Unionist victory at the polls did not seem so impossible at the time as subsequent events made it appear. The Home Rule majority in 1906 had been swollen to exaggerated proportions by the discontents accumulated by ten years of Unionist Government, by Balfour's Education Act, which, whatever its

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merits, had alienated the great bulk of Nonconformity, and by the split on Tariff Reform. Many Conservatives and Unionists were now returning to their allegiance, by-elections were moving favourably for us, and the Government's supporters in their turn were becoming increasingly restive. In order to obtain the support of the Free Fooders, they had pledged themselves at the General Election not to make Home Rule an issue in this Parliament, and their interim policy had satisfied no one and had been repudiated by the Nationalists. The rejection of their Education and Licensing Bills by the House of Lords had stirred no deep feeling, and their prestige was obviously falling. The progress of the Suffragists, and their growing hostility to Asquith and his Government, added to their troubles.⁵

The year began without any warning of what it held in store, and the first weeks were occupied by a dispute as to the strength of the Navy. The rapid growth of the German fleet was causing increasing anxiety, but there was a section of the Cabinet which was not yet prepared to embark on what was in effect an armaments race. The Opposition stood for a substantial building programme, and its policy was embodied in the slogan invented by Mr. Wyndham, 'We want eight and we won't wait'—the reference being to the number of capital ships to be laid down. The Cawdor programme of Mr. Balfour's Government had allowed for the construction of four annually, but this had not been strictly adhered to by the succeeding Liberal administration. In the autumn of 1908 the Admiralty became thoroughly alarmed, for it was clear that unless the rate of building was accelerated, in four years' time Great Britain would only possess the same number of battleships as Germany. The First Sea Lord, Sir John (later Lord) Fisher pressed the Cabinet to decide on laying down eight ships, and although this met with the support of Mr. McKenna, the First Lord, it was violently opposed by Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Haldane, and Mr. Winston Churchill.

The differences in the Cabinet on this question were soon the talk of the lobby and the clubs, and when Austen

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attended a levee on February 23rd he met the Second Sea Lord, Sir W. H. May, who admitted the fact. 'Well,' said Austen, 'I don't know what you have asked for, but you will get it if you are firm. Tell Fisher from me that I repeat now what I said to him when we first met fifteen years ago. If the Naval Lords stand firm, and are prepared to resign together, they will get their way now as they did over the Spencer programme.' Next morning Austen received the following note from the First Sea Lord :

Admiralty
23.2:09

MY BELOVED AUSTEN,

I've just got your message by May ! I *am* sitting tight !

Yours till hell freezes !

J.F.

Next day Austen met Sir John Fisher in Palace Yard, and the Admiral renewed his assurances that he was sitting tight. At the top of his voice, but with great insistence on the need for absolute secrecy, he declared that the Prime Minister was behaving abominably, that the Government did not want to resign, and that he himself consequently had the whip hand.

The outcome of the controversy was that under threat of Mr. McKenna's resignation Sir Edward Grey threw his weight into the Admiralty scale, and this sufficed to convince Mr. Asquith. Accordingly the Admiralty programme, with some immaterial provisos, was accepted in its entirety. Austen's summing-up represented the point of view of many a member of the Opposition : 'Asquith jumps about like a parched pea in a frying-pan, and doesn't know which way to face, the Liberal Party is divided and all sections of it dissatisfied and uneasy, and confidence in the Admiralty has received a rude shock.'⁵

CHAPTER VI

THE BUDGET OF 1909 AND THE PARLIAMENT ACT

AT the end of April the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the so-called 'People's Budget,' and almost at once there was a perceptible change in the political situation: the initiative passed again into the hands of the Government, and Opposition hopes of office in the near future had perforce to be abandoned. A modern historian has admirably summed up the position as it appeared to the Prime Minister and his colleagues in the first weeks of 1909: 'The fight with the House of Lords must be pegged to a single issue, of strong appeal to Labour, and startling. If that House could be lured, by rejecting a Budget, into an assertion of their ultimate power, not merely in ordinary matters of legislation, but in a sphere in which for two hundred years they had admitted a tradition of non-interference, the flagrantly obstinate nature of their Party spirit would be displayed. If the Budget could be given a markedly social colour, that obstinacy could be made to appear an entrenched class obstinacy of a kind to rouse even the least politically minded voter to some feeling on a constitutional matter. The taxation of what seemed a peculiarly idle form of capitalistic profit-making—the increment on land values—for the purpose of establishing new social services, without draining the means for national defence, was a perfect electoral formula.^{5 1} It was not, perhaps, a policy which would have commended itself to the Liberal leaders of an earlier generation, but they had a Right Wing, the Whigs, to consider, while the pre-occupation of Mr. Asquith was to placate the Left.

The Budget which Mr. Lloyd George now introduced was admirably suited to this purpose. Whether or not it was deliberately calculated not so much to raise revenue as to produce, in due course, a social revolution is beside the

¹ R. H. Gretton, *A Modern History of the English People, 1910-1922*, p. 12.

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point, but it certainly made a special appeal to the heterogeneous elements that supported the Government. In addition to the land tax already mentioned, there was to be a super-tax on income over £5,000 ; death, legacy, and succession duties were to be raised ; a levy on unearned increment was proposed ; and the liquor trade was placed under heavy contribution. In defending his proposals the Chancellor of the Exchequer set the tone for the campaign which was to follow when he said that it was a war Budget for waging implacable warfare against poverty. It was certainly the most controversial Finance Bill of modern times, and its reception in the House of Commons was comparable only with that of the second Home Rule Bill. It did not receive its third reading until November, and during its passage through the Lower House it expanded from seventy-four clauses to ninety-six, and from sixty-two pages to ninety-eight. There was only a ten days' recess between Whitsuntide and its final adoption by the Commons. The tax on undeveloped minerals was abandoned in favour of one on mining royalties, and extensive changes were made in the land taxes. These latter, it may be noted here, failed of their purpose, and were repealed by Austen himself when Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Government headed by no less a person than their originator, Mr. Lloyd George. This gave Austen special pleasure, for, as an ex-Chancellor, he was called upon to lead the attack on the Budget of 1909, and he did not shirk his duty. On many a morning the milkman was already going his rounds when Austen returned to Egerton Place, and except for ten days or a fortnight when he was laid up with sciatica he attended on every day of the Budget discussion. The result was that by the end of the session he had filled 526 columns of *Hansard*. He might well write : 'I trust, therefore, that you will feel that I fairly discharged my duty to my constituents.'

The actual details of the Budget falsified the prophets, among whom must be included Austen Chamberlain. In the previous July the Chancellor of the Exchequer had said :
* Next year I shall have to rob somebody's hen-roost, and I

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must consider where I can get most eggs, and where I can get them easiest, and where I shall be least punished.' No one, however, guessed correctly which hen-roost was to be robbed. Austen spent Easter in Holland with his wife, and just before he went away he wrote :

The latest rumours that I hear are that the Government have given up the idea of taxing land values, having come to the conclusion after prolonged enquiry that they would only get a million to a million and a half out of it, and that the game is not worth the candle. It is also believed that they have decided for the same reasons against a graduated Income Tax, and are now contemplating a raid on the Sinking Fund for six or seven millions, twopence on the Income Tax on all incomes, which would yield some five and a half millions, and two millions or so from licences. This would be very humdrum after their loud professions about the new resources at their disposal, and would not make them popular with anyone. But it would be much less pernicious than most of the plans that have been suggested for them. But it is wrong to raise the Income Tax and lower the Sinking Fund together, for that cuts a slice off our war reserve at each end.

In these circumstances Austen's immediate reaction to Mr. Lloyd George's proposals is of considerable interest :

What a Budget it is ! All the rumours were wrong, and there is the super-tax and the land values tax and the unearned increment tax, besides countless other changes and increases. We set to work this afternoon to organize some forty or fifty of our M.P.s into four committees to study and deal each with a section of the proposals, and I hope we shall make a good fight all along the line. It is certainly a 'great' Budget, and affords infinite matter for

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discussion and amendment, if we are allowed time. It will touch up a great number of people and make the Government many enemies, but I should think will be popular with their Party gatherings, and affords many good texts for their tub-thumpers. But I do not profess to have got its cumulative effect or even its separate provisions clearly in my mind as yet, for it is enormously complicated, and was not well explained by Lloyd George. He was fagged before he began. Halfway through he was dead beat, and had to ask for a half-hour adjournment. He recovered somewhat after this, but much of the speech was read, and badly read. He stumbled over the sentences, rushed past the full stops, paused at the commas, and altogether gave the impression that at these points he did not himself understand what he was saying. The speech lasted from three to eight, including the half-hour interval. The best part of it was the exposition of the large programme with which he began—a regular electoral manifesto, having little or no connection with the Budget. *Did you notice,' said A.J. B., 'how I, I, I recurred in that portion? I can't help thinking that he meant it as a bid for position against Asquith.' . . .

You may imagine that I did not envy myself my task of following Lloyd George at eight o'clock. Of course, I only skimmed the surface of his proposals, but even that was difficult enough. However, I was told by the colleagues who were brave enough to stay it out that my speech did very well, and Alfred¹ said to me later: 'You know, I suppose, that Arthur was very pleased with it.' I think they were all glad that it was my job and not theirs!

'It seems to me,' remarked Austen's friend Leverton Harris, speaking of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to Mr. Haldane in the smoke-room of the House of Commons that night, 'that he read that speech like a man who does not understand what he is reading.' 'Of course he doesn't,' replied the other. 'Why, we have been trying for weeks

¹ Lyttelton.

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to make him understand clause — of the Bill, and he can't/

Austen claimed that he worked harder that year than in any other of his life. The necessity of his continued presence in the House of Commons prevented him from speaking in the provinces as much as had been his custom, but he took the opportunity of one or two occasions in London to deal with the wider implications of the Budget in a way that was impossible at Westminster, where the measure was being fought clause by clause :

What is going to be the effect of their concurrent increase in income tax and super-tax and of their enormous increase in the death duties and succession duties on moderate estates upon the general rural life of this country? We hear a great deal in the House of Commons about the idle rich people. None of us here contend that there are not people of wealth with no particular sense of public duty, no particular obligations to anyone but themselves, who live serving perhaps no very useful, and certainly no very public, purpose, but there is a great deal of rubbish talked about the idle rich. The great mass of those who will be hit by these taxes nominally placed upon the idle rich are men who in their own spheres are discharging their full share of public duty as well as carrying on in the country or in the towns the life and industry which is necessary to our national prosperity. In my opinion the cumulative effect of the different taxes proposed in the Budget would be to work in the course of years, and in no too distant time, a revolution in our country life which will hit first and foremost of course, which will strike directly, the well-to-do, but which will, glancing from their shoulders, fall with added weight upon those of the poor and the labouring classes.¹

A few weeks later he pointed out another weakness

¹ *Morning Post*, May 20th, 1909.

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which was to become increasingly obvious with the passage of time :

Look again at their taxes on land with a building value. Who is going to suffer most ? Everybody is going to suffer who has any concern in or with land of that kind, but that which they are going to hit hardest and worst is not an individual, not a class—it is an industry, one of the greatest industries of the country, the building industry, and it is a curious and significant fact that in almost every case, and in each of these taxes, the worst weight of the burden falls upon an industry which is depressed at the moment that the tax is imposed.¹

Apart from a brief holiday with his wife in Florence in the late autumn, much spoilt by bad weather, Austen was preoccupied with politics throughout the year, but he was not wholly immersed in them as some men might have been in similar circumstances. Enough has already been said to prove the truth of what his brother Neville was to write of him after his death : ' He was always what Dr. Johnson used to describe as a " clubable " man, that is to say, that he was naturally sociable and delighted in company.' In consequence, he did not allow the Budget controversy to occupy all his waking hours.

Leverton showed me at dinner the first volume of his Graingerized *Fanny Burney*. It is really magnificent, and the inseting of the prints has been beautifully done by Riviere. You know he has been collecting them for years, and the whole will make thirty large folio volumes. He has a print of almost every place and every person mentioned. Where no prints of people named in the diary were in existence but portraits were known to be in their descendants'

¹ *Morning Post*, June 10th, 1909.

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hands, he has asked and obtained permission to have them photographed, so that this copy of his will be unique in its completeness. He met with but one refusal, and that from Rosebery of all people, who replied rather shortly that he could not allow it, and that he had only been able to trace a passing mention of the name, which was not of sufficient interest to justify the request. But there Lev. caught him fairly : ' Your lordship has probably referred only to the second edition of Fanny Burney's diary, and has not noticed the passages in the earlier edition, which I have the honour to transcribe : " They then joined in drawing a most odious character of him (Neil, second Lord Primrose), especially for avarice. After which Mr. Bruce (Abyssinian Bruce) said : ' And yet this man is my rival' (i.e. for the hand of Lady Anne Lindsay). ' Really,' cried I, ' I am sure I wonder that he should venture—I mean on account of his figure !' And again later : ' He is the fattest, ugliest, and most disagreeable man in London.' " ' "

I think Lev. had the best of that !

Another friend with whom Austen was in close touch was Mr. F. S. Oliver :

Fred Oliver dined here on Friday. He was in good spirits and as keen as usual, said he had decided to write no more articles but would write another book. But the problem was how to get it read, how to make it palatable to the great public of the U.K. and the Colonies. He had thought quite seriously of a novel or of a play ; but had decided against them. He has sold 5,000 copies of *Alexander Hamilton*, and is £150 out of pocket in consequence ! I said, ' What thieves the publishers must be !' but he replied, ' No, not thieves—just stupid.'

Austen was not the man to carry political differences

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into social life, though in later years it was sometimes, as we shall see, a strain not to do so :

I dined at Grillon's, a small but pleasant party—Asquith and Selby my neighbours ; Crewe, Wenlock, and Haldane my *vis-à-vis*; and Sandown and Birrell to complete our numbers. Somebody mentioned that Lord Russell had made a record at the Athenaeum to-day, scoring 140 blackballs out of about 180 voting. But this was capped by Crewe telling of a man who at Brooks's got 42 blackballs when only 41 members voted. A waiter subsequently confessed that he had surreptitiously slipped in a blackball lest by any oversight the candidate should get in, ' for he was very undesirable, sir.'

Before the contest over the Budget commenced Austen had a literary disappointment in Bagot's *George Canning and His Friends*. In spite of his dislike of the great Foreign Secretary he had eagerly looked forward to this book, and when he had read it his criticism was forceful, though by no means undeserved. He objected to the many errors that might have been avoided by a more careful correcting of the proofs, which he described as ' very irritating to the reader, like jolting over a rough road instead of running along smoothly and easily.' His final judgment on the first volume was most unfavourable : ' So far no new light is thrown on the mystery of Canning's career, of the Castle-reagh duel and his own unsatisfactory position. I don't know whether there is any more light to be got, but if so Bagot is not the man for the task. He does not know the history and the authorities of the time sufficiently well.' His final opinion after finishing the second volume was no better : ' I am greatly disappointed. Jos. Bagot has been quite unequal to the task of selecting and editing, and whoever read his proofs or transcribed the letters made or left more errors than I have ever seen in the same space.'

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Those who have read the book in question will not feel inclined to disagree with this verdict.

Meanwhile the ding-dong struggle over the Budget was proceeding at Westminster. One debate was much like another, and a single extract from Austen's letters will suffice to illustrate the vigour with which the Opposition pressed the attack :

Balfour opened the debate for us on Monday with a capital speech. He was followed—need I add that he was not answered?—by Buxton. Winston replied to him that evening, but Winston did not know enough to answer him. On Tuesday, Pretymann took up the game and made an admirable speech, full of knowledge, closely reasoned and well expressed. Chaplin began on Wednesday, dull and rather ineffective, for he never really got on to the real points of attack. Asquith's speech was remarkable for a very handsome tribute to Chaplin, paid with something of Chaplin's own old-world stateliness, and then for some excellent chaff on Chaplin's accusation that the C. of E. had stolen his clothes. How this would read, I cannot say, but it was delivered with more lightness than is usual with Asquith, and sent us all into roars of laughter at the time. For the rest his speech was full of big words and well rounded sentences as usual, but he did not touch the case made on our side. I followed him. . . .

As summer began to pass into autumn it became clear that the Budget would only get through the Commons to be rejected by the Lords, and that a constitutional struggle of the first magnitude was inevitable. On September 4th Austen is found first alluding to this, and a fortnight later Mr. Balfour expressed the opinion that if the Upper House did not reject the Budget he could not continue to lead the Conservative Party. Fearful of a clash between the two branches of the legislature the King discussed the matter

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with the Opposition leaders early in October, but he received little hope that the conflict could be avoided. At the same time Austen and his colleagues realized the inherent difficulty of their position from an electoral standpoint, and they did all in their power to prevent the issue being presented as one of Peers *versus* People. Already in September Mr. Balfour had made a speech at Bingley Hall in which he took the line that to think the country could go on in the old financial ways was to live in a fool's paradise, and that there must be a departure either in the direction of Socialism or of Tariff Reform. The Budget represented Socialism, and the alternative was therefore Tariff Reform : it was for the voters to choose between them. This was the platform upon which the Opposition made ready to fight the General Election that was now inevitable. In face of a policy which they considered to be fraught with danger to the country there was a closing of the ranks; the ' Whole Hoggers ' and ' Little Piggers ' tended to forget their differences, and for a time criticism of Mr. Balfour was silenced as his followers rallied round him for a contest in which everything that they held most dear seemed to be at stake.

It was certainly in no defeatist spirit that they entered the fight. They had recently won three more by-elections— at Central Glasgow, Stratford-on-Avon, and Bermondsey— and greatly reduced the Government majority in several others. Austen shared the enthusiasm :

Should the election be in November or in January? Gradually our people have come to the conclusion that January is the month for us, partly because the Budget, no longer very hot now, will be quite cold by then ; partly because unemployment will have been more felt by then ; partly because the new register is said on this particular occasion to be more favourable to us than the old, as we have got on to it large numbers of lodger voters, and because the class of voter who usually makes a new register unfavourable to us will on this occasion vote for Tariff Reform and more work; and

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last but not least because we got pretty clear indications that the Government wanted to have the election in November.

Our fellows are in excellent spirits, and those who have been speaking about the country say that there has been a wonderful change, and that every day gained is in our favour. The Budget is losing its glamour, and Tariff Reform is reconquering its position. George Wyndham for instance writes that we are 'as in January, only better.'

The Finance Bill finally passed the House of Commons on November 5th by a majority of 379 to 149. Eleven days later Lord Lansdowne announced that when it came up for second reading in the Upper House on the following Monday he would move : 'That this House is not justified in giving its consent to this Bill until it has been submitted to the judgment of the country.'⁵ The constitutional experts were divided on this treatment of a money Bill by the House of Lords. On the one hand Sir Frederick Pollock wrote to the *Spectator* saying that the rejection of the Budget was 'the most audacious attempt to subvert the foundations of Parliamentary Government since the Revolution of 1688/ while on the other Professor Dicey and Sir William Anson considered the rejection to be perfectly legitimate. However this may be, the ordinary peer had no doubt where his duty lay, and on November 30th Lord Lansdowne's motion, which rejected the Budget, was passed by 350 votes to 75. The challenge was at once accepted by the Government, which, on December 2nd, carried in the Commons, by 349 votes to 134, a motion 'That the action of the House of Lords in refusing to pass into law the financial provision made by the House for the service of the year is a breach of the Constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the Commons.' This was a skilful move in view of the coming election, for it enlarged the issue from the merits of the Budget to the demerits of the Lords. As the Irish were by no means in agreement with the Liberals and Socialists on the first point, but had no doubts whatever about the second,

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and as their votes were very necessary to the Government candidates in many constituencies, the resolution was exceedingly well timed. On December 3rd Parliament was prorogued, and on the 15th it was dissolved.

Austen took the line from the beginning that the Lords had acted perfectly constitutionally. They were, he told a meeting at Plymouth early in December, within their rights in rejecting a money Bill—what they were not entitled to do was to amend it. In the present instance, however, they had not rejected the Budget, but had merely insisted upon its being submitted to the electorate. His general attitude can also be ascertained from a letter which he wrote at this time to Mr. Maurice Woods, and from his election address :

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec. 15th, '09

MY DEAR WOODS,

I am glad to hear such a good account of your prospects in North Bristol. You have an immense majority to pull down, but no one can believe that the votes cast at the last election represent the settled mind of the country on the new issues which now confront the electors.

Some of these issues were clearly set forth in the Prime Minister's speech at the Albert Hall. On others, and those not the least important to a great shipping and industrial community like Bristol, he was silent.

He had not a word to say about the maintenance of our naval supremacy—unquestioned when the present Government took office, but now threatened by their remissness.

He had not a word to say about the promotion of Imperial Union or about the development of those trade relations with our Colonies to which Bristol owes its past greatness and its hopes of future prosperity.

He had nothing to say on the gravest of our national problems of to-day—the question of unemployment. He had no suggestion to make by which trade might be encouraged, industry developed, and employment increased.

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These great questions were all passed over in silence in order that the attention of the Radical Party might be concentrated on a double political revolution and a Socialist upheaval. It is indeed, to use his own words, a 'destructive substitute'⁵ which he offers for the constructive policy of Tariff Reform.

The veto of the Second Chamber—whether as now constituted or as it may hereafter be reformed—is to be abolished. The House of Commons, no matter how chosen or upon what issues, is to have supreme and absolute control in all matters without appeal to the people from whom its authority is derived. And the first use to which this new absolutism is to be put is to establish in Ireland a system of Home Rule twice emphatically condemned by the people of the United Kingdom, concealed from their view at the last election by the Liberal leaders when the Irish vote was a matter of indifference to them, but now brought forth from its hiding-place when the confidence and support of English Liberals is withdrawn and their places have to be filled by Nationalist and Socialist recruits.

Surely in such circumstances there is room for an appeal from the new Liberals to the old, and you will find in Bristol even among our former opponents many who will repudiate the novel and destructive measures put forward in their name. We seek to build up ; our opponents to destroy. We seek to promote Union ; our opponents to promote separation. They are impairing credit, frightening capital, hampering industry, and increasing unemployment. Our policy is to give security to capital, encouragement to industry, and a stimulus to employment. Between that constructive policy and 'the destructive substitute' of our opponents the electors have happily still the right to choose.

With all good wishes.

Believe me,

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The election address was as follows :

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GENTLEMEN,

Having accepted the invitation of the two Unionist Associations of this division to be their candidate at the forthcoming election, I have the honour to ask you for a renewal of the support which you have given me on so many previous occasions.

The policy of the present Government may be briefly summarized. They desire to destroy the veto of the Second Chamber in order that the House of Commons, once elected, may be supreme without further appeal to the people from whom its authority is derived. If they are successful, they propose to use this new absolutism to destroy the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, as they will have already destroyed the Constitution. The House of Commons will be absolute masters of the people, and the Government will be masters of the House of Commons. Thus tyranny masquerades as popular government and destroys the liberties which it professes to protect.

I am equally opposed to single-chamber rule and to the use which the Government propose to make of it. I shall resist the abolition of the veto of the House of Lords and the creation of a separate Parliament for Ireland. Our business is to build up, not to destroy ; to promote Union, not to weaken it.

For the work of the Union a strong Navy and a common Imperial policy are required. The Government have neglected the one and rejected the other. They have imperilled our naval supremacy and have ' banged, barred, and bolted the door ' in the face of the Colonial statesmen who invited us to join in the commercial federation of the Empire.

You have now an opportunity to reverse this decision. By the establishment of a system of mutual trade preferences, our markets may be enlarged, our trade increased, our Imperial resources developed, and the whole Empire strengthened and united more closely together. At the same time, and by the same measures, a great stimulus will be given to home production, both in agriculture and manufactures.

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The investment of capital will be encouraged, new employment created, and the demand for British labour increased.

The gravest of our home problems to-day is the question of unemployment. Distress has ceased to be occasional and has become chronic. The Government meet it with palliatives which merely touch the surface of the evil, but they refuse to apply the only remedy which goes to the root of the disease. There is not work enough to go round. In good and bad times alike distress committees are in operation, and distress grants are voted to employ 011 unproductive work those who ought to be engaged in productive industry. More work must be found, and Tariff Reform will find it. On the basis offered by Tariff Reform, and with the revenue derived from it, you may build up a stronger, happier, and more prosperous nation.

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Highbury, *December 30th, igog*

Once again Austen had to fight for his seat, and on this occasion his opponent was Mr. E. Hilton Young, now Lord Kennet, who eleven years later was to be his colleague in Mr. Lloyd George's Government. It was clear that Mr. Hilton Young had only been put forward in the hope that his opponent might thereby be confined to East Worcestershire during the ensuing campaign, but Austen felt that his own constituency was now so safe that he could afford to leave it occasionally. He was thus able to bring assistance to friends hard-pressed in neighbouring divisions. Everywhere he used the argument that the choice was between Socialism and Tariff Reform, and that the Budget was the embodiment of the former. So far as he was concerned the election did not produce any surprises, though it was marked by a somewhat acrimonious dispute with Mr. Alfred Mond, later Lord Melchett. On December 14th, in a

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speech at King's Heath, Austen suggested that in his commercial dealings Mr. Mond did not always apply the Free Trade principles which he advocated on the platform and in the House of Commons. The other repudiated the insinuation : ' I have yet to learn that it is any derogation from Free Trade principles for a business firm in a Free Trade country to make any arrangements as to the disposal of its products which it considers to be in the best interests of its proprietors.' In consequence, it was generally felt that Austen had been the victor in this exchange of political pleasantries.

When the poll was announced it was seen how safe Austen had made himself in East Worcestershire :

Chamberlain	.	.	12,644
Hilton Young	.	.	6,955
Majority	.		5,689

Not long afterwards Austen received another welcome reminder of his popularity with his constituents in the shape of a substantial cheque from his leading supporters towards the payment of his election expenses.

As soon as the final results from the whole country were available it was at once obvious that an extremely difficult situation had arisen. The great Liberal majority of 1906 had disappeared, and in the new House of Commons the strength of the Parties was : Conservatives 242, Liberal Unionists 31, Liberals 275, Socialists 40, and Irish Nationalists 81. The Government losses, it may be added, were almost entirely confined to England, where the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists had even a slight majority over all their opponents. The interest taken by the electors in the issues at stake is emphasized by the fact that, as has already been mentioned, no less than 92 per cent, of them went to the poll. The question immediately arose : Had the Government received a mandate from the country to force the Budget through the House of Lords ? The Liberals maintained that such was clearly the case, since the Conservatives were in a minority in the new House; but to

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this it was objected that the Irish were opposed to the Budget, and that if they voted according to their convictions Ministers would be in a minority. In effect, one of the most confused periods in modern British political history had begun.

Austen at once stated his views in a letter to Mr. Balfour :

Highbury
January 29th, 1910

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

I am very sorry to learn from a letter of Lady Betty's to Beatrice that you are not well. I expect you need a change and rest, but I fear there is little chance of your getting it, for we have stormy times in front of us and shall need your counsel and leadership.

What, I wonder, do you think of it all ? Frankly, I am disappointed ; but you were less sanguine than I was, so your disappointment should be less. Scotland is very bad ; Wales about as good as I hoped, though we have not made the progress in the places in which I expected it ; London did not come up to my expectations, nor did Lancashire. The Midlands have done well, though curiously enough we failed to win two of the seats about which, before the contest, we were most sanguine.

The counties generally are very good. In Devonshire we were overwhelmed at the last moment by the weight of oratory on the Government side—three Cabinet Ministers and other lesser lights, against whom we could set none but local men. But for this we ought to have won three or four more seats down there. The most curious feature of the whole elections is the singularly complete reversal of by-election results. Seats won at by-elections have always a tendency to swing back, but I have never known them to do so with such unanimity.

I have had a good many letters from candidates both successful and unsuccessful, and from them and from my own experience I draw the following conclusions :

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i. Tariff Reform was our trump card. Where we won, we won on and by Tariff Reform. Even where we lost, it was the only subject in our repertoire about which people really cared. In many cases (e.g. London) electors said to our canvassers : ' Yes, we want Tariff Reform, but we want the Budget (i.e. the land taxes) too. We'll have the Budget first, and we'll have Tariff Reform next time.'

2. The food taxes were, of course, the great difficulty our men met with. On the whole those who faced this difficulty most boldly came off best. But *where the question of food taxation had been shirked or evaded BEFORE the contest, it loomed largest IN the contest.* It requires time and repetition to beat down the cry of dear food, ' Black bread and horse-flesh,⁵ and to make the people look at the question in the proper light as first and foremost, for working men, one of employment. But it can be done if once our candidates see that they must do it, if they acquire for themselves and impart to others the necessary information, and deal with this question in frequent speeches, not waiting to be challenged upon it but going to meet their enemy in the gate. The ignorance of their own case shown by many of our candidates was shocking.

3. In London and in Yorkshire (West Riding especially) the Budget was popular and the Lords were not. The electors were interested in Tariff Reform (e.g. see Hewins' account of his experience), but they did not vote on it. They voted against the Lords and, above all, against the landlords.

4. In Scotland the class hatred was very bitter and the animosity against landlords extreme. Nothing else counted very much. Owing to the split in high quarters in Glasgow, such chances as we might have had in that city were ruined. The Free Fooders rallied at the last moment, but they could not undo the mischief they had done.

5. Where a man has become a convinced Tariff Reformer, nothing will shake him. It is a religion, and he becomes its ardent missionary. These are our best workers.

All the above is full of hope and encouragement as far

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as England is concerned. A little more time, as Hood told me before the election and Balcarres has written to me since, would have made a vast difference in Lancashire. Tariff Reform was making converts daily, but we started it too late in Lancashire owing to the attitude of the leaders in Manchester, and there was not time for it to sink in and get sufficient hold of the people. A bolder attitude in the earlier days would have led to much greater success in the elections. The workmen are more advanced than their employers. Scotland presents a more difficult problem, but there also Tariff Reform was held back too long. Our only chance of winning Scotland is to change the issue on which Scotsmen vote. As long as it is the land, the landlords, and the rest of the Radical programme we shall be beaten. We must try to make them think of something else, and that something else can only be Tariff Reform.

But there is one feature of the situation which causes me some anxiety. The combination of the Liberal and Labour Parties is much stronger than the Liberal Party would be if there were no third Party in existence. Many men who would in that case have voted with us voted on this occasion as the Labour Party told them, i.e. for the Liberals. The Labour Party has 'come to stay.' It is much stronger than at first appears from the electoral returns, for on this occasion it has chiefly served as a cat's-paw to pull Liberal chestnuts out of the fire. This the Socialists see and are complaining of. It may lead to trouble between the two Parties to the coalition in future, but the existence of the third Party deprives us of the full benefit of the 'swing of the pendulum,' introduces a new element into politics, and confronts us with a new difficulty. The Irish, of course, everywhere voted against us.

