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

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 O. Ullmann  
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LUNCHEON PARTY AT GENEVA IN 1927

In the centre of the front row is Dr. Stresemann, on his right M. Briand, on his left M. Vandervelde and Sir Austen Chamberlain. Behind Sir Austen are M. Paul Boncour on his right, Dr. Benes on his left.

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

BY  
SIR CHARLES PETRIE, BT.

*// half-tone illustrations*

*VOLUME II*



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## PREFACE

I HAVE to state my profound obligation to His Majesty the King for permission to include a letter from King George V. I wish also to thank Lady Chamberlain and the Prime Minister for their unfailing help at all times in the production of this volume as of its predecessor, and the Marquess of Zetland and Viscount Halifax for the co-operation of the India Office and the Foreign Office. I would also like to take this opportunity of acknowledging my debt to Sir Cecil Kisch at the India Office and Sir Stephen Gaselee at the Foreign Office.

To Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, the Marquess of Crewe, Lord Tyrrell, Lord Lloyd, Sir Walford Selby, and Mr. L. S. Amery I am deeply grateful for much help and advice, most generously given, upon many points, though of course they bear no responsibility for any views expressed in these pages. I desire also to express my gratitude to those who have so readily allowed me to reproduce letters of which either the copyright or the possession is theirs.

CHARLES PETRIE.

LILLINGTON

DORSET

*March, 1940*



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CHAPTER I  
THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

THE immediate effect of the outbreak of war, so far as Austen was concerned, was that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked him to join the latter in receiving a deputation of traders, bankers, and others to discuss the financial measures which it was necessary to take. These were, indeed, the first-fruits of the cessation of party strife. This task kept Austen busy for a day or two, and then, as Parliament had adjourned, he returned to Westgate to resume the holiday which had been so dramatically interrupted by Mr. Amery. There was nothing else for him to do. He was over fifty, and, as has been said, the time had not yet come when Ministers sought the co-operation of the Opposition in moments of crisis.

Meanwhile, there was a temporary revival of party strife over the fate of the Home Rule and Welsh Church Bills. It was round the former of these measures that the controversy raged most furiously. Mr. Asquith had given a promise that controversial politics would be avoided, and when it became known that he proposed to place the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book, though deferring its operation to a date to be fixed after the end of the war, his action was roundly denounced in Opposition circles as a definite breach of faith. Austen felt very strongly on this point, and even before Parliament adjourned he had written to Mr. Lloyd George :

House of Commons  
*Aug. 8, 1914*  
2.30 p.m.

MY DEAR CHANCELLOR,

I have of course been in free communication with B. L., and know what has passed and is passing between him and the P.M.

I think I ought to point out to you the disastrous effect on the City, on finance, and credit in all its branches which

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would inevitably follow any recrudescence of our domestic quarrels.

I do not dwell on this as it will be obvious to you that the first result of such an announcement as the P.M. appears to contemplate would be to destroy all our work of the last few days, and would render a great financial crash certain.

Yours truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

During the next few weeks Austen was in correspondence with Mr. Harcourt as to the Government's intentions, and Mr. Bonar Law also saw the Colonial Secretary. No progress, however, was made in the direction of a compromise which would satisfy both parties, and on August 31st there was a somewhat acrimonious debate on the subject in the House of Commons.

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

Sept. /, 1914

DEAR MR. CHANCELLOR,

... I very much regret that untoward circumstances prevented a fuller discussion of the Moratorium yesterday. I will say nothing about those circumstances except that the attitude of the majority towards Balfour and their utter failure to understand the feelings of the Unionists, and the sacrifices which they are making, would make me absolutely despair if I did not still believe that the Govt. had both a better perception of these things and a keener sense of honour than were shown by some of their followers.

But I cannot conceal from myself or from you that such debates put an almost intolerable strain upon our friends and upon us, and that I have no answer to the suspicions and remonstrances of friends *except that I do not believe that the Govt. will commit'an infamy.'*

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

To this Mr. Lloyd George replied :

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

Treasury Chambers, Whitehall, S.W.

*Sept. 2nd, 1914*

DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

Last Monday's debate was one of the most depressing incidents I have ever witnessed in the House of Commons. Ministers had just received disturbing news from the front, and the exhibition of temper on both sides was to us all the more painful for that reason.

To distribute the blame is a futile and pernicious exercise, and I should not now say a word to you on that side of the question had it not been for the fact that your letter casts the whole responsibility for that mischievous scene on our men. Had you been present you would hardly have taken the same view of Mr. Balfour's interposition. Whether he was right or wrong in entering a protest is a question upon which you and I would not agree, but I think we should take the same view as to the unfortunate way in which it was done. It was angry, petulant, shrewish. The Prime Minister had said nothing which would have justified the tone of Mr. Balfour's speech and Redmond's tone was unexceptionable. And apart from that Mr. Balfour's position and responsibilities in the great crisis are totally different to Mr. Redmond's. R. is the leader of a section which has until recently for historic reasons ostentatiously regarded the British Empire with an air of considerable detachment. He has never even posed as an Imperialist. Mr. Balfour as an ex-Premier has even now great Imperial responsibilities, and no speech from Redmond could have justified the rather truculent zeal with which Mr. Balfour advertised our differences to the enemy at a moment of supreme crisis in our fate.

These differences ought to be settled. It is our patriotic duty to find a settlement, and I wish I were convinced Mr. Balfour was doing his best to achieve that end. You have written quite frankly and it is better I should reply with the same frankness.

On the point of honour you will I am sure not forget that the Prime Minister is under an obligation of honour to the majority of the Irish people to do his best to place Home Rule on the Statute Book. It is well you should appreciate the Liberal point of view, otherwise you cannot judge it

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fairly. Liberals say and say truly that had the Unionists submitted to a Parliament in which they had a majority a measure just as obnoxious to Liberals as Home Rule is to your people it would nevertheless have gone through and been on the Statute Book in a single session. It has already taken us three, and now because a war intervenes it is supposed to be dishonourable to proceed any further.

It is essential the nation should be united, but that unity is unobtainable if half the nation are to be told that they are not to receive the same treatment at the hands of the Legislature as is accorded to the other half.

... I shall be sorry if differences as to Home Rule should prevent co-operation between both parties in resisting the common enemy. If we go out of office then I promise you that as I think this war a righteous war I shall give all the support in my power to a Unionist Govt, in bringing it to a triumphant conclusion.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

The next day Austen wrote again :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.  
*Sept. 3, 1914*

MY DEAR MR. CHANCELLOR,

Your letter only reached my hands ten minutes before I saw you yesterday afternoon. Our conversation in the Board Room, hurried though it was, perhaps makes any further answer unnecessary.

I should like to say quite definitely that I never intended to suggest that whilst the war lasts I shall withhold from the Government any support which I can give and which they may ask from me for the prosecution of the war. Nor shall I in other matters do anything to embarrass the Government of my country at such a crisis.

But I do press upon you most strongly that the very fact that we are now debarred by consideration for the national safety from taking any of those measures of agitation, or more, on which we had resolved and for which we

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

were prepared before the war, lays a corresponding obligation upon the Government.

If it would be unpatriotic in us to have recourse at such a time to means which in other circumstances we should not have hesitated to employ, it would surely be equally unpatriotic in the Government to take advantage of our restraint to carry in a controversial form the measures which were in dispute between us. I agree that a compromise is called for, but compromise cannot mean that we are to make all the sacrifices.

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Less than a week later, on the 9th, Austen was asked by Mr. Bonar Law to attend a meeting of the Opposition leaders at Lansdowne House to consider a memorandum which had been received from the Prime Minister. In this Mr. Asquith made two suggestions for dealing with the disputed Bill:

- (1) The Irish Bill to be put on the Statute Book.
- (2) Its operation to be suspended by a provision that it was deemed to be passed on a date one year later than the day of the Royal Assent or the end of the war, whichever was the later.
- (3) The Government to undertake in the next session to introduce an Amending Bill, and to prosecute this until disposed of either by acceptance or rejection.

The alternative plan was :

- (1) The Bill to go on the Statute Book, but not to come into operation for, say, six months.
- (2) Six Ulster counties to be provisionally excluded for three years.
- (3) At the end of three years the Imperial Parliament to determine the whole question of exclusion, and the six-counties not to be included until this had been done.
- (4) Sir Edward Carson, Mr. Redmond, and their friends to accept the decision \* until another new Parliament.'

The Prime Minister added that the first course was the one which commended itself to the Government, and that it was very doubtful whether the second would be acceptable to his followers.

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Austen and his colleagues were not long in coming to a decision. They unanimously agreed that the right course was to suspend the Bill *in statu quo* until the end of the war when the Government could resume its consideration with all the advantages of the position which they had already attained and of the Parliament Act. If, however, the Prime Minister was unwilling to adopt this procedure, they declared that the first of his suggestions was wholly inadmissible, but that they would accept the second in view of the critical position in which the country stood. Mr. Bonar Law accordingly wrote to Mr. Asquith in this sense, and on the 11th he received a brief reply to the effect that, as the Prime Minister had anticipated, the second course was not acceptable either to his colleagues or to the leading members of his party, and that in these circumstances the Government would on the 14th proceed with the first of their suggestions. This course was accordingly adopted and it called forth a very bitter speech from Mr. Bonar Law, who then led the Opposition out of the House.

Meanwhile, in consequence of the Government's decision a difference of opinion had risen between Austen and Mr. Churchill which for a time put a severe strain upon that personal friendship between them which had always existed in spite of political disagreement. It had been arranged that Austen and the First Lord of the Admiralty should speak from the same platform at a recruiting meeting in Birmingham on September 14th, but Austen, after talking the matter over with Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne, felt it was impossible for him to fulfil the engagement. He told Mr. Churchill this, but the other asked him to postpone any action until the Prime Minister had been consulted. A few hours later the First Lord wrote the following letter :

Admiralty, Whitehall  
*Sept. 11 th, 1914*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I regret more than I can say the view you take of the arrangement proposed. I should hope that on reflection you will see that the practical differences between what you ask and what we propose are utterly disproportionate

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

to the advantages of a friendly Ireland, and the disadvantages of a hostile Ireland, at such a time. It will of course be made clear that in no circumstances shall we ever be parties to coercion into Home Rule of Orange Ulster.

I cannot myself see the relevance of this controversy, however it be settled, to the object of our meeting on Monday. But in view of your wishes I am glad to escape from the labour of another speech, and shall be greatly indebted to you if you will take the necessary steps to have it all put off.

Yours sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

Austen refused to be mollified :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

*Sept. 12, 1914*

DEAR WINSTON,

I have received your letter with infinite regret. To the last I cherished the hope that after seeing the Prime Minister you might have a different message to give to me.

What the future now has in store for us I do not know. I shall of course do nothing to embarrass the national defence, and my services are at the disposal of H. M. Government, as they have been since the war began, for as long as the war lasts. But it is impossible that I should appear upon a public platform with a member of the Government at the very moment which the Prime Minister chooses, in defiance of all that he has said, to break the political truce and reopen political controversy in the House of Commons, trading on the patriotism of his opponents, to carry a most controversial Bill in its most controversial form.

Your knowledge that in this crisis we can have recourse to none of the means for resisting and defeating your action which but for the war were open to us should have shown you what passionate resentment this action must stir in our hearts. Amidst all the suspicions which have been engendered by the Government's delay in announcing a decision, I have confidently affirmed that this at least was a course which as men of honour you could not and

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would not adopt. I have, it appears, been mistaken, and I am almost as much grieved on personal as on public grounds.

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—I have telegraphed to the Lord Mayor of Birmingham as follows :—' Mr. Churchill and I much regret that we are unavoidably prevented from leaving London on Monday. Meeting must be indefinitely postponed. Austen Chamberlain.' I hope that this form of announcement meets your wishes.

To this Mr. Churchill replied :

Admiralty, Whitehall  
*Sept. 12, 1914*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

The Irish policy to which you and your friends would condemn us means the alienation of Irish Nationalism all over the world, combined with serious disaffection in Liberal and Labour ranks. This would amount to a grave weakening in the forces that can now be gathered together for the prosecution of the war. It is not on party grounds that I say 'we cannot afford it.' No question of Parliamentary support is involved ; but we must not squander forces which are vitally necessary to the success of our arms and to the national safety.

There is in my opinion no practical difference between the course we propose and the one you ask for, except this : that your course involves a quarrel with the Irish nation, and ours does not. Both policies begin by putting the Home Rule Bill on the Statute Book. Thereafter, you propose that the 6 counties shall be excluded for the time being, and that their final settlement shall stand over for 3 years, i.e. till after a General Election. We propose that there shall be a moratorium for 12 months or till the war is over, whichever is the longer period, before the Bill becomes operative ; and even then a further period of at

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

least six months must intervene—i.e. a General Election must ensue—before any effective step is taken. We couple this with a declaration of our intention to proceed with the Amending Bill so that it can come into law in time to overtake the Home Rule Bill ; and further with a declaration that after what has happened, whatever the fate of the Amending Bill, we shall in no circumstances use force against the Ulstermen. We believe that in the interval events will occur which will cause the petty differences of boundaries now outstanding to fade into insignificance.

Greatly as I should deplore the renewal of party controversy, I am sure that the nation and the Empire will regard you as wanting in judgment and in sense of proportion if on the difference between our policy and yours you either weaken the unity which prevails in Great Britain or seek to force us into a quarrel with the Irish nation.

The Government had a right to claim the absolute support of the Opposition in the measures necessary to carry on the war, and Conservatives throughout the country would not have tolerated any other attitude. Recognizing as we do the advantages which have flowed from that support, and the high motives which evoke it, I am bound to point out in view of your letter that we command, for the purposes of the war and for all measures connected with it, an intact and independent majority of our own of about 100.

In these circumstances I cannot feel that the support which you and your friends were bound in honour to give to the prosecution of the war ought to be made a lever to force us into a breach of faith with our own supporters, or into a fatally unwise policy towards the Irish nation.

I cannot take any responsibility for the postponement of the meeting to stimulate recruiting in Birmingham, though I shall certainly conform to your wishes in regard to it. I have therefore telegraphed to the Lord Mayor expressing my regret that as you are unable to be present I must ask to be excused.

It will be for you to justify a public action which cannot but be detrimental to our military strength.

Yours very sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

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This was indeed plain speaking, and Austen did not hesitate to reply in the same vein :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.  
*Sept. 13, 1914*

DEAR WINSTON,

I regret that the form of my telegram to the Lord Mayor does not meet with your concurrence. You will remember that when T saw you on Friday afternoon I told you that this was the only formula which I could devise to avoid anticipating the statement which the Prime Minister is to make to-morrow. You took no objection to its terms then, only asking me to delay sending it till after you had spoken to the Prime Minister. For the rest I accept full responsibility for my action. I have no doubt that it is my duty to be in the House of Commons to-morrow afternoon.

The rest of your letter calls for one or two observations and a correction.

You speak of a certain proposal as the course we (i.e. the Opposition) ' Ask for ' and elsewhere as what we ' propose.' You are mistaken. Our proposal was that all controversial legislation should be postponed till the war was ended, and that you should then resume its consideration at the stage it had reached when war broke out, the full benefit of the Parliament Act being assured to you by special legislation which we would help to pass. This you refused, though it is the only means of carrying out the Prime Minister's expressed intention that all parties should retain their position unimpaired by the support which they feel bound to give to the Government during the war.

The proposal which you describe as ours is in fact one of two suggestions made to us by the Prime Minister. The first we declared to be wholly inadmissible. To the second we reluctantly agreed to submit in view of the urgent need for complete unity in the prosecution of the war. No sooner were our views made known to you than the Prime Minister's colleagues rejected the suggestion to which he had obtained our consent, and insisted on the one to which we had expressed our decided objection.

This is the more remarkable as you say that in your

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

opinion there is 'no practical difference' between them. Why then insist upon the one which you knew was not acceptable to us? It would almost seem as if in the view of the Cabinet that was its chief merit.

I note that you now say that in no circumstances will force be used against the Ulstermen. I am glad to hear it for the Prime Minister forgot to mention this important condition in his communication to Bonar Law.

One further observation and I have done. You are right in saying that the Government had a right to the absolute support of the Opposition in the measures necessary to carry on the war, and that our party in the country would not have tolerated any other attitude. Your calculation is a sound one. Whatever happens, we shall do all we can to support the national defence and nothing to embarrass the Government in the conduct of the war. You must wish that the party with which you now act could show an equally good record for the last great war in which our country was engaged.

Yrs. very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Mr. Churchill answered :

Private.

Admiralty, Whitehall

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I beseech you to realize what an act of recklessness and unwisdom it would be for us—either party—to start a quarrel with Irish Nationalism here, in the colonies, and above all in America at this time of crisis. Really we ought not to be forced to choose between a scandalous row here, and open Irish disloyalty. Why should the state be imperilled by either catastrophe? Our plan prevents anything being done—except the sentimental satisfaction of having an inoperative bill on the Statute Book—till the war and the election are both over. And even these—how nearly the differences were adjusted—one poor Irish county—at the end of all the delays—that is all that will be left to fight about.

## THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

And why should we want to fight at all? No one can tell how parties will emerge from this war. And once the old party flags of the Victorian era have been hung up new principles of action must prevail.

I am sure if you think about it all you will see that the concession to the Irish of the sentimental point, while reserving every safeguard for the subsequent treatment of outstanding differences—is a prudent and necessary measure which all parties should take in common. It will rally to the Empire forces which otherwise are utterly estranged. It will remove from party warfare the principal obstacle to real unity of political action.

Never can the Ulstermen who have put aside their weapons to aid the Belgians, and have gone to the front to serve their country, be the subject of coercion to put them under Home Rule. Never can Englishmen look upon Irishmen as traitors and rebels if in this struggle they bear a loyal part, and shed their blood willingly and generously with our own men.

It will be a new world. Don't bar it out.

I am quite content about the way the meeting has been put off.

Yours very sincerely,

WINSTON S. GHLRCHILL.

P.S.—My last letter was agreed to by the Prime Minister before I sent it to you.

The two men were, however, at least as far apart as when the correspondence began :

Private.

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

*14 Sep. 1914.*

DEAR WINSTON,

Your private letter reached me yesterday afternoon. As your last letters were not marked private, and appeared to be written with a view to publication, I had supposed that you meant to send them to the Press. I have not done so, and it is not my intention to do so unless I am obliged by events.

## THE WAR AND THE INDIA OFFICE

I utterly dissent from your reading of the general situation. I believe, and I have the best American authority for thinking, that if you had done the obvious thing and announced at the beginning of the war that all domestic controversy must cease till the war was over, you would have had the unanimous approval of America, and even the Irish themselves would have recognized the justice and the wisdom of your action.

As it is you deliberately sacrifice the Ulstermen, who have shown an unconditional and splendid loyalty, in order to pay blackmail to the National Volunteers, who have held aloof and forbidden their members to give you any assistance, and to their American paymasters who I see no more reason to trust now than at any time during the last twenty years. Neither I nor my colleagues want ' a scandalous row ' or any row here, and we are doing our utmost to prevent it. Nor do I wish to add to the bitterness of controversy, but you have utterly failed to understand the effect produced by your action on opponents, who, since the crisis began, have spared no effort, individually or collectively, to support the Government of their country, who have buried all ancient feuds, personal and political, and have unreservedly placed themselves, their Party, its organization, at your service.

The fact is that, as you said to me on Friday, you ' do not care a damn about Home Rule/ and you are utterly incapable of appreciating the feelings of those to whom opposition to Home Rule is a deep-rooted and sincere conviction. You have destroyed our belief in the honour of public men and have shattered the hopes that some of us entertained that union in the present crisis might produce a better feeling and a greater agreement than would have seemed possible a few weeks ago. I see no gleam of light in the course that you have chosen. I would have staked my own honour that you would never do this thing, and I am heartbroken to find that I am mistaken.

Yours very truly,

AUSTEN CHAMBER LAIN.

The two men were clearly too far apart for any agreement to be possible :

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

Private.

Admiralty, Whitehall

14.9.14

DEAR AUSTEN,

Compared to winning the war I do not care about Home Rule : but that does not mean that apart from this comparison I do not care about it or think it a wise and hopeful policy. Crudely quoted as in your letter I cannot recognize the sentiment.

Don't bother to answer. With deep regret I must realize that we cannot understand each other's point of view ; and it remains for us to confront you with successful results at home as well as abroad.

I have no wish to publish the letters which were not marked *private*. But in such a matter I shall await an expression of your wishes.

Yours sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

With this letter the correspondence ceased, but many months were to elapse before the two men resumed their old friendly relationship.

Two days later, on September 16th, Austen attended a meeting of the Opposition leaders at Lansdowne House to discuss the attitude of the House of Lords with regard to the Home Rule Bill. The occasion of the meeting was an interchange of letters between Lord Robert Cecil and the Speaker at the conclusion of which the former had telegraphed to the Speaker 'Can you inform us whether, if the Bill is not returned by the House of Lords, you would place your certificate on a copy.' To this the reply had come, 'Parliament Act says the certificate is to be on the Bill. I doubt if a certificate on a copy would be valid.' From this and other evidence it seemed clear that the Speaker would only certify on the official copy of the Bill, and the question then arose whether the Opposition should or should not take advantage of this technicality. The official copy was in possession of the Clerk of the Parliaments, and he had told Lord Lansdowne that if the Speaker demanded he should feel it his duty to give it up in the absence of any instructions from the House of Lords to the contrary. The

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meeting at Lansdowne House was to consider the advisability of issuing any such instructions.

Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Lansdowne, and Mr. Balfour all expressed themselves as strongly opposed to this action. They took the line that if it were adopted the Opposition would be fighting on bad and very technical ground, which the ordinary citizen would not understand, and that the whole Unionist position would in consequence be weakened. Lord Curzon and Mr. George Gave were of the same opinion, and at first Lord Robert Cecil agreed with them, but he changed his mind in the course of the discussion. Austen, on the other hand, had from the beginning no doubt as to the right attitude to adopt. He said that the Government had behaved so badly that the Opposition was justified in using—and ought to use—every weapon placed in its hands. The machinery provided by the Government had broken down, and Unionists were entitled to take advantage of the fact. Mr. Asquith and his colleagues had behaved like Shylock, for they had insisted on their pound of flesh without regard to equity or good faith. 'I should reply to them, "Take your pound of flesh but not a drop of blood." They would either have to accept this position and compromise with us after all, or they would have to try fresh legislation to fill the gap. That legislation could not be successful, for the House of Lords would reject it, and in any case if they sought an escape by such means they would again have to take offensive action, and would put themselves in the wrong.' Such were Austen's views, and Sir Edward Carson, Lord Selborne, and Mr. Long were of the same way of thinking. The meeting, indeed, seemed evenly divided, but after some further discussion the advocates of resistance gave way in face of the opposition of Lords Curzon and Lansdowne, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Bonar Law. There was, however, a section who were opposed to extreme action, but desired to assert the existence of the right to take it, but Sir Edward Carson and Austen held very strongly that unless the question was to be fought out to the end, the less said about the flaw the better.

So ended the controversy about the Third Home Rule Bill, which thus reached the Statute Book only to remain inoperative. So fierce had been the battle that not even

the coming of the war had exercised a moderating influence upon the combatants. Nothing, perhaps, shows more clearly the slowness with which it was realized how much was at stake in the conflict with Germany than the correspondence which passed between Austen and Mr. Winston Churchill during that September.

From this moment the political scene changed fundamentally. The most active Opposition in recent Parliamentary history found itself with nothing to do but approve of the measures of the Government. It was an impossible situation, for it rendered, in fact if not in theory, Mr. Bonar Law and his followers responsible for measures on which they had not even been consulted. In these circumstances it is not surprising that dissatisfaction on the Opposition benches began to make itself felt, more particularly when it became evident that the conduct of the war was leaving a good deal to be desired. Austen gradually came to share these sentiments without, it is needless to add, any weakening of his belief that the struggle must be fought to a finish, but from the very beginning a subdued note of criticism is to be detected in his utterances. For instance he said at Southend in September :

If there was any reproach against our Government it was not that they hurried into war, but that they sought peace, even after peace was impossible, and that they were slow to recognize the determination of Germany, which left our good friends the French uncertain as to our action.<sup>1</sup>

It is not without interest, in the light of what was to come to see how at that time Austen envisaged the peace which he never doubted would crown the victory of the Allies :

It would remove from Europe the great war cloud that had hung over it for the past twenty years, and would assure to small peoples that right was might, not that might

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, September 25th, 1914.

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was right. It would save our country from desolation, it would give Belgium back its freedom, it would give Serbia, another small but gallant nation, its freedom and independence and compensation, he hoped, for the losses it had suffered. It would restore, he hoped, to France the lost provinces of which she was robbed in 1870, it would make the Poles a nation once again under the protection of Russia, free from Prussian influence, and therefore more liberal than we had ever known it, it would raise an impassable barrier to Prussian statesmen and Prussian Junkers, and destroy the doctrine that might makes right, and that what was good for Germany was law throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks later Mr. Bonar Law made a speech which disturbed Austen's friends considerably more than it did Austen himself. In the course of some remarks, which *The Times* entitled 'A Page of Secret History' and 'Mr. Bonar Law's Disclosure,' the Leader of the Opposition gave an account of the pressure which had been exercised on the Government to align itself with France in the early days of the previous August, but he made no mention of the part that had been played by Austen. Those who knew the truth were disgusted at what seemed to them to be a deliberate attempt to appropriate credit which rightly belonged elsewhere, but Austen flatly refused to make any public allusion to the misrepresentation. On this, his father's old friend, Mr. Jesse Collings wrote to him: 'You share your father's willingness to be effaced provided that the end in view is obtained. Self-effacement, however, may be carried too far, especially when it is used by others to feed their own ambition.'

Austen found time hanging rather heavily on his hands during these months. He made a number of recruiting speeches, and he readily accepted any work that came his way, not the least congenial of which was the chairmanship of the committee of the Imperial Bureau of Entomology, where he succeeded Lord Cromer. From time to time, too, he made suggestions to Ministers, as when in the very early days of the war he advocated the raising of the Royal

<sup>1</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 1st, 1914.

Montcalm Regiment in Quebec in order to stimulate the enthusiasm of the French Canadians. Meanwhile, in common with the great majority of his fellow-countrymen, he was becoming gravely perturbed at the progress of events. Autumn passed into winter, and winter seemed likely to pass into spring without bringing victory any nearer : the war was clearly something very different from any that England had known for a century. Its scope was continually being extended, and doubts began to arise whether those in authority were really competent to direct the great national effort. Was, for example, the slogan 'business as usual' wholly applicable in the circumstances? As, too, officers and men came home on leave there circulated rumours of apparent gross incompetence in high places. The silence maintained by the Government increased, rather than diminished, these apprehensions, and with the coming of 1915 the voice of criticism first began to make itself heard, for on January 27th the Unionist Business Committee was formed with Mr. Walter Long as Chairman, and Sir William Bull as Parliamentary Secretary. Before, however, this took place a letter from Austen appeared in *The Times* :

SIR,

Lord Crewe is reported in your columns this morning to have begun his reply to Lord Curzon's questions by observing that 'I may remind the noble earl that in some branches of our work we have been assisted by his friends, including Lord St. Aldwyn and Mr. Chamberlain. Therefore we cannot in any complete sense be said to have left the Opposition altogether without information.'

Lord Crewe is under a misapprehension. I have no information not shared by 'the man in the street' on any of the subjects on which Lord Curzon questioned him. I have not at any time received from Lord Crewe or from any member of the Government any information as to the conduct of the war or the policy of the Government in regard to it ; and I share to the full Lord Curzon's desire for more information as to the policy of the Government in regard to recruiting.

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The Government have from time to time asked my advice on certain financial questions arising out of the state of war. What help I could give them in this respect has been readily placed at their service, and they have equally readily put at my disposal the financial information which was necessary for the formation of any opinion.

Outside this limited sphere I have received no information from them except such as has been made public in the Press, and Lord Crewe is not entitled to suggest that I am in the confidence of his Majesty's Ministers or that I possess the answer to any of Lord Gurzon's questions.

It has been the duty of the Opposition to give to his Majesty's Government all the assistance they can in the prosecution of this war. It is discouraging to find a Minister using this fact as an excuse for a silence which has no justification either in the attitude and spirit of our people or in the very limited confidence which the Government have extended to us.

I am, etc.

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

9 Egerton Place, S.W., *Jan. 7.*<sup>1</sup>

In March there took place the long-awaited offensive at Neuve Ghapelle, but after an initial success the British advance came to a standstill. This failure caused widespread disappointment both at home and at the front, and criticism of the Government began to increase in volume. Austen pleaded for less secrecy :

... If we are ready to show such confidence in them (i.e. the Ministers), they owe some confidence to us ; if we are ready to submit to restrictions on our customary and traditional freedom, such as a few short months ago would have been unthought of by any British audience, then at least, where military necessity does not impose secrecy, they should take us into their confidence. I cannot speak to my countrymen at this time without appealing

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, January 8th, 1915.

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through them to the Government for a little more light on what is passing.

. . . News may be good or bad, but no Government understands our people which thinks that they will do good work by keeping back bad news. We have gone through bad times before, and the worse the times were the higher the spirit of the people rose. The greater the necessity you show them for the exercise of patience the greater the exertion they will make. . . . Any Government which tries to ride this country<sup>1</sup> in blinkers will never get the best out of its mount.

It was at this time, too, that the shortage of shells became generally known, and this contributed to the growing dissatisfaction. At the beginning of May the Opposition determined to take action.

On the 14th of that month Austen attended a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet at Lansdowne House which had been called to consider a suggestion of Lord Robert Cecil that the Opposition should move for a committee on the state of the nation, with closed doors, in order that there might be a free and frank discussion on the conduct of the war by the Government. There were several objections to this course, and Lord Robert did not press it at the meeting, but it served as the basis of a discussion in which he was supported by Lords Selborne and Curzon in urging that some attempt should be made to spur on the Government to greater exertions ; in particular they represented to their colleagues the necessity of personally pressing Ministers to take all the preliminary measures which would be required if it became essential to have resort to compulsion in the industrial or military field. After a good deal of discussion the Shadow Cabinet agreed that Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law should write to the Prime Minister expressing the opinion that this step should be taken, and promising the support of the Opposition if and when compulsion became necessary.

This was on Friday : on the following Monday morning,

<sup>1</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 17th, 1915.

May 17th, Austen was summoned by telephone to Lansdowne House to meet Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law. Events had been moving rapidly over the week-end, and the differences between Lord Fisher and Mr. Churchill over the Dardanelles and the former's Baltic scheme had come to a head. When Austen met his Leader the latter confronted him with the news that the First Sea Lord had resigned.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bonar Law had had this confirmed by Mr. Lloyd George in person, and he had informed the Chancellor of the Exchequer that it would be impossible for him, with this knowledge in his possession, to allow the House of Commons to be adjourned for the Whitsuntide recess without a statement on the subject ; he added that if such a statement was made he saw no possibility of preventing a severe attack on the Government. Mr. Lloyd George at once expressed his entire agreement, and said it was quite impossible for the existing situation to continue. In particular he inveighed against Lord Kitchener, who had ' put lies into his mouth ' as to the supply of munitions.

On this Mr. Bonar Law drafted a letter to the Prime Minister in which he stated that in view of Lord Fisher's resignation things could not go on as they were, and that in his opinion the time had come to form a Coalition ; nevertheless, in view of the delicate situation in Italy, which Power was about to join the Allies, he was ready to postpone public discussion if Mr. Asquith would give an assurance that he was considering the whole position, and that in the meantime no action would be taken on the resignation of the First Sea Lord : failing such an assurance the Leader of the Opposition said he would raise the matter in the House that very afternoon. It was to consider this draft that Austen had been so hurriedly summoned to Lansdowne House.

He at once expressed disapproval of the direct statement that a Coalition was necessary, and took the line that it would be sufficient to indicate that the Opposition required a reconstruction of the Government ; in this Austen was supported by Lord Lansdowne. After some further discussion, therefore, the following letter was approved :

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, vol. I, pp. 107 *et seq.*

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Lansdowne House  
17th May, 1915

DEAR MR. ASQUITH,

Lord Lansdowne and I have learnt with dismay that Lord Fisher has resigned, and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow the House to adjourn until this fact has been made known and discussed.

We think that the time has come when we ought to have a clear statement from you as to the policy which the Government intend to pursue. In our opinion things cannot go on as they are, and some change in the constitution of the Government seems to us inevitable if it is to retain a sufficient measure of public confidence to conduct the war to a successful conclusion.

The situation in Italy makes it particularly undesirable to have anything in the nature of a controversial discussion in the House of Commons at present, and if you are prepared to take the necessary steps to secure the object which I have indicated, and if Lord Fisher's resignation is in the meantime postponed, we shall be ready to keep silence now. Otherwise I must to-day ask you whether Lord Fisher has resigned and press for a day to discuss the situation arising out of his resignation.

Yours, etc.,

A. BONAR LAW.

However, before this letter reached the Prime Minister he had telephoned to Mr. Bonar Law asking him to come to 10 Downing Street to meet himself and Mr. Lloyd George, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer had told him of his conversation with the Unionist leader. Mr. Asquith at once stated that he had arrived at the same conclusion, and that he had been intending to inform his colleagues at the end of the week. He then produced a scheme for the distribution of offices, which was not complete, but which showed that he had been seriously thinking of the matter, and had made some progress. Both he and Mr. Lloyd George told Mr. Bonar Law that it was absolutely necessary to get rid of Lord Kitchener: he was no administrator, and it was impossible to work with him. The Prime

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Minister further declared that Lord Kitchener deceived him, and he specifically stated that a recent speech of his at Newcastle, in which he had denied that there was a shortage of munitions, had been written out, and approved by the other, before it was delivered. Mr. Asquith suggested that in the new administration Mr. Lloyd George should go to the War Office, Mr. Bonar Law to the Exchequer, Mr. Balfour to the Admiralty, and that Lord Lansdowne should become Lord President of the Council. As for Austen, he asked Mr. Bonar Law to find out whether he would be content with the Colonial Office, as he was particularly desirous of not offering him anything uncongenial. For the rest, the Prime Minister showed himself as anxious to include Sir Edward Carson as to exclude Lord Curzon.

Later that same day Mr. Bonar Law repeated this conversation to Austen at the House of Commons, and added that it would be rather hard on the latter if he himself became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Austen at once replied that he was far from taking such a view, and that his pretensions would indeed be exaggerated if he was not content with the Colonial Office, which was so closely and so honourably associated with his family : in any case he was only too ready to serve, with or without office, in any capacity in which he could be useful.

In a letter written after his return home Austen put his own position before Mr. Bonar Law :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

May 77, 1915

MY DEAR BONAR,

Since we parted this evening I have been thinking my best about the problems raised.

There are no two ways about it ! If our help is asked by the Govt, we *must* give it. God knows each one of us would willingly avoid the fearful responsibility ; but the responsibility of refusing is even greater than that of accepting, and in fact we have no choice. If Govt, tapped any one of us on the shoulder and said : Go to the trenches, we should go. If they asked us to dig trenches here or work as labourers in the factory we should do it. We cannot

shirk this job because we don't like it or because we think the risks to ourselves too great. You and I have been absolutely agreed about our attitude all through, and, as I told you, I am wholly with you now.

Now a word or two about details. I presume that to-morrow you will give no hint at our Shadow Cabinet as to who is to be in and who out beyond saying that Asquith has offered you a fair share of places and has proposed that you should be Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lansdowne Pr. of the Council and A. J. B. Ist Lord.

I attach great importance to your being Ch. of the Ex. That office gives its holder great authority and power. There is none other except the Prime Ministership which gives such influence, or such a starting point for influence, over the whole field of policy. It is the second in the Govt, when in the right hands. I beg you to take it. Don't for one moment think that it is, as you said, 'hard on' me. I have no ambition for it, and I think that there are special reasons why, *in a Coalition Govt.*, I should *not* take it. Perforce as LI. G.'s 'opposite number' I have been the most constant and detailed critic of his financial methods. But in such a Coalition, you must largely accept *the fait accompli* and I am therefore the worst man to succeed him at such a moment and in such conditions—worst, I mean, not merely because personally the most open to criticism, but also the Govt, in my person to criticism.

If I have had an ambition, it has been (ever since I was Civil Lord in '95-1900, except for a moment, I confess, when I thought the leadership was falling to me) to be Ist Lord of the Admiralty. That is out of my reach, and I only mention it to show you that there is nothing 'hard on' me in being sent elsewhere than the Treasury. If you take office I will go anywhere where I can be useful.

Secondly, I agree with Carson that I would sooner have Selborne in than Curzon—ininitely sooner. Curzon is *mauvais coucheur* as Asquith said; and I mistrust, as I know you mistrust, his judgment—and not without good cause. Besides, as Carson said, Selborne is absolutely straight and single-minded.

I do not think that Curzon has much influence anywhere, but I agree that he might be dangerous outside *if*

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*Long* also were discontented. I therefore urge you to tell Asquith that he must content *Long*. It will not be an easy thing to do but an attempt must be made, and I do not think that the Bd. of Agriculture will suffice—especially if poor me is put in a Secretaryship of State ! *Long* would really make an excellent Home Secretary. Is that impossible ?

