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TWENTY YEARS' ARMISTICE-AND AFTER

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY
SINCE 1918

by

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"L'histoire est une allée de cercueils: dans chacun de ces cercueils se desseche le cadavre d'une nation qui est morte pour avoir été infidèle à soi-même et à sa destinée."

GONZAGUE DE REYNOLD.

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CHAPTER I

VERSAILLES: CRIME OR BLUNDER?

ON June 28th, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, and on September 3rd, 1939, war broke out once more in Western Europe. The connection between these two events is unhappily extremely close, and the intervening period may well be considered by future ages as little more than an armistice between the two conflicts, for during the greater part of it the fear of war was more universally prevalent than has of recent generations been the case in an era of nominal peace. At the same time Great Britain played a large direct part in international affairs, particularly in Europe, and in consequence the question naturally arises whether, and if so to what extent, her statesmen have been responsible for the catastrophe which marked the end of these two disturbed decades. It is from this standpoint that British foreign policy during the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century is likely to be judged.

In retrospect it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the basic weakness of the Treaty of Versailles, as of that of Saint Germain and the Trianon, lay in the fact that the Allied and Associated Powers were not ready for peace when it came, and were not agreed upon the principle by which it should be inspired. The war ended suddenly, and both at home and abroad

the unpreparedness of the British Government was soon evident, while the situation was further complicated by the General Election which immediately took place. There were several reasons for this, and one in particular was highly creditable. Great Britain had not entered the war to obtain anything that belonged to somebody else, nor had she unredeemed lands to deliver from enemy rule: thus her war aims lacked the precision of those of the aggressor, Germany, as well as the obvious reasonableness of those of France and Italy. On the other hand, she had during the progress of hostilities entered into a number of commitments, especially in the Near and Middle East, which were by no means all mutually reconcilable, and these were already becoming a source of considerable embarrassment.

Before, however, examining in any detail the position of the British Government at the Armistice, it is well to recall the efforts which had been made to put an end to the war while it was still in progress, for they throw considerable light upon the attitude of the Allies before they had won their victory. There is no proof of any concrete proposals for peace prior to November, 1916, but during the last weeks of that year suggestions for a termination of hostilities were made in several quarters. The reason for this is not far to seek. For the first time since the war began the prospect of a stalemate had become obvious to the most convinced chauvinist on either side. In the West the Germans had failed to overcome the French defence at Verdun, while the ground which had been gained by the British had only been won at tremendous

cost. In the East the situation was more favourable to the Central Powers, but even there it was obviously idle to expect an early decision, Romania was at her last gasp, though Bucarest did not fall until the beginning of December; General Townshend had surrendered at Kut in May; the Allied forces at Salonika were clearly unable to take the offensive; and the Italians had made no real progress along the road to Trieste. On the other hand, none of these successes was likely to bring the Allies to their knees, for in no case were the Central Powers in a position to push their advantages home, while there appeared a distinct possibility of a Russian revival in the near future. At sea, Jutland had been fought, and although both sides claimed the victory, the fact remained that the British blockade of the German coast continued uninterrupted. In effect, neither set of combatants appeared at the end of 1916 to have any real hope of forcing a decision in the field, and, such being the case, it is in no way surprising that in London, as well as in Berlin and Vienna, the possibility of securing peace by negotiation should have begun to be envisaged.

On November 13th the Marquess of Lansdowne, then Minister without Portfolio, laid a memorandum before the Cabinet in which he suggested that the time had come to examine the possible bases for peace, *and to* make it plain that the Allies did not aim at the total destruction of Germany. This seems to have been the first definite step which any responsible statesman in any belligerent country had taken in the direction of a cessation of hostilities since the war began over two years before : there had been repeated

declarations that the sword would not be sheathed until this or that had been done, but the actual war aims of the antagonists were largely a matter of conjecture. Of course Lord Lansdowne's proposal was unknown to the general public at the time, and it is impossible to estimate what effect it might have had, for Mr. Asquith's administration was already tottering to its fall, and within a month it had ceased to exist. It was replaced by the Government of Mr. Lloyd George, which was pledged to a more vigorous prosecution of the war.

A week after Lord Lansdowne had put his views before his colleagues the Emperor Francis Joseph died. Whether the old monarch would have made an effort, had he lived a little longer, to bring the war to an end it is difficult to say, though several years later Herr Klastersky, in his *Der A/te Kaiser, wie nur einer ihn sah*, produced evidence which seems to show that he would have pursued such a policy. However this may be, there can be no question of the pacific sentiments of his successor, Charles. In a proclamation on his accession to the throne the new Emperor used the significant phrase, " I desire to do all in my power to end, as soon as may be, the horrors and sacrifices of the war." There can be but little doubt that this disposition on the part of their ally was extremely distasteful to the German Government, and it was almost certainly responsible for the German offer, to treat which was made on December 12th.

The Central Powers presented four identical notes in which they stated that they were willing to bring forward definite proposals, but also announced their

intention of fighting to a finish if these were rejected. Whatever chance of success this step might have had in other circumstances, an extravagant speech by the Imperial Chancellor, in which he threw all the blame for the outbreak of war upon the Allies, completely ruined. Such being the case, one may perhaps be pardoned for questioning the sincerity of the whole negotiation so far as Germany was concerned, for she may well have had no other object in view than to forestall a move on the part of Austria, and to place upon the Allies the onus of a refusal to discuss terms of peace. This, at any rate, was the interpretation put upon her action by those to whom the offer was addressed, and the impossibility of negotiating upon such a basis was demonstrated in speeches by Mr. Lloyd George, M. Briand, Baron Sonnino, and M. Pokrovsky. The suspicions of the Allied Powers were also voiced in their official reply on January 29th, 1917, when they declared, in addition, that there could be no peace without restoration and reparation.

A week after the Central Powers announced their willingness to enter into negotiations, the President of the United States addressed a note to all the belligerents asking for a statement of their war aims as an essential preliminary to any approach to peace. It is clear that Mr. Wilson had decided to take this step before he was acquainted with the intentions of the Central Powers, and the State Department was at considerable pains to show that the two proposals were entirely unconnected. This fact was certainly appreciated by the Governments concerned, though the general public in the Allied countries, which had

no great love at that time for the President of the United States, showed a decided disposition to confuse the two events, and in private, if not in public, Mr. Wilson's note was widely denounced as neither more nor less than a deliberate attempt to second the efforts of the Central Powers. The only reply which this appeal elicited from the Allies was a paraphrase of that which was shortly afterwards sent to their opponents, and in it they declared that " their objects in the war will not be made known in detail with all the equitable compensations and indemnities for damages suffered until the hour of negotiations ". It was, however, stipulated that the Turk should be expelled from Europe, but no mention was made of the retrocession of Alsace-Lorraine to France.

This interchange of notes, though it led to no definite result, cleared the air to some extent. It showed that Germany was not ready to treat upon any basis to which her enemies would agree, and that the Allies were not prepared to accept the mediation of a neutral, for although Mr. Wilson had not actually offered his services in that capacity, it was clear that they were available if desired. On the other hand, the reticence of the Allies suggested either that they were not in complete agreement with regard to their aims, or that the latter were subject to negotiation. The Emperor Charles felt that in either case there might be a chance for him to secure a settlement, and so, in the early days of February, 1917, he got into communication with his brother-in-law, Prince Sixte of Bourbon-Parma, with this end in view. Thus originated the most determined of the attempts to

bring the Four Years' War to an end by negotiation.

Prince Sixte was at that time serving with the Belgian Army because no Bourbon was allowed with the French forces, and he readily obtained the permission of King Albert to co-operate with the Austrian Emperor. He was then informed of the terms upon which his brother-in-law considered peace to be possible. These were: firstly, the conclusion of a secret armistice between Austria-Hungary and Russia in which the question of Constantinople was not to be made an issue; secondly, the restoration of Belgium and of Alsace-Lorraine—the latter, incidentally, a concession which, as has been shown, had not yet been demanded by the Allies themselves; and thirdly, the formation of a Southern Slav monarchy which should include not only Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania, but Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. It should be noted in connection with these suggestions that there was at that time no idea in the mind of the Austrian Emperor of concluding a separate peace; all that he intended to do was to explore the ground, and when he had arrived at a general understanding with the Allies, he proposed to place before Germany, Bulgaria, and Turkey certain definite recommendations based upon it. Great Britain, France, and Russia were, it may be added, each precluded from making a separate peace by the agreement of September 5 th, 1914, to which Italy became a party in November of the following year.

As a French subject, Prince Sixte naturally laid *his* brother-in-law's proposals before the President, M.

Poincare, in the first place, and he, in Ms turn, Communicated them to M. Briand, who was then Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs. Both agreed that they might well form a basis for negotiations, but they warned Prince Sixte that Italy would be the chief obstacle to any understanding. As a result of two interviews with M. Poincare the Prince went to Vienna, where he saw the Emperor in the latter part of March. Unfortunately in the interval two events took place which were destined to bring about the failure of the negotiations—namely, the outbreak of the Russian Revolution and the fall of the Briand administration. The first of these soon weakened Russia to such an extent that the jingoistic elements in Berlin and Vienna once more became convinced, with considerable justification it must be admitted, that the victory in the field which had seemed beyond their capacity to achieve at the end of 1916 was again within their grasp, while the second resulted in the installation as Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs of M. Alexandre Ribot, a man whose capacity did not rise above mediocrity. In spite, however, of these drawbacks, Prince Sixte continued his mission, and he was assisted by the fact that as the spring of 1917 was exceptionally late, and the Germans executed a retirement in the West, there was a comparative lull in the fighting.

On the return of Prince Sixte from Vienna, where he informed the Emperor of the attitude of France, it was decided to acquaint the British Government with what was afoot. Accordingly, M. Ribot told Mr. Lloyd George of the Austrian proposals, and the

other promised complete secrecy, with the reservation that he felt himself bound to mention the offer, though somewhat surprisingly not to mention the details, to King George. As evidence of the relations existing between Vienna and Berlin, it is to be noted that the chief reason of Prince Sixte for insisting upon such complete secrecy was the fear that if news of the proposals reached Germany the Austrian Emperor would be murdered at official German instigation within a week. On April 18th Prince Sixte had an interview with Mr. Lloyd George, in which the British Prime Minister showed himself extremely sympathetic, but, like M. Poincare, he feared that Italian ambitions would prove an insurmountable obstacle, for Italy was supposed to be demanding the Trentino, Dalmatia, and all the islands in the Adriatic that belonged to Austria-Hungary. At this point, however, it was discovered that the Italian Government, unknown to its allies, was already engaged in a separate negotiation with Vienna on the basis of the cession of the Trentino alone, and in these circumstances there seemed to be no special reason why London and Paris should be unduly careful of Italian susceptibilities.

Prince Sixte, therefore, came to England in May, and remained there until the first week in June, during which time he saw King George and had several conversations with the Prime Minister. The position then was that both the Emperor Charles and Mr. Lloyd George were extremely anxious to come to terms, and the former had become so thoroughly convinced of the impossibility of inducing his German

ally to listen to any proposals for bringing the war to an end that he was now prepared to negotiate a separate peace for his own dominions. On the other hand, M. Ribot was at least lukewarm, though whether it was his head or his heart that was at fault is a problem that may never be solved. Count Czernin, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, also blew hot and cold, and Prince Sixte found him to be an influence upon which no reliance could be placed. Lastly, the King of Italy refused to pay a visit to the Western Front, where it had been hoped to have arranged a meeting with the King of England and the French President at which the three rulers could have exchanged views on the Austrian proposals.

On the Allied side the protagonist of peace was Mr. Lloyd George. He at once suggested that he and M. Ribot should have a meeting with Count Czernin, and only the Frenchman's invincible obstinacy prevented the taking of a step that might well have shortened the war by some eighteen months. But when Mr. Lloyd George made up his mind, something had to be done, as even M. Ribot soon recognized, and after a good deal of discussion Great Britain and France proposed certain terms to Austria at the beginning of August. These comprised the cession of the Trentino to Italy, and the establishment of Trieste as a Free Port, while in exchange Austria-Hungary was to receive Silesia, Bavaria, and Poland within the frontiers of 1772. In other words, the Allies recognized that if the menace of Prussianism was really to be removed from Europe it was not only the verdict of 1870, but that of 1866, which had to

be reversed : accordingly they proposed that Austria should once again become the predominant power in Germany and a bulwark against the danger that threatened from the East, though this was no longer the Turk but the Bolshevist. It is not a little significant that this offer was made within a few days of the Pope's attempt to bring about peace by negotiation, and there can be no doubt that the action of the Vatican was not unexpected in Vienna. With this Papal initiative the present Pope, then nuncio in Munich, was closely associated.

Unfortunately this step was taken too late, and the course of the actual fighting was such as to render the very continuance of negotiations impossible. A British offensive had been launched on the Western Front at the beginning of July, while the delivery of the Allied note coincided with an Italian attack that came within an ace of breaking through the Austrian resistance. This last threat thoroughly frightened Count Czernin, and he succeeded in communicating his fears to the Emperor Charles, to whom he maintained that only the help of Germany could prevent the Austrian armies from being overthrown. In October the Austrian counter-attack resulted in the Italian defeat at Caporetto, and British and French troops were hurried to the Piave, where, for the first time, they came into contact with the armies of Austria-Hungary. The vicious circle was complete, and M. Ribot, still Minister for Foreign Affairs though no longer Premier, closed the door upon any further negotiations in a speech of quite exceptional bitterness. In the following year there was another exchange of

polemics, this time between M. Clemenceau and Count Czernin, and the air was thick with such charges as "*Monsieur Czernin a menti*", and "*Herr Clemenceau batgelogen*".

It was of this episode that M. Anatole France said

No one will ever persuade me that the war could not have been ended long ago. The Emperor Charles offered peace. There is the only honest man who occupied an important position during the war, but he was not listened to. In my opinion his offer ought to have been accepted. The Emperor Charles has a sincere desire for peace, so everybody hates him. Ribot is an old scoundrel to have neglected such an occasion. A King of France, yes, a King would have taken pity on our poor people, bled white, attenuated, at the end of their strength. But democracy is without heart, without bowels. A slave of the powers of money, it is pitiless and inhuman.

However this may be, the responsibility of M. Ribot is very heavy indeed. Two explanations of his conduct are possible. One is that he did not possess sufficient intelligence to realize that the Austrian proposal was entirely separate from the German, and so regarded the negotiations in which Prince Sixte played so prominent a part as a trap set in Berlin and baited in Vienna. The other is that he was so fanatical a republican that he preferred the continuance of the war to the success of a negotiation for which a Bourbon prince would receive the credit. The truth probably lies between these two explanations. In any event

defeatism was very prevalent in France at the time, and to a man of mediocre intelligence any resolute action probably appeared to be fraught with danger. It was nothing short of a tragedy that M. Briand did not remain at the Quai d'Orsay throughout 1917. Far more guilty was Count Czernin, for he knew his country's need of peace, and yet when the opportunity arrived of concluding it upon the most advantageous terms, his fear of Germany got the better of him. By their cowardice and incompetence he and M. Ribot almost certainly prolonged the Four Years' War by another eighteen months.

Whoever was responsible for the failure of this attempt to bring about a reasonable peace it was not Mr. Lloyd George. Thirteen years later Prince Sixte wrote of this incident to an English correspondent, "So far as England is concerned I have nothing but praise for Mr. Lloyd George. Your Prime Minister of those days understood the situation without any mental reservations of a political nature, and he saw in the possibility of peace the true interest of his country. When, in 1918, Clemenceau, in spite of the promise of Ribot which was equally binding upon him, divulged the contents of the letters of the Emperor Charles, Lloyd George kept his word, and in spite of pressure from Clemenceau, refused to testify to the authenticity of this correspondence."

Among the many unfortunate consequences of the failure to make peace in the summer of 1917 not the least was the progressive hardening of British public opinion, especially after the blood-bath of Passchendaele. This was proved by the hostile reception

generally accorded to the famous letter of Lord Lansdowne which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on November 29th. This letter was almost identical with the memorandum which its author had laid before the Cabinet twelve months earlier, and in connection with it Lord Esher said he was "sure we could have detached Austria, had we had the skill to make her definite peace offers six months ago". In this he was, in ignorance of what had actually taken place, unfair to Mr. Lloyd George, but his opinion is further evidence of the fact that the summer of 1917 was a very critical period, and Lord Newton, the biographer of Lord Lansdowne, admits that the appeal was issued at the wrong moment. Had it appeared in the spring the result of so respected a statesman's intervention would probably have been very different, and it is doubtful whether the polemics of the Press would then have been able to prevail against him.

The Times had in the first instance rejected the letter because they believed that it did not reflect any "responsible phase of British opinion", and the Northcliffe Press as a whole was vulgarly abusive. The *Morning Post* spoke of it as "a stab in the back", and Lord Lansdowne was accused of uniting various people "who are working for Germany in one clamorous cry". Mr. Bonar Law referred to the letter as a national calamity, and threatened a General Election if it evoked any support. The obvious strength of opinion in favour of a fight to a finish imposed caution on the British Government, and this was the most prominent characteristic of a speech which Mr. Lloyd George made in the first days of 1918.

He put forward three main conditions of peace—namely, the re-establishment of the sanctity of treaties, a territorial settlement based on self-determination, and " an international organization to limit the burden of armaments ". He naturally demanded " the complete restoration " of Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and of occupied French and Italian territory, but he disclaimed any desire to destroy Germany or to alter her constitution. The Prime Minister went on to declare that " the break-up of Austria-Hungary is no part of our war aims ", but proceeded to qualify this with a demand for " genuine self-government" for her nationalities, and added two very vague phrases about " the legitimate claims of the Italians " and justice for " men of Romanian blood and speech ". With regard to the German colonies, he repeated earlier declarations to the effect that " they are held at the disposal of a conference whose decisions must have primary regard to the wishes of the native inhabitants ".

During the ensuing months this programme was modified by arrangements with the minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while the situation was further complicated by President Wilson's Fourteen Points and by the interpretation which he put upon them in his negotiations with the Central Powers; in particular, his insistence upon a change of regime in Germany was in flagrant contradiction of Mr. Lloyd George's pledge. Such being the case, it is no exaggeration to say that the Armistice found Great Britain without any clearly defined peace policy, and that no real agreement in the matter had been reached even among the principal Allies. This lack of a definite

programme was to be the cause of much trouble in the future.

The worst difficulties, however, might still have been avoided but for the General Election which immediately followed the Armistice. Whether in their appeal to the country at this particular moment Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law were solely actuated by the desire to make sure that those who represented Great Britain at the Peace Conference had the electorate behind them, or whether, as their opponents alleged, they were not unmindful of the possibility of turning the victory to party account, is beside the point; what is certain is that as the election campaign progressed the Government became pledged to proposals of an extreme and impracticable nature.

The first note struck was one of moderation and caution, for the election manifesto of the two leaders stated that " our first task must be to conclude a just and lasting peace, and so to establish the foundations of a new Europe that occasion for further wars may be for ever averted ". On November 25 th Mr. Bonar Law, in a speech at Glasgow, was studiously non-committal : " We are going to the Conference ", he said, " as one of a number of allies, and you cannot expect a member of the Government, whatever he may think, to state in public before he goes into that Conference what line he is going to take in regard to any particular question". So far, so good, but within the next few days a different note began to be sounded in official pronouncements. At Newcastle on November 29th the Prime Minister declared, " When Germany defeated France she made France pay. That is the

principle which she herself has established— There is absolutely no doubt about the principle, and that is the principle we should proceed upon—that Germany must pay the costs of the war," but he was careful to add that " we are not going to allow her to pay in such a way as to wreck our industries ". With regard to British engagements under the Fourteen Points he was wisely silent.

Throughout the war the civil population had been markedly more bellicose than those who had been called upon to do the fighting, and reports reached those in charge of the Government campaign that this stiffening of the official attitude was decidedly popular. Accordingly the pace was quickened. Mr. Barnes, a member of the War Cabinet, on November 30th declared from the platform, "I am for hanging the Kaiser," and the public appetite rapidly grew for that on which it was being fed. A week later *The Twes*, then under the control of Lord Northcliffe, proceeded to apply pressure to the Prime Minister. In a leading article on December 8th entitled ' Making Germany Pay ' it observed that the public mind was still bewildered by Mr. Lloyd George's various statements, and went on, " There is too much suspicion of influences concerned to let the Germans off lightly, whereas the only possible motive in determining their capacity to pay must be the interests of the Allies." The same paper's Political Correspondent noted, " It is the candidate who deals with the issues of to-day, who adopts Mr. Barnes's phrase about ' hanging the Kaiser ', and plumps for the payment of the cost of the war by Germany, who rouses his audience and

strikes the notes to which they are most responsive." The First Lord of the Admiralty was not slow to take the hint. " We will get out of her (>. Germany) all you can squeeze out of a lemon, and a bit more," he told the electors of Cambridge; " I will squeeze her until you can hear the pips squeak/" His policy was to take every bit of property belonging to Germans in neutral and Allied countries; all her gold, silver, and jewels; the contents of her picture-galleries and libraries; and sell the proceeds for the benefit of the Allies. " I would strip Germany as she has stripped Belgium."

On December 11th the Prime Minister issued a final manifesto which showed how completely the attitude of the Government had changed since the campaign began. The six points which this document contained were as follows :

- i. Trial of the Kaiser.
2. Punishment of those responsible for atrocities.
3. Fulllest indemnities from Germany.
4. Britain for the British, socially and industrially.
5. Rehabilitation of those broken in the war.
6. A happier country for all.

Perhaps the most apposite contemporary comment was that of Mr. J. M. Keynes : " To this concoction of greed and sentiment, prejudice and deception, three weeks of the platform had reduced the powerful governors of England, who but a little while before had spoken not ignobly of Disarmament and a League of Nations and of a just and lasting peace which should establish the foundations of a new Europe."

This appeal swept the constituencies, and in this connection it is only fair to recall that the Liberals who followed Mr. Asquith made no very decided protest against this degradation of what had been a noble cause. Perhaps the most significant fact about the election was the relatively small number of soldiers who took the trouble to vote, for although no less than 2,400,000 ballot-papers were issued to them, only 830,000 exercised the suffrage : nor did many proxies for those serving at sea or in the more distant theatres of war make their appearance at the polling-stations. If this abstention was creditable to the intelligence of the armed forces, given the issues put before them, it was also ominous.

The result of this election was most unfortunate in more ways than one, for before long the people both of Great Britain and Germany felt that they had been grossly deceived: the former because the pledges given so glibly on the platform proved impossible to redeem, and the latter because they felt that they had surrendered on terms that were repudiated as soon as they had laid down their arms. There was some justification for both points of view. Mr. Lloyd George did not himself say that Germany would be made to defray the cost of the war, but that was the impression given by many of his supporters : when, therefore, in due course the Budgets of 1919 and 1920 disclosed huge deficits which necessitated a great increase in taxation, the disillusionment was complete. As for the Germans, they bitterly resented the fact that their fate should be made the sport of a British General Election, and they declared that the conditions upon

which they had given up the struggle bore no resemblance to those which they were subsequently compelled to accept. The British electorate displayed its resentment at the deception which it considered had been practised upon it by getting rid of Mr. Lloyd George upon the first opportunity, but in the German mind the bitterness continued to rankle, and was not the least of the many causes which carried Herr Hitlei into power.

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Treaty of Versailles and its ancillary settlements should have been so unsatisfactory. There can hardly now be a clause of these documents which has not been the subject of the most violent controversy, but one or two of the broader aspects of the Allied diplomacy of those days have not always received the attention they deserve. It is a well-established legal maxim that justice must not only be done but that it must also appear to be done, and had the Allies applied this dictum to their victory in 1918 many of their subsequent difficulties would have been avoided. They had won the war in the field, but no real effort was ever made to bring this fact home to the German people, and so the way was left open for the propagation of the Nazi myth that the overthrow of Germany was due to the collapse of the home front. There were victory marches in London and Paris, but it would have been much better had there been a victory march in Berlin. That was the policy of the Allies after the defeat of Napoleon, and of the Germans themselves in 1871 : there was no necessity for an occupation of the enemy capital, which would have

been undesirable from several points of view, but a march through it by the victors would have created an impression which no amount of Hitlerian propaganda would have been able to efface.

As for the Treaty of Versailles itself, one of its greatest weaknesses was that the Allies, in opposition to their own interests, carried the work of Bismarck to its logical conclusion and completed the unification of Germany. The strongest centrifugal force lay in the dynasties which ruled the various kingdoms and duchies, and which were always restive under the tutelage of Berlin; yet, as we have seen, the German people were deliberately encouraged to overthrow their ruling houses, to many of which they were deeply attached, as the price of peace, and so the last obstacle to a unified Reich was removed by those most concerned in its retention. Once the dynasties had gone there was no reason for the continued existence of their former dominions as separate units, and so the way was cleared for that complete Prussianization of Germany which was to be the outstanding accomplishment of the Nazi regime. Few voices were raised at the time against this mistaken policy, but now that more than twenty years have passed there must be many who agree with the late Jacques Bainville that the war was lost in the first clause of the Peace Treaty, in that the settlement should not have been made with Germany as a whole but rather that there should have been separate treaties with Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and the other States which had composed the Hohenzollern Empire.

This is not to say that Germany should have been forcibly disrupted, but rather that every inducement

should have been given to her to disrupt herself, and this development would not have been difficult to set in motion had a more judicious policy been pursued by the victors. Unhappily the French were so determined to reverse the verdict of 1870 that they forgot this in its turn had only been rendered possible by the victory of Prussia over Austria four years before, while the British Government does not appear to have thought about the matter at all, having drifted into peace almost as inconsequently as it had drifted into war.

Another serious mistake was to associate the League of Nations with the peace settlement. The former claimed to be based on the principles of abstract justice, while the latter rested on the armed forces of the Allies; it was clear that the vanquished were unlikely to regard the peace settlement with any marked favour, and to connect the League with it was to attach to Geneva the odium which already pertained to Versailles. Moreover, under cover of the League some very doubtful transactions took place. For example, there was a plebiscite in Upper Silesia, and in this 62.3 per cent, of the votes went to Germany, while 37.7 per cent, were cast for Poland; all the same the League awarded Poland fifty out of the sixty collieries, and 400,000 out of 570,000 tons of iron ore. Such a decision was hardly calculated to render Germany enthusiastic about the League: nor was there any reason why that body should have continued to be tied to the Peace Treaties, for all difficulties concerning them could have been settled between the signatories direct, and disputes referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague.

For these reasons, among others, the treaties of 1713 were less satisfactory than those which Great Britain concluded at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession and of the Napoleonic War. As far as the Treaty of Utrecht is concerned, it is true that drama and cynicism were just as much in evidence in 1713 as in 1919. About two o'clock in the afternoon of Good Friday, April 3rd, 1713, a post-chaise rattled down Whitehall, and as it stopped at the Cockpit there alighted, all covered with dust, George St. John, half-brother of the Secretary of State, Lord Bolingbroke, with the Treaty of Utrecht in his hand. Bolingbroke welcomed him on the doorstep with open arms, and exclaimed, "It is the Lord's work, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Probably the scene had been rehearsed, for that would have been typical of the Secretary of State, but his personal failings must not blind us to the magnitude of his success. The many advantages which accrued to Great Britain were due to his hard bargaining, and the conclusion of the peace was in itself sufficient to put him in the front rank of British statesmen. That he was so soon to show himself an arrant coward, both morally and physically, does not affect the question. There is much to be said against the methods he employed to effect a settlement, but Bolingbroke must share any responsibility with his Whig predecessors in office who had, for party reasons, rendered it impossible to conduct negotiations in any other manner. As for the treaty itself, its great merit was that it recognized existing facts. France was the first Power on the mainland of Europe, Philip V was the monarch desired by Spain, Great Britain was build-

ing a colonial empire, and Prussia and Savoy were rising states: all these incontrovertible realities were admitted at Utrecht. At the same time precautions were taken against the pre-eminence of France developing into hegemony, just as the recognition of Philip was a check to any Habsburg inclinations in the same direction. It was all eminently reasonable, and in its main outlines it endured for more than two generations, which is as far ahead as any statesman can be expected to look.

Bolingbroke and Torcy ignored general principles; they dealt with the real, not with the ideal; and their work stood. It is true that the British Government betrayed the Catalans, but there was more than one instance of a cynical disregard for war-time agreements in the settlement after the Four Years' War. There is a great deal to be said against Bolingbroke both in his public and private capacity, but it cannot be denied that he was a good European, and it was as such that he negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht.

The settlement at Vienna was slightly less realistic, in that an endeavour was made to render the world safe for autocracy, but the general restoration of exiled monarchs to their thrones was, in the nature of things, inevitable, and the attempt to put back the clock to where it had stood in 1789 may appear foolish in retrospect, but it is difficult to see what other course was possible. The statesmen of 1815 did not assemble in the Austrian capital to create a new heaven and earth, but to produce order out of chaos; and those who criticize their lack of idealism would do well to reflect upon the fact that, with all its imperfections, the Treaty of Vienna did inaugurate a period of forty years of peace.

The *status quo* in Europe was based upon the Treaty of Chaumont of March, 1814, and the subsequent arrangements made at Vienna. Briefly, these placed upon Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia the responsibility, for a period of twenty years, of defending the territorial settlement effected at Vienna, and also of preventing the restoration of the Bonaparte dynasty to the French throne. Furthermore, there were to be periodical reunions of sovereigns and ministers to discuss the more important problems of the day. It will be remarked that the Treaty of Chaumont was purely an arrangement between the victorious Allies, and that it was, in certain circumstances, definitely directed against France; but at the congresses which became so prominent a feature of the years following the conclusions of peace that Power was treated as an equal; and after the foreign armies of occupation had been withdrawn in 1818 she had little to fear from any possible concentration against her.

It was, of course, obvious from the beginning that the Treaty of Chaumont and its corollary might mean much or little, according to the interpretation put upon them by the signatories. Until France had settled down under the rule of Louis XVIII, and while there was consequently danger of further trouble in that quarter, the arrangement worked well, and although Great Britain refused to become an actual member of the Holy Alliance, she was in effect a sleeping partner in the concern. Before long, however, it became clear that Louis was a good deal more firmly seated upon his throne than some of his victorious contemporaries were upon theirs, and Austria, Prussia, and

Russia showed an increasing disposition to stretch the terms of the settlement in a way that was never intended. They declared that the *status quo* could only be maintained by the ruthless suppression of all revolutionary movements, and this, in its turn, naturally implied a right to interfere, by force if necessary, in the internal affairs of any country in which revolution showed its head. To this Castlereagh was firmly opposed, and he said :

We shall be found in our place when actual danger menaces the system of Europe, but this country cannot and will not act upon abstract and speculative principles of precaution. The alliance which exists had no such purpose in view in its original formation. It was never so explained to Parliament, and it would be a breach of faith to Parliament now to extend it.

Such was the attitude of the peacemakers of 1815.

There was little resemblance between Bolingbroke and Castlereagh in character or outlook, though they both called themselves Tories, but they were alike in their realism and in their determination to safeguard essential British interests, as the Treaties of Utrecht and Vienna testify. Above all, they knew their Europe, and they were the last men to indulge in what a later age would term 'wishful thinking', of which the parentage is by blind optimism out of profound ignorance. Accordingly the international settlements in which they played so considerable a part were based upon a frank acceptance of existing facts and of the position of the defeated foe, who was treated with a

justice which was tempered with equity and common sense; no attempt was made to reduce France to the level of a second-rate Power, but every care was taken to strengthen her neighbours so that she could not with impunity resume her career of aggression. At the conclusion of the Four Years' War no insult was spared to defeated Germany, while not only was she given every assistance to complete her unification, but she was left on her frontier with weak States who could not be expected to offer any effective opposition to her ambitions once her inevitable revival began.

On the other hand, there is little substance in the German complaint that it was an 'imposed peace', and in any event the argument comes ill from a nation which shows so little concern for the rights of others. The Treaty of Versailles was neither more nor less imposed than most other treaties which have terminated a war fought to a finish. In this respect it bears a marked resemblance to the Peace of Prague in 1866 at the end of the Six Weeks' War between Prussia and Austria, and to the Treaty of Frankfurt five years later, which brought the Franco-Prussian War to an end; in both cases Bismarck had made up his mind in advance as to the terms he meant to exact, and he took full advantage of the military position of his country to secure what he wanted. Even more recently Germany had imposed the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucarest upon Russia and Romania respectively in exactly the same way, and the terms of those settlements were considerably more severe than the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. The peace concluded at Brest-Litovsk was humiliating to

the vanquished to an extent without precedent in modern history. By it Russia lost a territory nearly as large as Austria-Hungary and Turkey combined; 56 million inhabitants, or 32 per cent, of the whole population of the country; a third of her railway mileages; 73 per cent, of her total iron, and 89 per cent, of her total coal production; and over 5000 factories, mills, distilleries, and refineries : by a supplementary agreement she paid to Germany an indemnity of 6,000 million marks. The terms of the Treaty of Bucarest were certainly not less rigorous. Romania was deprived of the whole of the Dobrudja; she had to cede certain frontier districts to Hungary, and to give that country control of the mountain passes; she was compelled to surrender her oil-fields and forests to the Central Powers, and to give them the right of pre-emption of all raw material and foodstuffs; while there was to be a German army of occupation of 90,000 men, paid for by Romania* who was only permitted an exiguous allowance of arms and munitions for her own use.

Where the Allies were to blame in 1919 was in excluding the German representatives, who came on behalf of a regime which had been set up largely to please the victors, from the preliminary discussions and negotiations, and in treating them with a studied discourtesy which was as impolitic as it was unnecessary. Unfortunately it was not to be the last occasion on which British and French statesmen failed to realize that if they would do nothing to satisfy moderate opinion in Germany they would sooner or later throw that country into the arms of the extremists.

Those who are inclined to ridicule the efficacy of German propaganda would do well to reflect upon the success of the campaign to vilify the Treaty of Versailles. That this settlement had many defects, and that it was inferior to the Treaties of Utrecht and Vienna, has already been shown, but that is no reason why the mere mention of it should bring a blush to the cheek of the ordinary Englishman. In any event, its territorial clauses can hardly be condemned on principle by those who had gleefully dismembered Russia and Rumania, while the financial provisions, which certainly were ludicrous, were modified out of all recognition before many years were past. Above all, it was Germany who began the war in 1914, and when she lost it was only natural that she should pay the penalty, though this fact is conveniently ignored by her apologists, native and foreign. The slump which so soon followed the short-lived boom, and repeated differences with the French, combined with an understandable feeling of general disillusionment, inclined the British public to be critical of the Versailles settlement, and German propaganda did the rest. The state of mind thus induced paved the way for the earlier Nazi successes. Yet in view of the terms exacted by the Germans at Brest-Litovsk and Bucarest it is useless for them to denounce the Treaty of Versailles as a crime, and it is more than likely that in the future historians will agree to treat it as a blunder.

At this point it is of no little importance to discover the principles which should govern the foreign policy of Great Britain, for it is only in the light of them that the conduct of successive British Governments

since Versailles can be fairly judged. In this connection Lord Bolingbroke may first of all be cited for the observation, " We must remember that we are not part of the Continent, but we must never forget that we are neighbours to it." The profound truth of this observation has not been affected, save to be reinforced, by the inventions of the last two centuries. Then, in 1824, George Canning drew up some instructions for his cousin, Stratford, who was about to take up a diplomatic appointment abroad, and they included the following reflection :

To preserve the peace of the world is the leading object of the policy of England, For this purpose it is necessary in the first place to prevent to the utmost of our power the breaking out of new quarrels; in the second place, to compose, where it can be done by friendly mediation, existing differences; and thirdly, where that is hopeless, to narrow as much as possible their range; and fourthly, to maintain for ourselves an imperturbable neutrality in all cases where nothing occurs to affect injuriously our interests or our honour.

Nearly thirty years later this same Stratford Canning, by then of world-wide reputation as the 'Great Elchi', wrote in a despatch to the Foreign Office, " The extreme desire for peace, if care be not taken, may bring on the danger of war". It will hardly be denied that these three statements afford an admirable basis for the attitude of Great Britain towards inter-

national problems, more especially if a statement of another great statesman, the late Lord Salisbury, be kept in mind—namely, that " the commonest error in politics is sticking to the carcasses of dead policies ".

Nevertheless, during the period which will come under review in the following pages voices were continually being raised in favour of what was termed by its supporters the policy of splendid isolation. What, they asked, had Great Britain to do with the politics of the mainland of Europe ? Let her follow the example of the United States, and, having won the war, concentrate on the development of her empire. The difficulty about putting this admittedly attractive doctrine into practice was that it soon proved no longer possible to secure isolation by such means, while history served but to show that even if it were possible, the resulting isolation would be the reverse of splendid. Time after time in past centuries England had been saved from invasion by the weather, but the substitution of steam for sail removed this natural protection, and then the progressive development of the aeroplane connected the British Isles still closer with the Continent. For these reasons military isolation was an impossibility, and in these circumstances it was out of the question for the country to remain politically aloof from its neighbours. Gradually the force of such reasoning began to be felt, and it was reflected in official policy. In 1925 Sir Austen Chamberlain secured from his fellow-countrymen what should have been given in 1920—namely, a guarantee of the Rhine—and fourteen years later his brother, amid the universal applause of all Britons, guaranteed Poland,

Romania, and Greece. The wheel had indeed revolved full cycle.

On the other hand, there were those who wanted to see Great Britain act as the policeman, or rather the 'universal aunt' of the universe. Many of them were actuated by the highest motives, but their idealism was to prove as impracticable as the selfishness of the isolationists. Pushed to extremes, as their policy was more than once by timid Foreign Secretaries thinking mainly in terms of votes, this meant an excessive tendering of unwanted advice to Continental Powers, and when it was not taken, of offering some more. In this way the prestige of the country declined, and her neighbours became irritated with her and with each other as the result of what only too frequently proved to be futile meddling. It is true that those who advocated such a policy did so in the name of the League of Nations and of Collective Security, and had the fact corresponded with the theory they would have been justified. Unhappily the League never came to be what its founder intended, and as all the Great Powers were never members of it, in practice the attempt to make it run before it could walk was not only to blight its chances, but also to throw on its most loyal member, Great Britain, all the odium for its failure. It may be said that no great statesman would have allowed this to happen, but there was no great statesman at the Foreign Office after Sir Edward Grey, with the exception of Sir Austen Chamberlain, and it was precisely during the years he was there that the repute both of Britain and of Geneva were at their highest.

Nor were these the only considerations which a Foreign Secretary had to take into account during the period between the two wars. In 1914 a decision of the British Cabinet could—and did—automatically involve every one of the King's subjects throughout the world in war: the Government in London carried on its foreign policy without reference to the Dominions save with regard to issues which might affect them directly. Thus the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 was concluded without consultation with any of the Dominions other than Newfoundland, which was informed of the proposed settlement of the old dispute concerning the rights of French fishermen in that colony. The agreement with Russia in 1907, which brought the Triple Entente into being, was similarly effected without the knowledge of the Dominions, and the Hague Conference of the same year was also conducted without their participation. It is true that during the ensuing seven years the tendency to seek the co-operation of the Dominions became slightly more pronounced, but none the less the British Government did not see fit to communicate to them its anxieties on the morrow of the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, nor was the Union of South Africa informed of the projected treaty with Germany for the eventual partition of the African possessions of Portugal.

The Four Years' War brought about a complete change. The notable part played by the Dominions in that conflict won them representation at the Peace Conference, and from this it was but a step to the complete autonomy accorded by the Statute of West-

minster. To-day several of the Dominions have their own representatives in foreign capitals, and it is, in a moment of crisis, the chief aim of a British Foreign Secretary to ensure that he has the opinion of the overseas Empire solidly behind him and his policy. In the long run this state of affairs undoubtedly makes for strength, but it equally militates against the rapid taking of decisions. The different Dominions have naturally different preoccupations, and what may appear of the first importance to Canada, may well seem a secondary consideration to South Africa. All, too, are far from Europe, and it is not always easy for them to appreciate the full significance of Bolingbroke's maxim. In these circumstances it is a testimony not only to the skill of Lord Halifax but also to the blundering diplomacy of Berlin that, with the exception of Eire, the whole Empire should have been united in the present conflict. Nevertheless, it will be to misunderstand the difficulties with which a Foreign Secretary has of late years been confronted if the autonomy of the Dominions in this connection is ignored. Since 1919, as before that date, the decisions of the French Cabinet have been binding on every French subject from Lille to Madagascar, and from Guadeloupe to Indo-China, but Downing Street has enjoyed no such power where the British Empire is concerned. This fact does not always receive the recognition which its importance merits.

Another factor which has not made the pursuit of a consistent foreign policy any easier since the conclusion of the Four Years' War has been the extent to which public attention has been concentrated upon

international affairs. Democratic government presupposes an intelligent interest on the part of the citizen in the affairs of the State, and this condition was undoubtedly fulfilled during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early years of the present century, as any man or woman of middle age can testify from their own personal experience. Of late the interest in domestic politics has been on the wane, for they are neither as intelligible nor as sensational as they were in the past. In consequence the attraction exercised by foreign politics, which have been spectacular in the extreme, was enormously enhanced, and to a dangerous degree, since sentimentality increased among the public without always a corrective deepening of knowledge. In view of the fact that democracy demands not that the citizen shall merely record a perfunctory vote every four or five years and then dismiss political questions from his mind, but rather that all the people shall take an interest all the time in all the problems of government, this development is far from reassuring.

It has meant that social questions such as Housing and Education, as well as the numerous problems connected with the overseas Empire, have been largely neglected by the man-in-the-street, who has given his attention rather to the progress of events in far-off countries like China and Abyssinia. In short, he tended to ignore the subjects upon which he may well have been competent to express an opinion, in favour of those which his experience had not equipped him to understand. Had a speaker or an organization hired a hall in the summer of 1914 to call attention to

some domestic grievance, whether real or imaginary, the building would have been packed, but had the purpose of the meeting been to hear an address on the international situation, it would have been poorly attended : twenty-five years later the position would have been reversed. What applied to the electorate was also true of their representatives, and for every one debate in the House of Commons on foreign policy before the Four Years' War there were probably a dozen during the years which followed that conflict. There were, of course, large numbers of people who devoted themselves seriously to the study of international affairs to their own and the country's profit; but it would be no exaggeration to say that there were very many more who regarded foreign affairs in much the same light as a thrilling film or a detective story. A section of the Press and innumerable authors encouraged this attitude, until in town and country alike people were talking glibly about the state of nations which they would have had the utmost difficulty in locating on a map, and of whose history they were entirely ignorant. In a word, foreign politics became fashionable.