So much for the past, and now as to the future.

I hope you will come up to town in time to allow of careful consideration of our course of action before Parliament meets for business. We ought, I think, to have more than one *cabinet' to discuss the situation. Meanwhile I give you my own first ideas for what they are worth.

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I suppose that if the Budget gets through the House of Commons it must pass the Lords. I say 'if it gets through the Commons,' as the Government may come to grief over the whisky tax. Probably, however, they will abandon it to placate the Irish, whose position, if it is insisted upon, will be one of some embarrassment.

To settle the Budget of this year must, I take it, be the first business of the Government, though there are rumours to the contrary. Then comes the question of the powers and constitution of the House of Lords. As to their powers I hope they will stand firm. Nothing can be worse for them or for us than that they should give way and pass a Bill on lines of the Campbell-Bannerman resolution, and one General Election is not sufficient to carry such a grave constitutional revolution. If they must die they had better die fighting. It is not the issue upon which I would choose to take the decision of the country if the choice were ours ; but there is nothing to be gained by committing suicide, and to consent to limit their veto to a single session would be suicide pure and simple.

On the other hand, it would be well for them to show their willingness to reform. Could not Lansdowne at once take up the report of Rosebery's committee ? This is one of the questions I should like to discuss with you and him. He might even put forward a proposal for election of a proportion of the House by county councils.

It is, however, possible that Asquith will at once confront the King with a demand that he shall create, if necessary, sufficient peers to force the Campbell-Bannerman Bill through the House. I do not imagine the King would consent to this without first sending for you and Lansdowne, and I think you ought to advise him to refuse. This would, of course, mean that you would have to be prepared to take office although in a minority in the House of Commons, and to dissolve again the moment you were beaten. In that case, I suggest that you should table one or more Tariff Reform resolutions, take a division on the first, and dissolve again at once. It would be a great risk, but I see no other

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way out, and we ought if need be to risk everything, for if we don't resist we lose everything.

If Asquith does not take this extreme course, which some of his colleagues and many of his followers are sure to press on him, our policy is easier. We must be aggressive all along the line, but above all, like the Anti-Corn-Law League in its seventh year, we must transfer the tariff fight from the country to the House of Commons. As Cobden said, the best platform from which to address the country is the floor of the House of Commons, and we must raise the issue there on every occasion, beginning with an amendment to the Address. This is the only way in which we can educate the people and above all educate our own men. We shall have a united Party behind us, and we can make a better show both in debate and in the division than we could in the last Parliament. We can riddle Asquith's assertions, and we can show up Lloyd George about German conditions both of living and wages. But we must fight out the *whole* question there, and be prepared to meet and indeed anticipate every challenge.

I believe the result would be quickly felt in the country. If time is given us we ought also to press our land policy. Your speeches on that subject were a great assistance to our men in country districts, and even in many of the towns, where the idea of small cultivating ownerships is popular.

There is much more to be said when we meet, but this is enough to show you in what direction my thoughts are tending and more than enough to exhaust your patience.

I am going up to London on Wednesday next, when my address will be 9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

This long letter has been quoted in full because it forecasts Austen's attitude during the next eighteen months. It may, perhaps, be criticized on several grounds, but it was not inconsistent ; nor was Mr. Balfour left unaware of what

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was in the other's mind. ' If they must die they had better die fighting.' Rightly or wrongly, Austen adhered to that view to the end, although it was to bring him into antagonism to his leader, and to range him with the ' Die-hards' of the Halsbury Club.

It was not, however, only Austen who was in doubt as to the course which the Government was going to pursue. The difficulty of their position was realized by some members of the administration too, and the Prime Minister informed the King that a section of the Cabinet was of the opinion that ' in view of the exorbitant demands of Mr. Redmond and his followers, and the impossibility under existing Parliamentary conditions of counting upon a stable Government majority, the wisest and most dignified course for Ministers was at once to tender their resignation to Your Majesty.' The Irish, in effect, were prepared to vote for the Budget, but they demanded a preliminary assurance that once it was passed legislation would immediately be introduced to remove the veto of the House of Lords so that a measure of Home Rule could be carried, if necessary, over the head of that body. For a moment the Cabinet hesitated, and then it decided to remain in office. Mr. Redmond was told he could turn it out if he dared, which he could not afford to do, as the Prime Minister knew very well. As Austen put it : ' In short, Asquith has his own way. Budget first and veto afterwards. Asquith has beaten his recalcitrant colleagues, and now defies Redmond, Barnes, and Co., who, being beaten, will doubtless all come to heel.' Nevertheless, the position continued obscure for some weeks, and on February 27th Austen wrote :

From what I have already written, you will know what is my view of the situation at the moment. Briefly, you may summarize it thus : a financial situation of great difficulty and complexity, a Parliamentary situation of unstable equilibrium, a Government which might at any moment be upset, an Opposition which is not ready to take

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office, and might be ruined by taking it in such peculiar circumstances, and an electoral situation full of doubt and danger for all Parties.

I have not the least doubt that the Government would be glad, mightily glad in fact, to be defeated on a side issue which left their policy intact—a snap decision, a point of procedure or anything of that kind. They would resign at once, shuffle the cards, discard the weak ones, and reappear at the elections united and rehabilitated, with the old issues of down with the veto of the Lords and down with the landlords and up with the People's Budget. Let the rich pay ! The earth is the Lord's, and He has given it to His people. You are His people.

Meanwhile, if we took office we should have no majority, and no one—not even Asquith—could really guarantee to us safe passage of the necessary financial Bills. One Budget is nearly twelve months overdue. Another Budget is nearly due, and before either can be carried a War Loan Bill, a Treasury Borrowing-powers Bill, Votes A and 1 of the Navy, a vote on account of the Civil Service and of the Army, and a Consolidated Fund Bill must be carried by Easter or the King's Government cannot be carried on. Never have we seen such a financial situation. Never has there been such a congestion of business. There has been nothing comparable to it on previous occasions when both Parties have come to terms to 'wind up' necessary business with a view to a dissolution.

What a kettle of fish !

This letter reveals the weakness of the Conservatives and Unionists. In the last resort they did not want to take office, and therefore much skilful manoeuvring was necessary if this fact was to be concealed from the rank and file. All the same, while the Government was hesitating the Opposition attacked. On the first night of the session Austen recorded his views of the new Parliament :

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This is a very different House from the last—our benches crowded and our men overflowing the gangway. The Labour Party now sit on the Government side, and the two front benches below the gangway on our side are occupied by our men and by the Independent Nationalists. But it is a different House in spirit as well as in externals. Our men are keen, and full of fight and spirits. The Government side is chastened. There will not be the same brutality as there was in the first session of the last Parliament.

Austen moved a Tariff Reform amendment to the Address, and to his great delight it was beaten by a mere thirty-one votes, which was in marked contrast with the majority of 376 by which a Free Trade resolution had been carried at the beginning of the previous Parliament. 'The debate,⁵ noted Austen, 'was remarkable for the number and excellence of the maiden speeches—Steel-Maitland, Tryon, Mackinder, Page Croft, and George Lloyd all made their mark. We are enormously strengthened in debating power.⁵ This, however, was mere skirmishing, and the real fight was to take place on quite another issue.

Once Mr. Asquith had made up his mind not to resign he left no stone unturned to rally a majority. On March 21st he tabled three resolutions: the first declared it expedient that the House of Lords should be prevented from rejecting or amending money Bills; the second stipulated that if a Bill passed the Commons in three successive sessions, and was thrice rejected by the Lords, it should 'become law without the consent of the House of Lords on the Royal Assent being declared⁵; and the third limited the duration of any one Parliament to five years, thus modifying the Septennial Act of 1716. These resolutions were carried by April 14th, and the Prime Minister then introduced a Bill founded on them.

In the meantime negotiations had been taking place with Mr. Redmond. A few changes were made in the

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Finance Bill to render it more palatable to Ireland, and, as the House of Lords made no further resistance, it became law at the end of April. The Opposition view of these events was admirably expressed by Mr. Balfour when he said that Mr. Asquith had deliberately bought the Irish vote for the Budget, and the price he had paid was the dignity of his office.

Austen used language no less scathing :

The quarrel with the House of Lords did not begin with the Budget. That only brought it to a head. It began with their first Education Bill. Let them bring that Bill into the House of Commons to-day. They cannot find a majority in this House of Commons to support it. Or let them try their Licensing Bill, which the House of Lords also rejected. Again, I say, you could not find a majority for it in the present House of Commons. They appealed to Caesar on these three great issues, and on each of them the verdict has been against them. On none of them have they got the majority they require, and accordingly they are searching blindfold to see whether by hook or by crook they can bring the discordant sections which compose their Party into one division lobby, whether by the sacrifice of principle, of measures, of policy they can keep their office if they cannot keep faith. As far as we know at present they have a majority for one purpose, and one purpose only : they have a majority for destruction. . . .

How many masters is this Government serving ? Pulled hither and thither, kicked on one side and kicked on the other, suffering every indignity, turning the other cheek to the smiter, careless of their own dignity, still more careless of the interests of the country, seeking only somehow, and at any cost, to find some favourable ground on which to take the fresh appeal which cannot be long delayed. I think the House of Commons suffers indignity by such a proceeding. I think the Government suffer. I know no spectacle more pitiable than a bench of men, each of

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them able in himself, yet so swayed by every passing gust of lobby intrigue, so subject to every accident, that they dare not call their souls their own, that they dare not stick to anything they say if it displeases any section of their supporters, and that from day to day, and hour to hour, they modify and alter their course to catch each passing gust of friendly breeze, and to avoid the squalls that descend upon them from all quarters.¹

The stage thus seemed set for a constitutional crisis on a scale which had been unparalleled since the days of the Reform Bill in 1832, but before proceeding to consider the actual course of events, and Austen's part therein, it must in fairness to him be realized that he was thoroughly aware that so far as the House of Lords was concerned a good deal more was required than a policy of mere negation ; indeed, his account of a meeting held early in March to consider the question shows him to have been in advance of several of his colleagues :

This morning I attended a concourse at Lansdowne House on House of Lords reform—chiefly remarkable for the presence of Rosebery at our councils. There was a good deal of rather discursive conversation and no very definite result. The biggest question raised was whether an elective element should find a place in a reformed House, i.e. whether a portion of the House being selected in some manner from the hereditary peers, and a second portion being nominated by the Crown for life or for a term of years, a third portion should be elected by some form of electoral college, probably county councils singly or grouped where the population was too small for a single county to elect a representative.

Rosebery, George Curzon, and I were in favour of this proposal.

¹ *The Times*, April 11th, 1910.

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' Unless you are prepared for that,⁵ said Rosebery, ' you might as well give up reform from within. Nothing less will affect public opinion sufficiently to change the situation in Scotland and the North.'

With this Curzon and I agreed. Wyndham was, I think, also of this opinion, but he is never very easy to understand. Long agreed and Akers-Douglas, to my surprise, expressed himself strongly in the same sense. Salisbury was entirely hostile to the idea ; Midleton was apparently hostile but quite incomprehensible ; Lansdowne expressed great reluctance to admit it and a doubt whether he could take any active part in support of it, but spoke before Long, Douglas, and, I think, Balfour had given their opinions. Balfour said :

' I agree with what I believe Austen thinks. I dislike the whole thing. I would like to leave things as they are if we could. I don't believe you can make a better House. But that is not the question. The question is : Can you make a Second Chamber strong enough to stand and resist assault ? Can you make such changes as will enable our men to fight with success in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Scotland against single-chamber government ? I don't think you can in our democratic days unless you admit an elective element, and although at first I thought that the elective and non-elective elements would at once clash, and the remaining hereditary element be thrust out, I have come to the conclusion on reflection that this danger is not as great as I at first thought, and that such a House as we are discussing might stand at any rate for fifty years.'

I had previously said : ' The question is not whether you can improve the House—I doubt on the whole whether you could get a House of men better qualified for their work—but the question is : Can you make the House strong enough to do its work successfully ? '

' That's exactly it,' said Rosebery. He and George Curzon and I were the active protagonists of an elective element ; Salisbury and Midleton the chief opponents.

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In spite of his preoccupation with the political situation Austen had by no means lost his relish for a good story, and one that he heard at this time concerning Mr. Gladstone pleased him very much. It was told by Sir Francis Mowatt, who was for many years Permanent Secretary to the Treasury. On one occasion Mr. Gladstone had been very much interested in some small Bill which had been considerably amended in Parliament, and Mr. George Russell found him in his study ruefully regarding the measure's mangled remains. 'Well, Mr. Gladstone,' said his visitor, * you must remember that, as the old Greek said, sometimes the half is greater than the whole.'

The then Prime Minister sprang to life. 'What old Greek said that?' he retorted. 'No old Greek ever said it.'

Mr. Russell, however, had already noticed a copy of Hesiod on a shelf, so he opened it at the passage where the phrase occurred, and laid it before the G.O.M. with the remark : 'The chance of for once triumphing over you in a point of classical scholarship overcomes my profound respect.'

Mr. Gladstone eyed the passage fiercely, and then snorted out contemptuously : 'An evident interpolation !' Yet when Mr. Russell asked that ripe scholar Sir Arthur Godley, for so long Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office, whether there was any reason to suppose that Hesiod had not written the line, the other replied : 'So little, that I believe it is the only line we have that he ever did write.'

Austen repeated this story with great glee, for in a curious way he was always attracted by his father's old leader, and he delighted in Gladstonian reminiscences.

There was no Easter vacation that year owing to the amount of business before the House, but there was a short recess afterwards, and Austen and his wife took advantage of the opportunity to go to Cannes, where Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain were staying. They had hardly reached there when they heard the news of the death of King Edward VII on May 6th. They at once returned to

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London, but too late for Austen to be present at the Proclamation Council. The King's death greatly moved him, for the dead monarch had been a loyal friend both to his father and to himself, and Austen had dined at Buckingham Palace not long before. 'A very good dinner, a quite excellent and very large cigar, and pleasant talk,' he had commented at the time; and the sovereign had told him : * You have a very difficult situation. You must play your cards very carefully.⁵ Proof that the regard was mutual was afforded by the action of Queen Alexandra in sending for Austen as soon as he got home from the Riviera. She took him to where the King lay in his open coffin. 'Thank you so much,' she said, * for your kind letter. I thought you would like to see him again. He looks so peaceful. Tell your father. I know he will feel it so much.'

Austen murmured a few words of appreciation, and then she went on : 'He is so peaceful. He looks so like himself. He always looked like that when he was sleeping—so like a soldier, and he died for his country. All this trouble the last year worried him—and perhaps he could have calmed it. Perhaps some word from him would have made them wiser.' Then the Queen made a reference to the cruise after the Coronation. 'Those were happy days,' she said, and then dismissed him.

After the funeral, which Austen attended, the Parliamentary recess was resumed, and he and his wife took a motor tour in the Loire country with their friend Mr. Leverton Harris. By the time that he returned in the early days of June fresh work was waiting for him.

The accession of King George V diverted public attention from political controversy, and when the ceremonies connected with it and with the funeral of his predecessor were over there was a general feeling that it would be most unfair to confront the new monarch with a constitutional crisis. If the politicians could arrive at a compromise between themselves, the ordinary citizen argued, it would be better for everybody. Accordingly the Prime Minister proposed to Mr. Balfour that four of the leading men on

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either side should meet in conference with a view to finding a solution acceptable to both Parties. The Opposition leader agreed to the proposal, and Mr. Asquith nominated to represent the Government, in addition to himself, the Marquess of Crewe, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Birrell, while Mr. Balfour chose the Marquess of Lansdowne, Earl Cawdor, and Austen Chamberlain. To the end of his life Austen could never make up his mind whether the Prime Minister really wanted a compromise or was merely playing for time. That the Chancellor of the Exchequer was sincerely desirous of an agreement he never doubted, and certain representations which Mr. Lloyd George made to Mr. Balfour during the summer would seem to confirm this interpretation of his attitude.

The conference met for the first time on June 17th, and it continued to sit, with several interruptions, until November 10th, holding twenty-two meetings in all. To quote Austen : ' There were times when we seemed very near agreement on some aspects of the problem, such, for instance, as the treatment of financial measures and general legislation, but the shadow of the Home Rule controversy hung over us all. The Unionists contended that organic measures, that is, measures affecting the Crown and the Constitution, must be subject to special safeguards, ensuring that, if the two Houses disagreed, the nation should be consulted before they became irrevocable. As to the Crown and the Constitutional Act which would result from any agreement we might reach, there was, I believe, no insuperable difference, but Home Rule barred the way. On this point we could obtain no satisfaction. . . . " One particularly interesting feature of the conference was that evidence was taken as to constitutional practices in the United States and Canada, and Dr. Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, and Mr. Fielding, of Canada, appeared to explain the position in their respective countries.

By September the Opposition leaders were becoming doubtful whether any useful result was likely to accrue. Mr. Balfour had been asked to make a public speech, and

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an extract from his letter asking Austen's opinion well reflects his views at the time :

... I think there are real objections to the *Unionist* members of the conference making Party speeches if the *Radical* members of it are holding their tongues. Of course, I should make not the most distant allusion to the ' constitutional question,'⁵ but, even with this limitation, I hesitate, and should rather like to know your opinion.

Since I began to hesitate, one circumstance has come to my knowledge which increases my hesitation. I hear that the King thinks of nothing else but the conference, and hopes for nothing so much as its success. I cannot conceive how he is to be gratified. But if the thing is to break down—as I fear it must—it becomes doubly important that the breakdown should not be attributed to us. . . .

I have been told a curious story on what seems very good authority. Elibank, so I am assured, declares that the Government and his Party are so determined not to have an election till after the Coronation that they will keep the conference going till next year ! If this anecdote be true, *cela donne a penser*.

In reply, Austen urged Mr. Balfour not to take a vow of silence, especially as Mr. Birrell was making public speeches, and he continued :

... I do not believe the story about Elibank's alleged utterance ; but even if he said it, I do not believe that he meant what he said or that it is in the power of Asquith and Co. to drag on the conference beyond the meeting of Parliament even if they wished to do so. They will at once be faced with the necessity of proceeding with the Budget, and before they are allowed to make progress with that they must state the results of the conference and their attitude

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towards the House of Lords. I anticipate, therefore, that the conference will conclude its labours within a week of the resumption of its sittings. . . .

What you say of the King's views I think most natural. He must wish to be relieved of the strain of an ultimate decision between the contending Parties, but it unfortunately does not lie with us to grant his wish, and we cannot sacrifice the Constitution in the vain hope of sparing the Throne.

Austen proved a true prophet, and on November 10th the last meeting of the conference was held, when its definite failure was admitted. Actually it had to all intents and purposes broken down nearly a month before over the treatment of Home Rule Bills. Mr. Balfour had proposed that if such measures were twice rejected they should become the subject of a plebiscite, but although Mr. Lloyd George admitted this was reasonable he said it was impossible for the Government to agree to it. On November 10th, however, Ministers put forward the proposal that a General Election should intervene on the next occasion on which a Home Rule Bill, having passed the House of Commons, was rejected by the Lords, but in this one case only, and that in future Home Rule Bills were to be treated in the ordinary way like any other measure. For the rest, the Government proposed that if a difference arose between Lords and Commons on two occasions in two sessions in two years it was to be settled by a joint sitting of the two Houses ; this was to consist of the whole of the House of Commons and one hundred peers, twenty of whom were to be Government supporters and eighty were to be selected on a system of proportional representation.

As to financial legislation, the Budget was not to be rejected by the Lords except in case of tacking, which was to be defined as follows: ' Finance is the sole business of the House of Commons, provided that if it appears that any provisions of a Bill, though dealing with taxation, would effect important social or political changes through expropriation

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or differentiation against any class of owners of property these provisions shall not be treated for the purposes of this Act as provisions dealing with taxation.' In that event the Government would have to embody such proposals in an ordinary Bill, to which the normal procedure would apply. The decision as to what was, and what was not, a genuine money Bill was to rest with a joint committee of the two Houses, composed of seven from each elected at the beginning of every Parliament, presided over by the Speaker with a casting vote only. In the matter of constitutional legislation Mr. Asquith said that no discrimination could be considered, but his Government was willing to agree that Bills affecting the Crown or the Protestant Succession should be subject to special safeguards ; that is to say, if the two Houses differed they should be dropped, but otherwise they should go to a plebiscite.

After the last session of the conference there was a meeting of the Opposition leaders at Lansdowne House, when it was decided that these suggestions did not provide a satisfactory basis for a compromise. Austen's principal objections were to confining the security from Home Rule to a single occasion, and to the absence of any general provisions securing that constitutional changes should be specially safeguarded. He thought better than most of his colleagues of the proposals for joint sittings, and he felt sure that the Government could be persuaded to raise the numbers of the Lords' delegates. What Austen did not like was the idea of leaving the Upper House wholly unreformed.

This conference, like so many similar gatherings, was less remarkable for what took place at its formal sessions than for what went on behind the scenes. In this instance it was no less than a proposal by Mr. Lloyd George for the formation of a Coalition administration. The suggestion was never discussed in the conference itself, and it was first made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Mr. Balfour in terms of such secrecy that the latter did not at first mention it to his colleagues, though it was subsequently ascertained

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that the Prime Minister knew all about the proposals from the beginning. Before the negotiations finally broke down its existence had been disclosed to the other five members of the Conference as well as to Mr. Winston Churchill, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. F. E. Smith, Mr. Akers-Douglas, and Mr. Gerald Balfour. The rank and file of the two Parties concerned, of course, had no idea of what was afoot, and well might Austen write : ' What a world we live in, and how the public would stare if they could look into our minds and our letter-bags.' He did not himself see the actual memorandum which Mr. Lloyd George presented to Mr. Balfour until some years later.¹

In brief, the Chancellor of the Exchequer argued that while Parties would always disagree on certain vital issues at that moment the most important questions were capable of being settled by the action of the two great Parties without any sacrifice of principle on the part of either. The progress of events abroad had rendered the matter urgent, and the problems which this new situation raised could not be dealt with by a single Party without its incurring a load of temporary unpopularity within its own ranks which neither side could afford to face if it stood alone, faced by an Opposition ready to take every advantage of tripping it up. The examples given were : housing, the sale of drink, insurance, unemployment, the Poor Law, and national reorganization, including under this head national defence, for which the Swiss militia system was suggested as a model, trade and tariffs, and schemes for uniting the Empire and utilizing its resources for defence as well as for commerce and foreign policy. Austen did not play a leading part in the discussion on these propositions, but a letter which he wrote to Mr. F. E. Smith expresses his views :

¹ Cf. Appendix I.

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Highbury, Birmingham

October 21st, 1910

MY DEAR F. E.,

Though not in Court I am as busy as you and cannot write as fully as I should like if my letter is to catch the post to-night. But let me make one or two points clear.

(1) That each one of us recognizes the gravity of the decision we have to take. There is no need to dwell on that.

(2) We equally recognize the vast importance of the results which Lloyd George holds out to us. To place the Navy on a thoroughly satisfactory basis, to establish a system of national service for defence, to grant at once preference to the Colonies on the duties immediately available, and to enquire, not with a view to delay but with a view to action at the earliest possible moment, what further duties it is desirable to impose in the interests of the nation and the Empire—these are objects which silence all considerations of personal comfort and all individual preferences or antipathies.

And in saying this please understand that I am as assured as you are yourself that Lloyd George has made this proposal in perfect good faith and without any unavowed or unavowable *arriere pensee*.

Nor am I at all less inclined to give the most attentive and even friendly consideration to these proposals because as I now understand from you and Bonar Law they are dependent on another consideration, namely on agreement for a settlement of the Irish question on the lines of what I understand Lloyd George calls Federal Home Rule for the United Kingdom, and what I should call Provincial Councils. On the contrary, I think this adds to the value of the proposal and increases its possible advantages. I have never been averse in principle to very considerable changes in Irish Government, and I see that it would be safe and wise to go further, as part of a national settlement which both Parties would maintain, than it could ever be if the plan were the work of one Party only, and regarded by that Party as a

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minimum capable under pressure of Parliamentary or political necessity of being indefinitely exceeded.

Although, therefore, this is a most important addition to the proposals laid before Balfour by Lloyd George, and although every addition adds to the difficulties as well as to the advantages of agreement, it does not materially alter the position at the moment, at least as I see it, namely that if we can come to some agreement at the conference on the points which we are there discussing, then there is open to us the possibility at least that a very much wider agreement and closer co-operation might be attainable.

But Lloyd George seems to have spoken to you as if he had already invited us to consider with him whether some such form of devolution could not be agreed to by both Parties, and as if there was a present danger that the conference would break up because we refuse even to consider such a proposition. This is a complete and, I think, dangerous misunderstanding. No such proposal has been made to us or even hinted at either inside or outside the conference. What we have been considering is not *what changes* in our system of Government should be made but *how* such changes should be effected. This is a wholly different though perhaps a not unrelated question, for what we desire is not a guarantee against all change, but security against changes in the machinery of Government *which the people do not approve*. If they clearly do approve them, they must have them. Whether we think them good or bad, we make no pretence under such circumstances to any power to prevent their passage into law.

It seems to me that Lloyd George has failed to recognize this, and that if he recognized it his path and ours might be considerably smoothed. For consider the position : If the country clearly approves any proposal they make on, for example, the Irish question, they *could and would carry it within a reasonable time and without a dissolution* under the plan which we have proposed with the honest desire to meet them as far as possible, *even though we as a Party were wholly opposed to the change* ; whilst, if the change were one agreed

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upon by both Parties, it would go through as easily and as swiftly as any great Bill has ever gone through Parliament.

Such security as we have asked therefore does not prevent change when Parties disagree, and does not render change one whit more difficult when Parties are agreed.

What more can he reasonably ask? And what is it he fears if this system be adopted?

My reply to your letter has grown far longer than I intended. Even now it has been written in such haste that my thoughts are badly and inadequately expressed, but at least it will serve to show you the temper in which I approach the consideration of these great issues and the momentous proposal made by Lloyd George to Balfour.

It will, I hope, also enable you to clear up the misunderstanding which seems to exist in Lloyd George's mind as to what he actually proposed to Balfour and what was our attitude to it.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

So far did these negotiations go at one moment that the actual distribution of offices in the Coalition Government was considered. Mr. Lloyd George suggested that Mr. Asquith should become First Lord of the Treasury with a peerage, Mr. Balfour President of the Committee of Defence with the leadership of the Commons, Lord Lansdowne Foreign Secretary, and Austen First Lord of the Admiralty; Mr. Lloyd George was to remain Chancellor of the Exchequer, but he expressed his willingness to vacate that office in favour of Austen. This grandiose scheme, however, came to nothing. It would have necessitated each side doing what it most disliked to please the other, and there was no compelling motive to bring the Parties together as was to be the case five years later. The concessions required from the Opposition in the matter of Home Rule, Welsh disestablishment, and education were greater than the rank and file throughout the country would have been prepared

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to accept. Mr. F. E. Smith and, though to a lesser extent, Mr. Bonar Law were in favour of coming to terms, while Austen would have liked to pursue the matter further, but they could not carry their colleagues with them.

So far as Austen was concerned the negotiations serve to show his lack of rigidity in the matter of Ireland. A federal solution such as he envisaged had formed part of his father's 'unauthorized programme' a quarter of a century before, and it was being advocated by his friend Mr. F. S. Oliver in a series of letters to *The Times* over the signature of Pacificus. Mr. Garvin was taking the same line in the *Observer*, and in a letter to him at this time Austen said: 'I . . . do not at all close my mind to the suggestion of a great development in Unionist policy towards Ireland, or rather, as I would prefer to say, a reversion to the line of policy which my father was laying before the country before Mr. Gladstone introduced his mischievous and destructive scheme.' Like Mr. Lloyd George's proposed coalition it is an interesting 'might-have-been,' but, to use Austen's words again, 'the passions of both sides were too inflamed, and their opposing standpoints too rigidly defined and fixed, for compromise to be possible to either.'

What made Austen particularly desirous of reaching a settlement, if at all possible, was the disquieting information which was reaching him as to German ambitions. In the previous summer Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, then British Minister at Stockholm, had supplied him with some very useful facts regarding German naval policy and the desire of Berlin to avoid alarming public opinion in Great Britain for the time being. 'I don't believe,' Sir Cecil wrote, 'Germany wants to make war, but merely to prevent us, through the fear of war, from doing what she doesn't approve of, for instance changing our tariff, or interfering with her expansion in the Near East.'⁵ In October Austen had another letter which was equally disquieting, for in it Sir Cecil proved how easily the various sections could be mobilized in support of the Government's foreign policy. * Another common mistake,' he wrote, 'is to suppose

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German finance is anti-military. On the contrary, it is supporting the ship-building programme and the Imperialist Press as much as possible. It is *betting* on war, and on a war in which England will have to pay a great indemnity—and judging by 1871 the great financiers will reap the benefit. The English Christian is a dangerous business rival to the Jew, but the German Christian is a mere soldier and doesn't understand business, so he is a useful servant, and not to be feared as a competitor. Perhaps that is the reason why the Continental Jews¹ are so violently anti-English.' With such information continually coming to his notice it was little wonder that Austen had showed himself responsive to Mr. Lloyd George's proposals.

The political truce thus came to an end at the beginning of November, and on the 1st of that month it was announced that the conference had broken up without reaching any agreement, though nothing was said as to the causes of its failure. Four days later Parliament met, and the Veto Bill was introduced in the House of Lords. Its terms were that, pending a reform of the composition of the Upper Chamber, any measure which passed the Commons in three successive sessions unchanged might be presented for the Royal Assent without the consent of the Lords ; and that any financial measure might be put before the King in the same way if, at the end of a month, the Lords' consent was withheld. The Government did not wait for the Bill to be defeated, for a week after the failure of the conference the announcement of the coming dissolution of Parliament was made. In making it the Prime Minister repeated a statement which he had made in the previous April to the effect that, in the event of the issue being further forced, Ministers would not advise a dissolution except on such conditions as would enable them, if successful at the polls, to place the Veto Bill (as the Parliament Bill was generally called) upon the statute-book despite the resistance of the House of Lords. This could only mean that if the Government

¹ Cf. the *Neue Freie Presse*.

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were successful at the polls, and the Lords still refused to give way, Ministers had received the assurance that sufficient peers would be created to ensure the passage of the Bill.