I wish Carson would come in. I think it is his duty to do so, and I believe his people would regard his presence in the Govt, as a guarantee rather than a desertion.

I have often said to you that I thought Henderson ought to be brought in also. Did you say anything of this to Asquith ? There is room for at least one extra office—not suitable for him, but possibly helping to provide for so many claims—I mean President of the War Trade Department (at present held by Emmott who is also Ist Commissioner).

It is late. Forgive such a hasty and illegible scrawl, written against time and still too late for post. I will send it by hand early in the morning.

Yrs. ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Nevertheless, the Coalition administration was not to be formed without some difficulty.

When, during the course of the afternoon, Lord Robert Cecil and Sir Edward Carson were approached they displayed such hostility to the idea that Mr. Bonar Law began to doubt whether he could carry the Party with him. He accordingly suggested a Party meeting, but to this Austen was strongly opposed ; he urged that such a meeting should be summoned after the Leader had taken his decision, when he could present it as an accomplished fact and give his reasons. Austen then set out to persuade Sir Edward Carson of the advisability of the course which he himself believed to be right. He argued that in normal times the functions of an Opposition were twofold, that is to say, to be a vigilant critic of Ministers and to provide an alternative administration when necessity arose. It was no longer possible to discharge either function. On the one hand, criticism, if

it was to be really searching and effective, would immediately bring the Party truce to an end, and divide the country into two hostile camps : on the other, it would be impossible to take office in a Parliament in which the Unionists formed so small a minority,<sup>1</sup> while it was equally out of the question to have a General Election. Sir Edward Carson admitted the force of this argument, which he did not attempt to answer. He confessed he could only repeat that his instincts were against a Coalition.

Mr. Bonar Law then urged that a change was inevitable now that Lord Fisher's resignation had brought matters to a head. The Government was too weak to withstand the shock, and had not the men necessary for reconstruction from within. Austen and his Leader also pointed out that if the Prime Minister requested the assistance of the Opposition it would be in the last degree unpatriotic to refuse at such a time, quite apart from the fact that a refusal would be utterly condemned by public opinion. Sir Edward Carson said he would like to think the matter over, and after further discussion with Mr. Bonar Law during the evening he and Lord Robert Cecil agreed that there was no real choice. On this the Leader of the Opposition went to the Prime Minister and obtained his permission to consult the Shadow Cabinet. It was also agreed between them that there should be no public reference to Mr. Bonar Law's letter of that morning, but that the starting-point of the negotiations was to be taken as the invitation of Mr. Asquith to the Leader of the Opposition to co-operate in the formation of a National Government.

The meeting of the Shadow Cabinet was held on the following day, May 18th, and the Leader's decision was unanimously approved. At the same time there was a strong feeling that Mr. Asquith should not remain Prime Minister, but Mr. Bonar Law announced that he had already spoken to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the subject, and had suggested three alternatives, namely Mr. Balfour, Sir Edward Grey, and Mr. Lloyd George himself. The Chancellor had replied that the Liberal Party would not tolerate a Conservative Prime Minister ; that the Foreign

<sup>1</sup> So early as August 7th, 1914, no less than 63 Opposition M.Ps. had been called away on military service as compared with 20 Liberals.

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Secretary's eyesight made him impossible apart from the fact that he had even less push and drive than Mr. Asquith ; and that he could not himself think of accepting the position as it would expose him to too much jealousy and criticism. As for Lord Kitchener, the question of his removal from the War Office had been again discussed between Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Asquith, and Mr. Lloyd George, and they had all reluctantly agreed that he could not be displaced, for the advantage of securing better administration of the War Office would be more than counterbalanced by the effect at home, in the Dominions, and among the Allied and neutral nations in view of the enormous prestige that attached to his name.

After the decision to join in a Coalition had been taken there was a considerable amount of intrigue as to appointments, and the Opposition as a whole was resolute against the continuance of Mr. Churchill at the Admiralty, but Austen took no part in this, beyond urging—unsuccessfully—the inclusion of Lord Milner :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.  
*May 21, 1915*

MY DEAR BONAR,

... I entirely agree with Carson's remark to-day that in such a crisis there are no claims—party or personal—and that the only question must be who can best serve the Country and where. If a man is needed he must come. If he is not needed he must serve in other ways.

Now, judged simply by the test of personal capacity—brains, character, earnestness, courage, organizing power—I set Milner absolutely in the first rank and I believe that all one part of the country holds him in like estimation, and that few appointments would bring more confidence and strength than his.

I feel this so strongly that I urge you again and much more forcibly than I have yet done to put his name forward, and I will make any personal sacrifice—if the phrase were not a mockery in such circumstances—to secure his inclusion.

In particular I offer to you and Asquith that, if it will facilitate Milner's inclusion—I will gladly serve as Under-

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Secretary to him in any office to which he is appointed, or as Under-Secretary to Balfour at the Admty., or I will do what would be much more distasteful to me—I will take an office like ist Gomr. of Works or Chancellor of the Duchy.

I write this very seriously and after full reflection. I don't suggest my standing out altogether, for I feel that would be shirking and that in any case you would not allow it, but if I took an under-secretaryship or a place like the ist Comr. the example might help you and the Prime Minister with others. You know that you can count on my loyalty in any office I accept.

I cannot cross your negotiations by writing direct to the Prime Minister, but I hope you will make this offer to him on my behalf, and will press for Milner's inclusion.

Yrs. ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—I know that the more extreme section of the Liberal Party dislike Milner, but I am confident that the inclusion of his name would give confidence both to the country and the Army that this was a *national* Govt, and not merely a two-party or three-party Govt, and that it meant business.

The first Coalition Cabinet was finally composed as follows :

Prime Minister	.	.	H. H. Asquith.
Lord Chancellor	.	.	Lord Buckmaster.
Lord President of the Council.			Marquess of Crewe.
Lord Privy Seal			Earl Curzon of Kedleston.
Home Secretary			Sir John Simon.
Foreign Secretary	,		Sir Edward Grey.
Colonial Secretary	.		A. Bonar Law.
Secretary for War	.		Earl Kitchener.
Secretary for India	.		Austen Chamberlain.
Chancellor of the Exchequer.		Ex-	R. McKenna.
First Lord of the Admiralty.		Ad-	A. J. Balfour,

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President of the Board of Trade.	W. Runciman.
President of the Local Government Board.	W. H. Long.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.	W. S. Churchill.
First Commissioner of Works.	L. Harcourt.
Minister of Munitions	D. Lloyd George.
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.	Earl of Selbome.
President of Board of Education.	A. Henderson.
Secretary for Scotland	T. McKinnon Wood.
Chief Secretary for Ireland.	A. Birrell.
Minister without Portfolio. <sup>1</sup>	Marquess of Lansdowne.

Thus at last came into existence that Coalition administration which had never been entirely absent from the minds of at any rate some statesmen since it had first been suggested by Mr. Lloyd George nearly five years before.

The new Cabinet was an amalgam of old friends and old enemies, and as eight months of war had, as we have seen, by no means obliterated party differences there were many complaints in Conservative circles that the Liberals had kept all the most important posts for themselves. Such resentment, however, was tempered by a feeling of satisfaction at seeing Conservative statesmen once more in office after nearly ten years in Opposition, while there was general satisfaction at the creation of a Ministry of Munitions. No one gave a thought to Disraeli's saying that 'England does not love coalitions,' though *The Times*, then owned by Lord Northcliffe, observed rather ominously of the new administration that it was 'the last effort we can make under our accustomed conditions of public life.' For the rest, the ordinary citizen felt decidedly more optimistic as a result of the change which had taken place.

<sup>1</sup> A misnomer, for the symbol of a British Minister is the Seals of his Office, and not a portfolio.

Curiously enough, in view of what had gone before, the differences which in due course inevitably arose between Ministers were rarely, if ever, along the old party lines. Fresh alliances and antagonisms, which had little to do with the divisions of pre-war days, came into being, and as they crystallized the whole political scene was gradually transformed, with consequences that were to be felt throughout the ensuing decade. A few days after the new Government had come into office Austen wrote to Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India :

It is a great experiment, but it is one which *must* be made to succeed, for its success is felt by us all to be of vital importance to the country. I can only say that our first Cabinets have begun well, that Party is left outside the door of the Cabinet Room, and that if there are differences of opinion—as no doubt on minor matters there will be—I do not believe that they will affect our cordial co-operation, and I see no signs that they will follow Party lines.

On one point the new Conservative Ministers soon came to agree with their Liberal colleagues, and that was the difficulty of working with Lord Kitchener. 'He is not,' Austen wrote in October, 1915, 'an easy man to deal with, for he talks loosely, and changes his mind often.' The strength of the Secretary of State for War lay in the confidence placed in him by his fellow-countrymen, but the fact that his virtues were not always those which the public ascribed to him did not facilitate the task of those who had to sit in Cabinet with him.

India and its problems were unknown ground to Austen save in so far as he had come into contact with them as Chairman of the Commission on Indian Finance two years before, and the difficulty of his position was increased by the fact that he was called upon to familiarize himself with them in the middle of a war in which India was heavily engaged. His predecessor at the India Office had been Lord Crewe, Lord President of the Council in the new administration, and Austen's relations with him were of the

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most friendly. All the same, the new Secretary of State for India certainly did not exaggerate when he wrote, 'Entry on office under such circumstances as prevail to-day has none of the exhilaration which ordinarily attends a change of Government. We newcomers accept our responsibilities as a great duty.'

The Secretary of State for India was the effective head of the Government of India, though, of course, responsible to the King, the Cabinet, and the British Parliament. The Government of India Act of 1858 had vested in him in Council the powers of the old Court of Directors of the East India Company,<sup>1</sup> and, in spite of the fact that his relations with the Viceroy were not exactly defined, it was established that in the event of a serious difference between them the Viceroy must give way or resign. Ten years earlier Mr. Balfour had described the Viceroy of India as 'a great officer dependent indeed upon the Home Government for his tenure, but with a large measure of practical freedom both from Parliamentary criticism and Cabinet control as regards administrative details.' This was still largely true when Austen took office, but Mr. Morley, who had been at the India Office from 1905 to 1911, despite his Liberal tradition, exercised a stringent authority over the Government of India, while the steady improvement in the means of communication rendered control from Whitehall a great deal easier than it had been in the days of 'clemency' Canning. All the same, the relations between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy depended to no inconsiderable extent upon the personal character of the holders of the two offices.

If, therefore, the position was delicate in time of peace, it was infinitely more so during such a war as that in which Great Britain and India were then engaged. The Indian Government had sent considerable contingents of troops to France, Palestine, and Egypt, and it was itself conducting major operations in Mesopotamia, where British troops were also employed, as well as a minor campaign in East Africa. Nor was this all, for German agents were busy

<sup>1</sup> There had been wide devolution of powers in various spheres since that date.

throughout the Middle East, so that special vigilance was necessary not only upon the North-West Frontier, but in the interior of India itself. Furthermore, the Government of India was even less fitted than that of Great Britain to wage war upon an extended scale, and the military system established by Lord Kitchener a few years before soon showed signs of breaking down beneath the strain. The magnitude of the hostilities also imposed a heavy burden upon Indian finances, and this necessitated the tapping of new sources of revenue, a procedure which was only too likely to rouse protests from any industries in Great Britain itself which might be adversely affected. Above all, the abnormal conditions that prevailed made it only too probable that the Secretary of State and the Viceroy would find it difficult to keep themselves fully informed of all that was taking place, even if their subordinates honestly tried to keep them so informed. Such, in brief, was the situation that confronted Austen when he took control of the India Office.

The Viceroy was Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, who had gone to India in 1910 after a distinguished career in the Diplomatic Service, having latterly been Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office. From the beginning personal relations with him were most cordial, and in his first letter Chamberlain wrote :

... I am sure that it will be easy for me to work with you, and that you on your side will not find me backward in giving to you all the support and confidence which you have a right to demand from one in my position. I rely on you to communicate freely with me in the assurance that it will be my earnest desire to meet your wishes whenever it is possible, and at all times to feel that I am fully in possession of your thoughts. . . .

I am too new to this office and indeed have had as yet too little opportunity of learning what has been passing in other spheres to venture on any opinions on Indian affairs, or on the general situation beyond saying this : that for the time being I think that circumstances impose upon us a rigorous concentration of effort on the essential points of the struggle and that I feel that it is very necessary that

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minor operations in outlying places should be avoided, or restricted to what is absolutely necessary.

In saying so much I believe that I only follow Lord Crewe's example. I have in mind of course in particular the operations in Mesopotamia. There is always a danger that the General on the spot will see his own needs and opportunities so strongly that they will not take their proper place in the perspective of the whole scheme of the war. Indeed, this is almost inevitable if the General on the spot—whatever that spot be—has the energy and enterprise and resource required by the trust confided to him. But this is a danger against which no man is better fitted to protect us than yourself, for you have a knowledge and experience of both world politics and Indian politics, such as few men among us can pretend to equal. And in the circumstances of to-day it is a great strength to us that the Viceroy of India should be also a European statesman of the first rank. . . .

That there were no differences of opinion between the two men it would be idle to claim, but not long before Lord Hardinge retired he could still refer to Austen as one who had 'done so much in so short a time to improve the relations between the India Office and the Government of India.' Later still, in his last letter as Viceroy he wrote : 'I should like to say how grateful I am to you for all the support that you have given me since you have been Secretary of State, and for your very thoughtful consideration for me in both political and private affairs. During the few months that you have been at the India Office you have certainly made things move, and you have undoubtedly improved the relations between my Government and the India Office which were really getting a little strained for reasons which I need not now go into.'

The war in Mesopotamia was naturally Austen's pre-occupation, and to understand the difficulties with which he was confronted the nature of the campaign must be borne in mind. In November of the previous year a force from India had captured Basra, at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates, but in the following month it was found that the Turks were concentrating at Kurna, fifty miles up

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the Tigris. Accordingly, the British forces advanced up country and dispersed the enemy, and this operation was typical of the whole course of the war in Mesopotamia. In spite of the desire both in Delhi and London to limit the scope of the operations the British advance continued because it always proved necessary, after the initial move had been made, to attack somewhere else in order to secure the position already reached. At the beginning of 1915, therefore, further reinforcements were sent from India under Sir John Nixon, who took supreme command, and when Austen succeeded Lord Crewe the British forces were on the point of capturing Amara, which was seventy-five miles North of Kurna.

Austen was from the first under no illusions as to the nature of the war or the difficulty of exercising any effective control from Whitehall, and on June 25th he wrote to the Viceroy :

As regards Mesopotamia I hope that Nixon fully realizes how short you are of troops and the extreme difficulty that there would be in reinforcing him. It is difficult from a distance to say when a forward movement increases our responsibilities and when it is in fact the best measure of defence. Provided he understands clearly the governing circumstances of the situation and does not embark on new operations in the belief that he can call for more troops whenever he wishes, I shall be satisfied to rely in the main on his judgment. But it would be dangerous to allow him to suppose that there are large reserves on which he could draw.

Already Austen was conscious of the fact that he was not always cognizant of what was taking place, and on July 8th he is found writing :

I am a little anxious about the latitude with which Duff<sup>1</sup> and the War Office here are interpreting my pre-

<sup>1</sup> Sir Beauchamp Duff, Commander-in-Chief in India.

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decessor's consent to their direct communication on certain matters. I find that I am dependent for important news, sometimes of a political character, and now as to an arrangement for the exchange of troops, on copies of the telegrams which have passed between Duff and the War Office, and which only reach me some days after their receipt. Not only am I thus left in ignorance of what is proposed until a provisional arrangement has been concluded which it might be extremely difficult for me to upset, even if there were strong reasons for doing so, but I am left in uncertainty as to your views and whether you have been consulted and have sanctioned the suggested arrangements. I have cabled to you on the subject, and I am sure that you will do all that is necessary to protect your own authority and to preserve my responsibility.

By this time Amara had been captured, and on July 25th the important town of Nasiriya fell into British hands. At first it was intended that this should mark the extreme limit of the advance, and two days before the capture of Nasiriya Austen wrote to the Viceroy, 'I am glad to know that you see no necessity for an advance to Kut-el-Amara.' This was in reply to a letter from Lord Hardinge in which the other had said :

In Mesopotamia we have at present sufficient troops to hold the Basra Vilayet, and we have no desire to do more. General Nixon, in a telegram to the Commander-in-Chief, advocated strongly a move forward from Amara to Kut-el-Amara, and said he would let us know what reinforcements he would require. We at once replied to him that he could have none, and we have heard no more on the subject from him.

Nevertheless one thing led to another, and Sir John Nixon urged that for the consolidation of the positions already held it was necessary to advance to Kut-el-Amara. Gradually he converted first Sir Beauchamp Duff, and then

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the Viceroy to his point of view : the British Government only agreed with reluctance, and Austen wrote to Lord Hardinge on August 26th, 'I am sorry that it should be necessary . . . to advance to Kut-el-Amara, but your reasons for doing so appear to be incontrovertible.' The operation was entrusted to General Townshend, and was brilliantly executed. On September 29th the British troops entered Kut-el-Amara.

Up to this point the campaign in Mesopotamia had been signally successful, and it was only natural that this should beget a feeling of optimism which subsequent events proved to be unfounded. With Kut-el-Amara in his hands Sir John Nixon became clamorous for an advance on Baghdad itself, although that city was another hundred miles by road and two hundred by water. He held strongly the opinion that the capture of Baghdad was perfectly feasible provided he had sufficient reinforcements sent to him to enable him to hold what he had taken. At first the suggestion did not meet with favour, and it was stoutly opposed by General Townshend, who would have to conduct the operation, and who had little more than a division under his command. He was well over three hundred miles from his base on the sea, and his only means of communication with it was a river full of shoals and mud-banks : the Turks, on the other hand, could be readily reinforced and had every advantage of communications, while Baghdad itself was an open city difficult to defend against superior forces. In spite of the success of Sir John Nixon in obtaining permission for previous advances in not dissimilar circumstances he might well have met with a final refusal on this occasion had it not been for the general military and political situation.

India Office, Whitehall, S.W.  
*October 8, 1915*

MY DEAR HARDINGE,

When I wrote to you yesterday it was under the impression that the one thing which it was absolutely impossible for us to do was to find fresh troops for Mesopotamia. This view had been strongly impressed upon me by Kitchener, and I understood that it was shared by those members of

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the Cabinet who are most immediately concerned with the conduct of the war and have the most detailed information both of our resources and of the calls which may be made upon them.

But the Cabinet have been greatly impressed by the review of the situation contained in the telegrams received from you and Nixon. There is, it would seem, an opportunity within our grasp for a great success, such as we have not yet achieved in any quarter, and it is difficult to overrate the political (and even military) advantages which would follow from it throughout the Far East.

This consideration is rendered even more important by the imminent intervention of Bulgaria in the war, by the renewed attack on Serbia by Austro-German forces and by the peril in which these developments place our forces in Gallipoli. It is clear that for the time being we can make no advance there. Our troops have, I fear, suffered much in *moral*, and there is great sickness among them. Altogether the prospects of that expedition are far from hopeful and, if the Austro-German attack opens the way for the free passage of supplies to the Turks, their positions might become untenable.

All this strengthens the case for taking full advantage of Nixon's victorious campaign by capturing and holding Baghdad ; and the Cabinet, on further considering the question this morning, authorized me to send the telegrams to Nixon and yourself which I despatched at 1.30 to-day. If Nixon is clearly satisfied that one additional division will suffice, he shall have it ; but in your telegram of October 6th, H.8245, after quoting Nixon's request for *a* division, you go on to say that ' at least an additional division would be required.' This seems to imply that in your opinion one division would not be sufficient, and it is for this reason that I have by desire of the Cabinet telegraphed again both *to* you and Nixon asking what number of troops will make you confident of success. If necessary, the Cabinet is prepared to send two divisions sooner than lose this opportunity and sooner than run any undue risk in pursuing it. But men are none too plenty, and we do not wish to send more than are required.

I ought to add that Kitchener was not present at this

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morning's Cabinet, having gone to France to confer with Joffre, but he is expected back to-morrow morning when I am to meet him in conference with the Prime Minister to go more closely into the matter ; but I hope that nothing will occur to prevent us from sending to Nixon whatever forces his and your replies may show us to be needed for the successful prosecution to its appropriate end in the capture of Baghdad of this brilliant campaign- . . .

Yours very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The British advance was accordingly resumed, and at Azizie, more than half-way to Baghdad, General Townshend routed some 4,000 Turks on October 23rd. It seemed as if the decision to push forward had been fully justified, and ten days later the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons : ' General Nixon's force is now within measurable distance of Baghdad. I do not think that in the whole course of the war there has been a series of operations more carefully contrived, more brilliantly conducted, and with a better prospect of final success.' For another three weeks such optimism seemed justified, and on November 22nd the British were at Ctesiphon, only thirty-five miles from their goal. The battle which followed was a confirmation of General Townshend's fears. The Turks, always magnificent defensive fighters as they had proved at Plevna, Chatalja, and Gallipoli, had occupied a very strong position, and, unknown to their opponents, they had also received large reinforcements. The British carried the first Turkish line of defences after severe fighting which lasted a whole day, but sustained 4,500 casualties out of a total of 12,000 men engaged. As the Turks were still greatly superior in numbers General Townshend decided to retreat, and by December 3rd he was back at Kut-el-Amara, where four days later he was completely invested by the Turks. A relief force was organized under the command of Sir Fenton Aylmer, but it suffered a severe reverse at the battle of Shaikh Sa'ad on January 7th, 1916, when casualties accounted for 23 per cent, of its effective strength, and a similar lack of success attended another attempt to break

through the Turkish armies a week later. Further efforts to relieve Kut were made, but they were all frustrated either by the Turks or by floods, and on April 29th General Townshend surrendered.

This reversal of fortune was bad enough, but it was accompanied by evidence of incompetence and blundering of which Austen soon felt the repercussions, and which in the following year led to his resignation. When General Townshend made his attempt to reach Baghdad he was greatly hampered by lack of land transport, although at that very moment there was a large number of mules and carts waiting at Basra, but there were no boats to convey them to the front. Worst of all was the lack of provision for the wounded. To quote Sir Arnold Wilson, himself an eye-witness of the horrors he described :

The wounded were collected in springless mule-carts, whose progress over the rough road evoked from their occupants cries and groans of agony, which struck horror into their surviving comrades. Most of them had been without water all day, and were chilled to the bone with the cold night breeze. The four field ambulances were equipped to deal with 400 casualties ; they had to cope that day with almost ten times that number. Two days were occupied in removing the casualties to the waiting steamers, on which they were crowded, unmurmuring, like cattle.

After fifteen months of war there was not a hospital ship or barge on the river. Never since the Crimea had British wounded suffered so terribly.

Whoever was responsible it was not Austen. As early as October 14th the following paragraph occurred in a letter he wrote to Lord Hardinge :

I am most reluctant to appear to convey to you or the Commander-in-Chief any mistrust of the arrangements made by the medical authorities for the troops in Mesopotamia, but owing to reports which have reached me I felt it necessary to telegraph an enquiry as to the fullness of the

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precautions which had been taken. . . . I know that the difficulties must be great and that it is impossible to foresee every contingency, but I trust that you will impress upon all concerned that in this matter of health they cannot take too many precautions, and that we shall not question expenditure required to safeguard the lives of our men.

A fortnight later he wrote again :

I continue to receive from members of Parliament and others anxious enquiries about the health of the troops in Mesopotamia and the provision made for them. *Inter alia* I have been sent a letter from some officer there in which he incidentally observes that my statement as to ice and other comforts provided at the Base Hospital \* was all eyewash.' I cannot go behind your assurance that all that is necessary and possible is being done, and you yourself are necessarily dependent on the reports of the military : but you will remember how we received the same assurances from military and medical authorities at the time of the South African War, and yet how much more might after all have been done, at any rate in the early days of that campaign. As we must now look forward not only to a prolonged occupation of Mesopotamia, but to having increased numbers of troops there, I beg that you will take all the steps in your power to stimulate the ingenuity of the medical authorities in making provision for their health and for the comfort of the sick. No expense ought to be allowed to stand in the way of the best provision that science can suggest.

At the beginning of December Austen wrote a private letter to the Viceroy dealing with this matter alone :

India Office, Whitehall, S.W.  
*December 3rd, 1915*

MY DEAR HARDINGE,

You know how anxious I am about the health of our forces in Mesopotamia. Apart from all feelings of humanity

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and of the duty we owe to those who are giving their lives, men are too precious to be wasted.

I wish to make all allowances for difficulties, perhaps only partly perceived by me and not known to my correspondents, but I am very uneasy about the reports that reach me.

I send you a sample. It is a letter from a Miss Bowring to my wife. They are both working at the 'Officers' Families Fund,' and that is all I know of Miss Bowring except that her father was in the Indian Civil and the brother, whose letter she quotes, was subsequently killed at Ctesiphon.

I do beg you to urge Duff to go thoroughly into this matter. For months in France Kitchener employed Colonel Lee on inspecting all the medical arrangements from the trenches to the Channel and suggesting whatever improvements he could. Is it not worth while to do the same thing in Mesopotamia ?

As to lack of food for officers and drafts passing up I have had the same complaint from other sources.

I beg you not to be content with easy assurances. On your advice comforts, etc., are not being sent from here, and we shall have no defence if all that is possible is not done.

Yrs. very sincerely,  
AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—This has been scribbled in great haste to catch the mail.

Austen's real difficulty in this connection was that he was deliberately kept in ignorance of what was going on. Less than a week after he had written this letter, and at the very moment when the horrors described by Sir Arnold Wilson were taking place, he received a telegram from Sir John Nixon saying, 'The medical arrangements, under circumstances of considerable difficulty, worked splendidly.' In view of this he replied, on December 8th, to a question in the House of Commons that 'the condition of the wounded is very satisfactory, and the medical arrangements have

worked well under difficult conditions.' His indignation when he discovered how he had been deceived is reflected throughout his correspondence. In the circumstances, therefore, the finding of the Mesopotamia Commission would appear to be a counsel of perfection :

The private letters of the Secretary of State to the Viceroy showed an earnest and continuous anxiety as to the condition of the wounded, and the only comment that can be made upon the Secretary of State's procedure is that he did not fully utilize the official powers at his disposal of forcing at an earlier period an investigation into the treatment of the wounded in Mesopotamia.

Until these events Austen had had little experience of military matters, and during his first months at the India Office he was content to take the generals in the field at their own valuation—certainly he had no desire to interfere with them in what he believed to be their own sphere of action. The course of the Mesopotamian campaign rendered him more critical. 'In this war,' he wrote to Lord Hardinge on December 2nd, 1915, 'our generals always seem to proceed on the assumption that our operations will be successful, whilst the Germans, who have had a larger measure of success, are yet always prepared with an alternative in case of defeat.' A week later he wrote : 'My confidence in Nixon's judgment is seriously shaken by his complete miscalculation as to the chances at Baghdad. How came it that his intelligence was so bad, and that he so seriously underestimated the numbers of the Turkish forces and the strength of their position?' <sup>1</sup>On January 18th, 1916, General Nixon resigned, and Sir Percy Lake was appointed to succeed him. Austen was by no means enamoured of the choice. 'I was surprised at the appointment. I wish that you had had a better man at your

<sup>1</sup> It must, however, be remembered that the whole of India's aeroplanes had been sent to England at the beginning of the war, and not replaced.

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disposal.\* And again : ' I feel sure that Lake's health and age render him unsuited for such a responsibility in such a climate, and that some successor must be found.' After the surrender of Kut he wrote to Lord Chelmsford, who had succeeded Lord Hardinge :

. . . General Townshend is a gallant soldier and appears to have handled his troops with great skill, but his attitude in other respects leaves a great deal to be desired. The papers are full of rumours and reports, all professing to originate in communications from him and all directed to his own greater glorification, always at the expense of somebody else. After his gallant defence and now that he is in captivity I shall of course say nothing in criticism of him, but I must say that his conduct in this respect produces a most unfavourable impression on my mind and contrasts strongly with the bearing of other officers, who, unlike Townshend, have themselves been the subject of criticism, but have preferred to maintain a dignified silence.

Austen's first months at the India Office were, quite apart from the war in Mesopotamia, not rendered any easier by the necessity of finding a new Viceroy. Lord Hardinge's term of office should have expired in the autumn of 1915, but it had been extended until the following March. The appointment of a successor lay, not with Austen, but with the Prime Minister, though, of course, Mr. Asquith consulted with his colleague on the matter. Austen's candidates were the Earl of Crawford, the Marquess of Salisbury, the Duke of Devonshire, and the Earl of Donoughmore, in that order. He pressed the claims of Lord Crawford, but the Prime Minister decided against them on the ground that Lord Crawford had no previous administrative experience. Other names were considered, among them Sir Arthur Lawley and Lord Buxton. Finally, Austen suggested Lord Chelmsford, who had been Governor of Queensland and New South Wales, and was actually serving with the Territorials in India. This suggestion found favour

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both in Downing Street and at Buckingham Palace, and Lord Chelmsford was duly appointed. Austen was a little disappointed that his advocacy of Lord Crawford's nomination should have been without effect, and he wrote to Lord Hardinge, 'It is not the choice which I should have made, but it has much to recommend it, and I hope that you will be satisfied with it.' The retiring Viceroy was more than satisfied, and went so far as to declare, 'In my opinion you could hardly have made a better choice.'<sup>5</sup>

Some idea of the work which devolved upon Austen at this time may be gleaned from the fact that between Easter, 1915, and February of the following year, when he took four days' holiday, he never left London. Circumstances did not permit of wide measures of reform in India, but even though it was not possible to initiate policy in the middle of a war there was a great deal for the Secretary of State to do. It need hardly be said that Austen took his responsibilities very seriously indeed, but he fully realized the complexity of the problems with which he had to deal :

... I begin to feel that I know something of India, but the more I know the more I see there is to learn, and the more impressed I am by the immense difficulties of our task. You hear of the Unchanging East, but what strikes me is the rate at which India is moving—at least on the surface where the current for the last ten or fifteen years has gone with ever-increasing velocity. No doubt that below are deep still waters of ignorance, custom, prejudice and conservatism, but this only makes the problem more difficult, for how is one to meet the legitimate (as far as they are legitimate) aspirations and ambitions of the small but increasingly united and increasingly influential educated class, who look to the institutions of Western democracy for their model and who include such chiefs as Bikanir, when in fact the materials for a democracy do not exist. I once said to Morley : 'Our difficulty is that we are forced to build from the top. You can find men for representatives, but where are you going to find the electors?' 'My dear Austen,' cried Morley, 'I grew old in the search for a constituency' . . .

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One subject in which Austen took a very keen interest was the granting of commissions to Indians. To quote his own words :

... It is the Indian *Army* which specially merits recognition of its services in this war, and the loyalty, contentment and good-will of the Army are of more importance to us than those of any other classes or sections in the nation. Are we then to say to the Army and to the Army alone—' For you there can never be any opening to advancement or authority in your profession. If you have ambition, you must join the lawyers or the talkers or the politicians. Elsewhere you or others may rise to the highest posts. You may sit in the Councils of Governors ; you may preside over services largely officered by Europeans ; you may hear appeals from English judges and reverse their decisions. All these things you may do if you are civilians and belong to the talking classes. But if you are fighting men and join the Army, there is no career open even to the most brilliant services' ? I conceive that such a position is no longer tenable and that we must face the alternative with all its difficulties.

He was not, however, able immediately to put his ideas into practice.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SHADOW OF MESOPOTAMIA

THE replacement of Lord Hardinge by Lord Chelmsford as Viceroy, and the fall of Kut-el-Amara, were followed by a lull in the Mesopotamia campaign, and, for Austen, the centre of interest shifted from the Middle East to Whitehall. The Coalition administration worked fairly smoothly during the summer and early autumn of 1915, though the lack of success which attended the Allied arms dashed many of the hopes to which its formation had given rise. At the beginning of November, however, there was an acute difference of opinion in the Cabinet on the question of the evacuation of Gallipoli, and Lord Kitchener was sent out to the Near East to report on the general situation. Mr. Bonar Law, however, was so alarmed at the risks that were being run in view of the Austro-German advance through Serbia, aided by the now hostile Bulgaria, that he wished a decision to be taken while Lord Kitchener was away : if this was not done he threatened resignation. There was a somewhat critical meeting of the Cabinet on November 6th, when, to quote Lord Balfour, \* Chamberlain, who agreed with him (i.e. Mr. Bonar Law) and who behaved with a most punctilious sense of honour, felt bound to take the ground that, having agreed to the departure of Lord Kitchener to report, he could not resign until that report had arrived. He did not think himself in the least likely to be convinced by any arguments which Lord Kitchener might advance against evacuation, but he would not pledge himself to resignation in advance of these arguments.<sup>1</sup> The crisis passed, the decision was taken to evacuate Gallipoli, and the only resignation was that of Mr. Churchill. Sir Edward Carson, the Attorney-General, had resigned a fortnight before on account of a general discontent with the whole conduct of the war, and had been succeeded by Sir F. E. Smith.

More serious were the differences over compulsory military service. It has already been shown how, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Politicians and the War*, vol. I, p. 168.

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spring of 1915, the then Opposition was in favour of such a measure, but the new Government went no further than a scheme of National Registration, and at the end of June a Bill for that purpose was introduced by Mr. Long into the House of Commons. Austen chafed under such a half-measure, and in the middle of August he wrote, \* I expect that we shall meet Parliament with a demand for compulsory service. I am sure that we ought to do so, and indeed that we ought to have done so a long time ago. But the Cabinet has not yet come to any decision, and the mills of Government grind slowly.' Instead, however, of a measure for compulsory service what made its appearance was the <sup>4</sup> Derby Scheme,' by which men between 18 and 41 were asked to enrol in groups by age, an unmarried and a married group for each year, and there were thus twenty-three groups of either kind. If this project did not prove successful by the end of the year, then compulsion was to be applied at once. This last decision was, it may be added, chiefly due to the insistence of Lord Selborne, Lord Curzon, and Austen, who were threatening to resign. Meanwhile, there was a further departure from normal British practice, for at the beginning of November the Prime Minister announced the creation of 'a strategic Cabinet' consisting of himself, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. McKenna.

On January 5<sup>th</sup> of the following year it was announced that over 650,000 single men had evaded enrolment, and the principle of compulsion was accepted. Even then Sir John Simon resigned, but Austen, at any rate, regarded this event calmly, for he wrote of it :

. . . You will have seen that Simon has resigned. He is a very able man, but I cannot say that I think he will be any great loss to a Government whose business is to carry on war. He gives a head and considerable rhetorical talent to the section of the House which opposes the Bill and I daresay we shall have some trouble ; but if, as I hope will be the case, Asquith takes a firm line and lets the House know that they must either pass the Bill with reasonable rapidity or face their constituents, I do not believe that

there will be serious difficulty. The results which the voluntary system has given us are very remarkable, but in a war waged on such an extraordinary scale they are insufficient. But apart from this general ground for action, which could have been urged with equal force several months ago, there is now the additional argument that we must redeem the Prime Minister's pledge. I do not need to tell you that on this point the Prime Minister never hesitated, and in spite of Press rumours I do not believe that there will be further resignations from the Cabinet.

All the same, the Cabinet very nearly broke up the following April, though when the crisis was over Austen was optimistic enough to think that its unity had been strengthened by what had taken place. He himself played no part in the events which came so close to overthrowing the Government.

By this time, however, another cloud had arisen which threatened to overshadow the whole horizon. At Easter there took place a rising in Dublin which was soon to awake, for a brief period, memories of 'old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago' in the Cabinet. After the defeat of the insurgents in the Irish capital some of their leaders had been shot by court-martial, but this was followed by a reaction in certain quarters in favour of a policy of conciliation, and the ghost of Home Rule began to walk again. It was now proposed to placate the Irish by putting the Home Rule Act into force at once, and Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson were not unwilling to assent to this course provided they could secure the exclusion of Ulster. On the other side were Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selborne, Lord Robert Cecil, and Mr. Long. Austen kept so far as possible aloof from the somewhat acrimonious discussions which ensued, but a few extracts from his letters to Lord Chelmsford will serve to show how far he had moved from the position which he had adopted in his correspondence with Mr. Churchill less than two years before. Of the rising itself he wrote on May 3rd :

. . . The authorities were caught napping. Birrell was



CABINET MINISTERS WITH KING GEORGE V, IN 1916

Front row, left to right: Marquess Curzon, Mr. Lloyd George, H.M. the King  
Earl of Birkenhead, Sir Austen Chamberlain,



## THE SHADOW OF MESOPOTAMIA

in England, the General Officer Commanding was away on a holiday, and the Head of the Royal Irish Constabulary was absent from Dublin. It is clear that there will have to be serious changes in the Irish Government. We can only be thankful that a movement for which we were so inexcusably unprepared has not proved more serious.

On June 28th he again alluded to Ireland :

We are working towards a solution of the grave difficulties which have arisen in consequence of the Irish situation, but we have had a very anxious and busy time which has left me all too little leisure for my Indian work. Reuter will have informed you of Selborne's resignation. I am afraid that others will follow, and the position of those Unionists among us who decide that, in all the circumstances of the day, our duty is to remain in the Government, will be one of the most painful and unpleasant that has ever fallen to the lot of public men. . . . I am one of those who feels that it is his duty to go on.