One unhappy result was that the power of organized minorities to inflame public opinion was vastly increased, as numerous instances were to show, and this made the task of Ministers far more difficult. It is true that in earlier days governments had been compelled to yield to pressure outside Parliament in international matters, but it was to pressure by people who knew what they were talking about, not by people who had been worked upon by agitators. The

ordinary citizen after the Four Years' War was flattered at being asked to demonstrate for or against some particular policy in the field of foreign affairs, and advantage was too often taken of his vanity and ignorance. The effect upon Ministers, to whatever party they might belong, was deplorable, and even when the ambitions of Herr Hitler were plain for all the world to see, they feared to tell the country the truth. Lord Lloyd was thus perfectly right when he told an audience at St. Andrews eight months before the present war began :

For nearly twenty years the English people have been living in a fool's paradise, taught that the world was moving at an ever-increasing pace towards the millennium, when it was clearly rushing to disaster.

The only criticism which can be made of this statement is that the electorate in a democratic State can never wholly divest itself of responsibility for the mistakes of its rulers, and during the period under review the British people were implicated, even if only because of their resolute refusal to give ear to those few who pointed out to them the folly of their ways. The man-in-the-street is not entitled to say, when reminded of the many blunders committed during twenty years by successive administrations in respect of international affairs, " Please, it wasn't me; it was the other boy." He must take his share of the blame for the Hell which has been let loose.

CHAPTER H

A MOST SUPERIOR PERSON

WHEN the Peace Treaties had been signed there was a change at the Foreign Office, and on October 24th, 1919, Mr. Balfour was succeeded as Foreign Secretary by Lord Curzon. More than twenty years before Lord Curzon had been Under-Secretary when Lord Salisbury was Secretary of State, and the older man had complained that his junior always wanted him to conduct the foreign policy of the country as if he had an army of half a million men at his beck and call. Lord Curzon had chafed under what seemed to him to be the excessive caution of his chief, for he wished Great Britain to act in the Palmerstonian manner, when her record had been one of "dazzling strokes of policy, of baffled rivals and discomfited opponents; of perpetual shouting of challenges and waving of flags". The period which succeeded the Four Years' War called for very different treatment, and as Curzon himself put it, "The qualities which a British Foreign Minister should now cultivate seem to be those not of cleverness or astuteness, still less of enterprise or daring, but those of endless patience and of an equanimity that never falters."

If the times had changed, so had Lord Curzon. His character is not easy to understand, and although less than two decades have elapsed since his death he

has become almost a legendary figure : yet unless his outlook and personality are appreciated his career at the Foreign Office cannot be properly assessed. In earlier years, especially when he was Viceroy of India, he had been extremely impatient of opposition, and this attitude had not a little to do with his famous difference with Lord Kitchener. However, by the time that he became Foreign Secretary much of his old force of character was gone, largely owing to ill-health, and although he still retained his majestic presence, those who came into contact with him soon found out that it was a *merefafade* with nothing behind. Only at the very end of the Lloyd George coalition did Lord Curzon assert himself at the Foreign Office : otherwise he refused to see what he preferred to ignore; he too often mistook an analysis for a remedy; and he was always prone to consider that a crisis could be overcome by the penning of a ' superior ' despatch.

Even these personal disadvantages might have been overcome had he been popular with his fellow-countrymen, which was certainly not the case. Lord Zetland admits that from the highest official to the humblest messenger there was scarcely a man in the Foreign Office who at some time or another during Lord Curzon's tenure of the Foreign Secretaryship did not nurse a grievance against his chief for some inconsiderate act. An officer who was one day summoned to bring some documents for the consideration of a committee over which he was presiding was kept standing for an hour while they were being discussed. The incident was typical, for the inconveniences to which he put those who served him were brushed

aside as too trivial to merit attention. This in itself might have done him little harm had it not become generally known, for history abounds with instances of great men who have been popular with the masses in spite of their lack of personal consideration for others. This was not the case with Lord Curzon. He carried no weight at all with the electorate, who eagerly swallowed every story about his ignorance concerning the life and habits of the ordinary citizen, and consequently his views were little regarded by his colleagues in the Cabinet, more especially since, as already mentioned, he never pressed them. Yet the irony of the situation was that Lord Curzon wanted to be liked, and whenever it was brought home to him that he had behaved inconsiderately he always proceeded to make amends; but he was never able to live down a reputation which had been by no means unjustly earned.

This was bad enough, but in addition he had, as Foreign Secretary, to work with two men who were antipathetic to him—namely, Mr. Lloyd George and M. Poincare. There had been occasions in the past when the control of foreign policy had been to some extent divided, and a notable example was when Lord Curzon was Under-Secretary during the third Salisbury administration, for the Prime Minister, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Chamberlain formed a veritable triumvirate. The predominant position assumed by Mr. Lloyd George after the Armistice was to a large extent the outcome of abnormal circumstances resulting from the war itself. In his capacity as Prime Minister he was naturally the supreme representative of Britain at

the Peace Conference, and that conference was the inevitable starting-point of British post-war foreign policy. The negotiations there were conducted by Mr. Lloyd George, and it was thus always open to him on his return from France to say that he must himself deal with any particular question on the ground that he had been responsible for the policy pursued at Paris. He worked with and through an extensive secretariat of his own, and it was by no means unknown for him to receive the representatives of foreign Powers without Lord Curzon ever being informed of the fact.

Had the two men been temperamentally more alike, harmonious co-operation might all the same have been possible, but by nature they were as the poles asunder. They were divided, in the opinion of Lord Zetland, by much the same gulf as had yawned between Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener in India, and the comparison was ominous. When to these personal differences were added divergences of view as to the policy to be pursued, the situation became serious. As Mr. Asquith put it when the Lloyd George administration was tottering to its fall:

You have had during these last few years in the same sphere of administration two authorities speaking with different voices, often pursuing discrepant and irreconcilable policies, often with the result that the one that knows less in the long run supersedes and overrides the one that knows more.

In his relations with Mr. Lloyd George the Foreign

Secretary displayed the same inability or reluctance to take a strong line that marked his whole attitude at this time, and his behaviour towards the Prime Minister recalls that of Julia in Byron's *Don Juan* :

A little still she strove, and much repented,
And whispering " I will ne'er consent"—consented.

The antipathy which existed between Curzon and Poincare will be discussed in its proper place.

Such was the man who now became head of the Foreign Office and such were his relations with the Prime Minister. The problems with which he was confronted were not, let it be admitted, of his creation, but, as has been shown, they were to no inconsiderable extent due to the Government of which he had for years been a member and to a policy against which he had never effectively protested. This criticism applies, however, not only to Lord Curzon but to nearly all British statesmen since the Four Years' War. They have sat in Cabinet after Cabinet without raising their voices against what their subsequent attitude proves they knew to be wrong, and consequently when, at the eleventh hour, they have tried to undo the mischief they allowed their former colleagues to do, it has not been easy to give them the credit which they have somewhat naively claimed as their due. If, therefore, Lord Curzon had exceptional difficulties with which to contend, he cannot be held wholly innocent of their growth.

The first of them concerned British relations with France. That country had only abandoned the annexation of the Saar and the separation of the Rhineland from the Reich in return for a definite promise

by Great Britain and the United States of military support in the event of renewed aggression by Germany, and a Treaty of Triple Guarantee to this effect was signed on the same day as the Treaty of Versailles. When, however, the American Senate repudiated President Wilson, the British Government took the line that, as the guarantee was not individual but collective, it was no longer binding on Great Britain. From this decision many disastrous consequences flowed. France became alarmed for her security, and sought to ensure it by a system of Eastern alliances as well as by the adoption of an intransigent attitude towards Germany; this policy in its turn alienated British public opinion, while the repudiation of the Treaty of Triple Guarantee by Great Britain deprived her of much of her influence in Paris. It is true, too, that the attitude of France was often stupid and short-sighted. She did all she could to foster separatist feelings in the Rhineland, but by methods only too well calculated to defeat her purpose, while she sternly discouraged all attempts to restore the Bavarian monarchy on the ground that this would be merely the prelude to the return of the old order throughout the Reich, whereas in reality it would have been the first step in the break-up of Germany. This search on the part of France for a substitute for the Treaty of Triple Guarantee was one of the chief features of European politics until the conclusion of the Locarno Pact.

Second only to this problem was that caused by the ineptitude or dishonesty of the various governments which came into power in Germany. The German *is*

not, contrary to the general belief, naturally efficient, and he only becomes competent when driven; for some years after the Armistice those who had done the driving in the past, and" were to do it again in the future, were in eclipse, and the result was that the various commissions of control set up by the Peace Treaty found it very difficult to do their work, or to decide to what extent the obstacles in their path were due to incompetence and to what to deliberate obstruction. All this bred suspicion not only between victors and vanquished, but between the Allies themselves, and still further poisoned the international atmosphere. The French were inclined to lay the blame for German obstinacy on British leniency, to which it was retorted that a more conciliatory attitude on the part of Paris would go a long way towards making the Germans more reasonable. Taken in conjunction with the extravagant hopes which had been deliberately raised at the General Election of 1918, the effect upon the British electorate was most disturbing, and this in itself was calculated to increase the difficulties of the Foreign Secretary.

Again, the Peace Treaty had been signed and the League of Nations established on the assumption that the United States would continue to interest itself in European affairs, and when this proved not to be the case a fresh series of complications ensued. In any event it was a mistake to connect the League with the Treaty of Versailles, since it had now become little more than an organization of the victorious Powers; to call it a League of Nations while the United States, Germany and Russia were not members was clearly a

misnomer. Yet it was worked as if it was all-embracing, and this led to blunders which in the end were to prove its undoing. Mistaking the shadow for the substance has proved a common fault among the statesmen of the twentieth century.

Last, but by no means least, was the policy of unilateral disarmament to which Great Britain was committed. "The world knows only too well", Lord Curzon told the members of the Imperial Conference in October, 1923, "that when the war was over we disbanded our forces with almost undue alacrity." As so often, in attempting to set an example to others the Englishman only succeeded in making an example of himself. What had happened in respect of Free Trade occurred again with regard to Disarmament, and no one followed Britain's lead. As Mr. Winston Churchill has well put it:

In fact, it has been an invariable rule that England, so steadfast in war, so indomitable in peril, should at the moment when the dire pressures are relaxed and victory has been won cast away its fruits. Having made every sacrifice, having performed prodigies of strength and valour, our countrymen under every franchise or party have always fallen upon the ground in weakness and futility when a very little more perseverance would have made them supreme, or at least secure.

The unilateral disarmament was bad enough from the point of view of the Foreign Office, in that it

meant that England had always to negotiate with one hand tied behind her back, although there is no evidence that Lord Curson ever opposed it with any vigour; but what was worse was the attitude it produced among the people. A wave of pacifism of the wrong sort swept the country, and the order of the day, among leaders and led alike, was to leave everything to the League of Nations, in which the British public continued to repose a childlike confidence until the crisis caused by the Italian attack on Abyssinia. In these circumstances, with very meagre armaments and an uncertain public opinion upon which to rely, it was not easy to pursue a firm or consistent foreign policy.

The preoccupation of British diplomacy in the years immediately following the Treaty of Versailles was the execution of the provisions of that settlement, and the method of consultation between the interested parties was by conferences which were usually held at some such delectable spot as San Remo, Rapallo, or Cannes. Thither resorted the statesmen of the various Powers, attended by armies of secretaries and experts, and at the termination of their labours the world was generally informed that complete agreement had been reached on all outstanding points. The method of negotiation recalled that adopted at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, but there was one important difference; when the masters of Europe met then they were concerned to prevent the outbreak of another war, while after Versailles they were still busy trying to liquidate that which had already come to an end. The most thorny problem was that

of German reparations, and Great Britain and France were by no means always agreed on the matter.

Nothing is so dead as a conference which did not achieve anything, but some account must be rendered of these meetings of the Powers, if only to give an idea of the maze in which the statesmen of Europe had condemned themselves to wander. The first of these conferences was held at San Remo in April, 1920, and it met in the most unpropitious circumstances. As a result of the violation of the demilitarized zone by Germany, in the course of operations in connection with a Communist rising in the Ruhr, the French had occupied Frankfurt and four other German towns, much against the advice of the British Government, which had, however, then been forced most reluctantly to give its consent to the occupation of three more towns, this time at the entrance to the Ruhr valley. To San Remo there went Mr. Lloyd George, M. Millerand, and Signor Nitti as well as Lord Curzon, who disliked everything about the conference. San Remo the Foreign Secretary found " a very poor sort of place confined in a very narrow strip between the hills and the sea, much less tidy and spick-and-span than the French Riviera ", and he loathed the " eternal twitter of the engines of Italian motors, which seem to make quite a different noise from any other ".

As San Remo is in Italy, the Italian Prime Minister, Signor Nitti, took the chair, and so long as the assembled statesmen kept away from the subject which they had come together to discuss—namely, Germany—all went well. Signor Nitti was affable and bland,

M. Millerand more subdued than the Englishmen had expected, and Mr. Lloyd George full of buoyancy. To make the party complete Mr. Balfour came over from Cannes, and delighted everybody with excellent stories told in execrable French : even Marshal Foch relaxed somewhat in this genial atmosphere. The scene changed when the conference settled down to its agenda. The French refused to consider the idea of German participation, while the British and Italians opposed the French argument that one ally might act independently against Germany to enforce the Treaty of Versailles. The upshot was that a sharp note was sent to Berlin demanding fulfilment of the disarmament clauses of the Peace Treaty, and refusing a German request for an increase in the permanent force of 100,000 men fixed at Versailles. The other problems were left to be settled later.

To San Remo in April succeeded Spa in July. This conference differed from its predecessor in that the representatives of Germany were admitted for the first time, chiefly owing to the insistence of Mr. Lloyd George. The atmosphere was not exactly cordial. There was much wrangling over coal, over reparations, over disarmament, and over war criminals. Finally, the Allied demands in respect of disarmament were conceded, and there was an agreement about coal. The much more difficult problem of reparations was left over to another conference, this time in London, early in the following year, which not only proved abortive, but resulted in an Allied ultimatum to Germany; this in its turn led to the fall of one German Government, and the rise of another which

duly gave way to the Allies. In the meantime there had been a triangular duel between Great Britain, France, and Germany over events in Silesia, and British troops had been sent there to restore order in the conflict between German and Polish bands.

Probably the best known of all the conferences of this period was the one at Cannes in January, 1922. It was held for the purpose of framing resolutions which were to be the basis for another conference at Genoa two months hence, but it is likely to go down to history for quite another reason. By this time Mr. Lloyd George had become anathema to the greater part of the French people, who considered him the personification of the Gallophobe and pro-German section of British opinion. Accordingly there was considerable opposition in Paris to the idea of M. Briand, who had become Prime Minister once again, going to Cannes at all, and one shrewd old compatriot warned him, "*Ab, Briand, vous etes deja alle a Canossa.*¹ *Prenezgarde que vous n'alliezpas a Cannes aussi*". When, therefore, photographs appeared in the Press of M. Briand apparently accepting with due humility instruction from Mr. Lloyd George in the art of swinging a golf club, this was taken as evidence that he was the Welshman's pupil in more important matters, and in consequence he was compelled to resign. M. Briand was replaced by M. Poincare, and a new, and still more agitated, phase in Anglo-French relations-began.

M. Poincare was the type of Frenchman with whom the ordinary Englishman finds it most difficult to deal.

¹ An allusion to the recent re-establishment of diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican.

He was in general precise and formal, and there was nothing imaginative or sentimental in his composition. He was a Lorrainer, and the vicissitudes to which his native province had been exposed had hardened a nature never very soft. His brother was one of the greatest of modern mathematicians, and his outlook, too, was to no small extent that of the mathematician. Clemenceau and Briand were Frenchmen to the core, but in the case of both there was something to command the affection of the foreigner, even if that foreigner were English. From the beginning there was a complete antipathy between M. Poincaré and Lord Curzon, and before long intercourse between them became almost impossible. On one occasion the French Prime Minister shrieked and roared at the British Foreign Secretary, raging up and down the room the while, until the latter could stand it no longer, and walked out. As one of Lord Curzon's colleagues remarked, "It was an incredible scene." In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Franco-British differences became enhanced, and the two nations drifted apart in a manner that boded extremely ill to the peace of Europe.

Mr. Lloyd George realized that an effort must be made to secure that general settlement which it was so fondly hoped had been reached three years before, and it was in this spirit that he went in May to the conference at Genoa to which had been invited the representatives of all nations. It was doomed from the start, for M. Poincaré not only refused to attend himself, but insisted on a rigid restriction of the scope of the conference and the exclusion from its agenda of reparations or any other matter arising out of the

Peace Treaties Then the United States refused to be represented, and this deprived the gathering of much of its importance. Above all, when the stage was finally set it was suddenly announced that Germany and Russia had made an alliance, known as the Treaty of Rapallo, and as friendship and co-operation between the nations was supposed to be the object of the conference, the other Powers could not but give their blessing, though this agreement was not in the least what most of them desired. The French said the alliance was the natural result of weakness on the part of the Western Powers, to which it was replied in London that the harsh policy of France had thrown Moscow and Berlin into one another's arms. However this may be, on May 16th Lord Curzon, who had not gone to the conference, was writing to his wife, "Genoa has now finally collapsed, and the Prime Minister is coming back with nothing—entirely his own fault. I hope it will be the last of these fantastic gatherings which are really only designed as a stage on which he is to perform."

The Foreign Secretary's wish was to be gratified, for although there were to be more conferences, the attempted reorganization of Europe by this means was henceforth abandoned as a definite policy. The failure of this system had certain lessons, of which the most important is that a conference which has not been a success inevitably leaves matters worse than it found them: the ground, therefore, must be very carefully prepared in advance, and it was for this reason that Sir Austen Chamberlain succeeded at Locarno when Mr. Lloyd George had failed on the French and Italian Riviera. Of course such preparation necessitates

working through the regular diplomatic channels, and Mr. Lloyd George was notoriously distrustful of the professional diplomat. Nor was this all, for ever since Germany commenced her struggle for world hegemony in the early years of the century it had been essential that before any problem was discussed among the Powers an agreement should be reached between Great Britain and France; not to do this was to play straight into the hands of Berlin, but it was only in the hard school of bitter experience that British and French statesmen came to appreciate the fact.

When Mr. Lloyd George returned from Genoa the days of his Government were already numbered, but its fall was precipitated by the progress of events in the Near East. Owing to some very clever German diplomacy and the failure of Great Britain to take advantage of her opportunities, the Turks came into the Four Years' War on the side of the Central Powers, and after fighting very gallantly and achieving some notable successes, were decisively beaten and had to sue for an armistice, which was only granted on very stringent terms. When this had been done the Near East was left to look after itself while the victors squabbled over the spoils nearer home, and the natural consequence was that from the point of view of the Allies the situation there very rapidly deteriorated. Lord Curzon realized the danger, and called the attention of his colleagues to it, but he was not ready to resign if his advice was not taken, and so it was ignored. In due course—that is to say, nearly two years after hostilities had ceased—the Treaty of Sevres was signed in August, 1920. By this settlement the

Turks retained Constantinople and a small strip of territory in its immediate neighbourhood, but the Straits, henceforth open to all, were placed under an international Commission, while Smyrna and a considerable *hinterland* were handed over to Greece. It is not without interest to note that this district had been promised to Italy by the Pact of St. Jean de Maurienne in April, 1917.

Whatever intrinsic merits the Treaty of Sevres may have possessed were neutralized by the fact that it was concluded too late—a fate which has so often overtaken the efforts of British diplomacy during the past quarter-of-a-century. The fact was that the settlement was made with a Turkey which no longer existed save in name. Sultan Mohammed VI at Constantinople, under the guns of the British fleet, represented nobody except himself, and all real power was in the hands of Mustapha Kemal Pasha, later to be known as Kemal Ataturk, away in the heart of Anatolia, where he was well out of the range of His Britannic Majesty's ships. Had the Western Powers but known it, Ataturk was a portent, for he was, with Lenin, the first of those dictators who were to cause them so much trouble. He knew perfectly well that British public opinion would not allow an army to be sent against him into the interior of Asia Minor, and the policy which Mr. Lloyd George pursued, in spite of occasional growls from Lord Curzon, suited him admirably. The British Government pretended first of all that Kemal did not exist, and continued to treat with the Sultan, who had as little effective control over the greater part of Turkey as had Mr. Lloyd George him-

self: then the Greeks were encouraged to try their hand at crushing the Nationalists, and this, as might have been foreseen, rallied the whole Turkish people to Kemal.

At this point it is pertinent to enquire on what information the British Government acted. Before the Four Years' War it was generally admitted that Whitehall was extremely well informed as to the position in other countries, and during that conflict there can be little doubt but that London knew more about what was happening in Germany than did Berlin of what was taking place in the British Isles. During the past twenty years, however, there would seem to have been a change. The British Government made a serious miscalculation in their estimate of the respective strength of the Greeks and Turks in 1922, and this unhappily proved to be but the first of a series of similar errors of judgment. The rapid growth of Nazism in Germany; the inability of the Abyssinians to offer effective opposition to Italy; the strength behind General Franco in Spain; and the failure of the Poles to resist the German advance: none of these was foreseen, and the result in each case was a severe blow to British prestige. A successful foreign policy depends upon a steady flow of accurate and up-to-date information, and so far as Great Britain is concerned this has been signally lacking during the past two decades. Whether it is that for some reason or another the information is not forthcoming, or whether it now gets no further than the pigeon-holes of Whitehall, is a question which some enterprising M.P. might well investigate.

France and Italy were under no illusions as to the outcome of the conflict between Kemal and the Greeks, and they hastened to make friends with the Nationalist leader: M. Poincare, in particular, was by no means sorry to give Mr. Lloyd George his tit for tat for the British failure to implement the Treaty of Triple Guarantee. Accordingly, when the Greek armies broke, and the victorious Turks were at the gates of Constantinople, the French troops were ordered not to co-operate with the British. For a brief space it looked as if there might be war between Great Britain and Turkey, and an open breach between London and Paris. The former, however, was averted by the tact of Sir Charles Harington, the general on the spot, while for once Lord Curzon asserted himself, and prevented the worst consequences of the Franco-British difference. Coming on top of many other unpopular acts both at home and abroad, this crisis was too much for the Conservative Party, and in the middle of October, 1922, Mr. Lloyd George was forced to resign.

Meanwhile a fine crop of dragons' teeth had been sown in another part of the Near East—that is to say, in Egypt. The position of Great Britain in that country had for many years been difficult of exact definition, for in theory Egypt was an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, and the British Agent and Consul-General merely conveyed the views of his Government to the Khedive: the practice was very different, since the representative of Great Britain was the real ruler of Egypt, British officials had a predominant influence in the admⁱ*
back were the bayonets of the B

tion; the Egyptian Army, too, was under British command and control. As for the suzerainty of the Sultan, its value was seen during the Turco-Italian War when the Porte was refused permission to send troops across Egypt to Tripoli. When the Turks entered the Four Years' War on the side of the Central Powers, and the Khedive also espoused their cause, it was clear that the existing regime could not continue : so a British Protectorate was proclaimed, another prince of the House of Mohammed Ali was placed on the throne with the title of Sultan, and the British Agent became a High Commissioner.

This course was adopted because it seemed to be the line of least resistance, whereas annexation pure and simple held out the prospect of many difficulties. Unfortunately it soon proved necessary, for military reasons, to proclaim martial law, and this in its turn not unnaturally led the Egyptians to complain that they had been given the shadow of autonomy without the substance: annexation they would have understood, but a protectorate combined with martial law seemed to be making the worst of both worlds. Nevertheless for a time all went well, though discontent began to grow when animals were requisitioned for war purposes and the Egyptians saw their country swarming with apparently affluent Englishmen. Another disturbing factor was the promise of independence given by the Allies to the Arabs, who were despised in Egypt. If these people have a right to be independent, it was argued, so have we, and, had anyone been prepared to listen, the first rumblings of the coming storm could have been heard long before the Armistice was

signed. There should thus have been no reason for surprise when, a few days after the termination of hostilities, the Nationalist leader, Zaghlul, took a deputation to Sir Reginald Wingate, the High Commissioner, to ask that a delegation might be allowed to go to London to discuss Egyptian affairs. Sir Reginald supported this request, but the Foreign Office rejected it, and in the early weeks of 1919 the storm broke. The Nationalists resorted to violence, and there were anti-British risings, accompanied by loss of life in all parts of the country. The High Commissioner showed firmness; order was restored, Zaghlul and three of his colleagues were deported to Malta, and about thirty people were put to death for their share in the murder of British soldiers and civilians.

At this point Sir Reginald was suddenly superseded by Lord Allenby, and for the next three years Whitehall blew alternately hot and cold. It might have been expected that men with the administrative experience of Mr. Balfour and Lord Curzon would have realized that in the East of all places consistency of policy is essential if trouble is to be avoided, but apparently this fact escaped them, for Zaghlul was alternately ignored, invited to Downing Street to discuss matters, and exiled to the Seychelles. Possibly it was the system that was at fault rather than the men. The Foreign Office has many virtues, but it is not ideally constituted for the government of an Oriental country, and yet the Foreign Office was responsible for the government of Egypt. The tendency in Whitehall was to regard the High Commissioner as an ambassador of the modern type—that is to say, as one who would

refer to London for instructions on all save the most trivial matters—and when the occupant of the Residency at Cairo showed any independence there was trouble with the Foreign Office. This was the case alike with Sir Reginald Wingate, Lord Allenby and Lord Lloyd.

Lord Allenby made, or was compelled by London to make, concessions which had they been granted earlier might have won the gratitude of the Egyptian people, but which were merely taken to mean that Great Britain had yielded to agitation, and that more agitation would produce still further concessions. There was much to be said for such an interpretation of British policy, for only too often did Great Britain refuse in some quarter of the globe first of all to consider a question; then, when confronted with violent agitation, she not only modified her previous policy but abandoned it altogether, and in these circumstances she naturally got no thanks for what she had done. That was the case with regard to Egypt. In November, 1918, the British Government refused to allow Zaghlul even to come to London to present his case, but by April, 1923, the Protectorate had been abolished, and Egypt was the proud possessor of a King, two Houses of Parliament, and all the usual appurtenances of a constitutional monarchy. Violence had paid, as it had also paid the Sinn Feiner and the suffragette. The moral did not go undrawn in more than one European country.

When Mr. Bonar Law succeeded Mr. Lloyd George as Prime Minister there was no change in the Foreign Secretaryship, though there had been one in the

attitude of the Foreign Secretary, which Mr. Winston Churchill characterized as " sudden and nimble ", but which Lord Curzon himself described as " slow and perhaps even belated". However this may be, the Foreign Secretary enjoyed a much freer hand under the new Premier than had been the case under the old, but he was handicapped in the use of it by his natural limitations. From November 20th, 1922, until February 4th, 1923, the Lausanne Conference, which had met to settle the fate of the Near East after the Turkish victories, dragged out its weary course, and from the outset it was clear that the differences between Great Britain and France would be the rock on which it was likely to founder. Such being the case, it might have been supposed that Lord Curzon would have been at special pains to cultivate the friendship of Italy, but when he met Signor Mussolini for the first time he was barely civil to the Italian dictator. Eventually, a second Lausanne Conference did arrive at a settlement, and the Turks gained their reward for refusing to accept the Treaty of Sevres, but it was once again made clear that while Great Britain and France remained in violent disagreement the general international situation would continue to be extremely disturbed.

The year 1923 witnessed a further deterioration in that general situation, and throughout the twelve months Great Britain and France were severed by what the wits termed a *rupture cordiale*. The final breach came over reparations. These had been scaled down at Cannes, and for six months after that Germany met her revised obligations, but in July she announced

that she could do so no longer. The reasons put forward were her economic difficulties, the financial chaos, and the collapse of her currency. To this the French replied that Germany had made no serious attempt to put her house in order since the Armistice, and that successive administrations had been guilty of the most reckless extravagance. By the Treaty of Versailles provision was made for this contingency, for the Allies were empowered to take any action deemed necessary against Germany without that country being entitled to regard this as an act of war. M. Poincare was determined to avail himself of this right, and nothing that Mr. Bonar Law said could divert him from his purpose.

At this eleventh hour the British Prime Minister, in the absence of Lord Curzon elsewhere, did everything in his power to bridge the gulf between London and Paris. He proposed that the reparation debt should be reduced to £2,500,000,000; that bonds of that amount should be immediately issued; and that, subject to the establishment in Berlin of a foreign Financial Council to supervise the reorganization of German finance, a four-year moratorium should be granted. Mr. Bonar Law accompanied this proposal with an offer, in the event of his suggestions being accepted, to cancel the French and Italian war debts to Great Britain, less certain sums representing gold deposits already in British hands and various minor financial adjustments; and he added that should Germany fail to satisfy the Council that she was making adequate efforts to attain financial stability, Great Britain would be prepared to join in the forcible seizure of German

revenues and assets, as well as in an extended occupation of territory. These proposals had much to recommend them, but they were made too late, and the situation had got out of hand. There was nothing for it but for the Allies to agree to differ, and the French marched into the Ruhr.

This act had the most unexpected and far-reaching consequences. In the recklessness of her despair Germany deliberately debased her currency until it became worthless. The result of this was that by one stroke she got rid of her internal debt, but at the cost of ruining the middle class which had been her backbone for so many years : the younger members of this class were thus denied the advantages which their fathers had enjoyed, and thus it came about that the very section of the community which in normal circumstances, is the bulwark of stability was ripe for revolution. Furthermore, the suffering caused by the occupation of the Ruhr helped to discredit the regime under which it had taken place, and this again helped to pave the way for a dictatorship. Whether or not France was the gainer in terms of cash by what she did is a subject upon which it is not easy to express an opinion, but she outraged public opinion throughout the world by her use of coloured troops, and left memories in Germany which will not be readily effaced. The British Government made no secret of its disapproval of the Ruhr adventure, but it could not wholly divest itself of responsibility, for the invasion was in no small degree an expression of that desire for security which France had hoped to obtain by the Treaty of Triple Guarantee.

Such was the state of Anglo-French relations when Mr. Baldwin, who had succeeded Mr. Bonar Law as Prime Minister, went to the country on the issue of Tariff Reform, and, largely owing to his own faulty tactics, was defeated at the polls. On January 23rd, 1924, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald became Foreign Secretary as well as Prime Minister, thus following the example of Lord Salisbury in the closing decades of the previous century. It was not, perhaps, an ideal combination of offices, but if either of them suffered in this instance it was the Premiership. The change from Lord Curzon was distinctly one for the better, for although that "most superior person" generally knew the course which ought to be pursued, he nearly always failed to pursue it. Mr. MacDonald, save where he was guided by party considerations, as in the case of Russia, was possessed of a judgment, or perhaps one should say an instinct, that was usually sound. He certainly did not share Lord Curzon's illusion that an occasional admonition would suffice to bring about a general recovery in Europe.

He fully realized that an improvement in the relations between Great Britain and France was an essential preliminary to any improvement in the international situation as a whole, and also that this was bound up with the question of French security. Fortune undoubtedly favoured him, for soon after he took office there was a General Election in France, and M. Poincaré and his *Bloc National* was replaced by M. Herriot and the *Cartel des Gauches*. The two Prime Ministers had much in common both in their tastes and outlook, and they worked hard throughout the summer of 1924

to bring their respective peoples together again. The method favoured at first had been a Treaty of Mutual Assistance, At the Third Assembly of the League in 1922 resolutions were adopted laying down the principle that disarmament and guarantees for security must go together. In the following year the Temporary Mixed Commission prepared a draft treaty, known as the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, for the purpose of giving practical effect to this principle. However, during the course of 1924 the British Government came to the conclusion that this arrangement was not acceptable, chiefly owing to the peculiar position of the British Empire, for, as one authority put it, " the apportionment of liability on Continental lines cut fatally across the structure of the British Commonwealth with its world-wide responsibilities ". In its place was evolved the Geneva Protocol.

This document proclaimed " the solidarity of the members of the international community ", and referred to a war of aggression as " a violation of this solidarity and an international crime " : it went on to propose the amendment of the Covenant of the League with a view to rendering more effective Article VIII, which prescribes " the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations ". The means by which this aim was to be attained may be summarised as follows :

1. Not to resort to war against other nations observing the Protocol, whether members of the League or not.

2. To recognize as compulsory the jurisdiction of the Court of International Justice in certain specified matters.

3. To refer political quarrels to the League or to arbitral bodies.

4. Not to mobilize armed forces during the course of arbitration of a dispute.

5. To consider as an aggressor any Power resorting to war in defiance of the agreement.

6. To consent that aggressor States should pay the costs of war to the limit of their ability, but that war indemnities should not include cessions of territory.

7. To take part in an international Conference on the reduction of armaments as a preliminary to rendering the Protocol operative.

Finally, it was agreed that a State engaging in hostilities should be presumed to be an aggressor unless a unanimous decision of the League Council should declare otherwise. On October 2nd the Protocol was without a dissentient vote recommended by the Assembly of the League to the various Governments, while far away in a Bavarian prison Adolf Hitler was putting the finishing touches to *Mein Kampf*.

From the beginning the Protocol was more popular in Continental than in British circles. Mr. MacDonald defended it on the ground that it confirmed and restated, rather than extended, the national commitments under the Covenant of the League, but his argument carried little conviction outside the ranks of his own party. The ordinary Englishman was inclined

to criticize the Protocol as an instrument to place the British Navy under the control of Geneva. Dominion opinion was especially critical, and it was only pressure from Downing Street that prevented the Dominion representatives from voting against it.

There was one other country with which Mr. MacDonald did much to improve British relations during his first term of office, and that was Italy. Italian policy had been none too friendly during the complications in the Near East two years earlier, and more recently opinion in Great Britain had been stirred by the bombardment of Corfu. On the other hand, Italy had a legitimate grievance in that she had never received her due under Article 13 of the Treaty of London of 1915 which stipulated that in the event of Great Britain or France increasing their colonial possessions in Africa at the expense of Germany, these two Powers would recognize the right of Italy to compensation, particularly in respect of a rectification of the frontiers of Eritrea, Somaliland, and Libya. So far as Great Britain was concerned this compensation was to take the form of Jubaland, but Lord Curzon had on one excuse or another done nothing in the matter, and Signor Mussolini was becoming extremely impatient at the continued delay. Mr. MacDonald took the question up at once, and in June it was finally settled.

In November, the Labour Government having been defeated at the polls, Mr. MacDonald was succeeded as Foreign Secretary by Mr. Austen Chamberlain, and it can certainly be claimed on his behalf that he left the international situation a good deal better than he

found it. The Protocol, it is true, had to be discarded, chiefly because it was in advance of public opinion at the time, but the fact that it had been concluded at all marked a welcome improvement in Anglo-French relations. Whatever view may be taken of Mr. MacDonald's domestic policy or of his subsequent career, the short period which he spent at the Foreign Office contrasts very favourably with the four years of his predecessor's sway there.

CHAPTER HI

THE SPIRIT OF LOCARNO

MR. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN had many qualifications, both personal and political, for the office of Foreign Secretary. He had been in the House of Commons for over thirty years, and he was thus thoroughly grounded in the business of public life, while, unlike Lord Curzon, he carried sufficient weight in the country to make his opinion respected in the Cabinet. He was extremely well-read in history and international affairs, for although he had never previously been officially connected with the conduct of foreign policy, he had, by virtue of the offices which he had held, been brought into very close touch with developments abroad. Moreover, like Lord Bolingbroke, he had the invaluable advantage of having studied the mind of the Continent on the spot in his youth, for after he came down from Cambridge he had been sent by his father for a year first to Paris and then to Berlin. In the German capital he attended the lectures of Treitschke, which filled him with foreboding, for, as he wrote at the time, "if you continuously preach to the youth of a country that they stand on a higher step of the creation to all other nations, they are only too ready to believe it," As Foreign Secretary he showed how truly he was his father's son in proving himself a practical idealist: his long Parlia-

mentary career had taught him the limits within which he was free to act, and he never hankered after the unattainable, being content to do his best with the tools that he had. Two claims in particular he possessed to distinction: he never took a step without preparing the way very carefully indeed, and his historical sense rendered him profoundly aware of the mistakes of his predecessors.

Owing to his monocle and correct sartorial appearance Mr. Chamberlain earned in some quarters a reputation for reserve and austerity which the facts most certainly do not warrant. As his brother has borne witness, he was essentially what Dr. Johnson used to describe as a clubbable man, and he was never happier than when mixing with his fellows. Nor did he by any means confine himself to the society of his contemporaries or of politicians, for he touched life at many points. Youth especially appealed to him, and it has been put upon record how one night the Foreign Secretary sat up at the Cafe Royal until the small hours defending his policy to two young Socialists. At such gatherings as those of the Coningsby Club, where men lately down from Oxford and Cambridge plied him with questions, he was at his best, and at Geneva he was readily accessible to the representative of any Power, however small: indeed, it was the trouble he took to keep himself acquainted with the problems of every country that played no little part in his breakdown in 1928. It is true that self-important back-benchers may have thought that he treated them too superciliously in the lobbies and smoke-room of the House of Commons,

though in taking offence in this way they forgot, amongst other things, the badness of his sight. Perhaps the best tribute to Mr. Austen Chamberlain is that of Mr. A. P. Herbert: "Big men die and are almost at once forgotten. Sir Austen was one of the few, I feel, who are genuinely 'missed'. He spent his life serving his country. He died poor, but respected and beloved."

Throughout his whole career Mr. Chamberlain was very conscious that he was his father's son : sometimes this was a handicap, but at the Foreign Office, when he was called upon to negotiate with Germany, the memory of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's dealings with that Power prevented him from trusting Berlin too far. The experience of the elder Chamberlain deserves to be remembered. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, when he was Colonial Secretary in Lord Salisbury's administration, he wished Great Britain to emerge from her isolation and to conclude a binding agreement with the Triple Alliance. After a certain amount of preliminary negotiation it was agreed between Mr. Chamberlain and Prince von Bulow, the Imperial Chancellor, that the former should make a public pronouncement to this effect which the latter would then echo in the Reichstag. The Colonial Secretary carried out his part of the bargain, but the German failed him, and went out of his way to be offensive to Great Britain. It was little wonder that Mr. Chamberlain should have expressed to the German Emperor the opinion that the Imperial Chancellor was "a. bad man to go tiger-shooting with". This was in 1898, and three years later the

Colonial Secretary persuaded his somewhat unwilling colleagues in the Cabinet to try again. Once more, chiefly owing to the influence of Count Holstein, the German Government cold-shouldered the proposal, and this convinced Mr. Chamberlain of the impossibility of effecting an understanding with Berlin. He had fathomed the mentality of those with whom it was necessary to deal, and when the time came to conclude the Entente with France the new policy had no more enthusiastic supporter. To his elder son the recollection of this episode apparently remained more vivid than to his younger.

Two years before his death Mr., then Sir, Austen Chamberlain committed to paper his views on the French and German peoples, and a paragraph from this analysis may well be quoted as revealing his personal views :

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 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. "What has been, may be." If the peril ever revives, the same deep forces will be at work, the same great issues at stake. England and France will need each other. Pray God they stand together, or our common civilization will perish.

Mr. Chamberlain enjoyed a very free hand at the Foreign Office, for Mr. Baldwin interfered extremely little with his Ministers' running of their Departments. He was a far freer agent than Sir Edward Grey had ever been. On the other hand, although Mr. Chamberlain was in the line of succession to the great Foreign Secretaries of an earlier age, it must never be forgotten that he was subject to two handicaps which they had never known—that is to say, the unreasoning optimism of the large majority of his fellow-countrymen and the unilateral disarmament of Great Britain which had been its result. Mr. Chamberlain never had the easy assurance of overwhelming might, even at sea, behind him.

When he arrived at the Foreign Office he was at once confronted with a difficulty. The result of the General Election had proved that the majority of the electorate disliked the Protocol, and therefore one of

the first tasks of the new Government must be to reject it: but how was this to be done without throwing Europe back into the chaos from which Mr* MacDonald had done so much to rescue her? What, too, would be the effect upon the new-found friendship between Great Britain and France? The more the Foreign Secretary studied the problem the more intricate it seemed to him to become, not least because it was now clear that the French would not be satisfied with the Protocol alone, and that even if the British Government accepted this without amendment it would be at once confronted on the part of France and Belgium by a demand to supplement it with a tripartite treaty. The fact that he had so recently taken office gave Mr. Chamberlain an excuse for postponing immediate action, and in the meantime he took advantage of a meeting of the League Council in Rome to sound Signor Mussolini and M. Herriot on the subject.

The result of these discussions, and of further reflection, was that the Cabinet decided to discard the Protocol, but they were fully aware that they must put something in its place, and the only substitute of which they could think was a defensive alliance with France of the type which had been envisaged six years before. Service opinion was still in favour of such a policy, but much water had flowed under the bridges since the Armistice, and it was doubtful how far the ordinary citizen would approve. The invasion of the Ruhr had made France extremely unpopular, quite apart from the traditional and often illogical British sympathy for the under-dog, but all

the same there seemed no other course. The Government's dilemma did not long remain a secret, and when the news of its proposed solution reached Berlin there was consternation. A bilateral Anglo-French alliance would be a re-affirmation of the Treaty of Versailles, and would perpetuate the division of the European Powers into victors and vanquished. This panic produced a German offer which was to revolutionize the whole situation, and it was primarily due to one man—Gustav Stresemann.

With Dr. Bruning he was one of the very few German statesmen of modern times who could truthfully be described as a good European. It has been stated that it was in methods rather than in ends that he differed from the Junkers and the Nazis, and that both Mr. Chamberlain and M. Briand were hoodwinked by him at Locarno. The latter charge is disproved by the story of the negotiations leading up to the pact, but so far as the former is concerned it seems to be based chiefly upon the fact that he strove to regain for his country something of her old position in the world, and, if possible, some of her lost territory. How far his mentality was removed from that of the Nazis is surely to be seen in their loathing of his memory. He certainly made some serious blunders, but these seem inherent in German diplomacy, while if at times he seemed unreasonable, allowance must be made for the difficulties of his position in his own country. Taking Dr. Stresemann all in all, it would be no exaggeration to say that—again with Dr. Bruning—he was the most, one had almost written the only, honest German

statesman with whom Great Britain has dealt since 1870.