There was another course which might, with perfect constitutional propriety, have been taken, and that was to entrust Mr. Balfour with the formation of an administration. The reason this was not done was because it was understood that the Conservative leader would not take office, though how such a misconception arose it is difficult to see, unless it was deliberately created by some interested party. As we have seen, the Opposition had no desire to take office, but it would certainly have done so in such circumstances. A General Election would, of course, have been necessary, but the result might have been very different from what it subsequently proved to be had the issue been the propriety of creating peers to enable Home Rule to be carried without the definite approval of the electorate. Had Mr. Balfour been beaten at the polls the House of Lords must have accepted the verdict, and the threat to swamp that body by the creation of new peers would not have been necessary. In effect, whichever way the nation voted, the crisis of the following year would have been avoided. This possibility was fully appreciated in the Opposition circles, where there was much resentment at the course adopted. Since the true fact, namely that Mr. Balfour was understood to be unwilling to take office, was unknown outside a very limited circle, there was a good deal of wild talk in the Carlton Club and elsewhere. As so often in such cases, those who knew least talked most ; while those whose information was complete had their lips sealed.

The lists were now set for the second General Election within twelve months, and Austen's address shows how he regarded the issues before the electors :

GENTLEMEN,

Less than twelve months ago you chose me by an overwhelming majority as your representative in the new

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Parliament. That Parliament is now to be hurriedly dissolved without any attempt being made to pass a single measure of reform, in order that the Government may escape from the necessity of explaining its policy and that the Opposition may be prevented from bringing forward any alternative proposals. This is not Parliamentary government, it is revolution, and revolution rendered only the more odious because the Ministers who advise it are not free agents, but the slaves 'of a scratch majority'—to use the Prime Minister's words—'combining under the coercion of Party exigencies for a particular and transient purpose.'⁵

That purpose is to establish single-chamber rule and to deprive the people of all effective control over the doings of their representatives, who are henceforth to be transformed into their master. With the veto of the Second Chamber destroyed and any appeal to the people forbidden, Home Rule, which the electors have twice rejected, is to be passed over their heads, and Ministers will 'toe the line' which Nationalists and Socialists dictate to them.

In contrast with this policy of destruction and confusion the Unionist Party offer you a constructive programme of progress and reform.

Reform of the House of Lords :

so that, reduced in numbers and reinforced by a large representative element, it may efficiently discharge the duties assigned to the Second Chamber in all democratic countries, may guard the liberties of the nation against the tyranny of a log-rolling combination of minorities, and may secure the orderly advance of political and social reform.

Reform of our Fiscal System :

so that, whilst adding to our revenue and relieving the injustice inflicted by recent legislation, we may reciprocate and enlarge the existing Imperial Preference, may secure increased markets for our produce and more employment for our people.

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Land Reform :

by which with the help of the State the number of occupying owners may be increased and the freehold of the land they till may in suitable circumstances be placed within the reach both of existing tenant-farmers and of a new class of small owners.

The establishment of a system of State-aided insurance against sickness and invalidity, the reform of the Poor Law, and the relief of local taxation require and will receive our early attention.

We believe that by these measures the unity of our nation and our Empire will be strengthened, our agriculture developed, our trade increased, and the lot of the unfortunate and the afflicted alleviated. The strength of the nation lies in the well-being of its people, and it is to promote their welfare that all our efforts will be directed.

The moment is a grave one in the history of our country. When such great issues are at stake all personal considerations sink into insignificance, but I believe that I have done nothing to forfeit your trust since last you elected me, and I confidently appeal to you for a renewal of your support.

I am, gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

9 Egerton Place, S.W., *Nov. 24th*

On this occasion Austen was unopposed, and so was enabled to give assistance to Opposition candidates elsewhere. He was engaged in this task in Scotland when he received a heavy blow, both politically and personally, for Mr. Balfour, at a meeting in the Albert Hall, promised that if his Party was successful at the forthcoming election he would not introduce Tariff Reform without a referendum. The disappointment was no less great for not being wholly unexpected. Hardly had it become clear that another appeal to the country was inevitable than a section of the Opposition demanded that the fiscal question should

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momentarily be set aside in order to concentrate on the issue of the Second Chamber. As early as November 13th Austen wrote : ' The editor of the *Express*, Buckle, Norton Griffiths, M.P. for Wednesbury, some others, and Garvin—Garvin of all men !—had all been in quick succession to tell Balfour that we could not win with the food duties, that he must—not indeed abandon them altogether—but announce that if returned to power now he would not impose any new food duty without yet another appeal to the country !' Austen had a long talk with his leader in the hope of persuading him to withstand the pressure to which he was subject, but that pressure was increasing day by day. * Just now,⁵ Austen wrote on the 16th, ' we are all flooded with letters from " ardent " but wobbly Tariff Reformers begging us to play hankypanky somehow with the food taxes, to run away from them to-day that we may live to fight for them again, etc., etc., till I am sick of them.' When, therefore, Mr. Balfour no longer had Austen by his side he yielded to the agitation, and gave the required pledge, though it is only fair to state that he notified the other of his intentions.

Austen protested with all the vigour at his command, and he afterwards told Lord Lansdowne that the declaration ' was a great blow to me—the worst disappointment that I have suffered for a long time in politics' ; but in public he made the best of what he considered to be a serious error of judgment :

... I make you a frank confession, ladies and gentlemen. The idea of submitting Tariff Reform to a referendum or poll of the people was no part of the original plan of the Unionist Party. It was intended that the referendum should apply to grave questions, especially of a constitutional character, where irreconcilable differences arose between the two Houses, and we had no intention and no idea of extending that referendum to Budgets or parts of Budgets, whether we agree with them or not. ... I told

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you, like the rest of my colleagues, I had no idea that the referendum should be applied to the Budget and I should not have made that suggestion myself, but when Mr. Balfour made it, that Tariff Reform should be submitted to the poll of the people, I am bound to agree with it. Just consider, ladies and gentlemen, why it was that Mr. Balfour gave that undertaking at the Albert Hall to submit the whole question to the opinion of the people.

That referendum was proposed when there were such questions of Home Rule. Mr. Balfour said : ' If that is your difficulty, if you are really expressing your mind when you say that your objection to the referendum is that it would work unequally between Parties, that it would cause your policy of Home Rule to be submitted to the people, and not my policy of Tariff Reform—if that is your challenge I accept your challenge : you put Home Rule to the people and I will put Tariff Reform.' ¹

The second General Election of 1910 did little to change the position of Parties in the House of Commons, for there were returned 240 Conservatives, 34 Liberal Unionists, 42 Socialists, and 84 Irish Nationalists. Mr. Balfour's pledge was thus proved to have had no effect whatever save the discouragement of the Tariff Reformers.

Austen's own feelings were expressed in a letter to Mr. Richard Jebb, who had at that time a free-lance connection with the *Morning Post*, then edited by Mr. (later Sir) Fabian Ware, and who had written urging the formation of an independent Tariff Reform group in the new Parliament :

Highbury
Dec. 7th, 1910

MY DEAR JEBB,

Many thanks for your kind letter. I am glad that you decided not to send your draft to the Radical candidate ;

¹ *Buxton Advertiser*, December 17th, 1910.

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I am sure that your decision was right, though I admit that Balfour's Albert Hall declaration was a bitter pill for me to swallow, first because it reversed a decision which we had deliberately taken and embodied in the Lansdowne resolutions¹—that Budgets, whether Tariff Reform or not, were not fit subjects for the referendum ; secondly, because I believed, and the result has shown, that, whilst wrong in itself, it would not even serve the end in view and win seats ; and thirdly, because I thought it played straight into the hands of those who had worked against our cause and Party, and would have the appearance of giving them the credit of any success which we did win.

I felt the decision like a slap in the face, and Cromer's satisfaction did not tend to soothe me.

However, in politics, even more than in most things, you must keep your great end steadily in view and not allow yourself to be diverted from your course by any temporary disturbance—least of all by any personal feeling. I took my decision, therefore, rapidly as I had to take it. There must be no split, so I ' toed the line.'

Now we have gained one thing. We know exactly what the Unionist Free Trade vote is worth. They have not won us a single seat ! The only Manchester seat in which we have gained votes is the one where the candidate repudiated the referendum. They could not even win Lincoln, where they maintained (on paper) a big organization. They could not even keep Cheltenham, where ' the moderate man with a small fixed income ' is supposed to abound !

It is something to have their influence and strength correctly appraised and its hollowness demonstrated. ' For that relief much thanks ! ' When I next say that the men for whom we have made this sacrifice are not worth a hundred votes in any constituency, perhaps my warning will receive greater attention.

We must, however, remember one thing. As far as I

¹ For the reform of the House of Lords.

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can learn every man, except the *Morning Post* and myself, who knew or was consulted about this proposal beforehand urged its acceptance. Indeed many men, and Tariff Reform leaders among them, did not wait to be consulted. They pressed this proposal on Balfour with unanimity, and promised him victory if he would take their advice. I was a voice crying in the wilderness. I stood alone. I don't wonder that Balfour yielded, and deeply as I regret it, I can hardly blame him.

Now as to the future. We need cool judgment and clear thinking. I do not see the whole way yet, but I see some things very definitely, and I want you to lay all personal feeling aside and think only of how we are to turn present failure into future victory. I think it can be done, but if we are to do it we must, I repeat, keep our eyes steadily fixed on the great ends in view, and not allow our disappointment to warp our judgments.

But first there is one personal statement I must make. I will not allow myself to be run against Balfour for the leadership. As long as he likes to keep it, he stands a head and shoulders above the rest of us. I am bound to him by many ties of personal affection, Party allegiance, and political regard, and though I see his faults as a leader I also know his strength, and I will not join any movement, open or secret, directed against him, nor will I allow myself to be used in opposition to him. You don't like this, but you must accept it. It is a *fact* with which we have got to reckon.

But I absolutely agree with you that Ware is too pessimistic. Our seven years' work is not undone, and cannot be undone. Victory is longer in coming than we hoped, but it will come. Every year brings us nearer to it.

Now what has that seven years' work done for us? It has made the Unionist Party a practically solid Tariff Reform Party. That is our great achievement. Above all else we must hold to that. Party allegiance is still the strongest political force in this country. If anything, it gets stronger and not weaker as the years pass. Let us use

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it, therefore. As long as we keep our place in the Party and in the Party organizations, it will be a Tariff Reform Party, and its triumph will be the signal for the triumph of Tariff Reform.

We can only win by and through the Party. We shall win by its means if we don't quarrel with it. But *if we quarrel with it, we can indeed ruin it, but we can carry Tariff Reform.*

That is the big fact which I have kept steadily before me for these seven years. What has happened lately does not alter it. It is the key to the whole situation, and we must hold tight to it.

My political life began with the Home Rule split in 1886. That struggle taught me something of the almost incredible strength of Party ties. Not thirty men outside the Irish, said John Bright, would have voted for the Home Rule Bill if anyone but Gladstone had proposed it. Yet when he succeeded in keeping the name and 'good will' of the Liberal Party, he carried nearly the whole Party with him. To organize a new Party is an almost impossible task. To secure victory for it would be quite impossible. To make the Liberal Unionist Party what it is required almost superhuman exertions on the part of some of the biggest men of the day, but its strength lay in the fact that it was just strong enough to hold the balance. It never did and never could have formed a Government or carried a policy except through one of the two great Parties.

Do not, therefore, let us quarrel with the Unionist Party or break it up. It is the instrument which we must use. We have no other, and we cannot forge another.

So much I see clearly.

As to the referendum I am not quite so clear, but I think now that the fates will solve that trouble for us without our interference.

If we were going to win this time, it might be a great nuisance. But we are not going to win. The settlement of the constitutional question will not now be in our hands, and whatever settlement the Radicals make is not likely to

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include the referendum for anything. If later on we revive the idea to use in case of deadlocks we shall, I hope, confine it to them, and probably, if we are wise, to deadlocks on constitutional laws only. In any case we shall not go out of our way to put any fresh obstacle between us and Tariff Reform.

Accordingly I have come to the conclusion that patience will do our work. The difficulty will solve itself, and it is neither necessary nor desirable that I should make any fresh declaration on the subject. Will you please tell Ware this, as I led him to expect that I should say something about its failure at Matlock next Wednesday when I speak for the last time. I have now decided to let it alone, or at least to say no more than I have already said. If you don't mind, you might let him see this letter, as it puts my views of the situation fully and, I hope, clearly.

We have lived down other disappointments, and we will live down this one.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

It took some time for Austen to live this disappointment down. As he wrote in later years : ^c 'Worse than the physical fatigue [of the General Election] and in part its cause was the intense depression which settled down on me as a result of the Albert Hall pledge. To have fought so long and so hard to keep Tariff Reform in the forefront of our programme and to prevent its being whittled away or postponed, to have come so near, as it seemed to me, to success, and then to see this new obstacle suddenly interposed in haste and at the last moment, though we had deliberately rejected it earlier after full consideration, left me miserable and exhausted.' The bitterness of disappointment brought him within measurable distance of a breakdown :

. . . But my real illness is known only to Ivy and myself. It's Referendum Sickness ! Balfour's Albert Hall speech



Speaight

Austen Chamberlain with his eldest son, 1909

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knocked the heart out of me, and I have been fighting without pleasure ever since. Up to that time I was clear we were right, and I could go on with good courage if not with particular hopefulness—but since then the bottom has fallen out of the world. Now I think we are wrong, and the stimulus to work and fight has gone.

Those who have been led to think of Austen as a cold and proud man would do well to reflect upon his character as shown when he was reeling under the blows which an unkind fate dealt him from time to time. He felt these rebuffs very keenly indeed, but it was typical of the man that he kept to the outside world so stiff an upper lip that only his own family knew what he had suffered.

Parliament met on February 6th, 1911, and on the 21st the Prime Minister introduced the Veto Bill. For the next six months tempers at Westminster became steadily more inflamed, but the constitutional crisis of 1911 was, it may be observed, in no sense a national crisis, for the nation as a whole took little interest in it. There were several reasons for this. It was the year of the Coronation, and the pageantry which attended that event naturally made a greater appeal to the man in the street than an arid controversy regarding the powers of the House of Lords. Then, again, the months when the political struggle was being waged most strenuously witnessed a number of events calculated to arrest public attention. Such were the 'battle of Sidney Street,' the Clapham Common Murder, the embarrassed circumstances of the Birkbeck Bank, the formal inauguration of the Queen Victoria Memorial with the new Mall and the Admiralty Arch, and the production of *Kismet*. Save at rare intervals, these distracted the popular notice from politics, and, as was certainly not the case in 1832, it was against a background of general indifference that the battle over the latest change in the Constitution was fought.

From the point of view of the Opposition the verdict of

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the electorate was eminently unsatisfactory, and it was the direct cause of the schism which now took place in their ranks. The fact that the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were slightly superior in numbers to the Liberals encouraged a section to oppose the Veto Bill to the uttermost, while another element felt that as Mr. Balfour had not obtained a majority, even apart from the Irish, it would be a mistake to push matters too far ; particularly must the creation of a large number of new peers be avoided. With this latter view Mr. Balfour agreed. Nor was this the only cause of disunion. The Party had agreed in principle to the reform of the House of Lords, but no decision had been taken as to the extent and character of the proposed changes. Then, again, the referendum had been adopted, but there was nothing like unanimity as to the circumstances in which it was to be applied. For example, did the Albert Hall pledge hold good for the future, or was it only applicable to the election which was past ? Such being the case, it was but natural that there should be a revival of the old division which had its origin in Mr. Chamberlain's campaign for Tariff Reform, and which had only been temporarily adjusted during the fight over the Budget. Once again there were protests against the inactivity and lack of leadership of Mr. Balfour, but the grouping was slightly different, for the Marquess of Salisbury and his brothers, Lords Robert and Hugh Cecil, were now to be found in the same camp as such stout Tariff Reformers as Sir Edward Carson and Mr. F. E. Smith. Austen's attitude was the corollary of his letters to Mr. Balfour and Mr. Jebb, quoted above ; he considered that having entered upon the struggle the Party should see it through, but nothing would induce him to question the leadership of Mr. Balfour.

The Veto Bill was forced through the House of Commons by a rigorous use of the closure, and passed its third reading on May 15th. During the greater part of this time Austen was far from well, and in April he and his wife took a short motoring holiday with Mr. Leverton Harris in France. Nevertheless, in spite of his health and the constitutional

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crisis his interest in his fellow-men and their ways was as marked as ever :

I have been reading Sir William Russell's life—the war correspondent. It is curious how seldom a biography satisfies one. This book seems to me much less interesting than it ought to have been, yet I cannot quite say why. The best thing I have yet found is the Duke of Wellington's reply to an invitation to dine with the Irish Society of London : ' F.M. the D. of W. seldom dines out, and never with people he does not know.'

His reading, however, was not all of a serious nature :

You will find *The Templeton Tradition* and *A Demoiselle of France* good reading, if you want novels. Mason's *Clementina* I think you have already read. *The Princess Virginia* is quite readable. All these would do very well for Father, I think.

In the matter of biography Austen was certainly not easy to please :

I have finished Arthur Elliott's *Life* of Goschen—very disappointing ! Indeed I consider it very badly done. It is a sketchy history of the formation of the L.U. Party and of the Unionist Free Food movement, but it is not a life of Goschen. Hardly a letter of his is published, the chapters on his Admiralty work are meagre to emptiness, and the whole gives no picture of the man—of his eager curiosity, his abounding energy, his restlessness or his force, his peculiar but harmless weaknesses or his innate strength of character. Indeed the only good bit of characterization is

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by Goschen himself. 'Yes,' he said on some occasion, '——is a moderate man, like me, *violently moderate*.' That is Goschen all over.

One story which Austen heard at this time pleased him greatly, and he described it as 'brief and improper.' It concerned a fellow M.P., a Liberal and a minor Minister, who took two ladies of easy virtue into the Ladies' Gallery. This was reported to the Speaker, who sent for him and asked what relation the ladies were to him. 'Sir,' replied the offender, 'they have both promised to be sisters to me.'

Another incident relating to the House of Commons must be told in Austen's own words :

Mark Lockwood went to Asquith and said he wished to invite the Kaiser to dine at the H. of C. during his coming visit to London. He said the Kaiser was a personal friend of his and Asquith understood it was to be Mark's private party, so he told him that it was not for him to advise what guests M. should entertain and he offered no objection. Then Mark went to Balfour, conveying the same impression that the dinner was a private affair. B. also replied that it wasn't his business to say whom Members should entertain, but he seems to have been seized afterwards with some qualms and to have written pointing out (i) that it would be a precedent which other sovereigns might expect to have followed, e.g. the Czar, whom the House *couldn't* entertain or who couldn't be entertained at the House because the Labour Party would be sure to make a row, and (2) that it would probably involve King George's going to the Reichstag when he visited Berlin, which might not be agreeable to him.

Then Mark goes to the Speaker and conveys to him that both the Prime Minister and Balfour approve an official invitation from or on behalf of the House, and the Speaker, without communicating with either of them (!), writes in

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that sense to the German Ambassador. Did you ever hear of such an indiscretion? Now, I am told and can well believe, the King is furious because, he says, it will compel him to dine with *those——Reichstag beasts' if he goes to Berlin, and he has sought to get the invitation suppressed. But this Metternich refuses to do, saying that he regards it as a very high compliment and that he is sure the Kaiser will so regard it also, though he may not accept it. Lastly the King sent Bigge to the P.M. or the Speaker to say that *he* would take care that *his* guest had an engagement every night of his stay so that he *could not* accept. Did you ever hear of such a kettle of fish? Such is the story told confidentially by Elibank to Balcarres and by him to me. Thank goodness the dinner is not likely to come off, but I fear very much that the fact of the invitation being sent may become public. And what an indiscretion the whole affair is !

In spite of worries over health and politics Austen was always writing of the happiness of his home life. To few public men have their families meant so much, and in letters full of the highest matters of State there are constant allusions to young Joe. When the boy had, that spring, to undergo an operation for adenoids, his father's anxiety was only equalled by his subsequent joy when all had gone well. It was lucky for Austen that his home was such a haven of rest, for fate had more than one trial in store for him before the year was over.

While the Veto Bill was under consideration in the House of Lords the Government introduced a Health and Unemployment Insurance Bill, of which Austen wrote : ' Confound L.I. George. He has strengthened the Government again. His sickness scheme is a good one, and he is on right lines this time. I must say I envy him the opportunity, and I must admit he has made good use of it.' Nevertheless, however much agreement there might be on such measures as this, there was no diminution in the general fighting spirit at Westminster. Shortly before the Veto Bill

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reached the Upper House the Marquess of Lansdowne had produced a scheme for the reform of that body, and for this prospectively reformed House he now attempted to retain power by amendments to the Veto Bill ; these provided for a joint committee of both Houses in matters of disagreement, and reserved for a referendum such Bills as those⁵ 'establishing national Parliaments' or * raising issues of great gravity.' It was clear that the Government would not accept these amendments, and the question at once arose whether the Opposition majority in the House of Lords would insist on them, and thus force the creation of peers. The issue was not immediately joined, for the Coronation took place on June 22nd. In spite of the distraction which this event might have been expected to provide, passions continued to run high in political circles. As the various statesmen entered Westminster Abbey for the ceremony they were cheered or hissed by those on the stands reserved for Members of Parliament and their friends. Mr. Lloyd George was specially singled out for applause and abuse in this way.

On July 21st a letter from the Prime Minister to Mr. Balfour was published stating that the Commons would be asked to disagree with the Lords' amendments, and proceeding : 'In the circumstances, should the necessity arise, the Government will advise the King to exercise his prerogative to secure the passing into law of the Bill in substantially the same form in which it left the House of Commons, and His Majesty has been pleased to signify that he will consider it his duty to accept and act on that advice.' This letter was the occasion of a scene in the House of Commons for a parallel to which one must go back to August, 1893. When, on July 24th, Mr. Asquith rose to move the rejection of the Lords' amendments, and to make his statement, the Opposition refused him a hearing. He was howled down, and the Speaker adjourned the House without question put.

The progress of events in no way weakened the conviction of Austen and his friends that the right policy was to resist to the last. They felt that a constitutional revolution

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was being effected without the mass of the electorate realizing what its effect would be, and they were of the opinion that if the creation of peers were forced a serious effort would have to be made to reform the Upper House as a preliminary step to endowing it with the powers which it should possess. Those who held this view came to be termed Die-hards, and the Party was divided, according to the political slang of the time, into 'Hedgers' and * Ditchers.⁹ In agreement with Austen were the Dukes of Bedford, Westminster, and Marlborough ; Lords Selborne, Salisbury, Milner, and Willoughby de Broke ; and, in the Commons, Sir Edward Carson, Mr. Wyndham, Lords Robert and Hugh Cecil, and Mr. F. E. Smith. The leader of this group was Lord Halsbury, who had been Lord Chancellor on four occasions, and in consequence it was often termed the Halsbury Club. As the crisis came to a head it was decided to give a dinner to Lord Halsbury as the best means of providing those who thought with him with an opportunity of putting their case. Austen played a prominent part in the organization of this function :

Carlton Club, Pall Mall, S.W.
July 24th, 1911

Halsbury Banquet.

DEAR SIR,

Viscount Wolmer, M.P., and Mr. Harold Smith, M.P., will be at the House of Commons to-morrow, Tuesday, with tickets for the Halsbury Banquet on Wednesday. Tickets can also be obtained by application to Mr. F. E. Smith at Grosvenor House by telegram or letter.

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.
EDWARD CARSON.
F. E. SMITH.
GEORGE WYNDHAM.

The Dinner was held at the Hotel Cecil, and Austen's speech on that occasion was as follows :

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It is very good of you to have drunk the toast of * The House of Commons,' which I noticed Lord Milner refrained from commending. I take it that it is rather to the great historic institution that you pay your tribute than to the particular exemplar of it which exists at the present moment, and I am not going to spend time on an occasion like this in discussing the merits or the demerits of that particular body. We are here neither to praise nor to criticize, but to do honour to Lord Halsbury and the men who think and act with him ; to assure them of our gratitude and to offer them all the support that it is in our power to give. It is true that at the moment there is some difference on this question in our Party, but the difference among us is ephemeral, and will quickly pass away. The union is lasting and profound. And we who support Lord Halsbury's action support it above and beyond all because we look not to the moment but to the future ; because we believe that the life, the power, and the vigour of our Party, and the interests not merely of the cause we now champion, but of all the great causes that are bound up with it, are associated with the stand which he and his colleagues are making.

For my part, three weeks ago I said in a public speech that to me it was unthinkable that a great historic assembly like the House of Lords, with fine traditions behind it and half the people on its side, should acquiesce in the surrender of its constitutional rights and its national duty. It may be a family defect ; it may be an hereditary failing—^c What I have said, I have said/ and I can no other. What is the revolution that is now in progress ? What is its source and history ? In the midst of a scene of disturbance in the sitting of the House of Commons the other day one exultant Radical uttered the truth. He called across to the leader of the Opposition in tones of triumph : ' You have been had.' Tricked ! And who is the trickster ? The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. This revolution, nurtured in lies, promoted by fraud, and only to be achieved by violence, is not one to which some of us will submit now or

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hereafter as long as the Constitution leaves us power to protest or fate leaves us life to work for its repeal.

My lords and gentlemen, so much of the past. But, as I say, what moves us most in the action we take to-day is not the past but the future. If by trickery and violence this revolution is now to be carried, tainted in its origin, it cannot endure unless we be false to the faith that is in us. But if we give way and acquiesce, who shall stand guarantee against the repetition of similar revolutions at quickened intervals in future? Who thinks that a Government which put Home Rule out of court when they could get a majority without Home Rule—and puts Home Rule in the foreground when they can only get a majority by Home Rule—a Government which is the sport and plaything of a combination which it cannot control and can only obey—will have strength in future to resist similar demands unless the full penalty of complying with them is exacted from them now?

They have been playing and they are playing a game of gigantic bluff. They do not wish to create peers. Those peers will be an embarrassment to them in their creation and when they are created, and they have sought to believe themselves, and have induced others to believe, that no peers would need to be created. Even now the bluff continues, and in spite of the letter of the Prime Minister which tells us what the King's undertaking is, it is sought to intimidate us by the idea that the pledges go far beyond any Mr. Asquith has pretended to have asked, still less to have received, and that the House of Lords will be swamped by these new creations because one hundred or two hundred peers are found to follow Lord Halsbury's lead. I say that is bluff, and fraudulent bluff. But if it were true it would not alter my opinion, and it would not change my action. I am not one of those who despair of their country, and I am ready now, as I have been ready at any time, to face the electors on the plain issue which is now before us and to ask them whether they wish their will to prevail, or whether they are content to be the slaves of a man who is himself the slave of log-rolling faction. If a repetition of these violent

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courses is to be prevented, if the kind of pressure which has been put on the Crown is to be made impossible in future, we must resist here and now, and no brave words about what we will do at some other time will carry conviction to the minds of men, or make our countrymen see how great and how profound is the issue which is at stake. The Prime Minister and his colleagues have tricked the Opposition. I dare say they have entrapped the Crown, and they have deceived the people. We loyal subjects of the Crown, and honest servants of the people, will do our utmost, come what may, to protect them and ourselves against a repetition of the outrage which is now being perpetrated.¹

It may be added that Austen had the full support of his father in the line he was taking.

Meanwhile the situation became every day more confused. Lord Lansdowne advised the Opposition peers to abstain from voting, though he would not discourage those who wished to vote in favour of the Bill in order to render its passage certain. A middle body, led by the Duke of Norfolk, were ready to abstain if all the Conservative peers did likewise, but announced that they would vote against the Bill if this course were not followed. Mr. Balfour, of course, supported the attitude of Lord Lansdowne, and in a letter to Lord Newton appeared to reflect on the Die-hards. ^c Let the Unionists in the Upper House follow their trusted leader. But if this be impossible, if differ we must, if there be peers who (on this occasion) are resolved to abandon Lord Lansdowne, if there be politicians outside who feel constrained to applaud them, let us all at least remember that the campaign for constitutional freedom is but just begun. . . . It would, in my opinion, be a misfortune if the present crisis left the House of Lords weaker than the Parlaiment Bill by itself will make it; but it would be an irreparable tragedy if it left us a divided Party.'

¹ *The Times*, July 27th, 1911.

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This letter provoked a strong remonstrance from Austen—evidence of how tempers were frayed by the long struggle and the exceptionally hot summer :

July 26th, 1911

MY DEAR BALFOUR,

As soon as I was able to leave the debate yesterday afternoon I went to your room to see you. You were absent, and no one could tell me where I could find you.

It now appears that you had retired to the Travellers, where you were at that moment composing the letter to Lord Newton in which you accuse us of 'abandoning our leader/ whilst encouraged by your language *The Times* this morning roundly brands some of your most earnest and, I will add, most loyal colleagues as 'rebels.'

I have read your letter with pain and more than pain. I think we have deserved better treatment at your hands. You cannot say that those whom you thus pillory have ever been wanting in loyalty to yourself. Might they not have asked in return at least for such ordinary consideration and frankness as a leader customarily extends to his followers? I have discussed this matter with you in council of your colleagues and in conversation. Nothing that you have said on any of these occasions has prepared me for the line you have now taken up or given me a hint of your intention to treat this as a question of confidence in the leadership of either yourself or of Lansdowne.

On the contrary, you have repeatedly stated that this was a question which must be decided by each individual for himself. The crisis at which we have now arrived has been visible for a year past. We have frequently discussed it. Yet till this morning you had given no lead and had never suggested to those whose views you knew to differ from those which you now express that you desired that they should alter or abandon a course of action to which they were publicly committed.

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It would be worse than useless to recapitulate at this stage the arguments which have convinced us that acquiescence by the whole House of Lords in the passage without amendment of the Parliament Bill would be disastrous to that House, to our Party, and to the country. You have confronted us not with a reply to our arguments, but with a denunciation of our conduct, and to make the pill more bitter you have addressed that denunciation not to us but to the public Press.

Under these circumstances I only desire to recall to your recollection that you have repeatedly stated that you had no objection to enforcing the creation of some peers if that did not of necessity carry with it the creation of such a number as would make a majority for the Government on all questions in the Lords ; that you even stated more than once that you believed that that would be the best solution ; and that as late as Friday last after our council you corrected a list which included your name among those in favour of unconditional acquiescence, saying that it was not correct to interpret what you have said in that sense. We now know from the King's declaration to Salisbury that his promise only extends to the creation of such a number as will carry the Parliament Bill, and that he will not consent to make more, and therefore the only danger which you feared from our action does not now exist.

Is it fair under such circumstances to talk of ' standing or falling ' by a policy which is not your own and which, till this moment, you have never asked us to adopt, or to accuse of ' abandoning their leader ' men who are carrying out a policy with which you have repeatedly expressed sympathy and even agreement ?

It was the determination of us all that there should be no criticism of yourself or of Lansdowne at the Halsbury dinner. It is still our determination, and not even your letter will shake it. But our relations would be less frank and confidential than they have always been if I did not tell you privately that you have given deep and I think undeserved pain to men who have served you with affectionate

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loyalty both by the manner and the matter of your communication.