A week later he was more optimistic :

. . . Cabinet difficulties in connection with the Irish question are passing off more satisfactorily than I had anticipated. We are to have a meeting of the Unionist Members of the House of Commons to-morrow, and I have no doubt that we shall carry the great bulk of the Party with us. But I expect there will be a small though angry opposition.

Once again, however, as so often in the history of Anglo-Irish relations, hopes of a settlement were doomed to disappointment, and on July 25th, Austen wrote :

I am not now hopeful that any agreement can be reached. Carson made a very powerful plea for unity which greatly

impressed the House. I am sorry that his speech was not better reported in the papers. It was the finest that he has ever delivered, and one of the greatest speeches of my, now considerable, House of Commons's experience.

In effect, if unity was preserved in Downing Street it was not reached in Ireland, where the road was now clear for Sinn Fein.

Meanwhile, Lord Kitchener had been drowned at the beginning of June, and his death necessitated some changes in the Cabinet. On June 29th Austen had, in connection with this, an interview with the Prime Minister which is best described in his own words :

The Prime Minister asked me to call upon him this morning. He said that he wished to speak about the re-arrangement of offices in the Government. He had decided—and on the whole he thought it was the best course—to make Lloyd George Secretary of State for War.

I interrupted to say that this was scarcely my business unless he had mentioned it, but that I regarded the appointment with considerable apprehension. Lloyd George had views of his own on strategy which differed from those of our General Staff, and I was afraid that the Prime Minister would find himself landed in considerable difficulties owing to the intrigues of Lloyd George with French politicians in opposition to our military advisers.

The Prime Minister replied that he quite understood my feeling, which indeed to some extent he shared. He had, however, taken every precaution in his power to secure that Lloyd George should not interfere with the authority of the C.I.G.S. acting under the instructions of the War Committee, and had got their respective powers clearly defined in writing. On the whole he thought this the best arrangement. He proposed to appoint Lord Derby as Under-Secretary for War. Lord D. was willing to accept the position, and the P.M. thought the appointment would give satisfaction.

He then proceeded to the object of the interview which

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was to suggest that I should take the Ministry of Munitions. Bonar Law had already sounded me on the subject and I had refused. The P.M. said that of course it involved what might be thought to be a certain sacrifice as the position of Secretary of State was technically a superior one, but it would be a position of much interest, naturally carrying with it a seat on the War Committee, and he felt that there was no one who was better qualified for the work than myself. He understood, however, from Bonar Law that I had some hesitation about taking the position in consequence of my relationship to the heads of some of the great contracting firms, and that I thought I might be exposed to a renewal of the attacks which had been made on my father and myself in 1899-1900. He himself did not think there was any possibility of this—'everybody knew there was nothing in it/ and he could not see 'whose interest it would be to revive it.'

I told the Prime Minister that I was surprised that he should have made this proposal, and astonished that he should think it right to press it on me. . . . I reminded him that both he and Lloyd George had stated that the work of the Munitions Department would be accomplished in three months and that in the meantime there was little or nothing to be done at the Treasury. And this at a time when there was already a crisis in the American Exchange, and when a further loan had to be raised almost at once ! This was the past history of the Ministry of Munitions ; they were then determined that no Unionist should have the credit of retrieving the mistakes which had been made ; but now, when whatever credit was to be secured at the Ministry of Munitions had been reaped by Lloyd George, when he left with a flaming certificate from the War Committee (based on his own unverified statement of what he had accomplished) because he thought that no more credit was to be got out of that office and that the Secretaryship for War was more attractive, the Prime Minister pressed upon a Unionist the acceptance of an office which he had previously refused to the leader of the Unionist Party, and that Unionist me of all people in the world !

I was amazed that after the events of 1900 he should make such a proposal to me. As long as I lived I should

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never forget that the whole of his party, with the exception of Grey and Morley to whom I should be eternally grateful, had done their utmost to destroy my father's honour and to hound him out of public life. And now, he, the Prime Minister actually told me that everybody knew there was nothing in the charges and invited me to expose myself to the same kind of campaign ! Nothing would induce me to do it, and I could hardly trust myself to speak about the proposal. He could himself see how difficult I found it to discuss it with him.

The Prime Minister at once said that had he known how strongly I felt he would not have made the proposal to me. He was sure that I should realize that he had not meant to propose and still less to press upon me anything that was distasteful to me. He would say no more about it : my feelings were conclusive on the subject.

I then said to him that I did not know how far Bonar Law had reported our conversation to him, but that I had said to Bonar Law that I was well aware of the difficulty in which he was placed by the statutory limitation of the number of Secretaryships of State which could be held in the House of Commons ; that it would be preposterous that any supposed personal claim or interest should hamper him in the rearrangement of the Government under the present difficult circumstances, and that while nothing would induce me to go to the Ministry of Munitions, I wished him to understand that I was perfectly ready to give up my present office and to take a subordinate one in order to facilitate his path.

I should not have chosen the India Office in the first instance, but of course I had become interested in the work and I liked the people with whom I was brought into contact, and I admitted that I should be sorry now to give up the one or to part from the other. But I wished him to understand that I felt strongly that no consideration of that kind ought to prevail in the present circumstances, and that my offer to go to another office was not merely formal, but the expression of my real feelings and desires.

At this point we were interrupted by Mr. Bonar Law who came in to speak about the Irish situation, and our conversation was not resumed.

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In consequence of this interview the following letters passed between Austen and his brother :

*India Office*  
30/6/16

MY DEAR NEVILLE,

The enclosed note of a conversation with the Prime Minister touches so closely a page of family history which none of us can ever forget that I should like you and the girls to see it. Please read and forward to them. I will tell Mary and Beatrice. The girls will please return the paper to me.

I cannot tell you how fiercely indignant I felt and I let the P.M. know it !

Yrs. affectly.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

On July 2nd, Mr. Neville Chamberlain wrote to Austen expressing his complete agreement with the line he had taken with the Prime Minister. The letter went on to say :

. . . My only regret is that you should at that moment have made him any offer which might involve your leaving the India Office.

Personally I should much regret your doing so. I would not have chosen it for you, but in the national interest it seems to me bad to make constant changes in administration unless there is urgent need for it, and the P.M. would hardly find a better administrator than yourself.

I agree entirely with what you say about LI. G. I rather hoped Derby might have had the W.O. but under LI. G. the Munitions Ministry has got into such a chaotic muddle that a change there is certainly necessary. . . .

Translation to the Ministry of Munitions was not the only offer which Austen received while Mr. Asquith was still Prime Minister, for in November of that same year he

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was asked to go to Russia to represent the Government in financial matters, but he declined on the ground that he could not be spared from the India Office, and that in any case the proper person to go was the Chancellor of the Exchequer :

. . . I do not recall any financial conference at which I have been present since proposals were last under discussion for the issue of a further loan, and I have not that intimate and daily knowledge of the financial situation and close association with the Bank and the City which would fit me to discuss the difficult financial problems in front of us with Foreign Ministers. Even before starting I should have to abandon my other work in order to try and acquaint myself with all that has passed, and even then my knowledge would be the kind of knowledge acquired by cram which frequently fails one in important matters where delicate and difficult negotiations are concerned. . . .

The previous month had been marked by a breakdown in Austen's health, and the strain to which he was subjected had begun to tell. Accordingly, he was ordered by the doctor to take a fortnight's complete rest, and the Viceroy's letters were the only official documents which he had sent on after him. He went to Broadstairs, where he described himself as 'breathing the finest air in England right at the North Foreland.' The change produced the desired effect, and it was well that this was so, for before the year closed Austen had been called upon to face a very difficult situation indeed.

As the year 1916 drew to its end it seemed as if the impetus which the formation of the Coalition had given to the conduct of the war was dying down, and once more there was a vague disquiet. Although the utmost gallantry had been displayed on the Somme there was clearly to be no immediate decision in the West ; the Battle of Jutland had been a disappointment to those—the vast majority of the nation—who did not realize that the tactics of Nelson's day were no longer applicable ; and the sole result of the inter-

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vention of Rumania on the side of the Allies was that she had shared the fate of Belgium and Serbia. In these circumstances it was not unnatural that the question should again be asked, as in the spring of the previous year, whether the best use was being made of the country's efforts and resources. Late in September a Man-Power Distribution Board was created with Austen as its chairman, and he found this post a serious addition to his other responsibilities ; indeed, it was one of the chief causes of the temporary breakdown which sent him to Broadstairs shortly afterwards. Nevertheless, it is to be feared that the ordinary citizen regarded the new Board merely as a kind of super-tribunal, subject to all the weaknesses of the ordinary tribunals.

The growing discontent gradually became focused on the Prime Minister. Was he, asked the man in the street in language put into his mouth by a section of the Press, the type of man to lead the nation in war, and would not some more dynamic and spectacular personality be preferable ? The character of Mr. Asquith is more baffling than that of any British Prime Minister of modern times, and Austen, who was in public life with him for a generation, never professed to understand him. He had undoubtedly great qualities, and it is a tribute to his skill as a statesman that he preserved his party and administration intact during the difficult years between the resignation of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the outbreak of war. ' He is,' Austen wrote in December, 1916, ' a gentleman in the fullest sense of the word. Very pleasant to work with, very loyal to his colleagues, and with a great equanimity in good or evil fortune which is in itself a considerable asset in times like these.' He was at his best when presiding over his Liberal Cabinet, in which the members were accustomed to work together as a team, but when the representatives of the Opposition took their seats a firmer line was demanded on the part of the chair if confusion was to be avoided. To quote Austen again : ' Asquith lacks the power to drive. Whether he was always deficient in it, or whether the habit of waiting on events and on colleagues has grown upon him in these later years, I cannot say. In any case the result was the same. Any Committee—call it War Council or

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Cabinet or what you will—is apt to dissolve in talk unless the chairman keeps them steadily to the point at issue and makes it his business to secure from them a decision on each question as it is raised. Asquith never so understood his duties. He waited on others. He no doubt often averted conflict, but he never contributed a suggestion. He only once in my experience directly helped us to a rapid decision.' To the end Mr. Asquith set his face against the appointment of a Secretary to the Cabinet, and to the institution of minutes of Cabinet decisions, as being both unnecessary and a violation of constitutional practice. It was also not unknown for him to be writing letters while discussion in the Cabinet proceeded.

If there was increasing criticism of the Prime Minister there was also growing scepticism concerning the system with which he was identified. 'For some time before the crisis,' wrote Austen, 'we had all been getting increasingly anxious about the course of the war. The machinery of the large Cabinet of twenty-one members was ill-adapted for effective or rapid decision. The War Committee was hampered by the necessity of obtaining its approval for all large questions of policy whilst the Cabinet itself was saddled with responsibility for decisions which it could not really control.' Above all, there was the clash of temperaments between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George. This was not, as has been shown, a new development, but the differences between the two men had become intensified with the progress of events, and on November 22nd, Professor Hewins, then M.P. for Hereford, noted in his diary, \* There is indecision everywhere, and trivial personal issues are considered more important than those of the war.' A week later he wrote, 'Feeling is going very strong against the Government on a variety of questions, and we have the perennial Lloyd George intrigue.'

During the last days of November the situation underwent a rapid change, which Austen described in a letter to Lord Chelmsford on December 8th :

. . . About three weeks ago Bonar Law, who, as I think, throughout earnestly sought to keep the peace between them

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(i.e. the Prime Minister and Mr. Lloyd George), told the Prime Minister that in his opinion a reconstruction of the Government had become necessary. He made certain proposals with this object in view, to which he had previously obtained the assent of both Carson and Lloyd George ; but his Unionist colleagues were not informed of them till later (Thursday, November 30th) and, when so informed, were unanimously of opinion that they were open to grave objection, and made certain alternative proposals. These did not commend themselves to Bonar Law who had, as was evident, committed himself too deeply to Carson and Lloyd George. Lloyd George, towards the middle of last week, presented to Mr. Asquith a proposal which was very much in the nature of an ultimatum ; the whole Harmsworth Press and the *Morning Post* were mobilized in support of him, and Asquith was bidden to stand and deliver.

In his letter, to which the Press gave the widest publicity, Mr. Lloyd George said that he could not remain in the Government unless the machinery for conducting the war was drastically overhauled, and there was established a War Committee from which Mr. Asquith was excluded. The ostensible reason for this last stipulation was that as the War Committee would have to sit daily the Prime Minister was too busy a man to take part in its deliberations.

This created a very difficult and extremely unpleasant situation for Austen and his Conservative colleagues, and on Sunday, December 3rd, they met at Mr. Bonar Law's house to discuss the position, the only absentees being Lord Lansdowne, who was out of London, and Mr. Balfour, who was ill. In the discussion which ensued Austen played a prominent part. He took the line that a reconstruction of the Government was inevitable since Mr. Lloyd George was in open rebellion and the Prime Minister had failed to assert his authority : a Conservative administration, or an administration under a Conservative Prime Minister was inadvisable if not impracticable, and it was therefore for the Liberals to decide which of their leaders they wished to see at the head of the Government. Austen's views found favour with the meeting, and there was a unanimous feeling

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that so far as possible the Conservative Ministers should hold themselves aloof from the personal quarrel between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George. Accordingly they advised the Prime Minister that he should tender his own resignation to the King, carrying with it that of all his colleagues, and if he was unwilling to do this they requested Mr. Bonar Law to hand him their collective resignation. With this end in view they adopted the following resolution empowering Mr. Bonar Law to act on their behalf:

We share the view expressed to you by Mr. Bonar Law some time ago that the Government cannot continue as it is.

It is evident that a change must be made, and in our opinion the publicity given to the intentions of Mr. Lloyd George makes reconstruction from within no longer possible.

We therefore urge the Prime Minister to tender the resignation of the Government.

If he feels unable to take that step we authorize Mr. Bonar Law to tender our resignations.

Mr. Bonar Law was not the ideal intermediary in the circumstances for he was suspect to the Prime Minister as one who was working with Mr. Lloyd George for his overthrow. Nevertheless, he was the Leader of the Conservative Party, and it is difficult to see how the Conservative Ministers could have acted otherwise. In the event Mr. Bonar Law blundered rather badly, Austen always maintained, for he never showed Mr. Asquith the resolution which had been passed, and left him with the impression that he had suddenly been deserted by his Conservative colleagues possibly in collusion with Mr. Lloyd George. The Prime Minister asked Mr. Bonar Law to hold up the formal presentation of the resignations for a few hours until he had had time to think the matter over, and to this the other consented.

What followed is described by Austen in his already quoted letter to Lord Chelmsford.

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In the course of the afternoon Asquith saw Lloyd George, and (I think under the reaction of what he considered our unjustifiable desertion) he accepted Lloyd George's terms—no doubt they were put to him with every consideration, and in as acceptable a form as possible—in regard to the status, functions, and number of the War Committee, whilst reserving for further consideration the question of its personnel. Lloyd George had proposed a Committee consisting of Bonar Law, Carson, Henderson, and himself. I certainly would not have served under such a Committee nor would Curzon or Cecil. We have little confidence in Bonar Law's judgment and none in his strength of character. Carson was a great disappointment in the three months during which he sat in Asquith's Cabinet. He is an Irish sentimentalist as Lloyd George is a Welsh one. He and Bonar Law would merely have emphasized Lloyd George's failings whilst echoing his views, and these are known to have been at variance more than once with those of the General Staff and Commander-in-Chief on questions relating to the larger strategy of the war. It was very proper to include Henderson as a representative of Labour. He is a very good fellow, but on all the larger issues of policy he would have been a cipher. Be that as it may, Asquith hereupon decided not to resign himself but to call for the resignation of all his colleagues and to reconstruct his Ministry, and we were so informed a little before eight (by Bonar Law who had arranged to meet us at F. E. Smith's house) by which time Curzon and Long had left town.

On Monday (December 4th), however, Asquith changed his mind. This, I think, was due in the main to his finding the substance of Lloyd George's conversation with him in the morning papers and to the fact that it was there universally represented in the Lloyd George press as a complete surrender by the Prime Minister, who was to be left in his position only on condition that the whole conduct of affairs was placed in Lloyd George's hands. Some at least of Asquith's Liberal colleagues, under these circumstances, strongly urged him to reject Lloyd George's terms and to act upon the advice which we Unionists had already given him. By Monday night Asquith had definitely decided to inform Lloyd George that he could not accept his proposals

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and on Tuesday morning he received Lloyd George's reply which, I need scarcely say, was his resignation, coupled with a perfunctory promise of support to Asquith's reconstituted Government and a very clear statement that he should proceed to agitate the country against him. Upon this Bonar Law announced that he had definitely decided to throw in his lot with Lloyd George. I have, I think, already said that Bonar Law was acting with Carson and Lloyd George throughout, even to the exclusion of all communication with the Unionist Ministers, who were left in complete ignorance of his views till after he had definitely committed himself to these two.

By this time suspicion as to motives was growing in all quarters. Austen was acting in close collaboration with Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil, and Mr. Walter Long, and when, on the morning of the 5th, they all met in his room at the India Office, Mr. Bonar Law imagined they were engaged in a conspiracy to depose him from the leadership of the Party though nothing was further from their minds. That same afternoon Austen, Lord Curzon, and Lord Robert Cecil had an interview with the Prime Minister, who asked if they would be prepared to continue in the Government even if Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law resigned. To this they replied that their only object was to secure an administration which could carry on the war successfully, but that the present Government had been so weakened by recent events that in their opinion it could not survive ; for this reason the only answer they could make to his question was a definite negative. This decision was clearly a blow to Mr. Asquith, who then asked what their attitude would be towards Mr. Lloyd George if he attempted to form an administration. They then assured him that they had no sort of understanding with Mr. Lloyd George, but that they were prepared to join in or serve under any Government which was stable and would devote itself to the prosecution of the war. ' We told him', wrote Austen, \* that in our opinion the co-operation of himself and Lloyd George was really necessary. Bob Cecil had the courage to suggest to him that the finest and biggest thing that he

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could do would be to offer to serve under Lloyd George ; but he would not allow Cecil to develop this idea, which he rejected with indignation and even with scorn.'

Mr. Asquith thereupon announced his intention of resigning, and he carried this out forthwith. Whether he declined to give advice as to his successor, or whether he was not asked for it, is unknown, but the King sent for Mr. Bonar Law, who then, in Austen's opinion, blundered badly once again :

He proceeded to ascertain that Lloyd George would be willing to serve under him and, having ascertained that, he asked Asquith if he would do the same. He should of course have reversed the order of his visits, gone straight to Asquith from the Palace, asked Asquith if he would serve under Lloyd George, and, on getting a refusal, made an appeal to Asquith to waive all personal considerations and consent to serve under him, i.e. Bonar Law. I think Asquith might have done it. He would have seen that Bonar Law was not a mere tool of Lloyd George and could act independently of him, and it was due to Asquith's position, if he was to be asked to serve under someone else after himself being Prime Minister, that he should be the first person approached by that someone, on receiving the King's Commission. But as Bob says, Bonar Law is an amateur and will always remain one. It is not by any means the only mistake he has made in these negotiations.

As it was, he appears to have informed Asquith that he had first secured Lloyd George's assent since it would have been useless to invite Asquith if Lloyd George had declined ! He was met by Asquith with a resolute refusal.

In these circumstances Mr. Bonar Law was compelled to inform the King that he could not form a Government, and the Sovereign then summoned him together with Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Arthur Henderson to Buckingham Palace to devise some way out of the difficulty, but Mr. Asquith refused to serve under Mr. Bonar Law. Finally, Mr. Lloyd George was entrusted with the task of forming a Government, and one of his first acts was

to ask Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil, and Mr. Walter Long to serve under him. They put a number of questions to him, and upon receiving answers which they deemed satisfactory agreed to comply with his request. In the meantime the situation had been complicated by a violent attack of the Northcliffe Press on Mr. Long, Mr. Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil, and Austen, and it was clearly intimated to Mr. Lloyd George that he must choose between Lord Northcliffe and them. Pressure caused these attacks to cease, but they were ominous of what lay ahead.

Austen remained at the India Office, but in the new Government the tendencies of the previous eighteen months were carried to their logical conclusion. The Leadership of the House of Commons was entrusted to Mr. Bonar Law, who also became Chancellor of the Exchequer, while there was set up a War Cabinet consisting of him, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, and Mr. Arthur Henderson. This was a far greater departure from constitutional practice than the old War Committee had been, and the principle of a compact supreme group having been established, the rest of the Government could be fully expanded to cover the needs of the war without the old fear of cumbrousness and slowness of action, so four new Departments were created. In retrospect it is impossible not to regret that these changes, in themselves probably inevitable, did not come in a different manner, but it would be idle to pretend that the sentiments of the man in the street were outraged by the manner in which Mr. Asquith had been forced to resign. Over two years of ruthless war had blunted all finer feelings, and among soldiers and civilians alike the replacement of Mr. Asquith by Mr. Lloyd George was extremely popular, while not much interest was shown in the methods by which it had been effected. The end justified the means in the eyes of the public, and the Ministers who accompanied the fallen Prime Minister into retirement were objects of scorn rather than of sympathy. Such was the background against which Austen and his colleagues were called upon to take their decisions.

He himself accepted, rather than welcomed, what had happened, and in a letter to his sister he gave full rein to his feelings :

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. . . I take no pleasure in a change which gives me a chief whom I profoundly distrust—no doubt a man of great energy but quite untrustworthy . . . who has tired out the patience of every man who has worked with him and most of those who have worked for him ; who let his Unionist colleagues down about conscription at the critical moment and then took up the question again when he thought the audience more favourable and the limelight more concentrated on himself. . . . You will see that I am sick of being told how beautiful the new world is and how pleased I must be to live in it. Still I hope it will be a better world, and for the time at least I will twang my harp in my own little corner.

Even in his own ' little corner ' he was soon to feel the effect of the change, for on February and, 1917, he wrote to Lord Chelmsford :

. . . I am being hard pressed by the Prime Minister who has, I think, rather exaggerated notions of what India can do, fed by reports which he receives from private correspondents whose information is often imperfect both as regards what has been done and what it is possible to do. He is in temperament and method the very opposite of the late Prime Minister. Asquith's great failing was that he never drove or pushed. The present Prime Minister is determined not to fail from the same cause, and I have been a little embarrassed by receiving urgent requests from him to take steps or to send demands which are not always carefully thought out, and are sometimes perhaps a little contradictory. . . .

One of the first acts of the new Prime Minister was to appoint Mr. Neville Chamberlain to be Director General of National Service, and Austen's account of the way in which this was done shows that the burden of office had in no way detracted from the facility of his pen :

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... I have had two bad nights caused by my anxiety for Neville. I am like a hen with one chick, and more anxious about him than I have ever been about myself, for I think I care more about his success than about any success or failure of my own.

But if this gigantic task can be discharged by anyone, I firmly believe that Neville is that man. The post was offered to Montagu, who had one qualification which Neville has not, viz. previous experience of and familiarity with at least a part of the problem, and the methods of Govt, administration and the organization of Govt, offices. It was declined by him—on reflection I think rightly, and so does the Prime Minister—because he felt unequal to its discharge.

In prevision of this possibility I had written to Gurzon—'If Montagu refuses, consider my brother.' When Montagu refused, Curzon or Milner put forward N.'s name and everyone *jumped* at it. The Labour men were warm in support, and everyone who has spoken to me since has said the same thing: 'What a task! but if anyone can do it, it is your brother!'

What a tribute to the position which Neville has made for himself! He has had an excellent Press and starts with everyone's goodwill. God prosper him! But talk of a mother bringing out her eldest daughter at a first ball, talk of a father listening to the maiden speech of his son in the House of Commons, talk of—what you will! you won't find such an anxious, fussy proud old soul as I am.

The War Cabinet made their decision at 1.0 p.m., and sent me to the telephone to summon Neville to London *instanter*. I telephone to B'ham. Govt. call. Prime Minister. Urgent etc. etc. Answer Lord Mayor Out, Lady Mayoress coming.

Hullo.

Hullo. That you Annie? Where's Neville? Urgent message from P.M.

Neville is in London. Gone to Local Govt. Board. Coming back 2.30 train.

Thanks. May keep him in London. In that case will telephone again. Good-bye.

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The letter continues with an account of Austen's efforts to find his brother in London, and their failure. Austen goes on :

Give up telephone. Across to India Office.

' Messenger, call a cab.'

' Wilson, go to Paddington, haul Mr. Neville out of the train, bring him back here, urgent message, Prime Minister, Director of National Service—unanimous wish—most important—off you go !'

About 2.50 arrival of Neville in custody at India Office.

\* Wilson, telephone P.M. that Lord Mayor is here. What is earliest moment he can see him ? Now, my dear Neville, the position is this.'

Follow some incoherent explanations on my part interrupted by Wilson—

' P.M. will see the Lord Mayor at once at H. of C.'

We walk across : the P.M. says ' Your brother will have explained—unanimous wish—all-important—Labour particularly enthusiastic about you—Hodge—Henderson.'

Neville : My work in B'ham.

P.M. : *This* is national work, *Imperial* work, etc.—Hullo ; what ? my questions ? Yes, I will come in. Well, talk it over with your brother. If you *can* give me an answer in time for me to make the announcement to-day—it is *so* important, it is *everything*, to announce the name at the same time as the creation of the post.

Exit P.M.

Knowing my Neville, I did not offer to talk, but sat silent and waited for his decision. He sat looking very unhappy, and thinking hard for some five or ten minutes and then said :

' Well, if it is put like that there is only one answer that one can give—*Yes*, but I don't like it. I know I *can* do my present work. I don't know about this. It will all be new to me, but I suppose I have no right to refuse.'

And so I rushed into the House, caught L.I. George almost on the hop, said ' he accepts,' and rushed out again to pick up N.'s things at the India Office, stuff his bag with such papers as I could lay my hands on at the moment, and speed him off to B'ham by the 4.20 train.

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. . . Now, I want to become Neville's Under-Secretary. I could really help him there, but it would make him ridiculous and cannot be thought of. I will do what I can from outside.

The next year, 1917, was probably the most unhappy in Austen's life, and the series of misfortunes, both domestic and political, by which it was marked might have broken one of less fundamental serenity of mind. He was far from being a man of little feeling, for many things affected him deeply, but, so long as he believed that the course he had adopted was ethically right, he took the buffeting of fate as the inevitable concomitant of a public career. What worried him far more was any domestic trouble, for his devotion to his family may without exaggeration be said to have been the ruling passion of his life, and 1917 overwhelmed him with worries both at home and in Parliament.

On January 12th his youngest child, Lawrence, was born prematurely, and for a fortnight he hung between life and death. In the long series of Austen's letters to the Viceroy there is hardly an allusion to private affairs, and for this reason such a paragraph as that which occurs in a letter dated January 19th is the more eloquent of what the writer was feeling :

. . . I am obliged to attend a very important War Cabinet this morning, and must then return home where the condition of our baby born just a week ago, is causing us a good deal of anxiety. I am thankful to say that my wife is doing very well, but the baby was in too great a hurry to see the world, and is a wee little thing whose hold on life is precarious. I did not venture to leave the house all yesterday, and am very uneasy at being absent to-day, though I think he is certainly better. But you will understand how difficult it is to fix one's attention on one's work under such circumstances.

Three days later he wrote, ' I am in great anxiety about

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my infant boy, born ten days ago, and find it very hard to fix my thoughts on work.'

It was at this time that he kept a diary for a brief space, 'to occupy my thoughts at a moment of great domestic anxiety,' as he put it, and the entries reflect his sentiments both as a father and as a statesman. Mr. Long that month lost his eldest son on the Western Front, and Austen noted on January 31st :

A fine letter from Walter Long to whom I had written on the death of his eldest son killed in action. Nothing finer in this war than the spirit in which people bear their losses. I marvel at their fortitude. Poor Walter, he was devoted to him and rightly proud of him. How should I bear such a loss ? I wonder if I could bear it as gallantly, and fling myself like Walter into my work with increased vigour.

His colleague and one-time rival was much in his thoughts those days, and on February 3rd he reflected :

Walter and I have had our tiffs—one at least at the time of Balfour's resignation of the leadership. But I like him. He is hot-tempered and easily angered, and at times there has been a queer streak of jealousy—at least of me—in his character. Bonar Law often complains of it. But I like him for all that, and his letter on his son's death by its simple piety and manliness would break down all prejudices if I had any. After all, I think, the jealousy of me was not so much a growth natural to the soil as seed diligently cultivated by Londonderry House !

Fortunately for himself Austen was always able to find solace in literature. 'I get through some quiet reading at my solitary dinners—Lamb's letters, then Byron's—racy and full of *temper*, excellent reading—now I am engaged on Scott's Journal again. I wish I had Lockhart's Life on my

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shelves.' This was the day after Lawrence was born, and shortly afterwards he wrote, 'I am now reading *Old Mortality*. How good the old books are when they are good.'

Since Cambridge days Austen had been an admirer of Byron, and the notes he made at this time show that his interest had not declined with the passing of the years :

I have had to be much at home, for one could not tell what any hour might bring. I find that amid the strain of the war I cannot read war books except such as are a necessary part of my work, and I take refuge in things as far removed from my daily cares as possible—first the letters of Charles Lamb, which I have not read since Canon Ainger's collection was published, then Byron's letters in Prothero's collection which again I have not read since it first came out, and now I have gone back to Scott's Journal. 'Whatever record leap to light, he shall never be shamed.' I know no nobler and at the same time more lovable character. Nothing could be finer than the way he met his great reverse of fortune.

Byron's letters are excellent reading. . . . Meeting Prothero the other day, I said 'I should like to see Murray's replies.' 'Murray was obsequious, extremely obsequious,' he said. He had no doubt in his own mind that Augusta (Mrs. Leigh) was the cause of the separation between B. and Lady B. I said that story seemed to me incredible—impossible to reconcile with Augusta's letters, still more with Lady B.'s to her. P. observed that Lady B. must have been a very strange woman. P. was convinced that Lady B. had meant to return to Byron and that Lady Noel had prevented her. B.'s own story to his solicitor was incredible. It was that Lady B. was the illegitimate daughter of Lady N. by the butler, that he had in a moment of passion taxed Lady B. with this, and then he had hurried off to her parents ; that there had been no other cause for the separation. P. seemed to think that Byron at least knew something about Lady Noel which had made her unwilling to go into Court. He added that Byron's father had undoubtedly cohabited with *his* sister.

I wonder how much Byron is read now—not much, I

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fancy. I am no reader of poetry myself, I am very sorry to say, but when I do read it, it is nearly always Byron whom I take from my shelves. I remember at Cambridge the first time I met A. W. Verrall his saying with a shy half-sneering laugh, 'Oh, you're the undergraduate who reads Byron. How interesting!' Shelley v. L. Morris! Epic of Hades!—were then the rage. John Bright liked Byron and could quote largely from him. I remember that one Sunday afternoon when he was staying at the Grove after a meeting, my Aunt Mary asked him to read some poetry to them and offered Browning. He read a page or two, then put it down with some rather contemptuous criticism, and started reciting Byron—page after page from memory. Bedtime. I think it was Scott that started me 'gurnalizing' as he calls it. How long will it be before I make another entry?

Thoughts of Bright and Browning called to mind other memories of the past :

Both were dining with my father at Prince's Gardens in the early 'eighties. In the course of the dinner the lady next my father said to him, \* Mr. Bright and Mr. Browning are quarrelling. They are getting so angry, I think you must intervene.' It appeared that Bright had stated that he thought Donnelly's proof that Bacon wrote Shakespeare was conclusive, and this was too much for Browning's equanimity. After dinner each confided his opinion of the other to my father. 'Silly old man!' said Bright of Browning. 'Writes stuff that no one can understand. Don't think he knows what he means himself!' 'Obstinate old fool!' said Browning of Bright, 'I don't believe he ever read a word of Shakespeare in his life!' And I fear it must be admitted that however much Bright may have read Shakespeare, he did not appreciate him. I don't remember any quotation from, or even allusion to, Shakespeare in Bright's speeches.

While Austen had been immersed in political complica-

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tions at home and by personal worries his work at the India Office had been for a time a little less exacting. The control of operations in Mesopotamia was handed over to the War Office in February, 1916, and in the following August there was a change in the command when Sir Percy Lake was succeeded by Major-General Stanley (later Sir Stanley) Maude. During the summer and early autumn preparations were carefully made for another advance on Baghdad, and by December the new Commander-in-Chief had at his disposal a force of over 120,000 men. The next three months witnessed steady progress towards the objective : Kut-el-Amara was retaken without opposition at the end of February, and on March nth, 1917, the British troops entered Baghdad.

These events only concerned Austen indirectly, and he was fully occupied with the consequences of the earlier failure. In particular public opinion in Great Britain was becoming ever more exasperated as evidence accumulated of the breakdown of medical arrangements during the earlier days of the campaign, and the King in person took the keenest interest in the matter. Lord Hardinge sent Sir W. Vincent and General Bingley out to Mesopotamia to investigate, and their report was to show only too clearly that the general suspicion was more than justified. By the summer of 1916 a veritable storm of discontent was sweeping across the country, and resolutions dealing with the conduct of operations both in Mesopotamia and in Gallipoli were tabled in Parliament. What then followed was described by Austen in a letter to Lord Chelmsford on July 20th :

I have been at the War Committee all this morning, and must proceed almost at once to the House of Commons. We had under the very serious consideration of the members of the Cabinet attending the War Committee, the position in both Houses in regard to to-day's debate. I, and others of my colleagues, have strongly resisted any suggestion for an enquiry which would add to the burden of work and anxiety of those who are responsible for the conduct of Military and Naval operations, whether at home or abroad.

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But our information is that if we attempted to meet the resolutions set down in the two Houses by a simple negative the Government would undoubtedly be beaten, the resolutions would be carried against them and though we should of course in such a case resign, each House would have set out on an independent enquiry into all these matters. The situation is so serious that it has forced us to the decision that we must meet the Houses with a positive offer. The Prime Minister will, therefore, announce that it is the intention of the Cabinet to set up two small bodies of enquiry for Mesopotamia and Gallipoli, respectively, who will report upon : ' the conduct of operations including the supply of equipment to the troops, the provision for sick and wounded and the responsibility of those Departments whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of the forces employed in those theatres of war.' These Committees will be secret Committees, and confidential documents will be laid before them. They will be kept as small as possible, and we shall endeavour to find for them responsible and sober-minded men.

In the debate which ensued Austen endeavoured to place the Mesopotamian operations in their proper place with regard to the whole wartime effort of the Government of India, but the House was extremely critical, and the Press next day did him less than justice. His real object in speaking was not to excuse himself, but rather to let those for whom he was responsible feel that he was not going to abandon them at the first hint of danger. ' I did not allow,' to quote his own words, ' the Indian case to go wholly by default.'

The Mesopotamia Commission consisted of Lord George Hamilton, who had been Secretary of State for India from 1895 to 1903 ; the Earl of Donoughmore ; Lord Hugh Cecil, M.P. ; Sir Archibald Williamson, M.P., later Lord Forres ; Mr. John Hodge, M.P. ; Commander J. C. Wedgwood, M.P. ; Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge ; and General Sir Neville Lyttelton. The constitution of this body meant increased work for Austen, for although he had been dubious as to the advisability of its creation once

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it had been set up he gave every assistance in his power. It was not, however, until December 21st, after the substitution of Mr. Lloyd George for Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister, that Austen was himself called upon to give evidence. His comment on the experience was, 'The members were very friendly to me, and I rather enjoyed myself.' He expressed the firm opinion that the Indian Army system as devised by Lord Kitchener had broken down under the stress of war through excessive centralization and the concentration of all authority and responsibility in a single individual. The intention, he pointed out, had been to abolish the Military Member, but the result had been quite different, for while the Military Member had disappeared in name the Commander-in-Chief had disappeared in fact. Austen expressed himself in favour of the creation of a Chief of Staff, coupled with the devolution of extended powers to the Adjutant and Quartermaster General, and to the General Officers Commanding Armies, whose number he felt might be raised to three if not four. At this point he was asked by Sir Neville Lyttelton whether he had ever considered the abolition of the post of Commander-in-Chief and the creation of an Army Council on the British model. Austen replied that he had considered the matter, but that he was strongly opposed to the adoption of any such plan. In his opinion it was essential to have a visible Commander-in-Chief for a force of the type of the British Army in India, while he further held that an Army Council or a Board of Admiralty would not work if presided over by a soldier or a sailor of superior rank and position to all the other members. Lord George Hamilton and Sir Cyprian Bridge expressed their entire agreement with this point of view.

Austen took the chance to express his appreciation of those who had worked with, or under, him. He paid a tribute to Lord Hardinge and Sir Beauchamp Duff for the risks they had taken, and the courage and unselfishness they had shown, in the early days of the war. 'I was glad also,' he wrote, 'to get an opportunity of saying a good word for Sir John Nixon, drawing attention to the complete success of all his earlier operations and to the chivalrous way in which he had behaved towards the officers under him, both whilst he was in command and since his return home.'