Towards the end of January the German Government intimated that it was willing to enter into an agreement guaranteeing the existing frontiers in Western Europe, but in doing so it committed one of those blunders inherent in German diplomatic methods, by asking Mr. Chamberlain to say nothing of the offer to the French. Not unnaturally, the Foreign Secretary saw in the approach only a clumsy attempt to drive in a wedge between Great Britain and France, and he considered that " these overtures were premature, and that the moment was not opportune for their successful prosecution ". Nevertheless, Dr. Stresemann persisted, and he put forward more detailed proposals, this time to the French, whom he endeavoured—unsuccessfully—to pledge not to divulge them to the British Government. Germany was ready to join in a pact between the Powers interested in the situation on the Rhine, especially France, Great Britain, Italy, and herself, with a solemn undertaking over a long period not to go to war with one another. The German Government further considered that a pact between the States interested in the Rhine might include a formal guarantee, both individual and collective, of the existing territorial position, and that the signatory Powers might further guarantee the fulfilment of the obligation in regard to the demilitarisation of the Rhineland; this pact would be completed by a treaty of arbitration to be concluded by Germany with France and the other Powers. So far as her Eastern frontiers were concerned, Germany was not

prepared to guarantee them in the same way as those in the West, but she was willing to conclude a treaty of arbitration with Poland and Czecho-Slovakia, Finally, the German Government considered that the pact of security could be formulated in such a way as to prepare for the conclusion of a world convention, to include all nations, on the model of the Protocol.

So was the Pact of Locarno born, but although the Foreign Secretary was now more favourably disposed towards the German suggestion, in which he saw a way out of his difficulty over the Protocol, there were still many problems to be solved. In the first place, would the French consider the new proposals went far enough, or would they require some further guarantee? Then there were the Eastern frontiers to be taken into account, and the German scheme might well result in a state of affairs in which Germany would be within her rights in crushing Poland while France was unable to come to her ally's assistance. Lastly, there was the attitude of the British electorate to be considered. The Liberal and Labour Parties were still wedded to the Protocol, and would oppose anything in the nature of a regional pact, while the Conservatives were all for a curtailment, rather than for an extension, of the national commitments. It was thus incumbent upon Mr. Chamberlain to walk extremely warily. The statesmen of France and Germany were in an equally difficult position. M. Herriot had to move at least as cautiously as the British Foreign Secretary, for his fellow-countrymen were not yet in favour of any pact with Germany, in view

of her-failure to comply with the disarmament conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. As for Dr. Stresemann, he and Dr. Luther, the Chancellor, had to take into account a public opinion that was highly suspicious, while their position was still further complicated by the fact that the German President, Herr Ebert, died at the end of February, so that their country was about to be plunged into what promised to be a particularly bitter contest to choose his successor.

With the prospect of a third course before them the British Government decided to reject alike the Protocol and the project for a defensive alliance with France. Accordingly, the Foreign Secretary left for Paris and Geneva to announce this decision. No charge has more frequently been brought against Mr. Chamberlain than that he was excessively Francophil, and undoubtedly some colour was lent to this accusation by an unhappy remark he once made about loving France like a woman. In actual fact he put as much pressure on Paris as on Berlin, and few of his critics have taken the trouble to study the relevant documents. On this present occasion he told M. Herriot quite firmly that both the Protocol and the defensive alliance were out of the question in view of the attitude of British public opinion, and he also insisted upon a further evacuation of the occupied German territory: in return he promised to sign a pact based upon Dr. Stresemann's memorandum. The French Premier was far from welcoming this communication, but unless he was prepared for a breach with England, which Mr. Chamberlain knew was not the case, there was

nothing for him to do but to acquiesce, however unwillingly.

From Paris the Foreign Secretary went to Geneva, where he sounded the death-knell of the Protocol. He declared that far from completing the work of the Covenant, it destroyed its balance and altered its spirit. For the most part his hearers were no more appreciative of his arguments than M. Herriot had been, but there were signs that their dissatisfaction was greater in public than was always the case in private. Mr. Chamberlain also took the opportunity to further the negotiations for a pact by impressing upon the Poles that a British guarantee of their frontiers was out of the question, while he made sure of the support of Italy : Signor Mussolini, indeed, went so far as to urge that the pact should be placed under the safeguard of the League. Such conversations played no little part in Mr. Chamberlain's activities at Geneva, and they represented an aspect of the League's usefulness which is too often ignored. The quarterly meetings of the Council gave the world's statesmen an opportunity of discussing the problems of the moment without an international crisis being thereby provoked. Since the eclipse of the League the foreign minister of one Power has been unable to meet the foreign minister of another without the Press of half the world breaking into scare-headlines, but Geneva did provide for such meetings taking place in at any rate relative calm. This is certainly not the least of the few benefits conferred by the League on its political side.

Geneva was one thing, but the House of Commons

was another, and the Opposition launched a general attack upon the foreign policy of the Government in general, and on the abandonment of the Protocol in particular. Then was seen the advantage of having at the Foreign Office an old Parliamentary hand. Mr. Chamberlain began by addressing himself to the Conservative majority. He laid considerable stress upon the very restricted liberty of action which would be left to a British Government under the Protocol, and he then aroused the enthusiasm of his supporters by the statement that he profoundly distrusted logic when applied to politics, and that all English history justified him in this view. Having rallied the benches behind him, the Foreign Secretary proceeded to spike the guns of the Opposition. " Like a dexterous conjurer he produced the German proposal from his pocket," as Dr. Stresemann's biographer put it, and gave an outline of its contents. He showed how both in the West and in the East the German Government was prepared to renounce war as a means of securing the revision of the Treaty of Versailles; he stated as his belief that Berlin was making a sincere and honest attempt to arrive at a settlement; and he concluded that the policy of the Government was to seek an agreement along the lines of the German memorandum. In the face of these tactics the Opposition attack melted away.

The way was now clear for the negotiation of the pact itself, but that was to be a slow business, and Mr. Chamberlain wisely made no attempt to force the pace. The difficulties came mostly from the German side although the proposal itself had originated in

Berlin. Even while the Foreign Secretary was taking his stand in the House of Commons upon Dr. Stresemann's memorandum there was an incident which came within an ace of wrecking the whole negotiation. The German ambassador, who had been listening to his speech from the gallery, came to him while the debate was still in progress, and said that he thought he had gone too far in his reference to Eastern Europe. Mr. Chamberlain was the last man to quail before bluster of this sort. He at once rounded on the diplomat, and asked him if this meant that Germany reserved the right to make war in Eastern Europe in furtherance of her political aims : if so, he would at once return to the chamber, say that he had been mistaken in German intentions, and resign. Before this threat the ambassador gave way, and thus Germany was committed to the interpretation which the Foreign Secretary had put upon her Eastern European policy.

The incident was typical, not exceptional, and it shows the difficulty of dealing with Germans, even with the most reasonable of them, and Dr. Stresemann could certainly be included in that number. The Englishman sees a negotiation as a deal, in which there must be a certain amount of give-and-take on both sides : to the German it is a military operation, in which the seizing of every tactical advantage is of the utmost importance. Furthermore, there is always a Count Holstein at the Wilhelmstrasse ready to wreck any agreement with Great Britain. So the discussions continued. At one moment Germany pleaded her defenceless condition as a reason why she should be

given special treatment, when she became a member of the League, in respect of Article 16 of the Covenant, though what lay at the back of this was fear of losing the Russian support which had been so valuable. On another occasion the German Government began to quibble about joining the League at all, and had to be told quite firmly that this was a *sine qua non* of any pact: then the Germans tried to introduce some stipulations in connection with the occupied territory. Beaten on these points, Berlin declared that the question of war guilt must first of all be settled, and this chicanery caused the Foreign Secretary to write that " the German Government, like a nagging woman, must have the last word " .

As if this was not enough, the German Presidential Election resulted in the victory of Marshal von Hindenburg. One of the " war criminals " and an avowed monarchist, his triumph was regarded as the first step in the return of the old order in Germany, and in Paris and Brussels the alarmed crowds already seemed to hear the tramp of marching feet borne down the East winds of late spring. Gradually these fears were set at rest, for the felon blow which the old soldier was to inflict upon his own country and the world was not to be struck for another eight years.

Yet, if the Germans were difficult, the French were by no means easy. They were naturally suspicious of Berlin's intentions, and were not without difficulty dissuaded from putting their reply to the German memorandum in the form of a *questionnaire* which would hardly have failed to be resented. Then at

one stage of the proceedings the Havas Agency very nearly wrecked the whole negotiation by publishing a statement to the effect that what was contemplated was a three-Power Pact of Great Britain, France, and Belgium against Germany. Even M. Briand, who succeeded M. Herriot as Prime Minister, once made an incautious remark to an American journalist which was immediately construed as meaning that he did not mind if Austria was incorporated in the Reich: this alarmed Signor Mussolini, who little realized that when this did happen he would have no alternative but to pretend to be pleased, and he was only pacified with difficulty.

All the same, the substitution of M. Briand for M. Herriot was an advantage. Not that M. Herriot was more intransigent than his successor, but rather that, being heavily committed to the Protocol, it was not easy for him to work whole-heartedly for the pact which was to take its place. The new Prime Minister's career had been a chequered one. He came, like so many French politicians, from the Left, but this had not prevented him in 1909 from breaking a railway strike by calling the strikers to the colours, while, as we have seen, he was too good a European to let any republican prejudices stand in his way when the Emperor Charles opened negotiations for peace in 1917. By the time of his death M. Briand had not only been Prime Minister on twelve occasions, but he had held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs for seven consecutive years. In appearance he was not prepossessing, and those of us, for example, who came into contact with him and M. Tardieu at the Londo

Naval Conference in 1930 could not but be struck by the contrast between the untidy but sympathetic Foreign Minister, as he then was, and the well-dressed but acrid Premier.

M. Briand was a man of medium height, with broad, stooping shoulders, deep chested, while his head was chiefly remarkable for an untidy shock of hair. He was, in effect, an ugly and ill-kempt man, but like many others of this type he had eyes which often danced with amusement, and a charming smile which redeemed the ugliness of his features. M. Briand was characterized by two qualities which are rarely found in the same individual—that is to say, wit and a sense of humour. When, during the famous game of golf at Cannes, the late Lord Riddell, who looked after the Press for Mr. Lloyd George, made an exceptionally good drive from the first tee, the Frenchman observed, "*Tiens! Il lance sa balle comme une fans se nouvelle*" But he could be bitter too when he thought the occasion demanded it. On his return to Paris he found, as has been shown, that the fate of his administration was already sealed, and that the one of his colleagues upon whom he had specially relied had gone over to his opponents. M. Briand grasped the situation as soon as the Cabinet met, and rising from his chair announced his intention of at once placing his resignation in the hands of the President of the Republic : as he was leaving the room he turned to the man who had failed him, and asked, " By the way, my dear friend, can you tell me the value of thirty pieces of silver at the exchange to-day ? " A great orator, one political weakness he did

possess, and that was laziness : intuition rather than application was the secret of his success. The difference between him and M. Poincare has been thus defined: "*poincare sait tout et ne comprend rien, Briand ne sait rien et comprend tout*"

Mr. Chamberlain and M. Briand, who had not previously been well acquainted, speedily became personal friends, and after the Frenchman's death the Englishman wrote of him that he was " simple in his tastes, warm in his friendships, a charming companion in a leisure hour, a colleague of splendid loyalty in time of difficulty ". This sympathy between the two statesmen was important when so much depended upon the personal factor, and it was in marked contrast with the relations existing between Lord Curson and M. Poincare. In these circumstances the negotiations between Great Britain and France proceeded smoothly, and in Berlin there was always Lord D'Abernon to strengthen Dr. Stresemann's hand against the Anglophobes in the Wilhelmstrasse. The towns of Dusseldorf, Duisburg, and Ruhrort were evacuated at the same time as the Ruhr, thanks to the insistence of the Foreign Office, and this reassured German opinion as to the intentions of France. At the same time Mr. Chamberlain neglected no opportunity of winning the British public to his side. Years before, he had warned Mr. Asquith that "any Government which tries to ride this country in blinkers will never get the best out of its mount", and he now practised what he had then preached. Under the influence of his arguments the supporters of the Protocol and of isolation began rapidly to lose ground, and the pact was assured

of a firm backing in the country. The necessity of such a rallying of public opinion when any new departure is made in foreign policy would appear obvious in the case of an electorate like the British, and it was the failure even to attempt to prepare the ground that was chiefly responsible for the fiasco of the Hoare-Laval Pact.

Great Britain and France were now agreed, but it remained to bring the negotiations to a conclusion in such a way as to avoid offending German susceptibilities. Accordingly Berlin was invited to send a legal expert to London to go over the draft, which he was to take away with him after having asked any questions he might think fit. This representative duly came to London, made some suggestions, obtained all the information he wanted, and ascertained the real intentions of Mr. Chamberlain and M. Briand without being asked to commit himself to anything. In this way were avoided the misunderstandings which otherwise might so easily have arisen from the presentation of a text between principals without any previous opportunity for exposition or explanation. This procedure was very different from that adopted at Versailles, or from that favoured by the Germans themselves on many an occasion.

The ground was thus thoroughly prepared when the statesmen of the Powers concerned met at Locarno in October, 1925, and there proved to be only one difficult corner to get round. This was when the Germans raised the question of evacuation and reparations, and only then did a breakdown appear possible, for Great Britain and France went to the limit of con-

cession without an agreement being reached.. On this occasion Dr. Stresemann displayed a courage rare in German statesmen at any time, and particularly since the Four Years' War, by waiving the point, and this enabled the Locarno Pact to be initialled. It was signed in London six weeks later, and for his share in bringing this great work of reconciliation to completion the Foreign Secretary was very properly created a Knight of the Garter.

The Locarno Pact consisted of eight treaties, of which the most important was that of mutual guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy. By it the first three Powers promised never to go to war against one another, and to settle all disputes between themselves by peaceful means. The five signatories, collectively and severally, guaranteed the maintenance of the territorial *status quo* in the West as fixed at Versailles, and the observance of the conditions laid down for the demilitarized zone. In all cases save one the decision whether a *casus foederis* had arisen was left to the Council of the League. The exception was in the event of actual invasion or of a flagrant violation of the stipulations regarding the demilitarized zone, if the guaranteeing Power was satisfied that " the violation is an act of unprovoked aggression, and that by reason either of the crossing of the frontier or of the outbreak of hostilities, or of the assembly of armed forces in the zone, immediate action is necessary ". In this case each party was to come to the aid of the victim. This was the only one of the Locarno treaties in which Great Britain was immediately concerned, as the others dealt with the

relations between Germany and her Eastern neighbours, or between France and her allies.

The Locarno Pact was destined to be the greatest achievement of British diplomacy in the period between the two wars, and Europe in consequence came nearer to settling down than it was to do again. Nor are the reasons far to seek. Sir Austen Chamberlain, as he must now be called, had a definite policy, he was determined not to run any unnecessary risks by precipitate action, and he was careful to retain the initiative in his own hands. That his successors have not triumphed in the same way, and that war has again come in spite of their efforts to keep the peace, is due to the fact that they have ignored his methods. In the absence of any policy save a passive attachment to the cause of peace they have vacillated between allowing events to take their course and deliberate encouragement to other nations to rely upon a British support which has not been forthcoming in the hour of need. Sir Austen may have wished that he could persuade his fellow-countrymen to go further, but he knew that this was out of the question, and he was not going to raise hopes that could not be fulfilled. In consequence he did succeed, at any rate for a time, in at once giving security to France and bringing Germany back into the comity of nations on a basis of equality. His work was as extravagantly praised at the time as it was subsequently decried, but some day it will have to be done over again if there is to be real peace in Europe, and the Foreign Secretary of that day will be fortunate if he is able to accomplish as much as Sir Austen effected at Locarno.

As for Germany, the Pact was freely negotiated, and she was treated with the most scrupulous fairness throughout the discussions which preceded its signature, so that it might have been supposed she would have regarded it in a different light from the so-called *diktat* of Versailles. This has not proved to be the case, and the provisions of the one treaty have been as wantonly violated as those of the other. The only excuse ever put forward by Berlin is that one of the purposes of the pact—namely, the disarmament of France—was not accomplished, and that both Great Britain and Germany were deceived. The answer to this charge was supplied by Sir Austen Chamberlain himself at the very end of his life : " The object of the Treaty ", he wrote, " was to preserve peace, not to secure disarmament . . . disarmament was not a condition of the Treaty, and no deception was practised on the Germans in this respect."

The Locarno Pact was meant to be not only an end but also a beginning, and Great Britain cannot justly be accused of going back on her commitments in this respect. The first step was to elect Germany to a permanent seat on the Council of the League, and this was to have been done in March, 1926, but unexpected difficulties arose. Hitherto it had been only the Great Powers—that is to say, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan—which had had permanent seats on the Council, and the intention was that Germany should join this select company. However, the fact that an alteration was to be made raised the hopes of other aspirants to permanent seats, and Poland, Brazil, and Spain each put in a claim, while more or less openly

threatening to veto the election of Germany and then resign themselves if they did not receive satisfaction. This was bad enough, but what was worse was that the Great Powers had their own favourites among these candidates. Brazil, it is true, had no supporters, but the Polish claim was favoured by France and also by Signor Mussolini, who at that time took no particular interest in Spain. On the other hand, Great Britain favoured the Spanish candidature in principle, but was not actually committed to press it on this particular occasion.

The Germans claimed, with considerable show of reason, that they had been promised election to the Council as constituted, and that if it were enlarged the value of membership would be proportionately diminished. To complicate matters still further, some of the smaller Powers, notably Sweden, began to fish in the troubled waters in the hope of thereby increasing their own importance. To what extent Stockholm received direct encouragement from Berlin it is impossible to say, but the Swedes set to work to form a pro-German *bloc* at Geneva consisting of themselves, the Danes, and the Dutch : the most pressing requests were made to Spain to join this combination, and when she refused, Sweden and her associates announced that they would oppose the creation of any new permanent seat save for Germany. In these circumstances the task of Great Britain was far from easy, but the Cabinet were determined to honour their obligations to Berlin, and Sir Austen went to Geneva with instructions not to admit any change in the Council "which would have the effect of preventing or delaying the entry of

Germany "; the British Government considered " it would be best that Germany should, as a member of the Council, have full responsibility for any further change in the Council beyond her own admission ". Dr. Stresemann personally realized the difficulty in which Great Britain was placed, but this was not understood in England itself, and Sir Austen was widely criticized on the ground that he was working with the French to obstruct Germany's election to the Council until this body had been enlarged with additional friends of France. In actual fact nothing could have been farther from the truth.

The upshot was that the election of Germany had to be postponed until the following September. In the last resort Spain and Poland had proved reasonable, but Brazil had shown herself impervious to argument, and a unanimous vote was essential. That this compromise was reached, and that there had not been a conflict between the signatories of the Locarno Pact, was almost wholly due to the efforts of British diplomacy. During the summer months Sir Austen exhausted his powers of persuasion upon M. Briand to reduce the number of French troops in the area still occupied as it would be " a clear breach of faith " to do otherwise, and he also urged a reduction in the forces stationed in the Saar. It is true that he did not make these protests from the house-tops, as some of his critics apparently wished, for that would have rendered it impossible for the French to comply with his requests, and would soon have produced once again the state of affairs which had existed in the days of Lord Curzon and M.* Poincard. Indeed, far from

being, as is so often alleged, unduly tender towards the French, Sir Austen might have a case made out against him that he did not make sufficient allowance for their point of view in his desire to be just to Germany,

It has been stated in criticism of British policy at this time that more might have been done to bring France and Germany together after the latter's admission to the League, but to argue thus is to ignore the state of public opinion in Great Britain at the time. It cannot be stressed too often that, however surprising in the light of later events, the Locarno Pact represented the extreme limit to which the vast majority of the Conservative Party was prepared to go, and the Government was a Conservative one. To have been perpetually intermeddling in Franco-German affairs would have necessitated further commitments, and these would not have passed the House of Commons. Liberals and Socialists might be willing to go farther, but they were certainly not ready to vote the armaments which would have become inevitable. Nevertheless, the Foreign Office gave its blessing to the famous meeting of M. Briand and Dr. Stresemann at Thoiry when it seemed for a brief moment as if the age-old quarrel between their countries was to be finally settled. Unhappily both statesmen had been somewhat carried away by their surroundings, and possibly the good cheer of which they partook caused them to minimize national differences : however this may be, when they returned to their respective capitals difficulties presented themselves which had seemed of small importance in the restaurant of the Lagers by

the waters of a Swiss lake in the late, summer. Had they realized what lay ahead they might have acted differently, but as yet there was no sign of the economic blizzard, while the number of Nazi deputies in the Reichstag had dropped from 32 to 14 at the last election.

In 1928 there occurred two events on which it is not possible to look back without somewhat mixed feelings. The first of these was the Kellogg Pact to outlaw war, and the second was a very badly handled naval agreement between Great Britain and France. The former repays careful examination on more than one score.

The United States had not concerned itself closely with the political affairs of Europe since the Senate had repudiated President Wilson, and the unparalleled prosperity which the country was enjoying encouraged the adoption of an attitude of lofty moral superiority towards the problems of the Old World. At the same time American money was being poured into Europe, and in the event of war it would be lost. Such being the case, the best course was obviously to reduce the chances of war to a minimum, and to this consideration the Kellogg Pact owed its inception. Moreover, the idea of outlawing war was not only a sound business proposition but also a high moral aspiration, and a combination of this nature always makes an irresistible appeal to the Anglo-Saxon peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. The project appears to have originated with a Chicago lawyer, and it came to M. Briand through another American, a professor. It is doubtful whether the French statesman grasped

all the implications of the scheme, but Franco-American relations were none too good at the moment, and it might help him round a difficult corner. He took the outlawing of war to mean in practice nothing more than the neutrality of France and the United States in one another's quarrels, and in due course he elaborated the conditions for a pact on these lines, which he sent to Washington. Months elapsed before any reply was received from the State Department, and when it did come the original French proposal was found to have been changed out of all recognition. Mr. Kellogg was desirous of abolishing war altogether as an instrument of policy, and he wished every nation in the world to sign an agreement to this effect. There was a Presidential election due in a few months' time.

This was just the type of "moral gesture" which was so popular in many circles in Great Britain at that time. It was assured of a good Press, and was calculated to appeal to the Opposition; therefore it was welcomed by a Conservative Government, and it was due almost entirely to the efforts of the Foreign Secretary that its original provisions were whittled down so as not to conflict with the terms of the Locarno Pact. The Kellogg Pact was then signed with due solemnity in Paris, by the representatives of Great Britain and the United States in all sincerity and by those of the rest of the world with their tongues in their cheeks. The result was not to outlaw war, far from it, but to cause a formal declaration of war to fall into disuse, with the most disastrous effects upon the whole system of international law which had over a long period of years been so carefully built

up to safeguard the rights of belligerents and neutrals. At once mankind went back to the practice of the sixteenth century, when Elizabeth and Philip II brought to a fine art the waging of war against one another without any formal rupture of relations, and in consequence it became almost impossible to say what was and what was not justifiable when hostilities were in progress. Within eleven years of the signing of the Kellogg Pact, Paraguay and Bolivia had waged one of the most sanguinary struggles in the course of recorded history in the wastes of the Gran Chaco; Japan had conquered a large part of China; Italy had by violence possessed herself of Abyssinia and Albania; Germany had forcibly annexed Austria and Czecho-Slovakia; and four Great Powers had fought under the guise of non-intervention in the Spanish civil war. In none of these instances was war formally declared, and it was surely by the irony of fate that the first Power to revert to the old time-honoured procedure was Great Britain. Lastly, it encouraged the average Englishman in the belief that there would never be another war, and that armaments were a waste of money. So much for the "moral gesture" of outlawing war.

Had the proposal come from any other quarter than from the United States it would probably not have met with such ready acceptance, even in England, but the attitude of the leaders of British public opinion is always irrational where America is concerned. The ordinary Englishman likes the American as an individual, but distrusts the United States as a Power: his rulers really share this distrust, but are always fearful of offending American opinion by

taking a strong line with Washington. The result is an appearance of exuberant cordiality in official circles, with much oratory of the hands-across-the-ocean type, which only makes the misunderstanding greater when the time comes to get down to details. Indeed, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that if the Foreign Office would occasionally use some very plain language to the State Department when British interests demand it, relations between London and Washington would, when the immediate storm had died down, be on a much more satisfactory footing. At any rate this has been the private opinion of at least one Foreign Secretary of recent years. Perhaps what is usually claimed as the chief bond between the two peoples, the use of a common tongue, is really the gulf which divides them. Because they speak the same language they assume that they have the same point of view, and the resulting disillusionment is the more bitter. If this was not the case, and they had to learn one another's language, they would assume they had different standpoints, and consequently be the more gratified when they found themselves in agreement.

The ill effects of the naval agreement between Great Britain and France were more immediate though not so lasting, and they were due rather to the way in which it was announced than to the agreement itself. Disarmament had already taken the place of reparations as the chief obstacle to the pacification of the world. After the signature of the Locarno Pact a Preparatory Commission had been set up to prepare the way for a Disarmament Conference, but it had

made little progress because while some of its members did not know what they wanted, others too obviously did, and it was to deprive potential enemies of offensive armaments while retaining their own. The work of this body had not been rendered any easier by the failure, owing to lack of adequate preparation, of a Three-Power Naval Conference at Geneva in June, 1927. A year later the Foreign Secretary announced in the House of Commons that Great Britain and France had arrived at a compromise on naval disarmament and trained reserves, and that this was based on a scheme proposed by M. Paul Boncour at a meeting of the Preparatory Commission.

At once there was an uproar, and as Sir Austen Chamberlain was at this very moment taken seriously ill, the situation was soon out of hand. The proposal upon which the agreement was founded had already been rejected by the United States and Italy, and neither Power was any too pleased that it should have reappeared in the form of a bilateral treaty between Great Britain and France. Then occurred one of those "leakages" in Paris for which it is not always easy to account. An "important French official" gave an interview to an English journalist in which he declared the agreement to be the most outstanding diplomatic event since the Armistice. He said that while it appeared to be merely a technical agreement, it was in fact of the first diplomatic importance, being nothing less than a return to the relations which had existed between Great Britain and France before 1914. He even declared that the agreement could "be considered as a sort of unified com-

mand of the naval and military forces of the two countries". Such an interpretation at once gave rise to the rumour that there were secret clauses by which the Mediterranean was to be divided into British and French "spheres of influence", and this roused in the mind of Signor Mussolini suspicions which it had for years been the object of British diplomacy to lull to rest.

At home there was an outburst of criticism, and for a brief space isolationists and internationalists fought under the same flag. The storm, however, died away almost as suddenly as it had arisen, for the announcement had been made in July, and the holiday season was at hand. Nevertheless, some damage had been done, and some of the mud thrown has stuck. This agreement seemed added confirmation of the belief that under the control of Sir Austen Chamberlain the Foreign Office was a mere branch of the Quai d'Orsay, and as the Conservative Government fell not long after, it had no opportunity of correcting this misapprehension. This, in its turn, has enabled the Germans and their sympathizers to represent the whole policy of Mr. Baldwin's second administration as Francophil in the extreme, and even to-day this legend is believed in many quarters, with a consequent condonation of more than one breach of faith on the part of Germany. The Labour Party certainly believed the accusation, and Mr. Arthur Henderson had hardly got inside the Foreign Office than he announced that he was not going to play second fiddle to France, as his predecessor had done. To compare this misunderstanding with the consequences of the Kellogg

Pact would be manifestly absurd, but it was most unfortunate, and may well have had some bearing upon Mr. Snowden's ill-advised defiance of France at The Hague.

It was, however, not only in Europe that British diplomacy was active during these years, for the situation in the Far East was disquieting in the extreme. A wave of xenophobia was sweeping China, and for a variety of reasons, of which Russian instigation was by no means the least important, the British were especially marked out for attack among the foreign communities. Finally, the British concession at Hankow was rushed by the Chinese, and the Foreign Secretary refused to allow it to be re-taken by force. For this act he and his colleagues have often been reviled, but surely some of the responsibility must fall upon their critics. The crux of the problem, like that of so many others, was armaments, and the British electorate still wanted to have it both ways: they desired disarmament in an armed world, and they expected their Foreign Secretary to behave like Canning or Palmerston. Had the force been available, no doubt the Chinese could have been taught a sharp lesson, as on previous occasions, but, even so, that would have meant an expedition, and the British public was in no mood for anything of that nature. For several years yet it had only ears for those who told it that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and that there was no international problem which could not be solved at a conference table by the mere fact of being there. Certainly the Cabinet was guilty of the state of the national armaments, but the differ-

ence between its guilt and that of the Members of the House of Commons and of the public was one of degree, not of kind. Unfortunately the lesson of Hankow was ignored, and far greater disgrace lay ahead, much nearer home, in consequence.

Strange as it may seem in these latter days, one of the greatest difficulties which Sir Austen Chamberlain had to face was the flat refusal of the Japanese to cooperate in defence of foreign interests in China. In vain did he implore Tokyo to hold even a brigade in readiness to be ferried across to the mainland. When, however, a threat developed to Shanghai, a British expeditionary force was sent out, much to the annoyance of the Opposition, and that city was saved from a repetition of the scenes which had taken place at Hankow. For the rest, there was nothing to do, as the Foreign Secretary openly admitted, but to give the Chinese Communists enough rope to hang themselves, which in due course they did. It was not exactly a dignified policy for a Great Power, and it was very far from that of the *civis Romanus sum* days, but it was the only one possible in the circumstances. Its implications were studied with the closest attention in more than one European capital.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLE ARTHUR

THE slogans of " Safety First " and " Trust Baldwin ", reinforced by the strains of *Stanley Boy* as a musical accompaniment, having failed to convince the electorate, the Conservative administration was in June, 1929, replaced by the second Labour Government of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. On this occasion the Prime Minister did not himself take over the Foreign Office, but, after apparently hesitating between the claims of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Arthur Henderson, appointed the latter as Foreign Secretary. Mr. Henderson had probably more political and administrative experience than most of his colleagues, for he had held various offices in the two Coalition administrations during the war, and for a time he had been a member of the War Cabinet. In the first Labour Government he was Home Secretary. It was, however, as controller of his party machine that Mr. Henderson excelled, and the rapid growth of the Labour vote since the Armistice was in a very large measure due to his efforts and ability.

It can hardly be claimed that Mr. MacDonald's second administration was as successful in the field of international affairs as his first had been, but, as will be seen, the blame does not wholly rest upon Mr. Henderson, for forces were being unleashed during

these years which passed the wit of man anywhere to control. The new Foreign Secretary found a great deal of his time occupied with his work at Transport House, and so was inclined to rely at the Foreign Office upon the permanent officials, with the result that there was a marked diminution in the driving-force which had characterized British diplomacy in Europe under his predecessor. Gradually the initiative was lost, and it was fated never to be recovered. While he was in office Mr. Henderson was called upon to face growing opposition from those who disliked his policy, but had his critics known what was to come after him they would almost certainly have been more tolerant in their attitude.

He started very badly by forcing the resignation of the High Commissioner for Egypt, Lord Lloyd. The attitude of the Foreign Office towards the Residency in Cairo has already been mentioned in connection with the Curzon regime, and it remained unaltered. Lord Allenby had had several sharp differences of opinion with Sir Austen Chamberlain as well as with Lord Curzon, but with the appointment of Lord Lloyd, who was an old personal friend of Sir Austen, it might have been supposed that harmony between London and Cairo would have remained unbroken. Unfortunately the new High Commissioner had enemies in the Foreign Office, two in particular, and what subsequently took place was very largely due to this fact, as well, of course, as to the old suspicion in Whitehall of any display of independence in Cairo. Sir Austen had tried to settle the outstanding differences with Egypt by a treaty in the latter part of 1927,

but had failed. Lord Lloyd had never believed an agreement was possible, and the Foreign Secretary considered that he had consequently not exerted himself enough to secure one: however, this difference was apparently forgotten, and the two men were soon on their old footing of cordiality.

Just before the fall of the Conservative Government a request was made by Egypt for British support in an endeavour to extend to foreign residents payment of certain taxes from which they had hitherto been exempt under the Capitulations. The High Commissioner was not willing to agree *in toto*, but the Foreign Secretary disagreed with him. Sir Austen then sent out to Cairo a lengthy statement of the Government's policy towards Egypt, but as this was drafted in the middle of the General Election, when Sir Austen was fighting the most fiercely contested election of his career, it possibly reflected rather the views of some officials in the Foreign Office than those of their chief. Lord Lloyd, it may be added, replied to the effect that he considered the memorandum displayed an optimism which was not in accordance with the facts. This reply did not reach London until after the Conservative Government had resigned. Meanwhile, the officials at home had been putting strong pressure on Sir Austen not to renew the High Commissioner's appointment at the end of its five years, but he had not arrived at any decision when he left office.

Such was the situation that confronted Mr. Henderson. He consulted his predecessor, who advised him not to make any change. This advice he did not take, but preferred to force Lord Lloyd to resign, not

on the ground of differences with himself, for there had not been time for any to arise, but with Sir Austen, who had specifically warned him against the adoption of such a course. In defending his action in the House of Commons the Foreign Secretary said the High Commissioner had been a source of a constant " stream of dissatisfaction normally restless, very frequently turbulent, never smooth, never clear ", but a study of the relevant documents does not bear out the assertion. The whole affair, particularly its precipitance, was puzzling, and given Mr. Henderson's tendency to rely upon his permanent officials one is tempted to conclude that it was they who forced his hands. In this connection it is at least a curious coincidence that while Mr. Henderson remained in office Lord Lloyd was refused permission to consult official papers in the preparation of his book on Egypt, and the ban was only lifted by Lord Reading. It was also unfortunate that when the Parliamentary debate took place Sir Austen Chamberlain was abroad, but it might have been expected that in his stead Mr. Baldwin would have defended the man whom he had himself appointed : however, he did not take this course, and those who spoke on behalf of Lord Lloyd, such as Mr. Churchill and Lord Salisbury, had not the knowledge to make a really effective reply. It was an unhappy commencement to Mr. Henderson's career at the Foreign Office.

The same summer witnessed the somewhat heated exchange of uncomplimentary epithets between Mr. Snowden and the French statesmen at The Hague, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer publicly de-

clared the figures of the Finance Minister of France to be "grotesque and ridiculous". The British public, which had been taught to believe in Sir Austen Chamberlain's subservience to France, heartily welcomed what it considered to be a reaffirmation of British independence, but the only result was to place a strain upon Anglo-French relations at a time when this was more than usually undesirable. The occasion of Mr. Snowden's outburst was a conference on reparations, in which connection it is to be noted that the Young Report, issued in June, fixed a reduced scale of payments which was both within Germany's capacity to meet and was adjustable according to the extent of her economic recovery.

So much for 1929. Its successor began with a Naval Conference in London, at which the representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States were present. The ostensible object was disarmament, but from the beginning it was clear that the main issue would be the Italian claim to parity with France. Italy was represented by her Foreign Minister, Signor Grandi, and France by her Prime Minister, M. Tardieu: M. Briand was there too, but he was a mere ghost of what he had been at Locarno, and exercised little influence on the proceedings. Grandi and Tardieu made no secret of their dislike of one another, and the boredom of the conference was relieved both for the delegates and the Press by their hits at each other. The Italian announced his intention of speaking in English at the opening session, to which his French colleague, who was not capable of doing this, objected on the ground

that it would be a betrayal of their common Latin civilization; Grandi, however, persisted in his purpose after observing that it was the first time he had heard that the ancient Romans spoke French. On another occasion he was reproached by the French Premier for demanding naval parity when his country had not the money with which to build the necessary ships. The Italian admitted this, and when Tardieu endeavoured to exploit his advantage Grandi replied that Italy had had the money, but had given it to the Pope by the Lateran Treaty, since she regarded this as a better investment. In such an atmosphere it was idle to expect the conference to result in a general agreement, and although a Naval Treaty was signed by Great Britain, Japan, and the United States, it was found impossible to bring France and Italy within its scope.

By this time the whole international situation was deteriorating rapidly, for like some fell disease the slump was sweeping across the world. It had begun on the New York Stock Exchange towards the end of October, 1929, and before long banks were closing by the hundred while the number of unemployed was in the neighbourhood of eight millions. It cannot be denied that the first reaction produced in Europe was a sardonic satisfaction that the boasted American prosperity was not eternal, and the general attitude was well reflected in a cartoon in an Italian newspaper which depicted a very miserable Uncle Sam spewing out dollars and bore the caption "He'll feel better when he's got it all up." Soon, however, it came to be realized that in this modern world when one house

catches fire the whole community is in danger, and the next two years witnessed a crash almost without precedent. By the end of that period the finances of Central Europe were once more in chaos, and Great Britain was off the Gold Standard. '

The repercussions of these events in the field of politics were serious, for the catastrophe came at a more than usually unfortunate moment. The men who had given Europe what it was hoped would prove to be new life, but which now turned out to be a breathing-space, were no longer there to ride the storm, and their successors could not bend the bow of Odysseus. Dr. Stresemann was dead, M. Briand was dying, and Sir Austen Chamberlain was out of office. A reaction set in against everything for which they stood, and while short-sighted Conservative M.P.'s were demanding a pledge from Mr. Baldwin that in any future Conservative administration Sir Austen should not be Foreign Secretary, elsewhere Parliamentary Government itself was beginning to rock on its foundations. This was notably the case in Germany, and what was happening there was ominous. In September, 1930, there was a General Election, and in the new Reichstag there were 107 Nazis and 77 Communists. This result was quite unexpected in British official circles, where the Nazi strength had not been put higher than 30, so that once more the Foreign Office would seem to have been badly served in the matter of information. Three months earlier the last Allied soldiers had been withdrawn from Germany—that is to say, four and a half years earlier than was stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles—so this

Nazi success was an interesting commentary upon the German mentality. Nevertheless, Britain, official and unofficial, did not stir in its sleep.

In a desperate effort to recapture its waning popularity the German Government in the following March concluded a customs union with Austria, but handled the negotiations so stupidly as to defeat its own purpose. In the traditional manner of the Wilhelmstrasse the rest of Europe was suddenly confronted with the *fait accompli*, and those in other capitals who might have given their blessing had they been consulted in advance were forced into opposition. French opinion in particular was definitely hostile, and saw in the agreement the dreaded *anschluss*, which was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The German Government was forced to refer the arrangement to The Hague Court, which declared it inadmissible. The bungling procedure adopted thus had the effect of further weakening the Government's prestige, and so played straight into the hands of the Nazis, who declared that their country was still clearly under foreign tutelage. Elsewhere there was a revival of the old mistrust of German intentions, though combined with a belief in the personal sincerity of the Chancellor, Dr. Briining.

During all this time it will have been noticed that Great Britain, whatever the political complexion of her Government, worked through the League of Nations, and was extremely careful to see that none of her fresh commitments in any way clashed with her obligations under the Covenant. In these circumstances, it may not be out of place to stop and consider the place of the

League during those eventful twenty years with which we are concerned. It started, as has been shown, with two severe handicaps—namely, its close association with the Peace Treaties and the defection of the United States—but other weaknesses developed with the years. The result has given rise to two schools of thought to-day, one of which holds the League failed to keep the peace because it attempted too much and the other because it attempted too little.

On its non-political side the League unquestionably did a great deal of good, and whatever the future may hold in store, it is sincerely to be hoped that its activities in this direction will not be abandoned. Under its auspices much valuable information of a sociological and hygienic nature was collected and sifted, and the various Governments were then induced to pass legislation based on this data. Indeed, it is here that one must sympathize with those who maintain that the League should have done more. There are many matters, trivial in comparison with the great political issues, perhaps, but which nevertheless affect the ordinary citizen just as closely, which it might have taken up, and so impressed with its usefulness millions of people all over the world who were not in the least interested in politics. Its magnificent work in connection with notorious abuses is beyond praise, but the man-in-the-street is not usually either a drug-addict or a consumer of the merchandise handled in the White Slave traffic; he is, however, the victim of varying currency systems, weights and measures, and rules of the road, while he has long cried out for a fixed Easter. It may be said that these are trifles

unworthy of the notice of an international organization, but they do affect the life of the individual, and from the beginning it was clear that if the League was to establish itself in the heart as well as in the head of mankind it would have to do its work, not from the top downwards, but from the bottom upwards.

All this is not to say that from the political point of view the League was always a failure. In 1921 it prevented war when the Jugo-Slavs invaded Albania, and again four years later when Bulgaria attacked Greece. By arbitration it settled such disputes as those between Finland and Sweden over the Aland Islands, and between Turkey and Irak with regard to their common frontier. In the matter of refugees, too, much valuable work was done. On the other hand, the League was successfully defied by Signor Mussolini as early as 1923 on the occasion of the murder of General Tellini, and it too often turned a deaf ear to the complaints of the minorities: the exception in this latter case being the Hungarians in Transylvania, whose spokesman, the patriarchal Count Apponyi, was allowed to discourse at any length at Geneva on the subject—possibly because he was an expert, since in earlier days he had been responsible for the harshest of the laws passed against the Romanians in Hungary. This rebuff and these shortcomings in the heyday of the League were ominous, for if this was possible in the green wood what would happen in the dry?

One of the basic weaknesses was that the promises of the statesmen when they were assembled at Geneva bore too little resemblance to their performance when they got back to their respective capitals. The history

of the Thoiry episode well illustrates this tendency, which became increasingly pronounced as the international situation deteriorated, until in the early months of 1940 Sweden, which had always posed as one of the champions of the League, deliberately violated Article 16 of the Covenant by refusing to allow Allied troops to cross her territory in the effort to save Finland. The atmosphere of Geneva was favourable to the growth of illusions which had a short life when the stern facts of the chancelleries were produced. The effect was that time after time hopes were raised only to be subsequently dashed, and on each occasion the League lost something of its prestige owing to its apparent failure. Nor did the attempts which were made to pretend that this had not happened do anything to help matters, for the League had always more to fear from its friends than from its enemies.