Ever yours,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

To this Mr. Balfour replied :

4 Carlton Gardens, Pall Mall, S.W.

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

Your letter—which I have read with feelings of pain which you will readily understand—seems written under a misapprehension.

There is nothing in my letter which was intended to suggest—or which on a fair interpretation ought to suggest—that I accused any friends of mine of disloyalty to myself. I certainly advised the Unionist peers to follow their leader, Lord Lansdowne ; I certainly hinted—nay, more than hinted—that if Lord Lansdowne felt that, through his lead not being followed, he must resign his leadership, I should follow his example. But I never for an instant thought, I never for an instant allowed anyone to say in my presence, that old and tried friends like yourself, like Selborne, like Salisbury, like George Wyndham either, were, or could conceivably become, guilty of disloyalty.

I think you underrate the difficulties of a situation which I at least did nothing to create. The shadow Cabinet showed irreconcilable differences of opinion. Had it been a real Cabinet one of two things would have followed. Either the dissentient minority would have resigned, or they would have silently acquiesced in the decision of the majority. There could, of course, be no question, in the case of a shadow Cabinet, of resignation. There certainly has been no silent acquiescence. Members belonging to the two sides at once set actively to work. They used all the means which printed correspondence or the public Press placed at their disposal, and in the face of all men the

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Party fabric was, for the moment, violently rent from top to bottom.

In these circumstances I could not remain a mere spectator. I had to speak, and if I spoke I could only say in public what I had already said at the shadow Cabinet. You state that I ^E have confronted you not with a reply to your arguments, but with a denunciation of your conduct.' How differently the same document strikes different readers ! I certainly endeavoured to indicate why I think the so-called fighting in the last ditch is not fighting at all ; and as for ' denunciation,' I had thought that my letter—especially the final paragraph—made it perfectly clear :

(i) that the importance of the issue had to my thinking been exaggerated ;

(2) that the division of opinion it has occasioned, even if inevitable, could and should be temporary.

Denunciation was never intended and was never used. It may be difficult to express differences of opinion when feeling runs high without giving unintentional pain. Your father, for example, observes that ' the country owes a debt of gratitude to Lord Halsbury because in this crisis of his country's fate he has refused to surrender his principles.' Many people will read this as meaning that in Mr. Chamberlain's opinion those who follow a different course from Lord Halsbury *had* surrendered theirs. I do not so read it. *That* would be ' denunciation ' indeed. But without going into these or other collateral questions I beg you to believe that while I did most assuredly advise the peers to follow Lansdowne, I never for a moment intended to express, or did express, anything at which my friends in or out of the House of Commons have reason to take umbrage.

Yrs. v. sincerely,

ARTHUR JAS. BALFOUR.

Unhappily the matter did not rest there, and Austen was involved in a passage of arms with Mr. Walter Long, which was not without significance in view of what was to follow

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in the autumn. On July 30th the following message appeared from Austen in the *Daily Express* :

As you know, I cordially support Lord Halsbury's action. Acquiescence in passage of Parliament Bill is a blunder ; support of it would be a crime which the Unionist Party will neither forget nor forgive.

A few days later, in a speech at Motcombe Park, Mr. Long expressed regret that some of his friends who belonged to the ⁶ 'No Surrender' Party had used language in speech and letter which he held to be most unjustifiable and most unfair. It was directed against his leaders—two men who for chivalry, for honour, for courage, and for statesmanship had few if any equals. To charge them with cowardice or with the adoption of a policy which would bring trouble upon the country was to lay against them an indictment which could not be maintained. He hoped there would be no repetition of the charges, because surely those of the same Party could agree to differ, if they must differ, without making offensive charges against those whose honour ought to be dear to them. These remarks brought the following letter from Austen :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.
Aug. 10th, 1911

MY DEAR LONG,

In your speech at Weybridge yesterday you spoke of our present difference and our future co-operation in a spirit which all of us appreciate and to which we shall all desire to respond. The difference is on a point which is even now passing into history, and we none of us wish it to be prolonged beyond the occasion which has given rise to it. It is, therefore, a cause of deep regret to me to see that you think that some of us who support Lord Halsbury have cast

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reflections by 'speech or letter' on the 'chivalry, honour, and courage' of our leaders and colleagues.

It would be affectation for me to pretend that I am not aware that your reference to a letter was particularly pointed at one written by me.

That letter referred to the consequences which, in my opinion, must follow from the acquiescence of the Unionist Party in the House of Lords in the passage of the unamended Parliament Bill. It expressed no new opinion. My views have been known to my colleagues from the first, and I hold them now as I have always held them.

But it never entered my head that my words would be interpreted as an attack on the courage or honour of leaders and colleagues from whom I differ on this occasion, but with whom I have worked for years in cordial co-operation to secure the great objects we have in common.

Had it occurred to me when writing that such a misinterpretation of my words was possible, I should have guarded myself against it ; and since a colleague thinks them capable of such a construction I think it right explicitly to disclaim a charge which I had no thought of making.

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

In the light of future events Austen's private comment on Mr. Long's action is not without interest :

Meantime it has been a very unpleasant time for all of us, and our enemies and critics within the Party (and some of our so-called friends too) have been saying all they could against us behind our backs. My letter in particular gave much offence, and was seized on by these folk to work mischief. But I should have left it to speak for itself and not broken Father's good rule of 'Never explain !' if I had not seen clearly that both Balfour and Lansdowne—particularly the former—felt themselves directly attacked

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in their honour. This was too much for me, and, bad as I think Balfour's leadership has been and unwarrantable as his own letter was, I could not leave things on that footing, and so took the occasion of Long's speech to repudiate all charges on their honour, whilst leaving their 'statesmanship,' which he said I had also attacked, to speak for itself.

But how is a Party to win with a leader who not once but twice calls for abstention on a critical division? Can he never learn? Curiously enough Long himself has been particularly civil to me throughout. He made a remonstrance very briefly but very quietly and in the most friendly way about the letter to me privately before he spoke, but could not have been pleasanter about it if he had been my best friend. Yet Balcarres tells me: 'He is furiously jealous of you, and hates you like poison.' I expect he is jealous, but he is a queer mixture. He is hot-headed, often wrong in opinion, a bad counsellor and not, I think, a particularly loyal colleague to Balfour, for he grumbles freely in the lobbies and often is the nucleus round which grumblers gather. But our personal relations have always been very friendly, and he has never shown a sign of jealousy to me when I have got on.

The day after Austen wrote to Mr. Long the Veto Bill passed the Lords by 131 votes to 114, and within a week the country was experiencing its first railway strike.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW LEADER

IN the third week in August, when the House had at last risen, Austen and his wife began their holiday by going to Zurich, where they stayed with an old friend of the Chamberlain family, Sir Henry Angst, who was British Consul-General. For some time past Austen had been becoming increasingly worried about German intentions, and the events of the last few months had hardly been such as to reassure him. On July 2nd it became known that a German gunboat, the *Panther*, had arrived at Agadir in Morocco, which was practically a French possession, and three weeks later Mr. Lloyd George addressed a grave warning to Germany. Peace, he declared, was the greatest of British interests, but if Great Britain was to be treated as if she was of no account, peace at such a price would be an intolerable humiliation. The gravity of the situation was further emphasized when the Atlantic Fleet, which had been on the point of starting for a cruise in Norwegian waters, was ordered to Portsmouth, and by an appeal in the House of Commons on July 27th by the Prime Minister for the postponement of any discussion of the situation. The British attitude convinced Berlin that there was no hope of driving in a wedge between London and Paris, and so the German Government showed a willingness to negotiate, but it was not until towards the end of November that an agreement was reached between Germany and France, and in the interval Europe came perilously near to war.

Austen found little to make him optimistic in what Sir Henry Angst had to say. The latter was in close touch with Herr Bebel, the German Socialist leader, who told him : * We are many, but we can do nothing. . . . You mark my words, the Government will try to make some patriotic *coup* to stimulate the bourgeoisie, and rally people to the flag.⁵ Sir Henry repeated this to Austen, and added : ' It is useless to talk of disarmament and peace conferences

A NEW LEADER

to Germany.' His friend's gloom certainly did not diminish Austen's apprehensions, and on September 23rd he was writing :

I gather from *The Times*—the only paper which I read—that politics have been very dull since we left home in spite of the efforts of the German Foreign Office to keep everyone in a state of anxiety and bewilderment. I must say that it is pleasant to see France keeping cool and resolute, and to know that all the panic has been on the side of Germany. The more panic and loss there is in that country as a result of their restless machinations the better it will be for other countries. What bad neighbours they are ! And one cannot see how this restlessness is to be stayed without a deal of blood-letting. If we come in they will be dangerous, but it is an unmixed benefit that the Government Liberals, at least, should have learned what manner of men they are and what dangers we have to confront. I don't think that Lloyd George will forget his lesson, and on the other hand the Germans have learned something, for they now know that even a Liberal Government won't give them a free hand to make hay of treaties and rearrange the world according to exclusively German ideas.

From Switzerland the Austen Chamberlains went on to the Italian lakes, and they were there when war began between Italy and Turkey. From the beginning Austen's sympathies were with the former, and he was severely critical of the attitude of a section of the British Press :

The attitude of most of the English Press seems to me gross folly. As we are not in any case going to intervene on behalf of the Turks, we shall not win their good will, and we are in danger of losing that of Italy. The Italians certainly counted on our approbation or at least our most

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favourable consideration ; and we preach and scold in angry impotence and affected moral superiority in a way that must be most aggravating. They claim—I do not know with how much reason—that they alone of European Powers were sympathetic to us during the Boer War and, though their action was sudden and high-handed, they have not at all a bad case on their side now. . . . Should we act very differently ? I doubt it, and I am sure that no other Power would. And then we, whose statesmen have talked of turning the Turks ' bag and baggage ' out of Europe, and who have hailed with delight almost every release of any people or place from Turkish sway as a gain to humanity and civilization, hold up our hands in pious horror and express ourselves as unutterably shocked. . . .

What I do not understand is why all Europe was so taken by surprise. There was certainly enough evidence here to show that a storm was brewing ; and I imagine that their own want of foresight makes the Press and politicians of other countries all the more angry with Italy. And this little blow to their conviction that we were just entering on the millennium has no doubt been peculiarly bitter to our own Liberal Press.

This letter was written at Lugano, and not so very far away, at Forli, a young man, then editor of *La Lotta di Classe*, and destined in later years to know Austen Chamberlain very well, was being sent to prison for twelve months for organizing resistance to the war. He had written of those who supported it : ' They want a vast Italy ; what I want is an Italy well cultivated, rich, and free.' The young man's name was Benito Mussolini.

On the same day, October 4th, that Austen was writing this letter he received the following telegram from his brother Neville : ' Expect telegram this afternoon urge you to return as soon as possible join movement feeling in country real and widespread.' This not unnaturally puzzled him considerably, but he was in any case on his

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way home, so he merely accelerated his return. He then found the explanation :

Westbourne, Edgbaston, Birmingham
Oct. 7th, 1911

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

Amery telephoned to me from London early this week to say that Milner, Carson, Selborne, Wyndham, F. E. Smith, Willoughby de Broke, and other Die-hards had met and had determined to act together and go for a forward policy. They did not want to form a separate Party or organization, but by working together to ensure that their views should have a fair chance. They were all (I still quote A.) ready and anxious to follow you if you would lead them, and were extremely anxious to get into touch with you. They even talked of sending a delegate to see you if you were within reach.

I hear from so many quarters expressions of dissatisfaction with A. B. and L., especially over their action with regard to the Parit. Bill, that I was very glad to hear of this move. It seems to me serious, and that now is the time for you to come forward and give them a lead. Accordingly I sent you a wire to show you that I thought the thing worth your very prompt and serious attention, and was much surprised to hear that they had not communicated with you.

Amery, however, says that finding you were coming home so soon and not quite trusting the privacy of the telegraph they decided to wait, but no doubt they will get in touch with you now at once.

A. told me that F. E. S. said after the Halsbury dinner that if he had ever had any doubts about your being the best leader your speech had dispelled them, and that he should follow you loyally and whole-heartedly.

I feel that this is the critical point of your career as well as of that of the Party. Of course, I am not suggesting any open revolt at present, but no doubt a difference of opinion

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will arise some time (if A. B. does not resign first) and you will get your way if you have the Die-hards solid behind you.

I wanted to talk all this over with you ; it is so much easier than writing, but I understand that my telegram puzzled you very much (and no wonder), so I write to explain.

Love to Ivy. I hope you are both the better for your holiday. We are very flourishing.

Yours affectly.,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN.

What was happening was that the Die-hards were desirous of forming a permanent organization to adopt in general a less negative attitude than had hitherto characterized the Opposition under Mr. Balfour's leadership, and to advocate a more constructive programme. Austen was a little apprehensive that this would develop into a movement against Mr. Balfour, and he admitted that he joined it because he believed that he could counteract any such tendency better from within than from without. The difficulties of the situation were, indeed, very forcibly brought home to Austen at this time when the Tariff Reform League issued a fresh appeal for money in his name. Of those who replied half refused on the grounds that the League was too closely connected with the Halsbury Club, and was therefore anti-Balfourian, and the other half declined out of disgust at Mr. Balfour's attitude over the Veto Bill. Such being the case it was small wonder that the three letters B.M.G.—'Balfour Must Go'—began to make their appearance in the Press, while it was obvious that the Opposition was by now so divided as to be incapable of making any effective resistance to the Government. The crisis came at the beginning of November.

At the end of the previous month the rumours, current for some time past, that Mr. Balfour was contemplating retirement from the leadership of the Party took on a more

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definite form, and on November 4th Austen Chamberlain was informed that they were true. There was also no time to be lost if the election of a successor was not to lead to further dissension, for on the 8th Mr. Balfour was to make the announcement of his intentions at a meeting of the City of London Conservative Association, and as the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations was holding its annual meeting at Leeds the following week it was clear that the new leader must be chosen before then. Accordingly Monday, November 13th, was fixed by the Whips for the meeting at the Carlton Club of the Conservative and Unionist Members of the House of Commons with whom the decision in those days lay.

From the beginning there could be no doubt that Austen Chamberlain and Walter Long would both be in the running. The former has stated the position with remarkable impartiality : ' I think it is true to say that my colleagues in the late Government, including the Whips, the keener Tariff Reformers, and many of the younger men, thought that I was the better fitted to fill the vacancy, but I still called myself a Liberal Unionist, I had only joined the Carlton Club a little time before, and the part which I had taken in recent events had certainly aroused some passing antagonism. Long, on the other hand, was a life-time Conservative, a typical country gentleman, and senior to me both in length of service in the House and in Cabinet rank, and he aroused none of the jealousies or doubts which were inseparable from my position.' Austen's candidature was, in particular, strongly supported by Lord Winterton, Mr. Waldorf Astor (later Viscount Astor), Mr. Arthur Lee (later Viscount Lee of Fareham), Mr. (later Sir) C. E. Warde, Mr. (later Sir) Laming Worthington-Evans, and Mr. Bertram Falle (later Lord Portsea).

Austen would have been less than human had he been altogether unmoved at the prospect of becoming Mr. Balfour's successor, but he regarded it with at least as much apprehension as hope. ' I wish,' he wrote, ' there were another Balfour, clearly superior to us, and obviously marked

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out for the post. How gladly would I play second fiddle to him ! But there is no such man at present, and having given my life to this work and got to the position I now hold, I cannot shirk fresh responsibilities or heavier labours if they fall to my lot.' Exasperating as he had often found Mr. Balfour, and frequent as had been his disagreements with him, he entertained a very genuine affection for the older man, and regret at the other's retirement was not unmixed with sorrow that his own activities in connection with the Halsbury Club might possibly have precipitated Mr. Balfour's decision.

Meanwhile, what was the attitude of Mr. Long ? * Although he was not officially informed of Mr. Balfour's decision until Monday, November 6th, his leader's resignation was not wholly unexpected, even if the moment chosen took him by surprise. A week before there had been a meeting at Devonshire House of which Mr. Long was one of the organizers, attended by some of Mr. Balfour's friends, to discuss the best way to strengthen his position as leader ; at this meeting Lord Derby and Mr. Alfred Lyttelton had stated as their opinion that Mr. Balfour's resignation might be anticipated at no very distant date, but neither of them believed that it would take place soon, or that their leader had absolutely made up his mind. ' Consequently, the announcement made by Sandars that A. J. B. had made up his mind to resign, that he was going to announce the fact to a meeting of his constituents on the following Friday, and that a meeting was to be called to select his successor on the following Monday, was to me a staggering blow. I had served under Balfour for more than twenty years ; I had stood resolutely by him during recent years when his leadership had been vigorously assailed by members of his own Party ; I had done my best to strengthen his position and secure the continuance of his leadership ; and to be

¹ The following paragraphs are based upon memoranda and letters discovered by Major the Hon. Eric Long after the publication of my book *Walter Long and His Times*, and generously placed by him at my disposal.

suddenly told, without any real warning, that he had decided, without any sort of preparation for his Party, to resign immediately, was naturally an event of the most serious and trying kind.'

Although Mr. Long had supported the official policy over the Veto Bill, and had refrained from joining the Halsbury Club, he was not at that moment in his leader's good books, as he himself fully realized. Like his rival, he had experienced the discontent with Mr. Balfour which was widespread in the Party, and at the end of September he had sent the leader a memorandum in which he outlined the position as he saw it. Mr. Balfour had already come to the conclusion that his successor in the Commons should be Austen Chamberlain,¹ so it would be incorrect to say that this memorandum was the cause of his opposition to the election of Mr. Long, but it certainly served to stiffen his attitude towards the other's candidature, for he resented the document quite considerably.² Lord Balcarres shared Mr. Balfour's feelings, as Mr. Long was fully aware, for he wrote : ' It was evident to me that Lord Balcarres, the Head Whip of the Party, was strongly of opinion that Mr. Chamberlain ought to be made leader, and I attributed his view very largely to the fact that he was at Balmoral when my letter arrived, that he had probably seen it and resented my action, and felt that as I had had something to do with Mr. Balfour's retirement I ought not to follow him. In addition, I believe he was of opinion, no doubt rightly, that Mr. Chamberlain would make a better successor than I . ' Mr. Long was correct as to the attitude of Lord Balcarres, who had said a fortnight before : ' Well, if I have anything to do with it, I don't mean the Party to have Long for leader.'

It was Lord Helmsley, subsequently second Earl of Feversham, who then represented Thirsk and Malton, who persuaded Mr. Long to allow his name to go forward for the vacant leadership, and among his supporters were Sir

¹ Cf. B. E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, vol. II, p. 87.

² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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William Bull, Sir Harry Samuel, Mr. (later Sir) Ian Malcolm, Lord Charles Beresford, Lord Castlereagh (later Marquess of Londonderry), Sir W. R. Anson, Mr. George Terrell, Mr. Jessel (later Lord Jessel), Mr. Charles Bathurst (later Lord Bledisloe), and Mr. E. A. Fitzroy (later Speaker of the House of Commons). Mr. Long was by no means eager to be nominated, for he has left it on record that he greatly doubted his own powers, and he was not at all sure that his health would stand the strain to which it would necessarily be subjected. On political grounds he was equally reluctant to enter the lists against Austen Chamberlain, for he felt strongly 'that we owed so much to his father that it would be proper to pay him the tribute of electing his son.' Nevertheless, his friends persuaded him to stand, alleging that if he gave way to his rival there was a strong section which would not follow a Liberal Unionist.

The secret of Mr. Balfour's resignation was well kept until the afternoon of Wednesday the 8th, when he announced it himself to his constituents of the City of London. Almost at the same hour his two potential successors, together with Mr. Chaplin, met accidentally at the House of Commons, having arrived simultaneously at the Ladies' Gallery entrance. They at once adjourned to Mr. Balfour's room to discuss the situation. After some preliminary conversation Austen stated his case. It was evident, he said, that the respective friends of Mr. Long and himself intended to run them for the leadership ; that there was so far no sign of any other candidate, but that it was more than probable that other candidates would be forthcoming. He went on to say that in his opinion it was impossible either for Mr. Long or himself to withdraw, since such an act would only be regarded as a betrayal by their friends, and would result in great bitterness and strife. All the same, in the event of a third candidate upon whom everybody could agree coming forward, he would suggest that they should both retire in favour of this third individual. Mr. Long readily agreed with this, and the decision was communicated to Lord Balcarras.

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The following day, Thursday the 9th, was not a happy one for either of the protagonists. The lobbies at Westminster and the clubs were the scenes of an agitation which increased with every passing hour as the groups of excited partisans became more heated. Long was the representative of a Toryism that had had its day, and in any case he would be quite useless as leader, so argued the supporters of Chamberlain ; to this it was replied with some heat that Austen was not a Conservative at all, that he was a Non-conformist, and that if he were chosen the Party would be run by the Birmingham caucus. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the principals themselves should have come to view each other with a certain amount of suspicion, for the more violent of their followers did all that was possible to poison their minds against one another. For example, on the Friday Chamberlain received the following letter from his opponent :

Written last night, but omitted to post it.

65 Eaton Square, S.W.

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

This is d——le ! I have heard two statements to-day. First, that you and I have had a long and unending feud ; second, that I would not ' serve under you.' I hope I need not say that there is no more foundation for the last than you know as well as I do there is for the first.

Yours ever,

WALTER H. LONG.

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On Thursday evening a third candidate entered the field in the person of Mr. Bonar Law, sponsored by Mr. Goulding, later Lord Wargrave, Austen's old antagonist in the Cambridge Union. What then happened is best told in Austen's own words in a letter written the next day :

MY DEAR LANSDOWNE,

Balcarres came to see me this morning. He told me that Bonar Law maintained his candidature, and positively declined to withdraw his name. Bal. thought Long and I should divide the Party nearly equally—he could not say which would get a majority, but the majority for either of us would be small. Carson would not allow his name to be put forward.

I replied that this was the report which I had expected to receive from him ; that under the circumstances I had made up my mind what to do. To accept the leadership in the Commons would have involved severe personal sacrifices on my part, but that I would have done it as a matter of duty if there had been a clear majority of the Party in my favour, and if I could have counted on the hearty support of the minority when once the decision was taken. But neither of these conditions was fulfilled, and that under the circs. I did not feel called upon to make the sacrifice involved.

On the other hand I believed that Long was unequal to the post, and so I understood did all our colleagues in council.

I therefore requested him to go to Long with this message from me : That I understood that we should divide the Party into two nearly equal sections, though so equal that Bal. could not say to which side the balance would incline ; that I thought this would be bad for the Party and that the followers of the one who was not chosen would find it much more difficult to unite in cordial support of the one who was chosen than of a third person ; that the obvious third person was B. Law, and that I therefore proposed that Long as the older Privy Councillor should propose and that I should second Law's name at the meeting on Monday. Bal. took this message to Long, who accepted it cordially. He then told Law of it, and Law asked for a day to consider, and asked to see me. He has just left. Both Bal.

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and I have told him that he must accept ; he had allowed his name to be put forward, and he could not now refuse.

Both Bal. and Law suggested that I should retire in Long's favour, saying that Long would inevitably fail and be obliged to resign within a year or less ; that then I should have a better chance, etc.

I admitted that the same thought, inspired by Satan, had crossed my mind yesterday, but I said that to appoint a leader whom we all three knew to be unequal to the work in order that he might prove his incapacity, and so be got out of the way, was to sacrifice the Party. We were on the eve of a critical year. If our leader was clearly unequal to the task, and so had to resign in the middle or at the end of the session, the Party would be hopelessly discredited and our case out of court for years. I could not, therefore, possibly accept that suggestion.

These are all the essentials. I thought you ought to know them at once. I have had a cordial note from Long, and a cordial interview with Bonar Law.

I do not give the thing up altogether without a pang, but there are many consolations, and it was clear that if chosen by a small majority under such circumstances I should not have received the hearty support which alone would have made me useful to the Party, or the position possible for me.

I hope you will think that I have done right.

Ever yrs.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Mr. Long's own account of what happened corroborates this : ' I had one or two interviews with Balcarres. His information confirmed my own, namely, that there was a great deal of bitterness being imported into the fight, a great many things being said on both sides which were better left unsaid, and whichever won it would be regarded as a triumph of electioneering tactics rather than of merits. On Thursday I wrote to Henry Chaplin and told him that

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this was the view I had arrived at : that I believed we should have a most unpleasant meeting at the Carlton, with a great many speeches which had better not be made, and a rather indecent conflict ; that, in my judgment, it would be easy to find a third person who would command universal respect and whose election would not produce these unfortunate results, and I thought that in all probability he, as the oldest member of the Party, would be able to bring this about better than anybody else. On Friday Balcarres came to see me and said that he had seen my letter, that Bonar Law had been nominated officially by Goulding the night before, that this, of course, made complications in the election, and that the whole thing was in as unsatisfactory a condition as it could possibly be ; and that he had seen Austen, who had agreed to stand down in favour of Bonar Law. As this was in entire conformity with the views I had already expressed to Chaplin, I at once assented—and, indeed, with considerable relief, for I did not believe that it was possible for either Chamberlain or myself to reunite the Party in its present condition. It was then decided that I should propose, and Austen should second, Bonar Law at the meeting at the Carlton on Monday ; and I went down by a late train to Wiltshire to hunt the next day.'

By the time that Austen Chamberlain received his erstwhile opponent's letter of the 9th, the situation had changed in the manner indicated, and he replied as follows :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.
Nov. 10th, 11

MY DEAR WALTER,

Many thanks for your note.

I think that the action on which we have agreed is the best for the Party, and I hope it will now settle down peacefully and at once to the big work in front of it. We must both give Law all the help we can.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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One last letter from Mr. Long may perhaps be quoted :

63 Eaton Square, S.W.

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

One line to say I think you have behaved splendidly, your sacrifice is immeasurably greater than mine.

I suppose our friends will all curse us !

Yours ever,

W.

11.xi.11

Mr. Long was quite correct in his assumption that their friends would not be too pleased with the compromise, and many a letter of complaint was delivered both at Egerton Place and Eaton Square. The week-end, however, gave time for reflection, and even the most heated partisans were forced to agree that the solution was the only one possible in the circumstances. With this came a realization of the self-sacrifice displayed by Chamberlain and Long, and a letter written by Mr. (later Sir) Samuel Hoare well expressed the attitude of the Conservative rank and file both in and out of Parliament :

House of Commons
Nov. 14th

DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

At the risk of being thought impertinent, I venture to send you this line to express the thanks of one of the rank and file at your magnanimous action with reference to the leadership of the Party.

I desire to say that it has given us all, and particularly the younger members, an example of unselfish devotion that is unique in the history of Party politics, and may I also add that your position to-day both in the House and in the country has been raised to a plane far above the height of any official position.

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I trust that you [will] not trouble to answer these few lines, still more that you will excuse me for having written them.

Yours sincerely,

S. J. G. HOARE.

In his own family circle Austen found some difference of opinion. His father was naturally disappointed at the outcome, but observed : ' In his place I do not think I could have done differently.' On the other hand, his brother rather regretted that the issue had not been put to the vote :

Westbourne, Edgbaston, Birmingham

Nov. 13th, 1911

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I have been waiting to write to you till I should hear the history of the last few eventful days, but Mary has shown me your diary to-night. . . .

For the Party's sake I cannot help wishing you had fought it out, for you could and would have made the Party's fortunes as no one else can. And one cannot help feeling bitterly that after all your splendid work you should not have had the loyal support which was your due ; but I feel proud of you for having acted as you did, and for having put your own legitimate ambition aside for the cause as Father did before you. And though it is the Party's loss I try to console myself with the thought that perhaps you will enjoy more happiness by being free from the strain and responsibility of leadership. Without being leader in name a man can have the predominant position in his Party, as we know, and at any rate you are under obligation to no one, and can go your own way unhampered by any ties in the future. Your action will win for you increased respect and affection among your friends, and perhaps even yet your opportunity may come to you.

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You have one ardent advocate and admirer in your sister-in-law. . . .

Our love to Ivy and yourself. In spite of all, I hope you may enjoy life more than has been possible these last twelve months.

Yours affectly.,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN.

On Monday the 13th the fateful meeting was held at the Carlton Club to choose a leader in the House of Commons, and there were 232 Members of Parliament present. It was, curiously enough, the first time that Austen had set foot in the building, for it was but recently that he had been elected, since Liberal Unionists had not hitherto been eligible for membership. On the proposal of Lord Claud Hamilton, seconded by Colonel Lockwood, Mr. Chaplin was voted into the chair, and Mr. Long then moved the election of Mr. Bonar Law to fill the place of Mr. Balfour. He began by paying a tribute to the work of Lord Balfarres during the previous week, and after saying that Chamberlain and himself had worked in close agreement in the last few days, he went on to deal with the merits of Mr. Bonar Law. Mr. Long finished on a note which some of those present must have thought strange coming from him :

I believe it has been a drawback to our Party that we have seemed to be always identified in our high posts with the land. Now, we have an opportunity which may never recur, my lords and gentlemen, if we do not take it. We have a chance of saying to our political opponents who are jeering at us, who are going about saying, as one of them said the other day, that we are all scrambling for the mantle which our great leader has laid down—we can answer them by saying in the clearest way : ' There is no scramble ; the Party is absolutely united.' No man is fighting for this

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great honour ; we are all agreed ; and we are going to-day to hand the mantle to a man in whom we have confidence . . . and a man who has been trained in the best of business circles. As a real business man he will bring to our councils, to the conduct of our debates, to the management of our business the mind of a business-man above and beyond all other things.

Mr. Long spoke for twenty-five minutes, and his speech was generally considered to be, both in manner and matter, one of the best he ever made.

Austen then rose to second the resolution, and began by saying : ' Mr. Long said he spoke for himself, but, indeed, he spoke for me too. I agree with every word that he has said. I have nothing to do now except to support the proposal that he has made, and to urge it upon your acceptance. I know, of course, that, as he said, there has been a little feeling that the matter has been taken out of the hands of the Party, and too much settled for you before you came to this gathering.' Some murmurs of ' Hear, hear ' at this point showed that he had not misinterpreted the feelings of his audience on this score, so he continued : ' Now, if there be any feeling of that kind, I think the best way to meet it, and the best answer I can give to it, is to tell you in the simplest possible terms what has happened as I know it.'⁵

He then gave an abstract of the events of the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of the previous week, finishing with these words :

We felt, as everybody must feel in such circumstances, that though to be leader of a great Party like this in the House of Commons is a post that no man would decline without some regrets, and that anyone might be very **proud** to occupy, no personal question could be permitted to interfere with the great interests of the Party and the cause for which it stands. Mr. Long very properly said that we

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have never talked about claims. No man had claims upon the Party except as he could serve the Party and as his nomination would be in its best interests. What we did talk about was whether our names should go forward or not. We thought they ought to go forward, in the first instance, in order that it might be seen whether the Party clearly preferred any one of us. We thought that they ought to be withdrawn when we saw that there was no such clear consensus of opinion in the Party, and when it became evident that it would be much easier for his friends and for my friends, and I think I may frankly say for him and for me (Mr. Walter Long: Hear, hear), as well as for our friends, to give our full, our hearty, and our cordial support to Mr. Bonar Law than it would be for the friends of either of us to give all the support that was necessary to the other, chosen in such circumstances as I have described.