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Needless to say Austen was pressed by the Commissioners for his opinion on the responsibility for the medical failures. He only gave it with great reluctance, and with the reservation that his information was not complete, but he confessed he had come to the conclusion that Inspector General Hathaway, the Principal Medical Officer, the General at that time on the lines of communication, and Surgeon General MacNeece had proved unequal to the very arduous and exceptional responsibility which had been thrown upon them. He added, however, that the failure in Mesopotamia was not a solitary experience, and he thought that under circumstances similar to those of the retreat from Ctesiphon the troops in France had suffered almost as badly in the retreat from Mons, whilst in Gallipoli, if the stories which he had heard were true, there had been a similar failure with even less excuse. Of Austen's evidence as a whole Lord George Hamilton wrote over a year afterwards, 'Mr. Chamberlain as a witness greatly impressed the Commission by his capacity, breadth of view, and fearless acceptance of responsibility. He left the Commission room a bigger man than he entered it.'

While the Mesopotamia Commission was preparing its Report, and General Maude was pressing on to Baghdad, Austen was occupied with several other problems which concerned his Department, and not the least thorny was the representation of India at the forthcoming Imperial Conference. When the matter was first discussed he insisted that she should be treated on the same footing as the Dominions. The special object of the Conference was to stimulate the overseas Empire to further efforts, and Austen roundly declared that it would be little short of an outrage if the representatives of India were excluded after that country's services in the war. The opposition came from Sir Robert Borden and Mr. Hughes, the Prime Ministers of Canada and Australia, while although Mr. Massey and Mr. Ward, from New Zealand, admitted that the case for Indian participation was unanswerable they were clearly not enamoured of the idea. General Botha in South Africa was in much the same position. Fortunately, however, Mr. Lloyd George supported Austen in view of the place which the Indian Army had won for the country, and the

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War Cabinet was unanimous. The face of the Dominions was saved by the form of the invitation. Had the meeting been one of the ordinary Imperial Conferences it would have been impossible to summon an Indian representative without the assent of the Dominions, but this was an Imperial War Conference, so that the Dominions were not asked to join in the invitation to India, while they could hardly refuse to meet an Indian statesman in the conference-chamber. All the same, had Austen not made so firm a stand it is open to doubt whether India would have been represented.

The next difficulty was the selection of the Indian representative, but on this Austen had already made up his mind :

Each Dominion is represented by its Prime Minister and has but one voice in the Conference. But the Prime Ministers are permitted to bring with them such other Ministers as they may desire, and may invite these Ministers to speak on behalf of their Dominion on any particular question. In the case of India the analogous arrangement would be that the Secretary of State should be the representative of India, but that he should be accompanied by other representatives whose names I should invite you to submit to me . . . Lord Hardinge accepted this view and believes that it will satisfy Indian public opinion. In any case it appears to me impossible to admit any other solution as long as the Secretary of State is directly responsible to Parliament for the policy of the Indian Government. In practice I should be glad to leave my colleagues from India to speak wherever possible on behalf of India ; but I must be the Head of the Indian delegation, and the policy which is advocated by it must be the policy of the Secretary of State in Council. I have seen some suggestion in Indian papers that no Official should be permitted to represent India, and that their delegates to Imperial Conferences should be appointed by some form of election. This seems to me sheer nonsense. Heaven knows what the electoral body is to be or what qualifications it would have for its task. . . . In truth if the wishes of the writers were to be followed, whilst every other Dominion would be represented

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by its Government, India would be represented by an opposition.

It was finally decided that the three representatives from India to assist Austen should be Sir P., later Lord, Sinha ; Sir James, later Lord, Meston ; and the Maharaja of Bikanir. For the decision to include one of the ruling Chiefs in the delegation Austen has left it on record that he was in part indebted to Mr. Walter Long, 'who has been most generous in his support of Indian claims. It is a great thing in these matters to have a friend at the Colonial Office.' The Indians were most sympathetically received. The day before the King received the Maharaja he sent a message to him : 'Tell Bikanir that as I was driving yesterday I saw him in a bowler hat and a suit of dittos, that I have never seen him in anything but a puggaree before and I don't wish to see him in anything else now.'

Austen had the satisfaction of seeing his efforts crowned with success, and India secured formal recognition of her place in the Empire. His own impressions are recorded in a letter to his sister written on March 24th :

Our Imperial War Cabinet sittings have been extraordinarily interesting. I am very much impressed by General Smuts—a man of great ability and with a knowledge of Europe that I have never known in any other over-sea statesman. Incidentally my colleagues from India have been delighted with their reception. All the Dominion ministers have been most cordial in their welcome, and I make bold to hope that henceforth India will be represented at all Imperial Conferences. So whenever I leave office I shall have to my credit two forward steps in Indian Imperial development; but if you suppose that young India will be grateful you are quite wrong. They would feel themselves traitors to their cause if they stopped to say thank you ! They will merely observe that even a Tory couldn't altogether stop their progress.

Lloyd George dined in my house last night ! Such are Time's strange revenges.

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The fact is that although Austen's tenure of the India Office was but a brief episode in a career almost wholly concerned with British and European problems it roused in him an interest in India and its future which continued unabated to the day of his death. His resignation prevented him from dealing with the reforms subsequently embodied in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, which might so easily have been the Chamberlain-Chelmsford Report, but he looked at India through remarkably unprejudiced eyes. From the beginning he realized the significance of the Russian Revolution :

The fact is that all the world is in a state of revolution. Let us hope that ours will be a peaceful revolution. But it will be revolution none the less. The ferment of these new ideas is working everywhere, and in India as much as anywhere. Opinion cannot but be excited by the Russian Revolution, by the congratulations showered upon the revolutionaries from England and elsewhere, and by the constant appeals to the spirit of liberty and nationality which are the ground-work of most of the public declarations of the time.

Austen wrote this to Lord Chelmsford on March 29th, while a few weeks later he defined the British goal in India as developing ' free institutions with a view to ultimate self-government within the Empire,' but, as has been said, it was not to be his lot to give concrete form to this policy.

The early months of 1917 saw Austen concerned with a subject of much more immediate importance to the Government of which he was a member, namely the storm roused in the House of Commons and the Press by the proposal to raise the Indian cotton duties to 7½ per cent, without any corresponding rise in the excise. ' All this does not terrify me,' he wrote to the Viceroy, ' and provided I have the continued support of the Prime Minister the sooner we fight our battle the better I shall be pleased. I do not pretend that as a Tariff Reformer I like protection of Indian industry against British industry any more than I like the high tariffs

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of the Dominions ; but I think the attitude of Lancashire is both selfish and shortsighted, and I am moved to disgust when they profess that they are actuated by concern for the poor Indian peasant. However, I must restrain my feelings and deal with them seriously, but as gently as I may.' Nevertheless, when the representatives of the Lancashire cotton trade came to see Austen they put their case in such a way as to anger him still further, and they received little in the way of consolation. He told them that if they knew more about the cotton trade than he did, he knew ' more about India than some of those who addressed the meeting.'

. . . Nothing has struck me more in the speeches you have made than the want of knowledge—I do not want to use a harsh word—but the absolute want of knowledge of Indian conditions and Indian feeling betrayed by the speakers to-day. You have spoken as if the Government of India against its will and its better judgment, the Secretary of State in Council at home and His Majesty's Government were all the dupes of a little knot of greedy mill-owners who were not satisfied with profits that might make anybody's mouth water, but had clamoured and agitated until they had secured some further assistance. You entirely mistake the situation, and it is a dangerous mistake. I beg you to face the facts. It may not alter your judgment; it may not alter your decision ; it may not affect the course which you feel it necessary to pursue ; but do not take your course in ignorance ; do not take it believing that in India there is no public opinion behind the Government or that the Government itself is the tool of a small and greedy clique.

India is changing rapidly. . . . We have called Indians to our counsels. In increasing numbers they will take their place and play their part in the Government of India. But if you call them into your counsels ; if you invite them to take the part for which they are qualified and to which they are entitled in the Government and development of their country, you must have patience with their views, even when you think they are mistaken ; you must deal tenderly with the matters in which they are vitally interested,

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and you must be willing to listen to them, and, where you can, to grant their wishes.

Now there is no representative of Indian native opinion who has not from the first regarded, and does not now regard, the special and peculiar position hitherto accorded to cotton in the Indian market, unlike that of any other British trade, as a great and crying grievance and an injury to India. There is not one of them who does not deeply resent it. There is no subject which has come in for more universal condemnation.

In taking leave of the deputation Austen was careful to stress once more the position of the Government and of himself:

... I should not be candid if I left you under any misapprehension as to my attitude or the attitude of His Majesty's Government at the present time. To reverse the decision which we have taken now would be a calamity for England. It would be quite impossible for me to be responsible for such a step, and I should not envy the man who had to take my place to do it. His Majesty's Government cannot hold out any hope, and it is not kind to keep you in any uncertainty.

The struggle was now transferred to the floor of the House of Commons, where the prospects of success for the Government were not at first very bright. The Whips were extremely gloomy, and declared that Ministers would have against them the whole of the Irish Party, the not inconsiderable portion of the Labour Party that was drawn from Lancashire, and the Opposition Liberals, whom they declared to be more united than at any time since the formation of Mr. Lloyd George's administration. Austen refused to be dismayed. He based his confidence on the fact that if the Government was beaten it would go to the country, and he doubted if Mr. Asquith would precipitate a General Election so soon after the publication of the Report

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of the Dardanelles Commission. Austen was justified in his optimism. Mr. Asquith showed no disposition to push matters to extremes, and suggested that the whole question should again be reviewed when the fiscal policy of the Empire came under revision at the end of the war. The Prime Minister, who had loyally supported Austen throughout, at once accepted the proposal, and so the difficulty was overcome, though 125 Members voted against the Government.

The raising of the Indian cotton duties was not in itself, perhaps, a problem of the first importance, but the way in which it was handled by Austen sheds some valuable light on his character, for it shows that he could be firm as well as conciliatory—a fact which his critics have not always appreciated. At the same time he had by no means abandoned his Tariff Reform principles, as his letter to the Viceroy describing the debate clearly shows :

. . . What I should like to see would be a scheme of post-war finance in which our 7½ might be taken as the level of our general tariff with an abatement for goods of British origin. The difficulty will be, of course, to make good the gap in your revenue. But this difficulty we must try to overcome, for whilst I have been glad to fight the battle of India against a particular impost forced upon her in spite of the universal discontent which it created in Indian and British Indian circles, I should not be prepared to back India in a policy of selfish isolation which disregarded her Imperial obligations and was not founded upon the principle that the prosperity and the trade of each part of the Empire is the common stock of the Empire as a whole, and that we cannot weaken each other without weakening ourselves.

Personalities as well as principles have to be dealt with by one in the position which Austen then occupied, and the future of Sir Beauchamp Duff was not the least of his minor difficulties. As the truth concerning the earlier failure in Mesopotamia became known the Cabinet lost confidence in him, and his neglect to visit that country himself was the

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subject of unfavourable comment. When, therefore, that officer returned to England to give evidence before the Mesopotamia Commission it was decided that his vacation of the post of Commander-in-Chief should be final, and Sir Charles Monro was appointed in his place.

Of more academic, but no less historical, interest now are the views then held by Austen and his colleagues as to the future of Mesopotamia after the war. The Cabinet appointed, in the middle of March, 1917, a small committee to deal with this question, and in addition to Austen it consisted of Lord Curzon, Lord Hardinge, Sir Thomas Holderness, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Sir Ronald Graham, and Sir Mark Sykes. The conclusions of this body were that the territory roughly corresponding to the Basra vilayet should be incorporated in the British Empire, and should be directly and openly administered as such ; while in the Baghdad vilayet British influence should be exercised through a resident working behind an Arab facade, and as far as possible with Arab officials, but supplied with such British officers as might be necessary for good government. In view of probable railway developments, and of the racial affinities of the inhabitants of these districts, as well as of the presence of Russia to the North, and of France in Syria to the West, the committee took the view that the area would more naturally fall into the East European, rather than into the Indian, sphere, and that it would therefore be more conveniently administered by the Foreign Office. It was also anticipated that India, through the Resident at Bushire, would continue to control both shores of the Persian Gulf, and would exercise a more extensive influence throughout Southern Persia up to the limits of the Russian sphere. While the committee was arriving at these conclusions the Czar was abdicating and the United States was declaring war on Germany. Fresh factors were, in short, coming into existence, and they were to affect profoundly the future of the whole Middle East.

The early months of 1917 had thus been exceptionally trying for Austen both on public and on private grounds, and in May he took a short holiday at Crawley, in Sussex, where, as ever, he revelled in country life and above all in the flowers. Rowfant, as the place was called, belonged

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to Mr. Godfrey Locker-Lampson, afterwards Austen's Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, and is a delightful Elizabethan house with a lovely garden, which the two Chamberlain brothers shared that spring and summer : their children were there, and the parents went down, when they could, for week-ends. In the woods Austen found, much to his joy, wild lilies-of-the-valley, for the story goes that St. Leonard fought with a dragon in the neighbourhood, but that in the course of the struggle he was wounded, and wherever drops of his blood fell the lilies-of-the-valley sprang up. For a few days Austen was able to shake off his cares, and then came another great trial, one of the greatest in his life. His immediate reaction can be judged from a letter he wrote to his sister at the beginning of June :

We had a perfect ten days at Rowfant and rejoiced in the fresh air and sunshine, the country, the flowers and the birds. It did me good to get such a holiday—the longest I have had since October, 1913 ! There was only one thing to mar it—no two : the boom of the guns in France distinctly audible and seeming to reproach one for standing idle even for a moment, and the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission which I received towards the close of my stay and which is the saddest and most appalling document that I have ever read. The worst features are that not only was the expedition ill-found from the first, but that high-placed and responsible officers deliberately concealed the truth and reported falsely in reply to my enquiries.

Hardinge, Duff, Nixon, 2 Medical Directors General and the Principal Medical Officer of the Force all come in for severe censure, and I do not altogether escape blame, nor the Govt, and other authorities at home, but except in the case of the orders for the advance on Baghdad where I share responsibility (for what is declared to be a bad blunder) with the War Committee I am blamed only for saying in ' private ' telegrams or letters what I ought to have said in public, i.e. formal, official despatches. A more fearful breakdown than that of the military organization in India which we owe to Kitchener, has, I should think, never occurred. The whole story saddens me dreadfully.

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Beauchamp Duff carries the heaviest load of responsibility, but hardly anyone comes well out of it.

The findings of the Commission with regard to the inception of the Mesopotamian campaign did not, of course, concern Austen, but its strictures on the advance to Baghdad affected him closely. The Commissioners found that the main responsibility rested with Sir John Nixon, 'whose confident optimism was the main cause of the decision to advance,' while the others in their opinion responsible were Lord Hardinge, Sir Beauchamp Duff, Sir Edmund Barrow,<sup>1</sup> Austen, and the members of the War Committee of the Cabinet. The Report went on :

The expert advisers of the Government, who were consulted, also approved the advance and are responsible for their advice, but the papers submitted to us suggest that the approval of the naval and military experts was reluctant, and was perhaps partly induced by a natural desire not to disappoint the hopes of advantage to the general situation which the Government entertained. It is, however, notable that the experts unanimously anticipated no difficulty in the advance on Baghdad, but only in holding it. We do not attach any share in the responsibility for the decision to advance to Baghdad to the Councils of the Secretary of State for India and of the Viceroy, as we have been unable to ascertain from the evidence laid before us that the advance to Baghdad was ever brought before them in such a manner as to allow them to give their personal advice and opinion upon it.

We have included the War Committee of the Cabinet and the Secretary of State for India among those upon whom responsibility for this misadventure rests. It is true that the War Committee and the Secretary of State acted upon the opinion of their expert military advisers, and that the Secretary of State only gave his assent to the advance after he had received an assurance from the General on the

<sup>1</sup> Military Secretary of the India Office.

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spot that he had an available force sufficient for his purpose. But so long as the system of responsible departmental administration exists in this country, those who are political heads of departments in time of war, whether they be civilian or military, cannot be entirely immune from the consequences of their own action. They have the option and power of accepting or rejecting the advice of their expert subordinates. The acceptance by a chief of wrong advice from expert subordinates may be an extenuation of, but cannot secure complete immunity from, the responsibility for the evils which may ensue.

The findings of the Commissioners so far as the condition of the wounded was concerned, and their exoneration of Austen from all blame in this connection, have already been mentioned, but in other sections of the Report the line was taken that he relied too much, in his communications with the Viceroy, upon 'private' letters and telegrams, and unduly neglected the use of official despatches.

If the old practice of having recourse to an official despatch had been adopted, and a despatch had been written at the outset with the full authority of the Secretary of State in Council, conveying to the Governor-General the rumours and the nature of the doubts which had arisen as regards the condition of the wounded, and such despatch had been received by the Governor-General in Council, the circulation of such despatch amongst both Councils would have accelerated an investigation and prevented a great deal of the distress and suffering which occurred during that period.

Commander Wedgwood, however, in a Minority Report said that 'to attribute the disasters in Mesopotamia to the use by the Secretary of State of private telegrams' appeared to him to 'show some lack of a sense of proportion.'

The Report was not made public until the end of June, when at once there arose the usual demand for a scapegoat, and in the meantime Austen was offered the embassy at Paris. The idea had many attractions for him, but before

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coming to a decision he asked the advice of his brother, and as this advice had much to do with his ultimate refusal the letter containing it may usefully be quoted :

5 Egerton Place, S.W.  
*June 28, 1917*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

Don't take my remarks of last night as definite advice against a course which obviously has great attractions both for you and Ivy.

I should not care to *advise* you on such a momentous question ; I only want to put certain considerations to you so that you may give them due weight when coming to your decision.

In favour of acceptance there are the following reasons :

You would occupy a position of great dignity and importance for which you have special qualifications and in which also Ivy would have full scope.

Looking at the post by itself I doubt if it would be possible to find another couple so well suited for it.

Again, I think you would both very keenly enjoy the life which would be full of interest and would keep you more closely together even than your present one.

In any future consideration of candidates for the F.O. the having been ambassador would give you a special claim and would make your appointment a natural one. I have always felt that the F.O. was your job.

Against :

The coincidence with the Mesopotamia Report is exceedingly awkward. The two things would certainly be coupled in spite of denial and your appointment might be slightly discounted in France in consequence.

In my judgment acceptance would finally remove you from domestic politics though not necessarily from foreign or Imperial politics.

I don't attach very much weight to my first objection. Any blame of you is purely technical and it will soon be recognized that you have come out very well. Moreover, one should not be moved or deflected from one's course by what people (mostly fools) think or say.

## THE SHADOW OF MESOPOTAMIA

My strong objection is the one I have put last, but here again its force depends chiefly on your own ambitions.

No one can foretell what will happen after the war in domestic politics. Parties will be disrupted, new cries and new men very likely will be coming to the front, and it is possible that your role might rather be that of the old experienced hand putting a brake on the extravagances of youth. A very useful and necessary but not dazzling function !

But if you should be away two or three years (and unless you were you would hardly have time to acquire the prestige and influence necessary to make a striking success) it would be folly to suppose that you could come back to a new H. of C. with a new constituency and take among new men the position you occupy now.

I have omitted to mention a third objection—undoubtedly serious, but public not personal, viz. the leaving the India Office to some new and inexperienced hand. It is difficult to estimate the balance of services between the two offices.

It is all a chancy business, but if you take it, fully realizing what you are giving up, there are great compensations on the other side.

Yours affectly.,

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN.

Meanwhile, resignation of his present office rather than acceptance of any new one was Austen's predominant consideration. As he studied the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission he came to the conclusion that it might well be his duty to resign. He was, according to the Constitution, the Minister technically responsible, and his administration had been called in question. It was not an easy decision to take, and it was not rendered any easier by renewed domestic worries, for this was the very moment when the doctors decided that Lawrence must undergo an operation. A letter which he wrote at this time to Mr. Pike Pease, later Lord Daryngton, vividly depicts his anguish of mind :

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9 Egerton Place, S.W.

MY DEAR PIKE,

Your note reaches me at a moment when it is doubly grateful to both my wife and me, for to public cares there is at this moment the added anxiety that our baby has to undergo an operation to-morrow. I believe that all will be well, but—you know what it means. Work is good for a man with private cares and sorrows, but private cares are not good for work.

Your note has touched us both, and we thank you for it.

I won't pretend that I am not suffering under the attacks on me. It is not in human nature to like them, but on my soul I do not reproach myself with my share in what is past, and I do not believe that when the first horror of these revelations is past, I shall be condemned. I am much more worried about what I feel to be the gross injustice to others—notably Hardinge and Barrow.

Barrow is without blame, and those who charge him are working off old scores. If Hardinge is to blame, what is his fault? It is that he trusted and believed the military and medical authorities who were appointed by the Home Government to advise him. Winston was condemned because he was supposed to have overridden the military and naval experts. Hardinge is condemned because he trusted them *in their own line*.

Somehow your note has been like a stone thrown into a geyser. You have stirred me up and I overflow you. Forgive me. I only meant to thank you, and to tell you that your note, which in any case would have touched me, has had a peculiar value from the moment at which it reaches me.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

What finally induced Austen to resign immediately was a decision of the Cabinet with regard to the Report. It had been decided in principle to set up a Court of Enquiry, and Austen understood that this body would examine precise charges against particular individuals cited by name. On

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July 11th, however, there was a meeting of the Cabinet, and it was then that Austen learnt this was not the procedure contemplated, but that the Court was to review the whole Report, and was itself to decide, as it proceeded, who among those named in it, or subsequently mentioned in the course of the enquiry, should be so to speak placed upon their trial. This, in Austen's opinion, produced an entirely new situation, and one which admitted of no delay in his resignation. There was, however, a serious difficulty in the way. The debate in the House of Commons on the Mesopotamia Report was to take place the following day, and Members would not tolerate Austen's silence ; but in fairness to his colleagues, the House, and himself he felt obliged in these circumstances to announce his resignation. On the other hand, etiquette demands that the resignation of a Minister shall not be made public until the King's approval has been obtained, and the King was in France. It was a serious dilemma, and one that troubled Austen sorely. His decision was to ignore etiquette for the nonce, and it may be added that the King from the first appreciated the difficulty. The Prime Minister, indeed, asked Austen to reconsider his decision, but the other refused to do so.

India Office, Whitehall, S.W.  
*July 11th, 1917*

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

I have very carefully considered the appeal which you made to me this afternoon not to press my resignation.

It is true as you were good enough to say that as regards the larger issues of policy involved in the Mesopotamian operations, my responsibility is the same as that of my colleagues in the Government of the day ; but even in this matter the Report of the Commission differentiates between me and other members of the Cabinet, and singles me out by name. In other points of less importance where responsibility attaches to me alone, they blame the procedure which I adopted. I stand, therefore, in a different position from any of my colleagues.

The Report of the Commission is now to be the basis of the investigation conducted by the Court of Enquiry.

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As I understand, no definite charges will at first be formulated against any individual, but the conduct and character of everyone named in the Report, including members of the Government of India and of the staff of the India Office will be the subject of enquiry. Our actions may at any moment be called in question, and we may be summoned to the enquiry not only to give evidence but to answer charges then for the first time formulated against us.

I recognize the difficulties with which the Government is confronted and I am most reluctant to add to them. But I am satisfied that a Minister who cannot protect his subordinates, who may at any moment find his own conduct impugned and his own acts called in question before a Judicial Tribunal, cannot possess the authority which is necessary for the discharge of his duties, and that his retention of office under such circumstances is contrary to the public interest.

The grave problems which confront the Government of India at the present time make it specially necessary that the Minister immediately responsible should speak with unimpaired authority, and should possess in full measure the support and confidence of Parliament. In the conditions which I have described I can count on neither, and my usefulness is at an end.

I must beg you therefore at once to take the necessary steps to relieve me of my office, and to secure for me His Majesty's permission to state the reason for my resignation.

Yours very sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

On the following afternoon there began a two days' debate on the Report. Since it was known that Austen was going to make a personal statement the House was crowded, as always when a Minister is so placed, though it was in no way anticipated that his resignation would be announced. The debate began with a speech of an hour and a quarter from the Attorney-General, Sir F. E. Smith, who dealt chiefly with the rules of evidence and the rights of defendants, and finally announced that the Government had decided to set up a Court of Enquiry. After a few

remarks from Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir John Simon rose from the Front Opposition Bench to contest much of the Attorney-General's argument. He objected to the procedure proposed, and suggested as an alternative a method by which, under a short and agreed statute, the necessary charges could be formulated against those censured, so that they might be refuted or proved in accordance with the elementary principles of ordinary justice. Other speakers pressed this course on the Government,<sup>1</sup> while Mr. Montagu, who had been Under-Secretary for India under Lord Crewe, asked Members not to punish men like Sir John Nixon for failure, and described Lord Hardinge as the most popular Viceroy of modern times. In effect, the big issues raised by the Report were being forgotten in an argument as to the best procedure to be adopted for the judicial investigation which was to follow, and Members had the uncomfortable feeling that the House had failed to rise to the greatness of the subject under discussion.

Such was the atmosphere when, just before half-past seven, Austen rose. Members at once streamed into the Chamber, and his first sentences had hardly been delivered before every bench was filled. In the centre of a crowded Treasury Bench sat Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Balfour, and Sir Edward Carson, while opposite were Mr. Asquith and his chief lieutenants. Four of the Mesopotamia Commissioners were present, and in the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery sat Mr. Neville Chamberlain, then head of the National Service Department.

Austen spoke for an hour and a quarter, and never before had he displayed such power over the feelings of the House. Even *The Times*, no friendly critic in those days, alluded to his 'extraordinary fire and animation,' and went on, 'The House felt that this was one of the rare occasions on which a speaker was addressing it from the heart, and it showed its sympathy by frequent bursts of cordial cheering.' He began by paying a tribute to Sir John Nixon and Lord Hardinge, and then proceeded, in a hushed House, to announce his own decision :

<sup>1</sup> Later in the debate Mr. Balfour announced that it would be adopted in deference to the feeling of the House, but in the end no action was taken owing to the difficulties encountered.

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For myself, I speak to-day under circumstances of some difficulty. It is quite obvious that the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission cannot be left where it stands. There may be differences, there were differences, in this House as to the tribunal to which should be remitted the decision whether action ought to be taken against any of those named. The whole House thinks that a judicial tribunal must try that question. That decision I do not for one moment dispute, but it necessarily carries with it another decision. It is not possible that I, who am named in the Report, apart from my colleagues—with whom I acted in common in the more important matters, and whose responsibility is sole and undivided in other matters, where the Commission administers rebuke or censure—it is not possible that I should continue head of that office in which my conduct has been censured, while such conduct might at any moment be called in question by the judicial tribunal to which you are going to refer these matters. Accordingly, Sir, my resignation, my final resignation, is in the hands of my right hon. friend the Prime Minister, and I only speak from this bench at this moment because, owing to His Majesty's absence from London on public work, it has been impossible to take His Majesty's pleasure upon it. With that personal explanation of my position I will proceed at once to deal with some of the matters on which I think the House has a right to call for a statement from me.

Austen then gave a detailed account of the part he had played in the control of operations in Mesopotamia. He began by warmly repudiating any suggestion that Sir Edmund Barrow had in any way exceeded his powers, and he reviewed stage by stage the communications which passed between the Government of India, the India Office, and Sir John Nixon, both before and during the advance from Kut. He showed how the Report condensed some of the telegrams which had been sent and omitted important passages from others. He stressed the political reasons that had made the advance on Baghdad desirable, and in this connection he dwelt on the activity of German emissaries in Persia, the pressure on Afghanistan, and the situation

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in the Balkans and the Dardanelles. At the same time, Austen was careful to make it clear that Sir John Nixon had urged the advance for military reasons, and to the General Staff at the time the problem was not how to get to Baghdad, but how to remain there.

He next proceeded to a minute examination of the discussions and correspondence on the possibility of providing reinforcements to hold the city, and on the probable effects of a compulsory retirement. He referred to the attacks made on Mr. Asquith and his colleagues for deliberately embarking upon a hazardous gamble, and he declared that they were based on a mutilated telegram which attributed to the Cabinet the declaration 'we are in great need of a striking success in the East.' Again, he filled the gaps, and showed that in the original message these words were preceded by the statement that Persia was drifting into war on the side of the enemy, while the Arabs were wavering. Austen was careful to make it clear that he in no way imputed misrepresentation to the Commission, but the House could not mistake the note of challenge in his voice when he declared that no man could safely be charged on paraphrased extracts. 'I think,' he exclaimed confidently, 'the House has quite made up its mind that it is not going to hang anyone on the Report of this Commission.'

From the military and political aspect of the operations Austen passed to the collapse in the hospital arrangements, which he declared to be both lamentable and inexcusable. 'I cannot say one word,' he confessed, 'to excuse or to palliate the horrible breakdown.' As for himself, he was entirely ignorant of it until the damage had been done. He replied to the criticism that he had relied too much upon 'private' letters and telegrams to the undue neglect of official despatches by pointing out that in accordance with an old-established practice it was by no means unusual to mark a telegram 'private' in order to ensure that it should reach the person to whom it was addressed without being intercepted or detained by subordinates. In conclusion he entered a strong plea on behalf of Lord Hardinge, and he reiterated Mr. Montagu's estimate of the Viceroy's success and popularity.

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What was Lord Hardinge's fault? Just remember for a moment the controversies that raged around military administration in India ten years and more ago. Up to that time the Viceroy had two military advisers. If he was not satisfied with the advice of the Commander-in-Chief he could turn to the military member of Council and could check, as he did check, the advice and recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief by the advice and recommendations of the military member of Council. That gave rise to friction. It was declared to be an intolerable system. The system was put an end to, and the military member was abolished with the deliberate intention of forcing the Viceroy to accept the advice of the Commander-in-Chief and not to look elsewhere in military matters.

After all, the gravest charge which the Commission have to bring against Lord Hardinge is that he trusted too implicitly in military matters to the military adviser who had been given him, and did not use his high authority and his great position to overrule and to go behind him. It would be an evil day for this House and for this country if because of any errors of judgment or any miscalculation for which others are as much responsible as he, some of them more responsible, a great public servant is to be hounded out of public life,<sup>1</sup> without a trial and without a hearing, in answer to the clamours of an ill-informed and passionate mob.<sup>2</sup>

The cheers which greeted the closing sentences of the speech showed that Austen had carried his hearers with him to the end, and the rest of the debate was evidence of the impression which he had made. Mr. Asquith said: 'From the first moment when my right hon. friend entered the India Office, in the month of May, 1915, he discharged its most difficult duties with vigilant assiduity, great and rare administrative power, and with unflinching tact and kindness.' Even more remarkable was the tribute of the Nationalist,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Hardinge three times offered to resign the Permanent Under-Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs, to which he had returned, but Mr. Balfour refused to allow him to do so.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, 95 H.C. Deb. 5s. 2210-2234.

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Mr. Swift MacNeill, for he said that Austen was the one ' who has come best of all out of this transaction, a high-minded gentleman who would not allow even a shadow or a shade to rest upon his name even technically, and who, like a true-hearted man, has resigned his position, though absolutely innocent. Of him it might be said that although the gates of promotion are shut—I hope only for the present—the gates of glory and uprightness are open to him.' The feeling of the House of Commons was that of the country as a whole, though there were not a few who considered that his resignation was a trifle quixotic.

It is to be noted that Austen said nothing of the course which he considered should have been taken. In private he expressed the opinion that the Government had blundered badly in its handling of the Report. ' We ought,' he said, ' at the outset to have announced what action we thought called for as regards individuals and taken it on our own responsibility, and then told the House of Commons to deal with *us*.' He fully admitted that he was to blame for not insisting on this course at the very beginning, and he attributed the mistake in no small degree to the Prime Minister's fear of the House of Commons. However, ' by assenting in its early stages,' Austen continued, ' to a policy which I imperfectly apprehended, I helped to place myself in an impossible position, and have paid the penalty.' The day after his resignation speech Austen wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting that Lord Islington, the Under-Secretary, should be his successor, but Mr. Lloyd George preferred Mr. E. S. Montagu, a choice *oi*~ which Austen warmly approved. One of the new Minister's first duties was to declare that he had secured the sanction of the Cabinet for his predecessor's proposal that commissions should be granted to Indians, while on August 20th he announced to the House that the policy of the Government was that ' of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.' The voice might be the voice of Mr. Montagu, but the policy was that which Austen Chamberlain had elaborated during the two previous years.

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So ended Austen's official connection with India. As he wrote to his sister :

. . . Well, there's an end of my ambition to do big work for India and for the Empire in that sphere. I think I was on the right lines ; I was beginning to see my way ; I had got the confidence of my office and Council and of the Indian Govt, and Services, and I think I could have won moderate Indian opinion. It was a sacrifice to give it all up, but it was clearly right and I can swallow down my regrets and enjoy and profit by the holiday which falls to my lot. I have my moments of blue devils, but they pass, and after all they are more due to the effects of long strain than anything else.

The course he had felt obliged to take was a blow, in spite of the fact that Austen was by no means as ambitious as were some of his colleagues. Later this same year he was indulging in some reflections on his career, with his retirement from the India Office still fresh in his mind, and he wrote :

As to ambition, I don't think that I ever had more of it than is necessary to make a man stick to his work until, in the year or two before Balfour's resignation of the leadership, colleagues and the course of events suggested the possibility—and indeed it seemed at the time the probability—of my succeeding him. Then my ambition was fired, for that seemed to open great possibilities, and I dreamed like others of being some day head of a ministry that should make some history, domestic and Imperial. But when that chance failed and I made way for Bonar Law, my ' ambition ' perished from want of sustenance and I can't revive it.

### CHAPTER III

#### DIFFICULT YEARS

FROM one point of view Austen's resignation was a blessing in disguise for it enabled him to have that long rest which he so greatly needed. As has been shown, he was never what would be described as a strong man, and by the summer of 1917 the strain of the last few years was beginning to tell. The borders of Surrey and Sussex had a special attraction for both Austen and his wife, and in the autumn they moved from Crawley to Barton St. Mary, near East Grinstead, as they did not want to leave the children in London, where the air raids were uncomfortably frequent. There they stayed for a few months until they moved to Thornhill in the same neighbourhood. During this period Austen's letters show that the 'moments of blue devils' had no real influence on his outlook, and he took full advantage of those pleasures of country life which meant so much, but which were so often denied, to him. His correspondence was full of accounts of flowers and plants, and he also seized the opportunity to get through a great deal of general reading. If ever a man knew how to get the maximum value out of leisure, that man was Austen Chamberlain. 'I have had such a holiday,' he wrote exultantly to Lord Chelmsford in October, 'as you can never know till your Viceroyalty is over.'

Among the books he read during these days was the biography of his father's old friend Sir Charles Dilke, and it prompted him to some reminiscences :

When he stayed with me alone at Highbury when The divorce proceedings had just been begun, I found him full of knowledge and very entertaining, but very tiring to entertain because he required two hours riding, two hours lawn tennis and some fencing daily, which did not accord with my habits. Later I saw him only in the House. He was an appallingly dull speaker, crammed with facts on many subjects and full of criticisms on most, but after at first listening eagerly I gave him up because all this mass of knowledge and flood of talk never led anywhere. I could

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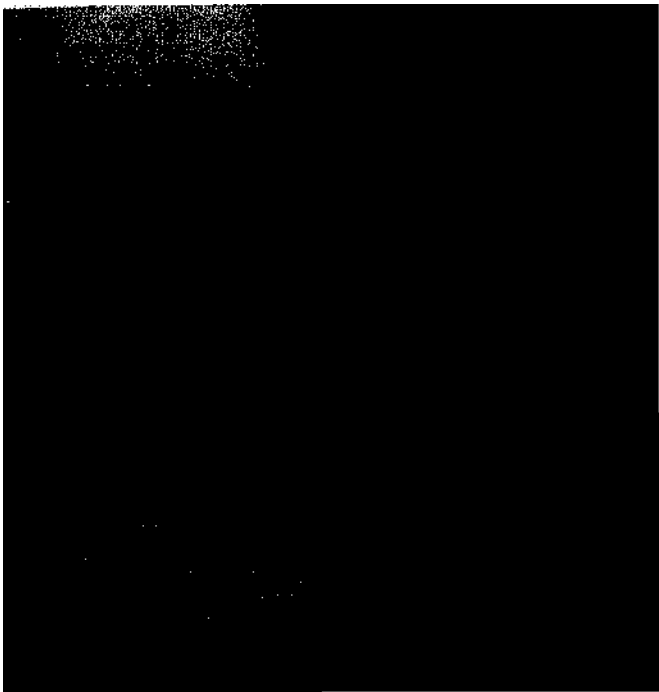
never detect any policy in his speeches, and one wearies of purely destructive criticism. I am speaking here of his speeches on foreign and military affairs especially. On labour questions I think he was more constructive.

There was, however, one author whom Austen still could not read, namely Gibbon, and he wrote at this time to a friend : ' I am very lazy now that I am out of the shafts, and read myself to sleep every afternoon with Gibbon. I have three times at least tried to read the greatest of all histories, and each time stuck in it. I feel that this is discreditable to me, but I doubt if the discredit will be removed this time.'