Great Britain can at least claim to have been less guilty of pursuing two policies, one at Geneva and one at home, than most other Powers. There certainly were indications of this when Lord Curzon was Foreign Secretary, but that was not wholly his fault, and the blame must be shared by Mr. Lloyd George. Sir Austen Chamberlain established the practice that the head of the Foreign Office should attend the meetings of the League Council, and his successors followed his example. When he first took office he found that the English members of the League secretariat were distinctly critical of the Foreign Office in general and of himself in particular on account of the abandonment of the Protocol, of which they were enamoured, but their attitude soon changed. Then,

again, with one or two notorious exceptions, English statesmen are not given to the extravagant language which was for several years the current coin of the Assembly, so that, taking it all in all, Great Britain did not make a habit of saying one thing at Geneva and doing another in Whitehall,

Another weakness of the League on its political side was the absence of any positive moral basis, and this became more marked with the passing of the years. The League made peace rather than justice its goal, and this was the cause of much of its ineffectiveness. War is not a thing to be lightly undertaken, and it should be the very last resort of a civilized people; but it would be idle to pretend that there are not injustices which drive men to take up arms sooner than submit to them. The record of humanity is the nobler for many a struggle in which the advantages of peace have been deliberately sacrificed in the pursuit of justice. Moreover, the League was established to vindicate the right. Sight of this was lost both by the sentimentalists, who thought peace was an end in itself, and by the politicians, who were guided by an overmastering desire to leave well alone. The result was one which no supporter of the League could have desired—namely, that, for fear peace should be broken, it showed itself afraid in the name of justice to call to account the more powerful miscreants. *Χαλεπωτάτη γὰρ ἀδικία ἔχουσα ὄπλα*, wrote Aristotle, and it was with precisely that type of offence that the League was most unwilling to deal.

Inevitably such an attitude led to the consolidation of the *status quo*, and thus to a repudiation of one of

the very objects of the League, for Article 19 of the Covenant expressly stated that "the Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become" inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world ". No action was ever taken under this clause, and the consequence of such neglect was to give a very definite fillip to that unilateral denunciation of treaties which has been so prominent a feature of the past decade. Yet to suggest that the League was not perfect was for years considered the rankest heresy in political circles in Great Britain, and it was the same whether they were Conservative, Liberal, or Labour. There is nothing holy about the League, and to regard it, as some misguided zealots were wont to do, as sacrosanct, was, as it soon proved, to do it a very poor service. Like every other human institution, the League must stand on its own merits, and to claim for it an almost divine sanction was to create a doubt whether it was defensible on material grounds. For this reason those who were its protagonists would have been better advised to abstain from denunciation of the supporters of the reform of the League, for events soon proved that the latter were its real friends.

Although not so obvious a defect in 1931 as it subsequently became, the Genevan theory that all nations are equal was far from according with the facts. That there is equality of status is undeniable, and Liechtenstein and Costa Rica possess as much right to have their independence respected as Great

Britain or Italy: indeed, the fact that Germany does not acknowledge such a right is one of the reasons why the Allies have taken up arms. On the other hand, it was ridiculous to attempt to work an international organization on the assumption that the smallest nations count for as much in the world as the Great Powers. There was equality in voting strength at Geneva, but there was no equality in respect of the responsibilities which a vote there might involve. There are Great Powers and lesser ones, and the interests of the former are universal, while those of the latter are local. The consequence of ignoring this distinction was that resolutions were voted by those who could not be concerned in their application, and when the Great Powers were not in a position to act. The League was thus rendered ridiculous, and its leading members, especially Great Britain, lost much prestige when they could ill afford it.

It was said by the wits at this time that the League was like a lift which had stuck between two floors, one of which was called "super-state" and the other "piece of diplomatic machinery", and that the lift-boy did not know whether to go up or down. Certain it is that many wished it to run before it had even learnt to walk, while those who had the widest experience of its actual working were the most fearful of the consequences of putting any undue strain upon it. In effect, to the discerning few the inherent weaknesses of the League were manifest before the slump came, but their efforts to call attention to these defects were thwarted by the vast majority of optimists who de-

clared that all was well, and that there was no necessity for reform. Which school of thought was right the future was soon to show.

As the second Labour Government, overwhelmed by difficulties by no means all of its own creation, was tottering to its fall, events were taking place which were to change the face of the world. In the Far East the Japanese militarists were in the saddle, and it was only a question of weeks when the attack on China would begin. In Southern Europe the Second Republic had come into existence in Spain, and the first steps had been taken in the direction of one of the bitterest civil wars in recent history. In Germany the pocket-battleship *Deutschland* had been launched, and the way pointed out for the revival of that navy which had more than anything else precipitated the conflict with Great Britain. It was the parting of the ways : behind lay the now unfulfilled promise which had seemed so fair on the morrow of Locarno less than six years before, while ahead was the gathering storm. Such was the situation when on August 26th, 1931, Mr. Henderson was succeeded at the Foreign Office by the Marquess of Reading.

CHAPTER V

SIMPLE SIMON

THE first National Government had little time to devote to foreign affairs, and what little there was to do in this field was adequately done by Lord Reading between the end of August and the beginning of November: on the 9th of the latter month he was succeeded by Sir John Simon. It might have been supposed that Sir Austen Chamberlain would have been reappointed to his former office, but as soon as the General Election was over he had expressed his desire to stand down in favour of the younger men, and so Sir John Simon, who was then only fifty-eight, became Foreign Secretary. He was destined to remain in this position until the summer of 1935—that is to say, during some of the most critical years of the present century.

Sir John, like Sir Austen Chamberlain, went to the Foreign Office with considerable Parliamentary experience behind him. With one break, due to his loyalty to the shattered fortunes of Mr. Asquith, he had sat in the House of Commons for a quarter of a century, and in addition to holding several legal offices he had for a brief space been Home Secretary. His chief contribution to history, however, had probably been his speech in 1926 proving that the General Strike was illegal, for the effect of this upon the leaders of the

movement had been decisive. At the same time he had never become a popular figure in the country or at Westminster, and the description of him as a disembodied intellect had stuck. At Geneva his reputation was such that it was unkindly and unjustly said of him that he would take no notice of a man until he wanted to make use of him, when he would slap him on the back and call him by someone else's name. His colleagues were hardly more enthusiastic: "a very able man," one of them wrote when he left the Home Office at the beginning of 1916, "but I cannot say that I think he will be any great loss to a Government whose business is to carry on war." His attitude on the eve of the Four Years' War and later over the question of conscription was still remembered. Yet in some ways he recalled Lord Curzon, for he strongly disliked being unpopular. The result was that, apart altogether from other considerations which will be discussed in their place, Sir John Simon did not carry the weight in the Cabinet, in Parliament or in the country necessary to a successful Foreign Secretary.

Although criticism of Sir John Simon's policy is inevitable on several scores, in common fairness allowance must be made for his difficulties. He had to deal with a public opinion which was still so blind to the realities of the international situation that the mere suggestion it might be necessary to rearm was sufficient in the summer of 1933—that is to say, nine months after the Nazis had obtained control of Germany—to convert a Conservative majority of 14,521 in East Fulham into a minority of 4,840. If, however, a heavy responsibility attached to the ordinary citizen,

a heavier lay with his rulers. Cabinet secrets of those days have not yet been revealed, but there is no evidence that any of Sir John's colleagues, not even Mr. Neville Chamberlain, ever entered any strong protest against the course he was pursuing; at any rate none of them was prepared to push his objections to the point of resignation. It is true that behind his back, in private gatherings, Ministers were loud in their denunciations of the Foreign Secretary, but they seem to have said singularly little to his face. As for the Prime Minister, Mr. MacDonald, his lips appear to have been as effectively sealed as those of his lieutenant, Mr. Baldwin.

It is also quite impossible to exculpate the rank-and-file of the enormous Government majority. In particular there were far too many Conservative M.P.s who were more frightened of their party Whips than of their country's foes. Some of them even sinned against the light. In any representative assembly a certain amount of party discipline is both necessary and desirable if government is to be carried on at all; otherwise the centrifugal influences will render it impossible. But it is a question whether of late years this discipline has not been carried too far in the House of Commons, at any rate on the Conservative side. For "my country, right or wrong", has been substituted "the Government, right or wrong", and in foreign affairs the results have been disastrous. A little more independence on the Government back benches between 1931 and 1937 might have altered the course of history.' The cynic must have found much to amuse him during those years in the counsels of the Conservative Party. First of all, any criticism

of Mr. Baldwin was little short of blasphemy, and at the annual party conference those who suggested that all was not well were frowned upon by the officials and reproved by their friends; then came the stage when the majority was disquieted, but stifled its fears out of a mistaken sense of loyalty; and lastly, after Mr. Baldwin had ceased to be leader, there was a veritable outburst of recriminations, and hardly any of his former followers were so poor, as to do him reverence. So it had been with Mr. Balfour, and so it will be with Mr. Chamberlain. Meanwhile, from the national point of view the damage is done, and one is left wondering whether the country would not be better served if the Whips and the Central Office encouraged, rather than repressed, independence of thought and helpful criticism in the ranks.

This is not to say that during the years of Sir John Simon's Foreign Secretaryship all the Conservative M.P.s were silent on the subject of defence and the international situation : far from it, but the majority of those who realized the danger were more concerned with the proposed reforms in India, and in the private fight between the India Defence League and the Union of Britain and India sight was lost of the clouds which were gathering in other directions. In short, not even the most convinced Conservative can look back with any satisfaction upon the behaviour of his party during Mr. MacDonald's third administration.

The Labour Party was less to blame. It had never posed as being other than internationalist, and the greater part of its adherents still viewed any manifestation of Imperialism with deep suspicion. Above

all, it was in Opposition, and the duty of an Opposition in the British House of Commons was defined by Tierney as to "oppose everything, propose nothing, and turn the Government out". Its most experienced leaders were either lost to it or had been defeated at the General Election, so that it would in any case not have been easy for Labour to put forward a constructive foreign policy. It is true that before long it was to clamour for military action against this or that Power while refusing to vote the necessary armaments, but it is also true that when war came a good many Labour men were quicker to admit they had been wrong than were some Conservatives.

The first important task of the new Foreign Secretary was to attend the Disarmament Conference which opened at Geneva on February 2nd, 1932, in that most dreary of buildings, the Bitiment Electoral. All the nations of the world were represented with the exception of Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and El Salvador, so that the subsequent failure could not be attributed to the abstentions, and the president was Mr. Arthur Henderson, in his private capacity. From the first the omens were unpropitious, for on the very day the Conference met the Japanese guns were raining shells upon Shanghai, and the delegates had to adjourn for an hour while the Council of the League discussed this affair.

The interest and hope aroused in the world at large by the assembling of the Conference were reflected in the manifestoes and petitions which were presented to it. The scene was thus described by an enthusiastic onlooker:

The President began by summarizing his collection of telegrams, each with its message expressing the hopes of so many millions or hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world. Then the women. Miss Dingman spoke in a clear American voice; then turned and handed up to Mr. Henderson a great sheet bearing the petition figures from I forget how many countries. Eight million, three hundred thousand signatures. Then came the visible sign, the petitioners with packages and books from all round the world. There were only four packets out of the British lot; only a sample out of 2,100,000. But even so the pile rose higher and higher and began to topple; the packets were carried off in relays in baskets. The President leant over from his dais and smiled as the mountain grew. The procession ended at last, and everyone felt that the President did well in his brief speech at the session's end to offer a special word of grateful cheer to women who had made this moving testimony possible.

That scene took place less than ten years ago. Laughter or tears can be the only appropriate comment.

The Conference certainly did not suffer from any dearth of suggestions, for the Great Powers each came forward with a scheme calculated, as on similar occasions in the past, to deprive potential adversaries of the particular type of weapon with which they were best supplied. What was not appreciated at Geneva was that time was an all-important factor, and that the

sands were beginning to run very low. On April 24th elections were held in Prussia, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Anhalt, and Hamburg—that is to say, in an area representing four-fifths of the Reich—and the result marked a great Nazi advance. In Bavaria they increased their representation by 34, securing 43 seats in the new Diet, while in Hamburg, Anhalt, and Wurttemberg they made sweeping gains : it was, however, Prussia that provided the greatest sensation, for the Nazis went into the election with 9 deputies and emerged from it with 162. It was a warning which one might have supposed the Powers would not have ignored,, but they entirely neglected it, with the exception of the French, whom it encouraged in their refusal to make any concessions at all. Whitehall remained as wholly unaffected by what was happening in Germany as it had done when the Nationalists were marching to victory in Turkey a decade before.

Nevertheless there was one man who read the portents correctly, and that was the German Chancellor, Dr. Brüning. He was under no illusions but that his last chance of preventing the advent of the Third Reich lay in securing some settlement at Geneva which would remove the stigma of inferiority in the matter of armaments, and he determined to go there in person to propound a scheme of his own. It was a singularly courageous thing to do, for in the previous June he had adopted a similar course with regard to reparations, and had come away with the proverbial flea in his ear. On that occasion he had gone to Chequers in the hope of securing a reparation moratorium in view of the economic crisis, and had been sent

home empty-handed : indeed, the fall of his administration had probably only been prevented by a similar proposal on the part of the President of the United States. In these circumstances it required a good deal of courage on the part of Dr. Bruning to expose himself to the same rebuff.

Accordingly, on April 26th conversations began between the British, American, and German statesmen. France was not, needless to say, excluded, but she was in the throes of a General Election, and so M. Tardieu was absent from Geneva, but it was decided that if the basis of an agreement came in sight he should be recalled. Dr. Bruning then proposed that, in return for an undertaking given by Germany not to increase her armaments for five years, or until a second Disarmament Conference, she should be permitted to reduce the twelve-year period of service in the Reichswehr to five years; to organize a militia which should not exceed the number of 100,000 men which the Treaty of Versailles fixed for the Reichswehr; and to purchase the war material hitherto forbidden. He also asked that the prohibition of the possession by the Reich of weapons of offence, such as aeroplanes and tanks, should be abrogated, but he declared that Germany was prepared to renounce these on condition that all the other Powers did the same: if neither of these suggestions met with approval, Germany would be satisfied with " samples " of the weapons in question. The British and American representatives, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Stimson, agreed that the German argument was both justified and reasonable, and Signor Grandi took the same view when Dr.

Bruning's scheme was communicated to him. An agreement appeared to be in sight when it was frustrated by an intrigue more reminiscent of the Renaissance than compatible with the age of supposedly open diplomacy.

A few weeks before, there had been a Presidential Election in Germany, and almost entirely owing to the efforts of Dr. Brüning, the aged Marshal von Hindenburg had been returned for a second term by a majority of nearly six million votes over Herr Hitler. Incidentally, the Communist candidate polled less than four million votes out of the thirty-six million cast, thus giving the lie direct to the claim of the Führer that he saved Germany from the Reds. Gratitude and loyalty were never the most prominent characteristics of Marshal von Hindenburg, and in spite of what he owed to Dr. Brüning, he allowed himself to come increasingly under the influence of the *camarilla* of his son, Oskar, Dr. Meißner, and General von Schleicher, who were working for the overthrow of the Chancellor. When Dr. Brüning put forward his disarmament proposals this little group of intriguers determined to frustrate him at any cost: accordingly, General von Schleicher met the French ambassador in Berlin at an evening party in a private house, and advised him not to negotiate with Dr. Brüning, whose fall was already virtually accomplished, and whose successor, whom he named, would be found more amenable. This advice suited M. Tardieu very well, and he refused, on the score of an attack of laryngitis, the pressing request of his colleagues to return to Geneva to consider the German scheme.

At this juncture British statesmanship, which alone might have effected a settlement, was found wanting. The obvious course was to put every sort of pressure upon M. Tardieu to return to Geneva and discuss the German proposals: if it proved impossible to persuade him to adopt this course, then Mr. MacDonald and Sir John Simon should have published to the world Dr. Brüning's offer, together with their own views and those of the United States. In this way not only would the hand of France have been forced, but the plans of the *camarilla* would have received a decided check. Instead, no action was taken, and matters were allowed to drift, with the most disastrous consequences both for the future of the conference and for the peace of Europe. In the words of Mr. Wheeler-Bennett, "The Allied Powers were sending Dr. Brüning back to Germany with empty pockets, and were apparently unaware either that they were encompassing his defeat or of the fact that he would be succeeded by men of very different character." The opportunity had hardly been allowed to pass than, as if to heighten the irony of the situation, M. Tardieu himself fell from power.

In Germany the results were soon to be seen. The President replaced Dr. Brüning by Herr von Papen, and a General Election in July gave the Nazis no less than 230 seats in the Reichstag. Thereafter events moved to their allotted end. Herr von Papen was succeeded by General von Schleicher, and although at another General Election in November the Nazi strength declined somewhat, on January 30th, 1933, Herr Hitler became Chancellor.

The responsibility of the British Government was considerable. If it felt that an undue strain would be put upon Anglo-French relations by the adoption of a firm line with M. Tardieu, then it might have been expected that it would at least have prepared for the reaction in Germany, but nothing of the sort was even attempted. Once again one is left wondering whether the Foreign Office was taken by surprise, or whether information as to the German political situation was ignored by those in authority.

The history of the next few years makes but sorrowful reading; nevertheless its salient points cannot be ignored. Herr Hitler commenced breaking his promises inside the Reich before he violated them beyond its frontiers. His allies of the Right soon realized that they had been duped, and the small man, whose rights he had promised to safeguard, became a mere cog in the wheel of a totalitarian State. It will be asked how such a cynical repudiation of pledges was possible, and there are several answers. There was, for instance, the ideological smoke-screen behind which the Nazis worked so long and so successfully. Then there was the uncritical nature of the people with whom they had to deal. The main reason, however, was that the Fuhrer was continually denouncing somebody or something, and after fifteen years as a defeated nation the Germans were prepared to forgive anything to the man who proclaimed their virtues to the four winds of Heaven. The Nazi technique was to play upon German fears and hopes until they were firmly in the saddle. So the Reichstag was burnt in circumstances calculated to revive the fear of Communism;

Germany resigned from the League of Nations in a way that stirred every patriotic heart in the Reich; while on June 30th, 1934, Herr Hitler indulged in an orgy of bloodshed in order to impress upon his subjects, by the old Prussian method of frightfulness, the danger of opposition to his rule.

All this should have been a warning to Germany's neighbours of what lay in store for them when the Nazi regime was fully established at home, but with the gangster's methods there went more than the gangster's cunning. While the first stealthy advances were being made in the direction of the annexation of Austria the other States were carefully lulled into a false sense of security. At this time was originated the policy which in a few years was to bring the Third Reich within measurable distance of the mastery of Europe.

The Austria established by the Peace Treaties was too small to live and too large to die. Her vicissitudes have been almost without parallel in modern times. Within the lifetime of many still alive she was the centre of a monarchy whose proud insignia was the double-headed eagle of Imperial Rome, whose leadership was acknowledged by the vast majority of the German people, whose sentries looked out over the plain of Lombardy, and whose trumpets rang out over the lagoon of Venice. To-day she is nothing but a province of the Third Reich, and Vienna, for five hundred years the pivot upon which Eastern Europe turned, is merely a German provincial town, another Dresden or Hanover. Austria was the first of the Fuhrer's victims, and her circumstances will repay a

little consideration for the light they throw upon conditions in Central Europe at a particularly critical moment.

In looking back over the past two centuries it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the major tragedy of Central Europe has been that German unity was not accomplished under the aegis of Austria rather than of Prussia, " behind whose brazen face ", as Mr. Algernon Cecil describes it in his biography of Metternich, " the lost soul of the Great Frederick has seemed, decade after decade, even to our own time, to be working out its malignant purposes." That this was not the case was, it must be admitted, to some extent the fault of the Habsburgs themselves. In the earlier part of the Thirty Years' War they had the ball at their feet, and they might have effected in Germany what Richelieu was accomplishing in contemporary France. In 1629 the Emperor Ferdinand II by the Edict of Restitution gave up the purposes of the Empire for those of the Church, and roused the Princes against him and his dynasty. The Treaty of Westphalia marked the triumph of the centrifugal forces, the Habsburgs looked to the East for the acquisitions which were to compensate them for what they had thrown away in the West, and when German national feeling began to awake it found its spiritual home in Berlin rather than in cosmopolitan Vienna. It is no exaggeration to say that the events of March, 1938, had their origin in those of March, 1629.

In more recent times the victory of Prussia at Sadowa had the effect of driving the Habsburgs out of Germany altogether, and there seems little doubt

that had the Central Powers proved successful in the Four Years' War, the subordination of Austria to her ally would have been complete. The Emperor Charles saw this very clearly indeed, and fear of it was by no means the least potent of the causes which induced him to put forward his peace proposals in the spring of 1917. As we have seen, even his own ministers could not be trusted. On one occasion, for example, Count Chemin was arguing in favour of an arrangement which would have made Austria virtually a vassal of Germany, and it was objected that the Emperor would never agree. "Leave it to me," he retorted characteristically, "I will soon bring him as far as that." In the end the Emperor was compelled to agree to a customs union which was to come into force when the war was over. The revolution at first hastened rather than retarded this development, for one of the earlier acts of the Austrian republic was to vote for incorporation in the German Reich. Nevertheless, the process could have been reversed at the end of the war had the Allies known their own minds, but they were too intent on upsetting the verdict of Sedan to think of disturbing that of Sadowa.

When the Treaty of Saint Germain had been signed, Austria found herself still an independent State, it is true, but shorn of the rest of the Dual Monarchy, with a capital ridiculously out of proportion to her population. In the immediate post-war period her Socialist rulers seemed more concerned in applying their own pet theories than in looking after her interests. The Social Democrats, to quote Dr. Schuschnigg, "persecuted with demonic hatred anything that recalled

Austria, her history, and her symbols. Where it was possible to do so the idea of Austria and the idea of patriotism were snatched from the hearts of school children". At the same time it was only in Vienna and a few of the larger towns that the Socialists were predominant; in the country districts the Church was supreme, and the old order to no inconsiderable extent survived.

The situation was aggravated by economic and social problems that defied solution. By the Treaty of Saint Germain the country had been cut off from its natural customers and sources of supply, and the ever-mounting tariff barriers accentuated the inconvenience. When the whole Danube basin owed allegiance to one monarch Austrian timber could be exchanged against the manufactured articles of Bohemia and the agricultural produce of Hungary, while Viennese banking-houses financed the transactions and Austrian steamers carried the empire's products from the ports of Trieste and Fiume to the outside world. At one blow all this came to an end, and Austria was called upon to adjust her economy to that of a peasant State, but with a capital which contained about a quarter of the total population, and which was in the hands of an extreme Marxian administration.

In some degree the social problem was the outcome of the economic. The working-classes in Vienna found much of their occupation gone when that city was no longer the residence of a Court and the centre of a great empire, and so they became an easy prey to Red agitators. There was, however, another class which also felt the change acutely, and that was the

section of the community which was in the habit of supplying officials to Bosnia and Bohemia, to Galicia and the Trentino. As the years passed the universities became increasingly fuller of young men for whom the reduced Austria of post-war days held out no hope, and who had consequently no interest in the preservation of the existing order : a few of them became Communists, but as soon as Herr Hitler's sun appeared above the horizon the vast majority donned the swastika in the belief that there would be more opportunities for them in the Greater Germany. As for the aristocracy, whom it might have been supposed would take the lead, not only were they for the most part reduced to poverty, but they had not recovered from their astonishment at the fall of the Habsburgs by the date of the arrival of the Fuhrer.

For a decade the situation remained, as the Viennese used to put it, dangerous but not serious. It was clear that Austrians were hopelessly divided on every subject, and there was sporadic rioting; but those were the days when British and American money was being poured into Central Europe, and Austria managed somehow to exist. Then came the slump, and all the existing antagonisms became bitter, even among such easy-going people as the Austrians. Private armies were formed, and it looked as if the country was heading for a civil war of the Spanish type. That this did not take place was due partly to the national character and partly to the fact that the politics of Austria were inextricably connected with the general European situation. Even so, a good deal of blood was shed, and the ruthless suppression of the Socialist rising in

1934^{was} an object-lesson in how such things should not be done, for it alienated public opinion abroad and rendered impossible any co-operation between those in Austria who were opposed to incorporation in the Reich,

By this time with the arrival of the Nazis in power in Berlin the pressure of events in Germany upon her southern neighbour had become tremendous. The emphasis laid upon race in the Third Reich made a strong appeal to the lower middle-class in Austria, which remembered that it was German too, and when to this sentiment was attached the possibility of obtaining profitable employment in the Greater Germany, the enthusiasm for the *anschluss* in these circles knew no bounds. The fact that Herr Hitler was an Austrian was also not without its influence, for, it was argued, surely he will look after his fellow-countrymen. In actual fact, a number of Austrians were given posts in Germany, but whether this was done for propaganda purposes or is to be taken as evidence of the Fuhrer's kindness of heart it would, perhaps, be tactless to enquire.

The then Chancellor of Austria, Dr. Dollfuss, realized that if the Nazi influence was to be effectively checked it could only be by creating in Austrians a feeling of pride in their own country, apart altogether from questions of race and of relations with Germany. Neither he nor his successor, Dr. Schuschnigg, denied that they were German; but they took the view that they were Austrians first, and that Austria had a glorious heritage of her own apart altogether from Germany. A vigorous traditionalist campaign was

therefore launched with the double object of weakening both the Nazi and the Socialist influence in the country. A determined effort was made to coalesce all the Right groups in the Fatherland Front, though this resulted in a good deal of jockeying for position in the new organization. The text-books used in the schools were revised, and all uncomplimentary references to Austria's previous rulers were excised; the old pre-war uniforms were restored for ceremonial purposes; and the regimental bands toured the rural districts playing such national airs as the "Radetzky March". It was not an easy task, for Dr. Dollfuss had to create, as much as revive, Austrian patriotism. In the past it had been the dynasty, rather than any national feeling, which held the country together, and the ordinary Austrian thought of the State in terms of the reigning monarch.

Such being the case, it was hardly surprising that the first result of this traditionalist campaign should have been a widespread revival of Royalist feeling. For more than a decade the Habsburgs had seemed forgotten in the land which they had ruled for centuries, but when Austrians were officially requested to direct their gaze upon the past, they naturally began to remember their old dynasty. Photos of the Archduke Otto were seen in the shop windows, and township after township made him an honorary citizen. How far Dr. Dollfuss was prepared to go in the direction of a restoration of the monarchy it is impossible to say, and in an interview which the present writer had with him a few months before his death he was manifestly unwilling to discuss the

subject. Nevertheless, he was too intelligent a man not to see whither this movement must tend; and that the exaltation of dead Habsburgs must inevitably stimulate interest in their living representative. At this time, too, not a few Socialists were quite willing to see the Archduke on the throne, for they felt that under his rule they would have far greater freedom than they were ever likely to experience under the Fatherland Front.

In effect, by the summer of 1934 the Austrian situation was taking a turn by no means favourable to the aspirations of Herr Hitler and his associates. They therefore determined to experiment abroad with those same methods which had proved so successful at home. They had their dupes in Austria, and they employed them in a manner which has since been adopted in Poland, Denmark, Norway and Holland, to prepare the way for a German invasion. On July 25 th the Austrian Chancellor was most foully murdered, and the dying man was denied the ministrations of a doctor or a priest. Sir Austen Chamberlain was but expressing the views of the civilized world when he wrote, " I feel almost physically sick when I think of the murder of Dollfuss, and I cannot get it out of my thoughts. Cold-blooded murder of a defenceless man is always revolting, but to leave him to linger on in agony, refusing to allow him either a doctor or a priest, seems to me to reach the limit of callous brutality." As for the murderers' paymasters in Berlin:

The charge is old ?—As old as Cain—as fresh as yesterday;
Old as the Ten Commandments—have ye talked those laws
away?

If words are words, or death is death, or powder sends the ball,
You spoke the words that sped the shot—the curse be on
you all.

What happened in March, 1938, was meant to happen on the morrow of the Austrian Chancellor's murder, but Herr Hitler found Italy in his path. The independence of Austria was still a cardinal maxim of Italian policy, and a few weeks earlier Signor Mussolini had made a determined effort to persuade Germany to respect it. The two dictators met in Venice, and for a brief moment it looked as if the problem had been solved: on June 16th a semi-official article in the *Giornale d'Italia* declared that an agreement had been reached that there was to be no interference with Austrian independence. When Dr. Dollfuss was murdered at the Fiihrer's instigation, Signor Mussolini massed troops along the frontier, and made it abundantly clear that any German move in the direction of Vienna would be resisted by force. In the face of this threat Germany held her hand.

The Austrian crisis had three lessons for Berlin, and they were all carefully assimilated. The first was that Austria could not be annexed without the consent of Italy. The second was that Germany must be free from danger of attack in the West, and this meant that the demilitarization of the Rhineland, which she had freely pledged herself to respect at Locarno, must be brought to an end. The third was that everything must be subordinated to re-armament. At the beginning of August the aged President von Hindenburg died, and the last vestige of even nominal control over the actions of Herr Hitler was removed.

While these events were taking place in Central Europe it was little short of a catastrophe that France should have been entering on one of those periods of internal instability which seem to occur at regular intervals throughout her history. At the very moment when it was most essential that she should present a united front to the world she appeared as a house divided against itself, and there can be no doubt that this encouraged the Nazi Government to take risks before which it would otherwise have hesitated. In May, 1932, the French President was assassinated; in February, 1934, there were riots in Paris involving loss of life; and in October of the same year King Alexander of Jugo-Slavia and the French Foreign Minister, M. Barthou, were murdered at Marseilles in circumstances which are still obscure, but which certainly reflected no credit on the French authorities. At the same time there was everywhere a growing spirit of unrest, and it was clear that at the elections of 1936 there would be a pronounced swing to the Left.

The year 1935, which before its close had staked out a claim to be one of the most important of the past two decades, opened not inauspiciously. Signor Mussolini was still exceedingly bitter against Germany for her interference in Austria, and on January 7th a Franco-Italian agreement was signed. It was never ratified, and the progress of events was soon to render it of purely academic interest, but in view of what the future had in store, the reference to Austria is not unimportant. The two Governments decided to recommend to those affected "the conclusion of an agreement of non-interference in their respective

internal affairs, and of a reciprocal undertaking not to incite or support any action calculated to make forcible attempts against the territorial integrity of a political or social regime of any one of the contracting parties ". In the main this was a reaffirmation of Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, but the special reference to those terrorist activities which had done so much to exacerbate feeling in Central Europe during the previous few months was obvious. This agreement, it was further decided, was to be signed in the first place by Italy, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Jugo-Slavia, and Austria, and it was to be open to the adhesion of France, Poland, and Romania. Moreover, if at any time Austrian independence appeared to be threatened, France and Italy were to take counsel together, and with Vienna, as to the most effective method of safeguarding it; " these consultations ", the official *communiqué* continued, " could then be extended by Italy and by France to the other States, with the object of assuring their concord". The British Government, it may be added, welcomed this improvement in Franco-Italian relations, little realizing that before the year was out it would be straining every nerve to disturb them.

Slowly, but all too slowly as events were soon to show, John Bull began to stir in his sleep. A few months ahead lay the Silver Jubilee of one of the most devoted monarchs Britain has ever known, but when it came to making the arrangements for the celebration of this anniversary the miserable state to which the country's armed forces had been reduced by unilateral disarmament was at once apparent.

Obsolete ships, a mere handful of soldiers with no reserves, and a wholly inadequate air force were the armaments which Conservatives, Liberals, and Socialists had agreed were sufficient for the national needs at a time when the international situation was steadily deteriorating. The preparations for the Jubilee at last brought the weakness of the country home to its rulers, and on March 4th the Government somewhat belatedly published a " Statement relating to Defence ". This White Paper, which was by no means enthusiastically received by any party in the House of Commons, called attention to " the unabated and uncontrolled " rearmament of Germany, and to " the general feeling of insecurity " which this had produced throughout Europe. It certainly opened the eyes of many people to the realities of the position, but, as we shall see, there was a very large section of the population which refused to listen.

Even this step had only been taken after yet another attempt had been made to coax Germany back into the comity of nations. Sir John Simon had several discussions with M. Laval, and a month before the publication of the White Paper a Franco-British statement was published favouring " a general settlement freely negotiated between Germany and the other Powers ", and inviting " the direct and effective co-operation of Germany ". It foreshadowed " the organization of security in Europe " by pacts of mutual assistance, " agreements regarding armaments generally " to replace the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and an air convention as " part of the general settlement ". Herr Hitler had seemed

to be ready to negotiate on this basis, probably for reasons of domestic policy, but the appearance of the British White Paper, which could in the circumstances hardly be described as provocative, provided him with an excuse for going back on his word* As one authority has said, " The whole incident is a classic illustration of the German contention that Germany may call a spade a bloody shovel, but other nations may not even call it an agricultural implement".

Having decided to defy the lightning, the German Government lost no time. On March 10th it was announced that an air force was already in existence, which proved that Germany had broken her word while negotiations were still pending, and six days later a decree was issued re-establishing conscription on the basis of a peace footing of twelve corps and thirty-six divisions. This defiant act was accompanied by a memorandum which endeavoured to reassure international opinion as to German intentions by stating that Herr Hitler had no desire to " fashion any offensive military instrument, but only, and exclusively, an instrument of defence ". In spite of this unilateral denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles no action was taken by the other signatories, and with very questionable wisdom Sir John Simon and Mr. Anthony Eden paid a visit to the Fuhrer within three weeks of his defiance of Great Britain and France, thereby encouraging him in the belief that he could afford to violate treaties with impunity. The situation was not improved by the publication of a photograph of the three men in which the two English statesmen looked for all the world like out-of-work men-servants

being interviewed by a prospective master. In any event the result of the interview was entirely negative. Herr Hitler refused to consider an Eastern Pact, and showed his dislike of the idea of mutual assistance; while he insisted upon an army of 550,000 men, and on a navy equal to 35 per cent, of that of Great Britain.

This revelation of German intentions temporarily brought the rest of Europe together. A special session of the League Council condemned the unilateral denunciation of treaties; the Franco-Soviet Pact was signed; and for a brief space the "Stresa Front" seemed to have blocked Herr Hitler's path. To Stresa there came Signor Mussolini, M. Flandin, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. The conference lasted four days, and it was announced that the representatives of the three Powers "found themselves in complete agreement on the various matters discussed". They also issued a long memorandum, which concluded with the words, "The three Powers, the object of whose policy is the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, find themselves in complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose". It is a sad commentary upon this pronouncement that before the end of the year in which it was made Italy was at war with Abyssinia, a fellow-member of the League of Nations; France had signed a pact with Russia, who had consistently dishonoured her signature over a period of years; and

Great Britain, behind the backs of France and Italy, had concluded a naval agreement with Germany, thus condoning Herr Hitler's violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

In retrospect the importance of the Stresa meeting is seen to lie not in what was discussed but in what was not discussed—namely, Abyssinia. It was already clear that Italy harboured designs against that country, and so long ago as the previous December there had been fighting between Italian and Ethiopian troops at Wal-Wal. The attitude of the British Government was unfavourable, not so much to Italian ambitions in East Africa as to the methods by which the Duce appeared determined to put them into practice. Signor Grandi, then Italian ambassador in London, advised his Government of the British view, and Signor Mussolini accordingly took his African experts with him to Stresa in the expectation that either Mr. MacDonald or Sir John Simon would raise the question of Abyssinia. Neither of them so much as mentioned it, and the Duce naturally concluded that he had been misinformed, for he could not believe that a problem was of importance to a country when that country's Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary refrained from even alluding to it when they had the opportunity. Henceforth, too, he paid little attention to the advice given him by Signor Grandi, who was always well informed in respect of British public opinion, and the unfortunate diplomat was kept; so short of news that he was driven to seek information from the Foreign Office.

Not the least interesting aspect of the Stresa Con-

ference was its sequel. Hardly had Sir John Simon returned to London than he asked Sir Austen Chamberlain to see the Italian Ambassador, and to impress upon him the serious view which the British Government took of Italy's policy in East Africa. Sir Austen did what was requested of him, but although Signor Grandi displayed a keen perception of what lay ahead, Signor Mussolini paid no heed to an informal warning of this nature. Why the Foreign Secretary had recourse to this peculiar procedure has never been explained. Shortly afterwards, at the beginning of June, Sir John Simon was replaced at the Foreign Office by Sir Samuel Hoare.

It may, perhaps, be claimed on Sir John's behalf that he did not commit many blunders, but even if this be allowed, it will hardly be denied that those he did commit were serious ones. By his failure to take advantage of Dr. Briining's offer at the Disarmament Conference he handed Germany over to the Nazis, and by his silence at Stresa on the subject of Abyssinia he set in motion forces which were to result in the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis. If it be objected that the responsibility for these mistakes rests rather with the Prime Minister, Mr. MacDonald, then the only reply can be that resignation was at any time open to the Foreign Secretary if he disagreed with his chief's policy. As he did not resign, it can only be assumed that he did not disagree, and he was the responsible head of the Foreign Office.

In the Far East the policy of Sir John Simon can be more easily defended against its critics. Japan had certainly violated her obligations as a member of the

League by her attack on China, and sanctions might therefore have been imposed upon her in accordance with Article 16 of the Covenant. Nevertheless, had this been done the only Power in a position to enforce them would have been Great Britain, who might well in that case have found herself at war with Japan without any effective allies. Nor were those who urged extreme measures upon the Government ready to face the implications of their advice, for the second Labour Government, curiously enough with the support of Sir John Simon himself, had suspended work on the Singapore Base, and all sections of the Opposition were still extremely hostile to any form of rearmament. Such being the case, to have adopted the course urged by the critics of the Government would have been to engage the country in a single-handed contest against Japan in her own area, a contest which must have necessitated denuding Great Britain and her home waters of armaments and ships at a moment when the situation on the Continent was going from bad to worse. In view, too, of the complete failure of sanctions against Italy not long afterwards, there is very little reason to suppose that they would have been any more successful against Japan in conditions far more unpropitious. Anyhow, the risk was too great. In refusing to embark upon any such adventures in the Far East the Government would appear to have been, in the light of subsequent events, fully justified.

CHAPTER VI

ENTR'ACTE

UNLIKE his predecessor, the new Foreign Secretary was a Conservative, and on that account might have been supposed to be more acceptable to the majority in the House of Commons : he had, however, come into conflict with the Conservative Right Wing over the Indian reforms, and was therefore regarded with some suspicion by those upon whose support he could otherwise have relied. His colleagues in the Cabinet, especially the younger men, welcomed the change at the Foreign Office, but it would be idle to pretend that either at Westminster or in the country Sir Samuel Hoare carried any more weight than Sir John Simon. He had, it is true, an excellent administrative record, which he fully maintained at the Foreign Office, but it was felt that he was not a forceful personality, and that he was too inclined to take his orders from others. In short, those best qualified to express an opinion felt in June, 1935, that the new Foreign Secretary was an admirable man for the post in quiet times, but the times threatened to be anything save quiet.

Sir Samuel was also subject to what would appear to have been an unnecessary complication by the appointment of Mr. Eden as Minister without Portfolio for League of Nations Affairs. Why this was done it is not easy to see, unless some considerations

of internal politics were involved, for in such matters Mr. Baldwin, who had now become Prime Minister for the third time, was an extremely good psychologist. Abroad the appointment was not understood, and it would be unfair to Sir Samuel Hoare not to point out that the impression created of a two-headed Foreign Office rendered his work much more difficult, though it may, of course, be replied with equal truth that a stronger man would have refused to hold office on such terms.

Sir Samuel's first act in his new office was a very serious blunder—namely, the conclusion of an Anglo-German Naval Agreement. It is true that the convention had been negotiated by his predecessor, but that does not lessen Sir Samuel's responsibility as its sponsor. By this agreement Germany definitely accepted a naval strength 35 per cent, of that of Great Britain to be applied not by tonnage but by categories, and "not to be affected by the construction of other Powers". It was meant to settle an outstanding point of difference between Great Britain and Germany, but the circumstances in which it was made were, to say the least, unfortunate, quite apart from the fact that it implied another concession to Herr Hitler's blackmailing methods. It was all very well for Mr. Baldwin to deny "any deviation from whole-hearted co-operation" with the Stresa Powers, but the negotiations had been conducted behind the backs of France and Italy, while the convention itself was a direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Signor Mussolini naturally drew the conclusion that the British Government shared his respect for the teaching

of Machiavelli, and went ahead with his plans for the conquest of Abyssinia.

All this was bad enough, but what was worse was that a wedge was driven in between Great Britain and France at a moment when the international situation was such as to render it most important that they should work closely together, and the conclusion of this naval agreement was by no means without its effect upon the French attitude six months later, when Great Britain became involved with Italy in the Mediterranean. In effect, the whole incident afforded an example of the mistake of not regarding the European situation as a whole. As for Germany, it is hardly surprising that some doubts were expressed, in circles not subject to official pressure, in respect of the value of an agreement with a Power which nearly two months before had informed the British Government that it proposed assembling twelve submarines " manufactured during the previous winter on the pattern of designs which had been drawn during the previous year ".

While the clouds were gathering over Europe the attitude of British public opinion remained profoundly unrealistic, and another three years were to elapse before it became fully alive to what was taking place on the Continent. As late as the summer of 1938 the headmaster of a well-known school in Dorset protested against aeroplanes flying over the district, on the ground that it distracted the boys from their work. The White Paper had, indeed, not been without its effect, but this had been greater in the country than in the House of Commons, where Sir Austen Chamberlain and Mr. Churchill found com-

paratively few followers. The Prime Minister complacently admitted that he had been wrong in his estimate of German air strength, but there was no disposition to call him to account for so serious a blunder, and all Mr. Churchill got for his pains was a strengthening of the determination of Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Neville Chamberlain not to include him in the Government: even when, some months later, the Prime Minister was forced by the pressure of public opinion to appoint a Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence he passed over Mr. Churchill in favour of Sir Thomas Inskip. The official world was still safe for the " yes-men ".

This was the year of the Peace Ballot, and as it throws considerable light, if from very different points of view, on British mentality at the time, it repays a little study. A large section of the electorate was canvassed, and the questions asked, with their answers, were as follows :

I. Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations ?

" Yes " votes, 11,090,387. " No " votes, 355,883. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 112,895.

2. Are you in favour of an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreements ?

" Yes " votes, 10,470,489. " No " votes,, 862,775. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 225,901.