Austen concluded with an appeal for loyalty to the new leader :

Mr. Bonar Law, if he be your choice, is not to be envied, but neither is he to be pitied. You give him a great opportunity, to the height of which I believe he will rise ; but if you give him that opportunity you have got to give him your whole heart. You have got to do it in no grudging spirit. There must be no regrets and no questionings left behind. The man who takes that position needs the united support of a united Party. The position is intolerable on any other terms, and, as we definitely withdraw our names, as Sir Edward Carson's name is withdrawn, we ask you not merely to make your decision a unanimous one to-day, but to pledge yourselves to give him that whole-hearted support without which neither he nor any leader can do justice to himself, nor successfully conduct the affairs of a great Party.

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The meeting then proceeded to elect Mr. Bonar Law, and after a few words of thanks from the new leader it broke up. In all the long history of the Conservative Party there has been no election to the leadership comparable in personal interest.

In retrospect it is difficult to see how Austen could have acted otherwise than he did. Had he allowed his name to go forward it would appear, on the evidence, that he must have been defeated. Lord Curzon expressed the view at the time that this would be the case, and a careful canvass by Sir Harry Samuel and Sir William Bull showed a majority of seventy for Mr. Long. This figure may be an exaggeration, but the appearance of Mr. Bonar Law in the field seriously lessened Austen's chances, for the new candidate would have taken far more votes from him than from his opponent. Some of the reasons which militated against Austen have already been mentioned, but there were others, one of which was the rivalry between the leading provincial cities. Liverpool, for example, had no great love for Birmingham, and the same was true of other of the larger centres of population : this, of course, was not without its influence upon the attitude of their representatives at Westminster. Nor was this all, for as Mr. Long was an ex-Chief Secretary for Ireland the Ulster Unionists would have voted for him. In these circumstances Austen was probably wise to withdraw his candidature, though these considerations in no way detract from the nobility of his action.

The new leader was, and has remained, somewhat of an enigma. At the moment of his election one of the shrewdest of the Conservative back-benchers wrote to a friend : ' How Bonar Law can help us, without any knowledge of Foreign Affairs, Navy, Church questions, or Home Rule, the Lord only knows.' There was much truth in this criticism, but it was not the whole truth. Mr. Bonar Law was to prove himself during the next three years a first-class fighter at a time when the Conservative Party desperately needed such a man at its head. Whether he was as good a

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strategist as a tactician is another matter, and the coming of the war prevented his being put to the test in this respect. An excellent Parliamentarian, he could always be relied upon to show his followers at Westminster plenty of sport, while at big meetings up and down the country he was remarkably effective. As a master of statistics he was unsurpassed, and he could use them with a deadliness of effect unique in the present century. His pre-eminence was the more remarkable in that he was absolutely devoid of personal magnetism, and he had no physical attributes to remedy this deficiency. Mr. Bonar Law's hold over his Party, which was very real, was thus notable in that it was largely in spite of most of his personal qualities.

His apparent diffidence of manner concealed a vaulting ambition, of which he was not, somewhat to his surprise, generally suspected by contemporaries. Austen thought him the most ambitious man he had known in politics. 'I once confessed to him that I had made many attempts to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, but had never succeeded in persevering to the end. He was astonished, and declared at once that he found that great procession of ambitious men, realizing their ambitions only to be cheated of their hopes, the most fascinating of all studies.'

Mr. Bonar Law's failings were that he was too inclined to come under the influence of others, and that he was rarely able to see more than one thing at a time, and, it must be confessed, that he was on occasion not a little jealous. Up to his election as leader, and for some time after, he had leant much upon Austen, but when the Irish question became the most important problem of the day he increasingly relied upon Sir Edward Carson. Then Mr. Lloyd George for a year or two exercised an ascendancy over him, and he actually proposed to place England under a duumvirate. A more permanent influence was that of Lord Beaverbrook. In his second defect he was in marked contrast with his predecessor, whose philosophic doubt often led him to see a problem in so many lights that he hesitated to take any action at all. As for Mr. Bonar Law's occasional

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outbreaks of jealousy, one example will suffice. Austen, as will be shown in due course, did more than any single man to force the Government to stand by France in August, 1914, yet in a public speech in December of that year Mr. Bonar Law took all the credit to himself for the pressure exercised by the Opposition on Mr. Asquith and his colleagues.

Such were the virtues and defects of the man who, without having held any office more important than that of Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, was the new leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party.

Austen had already lost no time in explaining his own position to Mr. Bonar Law :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

11,11.11

MY DEAR BONAR LAW,

Many thanks for your letters. Do not think that I did or do criticize your decision to allow your name to be put forward.

We have long been friends. You are now my leader as well. This change is not the breach of an old tie between us ; it is only the addition of a new one. I shall give you all the help I can. You have got a ' good Press' this morning. I hope and believe you will find a united Party on Monday.

My great regret at the moment is that I cannot go with you to Leeds. I have long been engaged to speak that night in Leigh. It was a stupid oversight to fix the day of the National Union meeting, but I am afraid that I should do more harm than good if I now tried to put it off. But you will know that whether at Leigh or Leeds I shall back you.

There is one question of great importance to which you must give your serious consideration at once—I mean the question of the referendum in connection with Tariff Reform.

You heard what I said on Wednesday.¹ Balfour's

¹ When he declared that he refused any longer to be bound by Mr. Balfour's pledge at the Albert Hall.

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decision on that point was taken in spite of my earnest entreaty, and with the knowledge that I was profoundly opposed to it. To keep the Party together and to support him, I swallowed my objections and accepted his platform for that election.

But the constitutional fight has now been fought out. His offer was not accepted. There was no compromise, and we as a Party ought not and cannot now be bound by that offer or by the scheme of House of Lords reform which was then suggested.

A stricken field changes the situation. We start afresh. The Party will not and ought not to go back to its old position.

It was, therefore, not by an accident or from thoughtlessness that I made that declaration when I did. I wished my colleagues in the House, if they chose me as their leader then, to know clearly where I stood. I thought it not less important that my position should be clear before anyone else was chosen.

I did not read Mr. Balfour's Albert Hall pledge at the time as binding him in any contingency except that of immediate success at the polls. Even so, I thought it then, and I think it now, a fatal mistake which gained us nothing and lost us much. I could not be a party to a repetition of the mistake or join a Government which proposed to handle Tariff Reform in that way.

I believe that though you took a slightly different view from me at the time, we are in agreement now as to the future. But you have the right to know my mind, and lest there should be any possibility of misapprehension I write it to you fully and at once.

Good luck, good courage, and good friends ! ! That is my wish for you in the arduous days now to come.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

While the Opposition had been engaged in fighting the

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Veto Bill, and with its own internal dissensions, it was not only the international situation that gave cause for anxiety, for the position at home was every day becoming more disquieting. Indeed, the three years which were to elapse before the outbreak of war were to be marked by a violence in the political and social life of the country for which it is necessary to go back exactly two centuries to find a parallel. On all sides there was a lack of restraint in language and conduct, and a tendency to resort to force as the one unanswerable argument. While the constitutional struggle was still in progress, and the pageantry of the Coronation was yet fresh in the public memory, the troubles had already begun. At various ports the seamen came out on strike in June ; carters and vanmen struck in July ; and in August there was a strike of the London dockers. Everywhere these disputes were accompanied by violence. At Hull and Cardiff there was fighting in the streets, also at Manchester, where the authorities had been compelled to send for a strong force of London police and for the Scots Greys from the garrison at York. There were the most violent scenes in Liverpool, where the troops were compelled to open fire, with the result that two men were shot dead and two hundred people were injured. Meanwhile there had been the railway strike, which failed chiefly because the attempt was too big, but also because motor transport, although still in its infancy, was already providing an alternative to the railways. It is true, as has already been noticed, that the summer had been exceptionally hot, but that was not the only reason for frayed tempers, as coming events were to prove.

The bitterness with which every industrial dispute was contested at this period is well illustrated by an event in the following year, when a meeting of strikers in one particular industry called upon the Almighty to compass the immediate destruction of the chairman of the organization which employed them. Nor were political agitators behind their industrial fellows in the adoption of methods which horrified those who had passed the greater part of their

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lives in the calm of the later nineteenth century. The suffragettes, in particular, stopped at nothing, and the more repressive the Government's measures, the more active they became. A bomb in St. John's Church, Westminster, blew out a stained-glass window just after the evening service one Sunday ; another was found under the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey ; and a third in St. George's, Hanover Square. Wargrave Church was burned to the ground. The King was assailed with shouted appeals at a charity matinee, and at one of the Courts a lady in the act of curtseying cried : ' Your Majesty, won't you stop torturing women ? ' At the Derby in 1913 a militant who had been more than once in prison dashed out on the course in front of the horses as they came round Tattenham Corner and was so crushed that she died within a few hours. Between 1911 and 1914 there was little of that restraint which is commonly associated with English public life.

Austen was gravely perturbed by these developments, and throughout his correspondence during this period there are constant references to them. ' We are living in a new world,' he wrote, ' and the past gives us little guidance for the present.' During the early part of 1912 a coal strike enhanced the fears of those who believed that the whole social structure was in danger of collapse, and men began to arm. Sir Ernest Jardine, for example, told Austen in March that he considered the situation so serious that he had been to a wholesale armourer's to buy five revolvers, which he proposed to take down to the country with him ; when, however, he gave the order the shopman said : ' We had a hundred yesterday ; we had fifty when we opened this morning ; we have not one left now.' Such experiences were hardly reassuring, and looking back on those days in after life Austen expressed the opinion that even the General Strike of 1926 provoked less bitterness and roused less fear. If the situation was alarming to the ordinary citizen it was still more so to Austen, who was closely following the policy of Germany. His anxiety on every score was profound, and

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in his letters at this time his preoccupation with politics is very marked. Even so, however, he could not resist repeating a good story :

I have just recently heard an odd bit of gossip about the choice of Campbell-Bannerman as leader of the Liberal Party, first on the authority of the late Lord Wolverhampton, and secondly on that of McKenna. It is to the effect that after Harcourt's resignation the Liberal leaders held a meeting to consider who should be invited to take his place ; that they were all agreed that Campbell-Bannerman was not the fight man, but that it would be discourteous to pass him over. Finally Tweedmouth said : ' Let me go to C.-B. with an invitation from you, and I undertake to get him to decline it.'⁵ This was agreed to, but after the interview Tweedmouth returned to say that he had been unable to secure a refusal from C.-B., who, on the contrary, insisted on accepting. It was suggested by McKenna that Tweedmouth had seized the opportunity to make his own terms and secure for himself the post of First Lord of the Admiralty !

That was in February, and in the next month he wrote :

Do you know these stories ? Winston Churchill, when Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, is said to have written a long memo, for Elgin ending : ' These are my views.' ' But not mine,' was Elgin's minute on the paper.

The other is older. Mowatt, when a young man at the Treasury, was called in by Lowe, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. ' Mr. Mowatt,' said Lowe, ' I have read this long correspondence of yours with the———Office. It won't do ; it won't do at all. There are only four letters which the Treasury can write in such a case. First, ' You can't have the money ' ; second, ' I have nothing to add

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to my previous letter ' ; third, ' This correspondence must now cease ' ; and fourth, and last, ' Go to hell !'

Meanwhile, Austen found much of his time occupied with the internal affairs of the Party. It was only now, after twenty-five years, that the fusion of the Conservative and Liberal Unionist Parties took place, and the preliminaries of this amalgamation necessitated many a long meeting. Then, the change of leadership had by no means solved every problem, for Mr. Bonar Law was subjected to at least as much pressure as his predecessor in the matter of the referendum on Tariff Reform. Austen did his best to dissuade him from repeating the Albert Hall pledge in any form :

Feb. 17th, 1912

MY DEAR BONAR LAW,

I have been thinking over what you said to me about the referendum. I earnestly hope you will make no such announcement. It is surely sufficient to say that the offer which Mr. Balfour made was not accepted—the compromise embodied in it was rejected—the situation has been changed by subsequent events, and the Party can be no more bound to the exact solution then than to the next form, let us say, of the Lansdowne Bill.

I am sure that any revival of the referendum in connection with Tariff Reform will lead to great trouble. I do not mind saying that a Tariff Reform Budget should be treated like other Budgets, that if every Budget was to be subject to a referendum, of course a Tariff Reform Budget could not be an exception to the general rule ; but I am most profoundly opposed to singling out a Tariff Reform Budget from all others and imposing upon it this additional difficulty.

I am most anxious to keep exactly in step with you, and I do not think that it should be difficult for me to do so ; but

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on this subject I burned my boats before you were leader, and I cannot unsay what I have publicly stated.

Yours very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

In February the Prime Minister asked Austen to take on the chairmanship of a proposed Royal Commission to enquire into the method of recruiting for all branches of the Civil Service, but he felt that he could not afford the time, and so declined. At Easter of this year he went with Lord Balfour of Burleigh to St. Petersburg on business connected with the bank of which he was a director, and stayed at the British Embassy with Sir George Buchanan. His visit was extremely interesting to him for political as well as business reasons, and he had a long talk with M. Sazonoff, then Foreign Minister, whom he did not consider to possess much force of character. For the rest, 'our stay in St. Petersburg continued most interesting to the end, but I think it was well that it did not last any longer, for it involved an amount of eating and drinking which, if much further prolonged, must have sufficed to undermine my constitution.'

Austen carried away from his conversation with M. Sazonoff the impression that the Russian Government had no very clear idea of the policy of Great Britain, and that this uncertainty did not make for peace. He felt himself that what was required was something in the nature of a British Monroe Doctrine. Many plain American citizens, he was prepared to admit, might be puzzled to give a clear definition of the Monroe Doctrine, but every American knew that if a foreign nation attacked that doctrine his country would unite to defend it. 'The Entente, as I thought, had come to have all the obligations of a formal alliance without its advantages. We had been on the brink of war at the time of the Agadir crisis, yet the public mind was wholly unprepared for it. If war came, we should be obliged to intervene ; it was dangerous to conceal the real position from the country, and to attempt to ride a

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democracy in blinkers.' In this attitude Austen was strongly supported by Mr. Balfour. Accordingly, soon after his return from Russia he put his point of view before Sir Edward Grey, but the latter considered the scheme impracticable ; the Cabinet would not support it. In consequence, British commitments remained in their original indefinite form.

It was not on foreign affairs, however, that Parliamentary and public attention was to be concentrated during the ensuing two years, but upon Home Rule and the disestablishment of the Welsh Church. The autumn session of 1911 had been occupied with the Insurance Bill, and although Parliament had reassembled on February 14th all business was dislocated by the coal strike until April, so it was only then that the measures dealing with these questions were introduced. The third Home Rule Bill was based on the model of the first, and it gave Ireland a legislature which was theoretically subordinate to that at Westminster. The Dublin Parliament was to have no jurisdiction in the matter of peace, war, the Crown, international relations, the Services, or the currency, but after an interval of six years the Royal Irish Constabulary was to come under its control. The financial provisions were at any rate more explicit, if no less questionable, than those of 1886, for there were to be established an Irish Exchequer and an Irish Consolidated Fund, and the whole cost of Irish Government, with the exception of expenditure on the reserved services, was to be borne by Ireland.

Austen at once fastened on the weakness of the financial arrangements :

I have not yet had time to look at the text of the Home Rule Bill circulated this morning, but I may say I share the general feeling on our side that the last form of the proposal is even madder than Mr. Gladstone's original plans. I cannot conceive anything more embarrassing to a British Chancellor of the Exchequer or more certain to create friction, and worse, than the financial arrangements.

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On the platform he was even more outspoken, as may be seen from a speech which he made at West Bromwich :

The Government promised the country to reconstruct the House of Lords, but they have not got a majority in the House of Commons for any forcible scheme of reconstruction. Their Party is split from top to bottom and from side to side over that question, and they are not likely to touch it as long as they are in that condition. So they turn to the further work of destruction, and we see English and Welsh Nonconformists, Irish Nationalists, Scottish Presbyterians, Irish Roman Catholics, Socialists, Syndicalists, and millionaire baronets all hanging together lest they should hang separately, all combined to plunder a Church or destroy a Constitution lest, if they were given a moment to think, they should turn and rend one another.

From this attack he passed to a statement of his own position with regard to the Welsh Church :

I was born and bred in Nonconformist circles, and Nonconformist traditions are strongly in my blood. I quite admit that, on the question of disestablishment, there is a great deal which may fairly be said on both sides. When I first stood for Parliament I would not pledge myself, in spite of some pressure, as to how I would vote on that subject. I kept an open mind, and I thought and I studied the question. Well, I made my mind up, and I am going to tell you what it is. I am going to oppose that Bill. After all the thought I have given to the subject, I cannot see what wrong it is that we Nonconformists suffer because one church in the country is connected with the State by an establishment. For my part, it seems to me that the chief effect of the establishment is to exercise a moderating and a broadening spirit upon the Church of England as a whole.

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It prevents that Church becoming the Church of a single school of thought.

• But then, would anyone care about disestablishment without disendowment? . . . For my part, whatever hesitations I have had—and I admit I had some before I made up my mind, and only gradually came to my present resolution—whatever hesitation I may have had about the question of disestablishment I have none about the question of disendowment. And I tell my fellow Nonconformists that they are doing a fatal act if they lend themselves to this spoliation of the Church in Wales.

If all the endowments are not sacred, modern endowments have no better sanction. If all trust funds, though well applied, are not to be preserved, what security is there for any chapel trust throughout the country? This is not a day when the country is divided wholly among members of the different churches. There are secularists as well, and the measure which some Nonconformists are prepared to mete out to the English Church to-day may be applied in no long distant future, if these views prevail, to their own chapels, their own endowments, and their own trust funds. Unless you preserve the legal rights of property, no man's property and no trust property and no church's property is safe. One common principle and one common law must apply to all, and the protection you refuse to others you cannot hope to receive yourselves.

Leaving the question of the Welsh Church, he proceeded to an examination of what appeared to him to be the chief defects in the Home Rule Bill :

Now, what is the Home Rule Bill? It is called a Bill to make provision for the government of Ireland. I should call it a Bill to break up the United Kingdom and to establish an Irish Parliament on a charitable basis at the expense of the British taxpayer. It is a measure more full of

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inconsistencies, more illogical, more contradictory than any that in my twenty years' experience I have seen presented to Parliament, and I have seen a great many Bills to which exception could be taken on all those grounds. You have been told for many years in broad and simple terms that the object of the Bill is to relieve the pressure upon the Imperial Parliament, and to leave Irishmen, who really know about Irish affairs, to manage their own purely local business in their own way, whilst at the same time preserving the unimpaired supremacy of the Imperial Parliament. Well, now we have got a Bill, and we can test how far the Bill carries out those professions.

It is quite true you will find the supremacy of Parliament declared in the Bill. Words cost nothing even in an Act of Parliament, and words you can have in plenty ; but if you ask what are the effective guarantees which secure that the will of the Imperial Parliament shall in the last resort prevail, you will search the Bill from beginning to end, and you will find no answer. On what is it that the power and effective action of a Government depend ? It is upon their being able to exert all the forces of the law, all the powers of the Crown if need be, in support of law and order to secure obedience to the behests of the Imperial body.

The authority of the Imperial Parliament is recognized in the Bill, but the effective power of the Imperial Parliament and of the Government at Westminster to see its will executed in Ireland is taken away. The police are handed over at once, the Royal Irish Constabulary are to be handed over in six years⁵ time. In the meantime they are to act, so far as I can understand, under the orders of the Viceroy, who himself is to take the advice and to accept the advice of Irish Ministers. We are to pay the constabulary for six years, the Lord-Lieutenant is to direct them, the Irish Government is to use them.

When the six years are over they are to be transferred absolutely to the Irish Government. If any question arises thereafter between the new Irish Parliament in Dublin and the old Parliament at Westminster, between the new



Three generations: Joseph Chamberlain with his eldest son and grandson

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Government, which represents the majority of Irishmen only, and the old Government, which represents the majority in the United Kingdom, how is the old Parliament at Westminster, the Government of the whole country, to make its will prevail ?

It is to pass an Act of Parliament, and the Irish Parliament is not to question it. But the Irish Ministers will name the judges, not the British Government. The Irish Government will have the police, not the British Government. The only instrument which the British Government will have at its command to enforce British law and maintain its authority is the Army, and unless you are prepared to use the Army to coerce Irishmen—if ever Ireland disobeys—from the moment this new Bill is established you cease to exercise any effective control over Irish proceedings, and all the verbal securities written in the Home Rule Bill are not worth the paper on which they are printed.¹

This speech well reflects the attitude of Austen towards the two great measures introduced by the Government that April, and in respect of Welsh disestablishment it proves that he was not ashamed to admit that he had changed his mind.

In the House of Commons he made a spirited attack on the Home Rule Bill during the second reading debate on May 7th :

I got off my speech. I scarcely know whether it was successful or not. Maurice Healy was in possession of the House and, having spoken for half an hour last night, dribbled on for more than an hour to-day. He absolutely emptied the benches and bored the few of us who were left to tears, but Members came in to hear me and remained to the end of my speech, so that I had a good though not a crowded audience. Halfway through I thought it was a failure—

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 27th, 1912.

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I seemed pulling a very labouring oar—but it went better afterwards, and though the effect was marred by my own feeling that I had too much to say (so that I left out things I ought to have said) it was, I think, on the whole successful, and I received gratifying congratulations afterwards.

Among the congratulations he received were those of his brother :

Westbourne, Edgbaston, Birmingham

May 8/12

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I must send you a line to congratulate you on your great speech in the House last night. From the reports in the *B.D.P.* I gather that you scored a triumph for the manner of it; the matter seems to me on reading it to be even more remarkable. In logic and sheer reasoning I think it is the best thing you have done, and quite in a class of its own compared with the other speeches in this debate. Indeed, it ranks with some of Father's speeches in the old days, and one cannot give it higher praise.

I brought up my first scheme¹ in the Council yesterday and am told that my speech was quite a success, but I had to accept a motion to adjourn the debate in order that the Council might have more time to consider such a complex scheme. . . .

Love to Ivy. I come up on Saturday and return first thing on Monday.

Yours affectly.,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN.

In their early days neither the Home Rule nor the Welsh Church Bill roused the interest which might have been

¹ For town planning.

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expected, for it was obvious that both would be rejected by the House of Lords, and the real contest was thus delayed. Meanwhile the Unionists of Ulster were organizing, and while Austen was in St. Petersburg most of his colleagues were attending a demonstration outside Belfast, where 100,000 men pledged themselves never to submit to a Dublin Parliament, and in September the Ulster Covenant was signed. The Opposition case was that as the last General Election had been fought on the question of the House of Lords, the Government had no mandate for Home Rule, and the by-elections seemed to show that there was considerable support among the electorate for this view, for in 1912 Mr. Asquith's followers lost South and North-West Manchester, Crewe, Midlothian, and Bow and Bromley. When Parliament reassembled in October, therefore, there was noticeably more excitement at Westminster than there had been during the summer, and on November 11th the Government was beaten by twenty-two votes on the report stage of the financial resolution for the Home Rule Bill. Mr. Asquith decided to follow the precedent set by Mr. Balfour seven years before and to ask the House to reverse its decision. The ensuing debate was stormy, and after the Speaker had adjourned it for an hour without effect he was finally obliged to terminate the sitting. So heated had tempers become that as the Members filed out Mr. Ronald McNeill, later Lord Cushendun, threw a book across the table and hit Mr. Winston Churchill in the face. 'The Government,' Austen wrote, 'may get their old horse up again and mend the broken shafts, but they can't mend their horse's knees.'

During the summer Austen found much of his time occupied by the School for Tropical Medicine, for he was chairman of its General Committee, and on July 17th there was a meeting at the Foreign Office, over which he presided, to launch an appeal for £100,000. Not long afterwards he went with his wife and Mr. Leverton Harris for another leisurely motor-tour in France and Italy, and this year his summer holiday was not interrupted by any political alarms.

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Austen had not, however, long returned to England before he was involved in another Party dissension. Although he had made his own attitude quite clear there was some doubt in the minds of the rank and file about Mr. Balfour's famous pledge, and on November 18th, also at the Albert Hall, Lord Lansdowne definitely abandoned the proposal to hold a referendum on Tariff Reform, and Mr. Bonar Law endorsed the declaration. A fortnight later the latter repeated and amplified his statement at another meeting at the Alexandra Palace, and Austen, of course, fully supported his leader's action. His private comment was : * So that is off my mind, but if you knew how often Law has doubted and hesitated since our decision was taken just after he was made leader, you would know what a weight is off my mind. These declarations were to have been made nearly a year ago, and were very nearly *not* made this week. But all's well that ends well.' At once the argument was put forward that this was to jeopardize the chance of success on the Irish issue, and this view was especially strongly held in Lancashire, where Mr. Bonar Law himself had his constituency. That formidable Lancastrian Mr. (later Sir) Archibald Selvidge mobilized his influence, and he found support in the Northcliffe Press, headed by *The Times*. Such pressure was too much for Mr. Bonar Law, and at Ashton-under-Lyne on December 16th he qualified his previous statement by announcing that he adhered to food duties for the purpose of Imperial Preference, which was itself a step to Imperial Unity, and that this was 'not the time to haul down the flag' ; but he promised that a Unionist Government would call a Colonial Conference, and would impose such duties only after the conference and if the Colonies regarded them as essential for preference.

Austen was not opposed to this modification in itself, as he proved in a public letter to a correspondent :

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Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec. 23rd, 1912

DEAR SIR,

I quite agree with you as to the success of the Albert Hall meeting and the satisfaction given by Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law on that occasion.

Mr. Bonar Law's subsequent speech at Ashton is supplementary to and explanatory of what he then said, but there is no contradiction or discrepancy between them. It must, I think, be obvious to you and to any man who thinks about the subject that, before deciding the details of Colonial Preference, consultation and conference with Colonial representatives is necessary.

What the Unionist leaders seek from the people is power to arrange for reciprocal preference, within certain defined limits. Exactly what the amount and the character of the preference shall be can only be settled when a British Government has this power and is in a position to conclude an arrangement with the Dominions.

All parties to the agreement must, of course, retain their autonomous rights. We have no more pretension to fix Colonial duties than the Dominions have to fix ours. But we believe that commercial union would be to our mutual advantage, and I do not doubt that a satisfactory agreement could be come to as soon as our people have invested our Government with the necessary powers.

Believe me

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.¹

Others put a different construction upon what Mr. Bonar Law had said at Ashton-under-Lyne, and hoped it meant that food taxes might by some means be once more side-tracked. Mr. Goulding, for example, wrote to the leader suggesting that if it would be any help he could get a large

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, December 24th, 1912.

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number of Tariff Reform M.P.s to sign a private letter to Mr. Bonar Law approving of a referendum limited to food taxes. Mr. Bonar Law sent this on to Austen with the comment : ' It seems to me the last straw.'

Highbury, Moor Green, Birmingham
Dec. 24th, 1912

MY DEAR BONAR LAW,

I do not wonder that Goulding's letter draws a cry of distress from you. He is a good fellow and the best of friends, as you know, but he was always a pessimist and he is not always a good counsellor. On this occasion I cannot conceive worse advice than he offers. Its adoption would cover Tariff Reformers with ridicule and destroy every shred of character with which we are yet blessed. I do not understand how after your recent speeches anyone can think it compatible with your honour to withdraw from the position you have taken up, and I am certain that it would be fatal both to yourself and to the Party if you were to do so.

Just consider what our history has been. Balfour handicapped us at the beginning with the promise of a double election. That did not prevent the Free Fooders from voting against us, whilst it puzzled and discouraged keen Tariff Reformers. That pledge was happily for the 1906 election only, and with our failure to win that election we were automatically free from it. Then in December, 1910, in spite of previous decisions to the contrary, Balfour imposed on us the new pledge of the referendum at the very last moment. The results were very similar. It did not enable us to win any seats, and it puzzled and disheartened earnest men. Now we are at least free from that embarrassing condition also. For heaven's sake do not let us resume the burden from which we are just free or place ourselves under any fresh disabilities. We have got a bad quarter of an hour to go through. The disaffection of *The Times* is serious, and I do not underrate it; but weakness

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on our part would be fatal to all of us. I cannot too strongly press upon you my conviction that you can save the Party by firmness and courage at this crisis, and that any change of plans would be fatal to our success. If you stand firm the Party will rally to you. The country will recognize a man of courage who knows his own mind and is prepared to risk all for his convictions. It is just because the Party has felt that it was not being led boldly and with confidence that we have had so much trouble, and it is because the country did not believe in our sincerity and conviction that we have remained out so long. I prefer your Albert Hall speech to your Ashton speech, and in so far as the second detracted anything from the first, I cannot but think it was a mistake. But I do not want to criticize or add to your worries. I am ready to defend both speeches on the lines laid down by you in your conversation with me last Friday, and to maintain their perfect consistency. On these lines I will do everything to help you and will stand by you whatever happens. It is a moment of rather fiery trial, but courage and firm faith will bring you triumphantly through, stronger in yourself and stronger in the esteem of your countrymen than ever before.

I hate to write you a political letter on Christmas Eve, but I hope that the New Year will bring you better fortune and more happiness than the past has done.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Unhappily the wish expressed in the concluding paragraph of this letter was not to be realized.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

THE year 1913 was for Austen Chamberlain one of frustration. During the earlier part of it he was wrestling with the situation created by Mr. Bonar Law's attitude towards Tariff Reform, and he was unsuccessful in his efforts to persuade the leader to adhere to the full programme. During the later months he was oppressed by the feeling that in the matter of Home Rule a catastrophe was rapidly approaching, but there again, in the exacerbated state of feeling on both sides, he was unable to make his influence decisively felt. Above all, there was the growing tension on the Continent. No one realized better than Austen that the Balkan wars had raised more problems than they settled, and the nervous, excitable condition of German opinion was a bad augury for what the future might have in store. Where public affairs were concerned, therefore, Austen had little to encourage him, and before the year was three weeks old he was writing : * I am very sick, and don't feel as if I wanted to write to you about politics just now, or indeed as if there were any politics worth writing about ! ' That was to be his attitude throughout the year. What atoned for these worries and disappointments in public life was, as so often, his domestic happiness. That Austen never despaired of his country was due not to his colleagues but to his wife. ' I wonder how long,' he wrote in April, ' it will be possible for me to remain a Party man. I am weary to death of these constant troubles, and should be far happier if I were quit of a Party who seem to me determined to ruin their own fortunes and most of what I hold dear with them.' The only things that made life tolerable, and enabled him to keep the smiling face which he generally managed to present to the world, were romps in the nursery or by the sea with his children—there were two of them now ; holidays abroad with his wife ; and the delights of country life at Camilla Lacey, the home of his friend Mr. Leverton Harris.