Although Austen revelled in his new-found freedom, his own happiness never rendered him any less sympathetic to the sufferings of others. ' The only tiling,' he wrote, ' that gives me qualms when I think of the state of Germany is the mortality and suffering among their babies and children. War is cruel and the Germans have made it far more so, but still I don't like to think of their babies.'

In November he paid a visit to France, and was taken to many interesting places at the front, such as Ypres, Bapaume, and Peronne. He was very impressed with the organization of the British Army, and came away perhaps a little more optimistic as to its future than subsequent events proved justifiable. A few days later Lord Lansdowne wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* suggesting that the time had come to make efforts for a peace by negotiation. Austen considered this to be a mistake :

What a *gaffe* of Lansdowne's. How he of all men came to write that mischievous letter I cannot think. You know how much I have grown to like him as well as to respect his judgment. But hitherto, if he erred, it was always on the side of caution. He was slow to move, liked plenty of time for consideration and was by nature averse from bold and decided courses. He is the last man whom I should have expected to write so inopportune and so unwise a letter. How could he talk about the ' freedom of the seas ' as an



#### THE COALITION CABINET OF 1917

Front row, left to right: Mr. Walter Long, Sir Robert Borden (Canadian Premier), Lieut.-Gen. Smuts (South Africa), Mr. Lloyd George, Sir J. Weston, Mr. W. F. Massey (New Zealand Premier), the Hon. Robert Rogers (Canada), Sir George Perley (Canada), Mr. Balfour, Mr. Henderson, Sir Maurice Hankey. Back row: Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Hazen, Sir Joseph Ward, Mr. Austen Chamberlain, Sir Edward Carson, Maharajah of Bikanar (India), Lord Curzon.



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open question ? And how came it that he failed to see what an encouragement his letter would be to the Germans and to our own pacifists ? Well, it is all a mystery of the human mind which I cannot fathom.

Long, however, before Lord Lansdowne's letter appeared to earn his disapproval Austen had once more become immersed in public affairs. At first he deliberately withdrew himself as far as possible from them, not only for reasons of health, but also because he wanted time to see the situation more clearly and in better perspective : moreover, as he himself put it, 'an ex-Minister who has just resigned is always in the way unless he gets right away.' He was determined not to become the rallying-point for the grumblers and intriguers at Westminster and in the clubs, and for one in his circumstances it was by no means easy to avoid being driven into such a position. Austen had not been in the House of Commons for a quarter of a century without realizing that the utmost care would be required on his part if he was not to be continually besought to speak on this subject or on that, and to 'give a lead.' If he was to avoid being dragged into controversy with his late colleagues it was imperative that he should keep away from London for a time ; so that his personal inclinations were reinforced by reasons of State as well as of health.

Nevertheless, he was not allowed, even during the weeks which immediately followed his resignation, entirely to live the life of a private individual. His work at the India Office had not been such that he could, without damage to the public interest, suddenly turn his back upon it, and both Lord Chelmsford and Mr. Montagu were continually looking to him for advice in his retirement. After the latter's declaration on August 20th, for which Austen was so largely responsible, it was decided that Mr. Montagu should visit India in person in order to study on the spot the question of the reforms necessary to implement his announcement. He asked Austen to go with him, but the other refused, not only on the ground that he did not wish to assume any fresh responsibilities at the moment, but also because he felt that if he went to India in such circumstances many diffi-

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cullies would arise. All the same, Austen followed with the greatest interest and sympathy the problems of his old department, and in the main he thoroughly approved of the way in which they were being handled, but there was one exception, namely, Lord Chelmsford's treatment of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab :

He (i.e. Sir Michael) rules one of the pivotal provinces of India—the N.W. Provinces, the United Provinces, and the Punjab, those are the Provinces on which the safety of India depends. From the Punjab comes the great bulk of the Indian Army, and its peoples have responded nobly to the call made upon them. In the early days of the war and on the return of the Sikh emigrants from Canada, it was the theatre of widespread conspiracy and some disturbances. Through all this O'Dwyer piloted it with great skill, firmness and moderation. Yet this is the man whom the Viceroy first bids apologize for his speech, and then publicly rebukes with an air of excuse and deprecation of the wrath of Indian politicians which is as lowering to the dignity of the Viceroy himself as it is destructive of the respect due to O'Dwyer.

O'D.'s speech may have been more intemperate than the report shows it to have been, but the provocation was great ; it was quite time to tell these talking gentry that they are not everything nor the most important thing in India, and that the actions of some of them are an ill support for their great pretensions, and O'D. by his position and his services was just the man to do it. I cannot conceive how Chelmsford could have allowed himself thus publicly to ' give away ' one of the greatest of the officers serving under him. This and Mrs. Bcsant's release make a bad atmosphere for Montagu's reforms. We are heading straight for another ' Albert Bill ' agitation by Englishmen on the one side, with great risk of another Ireland of Indians on the other.

... At any rate I am alarmed, and alarmed this time by an act of Chelmsford's, not of Montagu's. He seems to me to have lost his head. Scold your officials if you must or will, but in private. Don't lecture them and apologize for them in public, and beg of their angry and factious critics

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that they may be excused and let go like naughty children. That way danger lies everywhere, and above all in India.

Austen wrote to Lord Chelmsford direct in the same sense, and tactfully drew the Viceroy's attention to certain passages in Lord Morley's recently published *Recollections*, where the author dwelt, in connection with the Morley-Minto reforms, on the importance of the Government of India carrying with it the opinion of the European community in India. In mentioning this, Austen expresses his entire agreement with his predecessor's statement that the influence of this community at home is out of proportion to its numbers, and that it has ready access to the Press. Other considerations apart, Austen feared that the Viceroy had needlessly alienated this section of opinion by his treatment of Sir Michael O'Dwyer.

In October regular work began again for Austen :

I have consented to serve on the Committee which is considering reform of the House of Lords—a sort of 'Speaker's Conference,' but with Lord Bryce presiding. I have also agreed at the request of the Govt, to be one of three delegates (Smuts and Buckmaster being the others) to an 'Inter-Ally Military Council' (which has nothing military about it except the name chosen to please the Americans) and to be chairman of a British 'American Board' which will do all the work so far as we are concerned. The duty of the Council will be (under American chairmanship) to examine and recommend or reject all requests to America for assistance in money or material or food, and to certify for the protection of Mr. McAdoo (Mak'ado about nothing, I call him), the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, that the demands are genuine 'military' needs, and not an attempt to snatch trade from simple-minded Americans, whilst the 'American Board' (so called because it will be composed of myself and representatives of ten or twelve British departments) will compile, co-ordinate, compose, review, and, if needs be, curtail the British demands. Does the work attract me? No, but it needs doing apparently,

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for at present we act strictly on the Scriptural maxim—Let not thy left hand know what thy right doeth—and there is much confusion.

As to the House of Lords conference, I take Clovcll Salter's place after it has already held six sittings. This is a disadvantage. Further, I am not sure that I know my own mind, and I am afraid of being too Radical for my Party or friends, but this Edmund Talbot says is 'impossible—they all seem to have given up the hereditary principle,' whilst I hear that on condition that the Second Chamber is made elective, Whitaker and some other Liberal members of the Conference would give it powers in finance, which shook Hugh Cecil who champions the Commons' rights and privileges. What a world !

The tone in which Austen comments upon his new responsibilities shows how much better he was for his holiday.

Soon after his resignation he had been in correspondence with Lord Lansdowne in connection with the Conference on the House of Lords, for that nobleman had been pressed by the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law to accept the chairmanship before it was offered to Lord Bryce. At that time Austen was far from optimistic. He believed that the Labour Party and at least a third of the Liberal Party was opposed to any reform of the Upper House, and aimed solely at a further curtailment of its powers. As for the Prime Minister personally, Austen considered that he was more in sympathy with the Labour Party than with any other section of opinion, and that his immediate purpose was to form a Liberal-Labour combination under his own leadership with an eye to possible developments after the war. 'Asquith has never shown any interest in House of Lords reform. Simon, Runciman and others are, I fancy, opposed to it.' Austen himself was prepared, so he told Lord Lansdowne, to accept drastic changes of composition so long as the powers given to the reformed Chamber were adequate.

The Conference to consider the reform of the House of Lords owed its inception to the success which had attended that on Electoral Reform, and it kept Austen busy through-

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out the winter. By April, 1918, it had succeeded in producing a scheme of reform to which the large majority of its members gave their support. It recommended the creation of a Second Chamber consisting of two sections : one was to have 246 members, elected by panels of Members of the House of Commons distributed in thirteen geographical groups, and the other section, which was to constitute about a quarter of the whole Chamber, was to be chosen by a Joint Standing Committee of both Houses. The Conference resorted to the same procedure of a Joint Standing Committee to solve two other difficulties. Thus, one such committee was to decide what was and what was not a financial measure, and another, on which the Report conferred what it called ' the old name of free conference,'<sup>5</sup> was to adjudicate upon obstinate differences about legislative proposals between the House of Commons and the new Second Chamber. Unfortunately, the publication of the Report coincided with the crisis of the war, and it did not attract the attention it deserved. The scheme was perhaps too elaborate and complex to secure the instant approval which had met the Report of the Electoral Reform Conference, and there was certainly no marked demand on the part of the public for the Government to introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to the proposals. In the circumstances, therefore, it is hardly surprising that no action was taken on what came to be known as the Bryce Report.

The letter quoted above gives an accurate account of the work of the Inter-Ally Council of which Austen became a member in October, and in agreeing to serve he asked that he might be allowed to see the Cabinet Minutes in order that he should possess the authority and knowledge necessary for the position which he was to fulfil. The work, as will be seen, was exceptionally arduous, but it provided him with a great deal of information which was to prove of the utmost value when he once more became Chancellor of the Exchequer.

However, before the year came to an end Austen had been called upon to play an important part behind the scenes at Westminster. When he returned from his visit to France at the end of November he found a very difficult

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situation. The origin of the trouble was a speech which the Prime Minister had made in Paris on his way home from the Rapallo Conference, at which the Allies had taken measures to repair the Italian disaster of Caporetto. He announced that it had been decided to create a new Allied War Council, representing the Governments of Great Britain, France, and Italy, with a view to a better co-ordination of military action. He even went so far as to declare that the invasion of Italy might in the end prove a blessing, as it had taught the great lesson without which the Allies might never have been able to achieve real unity. In London there was a tendency to interpret these remarks as an attack on the Higher Command, and it was in no small measure due to Austen's efforts that Mr. Lloyd George was enabled to ride the storm which had, somewhat artificially, been created.

During this autumn Lord Salisbury and his friends were watching the Government often with very critical eyes, and in the following Austen defined his attitude both towards this group and towards the Prime Minister :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.

*Oct. 19, 1917*

MY DEAR SALISBURY,

On thinking over our conversation I have been led to define my own position rather more clearly to myself, and as it necessarily affects my answer to the questions you put me about Bob as well as to your invitation to attend your gathering of Big Wigs, I would like to supplement what I said to you. As it effects Bob I would like him to see this reply if, as I assume, you don't mind his knowing that you talked freely to me.

Now the question which I put to myself was this : Supposing I were to be offered again a suitable place in this Govt, would I join it, or, having been set free by the accidents of Mesopotamia, would I keep my freedom or join, if I joined at all, only in some fresh combination ?

Well, as things are and reserving my liberty to change my mind if circumstances change, my present answer to *myself* is that I would rejoin this Govt. I do not see **any**

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prospect of a better one or of one equally strong in the House of Commons or in the country, and this in spite of the fact that in my opinion they have lost and are losing ground.

I have not said this to any member of the Govt, though some of them at the time of my resignation and since have expressed a hope that I would soon be back among them, and I only say it to you now because it necessarily affects my action from day to day, and it would not be quite candid to leave you without knowledge of my feelings when you have spoken so freely to me.

The first result of this decision taken in my own mind is to make me feel that I had sooner not join any of your confabulations. I think I should be out of place and an embarrassment to myself and you. Yesterday I could not come because I was engaged to preside at a Tariff Reform League Committee, but when I wrote to you I was in doubt as to what my answer would have been if I had been disengaged. But I think my attitude towards the Govt, is rather different from yours and that of the friends with whom you are acting, though the difference is not I hope of a kind to prevent us from discussing things very freely as individuals.

The second result of the decision as to my own course is naturally to make me more than ever anxious that Bob should not resign. As regards the Ambassadorship I don't feel that I have any right to offer an opinion. His decision must depend on personal and family considerations which he alone can judge. I shall be very sorry if he withdraws from our political life. There is no one to fill the gap which he would leave in the Party and in the House, but he has a right to a free choice and to take private as well as public affairs into consideration.

But if it becomes a question of resignation pure and simple as distinguished from acceptance of another sphere of work, then I am opposed to it if it can possibly be avoided, for I do not believe that the Govt, can afford to part with him in anger, by which I mean on a serious difference of opinion as regards policy, especially in the sphere which is his own. I think that by quiet and firm persistence he can get his own way, that he is in a position to make conditions

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and to exert a very large influence. And believing this, I cannot think that except by some gross blunder of Lloyd George's—some hasty, ignorant, and ill-considered act, the consequences of which Lloyd George himself had not foreseen—Bob would ever be put in a position to justify him in abandoning his work.

Let me add that I know and have experienced in my own case that resignation is a sure road to temporary popularity, but in existing circumstances I remain of opinion that it is not a road which Ministers ought to take, except for grave reasons leaving them no choice—and I hope that my case was not an exception to my own rule !

One further remark. If Bob were to resign, I have in my own mind very little doubt that I should at once be asked to rejoin the Govt.—that is unless Bob's resignation brought the Govt, down at once which I think quite likely if he stood alone and almost certain if Walter went with him. Now the grounds of Bob's resignation when known to me might alter the decision to which I have provisionally come to support the Govt, in any way I can ; but if it did not, it would mean my entering the Govt, in the way and under conditions the most distasteful and even painful to me that I can conceive.

With which *cri de ccur* I end my long screed.

Yours ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The early weeks of 1918, before the German offensive in March, concentrated public attention wholly on the Western Front, witnessed growing concern at the connection of the Government with a section of the Press. Connected with the administration in one way or another were Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Home Chat*, *Weekly Despatch*, *Sunday Companion* and *Comic Cuts* ; Lord Rothermere with the *Sunday Pictorial* and *Daily Mirror* ; Sir George Riddell and Sir Henry Dalziel with the *News of the World*, *Western Mail*, *Reynold's*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* ; and Lord Beaverbrook with the *Express*. Of these Lord Rothermere was Secretary of State for Air, Lord Northcliffe was Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, and Lord

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Beaverbrook was Minister of Information. In these circumstances it was not unnaturally believed by the ordinary man in the street that when one of these papers took a strong line on any particular subject it was voicing the sentiments of the Government with which its proprietor was connected, and when attacks were made upon that Government's servants, military or civil, they occasioned disgust in many quarters. In effect, there was a growing belief throughout the country that Ministers were in far too close contact with the Press, and the recollection of what had happened in this connection at the time of the Government's formation in December, 1916, did nothing to allay anxiety.

Austen shared to the full the disquiet of his fellow-countrymen : always sensitive to any development which might lower the prestige of Parliamentary institutions, he felt he could not keep silent in face of what he considered to be an insidious menace. The independence of his position was a great asset, and on February 19th, during the discussion of the Army Estimates, he spoke his mind :

The Government has a great function to perform at any time, and most of all in war. The Press have a great function to perform at any time, and a function of special responsibility in war. But the functions of the Press are not the functions of the Government, and the functions of the Government are not the functions of the Press, and it is not possible, without misconception and misunderstanding, that they should be combined in the same person.

What is the function of the Government ? Three great newspaper owners are members of, or are intimately associated with, the Administration. Their papers are found from time to time to contain matters which the Government repudiates with energy ; and I, for one, say at once with truth and with sincerity, you will never persuade the public that a member of the Government or a person connected with the Administration can conduct a campaign in his newspaper contrary to the policy of the Government of the day. It ought not to be possible for him to do it, and you will not persuade the public that it is possible.

My right hon. Friend and his Government have sur-

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rounded themselves quite unnecessarily with an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust because they have allowed themselves to become so intimately associated with these great newspaper proprietors. I tell my right hon. Friend what everyone is saying in the Lobbies, outside the House, where men meet, but what I think it is now time for someone to say publicly and as a responsible man in this House. . . . As long as you have the owner of a newspaper as a member of your Administration you will be held responsible for what he writes in the newspaper. You would not allow a colleague not the owner of a newspaper to go down and make speeches contrary to the policy of His Majesty's Government or to attack men who are serving His Majesty's Government. You cannot allow them, instead of making speeches, to write articles or to permit articles to be written in their newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

Austen concluded with an appeal to the Government to sever a connection that was doing so much harm to all concerned, and the enthusiasm with which his speech was received was ample proof of the approval of his audience. Indeed, it was one of those rare occasions when the whole House was united, and when all present felt that the view expressed was not that of any section, but rather the opinion of the Commons as a whole. Austen had said what everyone was thinking, those who flocked to congratulate him did so for that reason, and not because he had scored a personal triumph. His success was the more remarkable in that he had spoken without preparation. In more ways than one he had established a position which was again to be his in the days of the National Government, and which his father had occupied from 1886 to 1892, that is to say as a private Member he exercised a control over the House to which few Ministers could aspire. His respect for the Constitution so impressed his fellow-legislators that they were willing to allow him to become its guardian, for only one voice was raised against him, and that, in effect if not in intention, was a complete justification of his argument.

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 103 H.C. Deb. 5s. 656-657.

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This was the more remarkable in that the House was overwhelmingly favourable to the Prime Minister, but it supported Austen because it realized that he had no ulterior motive in calling attention to what was abhorrent to Members both individually and collectively.

Austen was by no means prepared to let the matter rest in view of its importance and of the support which he had received, and he wrote both to Lord Curzon and to Lord Milner urging them to take action inside the Government, but it cannot be said that he obtained much assistance from either. Mr. Walter Long, on the other hand, was most sympathetic, and it would have required little to bring about his resignation. The rank and file were very enthusiastic. The Unionist War Committee went far further than Austen and passed a resolution to the effect that no member of the Government or officer holding a post under the Government should be allowed to act as the correspondent of a newspaper in respect of the conduct of the war. If this rule had been enforced it would, as Lord Beaverbrook pointed out, have at one blow destroyed the entire propaganda organization of the British Government, and Austen did not disagree with him. In view of the agitation which was thus being roused in political circles it was by no means easy for Austen to act in such a way as would compel the Government to take action without bringing it down in the process :

I saw Walter Long who would resign, I am confident, if I urged him to do so. 'But,' said he, 'we oughtn't to destroy this Govt, with such problems immediately in front of us without seeing our way to a successor to the Premiership. Only you, Austen, or the Speaker are possible.' I did not take this up, for I don't want to destroy the Govt, or to overthrow Lloyd George. With all his faults he has certain great qualities specially valuable at this time, and I want not to destroy him but to save him from his own folly. . . . So I guess that the end will be that he will have his own way, but will not be forgiven hereafter for affronting the House and public, and for pursuing a course of action rightly condemned by the public conscience. . . . If the

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Cabinet would take Lloyd George by the throat, he would have to yield, but they won't. . . .

Austen knew both his House of Commons and his Prime Minister. 'Lloyd George bamboozles the House too easily, and they don't make him sweat for his offences as they should.' Mr. Lloyd George duly made his apologia to the Unionist War Committee, on which Austen commented :

Those who have spoken to me about the matter since convey the idea that the P.M. is a devil of a fellow, and that they admire and are more than half convinced—till next time, when, on some new point arising, they will run through the same gamut of feeling—uneasiness, doubt, disgust or anger for the hot fit ; then thoughts of Asquith (their bug-bear), doubt again, fear, an anxiety to find an excuse, a determination to save Lloyd George somehow, an easy satisfaction with an inconclusive but persuasive speech, and a mild hope that he will somehow behave better in future.

All the same Austen had played the predominant part. Just before Mr. Lloyd George addressed the Unionist War Committee he had an hour's talk with Austen during the course of which he said that since the other's speech he had laid it down that any Minister must absolutely dissociate himself from all control of a newspaper while he was in office, and that the soldiers had intrigued against him, while all that he had done was to state the other side of the case : as to Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook, they had been appointed on their merits. The upshot of this was that, on March nth, the Prime Minister made a statement along these lines in reply to a question by Austen, without, however, blunting the edge of his questioner's attack during the subsequent debate :

. . . I am afraid that it is true, and frankly I for one regret it, that the House no longer exercises, or does not for

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the time exercise, the same authority and possess the same confidence in the country which previous Houses of Commons have done. . . . I regret it, because I know of no other public organ which can take the place of this House or which can fill the part which this House used to perform. . . . If the House of Commons has suffered, so has the Press. The confidence which the public places in the Press has been gravely and seriously diminished by recent events, for which a section of the Press, and a section only, has been responsible. I regret that only less than the loss of influence by the House of Commons, for the influence of the Press, a free and an independent and a responsible Press, is only of second importance in the working of our democracy to the influence of this House itself.

Austen then referred to the Prime Minister's statement, which he said had cleared the air. \* There has been too much coincidence. I take it as pure coincidence that certain papers have attacked particular servants of the Government, and that shortly afterwards the Government have found it impossible to continue those servants in the offices that they held. . . . Coincidences of that kind will breed suspicion.' <sup>1</sup> He went on to point out that Ministers are naturally in possession of a great deal of confidential information, and that with the best will in the world this must seriously embarrass them if they are also newspaper-owners. Austen concluded his speech by regretting that these Ministers had not resigned, and that the Prime Minister 'has not seen his way to make a clean cut and sweep away once for all the whole atmosphere of suspicion and intrigues which it (i.e. the appointment of these Ministers) has engendered.'<sup>2</sup>

In this way terminated an episode which had greatly strengthened Austen's position both in the House of Commons and in the country. His independence and courage had been proved beyond doubt, and also, it may be observed, his political skill. It would have been by no means difficult, as he realized to the full, to overturn the

<sup>1</sup> The reference was to Sir William Robertson.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, 104 H.C. Deb. 5s. 73-79.

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Government, and in that event it was not impossible that he might himself have been asked to form a new administration ; but such thoughts were far from his mind, and it was no mean tribute to his strategy, as well as to his honesty, that he effected his purpose without bringing down Mr. Lloyd George.

January had seen Austen in Paris on business connected with the Inter-Ally Council. He was much struck with the lavish display of food at the official banquets, and he contrasted it with the far more meagre rations which were then the rule on similar occasions in London. Austen chafed somewhat at the dilatoriness of the proceedings on which he was engaged, and he repeated with approval General Sarrail's remark to M. Clemenceau : ' Since I have seen Alliances at work, I have lost something of my admiration for Napoleon.' At the end of March he was in Paris again—in very different circumstances, for the Allied armies were reeling under the blows dealt by the German offensive, which had commenced a few days before. Some extracts from Austen's account of this visit show that his writing had lost none of its vivid quality, while they are also not without interest as an account of one aspect of a very critical period of the war :

We left London at 12.50 on Sunday (i.e. March 24th), lunched on the train, were kept waiting a longish time at Folkestone and then crossed in a boat crowded with soldiers, and with another similarly crowded in company, under escort of an airship and a couple of destroyers. What with zig-zagging and delays in entering the harbour we were a full two hours on the passage. We dined at Boulogne, and left in a Pullman soon after 8 p.m. It took us until 11 o'clock next morning to reach Paris. No food to be had anywhere. We stopped constantly, and crawled slowly even when we moved. We went to Abbeville, then round I know not how to Beauvais without passing through Amiens. Many of the party said they heard the guns. I could not be sure that I did, though with the constant stopping and equally constant slight but nagging sciatic pains I made but a sorry night of it.

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When Austen and his colleagues at last got to work the result was not very satisfactory, for M. Klotz, the French Minister of Finance, was 'far too much on tenterhooks to attend to our business, running at every moment to the telephone and obviously overwrought and "jumpy."'

We had decided that we would leave in any case on Wednesday, but our secretary reported that it was quite uncertain how or whether we could get away. No trains were coming through Amiens ; 300,000 people had already left Paris for the South, all places were booked for a fortnight ahead in the south-bound trains, Ministers were discussing the removal of the Govt, to Bordeaux once again—such was the news Fry brought us from the Embassy. We were in no cheerful mood when we sat down to dinner again with our General and young Victor Gazalet whom I had asked over from Versailles.

Accordingly, they continued their discussions on the following day, and left Paris at 11.40 in the evening :

This time we travelled by Amiens ; guns and bombing were clearly audible. Bury, our Treasury messenger, had packed some food for us, but our Italian and French fellow travellers had brought none, so we had to share our supplies with them. My breakfast was half a small roll, a hard-boiled egg and a thimble-full of wine. My lunch, still on the train, the other half of the roll and a tiny bit of cheese. As we neared Abbeville there were four or five immensely long trains immediately ahead or behind us and we crept slowly along, stopping every few minutes. Refugees crowded our train at the stations : others were tramping on the roads. Hospital trains going up empty, guns, horses, and men passed us in the opposite direction.

We got to Boulogne at about a J before three, got a *cafe au lait* and bit of bread, and were embarked at 3.15. By this time it was raining hard and there was a gale blowing. We had a rough dirty passage and were delayed

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for half an hour outside Folkestone by a hospital ship, which crossed with us, making a bad shot for the harbour mouth and nearly going ashore. We landed in a violent storm amid floods of rain. Keynes, who wished to get to a place near Lewes, and I had a motor waiting for us, but it was after 6.30 before we got away and 11 o'clock before I got to East Grinstead, so I thought it too late to seek Thornhill, and went to the hotel where they gave me a couple of eggs and a cup of hot cocoa and made up a bed for me in the drawing-room. I was thankful to turn in at midnight!

A few days after Austen returned from France he once more became a member of the Government. This fact would not have given rise to so much astonishment had the public realized Austen's attitude towards the administration. As has been shown by the line he took over the relations of the Government and the Press he had no desire to overthrow the administration: what he wanted was to strengthen it, and, such being the case, he could not logically refuse to take office again if that was to help to achieve his end. He had first been definitely approached in the middle of February, when Mr. Bonar Law rang him up at Thornhill on a Sunday afternoon. \* You will guess what it is about,' said Mr. Bonar Law, 'Derby has resigned.'<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister who, to add to our difficulties, is really unwell, has asked me to see if you would join us in his place. But of course that must depend on whether you agree with us or not in what we have decided.' The reference was to the decisions taken by the Supreme War Council at Versailles, which had led to the resignation of Sir William Robertson from the position of Chief of Staff. Austen replied that of course this was so, 'but,' he added, 'there is a preliminary question: would it carry with it a seat in the War Cabinet? Because otherwise I should not in any case be prepared to accept it.' Mr. Bonar Law replied that the point had not been considered, and he had no idea what view the Prime Minister would take: as for himself he did not think it was possible, as it would destroy the small War Cabinet, since

<sup>1</sup> From the War Office.

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if the Secretary of State for War was included there was no case for not treating the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Colonial Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, and possibly the Home Secretary in the same way.

Austen said that he did not agree, and to the suggestion that it was a matter to be talked over he answered, ' Won't it just be a waste of your time and mine ? Hadn't you better consider other arrangements at once, and look out for someone else ? ' The matter was not, however, settled on this occasion, for an hour later Mr. Bonar Law rang up to say that he had been misinformed, and that Lord Derby had not definitely resigned. In any event, it is more than doubtful whether Austen would have rejoined the Government then with the question of its connection with the Press, on which he felt so strongly, still unresolved.

By the beginning of April the situation was very different, and it was possible for Austen, with perfect consistency, to re-enter the Ministry. On the 5th of that month, in view of the approaching measure to extend compulsory service, he wrote to Mr. Bonar Law pointing out that Man Power had not been the subject most successfully handled by the Government, and now Ministers were obliged to deal with it again they would be confronted by great difficulties : however, they would be supported by the House of Commons and the country provided that they produced a complete scheme, and stood or fell by it. Austen also said he did not believe it was right to impose additional sacrifices on Great Britain without including Ireland in the Bill. Four days later Mr. Bonar Law asked Austen to go and see him, and expressed the hope that his old colleague would once more take office, though without making any definite offer. That evening Austen met the Prime Minister in the House of Commons.

' Come into my room, will you ? ' he said, and when they were alone, after a few words about the debate then in progress, went on, ' Well, I'm awfully glad that you will join us. It will be a great help. You know that——'

' Stop a minute,' said Austen. ' You're going too fast. I haven't yet been asked ! '

' What ? Didn't Bonar ask you ? No ? I don't understand that. I told him to ask you.'

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Austen then explained what had happened, and after some conversation he said he would like time to think the matter over, with the result that the following correspondence passed between the two men :

9 Egerton Place, S.W.3  
*10th April, 1918*

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

I have carefully considered the proposal which you were good enough to make to me in our conversation on Tuesday evening that I should join the War Cabinet on the occasion of certain changes which you have in contemplation.

Since [ I left your Government for reasons which seemed to me imperative, but did not spring from any divergence of policy or disagreement between us, I have, as you know, endeavoured to give you such support as was in my power, whilst not concealing the anxiety which some of your appointments caused me. My distrust of these appointments was not wholly allayed by the explanations and assurances which you were good enough to give in the House of Commons, and they cause me a certain embarrassment in considering your invitation to rejoin you. But the circumstances of the time are very grave. I do not think that they admit of a change of Government even if I thought that in itself such a change would be desirable ; and holding that the Government ought to be supported, I feel there is a strong obligation on all of us to give such help as you may ask from us.

You will see that the dominating factor in my decision is the present crisis in the campaign. But the Government are obliged at the same moment to take a vital decision on the Irish question. I have not seen the report of the Convention and know but little of its contents ; but there are some points touched upon in our conversation yesterday about which I think it is necessary that I should be perfectly outspoken and clear.

I believe that the time has come when the only safe and practicable solution of our difficulty is to be found in a federal organization of the United Kingdom. I believe this is now required for the satisfactory conduct of the

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business of Great Britain ; but I believe also that it is the only scheme which would make Irish Home Rule safe and the union of Ireland possible.

I understood that you agreed heartily with these conclusions and that you were ready to declare that this was your policy, but that you doubted whether it would be possible under present circumstances to produce the scheme for the whole of the United Kingdom simultaneously. I think it will be found both possible and wise to do this. But I am quite prepared that that should be left for discussion and decision by the Cabinet. The points about which I wish to leave no room for future disagreement are, first, that if the Irish case is treated in advance of that of the rest of the United Kingdom, nothing shall be done in the Irish Bill which is inconsistent with the extension of the same system of Government to England, Scotland, and Wales ; and, secondly, that the case of Ulster for resistance having always been based upon the plea that Ireland was being treated exceptionally, and that Ulster would have no right to resist by force a settlement which applied equally to the whole of the United Kingdom, Ulster should not be coerced into acceptance of the new scheme until such time as it is extended to other portions of the United Kingdom.

I am encouraged by our conversation to believe that these conditions commend themselves to you. If I am right in this I am ready to accept your offer and share your heavy responsibility. But it would not be right for me *to* join at this moment without a perfectly clear understanding on matters where any misapprehension might force me to withdraw from the Government almost as soon as I had joined it. This must be my excuse for troubling you with so long and so formal a letter. I shall be very glad to hear from you that I have rightly interpreted your intentions.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

10 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.i.

*April 13th, 1918*

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

As to the first part of your letter, I quite agree that our scheme of Irish Home Rule must be one which will fit in

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with a Federal plan. That is why I have strongly opposed every proposal to hand Customs over to the Irish Parliament.

With regard to the second part of your letter, that the Irish Parliament should not operate until either a Federal scheme is set up, or Ulster has notified its acceptance, I am afraid that would make it impossible to carry through any measure of Home Rule at the present moment. The Irish would say that we were trifling with them and there they would have the sympathy of a very large number of people in this country who would think that we were not holding the balance fairly between Protestant and Catholic Ireland. However, I understand that you have had a talk with Bonar Law about this and I can only emphasize what he said to you. This is a very grave war crisis—very grave—and the Government needs all the assistance it can get to help the country to pull through. That is what matters at the present moment. That is why I invited you to fill the vacancy in the Cabinet,<sup>1</sup> because we need your counsel and active co-operation.

There are two or three Ministerial changes we propose to make. I indicated one or two of them to you the other day. I should like to be able to announce them all at the same time. I hope to be able to do so on Monday. But the invitation to you does not depend upon our making the other changes, and I shall be very much obliged if you will let me know definitely that you are prepared to join the War Cabinet.

If you can see your way—as I hope you will—I should like you to be a member of the Cabinet Committee set up to frame the Irish Bill.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

9 Egerton Place, S.W.3

14th April, 1918

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

Thank you for your letter received late last night.

I recognize the reasonableness of your plea that in

<sup>1</sup> As Minister without portfolio. Lord Milner had succeeded Lord Derby at the War Office.

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circumstances of such immense difficulty your hands should not be further tied by anticipatory pledges, and in view of the explanations afforded me by Bonar Law and yourself as to the intentions of the Government, I accept your invitation to join the Cabinet and to serve on the Committee to frame the Irish Bill. I shall thus have the opportunity of discussing with you in Council both the character of the Bill and the conditions under which it can be brought into operation.

The crisis is so grave that those of us who support the Government must do so ungrudgingly and give whatever help you require of us.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

In a letter to his sister Austen outlined the motives which induced him to rejoin the Government :

The position both at home and in France is so grave that I have felt I could not do otherwise. In such times Asquith's half-way house is untenable. Either you must be prepared to turn the Govt, out and accept the full responsibility of your action, or you must support the Govt, ungrudgingly and serve where you can be of most use. It isn't a time for balancing between I dare not and I would, for half-hearted criticism and half-hearted support. It must be either the overthrow of the Govt, or wholehearted co-operation. I believe I can be of use and I feel bound to serve. A change of Govt, *now* is unthinkable. . . .

When it was announced that Austen was once more in office he received many letters of congratulation, but none pleased him more than those of Lord George Hamilton and Sir Archibald Williamson, who had been members of the Mesopotamia Commission, and Sir John Nixon. The Press was sharply divided, and that section of it which Austen had recently criticized in the House of Commons was almost vitriolic in its abuse. The *Evening News* had already been \* able ' and glad ' to state that owing to the

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public and private protests, the proposal to include Mr. Austen Chamberlain in the War Cabinet has been definitely abandoned', news which, the paper went on to say, 'would be heard with great relief by the nation.' The *Daily Mail* warned the Prime Minister that Austen was an 'ineffective mediocrity, whose career of amiable insignificance came to its inevitable end, amid the reality of war, in the Mesopotamian failure,' and 'to recall him at this juncture from his proper obscurity, to set such a man at such a moment in the midst of our supreme council, would be cynical trifling.' When the appointment became public the same paper protested against the inclusion in the War Cabinet of 'a feeble politician' like Austen in the name of 'every father, mother, or relative of the boys whose names appear in the sad lists printed in the last page of this journal every morning.' On the other hand, the *Liverpool Courier* declared that it constituted 'a real accession of strength to the Ministry'; the *Westminster Gazette* paid a tribute to Austen as 'an able, straightforward and honest man who can be trusted to keep cool and behave courageously in a crisis'; while the *Yorkshire Post* observed that 'the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain marks a personal triumph for him over the Harms worth influence; but, more important still, it indicates that Mr. Lloyd George has determined openly to ignore it.'

During the next few months Austen's principal care was once more the Irish question. In May of the previous year the Prime Minister had made a final effort to reach a settlement by means of the Irish Convention where it was hoped that Irishmen of all shades of opinion would meet together to effect a compromise, although the record of the four previous failures\* was hardly encouraging. In the circumstances it was not surprising that the Convention failed, more particularly since there were many important abstentions. A new Ireland was coming into existence, for Sinn Fein was winning sweeping victories at the by-elections, and in March there had occurred the death of Mr. John Redmond. The situation was further com-

<sup>1</sup> The Amending Bill of 1914, the Buckingham Palace Conference, the Lloyd George negotiations in May, 1916, and a proposal for Home Rule with six counties excluded.

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plicated by the recent extension of compulsory military service to Ireland, and the Report of the Irish Convention was published on the same day as that on which this measure was debated in the House of Commons. When, nearly a year before, Mr. Lloyd George had announced that the Convention was to be summoned he had declared that, if substantial agreement should be reached as to the character of a constitution, the Government would accept responsibility for taking all the necessary steps to enable Parliament to pass the necessary legislation to give effect to any such proposals. In view, however, of the Convention's failure he declared that the Government must accept the responsibility of bringing forward, with such guidance as the Report of the Convention afforded, a scheme for self-government in Ireland which should be just and would not give rise to any violent controversy. He further stated that this measure would be put before Parliament with the least possible delay,

Hopes of avoiding controversy were quickly dashed, for Nationalist Ireland flatly refused to accept conscription. Mr. Dillon, who had succeeded Mr. Redmond as leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, told Mr. Lloyd George across the floor of the House of Commons that he would get no recruits from Ireland ; Mr. William O'Brien contended that the proposal was a declaration of war against his country ; and Mr. Devlin charged the Government with ignoring a sub-committee of the Irish Convention, which had reported that, assuming a scheme of Irish self-government was adopted, it would in practice be impossible to impose compulsory service on Ireland without the assent and co-operation of the Irish Parliament. All the same conscription was passed in the teeth of these protests, and Mr. Dillon and his followers absented themselves from Westminster for three months to mark their disapproval. They spent this period in organizing resistance in Ireland itself, with the result that the Irish clause in the Military Service Act became a dead letter, for the Government never issued the Order in Council which was necessary to put the conscription machinery in motion.