3. Are you in favour of an all-round abolition of national naval and military aircraft by international agreement ?

" Yes " votes, 9,533,558- " No " votes, 1,689,786. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 335,821.

4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement ?

" Yes " votes, 10,417,329. " No " votes, 775,415. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 366,421.

5. Do you consider, that if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by (a) economic and non-military measures, (b) if necessary, military measures ?

" Yes " votes for (a), 10,027,608. " No " votes, 635,074. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 896,483. " Yes " votes for (b), 6,784,368. " No " votes, 2,351,981. Abstentions and doubtful answers, 2,422,816.

What is most remarkable about this Ballot, given the have-you-left-off-beating-your-wife type of question asked, is the number of negative answers. The result was claimed as " an overwhelming vote in favour of the League of Nations ", but in actual fact more than half the electorate took no part in the Ballot. All the same, the figures frightened a timid Government, and so afforded further proof of what can be done in Great Britain by an active and well-disciplined minority. The fact that there was not the slightest chance in existing conditions of giving effect to the principles advocated in the *questionnaire* seems to have escaped unnoticed.

All things seemed to play into the hands of Germany that summer as, without any effort on her part, the Stresa Powers became increasingly more divided among themselves. The shadow of Abyssinia fell across Europe as Italian troops were poured into Eritrea in preparation for an offensive as soon as climatic conditions rendered this possible. The moving spirit in this policy was Signor Mussolini himself, who, for good or ill, is one of the outstanding figures of the twentieth century.

There has been a greater unity about his career than is always appreciated, for in his earlier Socialism there was a good deal of latent Fascism, and when Sorel said of him, " Our Mussolini is no ordinary Socialist ", he was speaking nothing but the truth. It is customary to speak of the German, Russian, and Italian dictators as if there was little to choose between them, and although this is undoubtedly the case so far as lack of scruple and general dishonesty are concerned, it would be idle to ignore certain fundamental differences. Hitler is an ignorant fanatic; a man of no culture, raised to power as much by circumstances and others as by his own efforts. Stalin is an Oriental despot with the outlook of a brigand and the cunning of a priest, for which vocation he was originally intended. The Duce, on the other hand, is a cultured man of the world, thoroughly conversant with countries other than his own, and until he came under the influence of Count Ciano he was a good European. At the time of the invasion of Abyssinia he was still an Italian first and a Fascist afterwards. His personality has always been an attractive one. In conversation he makes no attempt to " lay down the law ",

and it is impossible to talk with him without being impressed by his encyclopaedic knowledge. He possesses an extraordinary ability to dissociate in any question the important from the trivial, and, like Mr. Neville Chamberlain, he goes to the heart of a problem in a way that has the effect of clearing the brains of those with whom he is conversing, and of reducing apparently insuperable difficulties to their right proportions. Marshal Balbo, in his *Diario*, alluded to this quality more than once, and showed how it was of immense assistance to his followers during the critical months that preceded the march on Rome, Mussolini's face reflects his character. In repose or in public it is stern and repellent, but he has a most charming smile, which recalls that of the late British Prime Minister and of Mr. de Valera. In effect, there is much in him of the traditional *condottiere*.

Behind him Signor Mussolini had a country whose traditions in the matter of foreign policy had always been opportunist. The Dukes of Savoy only preserved their independence by playing France, Spain, and Austria off against one another, and United Italy adopted the same tactics in changed conditions. Unification was rendered possible by the help of Napoleon III; an alliance with Prussia completed the work by the inclusion of Venetia in the new kingdom; and participation in the Four Years' War against her old partners in the Triple Alliance secured for Italy such substantial gains as Trieste, Fiume, and the Alto Adige. In spite of this there was a feeling that the country had not been fairly treated in view of the promises of her

allies in the Treaty of London and the Pact of St. Jean de Maurienne, and so, although Italy was numbered among the victors, she was by no means satisfied. "Treaties", said Signor Mussolini on the morrow of his accession to power, "are not eternal, and they are not unalterable; they are the chapters of history, not its epilogue." No one can accuse him of not living up to this doctrine.

Between May and August the Italian preparations were completed, and Great Britain, in common with the rest of the world, was left to decide what action she was going to take. From the standpoint of international law Italy had no case at all for resorting to force, and in doing so she broke her pledged word at least nine times. The Covenant of the League was quite explicit as to the action which the other members should take against her, though the case for doing so had been somewhat weakened by the failure to apply sanctions to Japan for her attack on China, while British hands in the matter of the violation of treaties were none too clean since the conclusion of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. There was also to be taken into account the question whether from an Imperial point of view an extension of Italian power in East Africa was or was not desirable. The Abyssinians had not been good neighbours either to Kenya or to the Sudan, but if Italy was once installed at Addis Ababa there was the danger that Signor Mussolini, his appetite having grown for what it fed on, might try to get possession of Egypt, by concerted pressure from the south and west. In short, one could argue a good case for the application of full economic sanctions,

pushed if necessary so far as war: this might have deterred Germany in the years to come, and it would certainly have re-established the shaken authority of Geneva. There was also much to be said for turning a blind eye to the Italian attack on Abyssinia, for in this way the formation of the Rome-Berlin axis might have been prevented, and the Stresa Front might have been maintained. What is impossible to defend is the action which was taken—namely, the imposition of ineffective sanctions, which merely encouraged Berlin and exasperated the Duce, while their ultimate failure dealt a blow to British prestige which it had not suffered since the days of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis two generations before.

On the other hand, it is not easy to see why Signor Mussolini acted as he did, and thus forged the first link in the chain which was to bind him to the Fuhrer's chariot wheels. That he had very considerable grounds for complaint against Abyssinia cannot be denied, and if he had brought them before the League he would have received satisfaction, for Sir Samuel Hoare had alluded in the most sympathetic terms to "Italy's desire for overseas expansion". Indeed, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that had Signor Mussolini played his cards properly he might have received a Mandate for Abyssinia which would have given him all he wanted. That he did not take this course would seem to show that he wanted to achieve his end by force, and not by any other means. If this is so, it was the first really serious blunder he committed during the thirteen years he had been in power, and in view of the legacy of troubles which has ensued

from the war in Abyssinia he must bear a heavy part of the responsibility for the evils which have since afflicted mankind. In the Duce's own career it marks the dividing-line between two periods—the one when he thought of Italy and Mussolini, and the other when he thought of Mussolini and Italy.

To no inconsiderable extent the Duce was aided by the differences which soon appeared between the attitude of Great Britain and that of France. In the former there was, as we have seen, a large and extremely vocal section of public opinion which really believed in the League of Nations as an effective instrument, but on the other side of the Channel the standpoint was very different, apart altogether from the fact that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement still rankled. The Stresa meeting had given France a feeling of greater security, for if war came on the Rhine her Mediterranean back-door would be safe. Not one Frenchman in ten thousand cared what happened to Haile Selassie so long as he could rely on Italian support against the Third Reich, but when London started to press for the application of sanctions there was nothing to do but comply. France wanted to keep on friendly terms with both Great Britain and Italy, but if a choice had to be made there could be no doubt which it should be. Moreover, the Quai d'Orsay had been one of the principal supporters of the League for so long that it could not weaken now without incalculable loss of prestige. Save among the professional anti-Fascists on the extreme Left, public opinion was hostile to England, and the British Embassy in Paris had to be guarded by two hundred police and the Gardes

Mobles. The Press was most outspoken, and the British Government was unhappily induced to adopt the Nazi method of exerting pressure upon a foreign Power to suppress a newspaper which criticized its policy.

It is thus not difficult to understand, and to some extent even to sympathize with, the vacillations of M. Laval, who for nine months endeavoured to steer a middle course that should alienate neither England nor Italy: what is by no means easy to fathom is the attitude of the British Government. Why, having decided to advocate sanctions, did not Mr. Baldwin push this policy to its logical conclusion? No satisfactory answer has ever been given to that question, and the then Prime Minister's lips appear to have been as effectively sealed since as he declared them to be at the time. There is, however, now sufficient evidence available to justify an attempt to solve the problem, and it is of the first importance to get to the bottom of the matter, for from the Abyssinian War all our subsequent troubles have sprung.

A General Election was due within twelve months, and twenty-five years had elapsed since the same administration had, in normal circumstances, been returned by two successive elections. The Prime Minister was, in fact, quite properly and perfectly justifiably, looking for a good issue on which to go to the country, and, sound strategist as he was, he thought a limited application of sanctions would best serve his purpose. The party managers had originally been very perturbed over the result of the Peace Ballot, but they had studied the figures with their usual care, and had come to the conclusion that such a policy as Mr.

Baldwin envisaged would best meet the case. It would enable the ordinary Englishman to put his fingers to his nose at Signor Mussolini without actually having to fight him, and it would deprive the Opposition of the opportunity of charging the Government either with neglect of British interests or with over-tenderness to Fascism. The Whips' Office and Palace Chambers therefore favoured a dissolution on this issue.

On the other hand, if the Peace Ballot meant anything, it was that the country had no desire to go to war, and the Press reflected this feeling. Nor was this all, for, as Mr. Baldwin and the Cabinet very well knew, the country was in no condition to go to war, thanks to a long period of unilateral disarmament supported by all three parties and cheerfully acquiesced in by the electorate. Expert naval and military authority held that although there could be no question of not being able to overthrow Italy, this might take some nine months, and at the end of the campaign Great Britain would, in existing conditions, be so exhausted that she would be unable to refuse compliance with any demand which Germany might put forward. Why the national unpreparedness was not frankly explained to the man-in-the-street is another matter into which it is perhaps inadvisable to inquire too closely. One can only recall Mr. Kipling's epitaph on *A Dead Statesman* :

I could not dig : I dared not rob :
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue,
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall save me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young ?

Five more years, however, were to elapse before the situation depicted in the latter part of this stanza came to pass.

Nevertheless it cannot be seriously suggested that Mr. Baldwin and his colleagues, among whom Mr. Neville Chamberlain was the most prominent, were so criminally negligent of the national interest, and so intent upon scoring a party advantage, that they were prepared to stake everything on limited sanctions. What would appear to be the true explanation of their conduct is that they were misled as to the probable outcome of the campaign in Abyssinia, just as previous administrations had been led astray with regard to the Greek prospects in Asia Minor and the Nazi hopes at the elections of 1930, to quote but two examples. As has been already mentioned, this lack of reliable information at critical moments has been one of the most serious handicaps from which Whitehall has suffered since the termination of the Four Years' War. The Abyssinians, in flat contradiction of the lessons of their whole history, were believed to be magnificent guerilla fighters, and the complete lack of means of communication was reckoned to be the decisive factor in their favour : the fact that the Italians were the best engineers in the world, and that the Abyssinians were about as united as the Highlanders in the sixteenth century, was conveniently ignored, while all evidence which conflicted with the official view was brushed aside. In the last resort the Government with its sanctions, like the housemaid with her bastard, could plead that it " was only a very little one " .

Accordingly when the Council met at Geneva in

September the Foreign Secretary rallied the League in defence of collective security, and Great Britain assumed the lead in the campaign to force Italy by peaceful means to abandon her designs against Abyssinia. With consummate skill, Signor Mussolini utilized the imposition of sanctions to popularize the war among his fellow-countrymen, who had at first regarded it with considerable disfavour, and by denouncing the machinations *of perfide Albion* he effected a revolution in Italian public opinion. He was even able both to eat his cake and to have it, for while making a great deal of very useful political capital out of the imposition of sanctions, he was soon convinced that they were not likely to prove effective : they were not imposed by Germany, Austria, or Hungary, so that Italy could import what she wanted through these countries, and in many other cases they were, as the saying then went, decidedly "leaky". The Duce also had a pretty shrewd idea that they would not be extended to cover oil, which really would have brought the war to a standstill, so he was in a much safer position than was generally realized at the time. On the other hand, the Negus believed that in the last resort Great Britain and the League would not hesitate to give him military assistance, and so he refused to compromise with Italy while it was still possible for him to save some part of his dominions from the enemy.

At this juncture Mr. Baldwin went to the country. Owing to his skilful handling of the situation, foreign affairs were not an issue, but in their manifestos the three parties had each something to say about them,

and in the light of subsequent events it is worth while recalling what was said.

The Prime Minister and Mr. MacDonald declared that the League of Nations would remain " the key-stone of British foreign policy ", and they pledged the Government to maintain and increase the efficiency of the League. In view of what was to come as soon as the new Parliament met, the passage relating to the conflict in Abyssinia may be quoted at length :

In the present unhappy dispute between Italy and Abyssinia there will be no wavering in the policy we have hitherto pursued. We shall take no action in isolation, but we shall be prepared faithfully to take our part in any collective action decided upon by the League and shared in by its members. We shall endeavour to further any discussions which may offer the hope of a just and fair settlement, provided that it be within the framework of the League and acceptable to the three parties to the dispute—Italy, Abyssinia, and the League itself.

The manifesto went on to affirm the Government's belief in collective security which alone would save the world from " a return to the old system which resulted in the Great War ". Reference was also made, in a somewhat apologetic manner, to the state of the national defences, which was described as " not satisfactory ". Action would " in the course of the next few years " be taken to " repair the gaps in our defences ", but it was carefully stressed that the defence programme would be " strictly confined to what is

required to make the country and the Empire safe and to fulfil our obligations towards the League ".

The Labour Party roundly declared that the Government had " a terrible responsibility " for the existing international situation because it had undermined the whole system of collective security by failing to withstand Japanese aggression. The manifesto of the Official Opposition went on to charge Ministers with having failed " to make Signor Mussolini understand that, if he broke the peace in Africa, Britain would join with other nations in upholding the authority of the League ", and also with " planning a vast and expensive re-armament programme, which will only stimulate similar programmes elsewhere ". No allusion, it may be added, was made to the armament programme of Germany, which had already been in force for six months. If returned to power Mr. Attlee and his colleagues pledged themselves to "speedy action, through the League, to bring the war in Africa to an end ", but they refrained from saying exactly how this was going to be done. In the matter of armaments Labour would " efficiently maintain such defence forces as are necessary and consistent with our membership of the League ".

The Opposition Liberals said less about foreign affairs than did either of the other parties. Their point of view is best expressed in the words of their own manifesto:

Upon the success or failure of the League of Nations in its efforts to penalize aggression must depend our own future policy in foreign affairs, and as to armaments. If the League succeeds

we shall take one course; if it fails, another. The issue is now in the balance. Until we know we cannot judge. . . . Our aim is to maintain the peace of the world and preserve our own security. Armaments, on however vast a scale, will not bring security or stop war. The national defences must be kept efficient and large enough for the needs of the times; but a colossal, panic expenditure upon arms is not the road to peace.

It would appear from these three documents that the inter-relation between policy and armaments was still only vaguely perceived by the three parties, and there was an atmosphere of unreality about each of these official pronouncements. Mr. Baldwin's shrewd calculation of electoral chances won the day for the National Government, and in such an atmosphere was elected a Parliament which was to witness events as momentous as any in history. It saw the death of one monarch, the abdication of a second, and the coronation of a third: it was a spectator of the disappearance from the map of five independent nations, victims to dictatorial greed: it broke all precedents by imposing compulsory military service upon the British people in time of peace: it supported the Government in declaring war upon Germany for the second time in a generation: and it is still sitting.

Hardly had the new Parliament settled down to business than it was announced that Sir Samuel Hoare and M. Laval had devised a scheme by which Italy was to receive several Abyssinian provinces while the Negus was to retain his sovereignty over the rest.

The proposals had not, however, been put officially either to Signor Mussolini or to the Emperor Haile Selassie. Indeed, the whole affair was an excellent example of how to do the right thing in the wrong way. Neither the House of Commons nor the electorate was prepared for what was suggested, and there was at once a cry that the Government had reversed the policy on which it had won its majority only a few weeks before. What should have been done was to secure the consent of both the Negus and the Duce before the scheme was made public, and in that case, although there would have been some grumbling, no serious opposition would have been encountered in Parliament: this procedure, too, would have been wholly consistent with the terms of the Government election manifesto. As it was, the storm of popular disapproval broke before anything had been settled with Rome or Addis Ababa, and Signor Mussolini and the Abyssinian monarch felt that they were being asked to pull Mr. Baldwin's chestnuts out of the fire: this they very naturally refused to do.

The untimely fate of the Hoare-Laval plan must not blind us to its merits. There can be little doubt but that both belligerents would have accepted it had it been put to them in a different manner. From the Italian point of view the campaign was at that moment hanging fire dangerously, and the terms were much the same as those to which Signor Mussolini was ready to agree at a considerably later stage of the war, while the Emperor Haile Selassie was far too intelligent not to appreciate the ultimate strength of the forces opposed to him. Nor, as has been said, was it likely

that the vast mass of the British people would have opposed, though they might have regretted, a settlement along these lines if it had been approved by the combatants, and if the latter had accepted the plan, the League could hardly have rejected it. The concentration of the Fleet in the Mediterranean was proving extremely costly, and it had revealed deficiencies which were very disquieting, while it was already abundantly clear that Great Britain was the only Power which was effectively applying sanctions. Above all, had the Hoare-Laval plan been adopted there would have been no Rome-Berlin axis.

Owing to the blundering methods of the Government it never had a chance of being considered on its merits, and there was hardly a mistake which was not made. The Foreign Secretary himself was the worst offender, for instead of returning from Paris to London to defend his proposals before his colleagues and the country, he went to Switzerland for a holiday. In the absence of any authoritative defence of the project the storm grew, and before many days had passed it was obvious that the Government would have to give way. What finally decided the Prime Minister seems to have been the attitude of Sir Austen Chamberlain, who had criticized the plan pretty sharply. He had not, however, finally made up his mind what line he would take in the House, but Mr. Baldwin was informed that Sir Austen meant to attack the Government, and such was his old lieutenant's influence that he realized this meant defeat. At that moment the Prime Minister decided to abandon the Hoare-Laval plan even at the price of losing his Foreign Secretary.

When the matter was debated in the House of Commons just before Christmas a scene almost without parallel was witnessed. Sir Samuel Hoare scored a considerable, if transient, personal triumph, and when he sat down there were tears in his eyes, while Mr. Baldwin endeavoured to rally his followers by appearing in the most obvious of white sheets. Had the Labour Party had the good sense to leave well alone, the Government might have collapsed, but Mr. Attlee rather overdid his attack, and so Sir Austen Chamberlain, seeing Ministers repentant, came to their aid. One would have supposed that after this Sir Samuel Hoare would have conducted a campaign up and down the country on behalf of the plan which he had sponsored and to put himself right with public opinion, but he did nothing of the sort: instead, he retired for a space into private life, and reappeared a few months later as First Lord of the Admiralty in the administration from which he had resigned. As for the Prime Minister, it took nothing less than a king's abdication to rehabilitate his position in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen.

At first the favourite candidate for the vacant post of Foreign Secretary was Sir Austen Chamberlain, but all he was offered was a position as Minister of State without a Department, and this he declined, as he came to the conclusion that Mr. Baldwin only wanted the use of his name to restore the shattered prestige of his Government. The new Foreign Secretary was quite a different man—namely, Mr. Anthony Eden.

CHAPTER VII

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

THE new Foreign Secretary had one advantage—namely, that of youth—over his immediate predecessors, for he was only thirty-eight. Nevertheless his interest in politics had not manifested itself so early as in the case of some of his contemporaries, and at Oxford he was attracted rather by the paintings of Cezanne than the policy of the Conservative Party. He served his apprenticeship to official life as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Austen Chamberlain, and since 1931 he had been successively Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord Privy Seal, and Minister without Portfolio for League of Nations Affairs. From the point of view of a Prime Minister as embarrassed as was Mr. Baldwin at that particular moment, Mr. Eden possessed the great advantage of being extremely popular with the Opposition, and with that very section of the public—that is to say, the enthusiasts for the League of Nations—which was most hostile to the Hoare-Laval proposals. On the other hand, Mr. Eden had no great hold on his own party, for a variety of reasons, and in the long run this more than counterbalanced the favour he enjoyed in Liberal and Socialist eyes. In this respect his career bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Lord Randolph Churchill and of Mr. George Wyndham, and in the crisis of his fate he was, like them, to discover how little backing he had on the benches behind him.

The policy which Mr. Eden took office pledged to

carry out was one of no compromise in respect of the Abyssinian War and of the strict enforcement of the existing sanctions, and there can be little doubt but that this accorded with his own personal views . Events, however, soon proved more powerful than the statesmen who were trying to control them. The Abyssinians, as if to prove the complete inaccuracy of what had been said and written in Great Britain about their guerilla tactics, staked everything on a pitched battle which they lost, and by the beginning of May the Italian flag floated over Addis Ababa. Signor Mussolini had successfully defied the League in general and the British Empire in particular. This latter consideration was uppermost in the minds of all Italians, as well as of most Germans, and the events of the next three years will not be seen in their proper perspective unless this fact is appreciated. No one on the Continent believed for a moment that Great Britain had advocated the imposition of sanctions for any save purely Imperialist reasons, and her statesmen's declarations that she had only taken action by virtue of the Covenant were universally regarded as a particularly nauseating piece of British hypocrisy. When, therefore, sanctions failed, the general opinion was that the prestige of Great Britain had received a serious blow, and that in future no great attention need be paid to her threats or counsels. The chickens had come home to roost, and it was plain that the Government should either have pushed sanctions to their logical conclusion or never have touched them at all.

By this time the Stresa Front had disintegrated sufficiently for Germany to make another move. Earlier in the year Dr. Gobbels had declared, " We

can do without butter, but not without guns ", and on March 7th the Fuhrer repudiated the freely negotiated Pact of Locarno by one of his sudden strokes, for while he was still speaking in the Reichstag the German troops were marching into the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland. All the familiar Hitlerian technique was employed. The step was forced on the Reich by the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Specious suggestions for " a system of European security " were put forward in order to bemuse the rest of the world, which was also assured that Germany had " no territorial demands to make in Europe ", while there was a specially friendly recognition of Poland's vital need for access to the sea. Not twelve months had passed since Herr Hitler had referred to his respect for the demilitarized zone " as a contribution towards the appeasement of Europe ", and in conversation with Mr. Eden had drawn a clear distinction between Versailles and Locarno, in that the latter had been " freely signed ".

March 7th was a Saturday, and all that week-end Europe waited to know whether it was to be peace or war. The Reichswehr had advised Herr Hitler against the move, and had the French marched the German troops would have been withdrawn, probably with consequences fatal to the Nazi regime. The Fuhrer, however, was right, and his military advisers were wrong. So well had his propagandists done their work in discrediting the Treaty of Versailles that British public opinion overwhelmingly approved of what had taken place, and the French Government, with a General Election due in a few weeks, was dis-

inclined to act alone : only the Czechs were ready to move, and they were sternly discouraged by the Western Powers. Accordingly, this latest affront to the sanctity of treaties passed off with the usual uplifting of hands in horror in the House of Commons. The Foreign Secretary condemned " the unilateral repudiation of a treaty freely negotiated and freely signed ", and declared that it struck a blow " at that principle of sanctity of treaties which underlies the whole structure of international relations ", while Mr. Baldwin spoke of " a new and disturbing factor in the international situation ". Nevertheless all this could not disguise the fact that Herr Hitler had " got away with it " again.

Yet it was the occupation of the demilitarized zone that made German expansion possible, for so long as his Western frontier was exposed Herr Hitler dared not prosecute his designs in the East. Once the Siegfried Line had begun to take shape the conquest of Austria became a possibility, and with Austria gone Czecho-Slovakia was defenceless: in its turn the overthrow of the Czech State would pave the way for an attack on Poland. No one seems to have realized all this save Sir Austen Chamberlain, but he was, as he frankly admitted, still only a voice crying in the wilderness. The majority in the House of Commons seemed quite content that any danger there was had been adequately met by the appointment of an eminent barrister to be Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. On the other hand, the Government was beyond doubt right in announcing that in spite of the action of Germany it still regarded itself as bound by

the provisions of the Locarno Pact in all that related to the defence of France and Belgium.

Hard on the heels of these events came the French General Election, which brought in another complication by placing the Popular Front in power, and thus gave a further impetus to the forces of disintegration. When the results of the second ballot became known, it was clear that what had taken place was that familiar development in post-war Europe—namely, the weakening of the Centre to the profit of the extreme Right and of the extreme Left. The Independent Radicals lost 34 seats; the Radical-Socialists, 42; the Socialist Union, 19; and the Independent Socialists, 10; while 72 Communists, and 10 Dissident Communists, were returned. Nevertheless, the extreme Right also gained some seats, while in many cases the Popular Front majorities were small, and it would not have required a large number of votes to have produced a very different result. This aspect was generally ignored abroad, but it was significant in the light of what was to come, and it explains why, when the tide had turned, M. Daladier found it so easy to suppress the Communists.

The vote was primarily one against the " old gang " and everything for which it stood—that is to say, repeated financial scandals and a studied indifference to the welfare of the working-classes. The pendulum in these circumstances swung to the Left rather than to the Right because, as in contemporary Britain, Fascism had become a bogey, and in the mind of the masses a vote for the Popular Front was regarded as a gesture of defiance towards Herr Hitler and the Nazis. It was

felt, in short, to be almost a patriotic act to vote Communist, and the Red leaders themselves were careful to appeal to the patriotism of the electorate with such slogans as, "*Pour une France libre, forte et heureuse*". Their advocacy of national organization, even down to the level of sport, took the wind out of their opponents' sails. Indeed, the failure of the Government's deflationist policy and the moderation of the Communist spokesmen may well, in the opinion of competent witnesses, have accounted for at least three million of the three and a half million votes cast for the Popular Front candidates. The enormous advance in the Communist poll certainly did not mean that there was an equivalent number of convinced Communists in France. There were villages where the whole electorate voted Red, and went to Mass next Sunday as usual.

There were other reasons too for the elections going the way they did. One was the excellence of Popular Front discipline, another the Franco-Soviet Pact, and a third was the social conditions obtaining in France. The Left in that country has always been better organized than its opponents, but never was this fact more obvious than in the elections of 1936. It concentrated on the candidate most likely to win the seat in question, and such tactics always give a great advantage in France to those who employ them, for candidates are legion: for instance, in one place of some 6,000 inhabitants which returned a single member there were no less than III aspirants for Parliamentary honours at the last election. As for the pact with Russia, Marshal Petain was undoubtedly prophetic when, on the eve of the poll, he wrote in *Le*

Journal that by stretching out the hand of fellowship to Moscow they had given it to Communism, and would live to regret it, but the ordinary French elector agreed that if Communism was officially admitted to be all right in Russia a little of it could do no harm at home. Finally, there was the lack of any social services at all comparable with those of Great Britain, Germany, and Italy. For years the politicians had been promising to do something in the matter, but nothing had been done, and the masses were becoming restive.

The election results were not carefully analysed abroad, while the more spectacular results of the victory of the Popular Front were proclaimed to the world. The red flag floated over the factories, "stay-in" strikes paralysed French industry, and from more than one point of view the state of France bore an unpleasant resemblance to that of Russia nineteen years before. He would have been regarded as a madman who would have foretold that this same Chamber would one day suppress Communism, and that Herr Hitler, who was professing himself horrified at the Leftward trend of events in France, would then be the ally of Soviet Russia. However this may be, the forces which might otherwise have kept Germany in check were immeasurably weakened. In England the pro-Nazi element asked what was the use of depending upon a Power so manifestly divided against itself, while the Little Entente began to have grave doubts about the amount of support which they could expect from France in their hour of need. The fates were still exceedingly kind to Herr Hitler, and it was not long before it became apparent that he had friends even on the left bank of the Rhine. Certain elements on the

Right were so disgusted with the Popular Front and the Russian alliance that they no longer excluded an understanding with the Third Reich, Those who held such views were fearful of a war in which France might find herself without any ally save Russia, and the Right has never been conspicuous for the warmth of its friendship towards Great Britain. In effect, there were at this time even more cross-currents than usual making themselves felt in French politics, and the result was a general uncertainty alike at home and abroad both as to her armed might and to her disposition to make use of it in an emergency. Since with this doubt concerning France was combined a not dissimilar one concerning England, it is hardly surprising that the lesser States were beginning to wonder whether the Genevan system was really going to endure.

Paradoxically enough, the first important act of Mr. Eden and the new French Prime Minister, M. Blum, was to drop sanctions against Italy. In the restricted form in which they had been adopted they had clearly failed, and had become purely punitive in character: in these circumstances no useful purpose was to be served by their retention, and public opinion both in England and France, led by Sir Austen Chamberlain, was coming to favour their abolition. At the annual dinner of the 1900 Club the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, declared that the policy of sanctions had been tried out, and had failed; a little later Sir John Simon said he was not prepared to see a single ship sunk in the cause of Abyssinian independence; and Mr. Baldwin warned his fellow-countrymen that the only alternatives were the accept-

ance of the new situation or war. On the last day of June, therefore, the League called off sanctions.

Never was there a better example of the truth of the words put by Shakespeare into the mouth of Antony, that "the evil that men do lives after them". Sanctions had changed the whole international situation by bringing Germany and Italy together, and their abolition neither could nor did put the clock back to Stresa. Bitter feelings had been aroused both in Great Britain and Italy which it would require time to assuage, and in this connection it should not be forgotten that if there was too much criticism of the Italians in England, the Duce was by no means guiltless of pouring oil on the fire. Indeed, it is from this moment that Signor Mussolini appears to have abandoned the caution which had hitherto characterized his action, and increasingly to have adopted the methods and outlook of his fellow-dictator in Berlin. For a brief space he seems to have hesitated, and in interviews during the last days of sanctions with Mr. Victor Gordon-Lennox of the *Daily Telegraphy* some members of the Imperial Policy Group, and with the present writer he showed a marked disposition to let bygones be bygones, and to resume the traditional friendship with Great Britain. This mood, however, soon passed, and it was replaced by a manifest determination to gloat on all and every occasion over the discomfiture of the League and the British Government: such exultations in their turn naturally produced further vilifications of Italy in England, and so the atmosphere became ever more thundery.

Even so it is more than likely that in due course the shouting and cat-calls would have died away had it not

been for the outbreak of the civil war in Spain . This conflict divided Europe into what simple-minded people believed to be two ideological camps, and it further strengthened the ties between Rome and Berlin. Herr Hitler's luck still held, for while the course of events in Spain mattered little to Germany, the struggle in the Peninsula could easily be used to widen the breach between Italy and her associates of Stresa days. At this moment the Russians commenced what can only be described as an offensive in Western Europe, and this still further played into the hands of Berlin.

There is a real danger of this being forgotten, and in that case much of what followed must be unintelligible. The success of the Popular Front in both France and Spain seems to have convinced M. Stalin that at long last there was a real prospect of seeing Europe Red at both ends, and he acted accordingly. In particular, he believed that France was going the way of Russia, and that Blum was another Kerensky. He was quite ignorant of the innate patriotism of the French, and he began to drive his supporters too hard. The first result of these faulty tactics was to alarm Belgium and England, and to draw still closer the ties which bound the Italian and German dictators. The more the Red Czar cracked his whip over the French Communists the more discontented they became, and the greater was the solidarity of their opponents. In these circumstances the revolution fixed for June 12th had to be countermanded, and Russian prestige suffered a severe rebuff. When the civil war broke out in Spain this encouraged M. Blum finally to come down on the side of non-intervention, at any rate officially, and thus the

conflict was prevented from developing into a new European war with all its attendant possibilities of revolution, which was just what Moscow wanted.

Direct Russian intervention in Spain was of much earlier date, and had been one of the principal causes of the fall of the monarchy five years before. The main inspiration of the Popular Front was from Moscow, and during the existence of the Second Republic it was Russia which pulled the strings, whatever was the political complexion of the puppets who did the dancing. In short, Russia was active in Spain before either Italy or Germany lifted a finger there. The Nationalist movement under General Franco, whatever it may subsequently have become, started as a reaction against the Russian domination of Spain: Moscow fully appreciated this, and for a time every kind of support was given to his opponents. When M. Stalin realized that in the long run the Nationalists were bound to win, he washed his hands of Spain altogether, but not before Italian and German forces had fought side by side under General Franco, and Spain had been converted into a training area for the next war. The Bolshevik offensive thus failed in France and Spain alike, but by then it had divided Europe into two ideological camps, and rendered particularly difficult the position of Great Britain, which had no desire to be manoeuvred into either of them : moreover, in all countries dislike and fear of Russia produced widespread sympathy with the Third Reich, which was regarded as the sworn foe of Communism. Herr Hitler was still playing with loaded dice.

The overwhelming mass of British people had no other desire in connection with the Spanish war than

to keep clear of it themselves and to prevent it from developing into a general conflict. A small minority strongly inclined to one side or the other, but the vast majority had no pronounced sympathies, though there was probably far more support for General Franco than may at first sight appear to have been the case, for his opponents were extremely vocal. The Government, however, was confronted with a very difficult situation, for it was by no means to British interests that Europe should be divided into two armed camps. What was required was clearly a lightning-conductor of some sort. The League of Nations would have been the natural instrument for this purpose, but Germany was no longer a member, while Italy viewed Geneva and all its works with the gravest suspicion and disfavour. Therefore the Non-intervention Committee was called into existence in London under the chairmanship of Lord Plymouth, and although its meetings were often marked by an exchange of vitriolic abuse, this was better than an enlargement of the Spanish war into an international conflict. It is true that the Great Powers assisted those in the Peninsula whom they considered to share their ideological conceptions, but as they were pledged to non-intervention ordinary decency demanded that they should only intervene actively on a modest scale.

Great Britain alone kept both to the letter and to the spirit of her undertaking, but she got little thanks for doing so. Her Government never enjoyed the happy position of the man in the old couplet:

**He who once a good name gets,
May piss a-bed, and say he sweats.**

The general reference to the Nationalists as "rebels"

and to their opponents as "loyalists" created the impression among the former that British neutrality in reality hid a preference for the Republicans, and the attitude of the Opposition, both Liberal and Labour, was given a prominence out of all proportion to its importance. Above all, the refusal to recognize General Franco even when his ultimate victory was assured gave the enemies of Britain an unrivalled opportunity of placing the worst construction upon the motives of the Foreign Office. On the other hand, Mr. Eden and his colleagues were continually being attacked in the House of Commons for their alleged partiality to the Nationalists, and this soon became little less than an obsession with the Left. As for the ordinary citizen, he could not see the news for the views, so encompassed was he about by the great crowd of propagandists, and he tended to regard the Spanish war in the light of Russian, French, German, and Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean. In any event he did not consider either General Franco or his opponents worth the bones of a single British soldier. If the Nationalists win, he argued, some form of Fascism will probably be the result; if Valencia triumphs, then Spain will go Red: as England is neither Fascist nor Communist, she is not particularly concerned. Any threat to British interests would be another matter, but rearmament was apparently proceeding apace, and the future could be left to look after itself.

Thus the year 1936 drew uneasily to its close. At home public attention came to be increasingly concentrated upon the throne and its occupant, and at

the beginning of December the abdication crisis monopolized it to such an extent that it was said at the time that the Germans might almost have marched into Austria without the average Englishman becoming aware of the fact. All this while events were taking place abroad which were not to be without their influence in the years that lay ahead. In country after country power was becoming ever more personal. General Metaxas was granted dictatorial powers by the King of the Hellenes; King Carol dismissed M. Titulesco; General Franco proclaimed himself dictator of Spain; and M. Stalin put more of his opponents on trial. Meanwhile, military service in Germany was increased to two years, and Mr. Roosevelt was re-elected President of the United States.

The beginning of 1937 saw an attempt to revive the old friendship between Great Britain and Italy, and the form it took was the conclusion of a "Gentleman's Agreement" in January of that year. This convention began with the recognition that "freedom of entry into, exit from, and transit through the Mediterranean is a vital interest both to the different parts of the British Empire and to Italy, and that these interests are in no way inconsistent with each other"; it went on to disclaim "any desire to modify or see modified" the existing *status quo* in the Mediterranean, and both parties promised to respect each other's rights and interests there. Appended to it was an exchange of notes between the then Sir Eric Drummond, the British Ambassador in Rome, and Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, in which the former made it clear that "any change

in the *status quo* in the Western Mediterranean would be a matter of the closest concern to Britain", while the latter gave a definite guarantee of Spanish integrity, especially as regards the Balearic Islands.

This agreement was meant to put an end to the period of mutual suspicion which had existed ever since the imposition of sanctions, and to pave the way for a return to the old cordial relations between the two countries, but unfortunately it did nothing of the sort, and that for a variety of reasons. In the first place there was the attitude of many Socialists and Liberals in England, who, curiously unmindful of the national interest, neglected no opportunity of vilifying Signor Mussolini and his country, and in this campaign they were joined by a small section of the Government's supporters, who would appear to have hoped by posing as extreme democrats to obtain Left votes when an election came. Such behaviour in its turn roused those in Italy who could not forget the British attitude over Abyssinia, and there was a lively exchange of scurrilous abuse. In this connection it is impossible not to wonder what part Germany, the one Power which had nothing to gain and everything to lose by an Anglo-Italian understanding, played in stimulating these mutual recriminations.

Nevertheless, what really prevented the Gentleman's Agreement from fulfilling the purpose for which it was concluded was not so much these polemics as the continuance of the war in Spain, and the Italian participation in it. In March the Italians who were serving with General Franco sustained a severe reverse at Guadalajara, and it was only natural, if some-

what tactless, that in the subsequent operations round Bilbao, where they were successful, their participation should have been announced from the house-tops. This served to revive the ordinary Englishman's suspicions of Signor Mussolini's intentions in the Peninsula and in the Mediterranean generally, and by the summer of 1937 relations between Great Britain and Italy were as unsatisfactory as before the Gentleman's Agreement was signed.

It was in such circumstances that, on May 28th, Mr. Neville Chamberlain succeeded Mr. Baldwin as Prime Minister. In view of the dominant part which the new Premier was to play in the field of international politics, and of the fierce controversy which attached to his actions, it will be well to see what manner of man he was who now sat in the seat of Pitt and Palmerston, for he is the subject of many misconceptions.

In the first place he was not, when he entered the House of Commons in 1918, quite the political novice that is commonly supposed. A man does not come from a household where both his father and his elder brother for years held the highest offices of State without acquiring, however unconsciously, the knowledge and outlook of a statesman, and a realization of the difficulties with which anyone holding that position had to deal. As Macaulay wrote of Swift, the most important affairs of state were as familiar as his weekly bills. It had been originally intended that he should embark upon a political career in his early thirties, but the failure of the sisal plantation he was managing in the West Indies, though through no fault of his,

rendered this impossible for financial reasons, so he had instead to go into business in Birmingham. While there he saw much of his father, especially during the latter's long visits to Highbury after his illness, and it was there that he met Mr. Amery, so long one of his closest friends. Thus, it was he who, at Mr. Amery's suggestion, urged his brother, Austen, at the beginning of October, 1911, to return to England at once from a holiday on the Continent and place himself at the head of those in revolt against the leadership of Mr. Balfour. His brother, it may be remarked, always kept him informed of what was afoot, and it is of more than passing interest to recall that when Mr. Neville Chamberlain heard the full story of those early August days in 1914 he wrote to Sir Austen that " some day the country will be grateful to Amery, George Lloyd, and you, for having preserved her honour ". Yet when war came again it was not Mr. Chamberlain, but Mr. Winston Churchill, who included Lord Lloyd and Mr. Amery in the Government.

Then, again, it would be impossible to emphasize too strongly the ties which bound the two Chamberlain brothers, or to exaggerate the debt that the younger owed to the older : indeed, it was in no small measure due to Sir Austen that Mr. Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister, and during Mr. Baldwin's last administration there was more than one occasion when Sir Austen would have taken a different line had it not been for fear of imperilling his brother's claim to the succession. The elder man's sudden death only a few weeks before Mr. Baldwin retired was, however, more than a personal blow to the new Prime

Minister. Mr* Neville Chamberlain had never greatly concerned himself about foreign affairs, and had presumed that when he got to 10 Downing Street he would have his brother at his side to advise him. With Sir Austen gone he made a praiseworthy attempt to master the intricacies of the international situation, but he had necessarily to rely on others, and some of these proved neither to be very wise nor very well-informed counsellors.

When the time comes for his final biography to be written it is more than likely that the explanation of his actions will be discovered, not in the circumstances with which he was confronted, but in his own character. Naturally reserved, unlike his father and brother, his long and solitary sojourn in the Bahamas at the most impressionable period of a man's life has had a profound influence upon his whole career; it has made him independent and self-reliant to a degree uncommon with democratic statesmen, and it is precisely this characteristic which has stood him in good stead when it was necessary to play for time. Nevertheless, *corruptio optimi pessima*, and although when he first became Prime Minister he tried to mix with his fellows, his reserve soon got the better of him, and it was his isolation and inaccessibility that were the principal causes of his fall. Moreover, it must reluctantly be admitted that he has never displayed much appreciation of those who have served him most faithfully outside the ranks of his immediate colleagues, and this is a real weakness in a leader.

Mr. Neville Chamberlain has proved himself a poor psychologist, both with regard to the individual and the mass, and some of his appointments were incredibly

bad. He would, however, be the last person to put in a claim for himself as a successful propagandist, and among the many great qualities which he has inherited from his father one would search in vain for Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's almost uncanny ability to appeal to popular imagination. Nor is the reason far to seek, for Mr. Neville Chamberlain has all his life been associated with those very branches of industry which require the least advertisement: even in the motor trade it was with a luxury car which practically sells itself that he was concerned. Had he been in one of the myriad businesses which depend on publicity, his outlook would, for better or for worse, have been very different. On the other hand, he possesses remarkable skill in going to the root of any problem with which he is confronted; he can focus his brain with lightning rapidity, and, without appearing to do so, he can bring the best out of the person with whom he is conversing. Had times been normal the man who became Prime Minister in May, 1937, might well have been acclaimed one of the most successful occupants of that great office.

From the beginning it was clear that Mr. Chamberlain meant to exercise a much greater personal control over foreign policy than his predecessor had done, and in a series of speeches he laid down the principles by which he intended to be guided. At the annual Guildhall Banquet he covered, as is usual on such occasions, a very wide field. In a brief reference to the conflict in the Far East he said : " In our view an essential for success in any endeavour to bring about a settlement is the co-operation of the United States, whose influence and interests in the Far East are so

considerable." Passing to the Spanish war he observed that " perhaps the only satisfactory aspect of the history of this affair from our point of view has been the close collaboration with the French Government which we have enjoyed throughout." From this he went on to mention " our relations with the two great Powers which are now so closely associated in what is known as the Rome-Berlin axis " :

It is the sincere desire of His Majesty's Government to see those relations firmly established on a basis of mutual friendship and understanding, which should not in our view be affected by differences in methods of internal administration.