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Politically the year began early, for Parliament re-assembled on January 1st to deal with the Home Rule and Welsh Church Bills, which were promptly rejected by the Lords the moment they had left the Commons. The internal crisis in the ranks of the Opposition, however, had developed even earlier. Over the Christmas holidays those who wished to clear the decks for the fight against Home Rule had been extremely active. The Irish Unionists naturally wished to shelve Tariff Reform for a struggle which to them meant life or death, and they were warmly seconded by the local Conservative leaders in such centres as Liverpool and Manchester, where Tariff Reform had never been very popular and where there was a large Orange element in the population. The Opposition Press took the same line, and *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Manchester Courier*, and the *Yorkshire Post* all called for the abandonment of food taxes as part of the Unionist programme. As Austen himself put it : 'In a few weeks, almost in a few days, the revolt had become general ; the panic had spread to all but a few stalwarts. When we examined the lists we found that we could only count on the constancy of some thirty to forty men.' Austen urged Mr. Bonar Law to undertake a six weeks' campaign in the country, and offered to take his share ; by this means he believed that what he considered to be the boggy of food taxes would be laid once and for all.

Mr. Bonar Law had always been an ardent Tariff Reformer, and he had not abated any of his faith, but he was every day becoming more impressed with the necessity of concentrating all the Party's energies upon the campaign against Home Rule, and he felt that to do what Austen suggested would be to cause unnecessary dissension. He therefore proposed to summon a Party meeting, and to resign the leadership. When this decision became known the following memorandum was signed by nearly every Opposition Member of the House of Commons :

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House of Commons

Jan, 8th, 1913

We whose names are undersigned, Members of the Opposition in the House of Commons, think it our duty to approach you with reference to the controversy which has arisen in the Party as to the methods which should be adopted in placing one particular part of the policy of preferential treatment of the Sister States, Crown Colonies, and Dependencies before the electorate.

We desire in the first place to express to you our great appreciation of the services you have rendered to the Party and to the country since you undertook the arduous task of leadership of the Opposition, and our unabated loyalty and confidence in your leadership.

We adhere to the principle of Imperial Preference. We consider that the Unionist Party if returned to power ought to put that principle into effect, in every respect in which the imposition of new duties on food is not required. We look forward to the carrying out of many useful measures of preference and of encouragement to Imperial trade in the interval which must precede the final completion of the full policy of Imperial Preference.

In your speech at Ashton you laid down that before any duty, however small, could be imposed on foreign corn or other foodstuffs with a view to giving preference to the Colonies, it would be necessary to summon a conference of the Colonies themselves to ascertain the exact situation and the relative advantages which would accrue both to them and to the United Kingdom. The question which is agitating the Party resolves itself into this—as to whether, in the event of the British Government finding it desirable, as the result of such conference, to impose duties upon foodstuffs with a view to the mutual advantage of the Colonies and ourselves, the proposals formulated should be forthwith brought before Parliament or first submitted to the electors for their decision.

By the adoption of the latter course we feel that no abandonment of principle is involved. It would involve a

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modification in procedure, but one which could be accepted for the sake of closing our ranks. We should in any event be prepared to follow your leadership, which we believe to be indispensable to the Party.

We learn, however, with profound regret and misgiving, upon authority that is not open to question, that you are of opinion that it is not possible for you in the circumstances to continue to lead the Opposition. We desire most respectfully to point out to you that in our opinion your retirement from the leadership would be fatal to the best interests of the Party and of the country. We are indeed confident that it would be impossible to find any other leader to whom the Party in Parliament and in the country would be prepared to give the undivided support which you can command. We venture to point out to you that seldom has there been a time when graver dangers threatened the country. The Constitution is in suspense, and while it is so suspended the opportunity has been taken by the Government to attempt to pass into law measures of the most far-reaching consequences, without submitting them to the electorate. Civil war is threatened in Ireland in the event of the Home Rule Bill being carried, and the Government turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of those who wish to remain our fellow-citizens under the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The meagre endowments of the Church in Wales, now devoted to the highest purposes of religion, are being plundered, and interests which touch most vitally the hearts and consciences of many loyal citizens are being outraged.

Moreover, these questions are being rushed through the House of Commons by methods of tyranny and by suppression of discussion unparalleled in our history.

The general feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction caused by the action of the Government surely renders it imperative that we should sink all differences in our efforts to defeat such a disastrous policy.

In these circumstances, affirming our loyalty to you and our willingness to follow any course that you may think

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proper, we appeal to your devotion alike to the country and the Party not for one moment to entertain the idea of resigning at the present juncture.

For the reasons we have mentioned we hope you may find it possible in this grave emergency, like many of us who are signatories to this document, to sink your own views as to the best methods and procedure in relation to one point, however important, in our policy, so that we may end all controversies and under your leadership oppose an absolutely united front to the disastrous proposals of the Government.

This document was principally the work of Sir Edward Carson and Mr. F. E. Smith. They read the draft through to Austen, who at once refused to sign it, saying that he could accept defeat but would not invite it. He was then informed that neither he nor any other front-bench man was to be asked to do so, but that if he objected to what was afoot no further action would be taken. Austen replied that the matter was out of his hands, and that he had no objection at all ; nor would he do anything to stop others signing. What he really felt he had written to his step-mother the day before : * I have done my best, but the game is up. We are beaten, and the cause for which Father sacrificed more than life itself is abandoned ! It is a bitter confession to make, and it is difficult for me to speak calmly about it.'

Mr. Bonar Law's final decision was conveyed in a letter to the Chief Whip :

I have discussed with Lord Lansdowne the memorial presented to me by Unionist Members of the House of Commons. That memorial, in effect, asks that we should retain the leadership of the Party while altering in one very important particular not indeed the policy of Imperial Preference, but the method by which the policy can be most effectively carried out. The modification requested by

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those who have signed the memorial is that if, when a Unionist Government has been returned to power, it proves desirable after consultation with the Dominions to impose new duties on articles of food in order to secure the most effective system of preference, such duties should not be imposed until they have been submitted to the people of this country at a General Election. This modification does not seem to us to involve any principle the adoption of which would have prevented us from loyally supporting the course of action desired by the majority of the Party, It would, nevertheless, have been more agreeable to ourselves, and in our view more for the interest of the Party, that the change of method should be accompanied by a change of leaders.

Before his resolution was made public Mr. Bonar Law had written a personal letter to Austen :

Pembroke Lodge, Edwardes Square,
Kensington, W.
Jan. 8th, 1913

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

Carson has told me something of his conversation with you yesterday, and I wish to say to you how well I understand what all this means to you. You cannot fail to look upon it as if it were going back upon your father's life-work, and though I believe that the tendency towards closer union on the part of the Colonies is the direct result of what he did, yet that cannot at the moment soften the blow much.

It is to me a great misfortune that I should be in such a position that it is I who seem to deal the blow at his policy. I have told you, and I am sure you believe me, that if you or your father wished it I should gladly resign my position, but I have not the courage to go on and be responsible for a policy which, with the feeling in the Party such as it is, I

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am sure is bound to fail. If I had been your father, I might have carried it through successfully, but I cannot.

In this crisis, as in the earlier one, you have acted as what I know you are, a great gentleman.

Yours sincerely,

A. BONAR LAW.

To this Austen replied :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Jan. 8th, 1913

MY DEAR BONAR LAW,

Many thanks for your letter. I reciprocate the spirit in which it is written, for in the midst of my own deep disappointment I can appreciate and sympathize with your feelings and difficulties.

As you know, I wish that you could have felt differently, and I still believe that the advice which I tendered you was the best for your reputation and for the Party, and that if it had commended itself to you and been acted on at once the position of the Party would have been stronger in three months' time than it will be now, and your own reputation immeasurably enhanced.

But I recognize that if you couldn't believe what I believed you could not advocate it with success, and I saw that I could not make you share the confidence that I felt.

If you and I now consulted our own wishes, we should leave politics to others ; but neither of us *can* do that, and you least of all.

You must make your sacrifice as well as others. I think you had the right to invite the Party to fight on your lines or get another leader. But, forgive me if I pain you, I don't think you have a right to say to the Party : * I see that my line is impossible and I cannot pursue it further, but I will not lead you on any other.'

The whole Party desires you to continue your leadership,

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and I do not think you have the right, as things now stand, to withdraw.

I have said more than I meant to. Indeed, I only wished to tell you that if I have not sought you out yesterday or to-day it is only because I could not help you by anything I could say, and I felt that things had now passed altogether beyond my control and that it was now for others to find a solution; since the cause which I supported was definitely rejected.

I am deeply sensible of the difficulties of your position. I will try not to make them greater, and if you do not altogether like what I have to say when I come to speak you must make allowance for a man whose dearest political hopes and personal affections have received from fate a cruel blow.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen, however, did not stand wholly alone, and the following letter reflects the point of view of the minority which refused to sign the memorandum to Mr. Bonar Law.

99 Eaton Place, S.W.

Jan. 8th, 1913

DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN,

Will you allow me to write you a few lines to tell you how very much I feel the present situation, not only for the sake of the policy but for you personally.

I myself have not signed the Party letter. I could not do it, for if ever there was a principle one could not sign away for the sake of tactics, however pressing or obvious, this is one of them. But there is always this to remember, that if not in office we are already reaping the fruits of Mr. Chamberlain's policy. The repulse of the Reciprocity Treaty¹ was due to that alone, and it may well be that there are still bigger harvests to be reaped from his sowing.

¹ Between Canada and the United States. It was rejected by the Canadian electorate in September, 1911.

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None the less it is indeed bitter to have this reverse, but there are still those who will pursue to the utmost of their powers the struggle for the ideals that he began and you so finely have continued.

I cannot help feeling that fifty people with belief are worth five hundred without—even in the House of Commons.

Yours sincerely,

GEORGE LLOYD.

On January 13th Austen stated his views in no uncertain terms to his constituents at Acocks Green. To the end of his life he was prouder of that speech than of any other he had made, and, a little paradoxically perhaps, he included it in his volume of speeches entitled *Peace in Our Time*. In view of the importance which he attached to it some quotations may not be out of place :

A political Party, if it is worthy of the name, is an association of men brought together for public action by a common faith in great principles of policy, for the defence and advancement of which the Party exists, and without which it would lose all the dignity and usefulness that distinguish a Party from a faction. But with such a Party there must always be room for honest differences of opinion, sometimes on questions of considerable importance, more often upon questions of detail, and very often indeed as to the exact extent to which in given circumstances we may yield or must stand out for the full completion of our ideals.

Austen then went on to examine in some detail the recent agitation in the Conservative Party, ' the importance and the gravity of which it would be . . . foolish to ignore.' At the same time he felt that the crisis was being taken too seriously. ' When a man sits with his fingers on his pulse,

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and insists upon continually taking his own temperature with a clinical thermometer, he is apt to fret himself quite unnecessarily into a state of high fever, and something of that kind has happened to the Unionist Party in these last few weeks.⁵ He was ready to admit that duties on food were unpopular, but he held that the right course was to face that unpopularity and conquer it. Then it was urged that these duties were not needed by the United Kingdom or necessary for preference ; that they had caused the defeat of the Conservative Party at three elections and would cause its defeat at a fourth :

I did not share those views. I do not share them now. I believe that those duties are needed if we are to do justice to our own agriculture, and, above all, if we are to make reasonably certain the success of those small owners and occupiers the creation of which it is part of our policy to encourage and to promote. I believed, and I believe, that though you may have preference without any new taxation, you cannot have any complete or permanent community of commercial interest unless you are prepared to vote these new taxes. I altogether deny that those views are not capable of clear explanation and of full justification at any gathering of our countrymen, or that they have been proved by anything which has taken place to be incapable of acceptance by them. It is not true to say that we have been beaten because we fought upon this issue. It would be much truer to say that we have been beaten because we did not fight upon this issue, and because we left the field in too many cases open to the misrepresentation of our opponents.

Nevertheless, he recognized that he was in a minority :

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rate, is against me. I have to acknowledge that the great majority of the Party took and take a different view. But for the first time in my long connection with it, for the first time in the eleven years that I have been permitted to sit in the councils of that Party, I am unable to take any share of responsibility for the decision to which they have come. I cannot turn my back upon myself. I cannot unsay what I have said. I cannot pretend to like the change in our attitude. I cannot pretend to view without misgivings its possible effect.

I am afraid that this change may be a calamity for the Party with which all my public life has been associated. I am afraid that it may prove a misfortune for the Empire which it has been my earnest desire to serve. But I have been too long engaged in politics to suppose that I can always have my own way, too long to sulk because I cannot now persuade the Party to take a course in this one matter which I believe to be alike the right course and the wise course ; and though I have to admit my disappointment and acknowledge my fears, I will do my best in the future as I have done my best in the past to support my leaders and to co-operate with my political friends. I care too much for the other great causes whose success is bound up with that of the Unionist Party to sit idly by and not to render what help I can in their defence or their promotion.

What made the blow even more severe was that when he and Mr. Long stood down in favour of Mr. Bonar Law he believed that in the new leader the Party had one who would not accept any modification of his father's policy. All the same, he loyally carried out the promise he had made at Acocks Green and played his part in the defence of Conservative and Unionist principles. During that spring and summer he was active not only at Westminster and the Midlands, but he spoke at several gatherings in London, and also in places so far afield as Hull and Lincoln. Even without this load on his mind it would have been weary

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work, given the circumstances in which the battle was being fought. Parliament was prorogued on March 3rd, and a new session began three days later, and the House of Commons at once set about the task of once more passing the Irish and Welsh Bills in accordance with the terms of the Parliament Act. One victory the Opposition did score. The Government had introduced a Franchise and Registration Bill, but they were obliged to abandon it on the Speaker's ruling that the adoption of an amendment allowing women to vote would so alter the character of the measure as to require the introduction of a new Bill. It was little wonder that at the Jewellers' Dinner in Birmingham that year Austen made a depressing speech in which he gloomily alluded to the 'lessening respect for law' that was becoming visible on all sides, and which he largely attributed to 'the lessened respect which Parliament itself at present enjoys.'

Austen realized the depression which had overtaken him, and when he could eschew politics he did so. It was fortunate that he had so many other interests. 'I found myself with a good hour to spare before lunch-time, so I spent it very pleasantly at the National Gallery in the English and French Schools.' On another occasion he wrote : ⁵ Tell Neville we have been very extravagant about Worcester china of late, and have two or three fine pieces to show him. What would he say to an apple-green jug of the finest quality and colour, painted with exotic birds? Does not his mouth water? ' What he saw did not, however, always please him. One night he was dining at the Ritz : ' Lady——was giving a large dinner for somebody's dance. I was depressed by the way the girls were dressed and got up. Half a dozen arrived as I was waiting for Ivy, and I took them for actresses. Probably they would have been much flattered, but I was—well, let me say shocked. This *genre* is really deplorable.'

Austen's power of mental recuperation, too, was great, and it was in evidence as soon as he got away from the surroundings that depressed him. In the middle of February

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he went to Folkestone with his wife and the children, and two days later he was writing :

It has been a lovely day, blue sky overhead and bright sunshine till nearly four o'clock ; but there was a cruel east wind, and it was mortally cold in an open motor. However, Ivy and I enjoyed our excursion. We drove across Romney Marshes through Rye to Winchelsea. Here we lunched at a nice little country inn and viewed the church and one of the old gateways, of which there were formerly four, and are still two at least. The church is the chancel of an old priory. Whether the nave was ever built seems doubtful, and the transepts are in ruins. But the chancel is very big, with aisles, and contains five fine monuments, the oldest being of the first Admiral of the Cinque Ports. One delightful little brass (of a friar, I think) remains in the floor, and there have been others. Both Winchelsea and Rye stand on little hills rising abruptly from the flat marsh-land, which now extends three or four miles farther out, the sea having receded, but they each have a muddy little tidal stream, up which small smacks can come and discharge their goods alongside the houses of the lower towns. We stopped on our way home to look at Rye church, a mixture of all styles, and castle with a gun terrace looking out to sea across the flats. It is a most attractive little town of quaint red-brick, red-tiled houses, one of which Henry James has taken. The marshes, with their wide horizon and great skyscapes, have an almost Dutch aspect, and are very attractive. Cox would have loved to paint them. Indeed, unless I am much mistaken, he did paint them more than once.

Lincoln cathedral had pleased him greatly, and was a welcome relief after an evening of speech-making :

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It quite came up to our high expectations, and we longed to be able to return to it and sit quietly admiring it in the afternoon. It stands so grandly on the top of a steep hill overlooking the broad plain, from all parts of which its three splendid towers are visible. And its workmanship is beautiful—its fine west front largely Norman, its deep south porch, its Galilee porch, the richly sculptured angel-choir—so called from the angel musicians sculptured in the spandrels of the choir arches, its two fine rose windows, and its lovely Chapter House combine to make it one of the most beautiful, as I suppose it certainly is the finest, of our Gothic cathedrals.

From Folkestone the Austen Chamberlains had gone on to Paris for ten days. Austen divided his time there between pictures, politics, and society. He discussed Anglo-French relations with M. Tardieu and M. Millerand, went to see Sacha Guitry in *La Prise de Berg-op-Joom*, and tried to persuade the Prefect of Police to express an opinion as to the best method of treating the suffragettes. Everywhere the international situation was the main topic of conversation, and the proposal to revert to three years' service which was its corollary :

They tell me public opinion will impose it on the Chamber as it imposed Poincare on an unwilling assembly. I find them tired of the constant pinpricks of Germany, of its constant threats and bullyings.

' *Eh bien, monsieur, et d quand la guerre ?* ' was M. le Bon's¹ opening when we left the ladies.

^c *Pas cette fois, monsieur, d ce queje crois du moins.*'

ⁱ *Eh bien, le plutot serait le mieux selon moi,*' he replied.

I asked why, and he said first because of the growing disproportion of population between France and Germany and the falling birthrate of the former. Secondly, because

¹ A former Minister of the Colonies.

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public opinion changed. It was in the right mood now, but it might not always be so. Lastly, if war had arisen out of the present situation, Russia, being the most directly interested of all the Powers of the Entente, it was certain would act promptly and with vigour. Meanwhile Austria was neutralized by the agitation among her own Slavs and by fear of what might happen in her Balkan possessions, and Italy had shown great military weakness in Tripoli. I suggested that France might do more to cultivate a good understanding with Italy—not that Italy would leave the Triplice to join the Entente, but her connection with the Triplice might be weakened. He admitted that during the war in Tripoli public opinion in France had been unduly excited, and the hand of the French Government had been forced.

On his return to London the Government asked Austen to take the chairmanship of the Royal Commission on Indian Finance and Currency, and after some hesitation he accepted. 'It is/ he wrote, 'to enquire into all manner of things which I have never studied and of which I know nothing ; so at least I shall learn something—and knowledge is always interesting and sometimes useful.' How useful this particular information was to prove he did not then suspect. Shortly afterwards he went down to Camilla Lacey to study the subject with which the commission had to deal : the lapse of time has deprived it of even academic interest, but it marked Austen's first official contact with India—a contact which was to come to an end in such unfortunate circumstances four years later.

During the summer there was a lull in the political battle so far as Westminster was concerned, but preparations for civil war were being pushed on in Ireland. The nature of the Home Rule struggle was also changing, for the Unionists were no longer contending for the Union alone. The key to the situation was now to be found in Ulster, for her exclusion from the provisions of the Home Rule Bill would

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have satisfied the opponents of that measure, but the Nationalists would not hear of any such modification.

Austen was busy all summer with his Royal Commission, and after the adjournment of Parliament at the beginning of August he and his wife once more went motoring in France and Italy with Mr. Leverton Harris. He was more than usually glad to get away, and in a letter written just before he went he said : ' The fact is that politics have slipped back into the bad rut of 1903-5, and I cannot get over the disappointment of last Christmas. I have no joy in trying to defeat the Government, for though they do much mischief I have no confidence that we should do good.' The holiday gave Austen the rest he needed, but it brought home to him more forcibly than ever the growing peril of the international situation, and he returned convinced that British domestic differences were encouraging Germany in her policy of aggression. He himself was as bitterly opposed to the third Home Rule Bill as he had been to any of its predecessors, but he was becoming alarmed at the wild talk which was prevalent in the more extreme Orange circles. Over two years before Mr. James Craig, now Lord Craigavon, had warned the readers of the *Morning Post* that ' there is a spirit spreading abroad, which I can testify to from my personal knowledge, that Germany and the German Emperor would be preferred to the rule of John Redmond, Patrick Ford, and the Molly Maguires.⁵ More recently a prominent Ulster Unionist, Major Crawford, had declared at Bangor that ' if they were put out of the Union . . . he would infinitely prefer to change his allegiance right over to the Emperor of Germany, or anyone else who had got a proper and stable Government.' Conscious as he was of the way in which such statements were interpreted abroad, Austen decided that the time had come for him to make a determined effort to secure a compromise.

When, therefore, he returned to England he had several conversations with his colleagues on the subject, and once more he suggested a federal solution, though without meeting with much encouragement for the proposal.

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Nevertheless the Prime Minister, in a speech at Ladybank on October 25th, invited the Opposition leaders to *an interchange of views and suggestions, free, frank, and without prejudice.' On all sides there was a good deal of talk of compromise, and there was much coming and going in Liberal, Conservative, and Nationalist circles. To what extent the professed desire for a settlement was genuine, and to what extent it merely cloaked a determination to make, if at all possible, one's opponents appear in the eyes of the electorate wholly unreasonable, it is difficult to say, but Austen was certainly sincere, and he determined to make a friendly response to Mr. Asquith's overtures ; this he did in a speech to his own constituents at Bromsgrove :

Until the other day the two great Parties in the State were arrayed against one another in what it seemed would inevitably be the bitterest and the most prolonged of conflicts. Then at the last moment, face to face with a situation of growing danger and difficulty in Ireland, the Prime Minister intimated his desire for conversations with the leader or some members of the Opposition. And the invitation was accepted by the leader of the Unionist Party in a speech which he made shortly afterwards. . . .

You know, when you first asked me to stand, the principal issue before us was Home Rule for Ireland. I declared myself against Home Rule then, and the course of subsequent experience has only served to strengthen my antipathy to anything in the nature of the Home Rule Bill of Mr. Gladstone or of the present Government. But I have never been, nor have the Unionist Party as a whole been, opposed to the consideration of an extension of local self-government equally applicable and equally applied to every part of the United Kingdom. The creation of county councils in this country was the work of the Unionist Party. The creation of popular county government in Ireland was the work of the Unionist Party ; and the Party with such a record has no reason in its past, and no reason in its

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convictions, for refusing to entertain—at least for refusing to consider—further extensions on the same principle.

There is room . . . for a great deal of conversation, though whether such conversation will lead to fortunate results or not he would be, I think, an unduly sanguine man who would undertake to prophesy. But at any rate there is room for conversation. There is room for an honest attempt to avert a great national calamity, and to try, even now, at the eleventh hour, if a great national and constitutional difficulty cannot be solved by a great national settlement. But if we of the Unionist Party are to take part in any such settlement, if we are to give it any kind of support, if we are even to abstain from doing our utmost to oppose it, there are certain principles of which we must seek acceptance from the other side.

Austen then went on to specify what these principles were. 'These bodies [i.e. local assemblies] must be subordinate not merely in name but in nature. They must have a position which will make it impossible for them to rival in any degree the power or dispute the authority of the Parliament at Westminster.' All parts of the United Kingdom must be treated on the same footing ; that in itself would be a safeguard, for it was impossible to imagine five rivals to the Imperial Parliament.

I sometimes think that all sides in this controversy have lost the true perspective by looking too exclusively at Ireland, and that if they would test the proposals which they make for Ireland by what would be safe and rational in the other parts of the United Kingdom—though our situation might be altered—not, in my opinion, altogether to its advantage, yet at any rate we might come nearer together, and we might avoid the hideous dangers which confront us at the present time.

From this he passed to a consideration of the position

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of Ulster, a province ^c less favoured by nature, perhaps, than the others,' and he paid a warm tribute to all that she had achieved. Then he pleaded for a little imagination. *Without imagination there is no statesmanship. Finally he wound up with an appeal to submit the whole question to the people.

The right course for everybody is to appeal to the last tribunal of all—to the judgment and wisdom of the electors. But so grave are the issues, so near are we to bloodshed, so fearful are the consequences which may follow if once bloodshed breaks out, that I, for one, rejoice that Mr. Bonar Law did not shut the door upon the conversations which Mr. Asquith invited, and I hope that wisdom and moderation may prevail, and that peace may yet be secured by common consent.¹

There was, however, little prospect of the Government's going to the country on the Irish issue, for the tide was running against them at the by-elections, and during 1913 and the first seven months of 1914 they lost East Cambridge-shire, Reading, South Lanarkshire, South-West Bethnal Green, Leith district, North-East Derbyshire, and Ipswich. When the character of these constituencies and their previous political history are taken into account it would appear as if a General Election at any time during the twelve months previous to the outbreak of war would have placed the Opposition in power. It was the conviction that such was the case which to no small extent so exasperated them.

By the time that Austen spoke Mr. Bonar Law was already in negotiation with the Prime Minister, and now chance provided Austen himself with an opportunity of furthering the cause of compromise. Earlier in the year

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*; November 21st, 1913.

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Mr. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, had asked his wife to launch the cruiser *Birmingham*, but the illness of Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain in the south of France had prevented her from doing so. Now Mr. Churchill asked her to launch the *Warspite*, and as the ceremony took place at Devonport it afforded an opportunity for the two statesmen to have several quiet talks over the Irish situation. From the first Austen was convinced that Mr. Churchill genuinely desired a settlement, and he believed that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Foreign Secretary were of the same opinion, though he was always inclined to be a little suspicious where Mr. Asquith was concerned. The upshot of their conversation was that somehow or other there must be special treatment for Ulster, though even there the difficulty arose as to what the boundaries of Ulster were to be and whether the province was to be excluded temporarily or permanently. There was, too, the attitude of Mr. Redmond to be taken into account. Leaders, also, might be prepared to think in terms of an agreed settlement, but the rank and file were not ready yet. As Mr. Churchill put it, both sides had to make speeches full of Party claptrap and no surrender, and then insert a few sentences at the end for wise and discerning people on the other side to see and ponder. Austen raised the question of a federal solution, but no great progress was made along those lines. . All the same, Austen returned to London with the impression that there were considerable forces on the Government side making for compromise. He also noted, with regard to Mr. Churchill himself, that 'the idea of fusion with an extreme wing left out on either side is obviously constantly in his mind, and would be greatly liked by him.'⁵

The year, however, was destined not to come to an end without further disappointments for Austen. Hardly had he left Mr. Churchill than the Prime Minister made a speech at Leeds which seemed to preclude any idea of a compromise.

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9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Nov. 29th, 1913

MY DEAR WINSTON,

' And what do you think of it all ? ' as Rosebery once said to a meeting. You told me that Asquith would say nothing at Leeds. I thought that dangerous, but he has done definitely worse.

When he spoke at Ladybank we thought his offer was made in good faith and that he meant business. Selborne, Lansdowne, and I, in the order named, all advanced to meet him. Thereupon he withdraws. He may say what he likes, but he *has* slammed the door in our faces. It is difficult now to think that the Ladybank invitation was made in good faith, and impossible to believe that he means business. He has blown conciliation to the winds. Could I have foreseen the terms of his speech (which I have only just been able to read in full) I would have talked Navy shop with you as long as you would have cared to continue—or the fashions or feminism or anything *except* the Irish question !

Well ! he has chosen, but I would not have his responsibility on my hands. He would scarcely have spoken differently if he had deliberately set himself to provoke strife. I presume he knew what he was doing.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The Admiralty, Whitehall

Nov. 30th, 1913

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

The Prime Minister has not withdrawn in the slightest degree from the Ladybank position. I am quite sure of this. Neither in fact nor in mood has there been any change.

I am sorry you take such an unfavourable view of his speech. I am confident we shall get to a settlement when the time comes. Anyhow you said nothing in your talk

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with me which weakened in any respect the integrity of your fighting position ; and all shall be buried in secrecy.

It was a real pleasure to me to entertain you both, and I greatly value the kindness which you have showed me.

Yours very sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

Before Mr. Churchill's letter reached him Austen had made a speech to his constituents in which he dealt with the question it concerned. First of all, however, he had a few words to say about Mr. Lloyd George, who had also recently spoken :

Since I addressed my constituents at Bromsgrove a little more than ten days ago two important speeches have been made—or perhaps I ought rather to say we have had a speech from the Prime Minister and a screech from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. . . . I am only going to say one word to-night about the speech which the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered on Saturday. When a man can see nothing in the attitude of his opponents but merely a covetous desire to grow rich as quickly as possible, no matter at what sacrifice to other people, when he can find no explanation of their motives except their inborn wickedness and selfishness, he ought to be above reproach himself.

And I think that a speech of the kind that was delivered on Saturday comes ill from the lips of a man who only a few months ago had to apologize, however reluctantly and however inadequately, to the House of Commons, of which he is a Member, for accepting a tip from a Government contractor and speculating upon the Stock Exchange while he held the responsible office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. The speech which was made on Saturday reflects discredit, not on this great class who were attacked, but on the man whose mind can conceive it.

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Austen then turned his attention to the Prime Minister's speech at Leeds :

When, a little time ago, the Prime Minister extended at Ladybank an invitation to the Opposition to discuss the Irish question, we thought that invitation was offered in good faith and that the Prime Minister meant business. The leader of the Opposition accepted the invitation in the spirit in which it was offered. Other members of the Party went further. Lord Selborne, Lord Lansdowne, and I myself in the speech I delivered at Bromsgrove took the Prime Minister's speech as made in good faith, and advanced to meet him, and contributed, as we thought, by our suggestions, to a peaceable and friendly solution of a great and grave national question. But as we advance he retreats, and when we stretch out a hand to meet the hand which he extends to us, he clenches his fist and shakes it in our face. In the speech which he made at Leeds he began with a travesty of recent history, and went on to declare that under no circumstances would he allow of any reference of this great subject to the verdict of the people. He next proclaims his perfect satisfaction with the provisions of the Home Rule Bill. He then declared that there must be no alteration in any of its principles, and finally he declined formally and explicitly any kind of conference or negotiations with a view of a national settlement, and, apparently with special reference to the speeches of Lord Lansdowne and myself, he proclaims that he saw no good in shouting suggestions from platform to platform. . . .