Austen and his colleagues were thus called upon to frame a measure of self-government for Ireland in the most unpropitious circumstances. His own position was no

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longer what it had been when he corresponded with Mr. Winston Churchill in the autumn of 1914. He felt that the old Unionist policy had become impossible, not because it was wrong, but because the British people were not prepared to follow it for a sufficient length of time to give it a fair chance of success. On the other hand, he was becoming increasingly attracted by the possibilities of a federal solution, which was so strongly advocated by his friend Mr. F. S. Oliver, and which had formed part of his father's 'Unauthorized Programme' a generation before. He felt that the case for such a policy was much stronger even than when he had advocated it in the months immediately preceding the war. Austen viewed with dismay the prospect of the overwhelming pressure of work which would be thrown upon the Parliament at Westminster during the period of reconstruction after the victory had been won, and he feared that it would not have sufficient strength 'to resist all that should be resisted in the claims which will be made upon it.'

He took advantage of the annual meeting of the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association to give public expression to the views he held :

I am convinced that the Irish question no longer stands as an isolated problem. The Irish question, as we know it, is a question of establishing a Legislature in Ireland to deal with purely Irish affairs. Do you think that it is possible—I speak to you now not as Irishwomen, if there be any Irishwomen among you, but to Englishwomen, Scotswomen, and Welshwomen—confronted, as we are, by an overwhelming rush of problems, many of them requiring to be dealt with from day to day for the immediate purposes of the war, another chapter of them dealing with the intermediate period after completion of peace before the world returns to normal conditions, which will have its own problems and difficulties, and yet a third, which deals with the normal period which will ensue thereafter—do you think it is possible for one Parliament to deal with all these questions for the whole of the United Kingdom, or even for Great Britain without Ireland, and at the same

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time to discharge its functions as the mother of all the Parliaments throughout the British Empire—the one real Imperial authority in the whole of this vast collection of States and Dependencies ? For my part, I am convinced that such a task is too great for any Parliament, and that unless we can find means, not merely to gratify the desire of Ireland for some kind of Legislature for itself, but to evolve Legislatures for other parts of the United Kingdom to undertake large portions of those duties and functions which have hitherto been discharged by the Parliament at Westminster, the whole machine will break down from overwork. The work which it is necessary for us to do will not be done ; questions in which large sections of our countrymen are interested will not be considered ; and the whole Parliamentary system will be in danger of falling into contempt and being superseded by some revolutionary form of activity, such as we have seen in other countries where Parliaments did not exist or did not possess the confidence of their countries.

There is no longer an Irish problem only. Though it is first and foremost an Irish problem, it is an English, Welsh, and Scottish problem. Above all it is an Imperial problem. You must set those Houses at Westminster free for the great Imperial problems which will press upon us with an urgency and importance they have never yet had. You must devolve upon Assemblies somehow to be created a part of the burden that we have to discharge, and in so doing may you not find that you have given a latitude for fruitful and beneficent experiment according to the idiosyncrasies, the needs and necessities of the component parts of the United Kingdom, to which free play could not be given so long as one body should have to legislate for them all ?<sup>1</sup>

Austen's views were not to find practical application. No Bill for Irish self-government was ever introduced, for the atmosphere was too unfavourable both in England and in Ireland : indeed, the state of the latter country was sufficiently attested by the fact that Lord French and Mr. Shortt, who had succeeded Lord Wimborne and Mr. Cave

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, May 15th, 1918.

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as Viceroy and Chief Secretary respectively, at this time deported many of the Sinn Fein leaders.

Although the project for the solution of the Irish problem came to nothing, it gave Austen a great deal of work during the summer of 1918, and it constituted only one of the many claims upon his time. He was, it is true, not in charge of a Department, but that merely meant that his work was not confined to any one field, but was concerned with a multitude of subjects, and this rendered it the more exacting. In addition to the activities already mentioned Austen was made chairman of the Economic Defence and Development Committee, and at the beginning of June he was asked by the Prime Minister to act as *locum tenens* at the Admiralty for Sir Eric Geddes during the latter's absence for a month or two, but he declined to do this on the ground that it would take too much of his time. Afforestation, reorganization of the machinery of government, the pros and cons of an Imperial Cabinet, and the desire of the Dominions for improved methods of communicating with the Prime Minister, all demanded his attention. Austen was, in effect, the 'maid of all work' of the Government.

As always, however, he never allowed public cares wholly to occupy his mind, and so eventually to render him mentally and physically unable to deal with them. Thornhill was his retreat whenever circumstances permitted, even though it was out of the question to get away without taking his despatch-boxes with him. Of one week-end in July, for instance, when he had one or two friends staying with him, he writes: 'We all enjoyed ourselves in spite of the unpropitious weather, and whilst the others loafed or took a Sunday evening walk with Ivy I did a little more gardening—digging a small border and planting it with Sweet Williams, putting out some Aubrietia and white foxgloves in the rockery, and rooting up all the new growth of weeds which had sprung up in the ground we had already cleared.' It was also the twelfth anniversary of his wedding. 'Twelve years of perfect and uninterrupted happiness for us both as far as happiness depends upon ourselves. I have indeed been fortunate.' A good story, too, had lost none of its appeal. 'By the way/ he wrote to his sister in September, 'did I ever tell you General Bliss's (U.S.A.) *bon mot* at

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Versailles ? The Council was discussing the naval situation in the Mediterranean, and a redistribution of forces was proposed, but the Italian Admiral was resolutely determined that his battleships should not leave port. *Some* discussion followed, in the course of which General Bliss left the Council room to give some directions. " What's happening inside ? " he was asked. " Oh ! They're all at sea—except the Italian Admiral ! " '

These were the months when the Germans were attempting finally to break through the Allied lines in the West, and with their failure came the great reversal of fortune which was to bring the war to an end in November. In common with his countrymen Austen was surprised at the rapid decline of the German arms, and his correspondence does not reflect any hope of an early victory, but rather concern at various aspects of the general situation. ' There will be no security for the future peace of the world if Germany regains the oversea possessions which she has lost, for with her later experience she would organize large coloured forces, and submarine and airplane bases, ready for her next adventure in world domination.' President Wilson did not inspire Austen with any great confidence. ' Would that the President saw facts more clearly, and was less the victim of fine phrases and unsubstantial dreams. I am told that his favourite among English newspapers is the *Nation*, and that he is really a typical Gladstonian Liberal of the last century—not exactly the perfect equipment for a world war with Germany as the mightiest of our foes.' As the Armistice came in sight Austen was more critical than ever of the President's policy :

The President has at last consented to consult his allies—none too soon—but characteristically he has made it very clear that he wishes the limelight man to keep the bull's-eye full on him, and he wishes his allies—I beg his pardon ' the associated Governments'—to give him a testimonial of their unbounded admiration and gratitude which he may use for electoral purposes ! Meanwhile he has put us all in the cart, and our first business is to get out and to get him out. ' Freedom of the seas '—' Go to Jericho ! ' He

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lays down 14 points and 2 speeches as the basis of the armistice. The Germans accept, and 'assume' the Entente Powers agree with him. How can we enter on negotiations without telling the Germans that they 'assume' too much, and how can we say that without putting the President's nose out of joint? There were difficulties enough already without his needlessly creating this fresh one. And mind you, he was furious when he thought that we were settling peace-terms with Turkey, against whom he has never sent a soldier, without first consulting him! 'I do not like you, Dr. Fell.'

Nevertheless, Austen was in favour of peace as soon as it could be secured on satisfactory terms, which he defined as the surrender of all colonies, the retrocession of Alsace-Lorraine, some loss of territory in the East of Europe, a limitation of the German Navy, and the payment of a large indemnity. He was not prepared to go on fighting for the mere sake of revenge for, as he himself put it, 'vengeance is a luxury that few can afford in public or private life.' There was another reason, too, which influenced him. Great Britain had reached her maximum effort, and, if the war continued, her contribution must decline while the American increased. The last days of the war prompted him to some reflections on difference in national character, and on November 2nd he wrote :

I should not be surprised to hear some day that the Emperor has abdicated. The people are turning upon him, rather basely I think, the Kings have no love for or real loyalty to him, and even the army . . . is ceasing to show him ordinary respect. When the game is up, we set our teeth, fight on and often muddle through. That is not the German way. Truculent in success, overbearing and brutal in victory, when they find that the game is lost they collapse morally as a people, and even Prussian discipline will, I believe, be powerless to put 'grit' into them. . . . Left to themselves they would lie flat, cry forfeit—and set to

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work slowly, silently and with infinite patience to begin all over again.

He went on :

If the guilt was immense, the punishment will be overwhelming. So be it. But I should like to see Berlin bombed and Essen systematically destroyed. However . . . if we can get a good peace, I am ready to forgo vengeance.

As soon as the Armistice had been signed domestic politics resumed their importance. The Parliament elected in December, 1910, was now in the last quarter of its eighth year, and it had passed five separate Acts for the extension of its life. The Representation of the People Act, which gave the franchise to women, had enormously increased the electorate, and the new register had come into force on October 1st. When it became evident that the end of the war was in sight the Prime Minister, on November 2nd, wrote a letter to Mr. Bonar Law in which he said that the sooner a General Election took place the better in order that a fresh Parliament, with full authority, might 'deal with the difficult transitional period which will follow the cessation of hostilities.' The letter continued with an affirmation of the writer's belief that a 'Parliament returned to support a Government constituted as is the present Coalition Government would fulfil . . . this essential condition.' As for policy, Mr. Lloyd George stressed the need of 'such conditions of living for the inhabitants of the British Isles as will secure plenty and opportunity to all'; key industries were to be safeguarded; and another attempt was to be made to solve the Irish question, but not 'until the condition of Ireland makes it possible.' Finally, the Prime Minister was 'prepared at once to agree that the Election should be contested on the basis of this letter,' and he asked Mr. Bonar Law to take counsel with his colleagues on the matter.

Accordingly, on November 12th, Mr. Bonar Law met

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his supporters, and as Austen was unable to be present he wrote the following letter :

Offices of the War Cabinet,  
2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W.  
*Nov. 11, 1918*

MY DEAR BONAR LAW,

I am very sorry that my engagement at the University of Birmingham makes it impossible for me to be present at your meeting to-morrow.

Had I been able to attend I should have wished to join with you in urging that the immensely difficult problems of demobilization and reconstruction make it as important to preserve the Administration on a broad bottom now as during the years of war. Government will need in larger measure than ever before the confidence of the country in dealing with issues which cannot be exactly defined in advance, and that confidence will more readily be given to a Union Government than to any purely party administration.

I find in the broad lines of the Prime Minister's letter the basis for such a Union. I do not pretend that he has pledged himself to all that I believe will in practice be found necessary, for example, in the sphere of economic policy ; but I welcome the steps which he has already taken, or now announces, to place our national life on a more secure foundation, and I am content to leave the development of that policy to be worked out with the open mind for which he asks. Less than this no Tariff Reformer could accept. More than this I have never asked since the outbreak of war brought us face to face with the problems of a new world.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Five days later the Prime Minister, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Barnes addressed a meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster, on the importance of returning the Coalition to power, and the election campaign began. The supporters of the Government argued along the lines of Mr. Lloyd

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George's letter, and they further claimed that it was essential to prove to the world that the Prime Minister and his colleagues were going to the Peace Conference with the nation behind them. The Opposition, that is to say, the Liberals who followed Mr. Asquith, and the Socialists, replied that the holding of the election was merely a dodge to turn the victory to party account. There was also some bitterness over the method of giving certain candidates certificates known as 'coupons.' Every candidate who was accepted as satisfactory by the Whips in Downing Street received a letter from Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law formally recognizing him as the Coalition candidate, and expressing the hope that the electors would return him as their representative in Parliament to support the Government in the great task before it. When it was discovered that no less than 364 Conservatives and Unionists had received the 'coupon' as compared with 158 Liberals, Mr. Asquith's followers declared that Sir George Younger, the Chairman of the Unionist Party Organization, had got the better of the bargain, while the Labour Party had a legitimate grievance in the number of Coalition candidates who received official endorsement in industrial constituencies for which the party had put forward candidates who had played a patriotic part during the war. A trifle less rigidity on the part of the Coalition organizers in their choice of candidates might have obviated a good deal of bitter feeling both then and subsequently.

Nor was this all, for as the election proceeded the appeal was couched in ever lower terms, and a demand for the trial of the German Emperor, together with the punishment of those responsible for atrocities, began to make itself heard. Government spokesmen, including at least one of Austen's colleagues in the War Cabinet, left no doubt as to the type of justice which was envisaged by the first of these proposals, and 'Hang the Kaiser' became a popular cry. Nor was the official attitude towards the payment of an indemnity by Germany in any way uncertain. Sir Eric Geddes announced, 'We will get out of her all you can squeeze out of a lemon and a bit more. . . . I will squeeze her until you can hear the pips squeak.' His policy was to sequester all property belonging to Germans in neutral

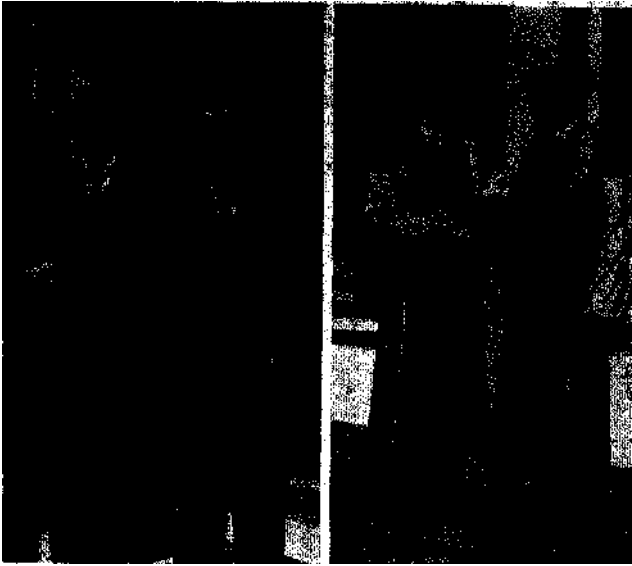
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and Allied countries ; all gold, silver, and jewels in Germany ; the contents of her picture galleries and libraries ; and sell them for the benefit of the Allies. ' I would strip Germany,' he declared, ' as she has stripped Belgium.' Such was the atmosphere in which the election was fought, and the most extravagant estimates of Germany's capacity to pay were put forward by those in high places.

Austen did nothing to encourage hopes which he did not believe to be capable of fulfilment, or the desire for a vengeance which he was ready to forgo ; indeed, his attitude towards the problems of the moment was one of studied moderation. Unopposed in West Birmingham he was free to assist Government candidates elsewhere, and this he did to the utmost of his ability. He was heckled more than once on the subject of the Emperor Wilhelm II, but he consistently refused to pledge himself to any extreme action :

We should be gravely mistaken, and we should be entering on a path of grave danger, if we thought the ex-German Emperor was the sole cause of offence in Germany. He was the conspicuous centre. He was the standard-bearer of the German Empire. He was the characteristic representative of Prussia and of Prussianized Germany, but as long as he was successful, as long as victory seemed likely to crown the German arms the German people were behind him. When war was declared, of mature deliberation and without provocation, hardly a voice in Germany was raised in protest. When the *Lusitania* was sunk, when gas was used for the first time in warfare rendering it more savage and more horrible than it had been in the worst times of the dark ages, when Louvain was sacked, when the women and girls of Lille were torn from their homes at night and deported to work in Germany, what protest was there in that country against the decisions of the Kaiser, his Councillors, his work, or his government ? Even the great majority of the Socialist Party supported the German Emperor and his Government as long as they seemed likely to prove successful.

I have no tenderness for the German Emperor. He bears upon his soul responsibility for great crimes against



With Mr. Baldwin

With Earl Haig at Oxford

SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN



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humanity, but he stands not alone, and I have no patience with the people who come whining to us to-day—to the prisoners of Ruhleben whom they have maltreated for four and a half years—like a small sneak at school, 'It was not I, sir, it was the other boy, punish him and let me go, sir.' I say until we are satisfied—and we cannot be satisfied until we have proved it—that in the German people there is a changed heart and changed mind, no single scapegoat can bear their sins. They have made their bed and they must lie upon it. They have so wrought and fought, they have wrecked such destruction on others, and they have become such a danger to the world and to liberty the world over that we are entitled and bound to take every precaution against the repetition of such outrages, to see that it is brought home to them that might does not make right.<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of reparations and indemnities Austen's utterance must have seemed singularly uninspiring compared with those of his colleagues. He had no desire to be lenient, but he pointed out to his hearers that 'there is no indemnity that Germany can pay as great as she ought to pay.' He reminded those whom he was addressing that payment in gold and securities would not amount to very much, and

. . . beyond that there is no means of paying except by exports of goods, and that raises a very different question. Then we have to consider whether we desire to make Germany a greater exporter of goods, a great competitor in our markets here, or a competitor with us in markets elsewhere. The measure of what we should ask of Germany is to be found in the point at which it would be injurious to us and to our Allies to press her for more. Up to that point we are entitled and bound to press her.<sup>2</sup>

On the subject of the colonies he had no doubts whatever,

<sup>1</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 29th, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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and he declared that 'no German colony shall go back to Germany to be used again as a menace to the peace and security of the ocean highways and commerce of the world.'

Austen referred in his speeches, however, not only to the past but also to the future, and on occasion his words had a prophetic ring. One night, for instance, in the Handsworth Division of Birmingham he dealt with a subject which was to exercise him greatly in the years to come :

We want to establish among the nations some Council with authority to call before them disturbers of the peace, to have submitted to international judgment the alleged causes of a quarrel. To make this ideal effective there must be some international sanction behind it. There must be some force which that Council of Nations can employ in order to enforce its decrees. That involves, in the first place, the creation of a tribunal in which the different nations of the world have confidence. But if the tribunal is to have force behind it, it must be such a League as inspires such confidence in the different nations that, on the decree of that League, those nations will put their resources at the service of the League to execute its decrees. It means for ourselves, if such a League is to be brought to full perfection and fruition, that there should be some British force acting no longer on the orders of the British Government, but called into action, despatched here and there, at the demand of the League of Nations and its International Council. That is a tremendous demand to make on any nation, and probably such a League will only be the result of slow growth over long years.<sup>1</sup>

In domestic matters Austen concentrated on Housing, Agriculture, and Town Planning as the subjects which most urgently demand the attention of the Government, and he expressed his conviction that only a Coalition could deal with them satisfactorily. As he was himself unopposed, he arranged for his workers to assist his brother in the Lady-

<sup>1</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, December 13th, 1918.

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wood Division, and it was a source of special satisfaction to him when Mr. Neville Chamberlain was elected by a comfortable majority.

It was a curious General Election in many ways. Nominations were taken on December 4th when 107 Members were returned unopposed, while for the remaining 600 seats there were over 1,500 candidates. Polling-day was on December 14th, but there was none of the ordinary excitement of an election, for the votes were not counted until a fortnight later in order to allow time for the collection of ballot-papers from the soldiers on the Western Front who voted by post. The new women voters polled in great numbers, but of the total electorate only 60 per cent, voted, which was poor showing compared with previous General Elections. In this connection the worst feature was the relatively small number of soldiers who took the trouble to exercise the franchise, for although no less than 2,400,000 ballot-papers were issued to them only 830,000 made use of their votes. Nor did many proxies for those serving at sea or in the more distant theatres of war make their appearance at the polling-stations, and it can hardly be disputed that the naval and military vote was the least satisfactory aspect of a not very satisfactory election.

When the results were announced it was found that the Coalition had swept the country, and had been returned with a majority of 249 over all its opponents combined.<sup>1</sup> In the new House of Commons there were 334 Conservatives and Unionists, 134 Coalition Liberals, and 10 other supporters of Mr. Lloyd George. London and the Home Counties were almost solid for the Government ; Scotland and Wales polled heavily on the same side ; and the Coalition did far better in the industrial Midlands and North than had been anticipated. The chief victims were the Liberals who followed Mr. Asquith, of whom a mere 29 were returned. Mr. Asquith was himself defeated in East Fife, which first returned him to Parliament in 1886 and had remained faithful to him ever since, while nearly all his old Ministers went down in the fight. Labour fared better, although Mr.

<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that, taking uncontested constituencies into account, its voting strength was only 818,997 more than that of its opponents.

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MacDonald, Mr. Snowden, and Mr. Henderson lost their seats. The net result of the election for that party was a considerable gain of ground in the industrial districts generally, and there were 59 Socialists in the new Parliament. In Ireland the by-elections proved true guides to the current of public opinion, for the Nationalists were left with only six seats in the whole country. Of the rest, 73 went to Sinn Fein and 25 to Sir Edward Carson and his followers.

Austen was not altogether satisfied with the result :

The Govt, would do better if it had a stronger Opposition in front of it. I am really sorry for Asquith's defeat, but I can feel no regret for Runciman or McKenna or Simon or the lesser fry. They all tried to fight on exactly the old party lines, raised the old cries, went just as far in opposition as they dared and showed no such magnanimity or patriotism as Asquith in his retirement. As for the downfall of the MacDonalds, Snowdens, Outhwaites and Hendersons, I unfeigncdly rejoice in it. It was deserved and will be useful.

B'ham is united and the majority good, but I wish the poll had been bigger. The better-class districts seem to have polled best, needing I suppose less canvassing and fetching. Neville's forecast of his opponents' numbers was very accurate.

No sooner had Mr. Lloyd George returned from his successful appeal to the country than he set about reconstructing his Government and in this Austen was to be intimately concerned. On January 10th, 1919, he received the following letter from the Prime Minister :

10 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W. 1  
*9th January, 1919*

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

Under the authority which I have received from the

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King to form a new Government, I have submitted your name to His Majesty for the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. The King has been pleased to give his assent to your filling this office and I should be glad to know as soon as possible whether you will accept it, as I am leaving to-morrow for France.

I consider in view of the great issues which will be at stake that when differences arise between the Treasury and other Departments it would be a good thing that these questions, instead of being referred direct to the Cabinet should be considered by a Committee consisting of myself, yourself, the Leader of the House and another member such as Lord Milner.

As long as the leadership of the House is treated as an office by itself, it is necessary that the holder of it should have constant access to me. I propose, therefore, that No. 11 should remain in Mr. Bonar Law's hands.

Yours sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

Austen was so annoyed with the way in which the proposal had been made to him that his first instinct was to refuse outright, but a little reflection caused him to change his mind. He accordingly went to see Mr. Bonar Law with whom, to quote his own words, he had 'an ugly row.' As Austen was leaving, the other asked him what he was going to do, and on receiving the answer that he was going to talk the matter over with Mrs. Chamberlain, but that he would probably refuse, Mr. Bonar Law said, as an added inducement, that if Austen insisted the office might be made to carry with it a seat in the Cabinet. This was hardly calculated to soothe Austen's feelings, and he exclaimed, 'Do you mean that the offer does not include Cabinet rank? In that case I will not look at it for a moment.' Mr. Bonar Law replied that he was not certain of the intentions of the Prime Minister on the point, and suggested that Austen himself should see Mr. Lloyd George, which was finally arranged. The truth was that Austen had no desire to return to the Treasury, and the stipulation about the house removed the one amenity which lent any attraction to the

office ; on the other hand he appreciated the strong reasons there were for the retention of 11 Downing Street by Mr. Bonar Law.

Austen spoke quite frankly to the Prime Minister. He told him that his offer had no attraction and the manner of it still less. Mr. Lloyd George had flung him a very curt letter at the last moment, like a bone flung to a dog, with a brief intimation that the only thing about the position, namely, a residence close to the Treasury and the House of Commons and giving access to the Prime Minister, which had any attraction for him would not be at his disposal. At this point he was interrupted by Mr. Lloyd George who explained that he had come to London to see his colleagues, but that urgent business connected with demobilization had prevented him from doing so. Austen at once accepted this, but went on to say that he had never wished to go back to the Exchequer, a feeling which the Prime Minister said he appreciated. 'Then,' said Austen, 'you won't be surprised that it has no attractions for me. It is an office which unhappily has of necessity much contentious business—even if the contention is entirely friendly—with other offices. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has all the odium of raising the money. His colleagues have all the pleasure and *kudos* of spending it. Each of their demands may be in itself reasonable, yet in the aggregate they are often impossible.' Austen went on to say that his first condition was that he would not accept unless Mr. Lloyd George would assure him of his confidence, and would give him with colleagues that support without which the position would be intolerable and impossible.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. Asquith had always given him that kind of support when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, though not when he was Minister of Munitions. He then discussed with Austen certain general lines of policy, and when he found that they were in fundamental agreement promised his support on the terms that the other desired.

Austen then proceeded to his second point, which was that whatever the Cabinet, whether large or small, the Chancellor of the Exchequer must be a member of it. At this Mr. Lloyd George pulled a wry face, and said there

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were difficulties. Austen answered that to him it was essential, and he thought that no one ought to take the office except on that condition, for on any other terms the Chancellor of the Exchequer would not have the necessary authority. The Prime Minister proceeded to elaborate the difficulties which confronted him, and enumerated the other Ministers who would put in a claim to be included in the Cabinet. Austen replied that he was sorry for his difficulties, but that the point was one for him to decide, and he would probably like time to think it over. As for himself, either he must be a member of the Cabinet or he would not take the office.

The Prime Minister, however, preferred to continue the discussion, and it transpired that he had some idea of two Cabinets—an Imperial Cabinet and a British Affairs Cabinet. He was going to France for at least three weeks, and he did not see how there could be a Cabinet with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and Mr. Bonar Law all in France. 'What, then, do you propose?' Austen queried. 'Who is to act for you in your absence?' 'Just what the King asked,' was the reply; 'he is very much disturbed about it. Bonar Law ought to stop here—I have promised to support any decision he takes—but he says his Party won't understand his not being one of the Peace delegates.' The Prime Minister thereupon sent for Mr. Bonar Law and, to quote Austen, 'we went over the ground backwards and forwards again.' The remainder of the discussion may be told in Austen's own words :

Bonar Law, who I expect acts upon the advice he gets from Beaverbrook, was rigid as to his position as a nominal delegate, but said he did not expect to stop more than a few days in Paris, and hoped to carry on the Govt, without a Cabinet by personal conferences with individual Ministers or groups of Ministers. I said I thought this manifestly impossible. I did not believe that any of the Ministers would stand it. In any case I could not accept it, and again I offered to leave them to talk it over among themselves.

Again the conversation see-sawed backwards and

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forwards. If I came into the Cabinet what about Long? What about Churchill? About Milner? About Eric Geddes, etc., etc. I said I had no objection.

\* But if you bring them in, the Cabinet can't be less than 15,' said Bonar Law.

' I must bring them in,' said the Prime Minister.

' Then that is impossible,' rejoined Bonar Law.

' Very well,' said I, ' then I must decline office.'

And then we went over the weary round again. Eventually I said that it was entirely their affair, but it seemed to me that if they did not want to bring in others, *leaving* the Chancellor in did not force them to do so. He had always been in.

' But not as Chancellor—only as leader of the House or of the Unionist Party,' said the Prime Minister and Bonar Law in chorus.

I replied that the public would not make that distinction. Neither of them would have accepted the office on the terms proposed to me and I would not accept it on such terms. Then at the last moment Bonar Law suggested that the old War Cabinet should be kept in being (and I should continue to sit in it as having been a member of that Cabinet) until at any rate the Prime Minister's return from France when he could consider his permanent arrangements.

' Well, would you accept that?' asked the Prime Minister.

' Yes, I am willing to accept that on the clear understanding that if at any time you propose to make a Cabinet without the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I resign.'

' Very well, then we'll try that.'

In this way Austen became Chancellor of the Exchequer for the second time. He rather regretted having accepted Mr. Lloyd George's offer, for he was doubtful of being able to rely on his support and he felt that if Mr. Bonar Law had to choose between the Prime Minister and himself his choice would be the former. Nor was Austen reassured by the information which reached him that the other candidates for the office were Mr. Winston Churchill, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, and Sir Auckland Geddes, for he sus-

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pected that Mr. Lloyd George would have preferred any one of them to himself, but that the pressure of the City had been too strong. However, as he wrote to his sister, 'One might as well be Chancellor of the Exchequer as a gardener ! Both are at the mercy of elemental forces.'

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

IN personnel the new Government was the old one with a few changes of Department, and it was not until the autumn that the Cabinet was reformed on the pre-war model. In the meantime it contained, in addition to Austen, only Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Curzon, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Barnes, though in fact the principal Ministers, whether nominally members of the Cabinet or not, habitually attended its meetings on all important occasions and took part in its discussions, but constitutionally they had no responsibility for them. Austen considered that this system had little to recommend it, and he felt that it would have been far better to have formed a representative Cabinet at once. The Ministry of Munitions survived under the more peaceful name of the Ministry of Supply ; Sir F. E. Smith became Lord Chancellor and Lord Birkenhead ; and Mr. Walter Long was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. The only mild sensation was the appointment of Sir S. P. Sinha, whom Austen had brought over to the Imperial War Conference, as Under-Secretary for India ; he was the first native of India to become a member of a British Government, and was very soon the first native of India to take his seat in the House of Lords.

The situation with which the reconstructed Ministry had to deal both at home and abroad was no easy one, though it was the former that mainly concerned Austen. The period of calm in which the General Election had been fought was not destined to last, and it was soon succeeded by one which recalled the bitterness of the immediate pre-war era. It seemed, indeed, as if the war had done nothing to soften old animosities, which had merely been laid aside to be resumed at the first opportunity. The common sacrifices of the previous four years were too soon forgotten in a violent clash between haves and have-nots. This hostility was reflected in the new House of Commons, and as good a description as any of that body in the early days of 1919 was given by Mr. Lloyd George himself. When the Ministers were over in Paris for the Peace Conference,

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one day Mr. Balfour said to the Prime Minister, ' I have been an exile from England since Christmas. Tell me what is happening there. What, for instance, is the new House of Commons like ? ' ' I'll tell you,' said Mr. Lloyd George, his eyes sparkling with fun and a smile spreading rapidly over his face. ' I made a speech to them. I addressed myself at first to the Opposition benches in front of me. They were very cold and hostile ; I couldn't get a cheer. This, said I to myself, is not the House of Commons ; it's the Trades Union Congress. So I turned as one does in such circumstances to the benches behind me, but neither was that the House of Commons ; it was the Associated Chambers of Commerce.'

Austen had only stated the truth when he wrote to Lord Chelmsford two years before that ' the world is in a state of revolution', and in these circumstances the composition of the new House of Commons was a further irritant to the opponents of the Coalition. The Government had been returned to Westminster with a Parliamentary strength out of all proportion to the votes cast, and Labour felt it had been tricked. The Trades Union Congress began to set itself up against Parliament. ' You', declared one of its delegates, ' who have sprung from the loins of the common people are infinitely more representative of the aims and aspirations of this country than the House of Commons/ A Council of Action was set up to enforce executive action in the interests of organized Labour. Mr. Arthur Bryant, in his monograph on Lord Baldwin, has selected some of the choicer specimens of the political abuse of that day. A leading organ of the Left, for example, reporting a speech of one of Austen's colleagues, began, ' Mr. Winston Churchill of the Brass Face erupted again last Saturday', while that statesman himself talked of the foul baboonery of the extreme Left. Lord Birkenhead advised the Conservative undergraduates of Oxford to throw their opponents into the Isis. Mr. George Lansbury wrote : ' I see in every industrial centre of our country a growing mass of men and women becoming imbued with wrath and hatred, settling down to parasitical lives of indolence and ignorance, and I see the classes who wax richer and fatter each day by living on the labour of those workers who are permitted to toil. I

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see those rich and powerful ones engaged in the infamous business of driving those who work deeper and deeper into the bog of poverty—poverty that is of mind as well as of body—and over it all is the spectre of another and an early war which once again will call forth all the bitterness and hatred of which man is capable.' An extreme view, perhaps, but one that was widely held.

Whether the blame for this state of affairs should be laid upon the leaders or upon the led, upon the politicians or upon the nation, is not easy to determine, but that there was a general lowering of standards is not open to question. It is proverbially easier to die well than to live well, and the truth of the adage seemed to be proved. Then, again, the war had ended so suddenly that both Government and people had been taken by surprise. The schemes for demobilization were not complete, and everyone was soon demanding an immediate return to pre-war conditions. There was little realization of the fact that to get on a satisfactory peace footing was going to be at least as difficult as it had proved to organize for modern war, and when the obstacles in the path of a return to normality made themselves felt there grew up a general feeling of exasperation with everyone and everything. There were strikes and mutinies, in course of which blood was shed and lives were lost. In retrospect, it would appear that hopes had been raised too high, and if instead of glib talk about 'a land fit for heroes to live in' more stress had been laid on the need for continued discipline and self-control some of the uglier aspects of the immediate post-war period might have been avoided.

Such was the chaotic state of the nation with whose finances Austen now had to deal. When he was last at the Exchequer he was concerned with a Budget of less than a hundred and fifty millions, while that of 1918 had amounted to eight hundred and forty-two millions. Even more embarrassing was the fact that it was very difficult to obtain any exact figures at all. 'I am kept very busy,' he wrote on February 16th, 'working long hours at one difficult problem after another, interrupted constantly by people who "must see me for a moment," and take anything from half an hour upwards, confronted with endless demands

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that I should receive deputations and with desperate appeals for help from France and Italy, quite uncertain what America will do, unable to find out what our expenditure will be this year and only able to make wild guesses at our future position.' Domestic worries always added to Austen's public cares, and a little over a month later he was writing, 'I begin to feel that I can't bear it. Ivy has got the 'flu, and though it is a light attack with no complications so far you can imagine what a load it adds to my other anxieties.' A few days later he was writing with regard to one of his problems, 'When "the City" is acting by instinct and rule of thumb it is amazingly clever and sure, but when it is asked to advise on large new issues, it has no theory or policy to work upon, and is indeed a broken reed.'

It was not uncharacteristic of Austen that when he was working his hardest he did most of his abstract thinking. The early months of 1919, when he was preparing his Budget, yet afforded him time to reflect upon the great problem of eschatology :

Of my own thoughts on the Great Beyond I find it hard to speak, for they elude me ever as I try to pursue them. Does it ever happen to you—something in my short or astigmatic sight makes it a constant experience with me—that you see a star just out of your direct line of vision and when you look straight at it and try to fix it, it disappears? So it is with my thoughts of the Beyond. I can imagine nothing which satisfies me, and so I think I hope for oblivion to be forgetting but not all-forgot.

Sure only of this am I : that we are what we are because others before us and around us were what they were. The power—if we have power—of love or work or duty or sacrifice or whatever our gift may be does not leave the world with us but dwells with those who have known us, fortifies and helps them and works on.

A world where one's loved ones are not or where they are so changed that all human feeling is denied them, a world, for instance, where Father is not my Father as I knew him, and Beatrice not Beatrice, and our love something different, a world with all values changed, no, I can't

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imagine it, and I don't want it now, nor would it help me to believe that it existed.

But if it exists, God in his mercy will provide and some day we shall understand. For if God *is*, He *must* be merciful. And I find no language except the old language to express my deepest thoughts and longings. 'Our Father which art in Heaven' and 'God bless Papa, etc., etc., and all who are dear to me'—the two prayers I learned at Auntie's knee say all I want to say. Are they heard by God or do they only echo in my own heart? I know not, and there is no need to know.

During all this time Austen was continually being distracted by strike after strike which meant long sittings of the Cabinet, and these in their turn were a severe strain on a constitution enfeebled, like that of so many of his fellow-countrymen, by the privations and anxieties of the war years. By May his weight was down to 10 stone 4 lb., and he was badly in need of a holiday. All the same he would have been less than human if he had not rejoiced when, in April, there took place the final breach between the Prime Minister and Lord Northcliffe, and Austen was publicly justified in the line he had taken a little over twelve months before. 'Lloyd George did his part admirably. He was grave, restrained and moderate in expression, voice and gesture throughout—only letting himself go a little, and not too much, when dealing with Northcliffe. He marshalled his speech admirably, showed good sense, reticence where reticence was required, and courage. I never liked him better, and there was but one verdict throughout the House at the moment as to his success and the masterly way in which he carried it off.'