An understanding, however, could, he felt, better be reached " by informal discussion than by public declamation ".

The Socialist Opposition had attacked the Government because there was no reference to the League of Nations in the King's Speech. Mr. Chamberlain dealt with this criticism :

There are apparently some people whose faith in the League is so shallow that unless they keep repeating its name aloud at frequent intervals they feel themselves liable to forget all about it. The faith of His Majesty's Government goes deeper than that. To us the League is not a fetish, but an instrument, the value of which is in direct proportion to its effectiveness.

At the present time its effectiveness is seriously impaired because some of the most powerful nations in the world are not members, or are not in sympathy with it. Even so, it still does much

useful and valuable work, but our aim must be to strengthen its authority, and thus so to increase its moral and material force as to enable it to carry out fearlessly and successfully the purposes for which it was originally founded.

His peroration foreshadowed the Munich Agreement and his refusal to believe the worst of Herr Hitler and his associates :

What sort of future are we trying to create for ourselves and for our children? Is it to be better or worse than that which we have inherited? Are we trying to make a world in which the peoples that inhabit it shall be able to live out their lives in peace of mind and in the enjoyment of a constantly rising standard of all that makes life worth living, of health and comfort, of recreation and of culture ? Or are we preparing for ourselves a future which is to be one perpetual nightmare, filled with the constant dread of the horrors of war, forced to bury ourselves below ground and to spend all our substance upon the weapons of destruction ?

One has only to state these two alternatives to be sure that human nature, which is the same all the world over, must reject the nightmare with all their might, and cling to the only prospect which can give them happiness. And for any Government deliberately to deny to their people what must be their plainest and simplest right would be to betray their trust, and to call down upon their heads the condemnation of all mankind.

I do not believe that such a Government anywhere exists among civilized peoples. I am convinced that the aim of every statesman worthy of the name, to whatever country he belongs, must be the happiness of the people for whom and to whom he is responsible, and in that faith I am sure that a way can and will be found to free the world from the curse of armaments and the fears that give rise to them, and to open up a happier and a wiser future for mankind :

In Faith and Hope the world will disagree,
But all Mankind's concern is charity :
All must be fate that thwart this one great end;
And all of God, that bless Mankind or mend.

A few days later, in a speech in Scotland, Mr. Chamberlain was more explicit in words which recall Canning's instructions to his cousin:

The foreign policy of this Government has, of course, to deal with many situations in different parts of the world, and the particular application of that policy must be fixed, must be adapted, to meet the actual conditions which it finds. I think one may say that all through it is guided by certain general principles, and among them I would name these. First of all the protection of British interests and the protection of the lives of British nationals; secondly, the maintenance of peace and, so far as we can influence it, the settlement of differences by peaceful methods and not by force; and, thirdly, the promotion of friendly relations with other nations who are willing to reciprocate our friendly feelings, and

who will keep those rules of international conduct without which there can be no security or stability in this world.

So much for the precept: it now remains to consider the practice. Mr. Chamberlain determined to make an effort to improve the international atmosphere, and he took an early opportunity of alluding sympathetically to Germany in the House of Commons, a gesture which was apparently appreciated in Berlin, but it was with British relations with Italy that he was primarily concerned. From the beginning he was seriously alarmed at the position as he saw it, and the information which reached him was such as to intensify, rather than to allay, his fears. It was represented to him that, absurd as such a belief might appear to an Englishman, the Duce and the mass of the Italian people were convinced that when Great Britain had completed her re-armament she intended to make an unprovoked attack on Italy in revenge for the rebuff she had received over Abyssinia. However fantastic this may sound, there can be no doubt whatsoever that such views were almost universally held in Italy. As soon as Mr. Chamberlain realized this he got into touch with Count Grandi, and assured him, both as Prime Minister and as a gentleman, that the British Government had no such intentions. The Italian Ambassador made no secret of his relief at this intimation, and Mr. Chamberlain then gave further proof of his sincerity by writing to Signor Mussolini a friendly letter which was immediately published in the Press of the world.

Again the barometer was set fair, but once more

appearances were deceptive, and it was the Spanish war that provided the complication. The late summer of 1937 was marked by a number of submarine attacks upon neutral shipping, and in September a conference of the Powers interested was held at Nyon to consider the question of appropriate action. Italy was to have been present, but she foolishly allowed herself to become the victim of a Russian manoeuvre. Stalin felt that something must be done to restore Soviet prestige, reduced as it was almost to vanishing-point by the repeated executions of his opponents, and the readiest method seemed to be to convert the Nyon Conference into a court-martial on Italy, whose submarines were suspected in many quarters to be guilty of the acts of piracy in question. The first thing to do was to prevent Italy's attendance, and this was achieved by the presentation at Rome of two insulting notes: the Italians very stupidly played into the Russian hands, and stayed away, which was exactly what Moscow wanted. However, Mr. Chamberlain saw to it that Great Britain did not become a partner in the Franco-Soviet Pact, which was the Russian manoeuvre, and, acting on his instructions, Mr. Eden made no reference to general politics, but confined himself to the subject for which the conference had been summoned—namely, the suppression of piracy in the Mediterranean. The upshot was that Great Britain and France decided to patrol specific areas of that sea, and although Italy soon associated herself with them, the incident caused a fresh outbreak of bitterness. Nor was this all, for at the same time Signor Mussolini visited Germany, and this new

assertion of the Rome-Berlin axis only served to emphasize the growing tendency to divide Europe into two armed camps.

In spite of this the attitude of Berlin towards the Spanish struggle was equivocal in the extreme. Herr Hitler had early recognized General Franco as the rightful ruler of Spain, and was apparently giving him every assistance to procure an early victory, but as the year 1937 drew to a close the question began to be asked whether German diplomacy was not in fact being directed towards a prolongation of the struggle. It was remembered that tension in the Mediterranean had always suited the German book since the French occupation of Tunis had thrown Italy into the arms of Bismarck; therefore credence was given to the growing rumours that German relations with Russia were resuming something of their old cordiality, and that Berlin was supplying arms to the opponents of General Franco as well as to the Nationalists. It was, too, Germany which put pressure on Italy to cease co-operation in the naval cordon which prevented contraband from reaching Spain, and the abolition of this form of control was, in the existing military situation, certainly not in the interests of General Franco. Of course the ideologists on both sides resolutely shut their eyes to these developments, but the latter were straws to show which way the wind was beginning to blow.

Thus the beginning of another year, 1938, saw the relations of Great Britain far from friendly with either the German or the Italian dictator. In the previous autumn the Lord Privy Seal, Lord Halifax, had visited

Berlin, but without much result: indeed, it was generally believed that the Fuhrer had only with difficulty been persuaded to receive the British statesman at all, and that he had bitterly complained that Mr. Chamberlain had not himself come to see him. His proposals for a general settlement were quite unacceptable. They meant a revision of minority treaties, the recognition of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, and the reorganization of Czecho-Slovakia on a Swiss cantonal basis. In addition Great Britain must promise not to give Austria either diplomatic or military assistance. In return for all this Herr Hitler was prepared to shelve his colonial claims for an agreed period, and if the British Government would give *de jure* recognition to General Franco he would take steps to restore peace in Spain. He was also prepared to mediate in the Far East. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the journey of Lord Halifax achieved nothing. It may be added that Mr. Chamberlain lost no time in conveying these proposals to Paris, for he was always mindful of his brother's policy of never allowing Germany to drive in a wedge between Great Britain and France.

Nor, as has been shown, was the situation any better where Italy was concerned. The friendlier feelings engendered by the personal message of goodwill sent by the Prime Minister to the Duce a few months before had gradually evaporated, and had been replaced by the old suspicion which dated from the Abyssinian War and the imposition of sanctions. Almost Sir Austen Chamberlain's last words had been, " You can fight one dictator, but not two "; yet the Italo-German

alliance was as strong as ever, and London was on equally bad terms with both Rome and Berlin. Mr. Chamberlain was profoundly dissatisfied with this state of affairs. He saw the national interests in the Far East threatened by the Japanese campaign against China, while the line of communication through the Mediterranean was menaced by a potentially hostile Italy. The situation in Palestine was going from bad to worse, and the anti-British broadcasts from Bari daily fanned the flames of Arab discontent. The Prime Minister could not forget his brother's advice, and as Berlin seemed aloof, in spite of the visit of Lord Halifax, he determined to see what could be done with Rome. Private information which reached him from the Italian capital at this time was to the effect that Signor Mussolini was desirous of arriving at an agreement, and the opportunity seemed a good one to break what had become a vicious circle. It was at this point that he came into conflict with his Foreign Secretary, Mr. Eden, and there occurred the first crisis of a year which was destined to be peculiarly rich in sensations.

We have already seen how much Mr. Eden owed to the Chamberlain family, and how popular he was with the Opposition. As Foreign Secretary, it is true, his Spanish policy was by no means always to the liking of Liberals and Socialists, but he had latterly become closely identified with that section of public opinion which revolved round the League of Nations Union, and he had gained the reputation, especially on the Continent, of being a violent Italophobe. Of late, too, he had grown out of touch with the rank-and-file of the

Conservative Party in the House of Commons, and still more with its supporters in the country. Indeed, it would probably not be too much to say that in the opening weeks of 1938 Mr. Eden was more popular with his political opponents than with those who were nominally his co-religionists, and neither he nor his immediate circle of friends and admirers realized how isolated they had become from the bulk of the Conservative Party. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, had not been head of the party machine for nothing, and he was careful, as was not the case two years later, to keep in close touch with his followers : never was this more marked than during the months immediately preceding Mr. Eden's resignation.

The crisis broke in February. Herr Hitler's changes in the Higher Command of the German Army had spread a feeling of disquiet, and it was clear that there was going to be an upheaval of some sort in Central Europe. Mr. Chamberlain became more desirous than ever of an agreement with Italy. The Foreign Secretary would appear not to have disagreed with this policy, but he insisted as a preliminary—rightly as subsequent events were to prove—that Rome should give a guarantee of good faith. He would, as was said at the time, only treat with the Duce provided that the latter first exchanged his black shirt for a white sheet. The Prime Minister, true to his determination always to believe the best of those with whom he had to deal, was prepared to waive what Mr. Eden considered an essential preliminary. The older man would take a chance, while the younger refused. For some days it was known in political circles that rela-

tions between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were strained, though the fact was regularly denied in the Government Press. Then, on February 19th, Mr. Eden resigned, and there was a first-class political sensation which entirely distracted British attention from a disgruntled speech by Herr Hitler which was delivered on the same day.

The air was full of rumours, of which the most persistent was that there would be a split in the Cabinet, and that a good many of the younger Conservative M.P.s would follow the late Foreign Secretary. The event showed that on this occasion the Prime Minister had his ear more closely to the ground than any of his critics. In the first place the crisis proved to be a political rather than popular one, and it hardly affected the working-classes. During the late afternoon of the day on which the debate took place in the House of Commons, and when the evening papers were full of the crisis, two navvies were observed at Waterloo station feverishly looking through the *Star*: suddenly one of them exclaimed, "Blowed if I can find the account of the Arsenal match; this paper's full of nothing but a lot of bloody politics." The incident was typical. Then Mr. Eden, whose personal behaviour was studiously correct, alone left the Cabinet, which was otherwise united behind Mr. Chamberlain, and when it came to a vote a mere handful of those on the Government side who had criticized the Prime Minister went into the lobby against him.

The resignation of Mr. Eden was followed by that of Lord Cranborne, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and this necessitated some alterations in the

ministry. Mr. Eden was succeeded by Lord Halifax, and Mr. Chamberlain announced, in reply to the protests of the Opposition against the appointment of a Foreign Secretary who was in the House of Lords, that he personally would answer for the Foreign Office in the Commons. This meant that the theory was henceforth to correspond more closely with the practice, for it was clear that for some time past the Prime Minister had been in direct control of the foreign policy of Great Britain : this probably had something to do with the resignation of Mr. Eden, for he had enjoyed a much freer hand during the Premiership of Mr. Baldwin.

In retrospect, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the excitement roused by the resignation of Mr. Eden was very much in the nature of a storm in a teacup. His difference with Mr. Chamberlain was concerned with tactics, not strategy, and it is impossible to speak too highly of his refusal to be drawn, during the months that lay ahead, into factious opposition to the Government from which he had resigned. He did not speak in the House of Commons again until October 3rd, during the debate on the Munich agreement, and the studiously moderate tone which he then adopted did much to rehabilitate a political reputation which had suffered considerably while he was at the Foreign Office.

CHAPTER VIII

BIRMINGHAM AND BERCHTESGADEN

THE choice of Lord Halifax to be the new Foreign Secretary was an extremely skilful one, and had Mr. Chamberlain displayed the same discrimination in all his appointments his career as Prime Minister might have had a very different ending. Lord Halifax enjoyed the respect of the Opposition on account of the conciliatory policy which he had pursued as Viceroy of India, and if for that very reason some Conservatives were inclined to shake their heads over his appointment they soon consoled themselves with the reflection that in fact the conduct of foreign affairs would be in the hands of the Prime Minister. How far this was an accurate estimate of the relative position of the two men it is still too early *to* say, though not even the most hostile critic of Lord Halifax has ventured to suggest that he is the man to acquiesce in a policy of which he disapproves. The situation, it may be observed, has a parallel in the close years of the eighteenth century, when Lord Grenville performed the functions which now appertain to the Foreign Secretary, and Pitt, for whom Mr. Chamberlain is known to have the most profound admiration, dealt in the Commons with such aspects of foreign policy as he did not feel could be wholly left to the young Under-Secretary, George Canning. For the rest, Lord Hali-

fax, owing to his personal character and religious views, could rely upon a very large amount of non-party support up and down the country.

Abroad the change in the Foreign Secretaryship produced immediate results of a very sensational nature. Mr. Eden's resignation created the atmosphere necessary for the commencement of Anglo-Italian negotiations, and Herr Hitler was quick to realize that if these were brought to a successful conclusion Signor Mussolini would regain his liberty of action; this might mean a return to the Stresa policy, and therefore it became necessary to strike at once. The consequence was the invasion of Austria in March.

The international position of that country had deteriorated rapidly during the past four years as a result of the break-up of the Stresa Front, but the state of affairs which produced the German invasion has an interest that is more than academic in view of what was to come. For some years, as we have seen, there had been only two alternatives for Austria, the Habsburgs or the *anschluss*, though unhappily the Powers refused to recognize the fact. The opposition to a Habsburg restoration came from Germany, though opinion there was not unanimous, for the military were indifferent, and it was Herr Hitler and the Nazis who felt strongly on the subject; and from the Little Entente, which feared the attraction of a restored monarchy for some of their own people. Yet had Great Britain, France, and Italy, all of whom were opposed to the *anschluss* and had vetoed a mere Austro-German customs union only a few years before, favoured the return of the Habsburgs the matter could have been arranged. Germany was not yet in a

position to take action, and the Little Entente was still heedful of the behests of Paris : even Russia would not have raised any objection. Still, the opportunity was allowed to pass, and it is to be feared that no small measure of the responsibility must rest with Great Britain. When Mr. MacDonald was Prime Minister he forbade the Archduke Otto to come to England, and the Foreign Office was, to put it mildly, unresponsive to any suggestion that the only way to keep Herr Hitler out of Vienna was to establish a Habsburg there : in effect, nowhere did it show itself more short-sighted than in the case of Austria. The official attitude was to let sleeping dogs lie, which was to ignore the fact that there were others who might find it to their interest to rouse them from their slumber, as subsequently proved to be the case.

A careful study of the state of public opinion in Austria during the period immediately previous to the German occupation could only lead to the conclusion that about a quarter of the population definitely wanted the Archduke, another quarter was Nazi, and that the remaining half was Socialist or indifferent, but was prepared to put up with either the monarchy or the existing order so long as it was reasonably governed. On the other hand, the driving force behind the Nazis was incomparably greater than that behind the legitimists. Too many of the latter were relics of the pre-war regime, and their attitude towards their cause was often that of the English Jacobites in the Forty-Five. Nothing, too, succeeds like success, and while Herr Hitler was marching from triumph to triumph, the Archduke did not seem very fortunate in calling the attention of Europe to his claims.

Dr. Schuschnigg has told us in his book, *Farewell Austria*, that he has always been a convinced monarchist, as the best hope of bringing the Austrian people together round a common rallying-point which they could find nowhere else, but the fact remains that neither he nor any other legitimist was prepared to take risks to place the Archduke on the throne. The only person who was prepared to put monarchist fortunes to the test was the Archduke himself. The Nazis, on the contrary, were ready to run the gravest dangers, even to the extent of sacrificing their lives, to bring about the *anschluss*, and this had not a little to do with their ultimate triumph. All the same, the independence of Austria might have been preserved, and the Habsburgs ultimately restored, had it not been for the war in Abyssinia. The application of sanctions, and the breach between Italy and the Western Powers, threw Signor Mussolini into the arms of Herr Hitler, and Austria was doomed. Only a miracle of statesmanship could have saved her, and that was not vouchsafed. In 1934 the mere threat of a German invasion sufficed to raise Italy to arms, but in 1938 the fact was accepted in silence. Had the Anglo-Italian agreement of April been already in existence it is possible that Herr Hitler might have hesitated, but he knew that for the moment Italy was isolated, and he struck.

The seizure of Austria was a rehearsal for that of Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway and the Low Countries, and the procedure was the same down to matters of detail. There was treachery within, while it was alleged that the occupation only took place to save the country from the horrors of civil war. In

this last connection it may be pointed out that in any event the invasion was a definite violation of the agreement of July, 1936, between Germany and Austria, when Herr Hitler recognized the " full sovereignty " of his neighbour, and both Powers agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the other. In these circumstances, even if there had been a prospect of civil war in Austria the Reich would not have been justified in armed intervention. It need hardly be said that the German Government has never produced a shred of evidence of Austrian interference on its side of the frontier which would have entitled it to consider the agreement no longer binding. As for the argument that the inhabitants of Austria are German by race, and that the country was once part of Germany, it has no bearing on the case whatever, and is as tendentious a theory as ever proceeded even from Berlin.

When Cornet Joyce seized Holmby House with the King in it, Charles asked him for his commission, whereupon the young officer pointed through the window to his troopers who were drawn up before the house. " It is as fair a commission," observed the King, " and as well written as I have seen a commission in my life." Dr. Schuschnigg might have said the same to his captors, for the only claim which Herr Hitler has to Austria is that which the army had to the person of Charles I—namely, the successful application of overwhelming force. The invasion of Austria was in the tradition of the seizure of Silesia, the partition of Poland, and the Treaty of BresfrJLitowsk, while it acted as a precedent for similar enormities in the future. Nor can there be any doubt but that the

vast majority of Germans condone such methods so long as they are successful. Not the least of the difficulties of the present international situation is that there is no standard of political morality common to Germany and the Anglo-Saxon Powers by which such events can be judged.

At the same time disapproval of the methods of Herr Hitler cannot blind us to the mistakes of Dr. Schuschnigg. Even after the Rome-Berlin axis had begun to function and the outlook for Austria had consequently become very dark, he showed great skill, but at the beginning of 1938 he would appear to have developed a certain recklessness. It is, of course, impossible to be dogmatic on this point, for much of what was said at his interview with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden is still a mystery, but all the same Dr. Schuschnigg never seems to have made up his mind whether or not he was going to throw down the gauntlet to Germany, and, if so, on what issue. As it was, he played straight into the Fuhrer's hands by allowing him to strike at the moment which suited him best, and even to put the Austrian Government in the wrong by the way in which the proposed plebiscite was handled.

From the moment it became clear that the support of Signor Mussolini was withdrawn, Dr. Schuschnigg should have done everything in his power to interest England and France in the fate of his country. With this end in view he should have re-established constitutional government in Austria and made it appear as if the issue between himself and Herr Hitler was one between democracy and dictatorship. He would

not have found the Socialists intransigent, for they had learnt a good deal in four years, and were too apprehensive of their fate under Nazi rule to rake up past grievances at such a moment. When this had been done a plebiscite should have been held on the question of incorporation in Germany, and the League of Nations should have been asked to send observers to see that the voting was really free. In such circumstances it is extremely unlikely that Herr Hitler, in view of possible complications in the West, would have moved, and the plebiscite would probably have shown a 70 per cent, majority against the *anschluss*. Instead, the Austrian Chancellor behaved like a man in a panic. Within a few days he completely reversed his policy towards the Socialists, and announced the holding of a plebiscite under conditions which would undoubtedly have told heavily in favour of his own supporters : when he realized that this was prejudicing his cause outside Austria, he altered the form of voting, and then, at a nod from Herr Hitler, he abandoned the plebiscite altogether. It was all very reminiscent of the last weeks of James II on the English throne. Yet there seems to have been no reason for this haste, since during the last month of Austrian independence the Nazis were losing ground. The Fuhrer's speech on February 20th had done him more harm than good, and all that Dr. Schuschnigg had to do was to let the reaction against Germany run its course. Why he was so precipitate it is impossible to say, unless he hoped thereby to forestall the German blow, in which case he was grievously mistaken.

So perished Austria as an independent Power, and no one can say that her end was worthy of her history.

A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust: and when
Can man its shatter'd splendour renovate,
Recall its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate ?

Of the tens of thousands who had cheered for " Kaiser Otto " or for the Fatherland Front, not one was found to fire a shot at the invaders. Of course resistance was hopeless, just as hopeless as it was at Thermopylae, but honour could have been saved. Dr. Schuschnigg said that he bowed to force, when in actual fact what he bowed to was the threat of force. The last Austrian Chancellor was so sincere a patriot, and he has suffered so severely at the hands of his brutal conqueror, that one cannot help hoping that some evidence will yet be produced to prevent history from passing upon him the harsh judgment that at the critical moment he despaired of his country. In any event no small proportion of the blame for what took place must be laid at the door of Great Britain and France for having refused to lift a finger for Austria when it was still possible to save her, and bitterly have they since paid for their indifference to her fate. As for Herr Hitler's unhappy victim, the events of the last two years have fully proved the truth of the words which Dr. Schuschnigg put in his *Farewell Austria* into the mouth of Hans von Hammerstein, " Take Austria away from the Austrians, and immediately they will all be aware of what they have lost."

The German annexation of Austria was regarded

with mixed feelings in Great Britain. In many quarters it was considered as a serious reverse for the diplomacy of the Prime Minister, but Mr, Chamberlain's supporters declared that it was primarily due to Mr. Eden's obduracy : had the Premier's wishes been followed, they argued, and Anglo-Italian discussions initiated some months before, Herr Hitler would never have become master of Vienna, However this may be, it was plain that the Third Reich had once more stolen a march on the Western Powers.

As for the Prime Minister himself, he said in the House of Commons on March 14th :

It is quite untrue to suggest that we have ever given Germany our assent or our encouragement to the effective absorption of Austria into the German Reich. We had, indeed, never refused to recognize the special interest that Germany had in the development of relations between Austria and herself, having regard to the close affinities existing between the two countries.

But on every occasion on which any representative of His Majesty's Government has had opportunities to discuss these matters with representatives of the German Government, it has always been made plain that His Majesty's Government would strongly disapprove of the application to the solution of these problems of violent methods. It must have, as I have constantly pointed out to the House, a damaging influence upon general confidence in Europe.

In view of Herr Hitler's statement on March 7th, 1936, that " we have no territorial demands to make

in Europe", and on January 30th, 1937, that "the period of so-called surprises is now over", the tone of the Prime Minister can hardly be considered too emphatic, but unfortunately he and the Fuhrer did not speak the same language, as the saying goes. All that concerned the leaders of the Third Reich was that they had "got away with it" again, and the influence of what they had done "upon general confidence in Europe" interested them not at all.

In spite of this reverse Mr. Chamberlain refused to be diverted from his purpose, and on April 16th, the Saturday of Holy Week, the Anglo-Italian agreement was signed. Its main provisions were as follows :

1. The declarations in the "Gentleman's Agreement" with regard to the *status quo* in the Mediterranean were re-affirmed.

2. The two Powers agreed to exchange information "regarding any major prospective administrative movements or redistribution of their respective naval, military, and air forces" in their overseas possessions in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea area.

3. Both parties promised not to do anything to disturb the existing position in Saudi Arabia or the Yemen : "in particular they regard it as an essential of each of them that no other Power should acquire sovereignty or any privileged position on any part of the coast of the Red Sea which at present belongs to Saudi Arabia or to the Yemen."

4. Both Powers undertook to abstain from propaganda against the other, and guaranteed

" at all times and for all Powers the free use of the Suez Canal", while the Italian Government stated that it had no intention of upsetting existing arrangements regarding Lake Tsana.

Annexed to the Pact were letters between Count Ciano and Lord Perth in which the former promised on behalf of his Government that the Italian forces in Libya should be placed upon a peace footing, and there was also a *Bon Voisinage* agreement between Great Britain, Italy, and Egypt.

Two forces had contributed to secure this agreement. One was the widespread dissatisfaction in Italy over the German annexation of Austria (Herr Hitler's picture was in those days generally hissed in the Roman cinemas), and the other was the friendly feelings at that time still entertained by the Duce for any one of the name of Chamberlain. Signor Mussolini had always felt the highest respect for Sir Austen, and the presence of the latter's widow in Rome during the winter of 1937-38 had revived the old sympathy for the family. The Easter Pact, as it was generally termed, was not intended to be a mere recapitulation of general principles and pious hopes, but rather to embrace all the points at issue between the two countries. It was agreed that it should come into force as soon as a beginning had been made with the withdrawal of the foreign volunteers from Spain, when Great Britain would formally recognize the Italian annexation of Abyssinia. The conclusion of the Pact was at once followed by a temporary relaxation of tension in the sphere of international relations, but this was by no means to the interest of Germany, and

once more it was the progress of events in Spain that turned to the advantage of those who wished to disturb the peace.

At the moment when the Easter Pact was concluded the Nationalist forces in Spain appeared to be on the eve of victory, and both Mr. Chamberlain and Signor Mussolini doubtless thought that the war in the Peninsula would soon be over, and that the provisions of the agreement could then be put into force. If such was the case they had forgotten the observation of the Duke of Wellington that "Spain is the only country where two and two do not make four". Far from General Franco's dramatic sweep to the Mediterranean bringing his opponents' resistance to an end, the Republicans seemed to fight harder than ever with their backs to the wall, and this in its turn rendered Signor Mussolini averse from withdrawing his volunteers. So spring passed into summer, and summer into autumn, without the Easter Pact becoming operative, and, as had been the case after the conclusion of the Gentleman's Agreement, the goodwill between Great Britain and Italy which it had engendered slowly evaporated.

At the same time Mr. Chamberlain was encountering a considerable amount of opposition at home which it must be admitted he did singularly little to placate. By now the greater part of the Liberal and Socialist Parties had seen the red light, and were supporting rearmament; some of them were even criticizing the Government for not having made sufficiently rapid progress. There were, however, exceptions; among these was Sir Stafford Cripps, who as late as May 23 rd, 1938, wrote in the *Daily Worker*, "The workers must

now make clear beyond all doubt that they will not support the Government or its armaments in its mad policy which it is now pursuing". Even to those members of the Opposition who were in favour of rearmament the Easter Pact made no appeal, for they wished British foreign policy to be based on ideological considerations—that is to say, they desired that Great Britain should set her face resolutely against agreements with totalitarian States other than Russia. Those who held this view attacked the Easter Pact vigorously both in the House of Commons and in the Press, but Mr. Chamberlain replied that the country could not afford a foreign policy based on likes and dislikes, though of course he could not state publicly what was the mainspring of his action—namely, an attempt to weaken the ties which bound Rome to Berlin. His opponents also accused him of having made unnecessary concessions to Signor Mussolini, but he had no great difficulty in rebutting this charge; and it must be admitted that a careful examination of the document itself can only lead to the conclusion that if there were any concessions they were on the part of Italy.

Nevertheless, if the Mediterranean was an embarrassment, the real danger lay in Central Europe, and this soon became obvious even to the most wilfully blind. The success which had attended the German invasion of Austria left no doubt in the minds of those best qualified to express an opinion that the appetite of Herr Hitler would be thereby whetted. Once more he had over-ruled his General Staff, and once more they had proved wrong while he was right. At the same time the enthusiasm in the Reich over the annexa-

tion of Austria had died down very rapidly, and it was clear that a further spectacular triumph was necessary if the allegiance of the German people to the Nazi regime was to be retained throughout the coming winter, Czecho-Slovakia was the obvious victim to select. That republic was a mosaic of races, and the Czechs themselves were in a minority of the total population. There were over three million Germans in the country, and if these could be sufficiently stirred up against the Czech Government in Prague then their incorporation in the Reich could be demanded on the grounds of self-determination, a plea which would at once be flattering to German pride and difficult for democracies like Great Britain and France to reject, quite apart from the fact that for geographical reasons it would, since the overthrow of Austria, be by no means easy for these Powers to come to the aid of the Czechs. Nor did the advantages to be derived from a drive against Czecho-Slovakia end there. If there was a German minority, there were also Polish and Hungarian minorities, so that in a move against Prague the Fuhrer could count on the support of Warsaw and Budapest. None of this would apply if a claim were put up to "re-unite" to the Fatherland the Germans in, say, Switzerland or Dantzig.

Criticism is likely for long to revolve round the policy of Mr. Chamberlain towards Czecho-Slovakia, but in common fairness to him the difficulties which he had to face must be stated. He was only called in to deal with the Czech patient when it was already doubtful whether even a surgical operation could save the latter's life. Had previous British Governments displayed the most elementary foresight they would

have done everything in their power to effect a settlement between Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, and so have blocked the German path to the East. No inconsiderable degree of responsibility must also attach to those who consistently ignored the problem created by the German minority in the Sudeten area when it was still possible to settle this within the framework of the Czecho-Slovak state. Indeed, long before Mr. Chamberlain became Prime Minister so many blunders had been committed by all parties that once Herr Hitler had determined to force the issue a crisis of the first magnitude could not be avoided.

The courage and restraint displayed by Dr. Benes and the Czechs in their hour of peril cannot blind us to the mistakes they made in the heyday of their triumph. From the moment when Germany began to pull herself together after the Four Years' War it cannot be too often repeated that the fate of Czechoslovakia was bound up with that of Austria, and for the latter there were but two choices, the *anschluss* or the restoration of the Habsburgs. Yet to every proposal for the return of the Archduke Otto the Czechs merely replied that in such a case they would march on Vienna, and, if M. Flandin is to be believed, they would not even listen to the representatives of Great Britain and France on this score, though there is no evidence, it must be admitted, that these were made with any vigour. Inevitably, therefore, Austria became a German province, and Czecho-Slovakia was menaced.

At the same time it was the irony of fate that Czecho-Slovakia should have been singled out for attack on the score of self-determination, for she

treated her minorities better, not worse, than her neighbours. It was, for example, preferable to be a German under Czech rule than a Jew in Nazi Germany. The grievances were local, and it was, for the most part, the minor Czech officials who were to blame. On the other hand, Great Britain and France were far from guiltless, apart altogether from their responsibility as members of the League of Nations, for though the creation of Czecho-Slovakia was their work, they never made, until the eleventh hour, any serious attempt to insist upon such treatment of the minorities as would remove their sense of injustice. Cantonal Home Rule, which was spurned in the late summer of 1938, would have been accepted with enthusiasm any time prior to the fall of Austria, and possibly even for some weeks afterwards.

Such was Mr. Chamberlain's heritage. Great Britain had no commitments save as a member of the League, and there was no stipulation that she should go to the aid of Czecho-Slovakia if the latter was attacked by Germany, as had been the case with Belgium in 1914, though France was pledged to do so. As early as February 22nd the Fihrer had begun to show his hand by reminding the world that the Reich would no longer tolerate further oppression or persecution of the Sudeten Germans. Then came the annexation of Austria, and on March 24th the Prime Minister made a statement:

Where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone invoked, and if war broke out it would be unlikely to be confined to those who had assumed such obligations. It

would be quite impossible to say where it would end, and what Governments might become involved.

The inexorable pressure of facts might well prove more powerful than formal pronouncements, and in that event it would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries besides those which were parties to the original dispute would almost immediately become involved.

This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France, with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty, and determined to uphold them.

The Czechs put the same construction upon these words that the Emperor Haile Selassie had done upon similar statements on the part of British Ministers, and assumed that they could count upon the armed support of Great Britain and France in their hour of need. Herr Hitler dismissed them as so much " hot air ", and his interpretation proved to be the correct one.

By this time it was every day becoming more obvious that unless the Czech Government did something to satisfy the grievances of the Sudeten Germans the latter would before long be content with nothing less than transfer to the Reich, for all the methods of propaganda which had proved so successful in Austria were now being applied to Czecho-Slovakia. Every normal police action was denounced as a brutal act of oppression; when a Czech soldier kissed a German barmaid the Reich re-echoed with the sad tidings;

and the German people were given to believe that Czech rule was reminiscent of the Dark Ages. Nevertheless, both justice and policy demanded extensive concessions by Prague, and the situation was not improved by the attitude of a certain section of British opinion in encouraging the Czechs not to yield an inch. The result of this was increased tension, and the weekend of May 21st-23rd was particularly critical. There was every possibility of a German *putsch*, and it is said that for two days the French Prime Minister had the orders for a general mobilization lying on his desk awaiting signature.

Yet, in spite of a recent interview with Signor Mussolini in Rome, when it is reasonable to suppose that Czecho-Slovakia formed the principal topic of conversation, Herr Hitler was not ready to push matters to extremes. Mr. Chamberlain, on the other hand, was prepared then for drastic action, and so near was war at one moment that arrangements had been completed for the evacuation of British nationals from Germany. However, after an agitated forty-eight hours Herr Hitler drew back, and a period of tension was followed by one of uneasy peace while the various parties took up their positions for what was destined to be the final struggle. A little earlier, on April 24th, Herr Henlein, the leader of the Nazi majority among the Sudeten Germans, had made a speech in Carlsbad in which he put forward his party's programme, which may be described as the very widest autonomy combined with a veto on the foreign policy of the Prague Government. On June 7th the Sudeten German party put forward certain proposals which embodied

the main points of this speech, and about the same time the Czech Government, on its side, embodied its devolution scheme in a draft Nationality Statute, a Language Bill, and an Administrative Reform Bill.

Twelve, even six, months before a settlement could easily have been reached on the basis of the Czech terms, but, egged on by Berlin, the Sudeten Germans kept on raising their price, and throughout June and July the situation steadily deteriorated. It was in these circumstances that Mr. Chamberlain made what can only, in the light of subsequent events, be described as a false move: he sent Lord Runciman to Prague with instructions to do everything in his power to bridge the gulf between the Czech offers and the Sudeten German demands. The Prime Minister appreciated the risk he was running, for he defined Lord Runciman's mission as " a task, perhaps, even perilous ", but added that the Government " felt that the object was good enough to justify the risk ". What he does not seem to have realized was that mediation of this nature would be construed by the Czechs as promise of armed help in the event of war, and when this was not forthcoming the bitterness would be considerable. The arrival of Lord Runciman certainly alarmed the Germans, who at once began to act in such a way as to render a peaceful solution impossible. An agitation was conducted from Berlin which was carefully calculated to produce " incidents ", while a partial mobilization in the Reich conveyed to the Sudeten Germans the assurance of help from without should the opportunity arise. Against this demonstration of force the British Government protested in the middle of August, only to be met with

the reply that Lord Runciman's efforts in Prague had merely served to increase the intransigence of the Czechs.

With the first week of September events began to move even more rapidly, and on the 7th *The Times* advocated, to the great astonishment of many of its readers, a solution on the basis of self-determination. Five days later Herr Henlein issued a proclamation demanding autonomy on the basis put forward in Printing House Square, and from then encounters between Czechs and Germans took place with increasing frequency, so that Prague was compelled to impose martial law in certain districts. However, enough was done by the British ambassador in Germany to prevent Herr Hitler from irrevocably committing himself to the use of force during the Nuremberg rally in the second week of September, though his speech on that occasion was couched in such terms that extensive rioting took place in the Sudeten area. By the evening of September 14th there was immediate danger of a German invasion of Czecho-Slovakia, with the probability of first France, and then Great Britain, becoming involved.

It was in such circumstances that Mr. Chamberlain, to quote his own words, decided " that the time had come to put into operation a plan which I had had in my mind for a considerable period as a last resort"—namely, to discuss the problem with Herr Hitler personally.

I knew very well that in taking such an unprecedented course I was laying myself open to criticism on the ground that I was detracting

from the dignity of a British Prime Minister, and to disappointment and, perhaps, even resentment if I failed to bring back a satisfactory agreement. I felt that in such a crisis, where the issues at stake were so vital for millions of human beings, considerations of that kind could not be allowed *to count*.

From the British point of view the position was not far from being desperate, at any rate in appearance, for the Germans were ready at any moment to march into Gzecho-Slovakia, while the French were distinctly lukewarm: the Paris Press represented considerable differences of opinion, and there were rumours of a split in M. Daladier's Cabinet.

At this point Signor Mussolini, determined not to be left out, proceeded to take a hand in the game. Accordingly on the 16th a by no means polite open letter was published by him to Lord Runciman in which he declared that events had out-distanced the Carlsbad demands, and advised Lord Runciman to advocate the holding of plebiscites not only for the Sudeten Germans but also for the other minorities in Czecho-Slovakia. Thus emboldened, Herr Henlein demanded, not a plebiscite, but the incorporation of the Sudeten territories in the Reich. All this occurred while Mr. Chamberlain was flying from London to Munich.

When the British Prime Minister arrived at the Fihrer's mountain fastness at Berchtesgaden it was to discover that Herr Hitler's terms were hard, and were far in advance of anything which had so far been considered, for they amounted to nothing less than

the transfer to Germany of all areas of which more than 50 per cent, of the population was German. The skill which had been shown in selecting Czechoslovakia as a victim was now apparent, for it would not be easy to get the British and French peoples to fight on this issue, however antagonistic they might be to Germany on other grounds. Lord Runciman, who had returned from Prague to give the Cabinet the benefit of his advice, had also come to the conclusion that it was now hopeless to expect the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans to live under the same rule. Accordingly, Mr. Chamberlain secured the consent of his colleagues in London and of the French Cabinet to self-determination, to which the Czechs were constrained to agree, and he went back, in spite of his sixty-nine years, to Herr Hitler, this time to Godesberg, to arrange what he imagined would be the details of the practical application of the scheme.

Instead, he was confronted with a demand, subsequently embodied in a memorandum, for satisfaction for the Hungarian and Polish minorities, for further areas in Czecho-Slovakia which were not mainly German, and for acceptance of these terms by October 1 st: it was little wonder that Mr. Chamberlain subsequently told the House of Commons of "the perplexity in which I found myself, faced with this totally unexpected situation". A further quotation from the Prime Minister's speech throws an interesting light upon his personal attitude towards the Fuhrer :

I had been told at Berchtesgaden that if the principle of self-determination were accepted

Herr Hitler would discuss with me the ways and means of carrying it out. He told me afterwards that he never for one moment supposed that I should be able to come back and say that the principle was accepted.

I do not want hon. members to think that he was deliberately deceiving me—I do not think so for one moment—but for me I expected that when I got back to Godesberg I had only to discuss quietly with him the proposals that I had brought with me, and it was a profound shock to me when I was told at the beginning of the conversation that those proposals were not acceptable and that they were to be replaced by other proposals of a kind which I had not contemplated at all.

What increased the difficulty of Mr. Chamberlain's position was that Herr Hitler requested him to convey this memorandum to the Czechs. The Prime Minister very wisely then put his views in writing, and persuaded the Fuhrer to do the same, with the result that the exchange of letters, as published in the British White Paper, leaves no doubt where either man stood. The two men then had a final interview, in which the Englishman would appear not to have minced his words.

I spoke very frankly, I dwelt with all the emphasis at my command on the risks which would be incurred by insisting on such terms and on the terrible consequences which would follow if war ensued. I declared that the language and the manner of the document, which I described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum, would

profoundly shock public opinion in neutral countries, and I bitterly reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond in any way to the efforts which I had made to secure peace.

What then ensued is too well known to require recapitulation. The Czechs refused the German ultimatum, France pledged herself to fulfil her treaty obligations, and Great Britain promised to stand by France. The British Navy was placed on a war footing, and all over Europe men and women waited with bated breath the arrival of a catastrophe which appeared inevitable. Mr. Chamberlain addressed one more appeal to Herr Hitler with the suggestion that there should be immediate discussions between German and Czecho-Slovak delegates in the presence of British representatives, but this proposal was rejected on the ground that it would lead to " further intolerable procrastination ".

At this point Signor Mussolini once more showed his hand. Since the crisis began he had displayed a marked disinclination to become involved in war, but his public utterances had been chiefly distinguished for their brevity and nebulousness. He was undoubtedly exercising such influence as he possessed over his German ally in the direction of a peaceful settlement, and Herr Hitler himself did not wish for war with Great Britain if this could be avoided: accordingly, the Fuhrer wrote to Mr. Chamberlain promising not to move his troops beyond a certain line, once they had crossed the frontier, together with other minor concessions. It was a retreat, if not very far, but it was sufficient to encourage the Prime

Minister to make one more effort for peace. He sent a personal message to Herr Hitler offering to come to Berlin, and he took advantage of what he believed to be the improvement in Anglo-Italian relations as a consequence of the Easter Pact to ask Signor Mussolini to use his good offices with the German Government. The result of this was the meeting at Munich of the Heads of Government of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany, and, in due course, the agreement between them which removed the immediate threat of war, though at the cost of leaving Czecho-Slovakia defenceless, and despoiled to the benefit of Germany, Hungary, and Poland.

It only remains to add that by a majority of 222 the House of Commons expressed its approval of the Munich Agreement, rather, it must be confessed, in the spirit which prompted Sheridan to say of the Treaty of Amiens that it was "a peace which all men are glad of, but no man can be proud of". As for Mr. Chamberlain, his defence of his policy can be summarized in his own words, "I claim no credit for my action, because I think it is only what anyone in my position would do, but I may say that by my action I did avert war, and I am equally sure that I was right in doing so."