It is difficult now to believe that he spoke in good faith, and it is almost impossible to believe that he meant business. Perhaps I do him an injustice. (Several voices : ' Hear, hear.') You think so ? ('Yes.') Well, there is another explanation, and I give you the benefit of it. Apparently I was mistaken. He is wandering in a circle tethered by a rope, the other end of which is in the hands of Mr. Redmond and Mr. Devlin. Or there is yet one further possibility

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—and it is the only other one I know—that the speech at Ladybank was not meant as a serious offer, but the Prime Minister was merely manoeuvring for position in a Party fight.

At any rate, he has done one thing by that speech ; he has made our course clear and easy. We can only accept the challenge which he threw down. There is no possibility of compromise if the spirit of that speech is to prevail. We shall defend the Union to the last. We shall give Ulster all the support in her arduous battle that it is our power to give. We, at any rate, so far as power lies with us, will not see a new Alsace-Lorraine created within the United Kingdom.¹

Mr. Churchill's letter of November 30th was forwarded to Austen, who replied at once :

Highbury
Dec. 2nd, 1913

MY DEAR WINSTON,

Many thanks for your letter of the 30th. Our fathers were friends in spite of political differences, and I hope that you and I can preserve our friendship through like difficulties.

Your letter of the 30th only reached me after my return from my meeting last night, though I do not *think* I could have spoken differently even if I had had the chance of reading your words first. I can only say that if the Prime Minister's position and meaning are indeed unchanged his words were singularly unhappy. He has managed to convey to everyone the opposite impression, whilst Lloyd George's outburst is beyond characterization.

You will see what I said—much interrupted by a defeated Socialist Councillor and a little knot of opponents organized by him—and you will understand that though always

¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, December 2nd, 1913.

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delighted to see you and Morley on any pretext I should prefer not to be asked to meet Lloyd George—at present.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen had been asked by Mr. Churchill to dine to discuss the matter with his father's old friend, now Lord Morley, and in fixing the date of the dinner Mr. Churchill added : ' The Prime Minister was much concerned to hear from me what I thought myself justified in telling him, namely how much you had been upset by his speech ; and he most cordially agreed with my reply.' The dinner took place on December 8th, and Austen gave an account of it in a letter to Lord Lansdowne :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Dec. 9th 1913

MY DEAR LANSDOWNE,

... I dined with Winston last night to meet Morley. F. E. Smith also present. I declined to meet Lloyd George.

I gathered :

(1) That Morley and Winston were very averse from coercion of Ulster—Morley even more so than Winston.

(2) That Dillon had told Morley that Devlin would stick by Redmond whatever happened.

(3) That Dillon and Redmond were in a chastened mood. They might sulk a bit, but would not oppose.

(4) That Morley hates Federalism. ' Am I to have all these local devilments of Parliaments in my country ? ' he cried.

(5) That there is a real danger of the Government trying to solve the difficulty by the mere excision of Ulster, and attempting to cast on the House of Lords the onus of rejecting this by not accepting the second reading of the Bill. This idea smiles to Winston more than it does to Morley.

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(6) That both Morley and Winston are seriously anxious about Asquith's delay in getting to business with Bonar Law, and that they have urged him without success to move more quickly. They begged me to write Morley a letter repeating what I said in conversation—that if we had not seen our way to a basis of settlement before the House met, all chance of agreement would be gone. Morley most heartily concurred.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen complied with the request which was made to him, and wrote the following letter to be shown to Mr. Asquith :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.
Dec. 9th, 1913

MY DEAR LORD MORLEY,

The conversation at Winston's last night offered much food for reflection both in the present and the future, but there is only one point in it to which after a night's reflection I want now to recur.

You and Winston want Home Rule, but you want it to come peaceably and with reasonable prospects of its working successfully and proving a healing measure.

I dislike Home Rule, but I dislike still more the prospect of civil war with its necessary consequences, the destruction of the House of Commons and the demoralization of the Army.

So it comes to this : that we all see serious peril ahead, and we are all willing to make some concessions to avert the calamities which threaten the nation.

I believe that our views so expressed are shared by the responsible men in both Parties. But if this be so, what will be said of us if we let the opportunity of a national settlement slip by ?

And this brings me to my point. There is no time to

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lose if anything is to be done. I quite understand the Prime Minister saying that he won't be hustled by anyone, but it is not persons but events which will hustle us all. Every day which is allowed to go by without progress renders agreement more difficult. Speeches have to be made, and they tend to emphasize differences and to commit disputants still further to their own particular line. Opinion hardens and time is given to the forces hostile to a settlement by consent to organize and agitate.

Again, look at Anson's letter in this morning's *Times*. It represents a feeling universal in our Party. We cannot afford to wait till the last hour to take or to leave what may then be thrown to us.

If Bonar Law cannot tell us by Christmas that the conversations offer a fair prospect of success, our whole Party must turn out on the stump as if a General Election were in progress.

Imagine the temper in which we shall then meet the House of Commons. Nothing but the persistent and strenuous personal exertions of Law (I speak what I know) kept our men quiet last session. If the House meets again with things as they are now, nothing can prevent the destruction of the House as you and I have known it.

And, finally, who among us can guarantee the continuation of peace in Ireland? When feeling is wrought up to the pitch which it now is, no man can say how, when, or by whom revolution will be begun. A street brawl, a clumsy policeman, a too zealous official, a nothing may fire the train, and no man can foretell the consequences, except that all the chances of a settlement by consent are then gone at once and for ever.

What I urge, therefore, is that, if there is no hurrying, at least there should be no time wasted. Asquith has met Law three times, I believe. This isn't business. If our leaders proceed in that leisurely way events will take the reins out of their hands. I believe that in less than half a dozen conversations they could settle the basis of an agreement or find out that agreement is not possible. I believe

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that agreement is possible, but I am convinced that time is working not for but against a settlement. *Liberavi animum meum*. I can do no more. If Asquith does not press on his private negotiations now it will be, in my opinion, quite useless to try later—and you know I speak as one who desires that these conversations should succeed.

Yours very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Unhappily the dismal prospect that Austen held out in the last paragraph of his letter proved to be a true prophecy, and there was nothing more that he could do. The meetings between the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law proved fruitless, and events drove on at an accelerated pace those who were no longer able to control them.

The new year did not begin any more auspiciously for Austen than its predecessor had done. His father decided that he would not offer himself for re-election in West Birmingham, and at his earnest request his son promised to succeed him there. Austen felt the break with East Worcestershire very keenly indeed, for personal associations of this nature always meant a great deal to him. The change also implied strenuous work. Little had been done in the constituency for eight years, a new generation of voters had come into being, and Austen was known very largely by hearsay as his father's son. Nevertheless, as he said at one of his earlier meetings : ' I do not feel very much of a stranger in West Birmingham. I am not really an article of foreign manufacture—I am rather what would be classified in Board of Trade statistics as a re-import. I was born in Birmingham, I began my public life in Birmingham, and if I was sent to East Worcestershire for them to put a polish on the article there, and work it up a little, after all I am a Birmingham man at heart.* He and his wife threw themselves into the task, and they had an invaluable asset in Mr. Neville Chamberlain. Describing one demonstration Austen wrote :

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Neville, I need scarcely say, was most warmly received, both in All Saints' Ward¹ and at the conference. I chaffingly told him that I was undergoing a new experience. Hitherto, I had been accustomed to be the biggest man in my constituency, but I now found that I was only his little brother. This is halfchaff, but it also contains a real truth, for they know and like Neville in a way in which they can only come to know and like me when they have seen a great deal more of me.

As in the previous year, Austen, his wife, and the children went to Folkestone in February, though Austen himself was in London a great part of the time. On March 9th, after their return, the Prime Minister brought forward a scheme of *provisional exclusion,' by which any county in Ulster was to be entitled to vote itself out of the Home Rule Bill, after a preliminary requisition by a certain proportion of the registered voters, for a period of six years. Within that time there would be at least two General Elections in England, in 1915 and 1920, so that the electorate would have two opportunities of expressing its opinion. If, at the end of six years, the Imperial Parliament had not confirmed the exclusion of such counties they were to come under the control of Dublin. This offer was at once inadequate and too late. It pleased no one, and Sir Edward Carson bluntly termed it 'a sentence of death with stay of execution for six years.' Austen took the view that it was quite insufficient, but the country had hardly had enough time to consider it in all its aspects before the disturbing news was heard that Army officers at the Curragh were resigning their commissions sooner than march against Ulster. The 'incident' which Austen so greatly dreaded had taken place.

In view of the importance of the Curragh incident,' and the painful impression which it made, the exact facts must be stated. On the morning of March 20th the officers in the Irish Command were ordered by Sir A. Paget, the G.O.C.,

¹ For which he sat on the Birmingham City Council.

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to decide by five o'clock in the afternoon whether they were willing to march against Ulster, or to be dismissed the Service. Incidentally, the latter alternative was illegal, for an officer can only be dismissed the Service by sentence of court-martial, but this is a minor point ; what those concerned really resented was the fact that they were forced to make such a choice. If direct orders had been given, as they should have been, the officers would have carried them out. Feeling on this point was particularly strong in the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General (now Sir) Hubert Gough.

General Gough went at once to the 5th Lancers, who were quartered in Dublin, and informed them of the orders he had received from Sir A. Paget ; he then returned to the Curragh, and in the afternoon addressed, at the 16th Lancers' Mess, the officers of the remainder of his brigade. He told them that Sir Arthur Paget had informed him that active operations against Ulster were imminent, and that the G.O.C. had further ordered that the officers were to be presented with what amounted to an ultimatum : namely that those whose actual home was in Ulster were to be allowed to be absent from duty during the operations in that province, and could disappear ; all other officers had to decide whether they would carry out their duties and obey all orders, even to the extent of making war on Ulster, or send in their resignations and be dismissed the Service. General Gough concluded : * Gentlemen, this is a matter which so seriously affects your future that I am not going to give you any advice on the matter at all, nor tell you what I personally am going to do. The decision must rest with the conscience of each individual officer.' He then dismissed his officers to their own quarters to make the decision. The infantry brigades were given the same alternatives, though in their case the whole weight of authority was exerted to prevent the officers resigning ; the result was that there were in all some fifty resignations, mostly from the Cavalry Brigade.

This development not unnaturally alarmed Sir Arthur Paget, and he accordingly summoned the officers of the

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Cavalry Brigade at the Curragh, less the 5th Lancers, to meet him the following morning, when he addressed them in terms which must, in the mouth of a G.O.C., be unique in the annals of the British Army. He commenced by saying that he was their friend and would not place them in any invidious position. He had no intention of making war on Ulster, and all that was intended was some moves to protect stores which were threatened by Hibernians. To such an extent was he prepared to go to avoid fighting that he had given orders that if any battalion met with opposition from the Ulstermen on its march it was to turn round and go back to barracks. If fighting against the Ulster Volunteers did occur he would order his men not to return the fire, but to lie down while he and his generals advanced alone through the firing-line to parley with the other side.

He then proceeded to deal with the case of the cavalry, whom he declared he did not really need, except perhaps for one regiment. In consequence, he would engineer a bogus disturbance in the south, and send the cavalry there to get them out of the way if only the officers would withdraw their resignations. If, however, the cavalry encountered an enemy, they would be under no obligation to fight, but could run away or hoist the white flag as they preferred. Even if a squadron should be on his flank in an engagement he would, if it cleared his flank for him, be very pleased, but if it took no active part he would be content. It is hardly surprising that one of those present should have said of this part of the General's speech that 'his idea of a sort of pantomime battle revolted most of us.'

Every kind of appeal was made in this truly remarkable oration. The officers by resigning were bringing disgrace on famous regiments ; it was not a soldier's job to indulge in sickly sentimentality ; he would march infantry to the cavalry lines, and disarm the regiments concerned ; General Gough and his officers would be tried by court-martial. Nor did Sir Arthur hesitate to introduce the name of the King, for he told the officers they must understand that the command to march against Ulster was the direct order of

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the sovereign, and he asked if they thought that he would obey the instructions of those 'dirty swine of politicians.' In spite, however, of the diversity of the arguments addressed to them, the officers refused to give way.

Austen got early news of what had happened, for he was a friend of General Gough's brother, also a soldier, who was then stationed at Aldershot. In common with the other Conservative leaders he did everything in his power to find a way out of the crisis, and in this they were greatly aided by Lord Roberts, who went to see the King, and by General (later Field-Marshal) Sir Henry Wilson, who was at that time Director of Military Operations on the General Staff. The upshot of their efforts was that General Hubert Gough returned to Ireland on the 23rd, after a brief visit to London, with a written assurance that the troops under his command would not be used to coerce the people of Ulster into acceptance of the Home Rule Bill.

The immediate and military crisis was thus over a few days after it had begun, but it left an ugly legacy of suspicion behind it. 'The net result of the whole,' Austen wrote on the day that the settlement was announced, 'is, as it seems to me, that the Government have tried to use force, and their weapon has broken in their hands; coercion of Ulster is now impossible, and they will be forced to propose fresh terms of accommodation. So much to the good. But on the other hand the discipline of the Army is seriously affected and a tremendous stimulus given to those Syndicalists and Socialists who want again to try conclusions with society in a general strike, and who will echo Ramsay MacDonald's cry of "Class prejudice in the Army"; whilst the Army itself, if called upon again to act in a coal strike or railway strike, will have its morale badly shaken by the memory of what has passed, and whatever Government is in power will be confronted by "incidents" of the most difficult and delicate character. The fabric of society is loosened. It will take long to repair the rents.' Had it not been for the coming of war with Germany five months later these gloomy forebodings might well have been fulfilled.

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In the debate in the House of Commons a day or two later Austen wound up for the Opposition in a speech which caused Balfour to remark : ' I never heard anything better done.' The feeling on both sides was greatly exacerbated by what had happened, and all over the country a diametrically opposite construction was put upon the same events. Conservatives held that Mr. Asquith and his colleagues had made up their minds to provoke Ulster to take up arms, and then to crush her by force ; and that only the blunders of Sir Arthur Paget, and the resolute action of the officers at the Curragh, had prevented the execution of this nefarious scheme. The supporters of the Government, on the other hand, were convinced that the Army, in co-operation with the leaders of the Opposition, had acted unconstitutionally in sabotaging the policy of His Majesty's Ministers.

Austen, as we have seen, had never been an extremist where the Irish question was concerned, but on this issue he was as convinced as any Orangeman of the perfidy of the Cabinet. ' The temper on both sides,' he is found writing, ' is hotter and feeling more bitter than it has been since 1886. I suppose the Radicals really do believe that there was an Army plot, whilst on our side, however reluctant some of us may be even to admit to ourselves that Ministers have lied, there is not one of us who can believe their disingenuous story that none of them contemplated anything more than putting a sufficient guard over valuable military stores. If nothing was intended but to guard a few military stores, would you move battle fleets and torpedo destroyers, cavalry and horse artillery ? Would you give officers the choice of " disappearing " if they were domiciled in Ulster, and of sending in their papers and being dismissed the Service if they did not wish to take part in the movement ? No jury would believe that statement on oath. Officers and men would have been ordered to go, and been court-martialled if they had disobeyed orders. You only give officers a choice when you recognize that it is civil war and that ordinary rules and ordinary methods do not apply.'

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When the resignations of Colonel Seely, General French, and Sir J. S. Ewart, respectively Secretary of State for War, Chief of the General Staff, and Adjutant-General, were announced, and when Mr. Asquith himself took charge of the War Office, it became clear that the Government realized it had blundered. To quote Austen once again : * One thing stands out clearly from the debates in both Houses. The Government have been forced to admit that the Army and the officers have done no wrong. How, under these circumstances, they think they can raise the cry of the Army against the People with success I don't know, and how as honest men they can attempt it I cannot conceive.'

The following correspondence between Mrs. Asquith and Chamberlain sufficiently reveals the feeling on both sides in the spring of 1914 :

10 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.

May 10th, 1914

DEAR MR. AUSTEN,

I don't suppose you know or care if I and my husband are for you or not, but as a matter of fact we *do* care, and always shall care for you. I could see last night¹ how worried you are, and I hope I said nothing to add to your worry. Life is very, very short, and I think with the exception perhaps of Arthur and my husband politicians in moments of crisis get quite out of proportion, and this is why they both say and do foolish things.

I have never been a rabid Home Ruler ; in fact till after Gerald Balfour came back from Ireland (and Wyndham and Arthur) I thought the Ulstermen were the only people that counted ; but both Arthur, Gerald, Wyndham, and the Dudleys told me if I were to live in Ireland I would find Ulstermen rather hard and narrow. Be this as it may, my husband has always been confident that he can settle the Irish question. He got into the House of Commons entirely on Home Rule in 1886. He fought against an advanced

¹ At a State Banquet.

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Radical (and no Unionist) on Home Rule. Bargains are not necessary if there are beliefs. Your Party have been helped in past days by the Irish. Your father said to me after the last election : ' The first thing that we shall do when we get into office is to bring in Home Rule.' (I will show this to you in my political diary.) I don't suppose if Hartington had lived we would have had all this row, because though he was very much against Home Rule he was a very wise man, and he never took the lowest view of his enemies or imputed either lies or baseness to them.

Do you realize where we should have been now if there *had* been ' a Plot' to overwhelm Ulster with millions of men and ships ? We should have been *swept out* by every back-bench Liberal and the whole public opinion of these islands. I will go further : the first shot that is fired now my Henry goes down and all his life's work is over. *There never* was ' a Plot' of any sort or kind, I swear, as I wish God to help me both here and hereafter.

I think it is having put your money on the wrong horse, and finding that so far from scoring over the follies our men have committed the country has been roused to fury by the monotonous manufacture of Babel and Billingsgate that is making the present bitterness.

I defend none of our fools, but surely it must have been *quite* evident to you if not at once but for some little time *who* the fools have been. You may say : ' The first fool is your husband for not having given away the others ' ; there is a great deal to be said for this view, but he will *never give* them away. Some of you who believe in ' the Plot' say *nothing* had happened. *Why* move a soldier at all ? Ulster was as peaceful as a dove, etc., *but you* didn't know that a great many things *had* happened—five Ulstermen in one day (apart from heavy warnings since Dec. from Ulster) had come over to say what all of you and your Press were saying daily, and had been saying for a year : ' We are on the last brink—civil war ! Civil war ! One movement, one small trifle may set both sides at each other's throat. Going! Going! Go . . . , etc'

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They also told us the Carson army wanted guns and ammunition (proved to be true now), and that our depots were quite unprotected and needed tremendous reinforcements ; Henry, who is not half as stupid and dilatory as your front bench think him, was so anxious not to *appear* even to provoke Ulster that he did what you all know, and a lot of our men were angry with him after the gun-running¹ that he did not budge. This is all old history, but though no doubt quite sincere, ' the Plot ' was bad tactics.

I admired you for saying you longed to turn us out except for your difficulty in Ireland. Would it not be wiser for this reason *only* to try and fix up the question and show a little size ? It will be worse for you than for us, as you will lose both sides in Ireland, the Ulstermen and the Nationalists.

After Carson's noble speech the other day and Arthur's, I think between you you should take quite another line. Stop the hundred questions a day, and try to make a settlement, if only temporary. You'll get in in time to reverse Home Rule, the veto of the House of Lords, insurance, etc. The country gets dog-tired of both sides if they stay in too long. There are lots of fellows who detest us in the country. They are terrified of their pockets (always a very taking fear and very infectious).

There are a lot of ardent and powerful Tariff Reformers, and many forces on your side not to mention the Church, the brewers, and the West End of London and other towns, but among these there are men who like fair play and courtesy : they don't think my husband a knave or a fool, and they resent the Unionists claiming and encouraging by their Press and their speeches politics in the Army. ' The Army has killed Home Rule ' ; ' The Army will never do this, and never do that ' ; in fact—put in plain words—' The Army is of our beliefs and not of yours.' This may be true, but to scream it out was *wrong*, and *nothing* can make it right. The opinion on these matters of General French, General Henderson, and more soldiers than you could

¹ Cf. *infra*.

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believe would amaze you, and there are *some* very sane liberal-minded men in the Army.

I stop all this, and hope I've said nothing you mind (I hold no brief for Winston's irritating speeches), nor, I hope, will you think it necessary for you and your delightful wife to avoid me. I shall never change to any of my friends or foes.

Yrs. sincerely,

MARGOT ASQUITH.

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

May nth, 1914

DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

I am not going to quarrel with any private friends on political grounds if I can avoid it ; but it is just for this reason that I would have avoided conversation with you or other *political* opponents at this moment if I could, for it is a moment at which it is difficult to be frank without being disagreeable. Our conversation will, however, make no difference between us, I am sure.

I won't discuss 'the Plot' (please note the very conciliatory inverted commas) with you, but I will ask you to read the P.M.'s speech and Winston's. I enclose two extracts. They will at least show you why we, who are no more 'all fools and knaves' than the Govt., believed, and believe still, that the intentions of the moving spirits of the Cabinet Committee were very different from those avowed by the P.M., and why we thought that the P.M. did not know (and perhaps still does not know) all his colleagues were doing, and certainly did not know all they were *contemplating*.

So much, and only so much, for the past. As to the future, I want peace. I should like it to be peace with honour for all concerned. I think I have shown as much by my speeches in and out of the House. But I believe that the course of the Govt, is making for war. Six months have been wasted, and worse than wasted. I see no real effort to come to terms with Carson or with Law. I know they

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want peace. I do not doubt that the P.M. wants it; but every day that he has allowed to slip away without advancing towards it, and every step he takes to force on the unamended Bill, lessens the chance of peace.

Meanwhile you complain—and I do not wonder—at the tone of our speeches. I might defend them, or I might retort by asking you to ponder Lloyd George's effusion to the candidate at Grimsby, but a *quoi bon*? The truth is that these things are inevitable while the fight goes on. They will grow worse and not better. . . .

What does the P.M. want? What does he mean? I don't know and none of us knows. Would this be the case after six months of conversations, if he had meant business from the first?

But there! I am doing what I did not intend to do—perhaps making matters worse instead of better. I cannot say anything that will please you except that there shall be no personal quarrel, if I can avoid it, with you, and in that case 'you' includes Mr. Asquith, for I am not such a fool as to suppose that I can quarrel with your husband and remain your friend.

Yrs. very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—You *must* have misunderstood my father. He could not have said that *we* should bring in Home Rule. He was then and is now decidedly more uncompromising than his degenerate son. He must have meant that the first thing *you* should do was to bring in Home Rule.

A. C.

For Easter the Austen Chamberlains had gone to Crowborough, and once more Austen displayed his marvellous capacity for enjoying a holiday to the full, whatever political cares there might be in the background:

This afternoon we took a fly again, and Ivy, Joe, and I

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went for a drive. The day grew finer as it went on, though the wind did not drop altogether till after our return for tea. Our road took us along country lanes, over a broad common and through woods with fine beech, oak, and yew trees. We stopped twice to pick flowers, and brought home a bunch of cowslips, wood sorrel, anemones, and lady-smock. We found the leaves of *Orchis mascula* in a field where Ivy and Joe picked it two years ago, but there were no flower spikes visible as yet. Our room is gay with flowers. The hotel provides us with a vase of pretty tulips and another of garden daffodils and narcissus, and we have added another of gorse and catkins and twigs of larch, with their lovely red blossom, and no less than five bowls of primroses, wood anemones, and cowslips.

What a change from the wild rush of political excitement of the last few weeks ! It is all so peaceful and delightful, and Hyde Park seems far away.

The allusion to Hyde Park was to a big Unionist demonstration there not long before when Austen had spoken from one of the platforms. It was not an experience that gave him much pleasure, and he wrote of it : 'I feel that if I did that sort of thing three Saturdays running I should infallibly become a kind of third-rate Jim Larkin, incapable of argument or reason, husky-voiced and blatant.' **Very** different were his feelings that Easter :

Easter Sunday, and as lovely a day as heart could wish for. Beautiful sunshine, a cloudless sky, a lovely landscape, buds bursting into leaf and flower in the genial warmth, the birds singing in every tree and bush, and, gladdest of all, the song of the larks as they soared upwards into **the** blue. All nature seemed to be rejoicing. It is on this **day** of all others, not even excepting Christmas Day, that I always feel regret that I cannot join Ivy at Communion—a feeling that you will understand and sympathize with.

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She has brought so much into my life, and we share all else so completely that it always makes me a little sad that on this day and at this service, which means so much to her, I cannot be with her.

Austen had not long been back in London before Ireland produced another sensation, for on the night of April 24th there was a very successful piece of gun-running in Ulster. Along guarded roads 25,000 rifles and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition were rushed away to points of distribution in lorries and cars, and the efficiency of the Unionist organization was attested by the fact that no fewer than 16,000 men were employed. Austen noted on the 29th :

I first heard of the moment fixed for the gun-running on Friday afternoon. Had it been possible to postpone it, Carson would, I think, have done so, not on account of our debate, but because the situation in Ireland had changed so completely since the Gurragh episode ; but the arrangements were too far advanced, and the ship and its crew could not be kept indefinitely waiting. We were in some anxiety lest the attempt might result in bloodshed in spite of all precautions, but, as you will have seen, the preparations were made with a completeness, and everything was carried through with a smoothness and a success, which reflect the highest credit on the brains of the Ulster movement.

In May a new experience befell Austen, for he spoke at the Oxford Union. It was, indeed, a sign of the times that the Eights Week Debate should be concerned, not with some frivolous subject, but with Ireland, for the motion was ' That this house supports the Home Rule Bill as a step towards the ultimate federal organization of the United Kingdom.'⁵ Mr. A. H. M. Wedderburn, affectionately

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known to his contemporaries as ' God/ was President of the Union that term, and the motion was proposed by Mr. G. H. Strauss, of Christ Church. Austen made no attempt, in opposing the motion, to be epigrammatic, but for three-quarters of an hour he stated the case against Home Rule, and when the count was taken it was found that the motion had been lost by 317 votes to 234. The number of those voting was an eloquent tribute to the popularity of the guest of the evening.

A few weeks later, on July 2nd, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain died. He had returned from Cannes early in May, and his sudden death was unexpected. Austen saw his father on the morning of that day, and Mr. Chamberlain questioned him about some debate a day or two before. Austen mentioned a speech by the Prime Minister, and his father asked what he had replied. ' Quite right,'⁵ he said when he had been told ; and added as Austen left the room : ' Somebody has got to give way, but I don't see why it should always be us.' These were the last words he spoke to his son. What Austen owed to his father, and how close were the ties between them has been indicated on many a page of the present work. The immediate effect was that Austen had to forsake East Worcestershire, where he was succeeded by his friend Mr. Leverton Harris, for West Birmingham sooner than he had intended, but the Liberals, with one of those courtesies which so often mark the politics of Great Britain off from those of other countries, refrained from opposing his return in spite of the fierce Party feeling of the moment.

While Austen was thus occupied with family and personal matters, one last effort was being made, by the King himself, to secure a compromise on Home Rule, and to prevent civil war. A conference was summoned at Buckingham Palace, and it was composed of the Prime Minister and Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Redmond and Mr. Dillon, Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Craig. It was a vain hope. On July 24th Mr. Asquith announced in the House of Commons that the conference had been unable to come to any agreement

'either in principle or in detail.' It seemed impossible to avoid catastrophe, for within a few weeks the Home Rule Bill would become law. Two days after the Prime Minister had spoken the Nationalists landed a big consignment of arms near Howth, while, on the other side, arrangements were being hurriedly made for opening English country houses to women and children from Ulster as soon as the fighting should begin. Such was the state of British politics when, on July 28th, the Foreign Secretary rose in the Commons to make a statement concerning the Austrian rejection of Serbia's reply to an ultimatum demanding satisfaction for the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand at Serajevo a month before.

Three days later, on Friday the 31st, Austen went down to Westgate, where his wife and children were staying, confident that the Government had made up its mind to support France and Russia. The time had not yet come when, in moments of international crisis, Ministers took their opponents into their confidence, and Austen and his Conservative colleagues were largely dependent upon hearsay for information as to the progress of events. Two men in particular were tireless in their efforts to keep their leaders apprised of what was happening, namely Mr. Amery and Mr. (later Lord) Lloyd. Neither was, as a back-bencher, at that time in a position to influence the issue himself, but both took care that Austen should be at once informed of every development in the situation. He was not destined to remain long at Westgate. About three o'clock in the afternoon of the day following that on which he arrived he received a telegram from Mr. Amery to the effect that the latter was coming down in a couple of hours. Actually he did not arrive until nearly eight, owing to a breakdown on the line, and so serious was the news he brought that Austen **went back** to London with him by the next train.

Mr. Lloyd met them on their arrival about one o'clock the following morning, and the three men adjourned to Austen's house in Egerton Place. Mr. Lloyd had plenty of news. There had been a discussion on the Friday evening

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at Mr. Goulding's house at Wargrave, where Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. F. E. Smith, and Sir Edward Carson were staying, and it then transpired that there were acute differences of opinion in the Government regarding the policy to be adopted. The Cabinet was overwhelmingly pacific, and in the event of intervention some seven or eight resignations were to be expected. Mr. Churchill, who had already envisaged the inclusion of Conservatives in the administration, had told Mr. F. E. Smith of the situation in inner Liberal circles, and wanted an assurance that if these resignations took place the vacancies would be filled by the Opposition leaders. Mr. Bonar Law ' would give no encouragement to Birkenhead. He objected to Mr. Churchill as the medium, and commented on the fact that overtures were made through him. This method of indirect communication so common in political circles never suited Bonar Law, and he would take no action. . . . Matters, therefore, advanced no further than the acceptance of the general idea that the Tories should support the Government if it declared for war, and Churchill's effort, though well intentioned, failed.'¹ The next afternoon the whole party from Wargrave motored up to London, which they reached while Mr. Amery was still in the train on his way to Westgate.

This was not the only information which Mr. Lloyd had to relate. He had been in touch with M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, who had told him that the Government was taking no steps to support France. Mr. Lloyd had come straight from Lansdowne House, where Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Bonar Law had been discussing the situation, together with General Wilson. They had separated without taking any definite action, beyond offering to see the Prime Minister if he so desired, and Mr. Lloyd was depressed at what he had seen and heard. Mr. Balfour, he told Austen, of course understood the position, but Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne did not seem to grasp its significance. Austen was the only man

¹ Lord Bcaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, vol. I, pp. 23-24.

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who could get them to move. Shortly after two o'clock Mr. Lloyd left, and Austen at last got to bed.

Early next morning he was on the telephone to Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law, and as a result arranged to be at Lansdowne House at half-past nine. Actually he got there a quarter of an hour earlier, and while he was waiting for his host he wrote the following note to be sent by his colleagues to the Prime Minister. It is still in existence, on the notepaper of Lansdowne House :

We feel it our duty to declare that, in our opinion, any hesitation in now supporting France and Russia, our intimate friends (with one of whom at least we have for years past concerted naval and military measures affecting gravely her own military and naval dispositions at this moment), would be fatal to the future security of the United Kingdom ; and we offer His Majesty's Government the assurance of the united support of the Opposition in all measures required by England's intervention in the war.