On April 30th Austen introduced his Budget, and it was something of a shock to those who had hoped that the coming of peace would mean some relief in the matter of taxation. The actual deficit was no less than £1,690,280,000, and the estimated deficit for 1919-1920 was £233,810,000. The duty on spirits and beer was increased, and the death duties were raised to such an extent that on very large estates they amounted to 40 per cent. On the other hand, it gave

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Austen great pleasure to be able to make provision for Imperial Preference. 'It was a satisfaction to stand where Father had so often stood and to propose a definite preferential policy.' He was, too, well satisfied with the Budget as a whole, particularly in view of the difficulties which he had encountered in its preparation, for less than a week before he had written from Thornhill: 'I have had three very busy and rather agitated days in London over the Budget—millions suddenly disappearing here, then re-appearing in whole or in part elsewhere, sudden discovery of a snag here and a rock there, all the ordinary concomitants of a Budget but magnified to Brobdingnagian proportions.' In the circumstances it is hardly surprising that Austen found his speech a big physical effort. He was on his feet for two hours and a half, and in the middle he felt rather dizzy, though no one noticed it: there was, however, considerable merriment when the stiff brandy and soda, which he had ordered, was handed to him just as he passed from spirits to beer. He was pleased that in the two days<sup>5</sup> debate not a single question was asked as to his meaning, and 'a House which knew me not, and had begun to distrust my capacity under the influence of almost daily carping criticism, seems to think that after all I may have something in me.'

In June a Victory Loan raised £250,000,000, but this did not mean that even Austen's immediate troubles were at an end, and in the following month he was compelled once more to impress upon Parliament and the public the seriousness of the financial situation. Speaking on the Consolidated Fund Bill he said frankly that the position was turning out worse than he expected, for revenue was proving to be badly below his estimate while expenditure had been above it.

While Austen was wrestling with the national finances the Peace Conference had been meeting, and the Treaty of Versailles was signed. He had from time to time been over to Paris when some point in which the Treasury was concerned had to be settled, but he played no prominent part in that international settlement with the consequences of which he was one day to be called upon to deal. On June 29th, he wrote:

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So Peace is signed at last. . . . Will the world have rest ? I think the G.I.G.S. calculated a little time ago that there were still 23 little wars going on, and the whole East of Europe (not to mention Russia) is still a weltering chaos. As to Germany I wonder and wonder and wonder. I thought that Brockdorff-Rantzau's main note read like that of a man who wanted to sign and to keep what he signed, but who would not sign the first terms put forward by the Allies.

Even the old Germany would not, I think, rashly challenge a new war in the West, but the chaos on their Eastern frontier, and their hatred and contempt for the Poles, must be a dangerous temptation. . . . But if Germany remains or becomes really democratic, they cannot repeat the folly of Frederick the Great and Bismarck and his later followers. No democracy can or will make aggressive war its year-long study and business, though it may easily enough flare up in sudden passion. But think of Germany with its 60 or 70 millions of people and France with its dwindling 40 ! I shudder !

Further evidence of the views which Austen held at this time is afforded by a letter which he wrote later in the year to Mr. Maynard Keynes in acknowledgment of a copy of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* :

. . . I am full of admiration for a brilliant piece of work. I read your description of the Conference with malicious pleasure, especially of what concerned the President, whose picture you have drawn with the brush—shall I say ?—of a Sargent, who is always surprised that his brush reveals secrets which cause the observer to dislike or despise his sitter. I was never among the President's admirers. He seemed to me to be the dupe of his own words, and the impression of empty rhetoric which I derived from reading his pre-election addresses remained with me when I read his utterances about the war from which you were led to expect so much.

I wish that I thought that your reasoning as to Germany's

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capacity to pay, and your picture of the economic state of Europe, less accurate than I do. I think you a little too pessimistic, but in the main I believe you to be right. But surely it is unjust to blame 'the politicians' for the estimate of Germany's capacity to pay, which was, in effect, accepted by the Conference. It is true, of course, that the British Treasury, including yourself, and the American Treasury representatives, held a different view; but they were not the only experts, and you ignore in your book the part played by Lord Cunliffe and Lord Sumner. They were chosen to advise the British Government before they were committed to any figure, and in the belief that they were as shrewd, competent and fair judges as we could find. How could Lloyd George, or anyone else, definitely reject advice tendered on such high authority?

Again, I differ from you as to the moral relationship (if I may use that phrase) of the Treaty to Wilson's Fourteen Points and three speeches. That Wilson should have submitted this orgy of rhetoric to Germany without consultation with his associates was characteristic and deplorable. It would be difficult to say how, under the circumstances, the Allied Governments could have acted differently. But it follows necessarily that Wilson's declarations could not be taken as a legal contract—indeed, they were incapable of being used in such a way, and could only be regarded as general indications which the Peace Conference might apply within the limits of reason and good sense. . . .

That summer Austen was offered the Washington Embassy, but although there was no Mesopotamia Report hanging over him he refused for the reasons which his brother had put before him when there had been a question of going to Paris two years before.

It was in October of this year that the Austen Chamberlains left Thornhill and took up their residence at Twitts Ghyll, near Mayfield in Sussex, which was to be their country home for the next decade. Austen had bought the property, not without some searching of heart, and he certainly got full value out of his acquisition in the matter of enjoyment. \* It is all very interesting and exciting to us', he

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wrote, and this was no exaggeration. His own description of the house is the best evidence of his affection for it :

The cottage stands where two lanes meet. Its framework, if you could see it, is exactly like that of the farmer's great barn opposite—huge oak timbers such as went to the building of the old wooden navy, some straight or bent with age, some curved by the natural growth of the tree, but all hewed and squared with the axe and the adze ; no saw or plane had spoiled their beauty. Between the balks of timber it is wattle and daub, but one side has been clap-boarded against the south-westerly storms and the opposite one, facing the lane, is half-birch half-tile. The old tile roof sags and wavers with the yielding of the beams. Just to the right of the cottage and shadowing the north-west corner is a magnificent old yew.

Austen's first care was to lay out an Alpine garden. More than thirty years before he and his father were shown at Kew, as a great novelty, an unheated greenhouse filled with pans of Alpine plants, and as they drove back Austen told Mr. Chamberlain that if he ever had a garden of his own he would not attempt to grow orchids, but that he must have an Alpine house. Now this dream had come true, though it took the form of a garden rather than of a house, because the latter would require daily care and watering, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer could only get to Twitts Ghyll at week-ends. For the next ten years this garden was his one real relaxation, and there are as many, if not more, references in his private letters to matters horticultural as to matters political. Austen took great pride in his gardening, and there was one story in connection with it that particularly pleased him. When he first went to Geneva, in early March, 1925, to attend the Council of the League of Nations, he visited the famous Alpine garden of Dr. Correvon. As he was walking round he remarked upon a group of *Tulipa Clusiana* of which the leaves were pushing up although the buds were not yet showing. Later the same day an English lady went to see the garden, and

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Dr. Correvon mentioned Austen's visit. 'Ah!' said the lady, 'you have had the Minister for Foreign Affairs here? It is great honour for your garden.' 'Minister for Foreign Affairs, pooh!' came the scornful reply. 'There is a Minister for Foreign Affairs in every country, but there is only one who can identify *Tulipa Clusiana* by its leaves. As Austen used to say, "There was one subject at least of which I knew more than my colleagues!"'

If the year 1919 was for Austen one of preoccupation with the financial situation tempered by the distraction caused by an almost unbroken succession of strikes, the other problems of the day also made serious inroads upon his time. He took his share of the ordinary work of the Cabinet both in and out of Parliament, though it is to be noted that his responsibility was not as great, in spite of the repeated absences of the Prime Minister on the Continent, as it would have been in normal circumstances when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the second man in the Government; that position was held by Mr. Bonar Law as Leader of the House of Commons.

With the arrival of 1920 the political scene began to change. The Peace Treaties were signed, and although both in Eastern Europe and in the Near East there were wars and rumours of wars home affairs almost exclusively claimed the attention of the British electorate, with the result that in the Conservative ranks there gradually became audible the first rumblings of that storm of discontent with the Coalition which two years later was to exercise so decisive an influence upon Austen's career. There were several reasons for this, and not the least important was the repeated Government failures at the by-elections. In 1919 the Coalition lost West Leyton, Central Hull, Central Aberdeenshire and Kincardineshire, Bothwell, Widnes, and Spen Valley, while in the year that was just beginning, losses were to be sustained in the Wrekin Division of Shropshire, Dartford, Louth, and South Norfolk. In a somewhat unreflecting antagonism to his rulers for what he believed to be their inability to create that 'land fit for heroes to live in' which he had been promised at the General Election, the voter was turning to the Socialists and Independent Liberals as the only practicable alternative to the Coalition. This

tendency had its effect upon the Government's Conservative supporters both in and out of Parliament. There were men in the Ministry whom the ordinary Conservative mistrusted, and measures were passed which he intensely disliked. This in itself was bad enough, but when it became clear that the electorate was turning against the Coalition the Right Wing saw no particular reason why it should go down to disaster at the next General Election with allies of whom it was profoundly suspicious. Voices were also raised, though not at all loudly as yet, to the effect that a Government which was principally dependent upon Conservative support should have a Conservative Prime Minister at its head.

To this several answers were made by Austen and his friends. In the first place they denied that the national emergency, for which the Coalition had been formed, was at an end, for if peace had been signed there was still an enormous amount of reconstruction at home to be done. Then they pointed to the unrest throughout the country, and declared that unless co-operation with Mr. Lloyd George's followers was maintained there was little to prevent the Socialists coming into power. As for the Prime Minister himself, they saw in his popularity the Coalition's greatest asset, and they urged that it would be ungrateful as well as unwise to attempt to displace him. For a time these arguments sufficed to keep the discontented from any overt opposition, but it was already clear that it would not require a great deal to cause a definite breach in the ranks of the Government supporters, and in due course the progress of events in India, in the Near East, and above all in Ireland precipitated a crisis.

As in the previous year Austin's main concern was with his own Department. The financial situation was no better than it had been twelve months before, and the index figure of comparison with pre-war prices had risen to 176. So on March 10th he was writing :

I am deep in Budget. For weeks the daily pressure has been such that I could make no progress. You cannot read memoranda on the State of the Nation, on Sinking

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Funds, Depreciation Funds, charges 'Above the Line' and 'Below the Line' (Talk intelligibly ! I exclaim), on Excess Profits Duty, on Graduated Profits Tax, on Corporation Tax and Dear Money—you cannot read these I say in odd quarters of an hour or amidst the sitting of Cabinets, Supreme Councils, Conferences and Committees. So to-day I stayed at home till 4 p.m. and made progress. But I am frightened at the work in front of me, for I have no known reserve of strength, only the knowledge that needs must when the devil drives. . . .

Of the five Budgets which Austen introduced in the course of his career this was easily the most contentious. The deficit which he had to face was nearly a hundred millions more than he had anticipated. The duties on spirits, beers, and wines were raised once more, and a further special tax was put on champagne and other sparkling wines ; an *ad valorem* tax of 50 per cent, was placed on imported cigars in addition to the existing tax ; postal rates were raised all round ; and the Excess Profits Duty was increased from 40 to 60 per cent. It was round this last proposal, and the abolition of the land taxes, that relic of the far-off days of the ' People's Budget,' that controversy raged most furiously. Austen was savagely attacked by those affected, but the onslaught brought out the fighting spirit inherent in his father's son.

The Budget has certainly provoked an interesting situation. Its first reception was distinctly favourable. It was ' bold and courageous,' and so forth. Now the interests are beginning to make themselves heard, and my foes are of my own household. The Federation of British Industries is very strong in the House and its clamours are being echoed by the *Daily Telegraph*, *Chronicle*, *Express*, and *Pall Mall*, whilst the *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian* continue to support me. I shall have my own way in the end with minor concessions—something especially for new businesses—but I shall have a big fight with the Big Bugs and mean-

while the lesser plagues of Stamps, and Beer and Spirits and Wines will buzz and bite.

But I have a rod in pickle for the Federation when it gets troublesome. I offered them an alternative which many of their supporters now say would be the right thing, and they would not have it. I invited them to find an alternative, and after 14 months they came back with what in effect was an additional income tax. They have some reason to be vexed or at least surprised, but they are a selfish, swollen lot, and if they think that they can bully this Chancellor because there are so many of them in the House, they will find that they are mistaken. It is good for them to be told at once that I stand or fall by my proposals. If they won't take them from me, they will get them and a Capital Levy from someone else.

Austen got his way as he prophesied, not least because he related to the House the story of his relations with the Federation of British Industries. He made one of those rare speeches which actually influence votes, and in spite of the clamour which had been raised only 75 Members went into the lobby against the Government.

All this time the situation in Ireland had been going from bad to worse. In 1918 a number of the leading Sinn Feiners had been arrested, but this measure had done little, if anything, to improve matters, while in the spring of the following year Mr. de Valera made a spectacular escape from Lincoln gaol. There were constantly recurring attacks on police barracks and post offices, while the ambushing and killing of policemen became ever more frequent, and an attempt, which was nearly successful, was made to murder the Viceroy, Lord French. The difficulties with which the Government had to deal were many, as Austen fully realized :

I spent Friday morning and afternoon <sup>1</sup> in Cabinet conference on Ireland. Most puzzling and most distressing. Can modern democracy handle such problems successfully ?

<sup>1</sup> He was writing on July 24th, 1920.

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The country is in revolution, and many features of the situation are worse than anything that we have known in the past. And one can no longer rely upon *both* parties in the State to follow out a policy that requires years for its success. Can one rely even on one party to see a difficult problem through? A sensational Press upsets their nerves and makes them impatient, first clamours for stern measures and then screams itself into hysterics when it sees what stern measures mean in practice. There is nothing worse than selling out on a policy which you can't carry through, for such a policy, whatever its intrinsic merits, must always be wrong. I don't see my way clear. The old Unionist policy is not possible, for our people won't give it the time necessary for it to achieve its end. 'Home Rule' seems now equally impossible. Is it to be Dominion Govt.?

Austen's colleagues felt the same, and they decided that one more attempt should be made to reach a settlement while law and order must be re-established at all costs. Accordingly, the Home Rule Bill, 1920, was passed, and by this measure two Parliaments were set up in Ireland, that is to say, one at Belfast for the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone; and the other at Dublin for the rest of the country. Each Parliament had a Senate, and a House of Commons elected by proportional representation; while full powers were given for dealing with education, agriculture, land tenure, labour problems, poor law, local government, health, railways, liquor questions, police, and old age pensions. As a link between North and South there was established a single Federal Council for the whole of Ireland, elected in equal proportions by the two legislatures. This scheme had much to recommend it, and the chief comment at the time it was produced was that it was a pity it had been so long delayed. For the coercion of lawlessness a number of demobilized men were enlisted into the Royal Irish Constabulary as auxiliaries, and their khaki uniforms and dark caps soon gave them a grim notoriety under the name of 'Black and Tans.' With their coming a more bitter spirit characterized the struggle, and there were reprisals

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and counter-reprisals. In November the Prime Minister was optimistic, and declared that the Government 'had murder by the throat'; but events soon falsified his optimism, for that very month a number of English officers were dragged out of their beds one Sunday morning in hotels in Dublin, and shot in cold blood before the eyes of their wives, while shortly afterwards some of the public buildings in Cork were burnt down by way of retaliation.

As for India, where Austen never ceased to follow events closely, there were many grounds for anxiety. The reforms, based on the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, had become law, but there had been an ugly incident at Amritsar in the previous year of which the repercussions were beginning to make themselves felt at Westminster. There had been disturbances of a revolutionary nature in the Punjab, and of these Amritsar was the centre. In defiance of a public proclamation a crowd of 15,000 natives one day assembled in a space known as Jallianwala Bagh, and although they were unarmed, Brigadier-General Dyer, who was in command of the troops, considered the situation so serious that he ordered his men to open fire. This they did for several minutes, with the result that some 400 of the rioters were killed, and about three times that number were wounded. There was at once an outcry both in India and in Great Britain; General Dyer was deprived of his command; and a committee under the chairmanship of Lord Hunter was appointed to investigate the matter. This body condemned General Dyer for undue severity, but there was a large section of opinion which believed that he had in reality saved India. The subject was discussed in the House of Commons on July 8th, 1920, and on this debate Austen commented :

I hope that I shall not have such a House<sup>1</sup> as confronted Montagu on Thursday, and that, if I do, I shall not handle it so maladroitly. With the House in that temper nothing could have been so infuriating to it as his opening remarks—no word of sympathy with Dyer, no sign that Montagu appreciated his difficulties, but as it were a passionate

<sup>1</sup> For the debate on raising the Excess Profits Duty.

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peroration to a speech which had not been delivered, a grand finale to a debate which had not begun.

I am really sorry for Montagu. He is able, ambitious, nervous, highly strung. He has a most difficult situation to handle in India with a Viceroy<sup>1</sup> who is none too able and with Councils in India and in London which seem to me below the average. Our party has always disliked and distrusted him. On this occasion all their English and racial feeling was stirred to passionate display—I think I have never seen the House so fiercely angry—and he threw fuel on the flames. A Jew, a foreigner, rounding on an Englishman and throwing him to the wolves—that was the feeling, and the event illustrates once again what I said of Dizzy. A Jew may be a loyal Englishman and passionately patriotic, but he is intellectually apart from us and will never be purely and simply English.

It is hard, for in this case the decision was not Montagu's but that of the Cabinet, based on most careful examination by a strong Cabinet Committee, and making all allowance for Dyer's difficulties I cannot see that with any regard for the principles on which our Empire is and must be conducted we could have done less. But when 'Clemency Canning' is represented by Edwin Montagu, violent opposition is certain.

I returned home very sad and much upset by the whole tone of the debate. The new scheme in India is launched under the worst possible auspices.

This debate was the first step in the break-up of the Coalition, and the supporters of General Dyer, or perhaps it would be more correct to say the critics of Mr. Montagu, began to act together on other questions than those relating to India, though more than two years were to elapse before they formed a majority of the Conservative Party. The controversy over General Dyer was, however, the first cloud on the horizon.

Before the year was over India was again to figure very largely in Austen's life, and in a peculiarly personal manner, for in October he was offered the Viceroyalty. He refused

<sup>1</sup> Lord Chelmsford.

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the offer at once, though had he been a bachelor or childless he confessed that he would have been sorely tempted to accept. His tenure of the India Office had, as has been shown, served to interest him deeply in Eastern affairs, and he fully appreciated that the new Viceroy would have immense opportunities in view of the constitutional changes which were taking place. Nevertheless, all this weighed little in the balance against the inevitable separation from his children. Austen could never contemplate their return to school each term without a feeling of profound dejection, so it was hardly likely that he could face with equanimity an absence of five years. Mr. Lloyd George, it may be added, confessed that he was 'rather relieved' at Austen's decision, for although it was by no means easy to find a suitable Viceroy<sup>1</sup> he had no wish to lose his Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The reference to Mr. Disraeli in Austen's comments on Mr. Montagu calls for explanation. The last two volumes of Mr. Buckle's *Life of Disraeli* had just appeared, and Austen had read them with the greatest interest. 'The mind of a seer in the body of a mountebank', was one of his reflections on the Victorian statesman, while 'East is East through all the generations, and Dizzy, tho' an English patriot, was not an Englishman,' was another. 'I am continuing Dizzy's-Life, and have just entered upon the last volume. I find it extraordinarily interesting. The man and almost everything about him repels me, but his insight and foresight were extraordinary. England may have been or have become in Salisbury's words "the passion of his life," but he was not an Englishman. But man of genius he was.' Indeed, the opinion of Austen on Mr. Disraeli was not unlike that which he held of Mr. Canning : \* He always interests me. I am quite unable to deny his greatness or the mark he left on the world, but I must admit that he is to me a kind of Dr. Fell. . . . I fear that, if I were asked to name three great statesmen of undoubted merit whom I nevertheless did not admire, Canning's name would be on my list.' On the other hand Austen had a great respect for Lord Castlereagh, who appeared to him to be endowed with the qualities in

<sup>1</sup> Lord Reading was subsequently appointed.

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which he considered Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Canning to be deficient, and he insisted that Lord Castlereagh's portrait should be hung on the wall of the room in the Foreign Office where the Pact of Locarno was to be signed.

The situation abroad was also a cause of anxiety to Austen throughout the year, and the policy of France in particular disquieted him. In January he was writing of the extended French occupation of German territory :

She (i.e. France) went in against the expressed sense of every Ally and America, used black troops to occupy Frankfurt, and might easily have provoked serious trouble. I think Millerand and Poincare with Foch to egg them on very dangerous, and it was time to let them know that if they provoked or provoke a row by isolated action, they will be left to settle it by themselves as best they can. They live in a nightmare terror of Germany, but unless they are careful they will plant such memories as Germany will never forget, and someday will avenge.

Later in the year Austen revised his opinion of M. Millerand, but nothing could diminish his mistrust of M. Poincare.

Throughout the year 1920 Austen devoted his spare time to the garden at Twitts Ghyll, and that house more than fulfilled his expectations. By the end of June the rock garden was finished, and Austen was hard at work with the planting. 'Neville offered to weed yesterday morning/ he wrote one day, 'and flattered us by walking about with a small fork and basket, and declaring that there were no weeds in our garden.' For a holiday lasting more than a few days Austen had to wait until the beginning of the next year when, in company with Mrs. Chamberlain and Joe, he paid another visit to Spain. During the course of it he went to Tarifa, and the son of the pioneer of Tariff Reform not unnaturally took a keen interest in the place which gave its name to the word 'tariff.' Circumstances forbade a long holiday, but the change did him a great deal of good, and he was to require all his energy for the task

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which lay before him, though while he was revelling in the January sunshine at Algeciras he had no inkling of the difficulties and worries that the ensuing eighteen months were to bring.

Mr. Bonar Law had not been in good health for some time, and in March, 1921, he was compelled to give up all public work. There was only one possible successor, and that was Austen, who accordingly became Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons. No other name was seriously considered, though mention was made of Sir Robert Home in some quarters. Yet the prize was not so attractive as it had seemed ten years before, and Austen accepted it as much from a sense of duty as for any other reason :

Ten years ago I thought I should be chosen leader of the Party, and resigned my chances not without regret to a man only a year or two older than myself and very much my junior in the House of Commons. It never occurred to me then or since that the chance would come to me again, and though Bonar Law has often complained of being very tired, I thought him at least as good a ' life ' whether political or otherwise as my own. And now he falls out so suddenly and unexpectedly that it leaves us all sad and breathless, and the wheel of fortune turning full circle brings to me again what ten years ago I should have liked, and what I now accept as an obvious duty, but without pleasure or any great expectations except of trouble and hard labour. . . . As one after another of one's old colleagues drops out of the ranks I feel sad and lonely, and do not experience as of old the joy and fire of battle.

Austen could, indeed, hardly have become leader at a more unfortunate moment, and it was a most uneasy inheritance upon which he now entered. His party was in office, it is true, but as a partner in a Coalition that was every day becoming more unpopular in the country as the by-elections abundantly proved. There was no opportunity of initiating policy, and all that could be done, in

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view of the widespread economic and social unrest, which seemed to grow worse instead of better, was to work away at the liquidation of the war. All this was bad enough, but those whom Austen was to lead were themselves becoming every day more divided. 'Members have been growing increasingly restive in the House/ wrote Austen, and this was no exaggeration. Such was the legacy which Mr. Bonar Law bequeathed to his successor.

Nevertheless, Austen's start was promising. 'The Party meeting was very cordial, and gave me a great reception.' It was held at the Carlton Club on March 21st, and Lord Edmund Talbot was in the chair. Messages in favour of the election of Austen as leader of the Party in the House of Commons were read from Mr. Balfour, Mr. Walter Long, Sir Edward Carson, and Sir Robert Home, and a resolution to this effect was proposed by Captain Prctyman and seconded by Sir Edward Coates. It was carried un-animously, and Austen then entered the room to the accompaniment of continued cheers. His speech was a short one, but after paying a tribute to the memory of his predecessor he took the opportunity of reminding his hearers of his attitude towards the Coalition :

I am not going here and now to attempt to forecast the future of our Party or even of the Coalition ; but there are moments when insistence upon Party is as unforgivable as insistence upon personal things, when the difficulties which the nation has to confront call for a wider outlook and a broader union than any that can be found even within the limits of a single party, and when the traditions of more than one party, the ideas of more than one party, need to be put into the common stock so that the country may be safely piloted through hours of crisis and danger.

He then made an appeal for loyalty on the part of those who were henceforth to be his followers :

They (i.e. the Liberals) think that our loss may be their

gain. Let us see that it is not. When a great figure is removed we learn, perhaps for the first time, how much we owe to him. The little murmurs, the small criticisms, which made his task more difficult, which added to the strain, the almost impossible strain, of those years of labour and anxiety—these things seem to us very small now. We think not of the minor and passing differences, but of the great underlying unity of purpose and of sympathy. Those murmurings and those criticisms did not matter very much so long as we had Mr. Bonar Law's great influence and his sure guidance to lead us through.

They would matter immensely now. And if I feel that I can undertake the charge which you entrust to me it is in the assurance that in the difficult days that lie ahead of us I shall have not merely your general support, but your generous forbearance in any mistakes that I may make, and that you yourselves as members of a great party will remember that you are a unity, that you too must stand together, not merely in support of your leaders but in support of one another. The load which we have to carry can only be carried successfully if we all work with a common purpose, if we all try to help one another, and each of us seeks to take his share in the difficult task that lies before us.<sup>1</sup>

The Press as a whole was favourable, and Austen was reassured to know 'that the gibes and sneers of the last few years are not the real judgment of my countrymen upon me.'<sup>5</sup> The Party and the Press were not, however, the only factors in the situation, for there was also Mr. Lloyd George whom, as we have seen, Austen had often criticized bitterly in the past. It is thus interesting to note that it was at this time that the two men came closest together. 'It was not,' Austen testified later, 'until after Bonar Law's retirement . . . that any real confidence or regard was established between us. Through the two anxious years which followed, I learned to know him at his best.' It is, indeed, not a little curious that during the war, when all men were praising Mr. Lloyd George he should have been a

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, March 22 nd, 1921.

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none too friendly critic, while during the last days of the Coalition, when the Prime Minister was every day becoming a subject of greater dislike to the bulk of the Conservative Party, Austen should have come to entertain for him a very warm personal regard. This development was surely much to the credit of both men.

The contrast between himself and his predecessor was well summed up by Austen at this time :

By the way it will amuse you as much as it did me to hear that when told that the Party would certainly choose me the P.M. threw up his hands and cried, ' He's an awful Tory,' and that the Party appears to share the view that I am more of a Conservative than Bonar. And the odd thing is that it is true, for I have a tradition and he had none. He always seemed to me curiously without the historic sense. I don't think that I ever heard him use an historic illustration or appeal to history or tradition or custom. The fact that he had no experience of government did not trouble him when he took the leadership. What he was afraid of then was his want of birth. He was confident that he could lead without experience, but afraid that the Party might follow unwillingly because he had not blue blood in his veins.

It's an odd world. How Lady Londonderry would have thrown herself on my neck if she had been still living ! I always used to say that the number of fingers she gave me—varying from 10 to 2—was a sure sign of the state of my fortunes.

Nevertheless, in eighteen months the scene had changed again, and the Conservative Party once more took Mr. Bonar Law for its leader because it had by then come to consider him a better Tory than Austen.

The Austen Chamberlains moved into 11 Downing Street—' that does not conduce to economy which is a bore '—when Austen succeeded Mr. Bonar Law, and Sir Robert Home became Chancellor of the Exchequer : owing, however, to the coal strike then in progress Sir Robert

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could not immediately be spared from his duties as Minister of Labour, and so Austen introduced the Budget on April 25th. It showed a very different picture from that of the two previous years, for in spite of the fact that during 1920 there had been no less than 1,715 industrial disputes involving two million people there was a surplus of £230,556,789. In these circumstances it was possible to make some concessions, so the Excess Profits Duty was repealed, the additional tax on cigars imposed the year before was taken off, and the duty on sparkling wines was readjusted. It was fortunate that Austen had so reassuring a statement to make, for he was only given a week's notice of the fact that he was to introduce the Budget and nearly a month had elapsed since he left the Treasury. Yet although this meant several days of very hard work Austen was so relieved at being no longer Chancellor that he almost enjoyed the preparation of his swan song. He had not, in Cabinet, received from Mr. Bonar Law the support to which he considered himself entitled, though he always said of the Prime Minister that he \* was far and away my best friend.' Now he had finished with the Treasury for ever. 'I can't tell you how great is the relief to me of being freed from the responsibilities of the Chancellorship of the Exchequer.' On the other hand, close relationship with the Prime Minister meant attendance at those political breakfasts in which Mr. Lloyd George delighted, and this ill accorded with Austen's customs : 'Breakfasts are the devil !' he wrote. 'Destructive of the digestion and the temper ! And nothing disturbs me more in relation to the performance of my new duties than the matutinal habits of the Prime Minister.'

Although more than one difficulty of a fairly serious nature, not the least being the anomalous position of Dr. Addison as Minister without Portfolio, confronted Austen during his early months in his new position, the problem of Ireland was his preoccupation. The elections in Ireland, as provided by the Act of the previous year, took place in May, and in the South the result was a farce, for there was not a single opposed return, and the new House of Commons would have been composed entirely of Sinn Feiners but for the four Unionists who had been elected by Dublin University. In Northern Ireland, on the contrary, there were

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genuine contests which resulted in a Unionist victory, and on June 22nd, the Parliament at Belfast was formally opened by the King in a speech which made a notable appeal for forbearance where Ireland was concerned. He expressed the earnest desire that peace might be restored, and that the old bitterness between Irishmen and Irishmen, and Irishmen and Englishmen might disappear for ever. This represented a marked change of attitude on the part of the British Government since the previous December, and it was followed by an invitation from Mr. Lloyd George to Mr. de Valera to a conference to discuss how peace might be made since it was now clear that the Sinn Feiners would not be content with the Act of 1921. It has already been shown in what direction Austen had for some time been moving where Ireland was concerned, and he fully approved of a proposal of which he was the originator. 'I am sure that if this means had not been adopted we should not have secured the support of the country for the fight which was the alternative.'

In saying this Austen undoubtedly expressed the point of view which had converted the Government from coercion to conciliation. Ireland had become a veritable running sore, and the early months of 1921 had marked no change in the situation. The critics of the Government said it was unable or unwilling to make either peace or war, and however this may be outrage followed outrage, while by the time that Austen succeeded Mr. Bonar Law the King's writ had ceased to run in wide areas of the South and West. It may well be that had the military been given a free hand Sinn Fein could have been crushed, but, as Austen had long come to realize, it is certain that the English electorate would not have supported such a policy. There were many serious problems in England herself, so it is hardly surprising that the desire of the overwhelming mass of the population, far from the re-conquest of Ireland, was to forget all about her. Indeed, it would have been difficult if not impossible to have rallied support for the adoption of a strong line towards Sinn Fein. There was also the attitude of American opinion to be taken into account, and with the question of the war debt extremely urgent this was not an aspect of the problem which could safely be ignored.

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Although Mr. Lloyd George's invitation had been accepted early in July, it was not until October that the conference itself took place. Austen was one of the British representatives, and his colleagues were Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Birkenhead, Mr. Winston Churchill, Sir L. Worthington Evans, Sir Hamar (later Lord) Greenwood, and Sir Gordon (now Lord) Hewart. Of the Irish delegates it was Mr. Arthur Griffith who made the strongest appeal to Austen. 'He had, I think, no hatred of England in his heart ; he was ready, as so few Irishmen are, to forget and, therefore, to forgive, and though he stood firmly by what he conceived to be the rights of Irish nationhood, he was broadminded enough to understand, and within those limits to endeavour to meet the British point of view.<sup>5</sup> Austen found himself less in sympathy with Mr. Michael Collins. 'He had his own code of honour, and to it he was true ; but it was not mine, and between him and me there could be no real sympathy, and perhaps only partial understanding.' Mr. Erskine Childers, 'that dark spirit' who was the secretary of the Irish delegation, Austen thoroughly mistrusted from first to last.

The conference lasted until December 6th, when the treaty which established the Irish Free State was signed at half-past two in the morning. More than once it appeared as if an agreement was impossible, and in the end the Irish delegates were only induced to sign when faced with the alternative of a resumption of hostilities within three days. There were seven plenary sessions of the conference, and Austen was present at all save two. After the seventh session of the plenary conference negotiations were conducted through sub-conferences, and Austen attended nine of these out of a total of twenty-four. It would be idle to pretend that he took the lead on these occasions for he considered that this should be left to the Prime Minister, but the official account of the proceedings shows that he played his part in the discussions, and that part was certainly not, as some of his critics were soon to maintain, to urge surrender : indeed, it would not be surprising if the Irish delegates had formed the opinion that he was one of their principal opponents. Austen's real work lay outside the conference in persuading the Party he led to agree to a

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settlement at all, and that absorbed nearly all his energies during the autumn of 1921. In view of all that had gone before it was no easy task.

Dissatisfaction at the appointment of Dr. Addison as Minister without Portfolio after what they considered to be his failure at the Ministry of Health had increased the discontent of many Conservatives with the Coalition, and in June those who held such views received a lead from the Marquess of Salisbury in a letter to the *Morning Post* in which he argued that it was necessary for the Conservative Party to recover its liberty of action, and to free itself from any binding obligation to support the Coalition. Austen had at once replied to the effect that the time had not yet come for such a dissipation of strength as Lord Salisbury's proposal would imply, and he cited as an example of fruitful co-operation between men of different political origins the second and third administrations of Lord Salisbury's own father. This argument was to influence him greatly during the ensuing fifteen months, though it made little appeal to the majority of his followers in and out of Parliament. Austen had spent by far the greater part of his political life in an atmosphere of compromise, and a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives did not shock one who had sat as a Liberal Unionist in Conservative Cabinets. Then, again, personal contact with Mr. Lloyd George was developing in him a strong feeling of loyalty and admiration. Above all, Austen had no confidence in his Party's ability to win an independent majority of its own, and in view of the strength of the disruptive forces up and down the country, he felt that the fall of the existing administration might well be the prelude to revolution. Unfortunately, he was coming to hold these views more and more when others were holding them less and less.

Nevertheless, Austen fully realized the difficulties that confronted him, and on October 17th he wrote :

The Conference drags, and a section of our Party grows more restless every day. If we fail to make peace, I suppose that the Party will reunite and I think that the country will be behind us. But if we succeed . . . we shall have serious

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trouble with a section of our own people—with how many I cannot say.

The annual meeting of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations was to be held at Liverpool in November, and it was clear that on this occasion the issue would be joined between the Die-hards and their opponents.

As the date of the meeting drew nearer Austen became increasingly more impressed with the gravity of the situation, and he certainly did not underrate the opposition which he had to face :

Sinn Fein and Ulster in front, the Die-hards on my back and the National Union meeting on Thursday in L'pool, the stronghold of Orange Toryism—you can imagine what it all means. And I might add to my catalogue of troubles Bonar Law, an Ulsterman by descent and in spirit, a very ambitious man, now astonished at what he thinks his own complete recovery and itching to be back in politics where he is disposed to think that the first place might and ought to be his.

I am fighting for my political life. What L'pool has in store I don't know. The Die-hards are organizing fiercely and strenuously. If we are beaten there it won't be the end, but it will be very unpleasant. Thank heaven F. E. and I are absolutely at one. I believe now that we shall carry a united Cabinet and get a solution in complete accordance with our pledges. If so, we shall have done the greatest service any body of men could render to the Empire at the present time. But the strain and labour are for the time being immense.

The prospect of coming to terms with Sinn Fein had greatly increased the strength of the anti-Coalition, or Die-hard, element in the Conservative Party. The clubs were split from top to bottom, and their political committees were the scene of heated controversy. In the provinces there were the same divisions of opinion as in London, and

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it is safe to say that the majority of the delegates who crowded into the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool that November morning were seriously perturbed at the course of events. Austen had, however, the support of the three men who carried the greatest weight with a Liverpool audience, namely Lord Derby, Lord Birkenhead, and Sir Archibald Salvidge ; his brother had also secured the attendance of a strong contingent from Birmingham, so that the gathering was thoroughly representative of both sections of the Party. Feeling that he had his back to the wall Austen made a fighting speech, the vigour of which astonished some who were inclined to forget that he was his father's son. He began by discussing the future of the Coalition and its constituent parties, and he left his hearers in no doubt as to his own views :

Sooner or later . . . the decision must be given whether we of the present Coalition dissolve, breaking up the forces of order, weakening the party of stability and constitutional progress, or whether, out of that coalition, dictated to us in the midst of war by the imperious needs of national safety, cemented by common action in years of difficulty and danger since the war, will come a new party, constitutional, democratic, national.

He then proceeded to stress the need for peace both at home and abroad, and expressed himself optimistic with regard to the Washington Conference which was in progress. This done he addressed himself to the problem of Ireland :

We have heard a great deal recently of Die-hards. I am not going to say an unkind word about Die-hards. I have been a Die-hard myself. If some people had their way I should very soon be a Die-hard again. But when the colonel of the Middlesex Regiment fell mortally wounded at Albuera calling to his men, ' Die hard, my men, die hard,' he knew what he was fighting for. He knew it was a cause worth giving his life for, and he called upon his men to do the same.

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Don't let anybody die before it is necessary. I don't want them to die ; I want them to live to fight beside us ; and I am convinced that if they will have a little patience, and if they will wait until they know, there will be no split amongst us. . . . No, I have no quarrel with the Die-hards. They are men of sincere conviction and of strong faith.