Such was Mr. Chamberlain's belief, but it was not shared by an influential minority at the time, and the course of events subsequently has caused his whole Munich policy to be even more fiercely criticized. It is still too early to attempt a final judgment, for much indispensable evidence is not yet available, but the Munich Agreement looms so large in recent

history that it cannot be wholly ignored until all the facts are known.

There are certain deductions which will now surely be admitted both by the champions and the critics of Mr. Chamberlain. The first is that he was excessively and unjustifiably optimistic on his return from Munich. The settlement certainly did not represent "peace with honour" as he told the crowd in Downing Street, and to talk of "peace in our time" was to lay himself open to the retort that what he meant was "peace in my time", which, from a man of seventy, did not mean very much. The Whips and the Conservative Central Office took their cue from the Prime Minister, and it became a duty in the ranks of the Government supporters to look at the future through roseate spectacles. At the same time, whether by accident or design, all real information as to what had happened was withheld from those who were expected to put the Government's case from the platform or in the Press, with the result that the defence was often grotesque. Never was the lack of co-ordination between the Foreign Office and its propagandists at home more apparent than in the months following the Munich Agreement: speakers and writers were expected to argue their case without having been given their brief, and in these circumstances it is little wonder that the most contradictory arguments were put forward in support of the official policy.

Then, again, Mr. Chamberlain entertained a touching belief in Herr Hitler's sincerity in spite of the German's proved duplicity over a long period of years. One would have thought that the Fuhrer's

changed attitude between the conversation at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg would have reminded him of Sir Austen's warning to the House of Commons six years before:

While something is refused to Germany it is vital. If you say, " Well, we will give it to you, and now our relations will, of course, be on a satisfactory footing", it loses all value from the moment that she obtains it, and it is used by her merely as a stepping-off place for a further demand.

All the available evidence goes to show that Mr. Chamberlain sustained a severe shock when in the following March he realized that he had been duped. Never a good judge of character, he showed at his worst in this respect where the Fuhrer was concerned. It must, however, be conceded that he was not alone in being deceived by Herr Hitler, for many others shared a like fate, not excluding Sir Nevile Henderson. Also, it can hardly be denied that the Munich Agreement represented a further victory for brute force. Mr. Churchill summarized all the effective arguments against what had been done when he said the country had "sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and France has suffered even more than we have ": he went on to point out that the difference between Godesberg and Munich was that instead of the victuals being snatched from the table, they were served to Herr Hitler course by course.

On the other hand, much of the criticism of the Prime Minister is now seen to have been beside the point. It was at the time freely stated by those who disagreed with him that Herr Hitler was only bluffing,

and that had he been fairly faced he would have given way as it was alleged he had done in the previous May, The evidence of Sir Nevile Henderson (Cmd. 6115) is convincing on this matter :

There were, in fact, for Herr Hitler only two solutions : the use of force, or the achievement of his aims by the display of force. " If you wish to obtain your objective by force, you must be strong; if you wish to obtain them by negotiation, you must be stronger still." That was a remark which he made to a foreign statesman who visited him this year, and it expresses in the concisest possible form the Hitler technique. It was exactly that which he displayed in September, 1938. He was no more bluffing then than he was bluffing in August, 1939. . . . There was no Eastern front to give him cause for hesitation in 1938, and he could have counted then on Hungarian as well as Polish support in his nefarious plans for the dismemberment of Gzecho-Slovakia. But for Munich he would without a shadow of doubt have invaded that country on the 29th September last year, just as surely as he invaded Poland on the 1st September this year, and the war would have come eleven months earlier.

There can also be no doubt that the Munich Agreement was overwhelmingly popular, especially with the women electors, for some weeks after it was concluded. Had Mr, Chamberlain gone to the country on the morrow of his return from Germany he would have obtained a majority comparable with that of 1931, and it is certainly to his credit that he resisted the tempta-

tion. The man in the street welcomed the settlement, not as an end, but as a beginning, and so long as he held these views he was enthusiastically pro-Chamberlain. With the women it was largely a question of sentiment: their husbands, sons, and lovers had not had to go to war, so they were enthusiastic for the man who had brought about this happy state of affairs. The one sure way of evoking applause at any public gathering during the autumn of 1938 was to say that but for Munich the country would have been at war. Possibly this was but another example of the muddled thinking which had for so many years characterized the British approach to problems of international policy; possibly it was a sure instinct: that it was a fact nobody can deny. The duty of a Prime Minister, however, is not to follow, but to lead, public opinion, and so although the support of the majority may be a reason for adopting a bad policy, it can never be an excuse. In the case of the Munich Agreement it was a contributory, rather than the principal, factor.

The final judgment cannot be passed upon the negotiations of September, 1938, until detailed figures are available regarding the relative strength of the Franco-British and German armaments. We know that Herr Hitler was prepared to fight, and if Mr. Chamberlain, as may well be the case, was merely playing for time until the scale, then in Germany's favour, had been redressed somewhat, he was justified in the line he took, though, even so, his display of optimism was somewhat overdone. The acid test is, Were the Allies in a better position to make war in September, 1939, than twelve months earlier? If they

were, then Munich was worth while, much as one may regret the sacrifice of Gzecho-Slovakia. When the archives are opened, which will certainly not be until the end of the present war, then a definite answer can be given; but in the meantime controversy is likely to rage over the Munich policy.

Upon British domestic politics the Munich Agreement exercised a most baneful influence : it widened the rift in public opinion which had been caused by the resignation of Mr. Eden, and which was not really closed until Mr. Chamberlain was succeeded by Mr. Churchill in May, 1940. The settlement was opposed by practically all the members of the Liberal and Labour Parties, and by an influential minority of Conservatives, which included Mr. Churchill, Mr. Eden, Mr. Amery, Mr. Duff Cooper (who resigned from the War Office by way of protest), and Lord Lloyd. In the local Conservative Associations there was a bitterness which recalled the dispute over the Indian reforms a few years before. The party machine soon rendered the opposition from within ineffective, but suspicion of Mr. Chamberlain continued to exist far beyond the ranks of his political opponents, and it was always ready to make itself felt. As for the Prime Minister himself, he was so sure that he had done right that he became angry and resentful when criticism was levelled at him, and this further embittered the atmosphere. He tended more and more to withdraw from the outside world, with which he remained in contact almost wholly through Sir Horace Wilson, and the consequence was a rapid diminution in the enthusiasm felt for him by his followers in and out of Parliament.

CHAPTER IX

TOWARDS THE ABYSS

THE present writer spent the weeks which elapsed between the Munich Agreement and Christmas, 1938, in Central and South-East Europe, principally in Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary, and he saw little to warrant any other conclusion than that the Agreement was a mere breathing-space, though on that ground it found no inconsiderable amount of favour. War sooner or later was regarded as inevitable, and the omens to be observed in official Germany were distinctly unfavourable. The Press was once more working up popular feeling against what was left of Gzecho-Slovakia, and Herr Hitler was growling that he had been baulked of his prey by Mr. Chamberlain at Munich. No gain had any attraction for him unless it had been made by force. Having unloosed the underworld on his own country, he was impatient to unloose it on his neighbours.

Such being the case, the optimism, even complacency, which existed in London seemed the more surprising. The note was set by the Prime Minister, who, at the beginning of January, 1939, anticipated " a more tranquil year ", and once again the Whips and the Party Machine set to work to imbue the public with optimistic feelings. Government speakers, presuming that Ministers were in possession of information which

justified their confident tone, radiated hope, and those who ventured to question the official attitude were sneeringly referred to as "jitter-bugs". We now know that the eminent statesmen who indulged in this orgy of optimism had no other basis for their forecasts than their own wishful thinking, and that when one of the most distinguished of them told a Conservative audience behind closed doors at the end of February that there would be no war because any German move against Great Britain and France would bring the United States to the aid of the latter within a few days, he was talking the veriest gibberish. Yet this attitude persisted in Government circles and among those who took their cue from them, and any slight relaxation of the international tension was sufficient to produce overwhelming evidence of the continued existence of such sentiments. Mr. Chamberlain's ill-timed outburst of optimism on the eve of the German offensive last spring will not readily be forgotten.

In the second week of January the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary went to Rome. The Easter Pact between Great Britain and Italy had recently been ratified, and relations between the two countries were apparently more friendly than they had been since the imposition of sanctions. On the other hand, Rome and Paris were on the worst possible terms, the Spanish civil war was once more going in favour of General Franco, and German ambitions in Eastern Europe were causing more than usual disquiet. It was of importance to discover, if possible, where Italy stood in these matters, and personal contact with the Duce seemed the best way of finding out. The meeting was equally advisable from the point of view of Signor Mussolini,

If Great Britain wanted to ascertain how far he was prepared to go in his claims on France and in his support of German schemes in regard to colonies and the Ukraine, he was just as desirous of estimating the extent of British opposition he might encounter in his dispute with France. The British statesmen were exceedingly well received by the populace, and it is to be feared that this, coming after the cheers which had greeted Mr. Chamberlain at Godesberg, may have reinforced the British Prime Minister in the belief that the German and Italian dictators had less hold over their respective peoples than subsequently proved to be the case. For the rest, the meeting does not appear to have provided either party with the information it sought, though it served to confirm in their illusions the unreflecting optimists in the British Isles.

How little Signor Mussolini still resembled the loyal collaborator of Sir Austen Chamberlain at Locarno, and how unsafe it had become to place the slightest reliance upon his word, was soon shown, for on Good Friday—of all days in the year—April 7th the Italians seized Albania. Of all the violations of the elementary principles of justice which have been perpetrated of late years this was perhaps the most heinous from every point of view, and showed that the fellow-countrymen of Machiavelli had nothing to learn from those of Frederick the Great. That such a day should have been selected by a nominally Christian Government was itself ominous, while it was equally significant that the Duce should have concluded a Pact with Great Britain one Easter and broken it the next. The real reason for the stroke was that King Zog, who had hitherto been largely dependent upon Italian support,

was becoming too secure upon his throne to suit Signor Mussolini, and when an heir was born the Duce felt that it was now or never. That the Queen had only been delivered of her child two days before did nothing, it need hardly be said, to modify his determination to strike at once. The official explanation was that it was far from the wish of Italy to change the *status quo* in Albania, but that the attitude of King Zog constituted a threat to Italian interests which Rome felt bound to resist.

As on other occasions in similar circumstances, the British Government appears to have been taken completely by surprise : the fleet was scattered all over the Mediterranean, and Ministers were likewise dispersed over the countryside. Indeed, it is not surprising that there were ugly rumours of connivance on the part of Mr. Chamberlain, and the Italian Government did everything in its power to spread them by sending to London one of its ablest propagandists, Signor Villari, for this purpose. Such accusations had, of course, no foundation in fact, but the British Government's ignorance of what was afoot, and smug complacency after Albania had been conquered, were disquieting to the last degree. The Prime Minister contented himself with observing that " His Majesty's Government find it difficult in the extreme to reconcile what has happened in Albania with the preservation of national sovereignty as contemplated by the Anglo-Italian Agreement", but he announced that he did not propose to denounce the Easter Pact itself because " nobody with any sense of responsibility can in these days lightly do anything which would lead to an increase in international tension, and everybody would deplore

the loss of the advantages that follow from international agreements arrived at after mutual discussion". Whether Mr. Chamberlain believed at this time that war with Germany was inevitable cannot be stated with certainty, but he assuredly hoped that if it took place it was possible to persuade Italy to remain neutral, and this is the explanation of the attitude he adopted over the invasion of Albania. That he was proved wrong in June, 1940, is bound to affect our judgment of his policy fifteen months before.

At that eleventh hour Signor Mussolini was too deeply committed to Herr Hitler for the Italo-German alliance to be broken save by war, but in retrospect it is impossible to resist the conclusion that there had been occasions earlier, even after the Abyssinian War, when different methods might have produced different results. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the personal factor was of the utmost importance in international relations, British Governments were careful to select as His Majesty's representatives those who were likely to be acceptable to the rulers of other nations, but since the revival of monarchy, in the etymological sense, no return has been made to a practice which did much to enhance British prestige abroad. Sir Ronald Graham was a man for whom the Duce had the highest respect, yet, for no apparent reason, he was replaced by Sir Eric Drummond, later Earl of Perth, than whom, with all his admirable qualities, no worse choice could have been made for the Rome embassy. While he was there he and his staff were isolated in the *Venti Settembre*, and it was no uncommon experience to attend a large dinner-party at the British Embassy without meeting a single

Italian. It is to be feared that criticism of a similar nature is equally applicable to British ambassadors and ministers in other countries.

The corollary of this was the refusal of the Government to listen to, much less to employ, individuals outside the official hierarchy. There were many men in Great Britain who, for one reason or another, possessed great influence in foreign countries and with their rulers, but when those people offered their services they were made to feel that they were guilty of a breach of decorum in putting themselves forward* While Germany was making the fullest use of such of her nationals as had connections abroad, Great Britain pursued the opposite policy: Lord Lloyd and the British Council did what they could, but they never received the backing which was their due. The permanent officials were determined to exclude all outsiders, and in this they received the full support of their political chiefs. The result was that the British case abroad was never adequately presented either to rulers or ruled, while Whitehall, having deliberately refused to avail itself of the help of those who could have kept it informed, was, owing to its ignorance, continually surprised by events. When war came this policy of the "closed shop" was intensified rather than abandoned, and until Germany burst into the Low Countries officialdom was all powerful in the counsels of His Majesty's Government. Had a more realistic line been taken, and at an earlier date, Italy might have been detached from Germany, but in some quarters it seems to have been considered preferable to lose through the regular channels of diplomacy, than to win by unorthodox means or persons.

This, however, is to anticipate, for what immediately caused Signor Mussolini to invade Albania was the determination to have something to show the Italian people in return for his acquiescence in Herr Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia in March. Once again the time-honoured procedure was adopted as anger and horror were followed by a formal note of protest. Yet the final overthrow of Czecho-Slovakia was the real parting of the ways. As recently as September 26th of the preceding year Herr Hitler had said, " We do not want to see other nations amongst us. We want to live our own life, and we want other peoples to do the same. Our foreign policy aims are thus limited. . . . We do not want any Czechs." Many people in the British Isles, in spite of the writing on the wall, still believed that the Fuhrer had no other desire save to incorporate all Germans in the Reich, and not all the persecution of Jews, Catholics, and monarchists could persuade them that this was other than a perfectly legitimate object. What happened in March, 1939, at long last stripped the veil from their eyes, and henceforth, save for a very small minority, all Englishmen were united in the conviction that the German goal was the hegemony of Europe. Had Herr Hitler attacked Great Britain before he had made his intentions so obvious the Fifth Column would have been formidable indeed.

If the overthrow of Czecho-Slovakia completed the disillusionment of the Fuhrer's admirers in England, it marked the end of Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. He was himself obviously unwilling to admit that he had failed. At Birmingham on March

17th the Prime Minister almost plaintively observed, " Surely as a joint signatory of the Munich Agreement I was entitled, if Herr Hitler thought it ought to be undone, to that consultation which is provided for in the Munich declaration." Six days later in the House of Commons he faced the facts somewhat more squarely:

His Majesty's Government have already made clear that the recent actions of the German Government have raised the question whether that Government is not seeking by successive steps to dominate Europe, and perhaps even to go farther than that.

Were this interpretation of the intentions of the German Government to prove correct, His Majesty's Government feel bound to say that this would rouse the successful resistance of this and other countries who prize their freedom, as similar attempts have done in the past.

Mr. Chamberlain, in short, had acted on the assumption that Herr Hitler could be trusted, and events had proved him wrong.

At this point the question naturally arises whether in the circumstances Mr. Chamberlain should not have resigned, and it is difficult to answer otherwise than in the affirmative in the light of the fuller knowledge of to-day. His policy had failed both in respect of Germany and of Italy, and neither in Berlin nor in Rome was his name henceforth to carry weight. It would have been far better had he made way for someone of a more combative temperament and

possessed of a deeper mistrust of the dictators, for throughout the ensuing twelve months Mr. Chamberlain gave the impression of a man egged on from behind to take a course that was personally distasteful to him. One wonders to what extent he depended upon his own judgment and to what he relied upon that of others : above all, whether he was not influenced by the Party Machine which always made it so easy to believe oneself indispensable and infallible. The cloud of incense which goes up from the altars of the Whips' office and the local associations must bemuse any leader of the Conservative Party, and it would not be surprising if Mr. Neville Chamberlain was not persuaded to remain at 10 Downing Street against his own better judgment after the German and Italian dictators had finally frustrated his efforts to come to an agreement with them. That his decision was against the best interests of the country, as well as damaging to his own reputation, will hardly now be denied.

The months which elapsed before the war came at the beginning of September were, in consequence, marked by divided counsels, and the impression grew that the Cabinet was undecided, if not actually at loggerheads : however this may be, the Government certainly lagged behind public opinion, and the belated introduction of conscription at the end of April was forced upon Ministers by the country. In short, it was impossible not to believe that Mr. Chamberlain and at any rate some of his colleagues were not from time to time looking regretfully back over their shoulders at appeasement. Before, however, indulg-

ing in any detailed criticism of the policy pursued during the summer of 1939 it will be as well to recall the actual facts, for since then so much water—and blood—has flowed under the bridges.

On March 31st the Prime Minister announced that the Government had given an assurance to Poland that, during the period while consultations were proceeding with other Powers, in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government considered it vital to resist by force of arms, Great Britain would at once come to the support of Poland. France, it may be added, gave a similar guarantee. A few days afterwards Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, visited London, and a definite agreement of a more permanent character was reached. To quote Mr. Chamberlain's own words :

Like the temporary assurance, the permanent agreement would not be directed against any other country, but would be designed to assure Great Britain and Poland of mutual assistance in the event of any threat, direct or indirect, to the independence of either.

It was a far cry to the day when Sir Austen Chamberlain, as Foreign Secretary, had written that " no British Government ever will or ever can risk the bones of a British grenadier " for the sake of the Polish Corridor. This guarantee to Poland was, of course, the immediate consequence of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the similar Italian action in Albania resulted in a similar guarantee to Greece and Romania.

These pledges marked a fundamental change in British foreign policy, for they went far beyond anything contemplated in the Geneva Protocol, which had been rejected owing to the extent of the commitments that it would necessitate. Mr. Baldwin had been criticized in many quarters for saying that Britain's frontier was the Rhine, but that frontier was now anywhere between Vilna and Salonika. By the summer of 1939 British obligations were very extensive. First of all there was the defence of France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression in accordance with the provisions of the Locarno Pact, which had been reaffirmed in London in March, 1936. There were also treaties pledging Great Britain to go to the aid of Portugal, Iraq, or Egypt in certain circumstances. In addition there were the obligations under the Covenant of the League, by which, as defined by Mr. Eden, "our armaments may be used in bringing help to a victim of aggression in any case where in our judgment it would be proper under the provision of the Covenant to do so." Lastly, there were the new guarantees to Poland, Rumania, and Greece. Lord Halifax gave the reasons for this departure from the traditional principles in a speech at the end of June :

We have assumed obligations, and we are preparing to assume more, with full understanding of their causes and with full understanding of their consequences. We know that, if the security and independence of other countries are to disappear, our own security and our own independence will be gravely threatened. We know that if international law and order is to be

preserved, we must be prepared to fight in its defence.

These were very admirable sentiments, if a trifle belated, and one is tempted to ask how it was proposed to translate them, together with the obligations enumerated above, into action. We have already seen how the essential connection between armaments and policy had escaped successive British administrations since the end of the Four Years' War, and even the value of the Locarno Pact was greatly diminished by the unpreparedness of Great Britain. Of late years something had been done, but not nearly enough: in 1935 the country was assured that it should have an air force equal to that of any Power within striking distance of the British Isles, but it had not been provided with anything of the sort. This was not primarily the fault of Mr. Neville Chamberlain, but of his predecessor, yet he was a prominent member of the Cabinet which neglected the country's defences when the German danger was already manifest, and there is no evidence that he ever protested against so suicidal a policy. One would, too, like to know if the Service chiefs were consulted before these guarantees were given, and, if so, what advice they gave.

That it was right to give the guarantees, if they could be implemented, there can be no question, but it was forgotten that if a fresh policy can be elaborated overnight the armaments essential to its success cannot be improvised so rapidly. Yet it was not until April 26th that the institution of compulsory military service was announced. A month before the extremely dubious expedient of doubling the Territorial Army had been adopted, but the principal result of this was to produce

confusion throughout the force, for officers, N.CO.s and equipment were all lacking. The delay in imposing conscription was partly due to the attitude of the Prime Minister personally, and partly to a belief in Downing Street that the electorate was opposed to the scheme. This was certainly not the case, as events were soon to prove, but even had it been true an energetic campaign by Ministers and M.P.s would soon have brought about a change: this, however, was never attempted by the Government, who seem to have been taken completely by surprise when the country demanded compulsion of them. Accordingly, when the time came to do more than pass resolutions and utter edifying platitudes the Navy was found to be ready, but the Army and Air Force were woefully inadequate from the point of view of numbers.

So much for the effective assistance which Great Britain herself could give in the early days of a war to those whom she had guaranteed : it was clear that if her promises were to be worth anything she must find others nearer the possible scene of hostilities who would help. France, hypnotized by the Maginot Line, was wedded to the new theory that wars are won by sitting still, and the concentration of an army in Syria was as far as she was prepared to go. The guarantee to Greece could be made effective by the Royal Navy if its civil heads allowed it to be in the right place at the right time, but what of Rumania and Poland? Direct British assistance to the former is only possible in one of two ways; that is to say, by a landing, with Greek consent, at Alexandroupolis or Salonika, and then by a march across Bulgaria, an operation which is almost impracticable, and would in

any case, owing to the time it would take, be ineffective; the other method is by landing an expeditionary force at Constanza, but this presupposes an uninterrupted passage through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. By the summer of 1939 the Turks had recovered full liberty of action, and the Straits were fortified. Accordingly, after some negotiations, an Anglo-Turkish Agreement was concluded by which the two Governments declared that " in the event of an act of aggression leading to war in the Mediterranean area they would be prepared to co-operate effectively, and to lend each other all aid and assistance in their power ".

How much this agreement implied when a *casus foederis* arose the future alone could show, but for the moment it had a stabilizing effect upon the situation in the Mediterranean. It became clear that Great Britain in the coming struggle would have what she had not in the Four Years' War, a friendly Near and Middle East, while the gradual creation in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt of a very substantial Anglo-French army was a further warning to potential disturbers of the peace. At the same time arrangements were made by the British Government to facilitate export credits up to sixty millions to help the friends of Britain, and Greece, Rumania, and Turkey derived considerable advantage from this scheme. Nevertheless, King Carol was far too experienced a statesman, and the situation of his country was far too exposed, for him to put all his eggs in one basket, and though grateful for the British guarantee, he took care not to act in such a way as to give Germany any provocation.

The position of Poland was more difficult still, for there was no possibility of making an arrangement with any of her neighbours by which British forces could be sent to her assistance, even supposing that such forces were available. Accordingly, negotiations were commenced with Russia with a view to persuading that country to enable Great Britain to fulfil her obligations to Poland. These discussions are still wrapped in mystery, for although Mr. Chamberlain later undertook to publish an account of them in a White Paper, he subsequently retracted his promise. All through the spring the discussions dragged on, but on June 7th the Prime Minister made an important announcement in the House of Commons. He said that general agreement had been reached between the two countries on the main objects to be attained; that Great Britain had made clear her immediate and unreserved readiness to join with France in giving full military support to Russia in the event of any act of aggression against her involving her in hostilities with a European Power; and that military help should not necessarily be confined to cases of aggression upon the signatories' own territory. Mr. Chamberlain stated that the only serious obstacle was the Russian insistence on the need for guaranteeing the integrity of the Baltic States in view of the fact that those States were determined to resist such a guarantee as a threat to their neutrality.

Unfortunately in taking this roseate view of the situation the British Government was once again in ignorance of the real facts, for the Russians were actually conducting two sets of negotiations at the same time; one with London and the other with

Berlin. When the Russian dictator found that Mr. Chamberlain was making difficulties over his desire to regain the position in the Baltic held by the Czars he simply turned to Herr Hitler, who had no such scruples. On August 22nd the conclusion of a Russo-German Pact was announced, and British diplomacy had sustained another severe reverse, while the fate of Poland was sealed. Why the guarantee was ever given to that unhappy country without steps being first taken to ensure that it could be implemented is one of those mysteries of the last few years which will only be solved when the chancelleries give up their secrets, if at all. What will hardly be questioned is that the Prime Minister was taken completely by surprise, and neither he nor Lord Halifax seem to have had an inkling that Russia was negotiating with Germany as well as with themselves.

The real truth seems to have been that the Cabinet was still envisaging war, in so far as it envisaged war at all, in the terms of 1914, and it was completely blind to the character of the men with whom it was dealing. The gangster mentality was so alien to Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax that they never expected it in others. Monarchs, constitutional or despotic, and Parliamentary democracies are guided by tradition, so that within certain limits it is possible to forecast the line they will take in the field of foreign policy, but dictators, who are solely concerned with the present, are neither influenced by the past nor interested in the future. There was probably someone who could have told the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary what was afoot, but, if so, that someone was outside the "closed shop" of officialdom, and so he was

politely but firmly told that his information was not desired by those in authority.

All that summer the preparations of the Axis Powers were plain. As early as May 7th Germany and Italy had signed a military and political pact, and from that moment there began in the Reich a campaign against Poland which was ominously reminiscent of that against Czecho-Slovakia twelve months before. The immediate return of the Free City of Danzig was demanded together with the strip of territory connecting Poland with the Baltic. That Herr Hitler hoped to obtain his ends without recourse to war is undoubted, and he was encouraged by Herr von Ribbentrop to believe that this was possible. When the agreement with Russia was signed he felt sure, not only that he was no longer haunted by the German strategist's nightmare of a war on two fronts, but also that Great Britain and France would go back on their pledge to Poland. Future generations may well be extremely critical of the handling of British foreign policy during the period under review, but there is one charge which cannot be brought against Mr. Chamberlain, and it is that, like Mr. Asquith in 1914, when war was in sight he neglected to make his intentions plain to Germany. No man could have announced his purpose more clearly.

As soon as he knew of the pact between Germany and Russia he wrote to Herr Hitler in terms that left no doubt as to his meaning. " Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public re-

peatedly, and plainly, and which they are determined to fulfil. It has been alleged that if His Majesty's Government had made this position more clear in 1914 the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding." It would be dangerous for Herr Hitler to think that if hostilities once began success on one front would imply their speedy termination. "Having thus made our position perfectly clear, I wish to repeat to you my conviction that war between our two peoples would be the greatest calamity that could occur." It was not desired by either nation, and there was nothing in the dispute between Germany and Poland to justify it: Mr. Chamberlain, therefore, suggested a truce on both sides in order to lessen the immediate tension, while if there was to be a final settlement there would have to be guarantees by other Powers. "At this moment I confess I see no other way to avoid a catastrophe that will involve Europe in war. In view of the grave consequences to humanity which may follow the action of their rulers, I trust Your Excellency will weigh with the utmost deliberation the considerations which I have put before you."

The Fuhrer made a formal reply to the effect that he could not modify his Polish policy; that he was prepared to accept even a long war rather than sacrifice German national interests and honour; and that, if Great Britain persisted in her own measures of mobilization, he would at once order the whole of the German forces to be mobilized. Nevertheless, he consented to

receive Sir Nevile Henderson on August 23 rd, and what occurred is best related in the latter's own words :

At my first interview with him on that day, Herr Hitler was in a mood of extreme excitability. His language as regards the Poles and British responsibility for the Polish attitude was violent, recriminatory and exaggerated. He referred, for instance, to 100,000 German refugees from Poland, a figure which was at least five times greater than the reality. Again I cannot say whether he was persuaded or persuaded himself of the reality of these figures. At my second interview, when he handed me his reply, he had recovered his calm but was not less uncompromising. No longer, he told me, did he trust Mr. Chamberlain. He preferred war, he said, when he was 50 to when he was 55 or 60. He had himself always sought and believed in the possibility of friendship with England. He now realized, he said, that those who had argued the contrary had been right, and nothing short of a complete change in British policy towards Germany could ever convince him of any sincere British desire for good relations. My last remark to him was that I could only deduce from his language that my mission to Germany had failed, and that I bitterly regretted it.

All the same, Mr. Chamberlain's letter does appear to have made Herr Hitler hesitate, not indeed because of any dislike of war but in the hope of detaching Great Britain from Poland. He therefore sent for the British Ambassador again, and asked him to fly

to London with an offer of which the substance was that "he accepts the British Empire, and is ready to pledge himself personally for its continued existence, and to place the power of the German Reich at its disposal . . . the Fuhrer repeats that he is a man of *ad infinitum* decisions by which he himself is bound, and that this is his last offer. Immediately after the solution of the German-Polish question he would approach the British Government with an offer/' There was nothing to be done, for Herr Hitler was determined to dictate, not to negotiate. The British Government had warned Germany that force would be met by force, and the whole Empire supported it in this attitude.

Events then moved very swiftly indeed, and in the early hours of September 1st the invasion of Poland began. The Poles naturally invoked the guarantee, which had been given to them, and Great Britain informed Germany that unless she was prepared at once to withdraw from Polish territory the British Government would fulfil its obligations. For some reason so far unexplained no time limit was placed upon this threat, and there were the wildest rumours in London : some said that Mr. Chamberlain was preparing to *give* way again, while others declared that France was making trouble, and in the light of subsequent events this may very well have been the case. All that was known for certain was that Italy was making a desperate effort to preserve peace. September 2nd was a Saturday, yet Parliament sat all the same, and the atmosphere of the House of Commons was heavily charged. The Prime Minister alone preserved a detachment which to many seemed a little ill-timed,

and when Mr. Greenwood expressed his disquiet it was clear that he had the House with him, while Mr. Amery was heard to exclaim, "Speak for England." It would have required very little for Mr. Chamberlain to have been howled down.

Whether or not as the result of this revelation of popular feeling the Prime Minister that night instructed Sir Nevile Henderson to obtain an assurance before 11 a.m. the following morning of the suspension of all aggressive action against Poland, and of the withdrawal of the German forces from that country. No reply to this communication was received, and at eleven o'clock that Sunday morning Great Britain and Germany were once more at war. A quarter of an hour later Mr. Chamberlain broadcast. He showed how up to the very last moment an equitable settlement was possible, but Herr Hitler would have none of it, so "his action shows convincingly that there is no chance of expecting that this man will ever give up his practice of using force to gain his will". His conclusion will long be remembered by all who heard it: "It is evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution—and against them I am certain the right will prevail." To the House of Commons he opened his heart as fully as it is possible for a man to do: "Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins."

The attitude adopted by the British Government during the latter part of August and the first days of September, 1939, contrasts very favourably with that which Mr. Asquith's administration took twenty-five

years before. Every effort was made to settle the dispute between Germany and Poland by negotiation, and Berlin was told plainly that an attack upon her Polish neighbour would mean war with Great Britain. The mistakes of British statesmen were legion during the years which had elapsed since Versailles, and there were to be plenty more in the conflict that had just begun, but in the critical days before the outbreak of war it is difficult to see how they could have acted otherwise than they did.

What must be conceded is that, moral considerations apart, Herr Hitler displayed remarkable skill in the choice of Poland as his victim, for the Germans have always loathed and despised the Poles. Whether he really envisaged war against Great Britain and France at this stage it is impossible to say, but in any event it might have been difficult to rouse the German people to any enthusiasm for a war in the West. On the other hand, the idea of crushing the Poles was universally popular, and if the Polish campaign led to a general war, the latter would be accepted as the inevitable sequence of events. The agreement with Russia certainly exposed the hollowness of the alleged ideological division of Europe, and at the time it was generally considered a serious blunder on the part of Germany as tending to the alienation of such countries as Spain and Japan, and possibly even Italy. The progress of the war has shown that the Fuhrer had a shrewder conception of the realities of the situation than his critics, for the success of the German arms soon enabled those neutrals who disliked the Russian pact to conquer their aversion.

CHAPTER X

NEMESIS

THE war which began in September, 1939, was paradoxical from the start, and it was not long in giving the lie to the prophets. For years it had been confidently asserted that never again would there be war in Western Europe, and when the ambition of Herr Hitler falsified this prophecy, the pundits were not slow to declare that the conflict would be precipitated without warning given, so that civilization might well perish over-night in a hurricane of gas and incendiary bombs. In actual fact it would be difficult to find a precedent for a struggle of which the approach was more clearly heralded in advance, since it had been latent for many months before the first blows were struck. Indeed, there were not a few people in Great Britain who felt definitely relieved on September 3rd to know that the tension was over. Finally, we were told that there could be no repetition of the strategy of twenty-five years before, inasmuch as no British Government would dare to send a large army to fight on the mainland of Europe. Yet had anyone said in the early days of the Nazi regime that Great Britain would be given two years to make her preparations and then eight months to put them into practice, he would equally have been laughed out of court.

All this had a considerable effect upon public opinion. Far from bursting upon the country in full intensity from the first moment, the war, from the military and aerial standpoint, came gradually, and only at sea was it waged *aVoutrance* from the moment it was declared. Had it not been for the precautions necessitated by the new danger of attack from the air, and by the restrictions upon the consumption of petrol, the ordinary citizen would during the first few months of the conflict have been far less aware of its existence than he was of that of its predecessor. All this undoubtedly had its effect upon the public mind, which became perplexed at finding that events did not take the turn which had been so confidently expected. On the other hand, no British Government ever had a more docile people with which to deal. Restriction was placed upon restriction to an extent and with a rapidity for which there is no parallel in English history since the time of Cromwell, and yet all were accepted with hardly a murmur. Official interference with the life of the individual citizen was practised to a degree that was unknown in the Four Years' War, or which was only possible after the most careful preparation of the public mind. Even outstanding blunders, which might have been expected to force the resignation of a Minister, were condoned. Never was a Prime Minister so powerful as Mr. Chamberlain between September, 1939, and the German invasion of Scandinavia.

The effect upon the Government in its relations with foreign Powers was immediate. Criticism ceased, and for the first time since he took office Lord Halifax

had a free hand so far as his fellow-countrymen were concerned. Unfortunately he and his colleagues did not rise to the height of their opportunity. Abroad, they appeared to work on the assumption that time was of no account, and that in any case no neutral could be so misguided as to be anything but enthusiastically pro-Ally. At home, the Foreign Office whole-heartedly shared the general view of Whitehall that the war was to be one of officials, by officials, for officials. In the previous conflict a great many outsiders—mere intellectuals and journalists—had been introduced into the administrative machine. No doubt they had contributed materially to the winning of the war, but they had been a confounded nuisance with their unconventional ideas. This must not be allowed to happen again, and, as we have seen, the "closed shop" became the order of the day. To this initial blunder all subsequent mistakes were due, and these in their turn contributed materially to the disasters of the following spring and summer. If Mr. Lloyd George used the permanent official and the regular diplomat too little, Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax relied on them too much.

The functions of diplomacy in time of war are varied, but their main object must be to second the efforts of the armed forces. For this purpose what is required in those who control foreign policy is alertness of mind, a full realization of the issues at stake, an absence of prejudice, and a determination to turn to account any opportunity whenever and wherever it might occur. With all their admirable qualities, Lord Halifax and the chiefs of the Foreign Office,

with the notable exception of the Under-Secretary of State, Mr. R. A. B. Butler, were not so gifted, and they acted as if the struggle against Nazi Germany were the War of the Austrian Succession. The result was a long series of diplomatic reverses in Europe and Asia which, far from assisting the armed forces, was eventually to render their task considerably more difficult.

At the beginning of the conflict the official view was that the Allies were not fighting Germany, but only the Nazis. This was a highly disputable proposition, but if it was entertained, one would have imagined that it would have been acted upon in some other way than by the mere dropping of pamphlets, the contents of which were carefully concealed from the British taxpayer. In particular one would have thought that every effort would have been made to mobilize against the Nazis that opinion on the Right and Left which was fundamentally so hostile to them. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate the official refusal to take advantage of opportunities which offered themselves. Before the war had been in progress more than a few weeks a suggestion was put before Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, and the then Minister of Information that the understanding between Germany and Russia, and the Russian invasion of Poland, afforded an excellent chance of mobilizing Right opinion all over Europe against the Nazi regime. It was pointed out that the Right elements in all Continental countries had long been suspicious of Nazism for its attitude towards monarchy and religion, but that they disliked Bolshevism far more,

and were therefore tolerant of Nazism as the lesser of the two evils: now that both their opponents were in the same camp it should not be difficult to rally Right feeling to the side of Great Britain, Propaganda along these lines would be particularly valuable in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, and the Balkan States. It can easily be imagined what use Berlin would have made of a similar opportunity, but it was rejected by English officialdom on the grounds that the Government was very anxious not to introduce class distinctions into its propaganda. It is understood that a similar reply was given to those who urged action among Left elements. Dr. Gobbels would appear not to have entertained the same scruples.

The second illustration of the failure to utilize every available weapon concerns the Principal of a certain educational establishment. This man is one of the greatest authorities in the British Isles upon Poland; he is thoroughly conversant with her language, is on terms of familiarity with her leading men, and has studied Polish problems on the spot over a long period of years- Indeed, it would have been impossible to have found one better qualified either to advise the Government in London, or to work for it in Poland, once it had been decided to guarantee Polish integrity, and it is not difficult to imagine the use which the Germans would have made of such a man in similar circumstances. In actual fact no advantage whatever was taken of his knowledge or influence, and the sole official recognition of his existence was a request that he should go to Poland and

encourage the Poles to fight; but after he had expressed his willingness to do so provided that Poland's allies also did some fighting, he heard no more of the matter. This incident, it is to be feared, is typical of the refusal of Whitehall to avail itself of help from outside the official hierarchy, a refusal which has largely contributed to the many unpleasant surprises which the Government has of late years received on the mainland of Europe.

On the positive side there was a similar lack of enterprise. The period of suspense which lasted from the conquest of Poland until the invasion of Scandinavia provided an admirable opportunity of rallying the neutrals to the cause of the Allies, but no proper use was made of it. Sir Denison Ross was, indeed, sent to Turkey, but that was the solitary exception which may be said to prove the rule. Herr Hitler's agreement with Russia had momentarily shocked Spain, and there was a real chance of removing the impression that Great Britain was hostile to General Franco and everything for which he stood. There were a number of people in England who had enthusiastically supported the Nationalist cause, and were therefore well liked in the new Spain. The Anglophil section of General Franco's followers were insistent that some of these Englishmen should be sent out to put the British case in the Peninsula, but once again nothing was done. Lord Lloyd, the Chairman of the British Council, was fully alive to the necessity of complying with this request, but every sort of obstacle was put in his path, and German influence in Madrid did the rest. Spain was

allowed to drift into the camp of the Axis Powers. Much the same happened in the Balkans, where a deaf ear was also turned to those friends of Britain who clamoured for support.

Such being the case, it would surely have been better if Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax had resigned at the outbreak of war, since they had not done so at the time of the conquest of Czechoslovakia. The Prime Minister's virtues were not those of a leader in such days as lay ahead, and he had himself told the House of Commons that everything in which he believed had crashed in ruins. Furthermore, it was clear that to combat Germany successfully the whole-hearted support of Labour was essential, and Mr. Chamberlain could not hope for that. Unlike his father and brother, he lacked drive and imagination, and yet those were the very qualities of which one in his position stood most in need. The same criticism applied to Lord Halifax. The result of their retention of office was that the initiative in every field, but especially in the diplomatic, was left to the enemy, to the proportionate discouragement of the friends of Great Britain. As if this were not bad enough, an atmosphere of easy-going complacency was exuded by official circles, culminating in Mr. Chamberlain's extraordinary announcement in the spring of 1940 to the effect that he felt ten times more confident than when the war began: this observation was made, it will be remembered, on the eve of a series of disasters as grave as any in the course of British history. It is little short of a tragedy that the man who had done such remarkable

work at the Ministry of Health and at the Treasury should not have realized how unfitted he was to be Prime Minister in time of war.

After a brief period of relief that Italy, Spain, and Japan had not taken up arms on behalf of Germany there came the first reverse in the collapse of Poland. In view of the guarantee which had been given her, this was a bitter blow, but at once allsorts of excuses were put forward. The Poles could not fight, and/or they might have resisted the Germans if they had not been stabbed in the back by Russia. Anyhow, such a German walk-over was impossible in the West. Unfortunately these comforting reflections raised more problems than they settled. If the Poles could not fight, why was their integrity guaranteed? If they could fight, why were they not helped? As for the assurance that such a collapse was out of the question on the Western Front, the events of the following May and June were to supply an adequate answer. There was also the moral aspect. The Allies had gone to war with Germany because of that country's aggression against Poland, but when Russia behaved in exactly the same manner not a dog barked in London or Paris. When is aggression not aggression? Apparently, in the eyes of Whitehall, when it is committed by Russia. At any rate, that was the precedent set in Poland, and faithfully followed in the case of Finland and Romania.

These reflections inevitably lead to the question, What was the Allied plan of campaign when war broke out? It is not an irrelevant consideration in this place, because if it is the function of diplomacy

to second the efforts of the-armed forces in time of war, then the work of the Foreign Office cannot be appraised without a knowledge of the strategy of the Higher Command. It was generally supposed by the man-in-the-street that the Poles would be assisted by bombing attacks on Western Germany and by at any rate an attempt to penetrate the Siegfried Line : neither of these things happened, and a tentative French advance into the Saar was abandoned, apparently because the forces concerned were getting too far from the protection of the Maginot Line. It may well be that military action to relieve the pressure on Poland was not a practical proposition, but if this was the case, then why was she guaranteed ? Indeed, this once more raises the question whether the Service Chiefs were ever consulted. In any event the failure to do anything whatever for Poland rendered infinitely more difficult the task of British diplomacy, even had the latter been more enterprising than was unfortunately the case. Germany had achieved her immediate object in spite of the armed resistance of Great Britain and France, and that was not an easy argument to counter in neutral countries, particularly in view of the fact that British diplomats were generally out of touch with those sections of opinion to which it was likely to make the strongest appeal.