In the original draft the only alteration is ' United Kingdom ' for * Great Britain.'

Almost as soon as Austen had finished writing Lord Lansdowne made his appearance, and, whatever may have been the case on the previous evening, he at once declared that it was out of the question for England to hang back. No answer had been received from the Prime Minister, so Austen urged very strongly that his host and Mr. Bonar Law should go at once to Downing Street, demand to see Mr. Asquith, and tell him what they felt. Lord Lansdowne was somewhat reluctant to adopt what seemed to him desperate remedies, but while he was out of the room having his breakfast Chamberlain drafted another note to serve as the basis of a further communication to be made verbally to Mr. Asquith if it was discovered that the Government had irrevocably decided not to intervene. It ran as follows :

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If the Government are found to have definitely decided against the immediate declaration of war, urge (i) that mobilization be at once ordered ; and (2) that the Government require from Germany within twenty-four hours a categorical undertaking to respect *in all contingencies* the neutrality of Belgium (or the Low Countries).

Austen had originally written 'be definitely opposed against/ which he altered to 'have definitely decided against.'⁵ The suggestions themselves were founded on some remarks made by General Wilson to Mr. Lloyd. By the time this had been written Lord Lansdowne had breakfasted, and ten o'clock found him and Austen at Mr. Bonar Law's house in Edwardes Square.

The Conservative leader was in agreement with his colleagues as to the proper course for the country to pursue, but he was unwilling to take any further steps to get into touch with the Prime Minister. He had been invited to dine with Mr. Churchill and Sir Edward Grey, but had refused for fear that to accept would make it appear that he was intriguing with a section of the Cabinet behind Mr. Asquith's back. Austen was insistent that matters could not be left where they were. The Cabinet was to meet in less than an hour, and it was most important that those members of it who wished to stand by France and Russia should be acquainted with the attitude of the Opposition. It was the more urgent owing to two events. On the previous Wednesday, at dinner, Mr. Balfour had been talking to Sir Arthur Nicolson (later Lord Carnock), who was then permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and, not uncharacteristically, argued against co-operation with France and Russia, the policy in which he really believed, for the sake of the dialectical exercise. Sir Arthur took him seriously, and reported what he thought were Mr. Balfour's views to Sir Edward Grey. To make the position even more complicated, Lord Hugh Cecil had written to Mr. Churchill in favour of the neutrality of Great Britain.

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This news seems to have made Mr. Bonar Law change his mind. Austen was in and out of the room at the telephone, and at his return on the last occasion Mr. Bonar Law suddenly said, somewhat to the other's surprise : ' I am not sure that after all Austen is not right. I think we ought to write to the Prime Minister.'⁵ The three men then composed the following letter :

DEAR MR. ASQUITH,

Lord Lansdowne and I feel it our duty to inform you that, in our opinion, as well as that of all the colleagues whom we have been able to consult, any hesitation in now supporting France and Russia would be fatal to the honour and to the future security of the United Kingdom, and we offer H.M. Government the assurance of the united support of the Opposition in all measures required by England's intervention in the war.

This was signed by Mr. Bonar Law, and reached the Prime Minister before the meeting of the Cabinet at eleven. When the Cabinet met, two of its members, Lord Morley and Sir John Simon, had already resigned, though the latter ultimately withdrew his resignation, and Germany had declared war on Russia.

The rest of that Sunday was as disturbed for Austen as for everybody else in a responsible position. From Edwardes Square he went back to Egerton Place ; rang up Mr. Lloyd to find that Mr. Amery was at his house ; and went round there to get the latest information which had reached Mr. Lloyd from the French Embassy, with which he was in constant communication. Among Austen's papers are several notes received during that momentous day. At five-ten Mr. Lloyd telephoned to say that German troops had crossed the French frontier near Nancy without a declaration of war, and half an hour later arrived the following letter from Mr. Amery :

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9 Embankment Gardens, Chelsea, S.W.
2.8.14

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

I have had a message from Wilson that Asquith has allowed him to hold up all the trains that were to have taken Territorials out to camp, except some forty trains which have gone already ; having these trains held in readiness means a most important saving of time if mobilization is decided on, and Wilson construes Asquith's consent as a favourable sign as far as it goes.

Yours sincerely,

L. S. AMERY.

At eight-fifty Austen received a hurried note from Mr. Lloyd :

Have just had word from French Embassy that the position here though better is not good. At 4 p.m. Govt, had decided to give naval support under certain conditions ! ! This is *not* enough ; can nothing more be done ?

G. L.

After dinner Austen joined Lord Lansdowne and the Duke of Devonshire at Brooks's, where Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson also soon arrived. They brought with them a communication from the Prime Minister in which he stated that Great Britain was under no obligations to France, but admitted that it was a British interest not to see France crushed. Austen regarded the letter as ' most unsatisfactory,⁵ and said it ' looked as if the Government were searching for excuses to do nothing.' Actually there was more to be said for the Prime Minister's attitude than the Opposition leaders were in the excitement of the moment prepared to concede. To this Sir Edward Grey was later to bear witness : ' Had it not been for Asquith the outbreak of war might have found us with a Cabinet

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in disorder or dissolution, impotent to take any decision.' ¹ Austen also learnt at this time that Mr. Churchill had had a talk with Mr. Balfour that day. Before the Conservative statesmen separated it was decided that Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne should see the Prime Minister the next morning.

Before going to bed Austen wrote to Lord Lansdowne :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Aug. 2nd, 1914

11 p.m.

MY DEAR LANSDOWNE,

1. With reference to No. i of Asquith's memo, to Law (' England is under no obligations express or implied to France ') there recurs to my mind a passage in the account George Lloyd gave to me last night of Cambon's conversation. C. said : ' There is no written agreement of any sort or kind. There isn't a scrap of paper. But there is more.* Everything, every act of the last few years gave us the assurance of your support, etc. etc' And then came a bitter cry : '*Et Vhonneur ? Est ce que VAngleterre comprend ce que c'est que Vhonneur ?*'—or some similar words.

2. I was most gravely surprised and disturbed by Carson's language about Ulster Volunteers. I beg you to impress on Law and Carson that any failure on the part of reservists—officers and men—being Ulster Volunteers, to obey a mobilization order will damn to all eternity the Ulster cause. I hope and believe that the question is purely academic, but any public expression of the thoughts Carson uttered to-night, or any failure of the Ulstermen to do their duty in this crisis, will in my opinion *absolutely ruin the cause of the Union*. I cannot put this too strongly.

Yrs. ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

* Compare what you said to-night : ^c An entente is stronger than an alliance, because it is not defined.'

¹ *Twenty-five Tears*, vol. II, p. 242.

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P.S.—Amery has just been in (11.45), having been at *The Times* and *Morning Post* offices. Both Gwynne and Geoffrey Robinson believe that the Cabinet is stiffening, and that the evening meeting was more satisfactory. Harcourt is said to be leading the peace-at-any-price party. Henry Wilson got leave this afternoon or evening to call in all outlying detachments to their regiments. This was refused earlier. Artillery and baggage were moving in Victoria Street as Amery passed through.

A small crowd was cheering outside the French Embassy as I came home.

I suggest that you should ask Asquith whether it is true that Germany has refused to pledge itself to observe the neutrality of Belgium.

I believe German troops are in Luxembourg, but this, I think, is not new, though contrary to the treaty of 1867 (May 31), article 2, to which we are one of the guarantors.

The following morning, that of Monday, August 3rd, Austen attended a meeting of the Opposition leaders at Lansdowne House at eleven to hear the account of what had passed at the interview of Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne with the Prime Minister. It was a representative gathering, for in addition to those already mentioned there were present Mr. Balfour, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Salisbury, Lord Robert Cecil, and Mr. Walter Long. Austen and his colleagues then heard for the first time what were Mr. Asquith's real sentiments, and as a result criticism of the Prime Minister personally began to subside. Austen played a considerable part on this occasion, as, indeed, he had done ever since the beginning of the crisis. * A note from Mr. Churchill, handed to Mr. Balfour while we were together, explained that Sir Edward Grey had made his announcement about the fleet to the French Ambassador only, and that it had not been communicated to the German Ambassador, who would learn it only from the declaration made this afternoon in the House of Commons. I held up

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my hands in horror at this slipshod way of conducting affairs, saying : " Suppose the German fleet comes out not knowing of our intentions—is the British admiral to fire a shot across its bows, and order it to go back ? " ' "

Austen at this meeting also seems to have made the first suggestion that Lord Kitchener, who was about to return to Egypt, might be appointed Secretary of State for War. * I said that Leverton Harris had telephoned to me that Girouard had just been to see him, saying that affairs at the War Office were in some confusion owing to the fact that the Prime Minister had no time for his departmental duties as Secretary of State, and suggesting that Kitchener, who left London at eleven-thirty this morning, might well be kept and used at the War Office. This idea was taken up, and Balfour sent an immediate note to Winston, then at the Cabinet, asking if it had occurred to the Prime Minister that Kitchener might be more useful in organization at the War Office at this moment than in Egypt. If the Prime Minister approved the idea there would be time to stop Kitchener at Dover.'

That afternoon Sir Edward Grey made his memorable speech in the House of Commons, and the next day Great Britain was at war. In the light of the evidence it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Austen played the decisive part in inducing the Opposition leaders to bring pressure to bear on the Government to stand by France and Russia, or that this pressure was largely responsible for a decision being taken before it was too late. Ten days later Austen received a letter from his brother Neville :

We are most grateful for the intensely interesting memorandum which I return herewith. It makes one fairly gasp to think that we were within a hair's-breadth of eternal disgrace, and some day the country will be grateful to Amery, G. Lloyd, and you for having preserved her honour.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE'S MEMORANDUM ON THE FORMATION OF A COALITION, AUGUST 17th, 1910

SOME of the urgent problems awaiting settlement, problems which concern intimately the happiness and the efficiency of the inhabitants of these islands, their strength and influence, can only be successfully coped with by the active co-operation of both the great Parties in the State. Parties will always disagree on certain vital issues affecting the government of this country : their respective points of view are essentially different; but at the present moment the questions which are of the most vital importance to the well-being of the great community are all questions which are not only capable of being settled by the joint action of the two great Parties without involving any sacrifice of principle on the part of either, but which can be better settled by such co-operation than by the normal working of Party machinery. This country has gained a good deal from the conflict and rivalry of Parties, and it will gain a good deal more in the future from the same cause ; but I cannot help thinking that the time has arrived for a truce, for bringing the resources of the two Parties into joint stock in order to liquidate arrears which, if much longer neglected, may end in national impoverishment, if not insolvency.

It must be quite clear to any observer that the rapid rise of great foreign competitors has put us in a position where no time ought to be lost in repairing the deficiencies of our national system and putting our machinery in better order, in order to equip us for a state of things with which we have never before been confronted. For the first time in hundreds of years the Continent has enjoyed a long period of peace and repose and foreign nations have employed the immunity from internal and external conflicts in developing their industrial and commercial equipment to an extent which menaces our supremacy. Under these circumstances it becomes us to sink our differences and to unite in combined and sustained effort to reorganize the national life of our country in all its branches, so as to put us in a position where we need have no apprehension as to the future of the British Empire whatever the strain may be that shall be put upon its resources. I would summarize the advantages which in my judgment will be gained by attempting a non-Party solution of the great Imperial and national problems to which I have alluded :

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i. None of these great problems can be effectively dealt with without incurring temporary unpopularity.

There is always some essential part of a scheme, sometimes the most useful and far-reaching in its beneficial results, which for the moment has to face a good deal of misapprehension. A large number of people misunderstand it, and it causes an amount of apprehension which experience alone can dispel. If you have a hostile Party with nearly half the nation amongst its organized supporters waiting to take advantage of every slip, no Ministry will be disposed to take unnecessary risks, and often the unpopular section of a project has to be ruthlessly cut out, in order to save the remnant, although that section may be essential to a complete and successful treatment of the subject.

2. When you come to subjects of this kind, the equality of the Parties in numbers is in itself a source of weakness, for it means that a Government has only to alienate a comparatively small number of the electorate of the country in order to incur defeat, and an Opposition has only to win the support of the same number in order to oust their opponents from power. Thus, often the least responsible, the least well informed and the most selfish amongst the electorate may have a decisive voice in determining the issues upon which the whole future of the British Empire may depend. If joint action between the Parties could be negotiated, these undesirable elements would sink to their proper insignificance as factors.

3. This is a corollary of the two preceding propositions. No settlement is possible without exciting a good many ill-informed prejudices, some of them with an historical basis. They cannot be argued with, they cannot always be voted down ; but they are extremely pernicious in their influence upon the settlement of a difficult and complex problem. Separate action means that a Party in opposition is driven into enlisting the support of these prejudices, whether it wishes to do so or not : the more extreme men amongst their own supporters on the platform and in the Press always take advantage of these elements, however enlightened a view the Party leaders may take. Joint action will enable a Government based on the best of the strength of the two Parties to ignore these prejudices.

4. Parties are now committed through a long course of controversy to particular methods of dealing with problems, and however much the more instructed amongst them may feel that there are other and better alternatives which have not been put forward, no Party can afford to abandon the position which it has deliberately taken up and long defended in the presence of the enemy. Governments are therefore driven to the second best

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method of settling a question, because their Party programme and Party pledges make it impossible for them to take the best course.

5. Extreme partisans supporting the Government often drive it against its better judgment to attempting legislation on lines which are the least useful in dealing with a question. As a rule the advanced sections of a Party, being propagandist, are the most active, the best organized, the most resolute, and therefore the most irresistible. Joint action would make it possible to settle these urgent questions without paying undue regard to the formulae and projects of rival faddists.

6. No Party has a monopoly of able and efficient men, nor has it a monopoly of duffers. No Party commands the services of more than half a dozen first-rate men, and it has to depend for the filling up of all the other posts in the Government upon the services of men of second- and even third-rate capacity. Inasmuch as some of these posts are of great importance when you come to questions of national organization, under the present system their presence as the heads of these departments presents an effective barrier to reform. The head of a department is supreme in that department; not even the Prime Minister can effectively direct, guide, and control his action; and, as for the rest of the Government, they are too concerned in the management of their own departments to be able to give the necessary attention, even if it were possible for them to interfere with a colleague. It is therefore vital to any scheme of national reorganization that the best men that the nation provides should be secured as heads during the period of reconstruction. This can only be achieved by drawing upon the resources of both Parties in the State.

What are the questions which call for immediate attention and which could properly and effectively be dealt with by some combined effort as I indicate? There are first of all the questions which come under the category of Social Reform: they affect the health, the vitality, the efficiency, and the happiness of the individuals who constitute the races that dwell in these islands.

HOUSING

The putting an end to a system which houses millions of the people under conditions which devitalize their strength, depress their energies, and deprive them of all motive power for putting forth their best.

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DRINK

The problem of excessive drinking has a most intimate relation to other questions of Social Reform. There is no doubt that a vast number of people in this country destroy their physical, mental, and moral powers owing to their addiction to alcohol. One Party has been for the moment completely captured by a rigid and sterile plan for effecting reform ; the other Party's energies are concentrated upon resistance to this scheme. If both Parties put their heads together, they could discover some idea which, whilst treating vested interests fairly, and even generously, would advance the cause of national sobriety.

INSURANCE

Provision against the accidents of life which bring so much undeserved poverty to hundreds of thousands of homes, accidents which are quite inevitable, such as the death of the breadwinner or his premature breakdown in health. I have always thought that the poverty which was brought upon families owing to these causes presents a much more urgent demand upon the practical sympathy of the community than even old age pensions. With old age, the suffering is confined to the individual alone ; but in these other cases it extends to the whole family of the victim of circumstances.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment might also be put in the same category. Whatever is done towards improving the trade conditions, we shall at any rate for some time to come have to face a percentage of unemployment, especially in certain precarious trades. No country has been able to avoid it, and, with fluctuations in trade, the constant improvements in machinery, the variations in public demands for commodities and many other reasons, men will be thrown out of employment temporarily, and great difficulty will be found in absorbing this surplus labour. Much misery will thereby be caused, misery often culminating in hunger and starvation. Every country ought to provide adequately against such disasters.

This question of insurance illustrates one of the difficulties that must necessarily be encountered by every Government that attempts to grapple with it without first of all securing the co-operation of its opponents. The hardest case of all is that of the man who dies in the prime of life leaving a widow and young children. She suddenly finds herself without any adequate means, very often with all her means exhausted by medical and funeral expenses, face to face with the task of

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having not merely to attend to her household duties and the bringing up of the children, but also with that of earning a livelihood for herself and for them. In Germany they contemplate adding provision for widows under these conditions to their ordinary invalidity insurance. It is comparatively easy to set up a system of that kind in Germany ; but here one would have to encounter the bitter hostility of powerful organizations like the Prudential, the Liver, the Royal Victoria, the Pearl, and similar institutions, with an army numbering scores, if not hundreds of thousands, of agents and collectors who make a living out of collecting a few pence a week from millions of households in this country for the purpose of providing death allowances. The expenses of collection and administration come to something like 50 per cent, of the total receipts, and these poor widows and children are by this extravagant system robbed of one half of the benefits which it has cost the workmen so much to provide for them. Sometimes these agents and collectors sell their books and sub-let them and make hundreds of pounds out of the transaction, all at the expense of the poorest and most helpless creatures in the land. This system ought to be terminated at the earliest possible moment. The benefits are small, costly, and precarious, for if a man is unable, owing to ill-health or lack of employment, to keep up his payments, his policy is forfeited. State insurance costs 10 per cent, to administer, and, inasmuch as the State and the employer both contribute, either the premium is considerably less, or the benefits are substantially greater, than with the insurance companies. But, however desirable it may be to substitute State insurance, which does not involve collection and therefore is more economical, any Party that attempted it would instantly incur the relentless hostility of all these agents and collectors. They visit every house, they are indefatigable, they are often very intelligent, and a Government which attempted to take over their work without first of all securing the co-operation of the other Party would inevitably fail in its undertaking ; so that, if a scheme of national insurance is taken in hand by any Party Government, it must be confined to invalidity, and the most urgent and pitiable case of all must be left out. I may add that compensation on an adequate scale is well-nigh impossible, inasmuch as it would cost something like twenty or thirty millions at the very least to buy off the interest of these collectors, and such a payment would crush the scheme and destroy its usefulness. On the other hand, the agents cannot be absorbed in the new system, there being no door-to-door collection contemplated.

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This is an excellent illustration of the difficulty of dealing with some of these problems except by joint action.

THE POOR LAW

This requires overhauling and re-casting, and I can see nothing in the principles of either Party which are irreconcilable in this matter.

NATIONAL REORGANIZATION

There are several questions coming under this head which could be much better dealt with by a Coalition than by a Party administration.

There is education. Not merely could the denominational be thus much more satisfactorily disposed of, inasmuch as the Parties are committed to certain controversial solutions which may not be the very best, but there are questions like the raising of the age limit, which is quite essential if the youth of the country are to receive a training which will enable them to cope with the workmen of Germany and the United States of America.

The same observation applies to the development of technical instruction in this country. The raising of the age limit would excite a good deal of opposition in many quarters, and might gain for a Government great unpopularity, even amongst sections of its own supporters who benefit now largely by boy labour. The Unionist Government of 1886 discovered this, and it is only a Coalition that could, here again, have the strength to face the ignorant and selfish prejudices that will be aroused by any effort to keep the children at school instead of turning them out to make money for their parents.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

This ought to be thoroughly looked into from the point of view of both efficiency and economy.

There are undoubtedly directions in which money can be saved : there are others in which it is imperative that more money should be spent. The whole question of national defence ought to be boldly faced. I doubt whether we are getting our money's worth in any direction. I am strongly of opinion that even the question of compulsory training should not be shirked. No Party dare touch it, because of the violent prejudices which would be excited even if it were suspected that a Government contemplated the possibility of establishing anything of the kind. For that reason it has never really been looked into by statesmen in this country. The Swiss militia system might

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be considered and those liable to serve might be chosen by ballot. We have no such need as Continental countries labour under of organizing an Army of 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 for defence ; but we might aim at raising 500,000 armed militia to supplement our Regular Army to provide against contingencies.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Our whole system of local government is on a very unsatisfactory basis. There are too many boards and there is no system of intelligent direction, such as is provided by the Burgo-masters on the Continent. Whilst there are too many small boards and councils, there are too few large ones, and a good deal of work is cast upon the Imperial Parliament which could be much more efficiently discharged by local bodies on a large scale.

TRADE

The various problems connected with State assistance to trade and commerce could be enquired into with some approach to intelligent and judicial impartiality if Party rivalries were eliminated. We have not merely problems connected with tariffs, but we have the question of inland transport that ought to be thoroughly overhauled. In Germany, the railway is one of the most important weapons of the State for the purpose of promoting the foreign trade of that country.

THE LAND

There is no question which would gain more, by the elimination of Party strife and bitterness, than that of the land. It is admitted on all hands that the land of this country is capable of much more profitable use than is now given to it. Both Parties seem to imagine, for the moment, that the real solution lies in the direction of establishing a system of smallholdings. I think they have been rather too readily rushed by small, but well organized, groups of their own supporters into an acceptance of this doctrine. These groups are inspired by men of no marked intelligence and with little knowledge of land cultivation. The smallholdings craze is of a very doubtful utility ; and I do not think its devotees have sufficiently considered whether farming on a large scale by competent persons with adequate capital is not more likely to be profitable to the community than a system which divides the land amongst a large number of more or less incompetent smallholders. After all, farming is a business, and it requires just as much capacity to run successfully a 50-acre farm as it would to manage a 500-acre holding. There ought

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to be the same knowledge of the qualities of the soil, the same gift of buying and selling, the same skill in making the best of the soil in both cases. It is very rarely that men enjoy a combination of all these gifts ; and it is far better that the majority of men should work under competent guidance, direction, and command than that they should undertake the responsibilities of management. Few are the men who can, if left to themselves, put their own labour to the most fruitful use. The alternatives are worthy of much more careful and thorough consideration than has hitherto been given to them. If a mistake is made, it will be irreparable for generations. Once a system of small-holdings is rooted in this country it will be almost impossible for a very long period to substitute for it a system of farming on a large scale with adequate capital, where the State might very well assist, and under intelligent management.

IMPERIAL PROBLEMS

Schemes for uniting together the Empire and utilizing and concentrating its resources for defence as for commerce might also to much better advantage be undertaken and put through by a Coalition. They are the most delicate and difficult questions that have to be settled by modern statesmanship. In many respects they are the most urgent. Now is undoubtedly the best time to approach them. After all, there are Parties in the Colonies as well as here ; there are Parties in our Colonies whose sympathies are more naturally attracted to the Liberals, and some whose views perhaps bear an affinity to the Conservatives. In one section, Conservative statesmen are viewed with some suspicion ; by others, the Liberal Party is regarded with much distrust ; but a Government that represented both Parties would appeal to all sections and would carry infinitely greater weight. In this connection, the settlement of the Irish question would come up for consideration. The advantages of a non-Party treatment of this vexed problem are obvious. Parties might deal with it without being subject to the embarrassing dictation of extreme partisans, whether from Nationalists or Orangemen.

FOREIGN POLICY

Such a Government, representing as it would not a fragment but the whole nation, would undoubtedly enhance the prestige of this country abroad.

August iyth, igio.

APPENDIX II

MR. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN'S MEMORANDUM ON THE REFERENDUM, JANUARY 23rd, 1911

IN this paper I do not propose to deal at all with the application of the referendum to Tariff Reform. I regret the Albert Hall pledge, but I recognize that, as long as the conditions remain unaltered, the pledge is binding on our leader and must be kept. If, therefore, I say nothing about it, my colleagues will understand that I do not dispute its binding force under present circumstances, but that I think that the method of its fulfilment will best be settled after the general scope and machinery of the referendum have been decided on broad principles and without reference to this special case. Much as I dislike singling out Tariff Reform for exceptional treatment, I would sooner that it was treated exceptionally than that our whole scheme of constitutional reform should be distorted and vitiated by an attempt to secure equality and uniformity of treatment at the expense of sound political reasoning. In other words, believing as I do that finance is not a suitable subject for the referendum, I should prefer that this particular financial measure should be treated exceptionally rather than that all finance should be referred to a popular vote merely to 'save the face' of Tariff Reformers and secure uniformity of treatment.

With this explanation I proceed to discuss (1) the conditions under which the referendum can be usefully employed ; (2) the purpose for which it should be used. From this examination I shall deduce the class or classes of questions to which it should be applied and the method of its application.

I. THE CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE USE OF THE REFERENDUM

These are :

(1) That it should not be used in the case of small matters which excite little public interest.

If so used, the polls would be ridiculously small and it would soon fall into contempt from inanition.

(2) That even for great issues it should only be used on rare occasions.

If used too often on great issues which are keenly contested, the disturbance and agitation throughout the country, approaching that of a General Election, will cause it to become hateful, and a demand will arise—among traders and business-men first of

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all and afterwards among other classes—to be relieved from what would be an intolerable burden.

I would add that its frequent or habitual use would necessarily weaken the responsibility of Parliament and encourage Members to vote for measures of which they disapproved if they were popular among any considerable section of their supporters, trusting to others to reject what they themselves were afraid to oppose, or at least washing their hands of responsibility for the consequences.

(3) That it should not be used for measures which may take the form of a direct bribe to the electors.

If so used, it would, in my opinion, demoralize first Ministers, then Parliament, and then the electorate. A crude bribe might perhaps be rejected by the electors, but I would not trust them to withstand the dangerous and insidious mixture of bribery and sentiment which forms the staple of the platform speeches of Mr. Lloyd George and the Socialist Party generally.

(4) That the question referred should be as simple and direct as possible.

This needs no argument. Our electorate is eminently qualified to judge broad principles and rules of conduct. No democracy in the world is fitted to adjust small differences or to disentangle complicated details.

One further general observation should find place here. It is, I believe, the universal experience that it is very difficult to get people to the poll on a referendum where no personal issues are involved. In ordinary elections many a man votes for a candidate who would not vote either for or against an abstract proposition. The common explanations of a defeat, 'We lost because we had a bad candidate' or 'They won because they had the better man,' are a recognition of the fact that vast numbers of people vote for men and not measures; and if measures are entirely dissociated from persons the polls will, I believe, generally be small. I am fortified in this opinion by quite recent experience. In recent ratepayers' polls in the district round Birmingham on the subject of incorporation with Birmingham, when the pockets of the ratepayers were supposed to be directly affected, the total number of votes recorded in no case reached 60 per cent, of the registered voters, and, I believe, exceeded 50 per cent, in only one case. In New York State a referendum was taken on an important constitutional amendment concurrently with an election for Governor. The candidates for the Governorship received among them one and a quarter million votes, but of the one and a quarter million electors who voted, only three-quarters of a million, or 60 per cent., took the

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trouble to record a vote at the same time and in the same booths on the constitutional issue. The recent ballots of the boiler-makers on strike show an even more amazing indifference.

I dwell on these facts because they seem to me to have a most important bearing on the probable working of the referendum and therefore on the use that can be properly made of it. Some of my colleagues seem to think that this *vis inertia* will necessarily make the referendum a most conservative force. This might be so if it were possible to insist that an absolute majority of the electors on the register should be required to carry a Bill on referendum ; but I regard such a stipulation as in practice impossible, and I believe that a simple majority of those voting must suffice to decide the issue. If this is so, or even if a two-thirds or three-fifths majority of those voting be required, the result will be just the opposite. People who do not care or who do not feel strongly about the issue will stop away from the polls. People who dislike a measure but whose opposition has been mitigated or bought off by concessions will not take the trouble to vote for it, and, though they may prefer the amendments to the original Bill, will not be sorry to see the whole Bill, amendments and all, rejected. There will therefore be no inducement to a Minister to modify his Bill when once it becomes apparent that its ultimate fate depends on a referendum. He will accept amendments if they enable him to escape the referendum altogether, but as soon as he knows that the Bill must go to a referendum, he will refuse all further concessions to *opponents*. For he will argue in this way : * I cannot placate my opponents by any modification of details. They are opposed to the principle of my Bill and will vote against it whatever concessions I make. My only chance is to carry with me the full and enthusiastic support of my friends and especially of such organized bodies as can bring their members to the poll. Every concession to opponents weakens their support and lessens their enthusiasm. Without them I cannot now succeed. Henceforth, therefore, I must consider them and them only in deciding whether to accept amendments or not.' So the Minister must argue. Can it be doubted that the result will be to throw increased power into the hands of extremists of either Party ?

II. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE REFERENDUM SHOULD BE USED

These considerations lead me to the conclusion that the referendum is useless for the settlement of what may be called * Committee points ' and should only be employed where it is desired to obtain from the people themselves an answer

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'aye' or 'no' to the simple question : 'Do you desire this Bill to pass?' Even so, I hold that for the reasons already given its use must be rare and confined to a narrow class of cases which can be easily distinguished from others and whose separate and peculiar treatment can be readily justified.

III. CASES TO WHICH THE REFERENDUM SHOULD BE APPLIED AND THE METHOD OF ITS APPLICATION

If these arguments be accepted, the problem is very much simplified.

The use of the referendum would be confined to alterations in the law-making power as distinguished from ordinary changes of any particular law. It would be employed only where the two Houses differed so as to restrict the occasions for taking a poll as narrowly as may be, and to prevent a poll being rendered obligatory by law even in cases of petty changes which are not worth it; and as the verdict of the people is desired not on details but on principles—not on the question of a little more or a little less but on the question of to be or not to be—the Bill would pass through all its stages in Parliament, differences between the two Houses would be resolved by the Joint Session in the usual way, but the bill after passing through Joint Session (if it did so pass) would be reserved for the consideration of the people and would not be submitted for Royal Assent unless it obtained a majority (or the requisite majority) of those voting at the referendum.

These objects could be secured by a proviso to the clause establishing the system of Joint Session. In case of irreconcilable differences arising in regard to *any* Bill, those differences would be submitted to the decision of the Joint Session.

Proviso. Provided that if the Bill in respect of which the difference between the two Houses has arisen is a Reserved Bill as hereinafter defined, that Bill after passing through the Joint Session with or without amendment shall not be submitted for the Royal Assent unless it receives a majority of votes at a referendum to be taken within (?) two months of its so passing.

Definition of Reserved Bills. All Bills dealing with the succession to the Crown or the composition, relations, or powers of either House of Parliament shall be Reserved Bills for the purposes of this proviso.

Note.—The wording of this definition of course requires careful consideration of the draughtsman.

A. C.
23.1.11.

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