On the other hand, the Government could claim to have brought a united Empire into the war. In years to come, when the official archives are opened, it may well be found that on more than one occasion Mr. Chamberlain's procrastination was due to the necessity of bringing the Dominions into line, and in any event

no praise can be too high for the then Prime Minister for the feat he accomplished. As was perhaps only to be expected from his father's son, Mr. Neville Chamberlain has always appeared at his best where the overseas Empire is concerned, and whatever may have proved to be his failings as a war-time leader, it will always be remembered that in the very difficult circumstances created by the Statute of Westminster he so acted that the Empire spoke with one voice at the beginning of September, 1939. If the Germans hoped that centrifugal tendencies would assert themselves, they were doomed to disappointment, and when they had finished their Polish campaign there were, so far as they were concerned, no differences of opinion among the peoples who owed allegiance to King George VI. This was a solid asset of inestimable importance, and it was also one of the most effective weapons in the armoury of British diplomacy. Most of the credit for this must go to Mr. Chamberlain.

After the conquest of Poland there was a lull in the military operations and a renewal of activity on the diplomatic front, for Herr Hitler hoped that Great Britain and France would recognize his Polish *fait accompli*. This interval was largely occupied by Berlin in an attempt to divide the Allies, and although at the time it was generally considered to have failed, subsequent events were to prove that it had been by no means wholly without effect. It has already been mentioned that the somewhat exaggerated nationalism of the Poincare era, which was fundamentally anti-German, had begun to change its character, and that even before Munich the Fihrer had more sympathizers

on the left bank of the Rhine than was generally realized in official circles in London.

There were several reasons for this, and probably the most potent was anti-Semitism. This sentiment has always been strong in certain circles in France, as the Dreyfus case abundantly proves, and it had of late grown a great deal stronger owing to the influx of Jewish refugees, by no means always of the best type, from Central Europe. Frenchmen were often heard to declare that these people were planning a war of revenge against Germany in which the fighting was to be done by France, and such opinions by no means ceased to find expression when hostilities began. To what extent Jewry was connected with the Grand Orient, and how much influence was exercised by both upon the rulers of the Third Republic, is impossible to determine, but the fact is that the scandals which had been so prominent a feature of recent years had convinced a growing number of Frenchmen that their country was being run by a clique of Jews and Freemasons in their own interests. Such being the case, there was naturally a good deal of approval of the Nazi attitude towards the Jews and Freemasons in Germany.

These feelings had become accentuated owing to the accession to power of the Popular Front under M. Blum, himself a Jew. It is true that the Franco-Soviet Pact had been negotiated by the previous administration, but relations between Paris and Moscow became definitely cordial under the new regime in spite of Stalin's attempt to treat Blum as another Kerensky. This further alienated the Right, and

caused it to look not without favour upon a country where Communists were treated as criminals and Moscow was regarded as the home of Anti-Christ. The Russo-German Pact and the vigorous action of M. Daladier against the subversive forces on the Left did much to rally this section of opinion, it is true, but during the long winter lull in the campaign German propagandists were continually whispering that the Fuhrer had not really changed his views about the Soviets, while some of M. Daladier's supporters were just as suspect as the Communists he was repressing. In effect, the political condition of France during the winter of 1939-40 was just as unhealthy as it had been in 1917, and unfortunately there was on this occasion no Clemenceau to restore the situation.

Those who held such views were not, it must be admitted, particularly enthusiastic about the British alliance, which in their opinion was too much an affair of the Left. That there was something in this argument cannot be denied, and little effort had been made on the British part to keep on good terms with the French Right. The swing in intellectual circles away from Parliamentarianism, which had been growing in force for many years, was completely ignored on this side of the Channel, and the leaders of the movement were quite unknown. In this way what had been a real union of peoples came dangerously near to developing into an understanding between the British Government on one side and a mere group of French politicians on the other. The case of Salengro is an excellent illustration of this.

This man, who had been made Minister of the Interior by the Popular Front, was execrated by Right and Moderate opinion as being the worst type of professional Masonic politician, and he was generally believed to have been a deserter in the Four Years' War. Accordingly, the panegyrics that were pronounced upon him in England when he committed suicide were hardly calculated to appeal to that large section of French opinion which held the dead man in detestation.

Nor was this all, for sanctions were by no means forgotten by many Frenchmen, who argued thus : we had at long last secured a friendly Italy, and were thus able to regard Germany with equanimity, when Great Britain insisted upon embittering our relations with Rome because she did not want to see an increase in Italian power in East Africa and because her Prime Minister was frightened by the result of the Peace Ballot. The result is that to-day Italy may declare war on us at any moment, while all Great Britain has provided is a few divisions which can be counted on the fingers of both hands. Such was the point of view of not a few French people. Moreover, it must unfortunately be admitted that the British effort was not sufficiently advertised. One outstanding mistake was the regular publication of the unemployment figures, and it was by no means easy to persuade the French that Britain was putting all her energies into the prosecution of the war when they read that she had anything between one and two million men unemployed.

Such were the cross-currents in France during the

winter of 1939-40, when, it may now be said without fear of contradiction, there was on both sides of the Channel far too much talk and far too little action. The result was that so long as the war did not take an active form the cracks in French resolution could be papered over, and, given the outlook of M. Daladier and General Gamelin, it was in these circumstances only to be expected that the line of least resistance would be followed. Yet there can be no doubt that if they had been given a lead, the overwhelming mass of Frenchmen would have rallied to the British alliance, and had either M. Daladier or M. Reynaud possessed the personality of a Clemenceau he could have crushed M. Laval and his followers as the "Tiger" had crushed Bolo, Malvy, Caillaux, and Charles Humbert. There was, however, no one to rally France with the heartening slogan of Clemenceau, "*Je combattrai devant Paris. Je combattrai a Paris. Je combattrai derriere Paris.*"

So the defensive, both in diplomacy and war, became an end in itself, and it was comfortably assumed in London and Paris that in due course Germany would be strangled by the blockade, just as four years before it had been taken for granted that sanctions would compel Italy to relax her grip upon Abyssinia. What was not apparently envisaged was that Germany would attempt to break the bonds which bound her before it was too late. In actual fact this policy was that of the ostrich, for it ignored the consideration that as the Germans were unbeaten they were left with the initiative, and remarkably good use they made of it. They played upon the suspicions and fears of the lesser neutrals until the latter were

hopelessly divided among themselves and were oil none too good terms with the Allies. Every assistance which diplomacy could provide was employed to facilitate the coming military offensive, and the German embassies and legations abroad utilized to the full such citizens of the Reich as were possessed of special influence in foreign countries. The correspondents of the British Press never failed to sneer at these activities of the enemy, but in doing so they showed themselves exceedingly ill-advised.

On October 5 th Herr Hitler had entered Warsaw, and on the following day he began to talk about peace. There was, of course, never the slightest chance of a cessation of hostilities, but in the absence of any serious fighting there was much loose talk concerning war aims and peace terms. In the middle of these discussions came, at the end of November, the Russian attack on Finland. Stalin had not been slow to take advantage of the war to regain the old Russian territory which had been lost at the time of the revolution twenty-two years before. His action in Poland has already been mentioned, and during September and October he had secured that effective control of the Baltic States which he was later to complete by annexation: Finland was clearly marked out as the next victim, and however little Germany might like this extension of Russian power in the North, there was nothing she could do to prevent it without thereby precipitating a war upon two fronts. It need hardly be said that the onslaught on Finland took the British Government by surprise, and the dilatory procedure of London and

Paris could not fail to provoke the most unfavourable comparison with the rapidity of action which always characterized the dictators in similar circumstances. In due course the dispute was referred to the League of Nations, which with remarkable celerity proceeded to expel Russia from its midst, and called upon its members to give Finland what assistance lay in their power. On this Great Britain and the Dominions released for export to the Finns certain supplies of war material intended for their own use. It was still all very reminiscent of an eighteenth-century war prior to the appearance of Napoleon,

The attitude of Great Britain, or rather of the British Government, towards the Russian attack on Finland is not easy to understand. Public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of strong measures, and, as so often during the last eighteen months of Mr. Chamberlain's Premiership, was thus in advance of Ministers; but, as in the case of Poland two months before and of Romania eight months after, an unprovoked attack by Russia was not considered aggression in Whitehall. A rupture of diplomatic relations was apparently not even considered, nor was, it would seem, the possibility of turning the Russians out of Petsamo by naval action. It may, of course, have been that French influence prevented any active assistance being given to the Finns, and if so that is one more offence for which the late rulers of France will have to answer at the bar of history.

However this may be, the gallant resistance of the Finns aroused so much enthusiasm in the British Isles, not least in the ranks of the Labour Party,

that by February the prime Minister told that something must be done, though why he delayed so long is another of the mysteries that await explanation. In due course an Anglo-French expeditionary force was prepared, and Norway and Sweden were asked to allow it to cross their territory under Article 16 of the League Covenant, by which the contracting parties pledged themselves to "take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League ". German pressure caused the Governments both at Oslo and Stockholm to repudiate their liabilities, and thus the edifice of collective security, upon which so many hopes had been based, finally collapsed into ruins. Had Norway and Sweden taken a different line, which they might well have done had Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier acted earlier, Finland would have been saved, and Germany would have received a decided check in her designs upon Scandinavia. The hesitating and uncertain diplomacy of Great Britain and France was not calculated to encourage Norway and Sweden to bid defiance to the German and Russian dictators.

Even at this eleventh hour the situation might have been saved had resolute action been taken. The Swedes were very far from being united in support of their Government's policy, with which one of the leading Swedish statesmen, M. Sandler, was at open variance. It should not have been impossible to have arranged for him to do in Sweden what M. Venizelos had done in Greece in not dissimilar circum-

stances during the Four Years' War—that is to say, bring off a *coup d'etat* and then invite the Allies into the country. It may well be that this proposition was made to M. Sandler and that he declined it, but in that case it is curious that in the attempt to persuade him no use was made of the services of one of his closest friends in this country, A friendly Sweden would have proved of inestimable advantage to the Allies in the months that lay ahead, and the substitution of the Crown Prince for the reigning monarch, which would probably have proved necessary, would have been a small price to pay for such an asset.

When it became obvious that no substantial aid could be expected from the Allies, the Finns, after as gallant a resistance as is recorded on the pages of history, made the best terms they could with Russia, and these proved to be considerably less arduous than would have been the case had they not fought. On the other hand, the prestige of Great Britain and France suffered a severe blow. Another small nation had succumbed in spite of their support, and the neutral Powers trimmed their sails accordingly. They might, and they mostly did, believe that the Allies would be victorious in the end, and that all wrongs would then be righted, but in the interval they stood a very good chance of being over-run if they gave any offence to the dictators. Great Britain and France always seemed too late, and the Finnish fiasco redounded to the advantage of Germany.

At home public opinion was mystified and not a little resentful that more had not been done. Mr. Chamberlain's explanation was accepted as an excuse

rather than as a reason, and From this **moment there** can be dated the rapid growth of a feeling that before long there would have to be drastic changes at the top. Memories of Munich and of earlier unpreparedness began to revive, and one heard comparisons being drawn between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Asquith. Grumbling grew louder when a Cabinet re-shuffle was found to mean nothing more than a rearrangement of offices among the same Ministers, and this convinced a growing number of people that if there was to be a general speed-up Mr. Chamberlain himself would have to go. " Oh, for a week of his father ! " one heard the older men murmur.

To the Russian' attack on Finland succeeded the German invasion of Denmark and Norway, and it was at once clear that this would be the acid test of Mr. Chamberlain in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen as well as of the Allies in those of the world. Was Great Britain once more taken by surprise ? It is impossible to answer this question until a great deal more evidence is available. It was widely stated at the time that the British Government wished to bomb the German forces before they left harbour, but that M. Daladier refused to agree, on the ground that this might entail reprisals upon French towns, which, in its turn, would powerfully aid those who were tired of the war and wanted to make peace. Nevertheless, even if this be so, Mr. Chamberlain was obviously surprised at the extent and rapidity of the German successes, for when he first spoke on the matter in the House of Commons he said there must **have been** some confusion between Larvik and Narvik,

as he could not conceive that the enemy had penetrated so far to the north as the latter town.

Whether or not the British Government was hampered by the French at the outset, it acted quickly enough once the nature of the danger was realized. This is not the place, nor is it yet the time, to consider whether the counter-stroke was delivered at the right point or with the right troops : what happened was that full advantage was taken of the opportunity to cripple the German Navy, and for this alone the Norwegian campaign was well worth while. The promptitude with which British aid was forthcoming also did something, if only temporarily, to restore the prestige which had been lost by the submission of Finland, and the final evacuation of Norway passed almost unnoticed amid the clash of battle in the Low Countries.

Nevertheless the invasion of Norway served to point the moral of that of Poland and Finland—namely, that in the present state of warfare no small country can now hope to resist for long attack by a Great Power. The coming of the aeroplane has, at any rate temporarily, redressed the balance in favour of Goliath against David, though it is possible that some antidote, perhaps a ray, will be discovered in course of time. Just as the barons in the later Middle Ages could not withstand the royal power because the king could afford what they could not—namely, the artillery which battered down their castles—so the small state to-day must inevitably be overwhelmed by the air force of its larger and richer neighbour. Like most other unpleasant facts, this truth was

ignored during the twenty years which followed the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, or collective security might have become something more than a meaningless phrase. Had, for example, the whole of Europe accepted the leadership of Great Britain and France when Germany attacked Poland, and pooled its resources to bring the aggressor to reason, the war would have been over by Christmas, 1939, but the principle of collective security was, at the first real test, abandoned even by those who, like Norway and Sweden, never tired of proclaiming their devotion to it.

Failing the discovery of some effective antidote to the aeroplane, this problem will be one of the most important that the post-war world will have to solve, and it may well be that the most radical solution will prove the most effective—namely, the abolition of the aeroplane altogether. It has proved far too dangerous an instrument to put into the hands of man in his present stage of development, for he cannot be trusted to use it properly. Abolition would doubtless adversely affect many vested interests, but whatever compensation was paid to them would be cheap at the price, and the rich would be reduced to the* train and the motor-car once more: as for the business-man in a hurry, if he is to be compelled to reconcile himself to a slower means of transport, he will be able to reflect that by so doing he is ensuring that his business will not be bombed out of existence when next some nation decides to make a bid for the hegemony of the world. Yet it is to be feared that this is a mere counsel of perfection, and that mankind will

not of its own accord dispense with the aeroplane, any more than the child voluntarily gives up the box of matches.

The German invasion of Norway put an end to the stalemate which had existed between the Allies and the Reich since the conquest of Poland, and it was followed by a widespread demand in Great Britain for energetic action on a large scale. Leaders of public opinion professed to see in the state of Spain in 1808 a parallel with that of Norway, and it was urged that now was the opportunity to commence a campaign in which the enemy would bleed to death. Mr. Chamberlain refused to listen to such reasoning, and events soon proved him to be right. Whatever may have been Herr Hitler's objects in crossing the Skagerrak, one of them was undoubtedly to divert large British and French forces from the Western Front, but in this he failed. It would probably be tactless to enquire whether the Prime Minister acted as he did because he had information of what was coming in the West or because of his habitual refusal to give ear to criticism, but his policy was the only sound one. The disaster which ensued would have been far worse had the Allies, in any event numerically inferior to the Germans, been deeply committed in Norway.

Such being the case, it was indeed one of the ironies of fate that Mr. Chamberlain should have fallen on an issue where he was right and his critics were wrong. Whether the Government majority in the House of Commons would have been so small had the vote been taken after, rather than before, the invasion of the

Low Countries it is impossible to say, but the change had become sooner or later inevitable. Still, it was as curious a debate as any that have taken place at Westminster, for as the attack developed, particularly after the speech of Sir Roger Keyes, it was directed rather against Mr. Churchill than against Mr. Chamberlain, and yet it was the former who became the new Prime Minister. What was at stake, however, was not really the Norwegian campaign, but the whole domestic and foreign policy of the Government, for which the responsibility lay with Mr. Chamberlain. The man-in-the-street had come to the conclusion that we were always too late, and that this was due partly to the Prime Minister's age and partly to his temperament. To a large extent this was true, but there were other factors to be taken into account, especially the attitude of the French Government and the refusal of officialdom to listen to anyone outside the charmed circle of Whitehall.

Of one thing there can be no question, and it is that nothing so well became Mr. Chamberlain's Premiership as the leaving of it. Nor is this all, for it is clear that those chiefly implicated in the crisis produced by the vote on May 8th had learnt the lesson implicit in the fall of Mr. Asquith in December, 1916. The critics of Mr. Chamberlain had their say across the floor of the House of Commons, and a division was taken upon their allegations. This was far more satisfactory, as well as far more in keeping with the theory of the Constitution, than the somewhat sordid intrigues which marked the earlier crisis. Both Mr. Churchill and Mr. Chamberlain acted in a manner

above reproach. The new Prime Minister's immediate request to his predecessor to serve under him, and the other's ready agreement to do so, will be remembered when much else regarding the events which brought about the change of Government is forgotten. What the future holds in store for English parties is more than usually obscure, but when one recalls the tragic consequences which flowed from Mr. Asquith's refusal to co-operate with Mr. Lloyd George it is impossible not to entertain a feeling of satisfaction at the way in which a very difficult situation was handled in May, 1940.

It is too early yet to attempt a final estimate of Mr. Chamberlain's conduct of foreign policy, and, as has been observed on an earlier page, this will not be possible until the relative strength of the leading Powers at certain material times is known. It can, however, be asserted with confidence that one of the principal causes of his downfall was his inability to appeal to the imagination of the people. Other national leaders, Louis XIV and Frederick the Great are conspicuous examples, have met with reverse after reverse without losing their hold upon public opinion, and in Great Britain the outstanding case was the younger Pitt. Resistance to Napoleon became personified in this man who had done as much as was humanly possible to preserve peace, and whose views, as well as whose mistakes, in many ways resembled those of Mr. Chamberlain. Billy Pitt might be the object of dislike of Fox and his followers, but in some indefinable way he came to impress the ordinary citizen that while he was at the helm, all would be well, so

that while the factions were raging against him at Westminster the farmers at Shepton Mallet took the horses out of his carriage, and pulled it through the town. Mr. Chamberlain was never on such terms with the British people.

CHAPTER XI

THE LATEST PHASE

"MY Lord," said the elder Pitt to the Duke of Devonshire, "I believe that I can save this country, and that no one else can." It was in this spirit that Mr. Churchill succeeded Mr. Chamberlain in May, 1940, nor does the resemblance end there, for the new Prime Minister, like the Great Commoner, had been thrust upon Parliament by the country. The circumstances in which the two men took office were not dissimilar, for in 1757, as in 1940, the emergency which England had to meet was of the gravest. The Seven Years' War had begun badly, and the situation was perilous, not only because Minorca had been lost and Britain was threatened in India and America, but because the fighting forces were afflicted with a strange timidity and hesitation. On the earlier occasion, as on the later, the strength of the enemy inspired the most gloomy forebodings. "Whoever is in, or whoever is out, I am sure we are undone both at home and abroad," wrote Chesterfield; "we are no longer a nation. I never yet saw so dreadful a prospect," On the other hand, Sir Andrew Mitchell reported from M. de Knyphausen that the French were preparing to attack Madras, and were sending more troops to America. "When I hinted that there

were vast designs to be executed in the East and West Indies at the same time by the French, who were not yet masters of the sea, he answered, ' They are so flushed with the conquest of Port Mahon, and their successes in North America, that they are capable of undertaking anything.' " *Mutatis mutandis* the parallel was complete.

The new Government was not inappositely described as the " Ministry of All the Critics ", for so many of those who had been critical of its predecessor were included in it. From the beginning, however, it was clear that Mr. Churchill's administration would be judged by its ability to win the war, and to this consideration every other was subordinate. Lord Halifax remained at the Foreign Office, but it was clear that the policy of the country would be shaped by the Prime Minister, and in fact events began to move so rapidly that to talk of controlling them soon became absurd. For the rest, the new Government was accepted abroad as proof of the British determination to fight to a finish, and further evidence of this was afforded by the number of posts given to members of the Labour Party. In view of the importance of the Imperial contribution it was noted with satisfaction that the India, Dominions, and Colonial Offices were exceptionally well filled. Mr. Amery went to the India Office, and this was a source of great content to those who had for years regretted that his ability and drive had not been utilized by successive Prime Ministers. Sir Thomas Inskip, who had now become Lord Caldecote, became Secretary of State for the Dominions, and was thus

more happily **placed** than he had always been in the past. As for the new Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, his tenure of this office would strengthen any administration, and the Colonial Empire clearly had nothing to fear while he was looking after its interests in Whitehall. The satisfaction felt at these appointments in the Empire overseas was particularly important, for in a few weeks' time the British community of nations was to face Germany alone.

Hardly had the new Government been formed than Great Britain received a number of severe blows in rapid succession. The collapse of the Netherlands, the defection of the King of the Belgians, and the capitulation of France would have dismayed any other nation than that which traditionally never knows when it is beaten, while in addition there was the entry of Italy into the war on the side of Germany. It would be necessary to go back to the year 1797 to find an equal record of disasters, but not all of them concern us here. The defeat of the Dutch, for instance, was but another example of the inability, in modern warfare, of a small nation to hold up a large one, while too much mystery is attached as yet to King Leopold's surrender for any consideration of it to be profitable until a great deal more information is available: in particular, before a final judgment is possible it will have to be examined in the light of what was taking place in Paris and at the French G.H.Q. In effect, it is too early to say whether politics or strategy played the more decisive part in the German conquest of the Low Countries, but one thing can be asserted with confidence, and it is that the British soldier

proved himself every whit worthy of his forebears on the battle-fields where they had fought*.

The action of Italy meant the end of an old friendship, but one which, as we have seen, had weakened considerably of late years. That the vast majority of the Italian people wanted to go to war with Great Britain on behalf of Germany is almost certainly untrue, but they had no say in the matter; nor, apparently, had those in high places who were credited with pacific sentiments. It has been suggested earlier that a different policy might have weaned Signor Mussolini from Berlin even after the Abyssinian War, but since Munich he had become so involved in the meshes of German diplomacy that it was impossible for him to extricate himself even had he so wished, of which there is no proof. Whether a firmer line on the part of the Allies once hostilities with Germany had begun, and before Italy was ready to enter the fray, would have produced a different result, it is difficult to say, and in any event it was rendered impossible by the attitude of France. What is certain is that in many quarters in London excessive confidence was reposed in the moderating influence of the Italian Royal Family, of the Church, and of some leading Fascists, while too little allowance was made for the counsels of such men as the redoubtable Farinacci.

At the same time it would be quite untrue to suggest that the Italians were forced into war solely by the machinations of a minority of Fascist extremists. The untravelled Englishman is inclined to omit from his calculations the halo of infallibility which is

attached to the dictators, and to none of them more than to the Duce, who has always practised his precept of living dangerously. He has taken the most tremendous risks, and has always proved successful, while he has managed to reduce to a minimum the actual fighting which he has called upon his fellow-countrymen to perform. Such being the case, the average Italian shrugged his shoulders when he found that he was involved in the war, and trusted Signor Mussolini to see him through it without mishap. Of course the difficulty about a reputation for infallibility is that it is soon dispelled the moment things begin to go wrong, and when that happens there can be little doubt that influential sections of Italian opinion will begin to clamour for peace. A serious reverse, however, is an essential preliminary, and this is too often forgotten by the stay-at-home Briton who has never experienced for himself the almost religious enthusiasm felt for Signor Mussolini by so many Italians : indeed, the Duce has more supporters than has the regime of which he is the head.

There would not appear to be any reason why the old friendship between Great Britain and Italy should not be revived when the present conflict comes to an end. By that time the Italians will have learned what it is to be the ally of Germany, and, duly chastened, they will realize that their interests in the Mediterranean are the complement of the interests of Great Britain. They will, of course, have to abandon their Imperial ambitions in East Africa, evacuate the Dodecanese, and restore Albania to its rightful ruler, but these commitments have already proved a source

of weakness rather than of strength, and Italy will be the better without them. As for the regime, that is an internal question for the Italians themselves to decide, but it is obvious that so long as Signor Mussolini remained at the helm cordial relations between Rome and London would not be easy to attain. The solution may well lie in some modified form of Fascism under a more moderate leader, when the corporate state would be allowed to develop in an atmosphere of greater political and personal freedom.

Of far greater importance than the entry of Italy into the war was the withdrawal of France from it, and the subsequent changes which took place in that country. For more than a generation the Anglo-French Entente had been the basis of British foreign policy, and its abrupt termination constitutes nothing less than a diplomatic revolution of the first magnitude. Mention has already been made of the trend of French opinion during the earlier months of the war, but to understand what is happening, and still more what is likely to happen, it is necessary to look back beyond Munich, Stresa, and Locarno to the evolution of the French political system in the nineteenth century.

The Third Republic was one of the most curious regimes in the world. Nobody, except Bismarck, wanted it when it was established; nobody was ever very enthusiastic over it during the seventy years of its existence; and it only continued to exist because Frenchmen could not agree on what they wanted to put in its place. By the summer of 1940 it was a mere *facade*, and what little prestige it did enjoy was

derived from the fact that it was supposed to be based on the immortal principles of the French Revolution. Whether this event is to be regarded as the greatest curse or the greatest blessing in the course of human history, certain facts concerning it must be appreciated if many subsequent happenings in France are to be understood. It was not inevitable, for had Louis X V I shown an atom of firmness it would never have taken place. It righted no wrongs that would not have been remedied in due course without the resort to violence which it occasioned. Before Louis X V I came to the throne more than half the land in France already belonged to the peasants. Moreover, it was in a rich, not a poor, France that the Revolution broke out. The myth of a poverty-stricken country goaded by its misery into revolt against a corrupt and frivolous Court has long been exploded. It is not nations in the last stages of penury who rise against their rulers, but those who are prosperous. England in 1641, and Spain in 1931, were richer than they had ever been before, and so it was with France in 1789. The eighteenth century had been one of continued progress in the sphere of economics, and the truth is that the French peasant rose, not because he was worse, but because he was better, off than any other in Europe.

The immediate result of the Revolution was to put the bourgeoisie in the saddle, and there, save for one or two brief periods, it has ever since remained. The heyday of its power, when its rule was undisguised, was the middle of last century, when the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe governed France in its interests;

those were the days when the King of the French said to his subjects, " Get rich ", which many of them proceeded to do, often without much regard for their less fortunate fellow-citizens. The overthrow of the July Monarchy took the bourgeoisie by surprise : indeed, the Prime Minister was in the act of declaring to the Chamber that there could be no question of going back on the settlement made eighteen years before, when in rushed the mob, and the regime collapsed. Louis Philippe had been the nominee of the middle class, and since the revolutionaries would not have his grandson, the bourgeoisie had no one with whom to replace him. In these circumstances the only course open to them was to bide their time, and take advantage of any opportunity that might offer itself. They wished to safeguard the political and social advantages which they had secured at the Revolution, but they had no desire to see the pendulum swing so far to the Left as to bring into power the advocates of a social upheaval. For this reason the bourgeoisie in the moment of crisis has always rallied to any leader who will defend order and private property, and men as dissimilar as Louis Napoleon, M. Clemenceau, M. Poincare, and now Marshal Petain, have been endowed with dictatorial powers for this purpose. In marked contrast with the pusillanimity shown before their enemies by Louis XVI, Charles X, and Louis Philippe in the hour of danger is the savage defence of their property by the middle class whenever it has been attacked. Not a voice was raised in favour of the Second Empire on September 4th, 1870, although only four months before it had been approved at a plebiscite by more than

seven million votes to a million and a half; yet in the following year the Commune was literally stamped out in blood and fire, and there can be little doubt that Marshal Petain and his colleagues acted as they did in 1940 largely out of fear of a similar insurrection. For many years government in France has been honourably distinguished by the toleration it has displayed towards its opponents : only when the supremacy of the bourgeoisie is menaced is this policy reversed, and then the most repressive measures are speedily adopted.

In these circumstances it is easy to understand the alarm which the establishment of the Second Republic caused among the class that had ruled France for eighteen years. An administration that included among its most prominent members a Socialist like Louis Blanc and a workman like Albert, that proposed to set up national workshops for the unemployed and to adopt universal male suffrage, and that announced its intention of replacing the tricolour by the red flag, caused the gravest apprehensions : from that moment the bourgeoisie closed their ranks, and began to look round for a protector against the anarchy that threatened. They found him in Louis Napoleon, and so frightened were they at the prospect of Socialism that they gave him any powers for which he chose to ask, just as they had given them to his uncle in similar circumstances in the past. The bourgeoisie remained faithful to the Second Empire until it brought disaster on France at Sedan, and then they took care that the succeeding regime should also be consonant with their interests.

The large majority of Frenchmen are more inter-

ested in the theory of government than in its practical application, and never was this characteristic more pronounced than under the Third Republic. The rigid Caesarian authority of the Second Empire produced a reaction, and the result was a Constitution in which the executive was permanently at the mercy of the legislative, while the President was a mere puppet. The way in which this state of affairs came into existence is peculiar, and it was to influence French history for two generations. In the Constituent Assembly, which met to decide the fate of France after the fall of the Empire, there was a considerable majority in favour of a restoration of the Bourbons, but no immediate step in that direction was taken, partly because it was desired to saddle the republican administration with the onus of signing a shameful peace with Germany, and partly because the monarchists themselves could not decide whether they wanted the Comte de Chambord, the grandson of Charles X, or the Comte de Paris, the grandson of Louis Philippe, to reign over them. With the passage of time, however, the republican ideal began to gain ground, and when the Royalists perceived this, a compromise was reached by which the Comte de Chambord was to ascend the throne as Henry V and, since he was childless, the Comte de Paris was to be his heir. How near the monarchy was to being restored may be gauged from the fact that the carriages in which the King was to make his entry into Paris had been built, the horses that were to draw them had been bought, and the uniforms of the Court had been made, while a monarchical Constitution was in

proof, and the majority was waiting to pass it the moment that the word arrived that the Comte de Chambord had accepted the throne.

At the last minute this scheme was wrecked by the insistence of the Comte de Chambord that the *drapeau blanc* should become the national flag, a demand which Marshal MacMahon said was enough to make the *chassepots* go off by themselves. Such being the case, the Royalists accepted the republic as a temporary expedient, but, mindful of the fate of its predecessor, they enacted a Constitution in which the executive was left so weak that it would be impossible for President or Premier to repeat the exploit of Louis Napoleon. It was meant to last until the Comte de Chambord died, and the Comte de Paris was ready to ascend the throne. The republicans acquiesced in this solution, for they had no desire to see the Head of the State endowed with autocratic powers.

Unfortunately for the monarchists who made the Constitution, they soon lost control both of the Senate and of the Chamber, and so the Comte de Paris ended his life in exile, but their work endured. No important amendment to the Constitution was ever passed, and when M. Millerand endeavoured to increase the importance of the presidential office he was removed for his pains. In the absence of a rigid party system such as obtains in Great Britain and the United States, the Chamber—and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Senate—was divided into a number of groups, and a debate as often as not consisted of little more than a series of statements of general

principles by the protagonists of the various groups. To carry on the government of the country, the Premier had to placate first one section of the Chamber and then another, with the result that to carry out any bold programme of reform or reconstruction was an impossibility, save when some dangerous crisis was obviously pending. Even an appeal to the people was not open to an embarrassed minister, for it was a constitutional convention that the Chamber must not be dissolved until it had completed the four years for which it was elected. Such being the case, it is not too much to say that the regime depended, not upon the institutions which supported it, but upon a continual supply of men like Gambetta, Waldeck-Rousseau, Clemenceau, Poincare, and Briand, who knew how to make it work. Until recent years public opinion may be said to have tolerated this state of affairs rather than approved of it, and so long as the predominance of the bourgeoisie was not in any way threatened, the country left the Chamber and the politicians to work out their own salvation. As a compromise the Third Republic came into existence, and a compromise it remained.

Many times between the refusal of the crown by the Comte de Chambord and the beginning of the Four Years' War did the Third Republic appear to be on the brink of disaster. It was threatened with a *coup d'etat* by Boulanger; it was split from top to bottom by the Dreyfus case; and it stank in the nostrils of Europe when a President's son-in-law was found trafficking in honours, and when the Panama scandals revealed the venality of the representatives of the

people. Of the Presidents of the Republic, one was murdered, one was forced to resign, and two were the veriest nonentities. Yet the regime continued, and moved ever farther to the Left. Thiers estimated that at the end of the Franco-German War there were not more than a million and a half republicans in the country, but they knew what they wanted, which was certainly not the case with their opponents. The Masonic Lodges gave them the unity of purpose which the Right lacked, and in due course they carried the law for the separation of Church and State. In this connection it is not without interest to note that this measure was voted by deputies who represented only 2,647,315 voters out of a total electorate of 10,967,000. The reason why the Republic survived was, apart from the lack of agreement as to what was to be put in its place, that its foreign policy reassured the ordinary citizen: indeed, France has rarely been so well served abroad as she was during this period by the brothers Cambon, in London and Berlin, and by Barrere in Rome. She emerged from the isolation in which she had been left by the Empire, and when the storm broke in 1914 she was able to take the field with Great Britain and Russia as allies.

The cessation of hostilities left the French Republic incomparably the most powerful state on the mainland of Europe, and in many respects the position of France recalled the great days of Louis XIV and Napoleon. Her rivals were everywhere powerless. Germany was beaten to her knees, Russia had relapsed into barbarism, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had

disappeared, and the chaos of post-war Italy gave no indication of the revival which was so soon to take place in her national life. The Treaty of Versailles seemed to establish the predominance of France more securely than ever, and when M. Clemenceau retired from public life in January, 1920, the future appeared a bright one both at home and abroad. Since that time the decline of France has been uninterrupted, if often disguised. The Parliamentary System, which had generally been regarded with indifference, became the scorn of the great majority of French citizens, and the reason for this change of attitude was the public scandals, which occurred in unbroken succession. While Clemenceau was still at the helm, Caillaux was imprisoned and Malvy, also an ex-Minister of the Left, was exiled, while several more or less prominent persons were shot on the charge of intriguing with the enemy. In January, 1923, the acquittal of Germaine Berton, the murderess of the Royalist Marius Plateau, raised grave doubts as to the impartiality of the courts of justice themselves. In November of the same year Philippe Daudet, son of the Royalist leader, was found dead under highly suspicious circumstances, and most Frenchmen believe that the boy was murdered by the police. Above all, in 1934-35, the Stavisky scandal broke, and public opinion attached no importance to the financier's alleged suicide: he had been put out of the way in case he incriminated those in high places. Lastly came the government of the Popular Front, but in spite of the high hopes entertained of it in many quarters, it proved to be no freer than previous

administrations from personal scandals, while it left France naked before her enemies.

Concurrent with this reaction against the regime, but anterior to it in origin, were the activities of that group of Catholic and nationalist writers which made its appearance in France during the closing years of the nineteenth century, and which has ever since exercised a growing influence on French literature. It is, indeed, a little difficult to know how to classify these authors so as to make their interdependence the more clear, but they fall into two recognizable groups basing their hostility to democracy on nationalist and Catholic principles respectively.

French nationalism was born of the Franco-German War, and was the natural reaction against the pessimistic realism of the Zola school. "From the outset", Leon Daudet has written of Zola, "he made Truth his god and enshrined her, pen in hand, between the manure heap and the morgue." In its early days the strength and weakness of the nationalist movement on the political side derived from the qualities of its advocate, Paul Dérroulede, while its association with the failure of Boulanger caused a serious set-back to its fortunes. Almost from the beginning it was hostile to the Parliamentary Republic, and Deroulede was at length forced into exile owing to his activities in this direction. At the same time, it always remained a movement, and never became a party; indeed, men of all parties served beneath its banner, and it provided a link between Royalists, Bonapartists, and Republicans of the Right. The gradual modification of its attitude towards Germany in its later days has

already been discussed. Deroulede was succeeded by Maurice Barres, who remained until his death in 1923 the acknowledged leader of the movement. After the death of Barres his mantle fell upon Charles Maurras, probably the greatest intellect in France to-day, and one who exercises a very profound influence upon the younger generation. Men like Pierre Gaxotte are proud to acknowledge themselves his disciples.

The Catholic reaction in France against political democracy began somewhat earlier, and may in fact be dated so long ago as Montalembert. Its effective influence, however, is much more recent, and seems to have begun with Brunetiere, who was soon to be followed by Paul Bourget and Paul Claudel. The nationalist and Catholic criticisms of the Parliamentary Republic were often hard to separate, for both emphasized the need for authority, and it would, for instance, have been difficult to decide whether the principles which inspired the *Ligue des Patriotes* under the leadership of General de Castlenau were predominantly Catholic or nationalist. Then, again, superficial differences between the various groups which formed the movement were apt to blind observers to the similarity of their ends : for example, the condemnation of the *Action Fratifaise* by the Vatican was liable to obscure the fact that both that organization and the *Ligue des Patriotes*, which was strongly supported in clerical circles, were agreed upon the desirability of changing the French Constitution, especially by the introduction of a wide measure of devolution. Nationalism was, in effect, a belief which could be taught in a multitude of forms.

This digression into recent French history has been

necessitated by the need for depicting the background against which was set the collapse of France in the late spring of 1940. The majority of British people appear to have been surprised that when the French armies broke, the regime should also have fallen. But the Parliamentary Republic had never aroused much enthusiasm, and of late years the number of its active enemies had increased enormously: in these circumstances it was only natural that when it proved unable to defend the country, it should have been overthrown, and that its opponents should have come into power. That was precisely what happened in Germany in 1918, and to the predecessor of the Third Republic—namely, the Second Empire—in 1870; yet only four months before Sedan the most inveterate foe of Napoleon III, no less a person than Gambetta himself, believed that the Empire was stronger than ever. In these days when war is something more than the last argument of kings few regimes can survive military defeat. Louis XIV could remain secure on his throne in spite of the hammer-blows of Marlborough, but a century later the situation had already changed, as Napoleon recognized when he said of Frederick the Great, "He could lose a dozen battles, and still remain King of Prussia; I could not lose half so many, and retain the throne of France." There was no reason why the Third Republic should be an exception to what has become the universal rule.

Whatever may be the future of France it will closely concern Great Britain. As Kipling sang :—

**Where did you refrain from us or we refrain from you ?
Ask the wave that has not watched war between us two I**

The two countries can never be indifferent to one another, however much they may wish to be so, and for that reason it is to be hoped that British public opinion will not cherish any illusions about possibilities on the other side of the Channel. That France will sooner or later rise again may be taken for granted, but this renaissance may not become evident the moment that the weight of Germany is removed from her shoulders, and there is not the slightest reason to suppose that it will connote either the reappearance of the Parliamentary Republic or of the Anglo-French Entente in its old form. The future of French foreign policy will depend on the state of Europe after the war, and there is not much likelihood that France will merely wish to exchange the tutelage of Germany for that of Great Britain. Our motives may appear wholly admirable to ourselves, but if we are not again to find ourselves at the crisis of our fate without an ally in Europe, we must avoid the peddling of unwanted advice and the espousal of dubious causes. The France of to-morrow, whatever political shape she may assume, will assuredly not be prepared to be treated as a poor relation of Great Britain.

Furthermore, it is in the highest degree unlikely that the new France will select her leaders from among any set of *emigres*, however well-intentioned. The future ruler of the country may not be in the group of elderly politicians and generals who surround Marshal Petain, but he is more likely to be in France, occupied or unoccupied, than in exile in London. When the First Empire fell, the men who remade the country were not those who had gathered round Conde at

Coblentz, but those who had shared the lot of their fellow-countrymen at home, and there is no reason why history should not repeat itself. No doubt it is very flattering to British pride to think that when Germany is beaten France will with fitting humility entrust her destinies to those whom residence in London has made exceptionally familiar with the working of the British Constitution, but there is nothing in the past of France to warrant such an assumption.

It is manifestly useless to forecast the course of British foreign policy after the war, but one or two considerations have already arisen. The first is that the eclipse of France will render the task of British statesmen even more difficult than would otherwise have been the case. There will now be no sure ground anywhere on the mainland of Europe. It is no use thinking, as many people were doing only a few months ago, in terms of a peace settlement which should put everything back as it was before the Nazis came into power. Forces have been unloosed, especially in the East of Europe, which will require very careful watching indeed, and there must be no short-sighted view taken of the means to secure a peace which should endure for at least a generation. This war is completing the political and social revolution initiated by its predecessor, and the utmost care will have to be taken that necessary national and international adjustments do not result in a whole series of conflicts spread over the remaining years of the century. Some form of federation, local or universal, may be the ideal solution, but it is too

early yet to dogmatize, and those who believe in it would do well to remember the advice of Mr. Bertrand Russell, " It is only in marriage with the world that our ideas can bear fruit: divorced from it they remain barren." The actual facts of the situation will prove the answer to the question of whether federation is, or is not, possible.

However this may be, a great responsibility will rest upon the statesmen of Great Britain; a far greater responsibility than they had to shoulder at Utrecht, Vienna, or Versailles, for there will be few foreign colleagues to aid their deliberations. Voices will doubtless be raised at home in favour of leaving Europe to its fate, and of imposing upon it some political or social system which may for the moment find favour with the British electorate. Both counsels must be avoided like the plague, or there will be fresh trouble as soon as the Continent has recovered its strength. Britain cannot dissociate herself from the mainland of Europe, and equally she cannot dominate it by force, for the Dominions would not support such a project. This means that it will be of the utmost importance that the settlement must be made by those who know the countries whose fate they are deciding. The principle of the " closed shop " has done enough harm before and during the war: if it is to prevail at the peace conference the outlook will be black indeed.

Lastly, it is by no means impossible that the present conflict may prove to be the Peloponnesian War of Europe. If so, then Great Britain is happily placed, for she can look to the Empire overseas to assist in her

revival, and that with every justification. Not even the most sanguine Imperialist hoped that in time of stress the centripetal forces would prove so strong as they have shown themselves to be, and there is no reason why the feeling of Imperial solidarity which has been so prominent a feature of the war should not play its part in the peace. Never yet has the British Empire pulled its full weight on the diplomatic stage, and the opportunity for this to happen is at hand. Let us hope that there is among British statesmen, at home or overseas, one with sufficient vision to grasp it.

**It cannot be. The vision is too fair
For creatures doomed to breathe terrestrial air.
Yet not for that shall sober reason frown
Upon that promise, nor that hope disown.
We know that only to high aims are due
Rich guerdons, and to them alone ensue.**

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