I am not afraid of the Die-hards. All I ask of them is that they shall wait until they have the material upon which to judge. I am afraid of men with hot heads to-day who have cold feet to-morrow. You know the type. We see it in every struggle in the men who halloa you on to fight to-day, who ask to-morrow whether you weren't a little hasty, and who a few days later find the means by which you pursue your ends too strong for their queasy stomachs, and after a few weeks, scuttling to the rear, are ready to surrender everything, and make peace at any price.

Austen then alluded to the negotiations in progress, and proceeded to defend his share in them in a manner which enabled those present to obtain an idea of the working of his own mind.

Why did our old Unionist policy fail ? Not, in my belief at any rate, because it was wrong ; I think it was right. It failed because the country would not pursue it consistently through good fortune and through bad. It failed because after Mr. Gladstone's conversion the Union was no longer a national policy, but a party policy ; and Ireland is too close to us, her affairs react too constantly upon us, she is too ever-present with us at Westminster to enable you to build upon party the basis of a permanent solution of the Irish question.

In conclusion, he confessed that he had been wrong in the matter of the Union of South Africa :

I have one more observation to make, and it is in the nature of a confession. I have been in Parliament for very

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nearly thirty years, and have given goodness knows how many votes. There are some that I would not repeat with my later knowledge and experience. There are only one or two that I would wish undone. I will tell you one of them. The South African War was a just and necessary war. But for the issues then fought out and settled there could have been no lasting peace in that country. But though peace was signed, though allegiance was sworn, reconciliation lagged behind. Then came a change of Government, and with a new Government a new policy. By a great act of daring faith they conferred upon our recent enemies in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, on the morrow of our victory, full self-government.

I voted against them. I thought it a rash and wicked thing to do. If we could have seen further into the future, if I could have voted in that division with the fuller knowledge I have to-day, I should have known that that great act of faith was not, as I thought it, the destruction of our policy, but its completion and its fulfilment. That is the vote that I would undo if I could undo a vote once given. That great act, that daring act of faith, led directly to the reconciliation of the races in South Africa ; it led to the Union of South Africa ; it brought South Africa into the war with us ; added German East Africa and German South-West Africa to British territory.

This confession had an immediate effect upon the audience in the Philharmonic Hall, and it undoubtedly influenced a great number of votes. The Die-hards were not, it is true, slow to point out that the analogy was false, for in the case of South Africa generosity had followed in the wake of victory, while in that of Ireland it seemed rather a concession wrung from weakness. However this may be the immediate effect of Austen's pronouncement was to swing the meeting over to his side. His peroration was most eloquent :

Now and again in the affairs of men there comes a moment when courage is safer than prudence, when some

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great act of faith, touching the hearts and stirring the emotions of men, achieves the miracle that no arts of statesmanship can compass. Such a moment may be passing before our eyes now as we meet here. I pray to God with all my heart and soul that to each of us to whom responsibility is brought there may be given vision to see, faith to act, and courage to persevere.

It was in these circumstances little wonder that Austen got his vote of confidence, and thus a few weeks' respite from internal Party strife. Nearly three weeks later, in the early hours of that December morning, he was one of the signatories of the Irish Treaty, when the English and Irish delegates shook hands for the first time, and then parted after expressing the hope that they had laid the foundation of a permanent understanding and lasting friendship between the two peoples.

It had been a worrying year for Austen, and more than once he had wondered whether his health would stand the strain. 'Shall I ever feel rested?' he wrote as early as July, but fortunately that month marked the nadir of his physical weakness, for the root of his trouble was found to be teeth, and a few extractions resulted in a general improvement. Not the least, for Austen, of the penalties of office was that it left him so little time for general reading, but he could not miss anything connected with Byron however busy he might be; while, therefore, peace with Ireland hung in the balance in August he was reading *Astarte* :

It leaves no doubt that the charge against Byron and his half-sister Augusta, Mrs. Leigh, was true, and I suppose that my sympathy should go out to Lady B. ; but a more unsympathetic character I have never met. She belonged to the species who are described by their female friends as 'a Saint, my dear, a perfect Saint,' and for that character I have never had any liking. Their virtues come too near to being vices. I am glad that I did not know Lady B. or, for the matter of that, Lord Lovelace. I should certainly have quarrelled with him about Byron and his poetry, and I would far

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rather read Byron's letters filled with unholy wrath and passion than Lady B.'s cold effusions of friendship and Christian solicitude for the souls of the sinners. Bah ! the lady disgusts me. She had reason enough, God knows, for a total breach with husband and sister-in-law, but the friendship with and letters to 'dearest Augusta' make my gorge rise.

The following year, 1922, was probably the most anxious in Austen's career. When it began he was leader of his Party with the reversion of the Premiership assured ; when it finished he was merely a private Member, with whom the majority of the Party which he had so recently led was definitely out of sympathy. The twelve months which witnessed this change were certainly not the least eventful in British domestic history.

Before the old year ended Mr. Lloyd George had expressed himself very strongly in favour of an early General Election,<sup>1</sup> and the Lord Chancellor had given a small dinner-party a few days before Christmas to consider the question. On this occasion the project was supported by Mr. McCurdy, the Coalition Liberal Chief Whip ; Mr. Macnamara ; and Lord Beaverbrook, while Sir Archibald Salvidge was more doubtful. Shortly afterwards, on December 21st, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Birkenhead, Mr. Winston Churchill, and Austen met alone for a further talk, and the first two expressed themselves strongly in favour of an appeal to the country, while Austen and Mr. Churchill—the latter with more hesitation than the former—were opposed to such a course. The Prime Minister left a week later for the Cannes Conference. Such were the circumstances in which Austen asked Sir Malcolm Fraser, the Principal Agent of the Conservative and Unionist Party, to report to him on the probable result of a General Election.

The document which he received was not very encouraging. Sir Malcolm considered, after a confidential discussion with those most competent to express an opinion, that if the Prime Minister went to the country in February

<sup>1</sup> The first suggestion came from Lord Birkenhead.

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he would probably get back with a majority, but that the Conservative Party would be split from top to bottom. There would be a substantial addition to the Labour Party in the House of Commons, and it might well be that the majority of the Unionists returned would come back as Independent Unionists who would prove intractable at Westminster. Sir Malcolm pointed out that in the days of the co-operation between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists the then Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, was the head of the larger party, whereas in existing circumstances there was an uneasy feeling that the tail was wagging the dog. A careful estimate showed an almost certain loss of a hundred seats by the Coalition. Mr. Neville Chamberlain, Sir Herbert (now Lord) Jessel, and Sir Alexander Leith, who were consulted, also deprecated any immediate General Election. On January 9th Sir George Younger, the Chairman of the Party, expressed himself in the same sense in a circular letter to the chairman of constituencies. Nevertheless, there was throughout the month a campaign in a section of the Press in favour of an election, and although it died down the impression had been created that such an idea was still in the mind of the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, much was happening behind the scenes. Austen wrote to Mr. Lloyd George at Cannes to tell him of the result of his investigations, and to urge him to abandon the project. The Prime Minister had by this time taken serious umbrage at what he considered *to* be Sir George Younger's breach of confidence, but Austen defended Sir George on the ground that it was impossible for him in his position to keep silent. His own views he embodied in the following memorandum :

I am opposed to a dissolution at the present time—

(1) *Because our work is not done.*

(a) Ireland. It would in my opinion be taking grave and unjustifiable risks to leave the new Irish policy incomplete and exposed to all the accidents of the weeks in which every member of the Government would have to be stumping the country instead of governing **it.**

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- (b) House of Lords. We are doubly and trebly pledged to reform the House of Lords before a dissolution. It would be discreditable as well as unsafe to dissolve without attempting to deal with this question, and indeed without any agreement among ourselves as to the scope of the reform.
- (2) *The time is inopportune.*
- (a) Revival of trade is all important. A dissolution with its turmoil and expense would be the worst thing possible for trade.
- (b) With such extensive unemployment *that* must be the dominant issue, and the immediate result would be an auction for votes at the taxpayers' expense.
- (3) *Party grounds.*
- (a) My object has been to lead the Unionist Party to accept merger in a new Party under the lead of the present Prime Minister and including the great bulk of the old Unionists and old Liberals so as to secure the widest and closest possible union of all men and women of constitutional and progressive views. This requires time and careful preparation. No one except myself has ever begun to touch it. An early dissolution would at best find us still a Coalition—which is both unsatisfactory and unpopular—and quite likely two independent and, not improbably, two hostile Parties. I am not sure that the mere talk of dissolution has not made my policy impossible.
- (b) The feeling of my Party is almost universally against it.
- (c) It would be a gamble in which the only things certain are that the Coalition would lose many seats and that many Unionists would refuse to stand as Coalitionists.

All this time Austen was being literally inundated with

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protests against an election, and it was not long before evidence was forthcoming in support of his belief that the mere talk of a dissolution had rendered his position infinitely more difficult, for the question arose as to the form in which the appeal to the country was to be made. Was the Coalition to go to the electorate as such, or were its constituent parties to issue separate manifestoes? If, too, the election was won, was Mr. Lloyd George to continue as Prime Minister? These problems were being eagerly canvassed, and there was much support for the argument that the best course would be for the Conservative Party to regain its independence. The views of the Back-Benchers were well defined by Professor Hewins in an entry in his diary on January 19th :

The striking thing about the last fortnight is the disintegration of the Coalition. The idea of a General Election at once was not welcome to any section of Conservatives. Many cannot afford the expense and all doubt whether they would get in. Some are really keen on the reform of the House of Lords, but the prevailing feeling amongst Conservative M.Ps. and still more in the constituencies is that they will not have another Coalition election. Opinion, however, is not sufficiently formed to prevent some split in the Conservative ranks if LI. G. forced an election now. Fusion is out of the question. It is only another name for Coalition. So these people want to wait until Conservatives can go to the country as a party. Motives contrary to those of the Conservatives might impel LI. G. to go to the country. Every day weakens the position of the Co. Libs.<sup>1</sup>

The same day as that on which Professor Hewins made this entry in his diary found Austen speaking at Glasgow, where he made a determined effort to rally his followers. He paid a tribute to Mr. Lloyd George, whom he described as 'the biggest influence in Europe'; he assured his audience that there would not be an immediate General

<sup>1</sup> *Apologia of an Imperialist*, vol. II, p. 247.

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Election ; he stressed the achievements of the Coalition ; and he alluded to the promise to reform the House of Lords, declaring that 'between our Coalition Liberal Allies and ourselves there is agreement that you must reform the constitution of the House of Lords.' Unhappily, the force of this appeal for unity was weakened by the action that very day of Captain Guest, the Secretary of State for Air, in asking 'what Liberal cares twopence about the House of Lords ?' For the rest, there was general satisfaction among Conservatives that there was not to be an election, but this decision was considered to be in the nature of a victory for the malcontents, who were therefore encouraged rather than depressed by the course of events.

That there had been no appreciable change in the situation was obvious on February 13th when Austen received a deputation of Die-hard M.Ps. led by Colonel Gretton. The other Ministers present were Lord Curzon, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, and Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, as well as Colonel Leslie Wilson, the Chief Whip. The Die-hards numbered thirty-five, and included Sir William Davison, Brigadier-General (now Sir Henry) Page Croft, Lord Wolmer, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Lord Hugh Cecil, and Sir John Marriott. Colonel Gretton and his friends put the case against continued association with Mr. Lloyd George and the Coalition. In reply, Austen said that the object of the Liberal organization supporting the Prime Minister was to attract as many Liberals as possible to join it, and the intention of the Conservative leaders was to act upon the precedent of the Liberal Unionist secession from the Liberal ranks during the Home Rule controversy, and to form a working alliance with the Lloyd George Liberals gradually with a view to ultimate fusion in one party. In the meantime when a General Election took place separate manifestoes would be issued, and the Government would not go to the country as a Coalition. There was some pretty blunt speaking, but neither side convinced the other.

A week later, on February 21st, Austen took advantage of the meeting of the Central Council of the National Unionist Association to make the position even more plain along the lines which he had indicated to Colonel Gretton

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and his friends, and after saying that he did not contemplate a repetition of the exact procedure of 1918, he continued :

I think it more likely that we shall follow the older example—let us say of Mr. Balfour and my father—and each address our own constituents, but not without an understanding between ourselves, both as to what we want to do and as to the method by which it may be accomplished.

Nevertheless, the Prime Minister himself had to be reckoned with, for he was extremely anxious to be relieved of a burden which grew heavier every day, and he wrote strongly to Austen in this sense :

10 Downing Street, Whitehall, S.W.I  
*February 27, 1922*

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,

The present political position is one which calls for immediate decision on the part of the Government, otherwise the country will be plunged into hopeless political anarchy at a moment in its fortunes which beyond all others demands stability and steadiness. The nation is passing through the most severe industrial crisis which has afflicted it since the years that followed the Napoleonic Wars. Unemployment has grown to dimensions beyond compare in recent times. The people have to carry the colossal burdens left by the war through a period of unexampled bad trade. In addition to this trouble it has fallen to our lot to settle a problem which for seven centuries has roused fiercer and more prolonged racial and religious antagonisms than almost any other which has ever beset the path of British statesmanship. To overcome these difficulties unity and concentration are essential.

I had a feeling at the beginning of this year that the Coalition were gradually working through these troubles and that in another year this would be obvious to the eyes of all observers. The financial position of the country, as a result of the sound policy for which you were largely

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responsible when you were at the Exchequer, maintained, as you know, against much temptation which overcame governments and business-men in other lands, is better than that of any other State in Europe. Britain has recovered her old supremacy in this vital respect. Sterling has risen steadily under its burdens and is carrying them erect through the money-markets of the world. A great banker said to me the other day that our finance is ready for the revival of world trade when it comes—a most important consideration too often overlooked.

We are also gradually succeeding in our efforts to settle the international questions between the East and West which vex peace and prevent the world settling down to business. Washington accomplished great things and the conference at Genoa will produce an atmosphere of reconciliation which will tend to create general confidence in the outlook. And confidence breeds business. Ireland has not yet quieted down, but a few months will, I am hopeful, see that worried island tranquil and friendly. But we are by no means through the Great War crisis yet. With steadfast work and purpose I feel we could in the end straighten out the worst perplexities left by the war ; but that depends upon having a government that has a strong and stable position from which to operate.

In spite of much fractious criticism, until recently the nation was sustaining the Coalition in its efforts. There were electoral mishaps here and there, inevitable with such a majority as ours, but there were surprisingly few considering the state of the world and the persistent misrepresentation with which we were assailed. So firm was the political position that when two months ago there was some talk of a General Election our opponents of one accord showed unmistakable signs of alarm. It is not too much to say that the thought of having to invite the national verdict on their attacks caused panic amongst our critics.

In a few weeks there has been a complete change of the position for the worse. The impairment is not due to any mistake in policy or action on the part of the Government. It is attributable to a series of unfortunate activities on the part of some who are reckoned our supporters—and here I do not seek to discriminate or apportion blame—which

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has been responsible for lowering the credit and prestige of the Government. The control has been ostentatiously taken out of our hands by men who have no responsibility for the effects of judgment. There is an appearance of our having been overridden on an important question of policy by bluster and menace from outside ; in fact, the Government has been put into the position we have always predicted would be the fate of Labour Governments—that they would not be allowed to decide great national issues according to counsel, but would be compelled to act in obedience to dictation from irresponsible outsiders. The whole future of the Coalition, the relation which its component parts bear to one another, and the policy which it is to carry out, have been determined without even the formality of consultation amongst the Leaders, and the new policy is proclaimed for the first time by men of no authority, but who would, nevertheless, arrogate to themselves dictatorship.

This is a condition of things which is quite inconsistent with the self-respect which the nation expects from its public men. The consequence was inevitable in a highly trained and susceptible democracy like ours. The Coalition has lost more ground in public favour than at any previous stage in its career, and that, I claim, though no fault of its Leaders.

I have been driven to the conclusion that I cannot any longer render useful service to my country by retaining office under existing conditions. I am conscious of the tremendous difficulties with which Governments are confronted at this hour. Were it not for that fact I should have insisted on resigning long ago, but I was anxious not to rest under the imputation of running away from trouble. I never sought my present position ; as you are aware, I was ready to serve either under Mr. Balfour or Mr. Bonar Law during the crisis of the war. In fact, I urged that one or other of them should form a National Government. They decided otherwise, and I undertook to form a Government under pressure from them.

I have always felt the anomaly of holding the first position in a Government the majority of whose supporters belong to another Party, although I must at once say that

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I have never been thwarted in my action through any lack of support on the part of the Unionist supporters of the Government. They have always treated me with consideration and with a loyalty which I shall never forget. I have, nevertheless, felt for some time that it would have been wiser for the Unionists to form their own Administration and for my supporters and myself to give them independent support in the carrying out of the policy upon which we were agreed. I have repeatedly offered Mr. Bonar Law, and I renewed the offer to you when you succeeded him, to go out and give independent and loyal support to a government formed by either of you to carry out the policy upon which I knew we were in complete agreement. I suggest in all sincerity to you that the time has come for you to accept that offer.

No man can hope successfully to assist in handling such a baffling world situation as that which we witness unless the support on which he relies is confident and continuous. Recent debates have shaken that confidence. The party feeling which prevented the Liberal Party as a whole from giving undivided support to a National Government during a national crisis is now spreading to the ranks of the Coalition and is undoubtedly weakening its cohesion.

I am alive to the difficulties of persuading men who have all their lives been engaged in tense strife with each other to range themselves on the same side in the true spirit of comradeship. Suspicions, dislikes, and hatreds will survive whatever we do, and now and again will break out. We have witnessed recently such an outbreak. For national reasons this is to be deplored. I am as convinced as ever that national unity is essential to a successful issue out of all our troubles. We can observe for ourselves how much other countries suffer from the instability of governments based on shifting and incoherent groups. It has created uncertainty, hesitation, and delay in the settlement of Europe. Constant changes in the government of leading nations mean constant changes, if not in policy, at least in attitude. Much valuable time is lost in adapting old decisions to the opinions of new men, and when the adaptation is complete new governments again supervene. Europe is perplexed, bewildered, and feels lost amongst all these

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changes. These uncertainties and delays are hindering the recovery of the world, and all nations suffer, some more, some less, but all acutely. If Britain also lapses into that condition of changeability, not only will our own country suffer in prestige and power, but Europe will lose the undoubted advantage of having one great country in its councils which possesses a stable government.

So much am I impressed with the importance of securing this end that I urge you to agree to my freedom so that you may be in a position to form a homogeneous Government. I shall, of course, continue to sustain to the best of my ability those causes for which we have worked in common. I shall give cordial support to a Government that undertakes to carry through the Treaty with Ireland and that devotes itself to the work of pacification of the world. I know the opinion of my Unionist colleagues too well to believe that they would imperil national unity by initiating reactionary measures which would rend the nation and antagonize the democracy. It is an acute realization of the peril that prompts me to take this step. Premature revival of faction fighting would render Britain impotent. It would postpone the pacification of the world ; it would weaken the Empire ; it would extend depression into the region of disaster.

I shall always cherish the happiest memories of the co-operation and unswerving loyalty and friendship you and all others of my colleagues without distinction have extended to me. It is almost without precedent in political history. I feel I owe a deep debt of gratitude to your Party for the generous support they have given me for five years whilst I was engaged in endeavouring to carry out great national tasks. Whatever happens I can never forget the completeness with which they overlooked past causes of offence and helped in my endeavours for our common country.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

On receiving this letter Austen at once went to see the Prime Minister. He begged him not to resign, and said that it was the unanimous opinion of all whom he had

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consulted that Mr. Lloyd George should remain as Prime Minister, and that his resignation would be a disaster. It was, indeed, not without difficulty that he gained his point, and it is at least an interesting speculation what the history of the ensuing decade might have been had Austen become Prime Minister at this time.

On March 3rd, at Oxford, he amplified his statement to the Council of the National Unionist Association, and both in public and in private he endeavoured to restore unity in the ranks of his followers. Austen regarded Conservatives and National Liberals as 'two wings of one great constitutional and progressive party. No difference of principle separates us in regard to the immediate questions of the future. On the other hand everything for which we stand, including the great fundamentals of our constitutional and economic position which have hitherto been the common faith of both the great parties in the State, are challenged by the so-called Labour Party from whom alone a serious menace arises to the Coalition. I cannot understand the attitude of those who would desire needlessly to quarrel with our Liberal allies and to engage the constitutional forces in a fratricidal struggle.' At the same time he was beginning to recognize the strength of Conservative antagonism to the Prime Minister personally, for not long afterwards he wrote to Lord Long :

11 Downing Street, S.W.i.  
*27th April, 1922*

MY DEAR WALTER,

Your proposal that we should go to the country as the Conservative or Unionist Party, but forming part of the Coalition, is exactly the line upon which I have been working, and I am glad to find, as is usually the case, that you and I are in agreement. There is no doubt great restlessness among a section of our Party at our continued association with the Prime Minister. This arises partly from ordinary party feelings, such as always make a Coalition difficult, and partly, it must be admitted, from distrust of

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Walter Long had recently been created Viscount Long of Wraxall.

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the Prime Minister himself. Even many of those who recognize his great qualities and pay tribute to his great services, dislike his methods and are kept in a perpetual state of uncertainty as to what he will do next.

I do not know whether you have read the first two volumes of Lady Gwendolen's *Life of Lord Salisbury*. In reading them I could not help being struck by the close parallel between the feelings of Lord Salisbury for Dizzy and of Salisbury's sons for Lloyd George. Yet Lord Salisbury decided to co-operate, and did co-operate, most fruitfully with Disraeli, overcoming these personal difficulties and exercising considerable influence over Dizzy's policy. We are doing—and in my opinion, ought to do—the same.

The feeling in favour of a return to a purely party fight is strongest, as you would expect, in London and the Home Counties, and in those constituencies where our Party or candidate standing alone is powerful enough to be certain of victory. But in the industrial districts of the North and Midlands and in Scotland feeling in favour of continuing the Coalition is strong both among our Members and among our supporters. For some time past I have received many indications of the strength of this feeling, which was at first slow to express itself, but now comes to me in numberless Resolutions from Associations in nearly all parts of the country, but especially in those which I have named.

I do not think the Coalition can hope to be popular, for any Government confronted with the tasks which we have faced was bound to make mistakes and above all to disappoint expectations, and the pressure of taxation by itself is enough to render any Government unpopular. Had we formed a purely party Government, the Party would have borne the blame for all of which the country now complains. As it is 'Coalition' has to shoulder the burden, and there is at least this to be said—that the shoulders of the Coalition are broader than the shoulders of the Party. . . .

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen had his hands very full during these weeks, for

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Mr. Lloyd George was ill, and consequently the Prime Minister's work fell to him. Some idea of the difficulties of his position at this time as he saw them can be gathered from a letter which he wrote to his sister on February 26th :

I know what I want. My colleagues are agreed with me and Younger intends to carry out my policy ; yet they all seem to conspire to prevent it. Younger humiliates the P.M. publicly, F. E. attacks Younger personally ; Bonar Law tries on the crown, but can't make up his mind to attempt to seize it,<sup>1</sup> won't join us and share the load, but watches not without pleasure the troubles of his friends, and the Die-hards, instead of responding to my advances, harden in their resistance. ' Who'd be a nuss, a horrid old nuss ? '

In March there took place another crisis which still further damaged the reputation of the Government, namely, that provoked by the resignation of Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. Generally unpopular on personal grounds with the Gonservative wing of the Coalition, he had intensified this dislike by his attitude towards General Dyer, and it had long been clear that if he made a mistake he need expect no mercy from the majority in the House of Commons. At the beginning of March he received from the Government of India a telegram concerning the position in the Near East, in which the Viceroy urged the evacuation of Constantinople, the restoration of the Sultan's suzerainty over the Holy Places, and the retrocession to the Turks of Ottoman Thrace and Smyrna. Without consulting the Cabinet the Secretary of State authorized the publication of this telegram, and when he found that his colleagues disapproved of his action he resigned. In itself this incident was not of the first importance, though

<sup>1</sup> ' When Mr. Bonar Law had returned to London after the recess in February, 1922, he found " a complete change of opinion " among the Conservatives with regard to Coalition. He had spoken to the Prime Minister on the subject, telling him that in the present mood of the Conservatives it was impossible that things should go on as they were.' Dugdale, *Blanche E.E.*, *Arthur James Balfour*, vol. II, p. 345.

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some correspondence between Mr. Montagu and Mr. Lloyd George which appeared in the Press on March 10th attracted special attention owing to the acid tone in which it was couched. Two days later, however, Mr. Montagu made a speech to his constituents at Cambridge which not only contained several misstatements of fact, but was marked by a bitter personal attack on the Prime Minister as well as on the foreign policy of Lord Curzon, while he claimed that he had been sacrificed to placate the Die-hards. Austen was not, of course, directly involved, as Mr. Montagu was not a Conservative, but the repercussions affected him in that they were a serious embarrassment to the administration of which he was so prominent a member :

Was there ever anything stranger than Montagu's blunder? I am not sorry that there is to be a change in that office, but I can't help being very sorry for Montagu himself. The House cheered the news of his resignation savagely and not a single newspaper can suggest a word in his defence. It is not so that one would wish to end one's official career. And the tragedy of it is that it might have been prevented and the odd part of it is that even late on Thursday night Montagu could not see that he had done wrong. Friday's papers may have changed his view but I doubt it. I had a hectic day on Thursday. Curzon and Montagu both on the verge of tears (literally), Montagu requiring to be dismissed instead of resigning till I persuaded him five minutes before I had to answer the question ; an answer about Russian famine relief to be drafted and the very indecent haste of the change of Lord Chief Justice to be explained and excused.

I said that the publication of the telegram might have been prevented. I saw it first at Cabinet on Monday when I was presiding. Curzon brought it to me and I said that of course it must not be published. I saw him take Montagu aside and as neither of them appealed to me I assumed that Montagu had agreed or yielded. Not a bit of it ! He had told Curzon that he had already authorized publication. Curzon sighed and swore—and that was all. If only they had come to me I should have insisted on a ' clear the line '

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telegram cancelling the authorization and it would have *arrived in time!*

Now I am expecting Reading's resignation and shall welcome it if it comes, tho' I can't think who to put in his place. A Unionist will succeed Montagu and I hope to get Eddie Winterton into an Under-Secretaryship.

The Coalition business is settled and our Party outlook is better. Some of the Die-hards are coming in and there is a strong and growing movement of opinion against their attitude.

This, of course, was before Mr. Montagu had spoken at Cambridge, but even after that speech Austen's attitude was not greatly changed :

I don't want to think of Montagu. His 'explanation' filled me with shame and pain, but the House was so cold and he so thoroughly beaten and miserable that I had not the heart to hit him. The P.M. had been very rough with him in conversation, but even so I can't stand so swift and bitter a turn.

If the circumstances attendant upon the resignation of Mr. Montagu constituted a blow to the Government, the difficulty experienced in finding a successor still further diminished its prestige. The first approach was made to Lord Derby, who declined on the ground that he could be of greater service in a private capacity, while he was also doubtful whether he was sufficiently in sympathy with the Government's foreign policy to co-operate usefully with Lord Curzon. The next to be asked was the Duke of Devonshire, but he, too, refused on somewhat similar grounds. Austen then suggested Mr. Baldwin, but the Prime Minister demurred on the ground of his lack of decision, and finally Lord Peel was appointed to the vacant office. This solution of the difficulty was received, on personal grounds, with general satisfaction, but the fact that men of the calibre of Lord Derby and the Duke of Devonshire had refused to enter the Cabinet was another nail in the coffin of the Coalition.

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Hardly had this crisis been settled than another, though of a less public nature, arose in connection with the forthcoming conference at Genoa. At Cannes, earlier in the year, it had been decided that the representatives of Russia and the United States should be asked to meet those of the other Powers at the Italian port in order to arrive at some general international settlement. This at once raised the question of the recognition of Soviet Russia to which Mr. Winston Churchill was strongly opposed on the ground that the Russians could not be relied upon to carry out any promises they might make. Mr. Lloyd George retorted that if Mr. Churchill was going to insist on refusal of recognition in any circumstances then the Cabinet must choose between them. As so often, it fell to Austen to act as peacemaker, though whether on this occasion he would have succeeded it is not easy to say, for his powers were not put to their full test since the Genoa Conference did not fulfil the expectations which had been formed of it. Nevertheless the Prime Minister's diplomacy won high praise from Austen :

The Press reports, the official reports, and private letters all show that he is at the top of his form and handling things and people with immense skill. Private letters say that our reputation never stood higher, our influence was never greater, and that the P.M. is unmistakably cock of that dunghill. So far . . . he has had a triumph won by force of conviction, acquired authority and great skill and tact. Even Barthou feels his mastery and the force of his logic, and meditates asserting within limits his independence of Poincare.

Unlike many of his fellow-countrymen Austen also realized that the responsibility for failure did not rest with the Prime Minister :

He has saved Genoa from the burning in spite of Poincare" and brought back an 8 months' truce of God—no mean

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achievement. D——that fellow Poincare ! At the very moment that I was doing honour *con amore* to Cambon and backing the French alliance, P. was renouncing me and all my ways and repudiating Millerand's undertaking that they would not take action against Germany except in accordance with their Allies. How *can* you work with such a man or with such a people ? Wherever they have influence in the East they are using it against us—intriguing and constantly saying the French Codlin's your friend ! I shall try to see the French Ambassador to-morrow and explain carefully that my fine words will butter no parsnips for *that* cook.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FALL OF THE COALITION, AND AFTER

IF the early months of 1922 had been stormy the summer and autumn were to be even more disturbed, and the whole course of events both at home and abroad was such as to weaken still further the rapidly declining prestige of the Coalition. In June there occurred the terrible murder of Sir Henry Wilson, while the summer also saw British relations with France strained to the uttermost, and a war with Turkey was only avoided by the ability of the man on the spot, Sir Charles Harrington. There was also an unsavoury scandal over the sale of honours which further damaged the credit of the Government. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the by-elections continued to go against the Coalition, and seats were lost in Manchester, Camberwell, Cornwall, Leicester, and South Wales. Austen was not himself responsible for any of the events which were proving so damaging to the Administration, but their effect was to increase the difficulty of his position, for whenever he appeared on the point of re-establishing his authority over his followers some incident invariably occurred to throw everything into confusion once more. Had he been Prime Minister his task would have been much easier.

Ireland was still an embarrassment, for although the Dail had accepted the Treaty the state of the country was very disturbed, and no great progress had consequently been made towards producing the Constitution which, by the Treaty had to be adopted by Parliament before the end of the first week in December. The position of the police and of the British troops still in Southern Ireland also gave rise to complications which were reflected in the debates at Westminster, and the following correspondence between Austen and Lord Long well illustrates the former's difficulties in this connection :

17 Ennismore Gardens, S.W.7

M Y

DEAR

AUSTEN,

18THMAY,1922

I am very sorry to bother you again with a letter, but really I cannot help it, the situation is becoming so strained.

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In the House of Lords I really believe that everybody who is not either a Member of the Government or a Wee Free is, or is becoming, something in the nature of a Die-hard. The reason for this is—that it does not matter what the proposition is the attitude of the Government is always *non possumus*.

Take the debate we had the other day on Ireland. It was a double debate : first, on the R.I.G. on a Motion made by myself; second, on the general condition of Ireland, by Carson. I had been exhaustively into the case of the R.I.C. and my reason for moving and pressing the Government to give immediate consideration to the case and to be rather more generous in their terms, was twofold. First, an act of mere justice to that magnificent Force which has served us so well, and which we are compulsorily disbanding at a time when owing to the loyal character of their service they cannot even live in their own country. Second, the fact that unless there is a change in the conditions and they are more generously treated, most undoubtedly a great many of this splendid Force will pass out of Government employment with a bitter feeling of disappointment and hostility towards England, and this ought, I think, at almost any cost to be avoided. I am really talking of what I know, because I have personally investigated the whole case, and I have seen men of all ranks in the R.I.C., and others, such as Resident Magistrates, who know what the truth is and who feel very strongly on the subject. And yet the Lord Chancellor's answer was just as unsatisfactory as if my Motion had been made by some irreconcilable Die-hard.

When Carson's Motion came on, he spoke with singular self-restraint and moderation. It seemed to me to afford an opportunity to try and meet him half way ; but he, too, was turned down ; and the feeling of hopelessness amongst Members of the House was to me singularly distressing.

I think in your House, so far as I can gather, there is no tendency to increase the number of malcontents ; but there is the same feeling of dissatisfaction, and although I am not myself personally afraid of an election if it comes on under fairly satisfactory conditions, yet all this irritation and discontent does not help us.

It seems to me to be quite evident that Collins and

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company are not improving their position, and in common with a great many others I should like to feel certain that our Government are telling them in plain English that however anxious they may be to give them time and consideration, if they don't press on with their election and with the measures consequential upon it, which are necessary in order to restore order and maintain peace, our Government will be obliged to act themselves.

Further, if something a little more definite could be said about what will happen if Ireland attempts to set up a Republic, I think it would have a good effect in Ireland, where men of the peasant and smaller tradesmen class are joining the rebel movement simply because they are afraid that if a Republic is set up England will do nothing, and if they have not been friendly to the Republicans they will become outcasts like the loyalists have ; whereas if they felt certain that drastic steps would be taken to defeat any such movement I think most of them would decline to join the rebels.

I am sorry indeed to trouble you, but I think you ought to know what is common talk among a good many who are, and desire to remain, loyal supporters of the Coalition.

Yours sincerely,

LONG OF WRAXALL.

II Downing Street, S.W.I  
*19th May, 1922*

MY DEAR WALTER,

I am, as you may well believe, gravely anxious about the course of events in Ireland. I believe that Collins and Griffith are playing straight, but I find it difficult to believe that they are playing a winning game. A good deal depends, however, on the events of the next few days or weeks. Collins has given a good many indications, public and private, that if the conferences now being held between different bodies of Sinn Feiners in Dublin do not lead to satisfactory results he will have to take drastic measures.

We have repeatedly represented to him our grave anxieties as to the situation and we had indeed sent him an

urgent invitation—almost a summons—to come here a week ago with the principal signatories of the Treaty to discuss the position with us. In reply he undertook to come shortly, but pointed out that if he came just before the Dublin meetings were resumed every proposition that he made there would be imputed to dictation from London and that the visit at that moment would seriously prejudice his position. We felt that there was force and truth in this allegation and we agreed to the postponement ; but you may have noticed that in the speech which I made to the Women's Unionist Association on Friday of last week I spoke seriously of the situation and of our right to expect that the Provisional Government would take strong measures to discharge their obligations to us and to Ireland.

As regards a Republic, we have repeatedly stated that we would not tolerate its establishment, and we have had a Committee carefully examining the coercive measures which we might take if such became necessary, including the possibilities of blockade as well as military action. I may add, for your personal and very confidential information, as an old colleague deeply interested in Ireland, that Macready<sup>1</sup> has orders if the Republic were proclaimed in Dublin itself to act at once.

As to the R.I.C., I think it is admitted by the men themselves that their pension terms are fair, and by everyone else that they are generous—certainly they are more generous than anything that the State has ever before accorded to its servants. The great bulk of the men, according to all our information, want to live in Ireland, and where it is safe for them to do so that is of course far the best thing for them and for their country ; but we have made arrangements to facilitate the removal to this country of any whose lives are in danger in the present disturbed condition of great parts of Ireland, and my information is that we have always had more accommodation available for them in this country than there have been applicants. If, however, you have specific cases of grievance I should be very glad if you would send me some typical cases so that I may have them investigated.

<sup>1</sup> G.O.C. in Ireland.

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in any large body of men there are always some who are inclined to magnify difficulties and to make grievances. Sometimes the grievances are real, and even then they are sometimes occasioned by the fault of the man himself, as for instance, when having an allowance made to him to tide over the difficulties of the change he spends the whole of the money recklessly in a few days and then finds himself without means. But I cannot test these complaints except by specific cases, and as far as I have been able to ascertain the generous provision made is, as I have said, ample.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

A few days before there had been a somewhat acrimonious debate in the House of Commons on Ireland in connection with the kidnapping of three British officers in County Cork. Sir Henry Wilson, who had recently been elected to Parliament, played a leading part on this occasion, and the character of his intervention can be gathered from a note in his diary : ' I got much praise for my short speech last night, and the general opinion seems to be that I hit Austen very hard—which, indeed, was easy to do.' Austen's own comment was, ' Henry Wilson, as always, was incisive, dangerous, and mischievous.' This guerilla warfare with his own followers was most repugnant to Austen, and constituted a far greater strain than his other responsibilities. In this particular instance there was the added embarrassment that it marked a further fall in the Government's stock, for another half dozen of those who habitually supported Ministers voted against them. Significant of the trend of feeling in the House and in the Party was the attitude of Sir Thomas Inskip and Colonel Lane-Fox (later Lord Bingley). Both spoke as supporters of the Treaty and as friends of the Government, but they were alike in expressing grave anxiety about the situation, and declared that they could not vote for the Government unless they received a satisfactory reply. When the division was taken Colonel Lane-Fox abstained, and Sir Thomas Inskip voted with the Die-hards. It was little wonder that Austen was writing privately : ' I do love Ireland and the Irish. I love

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them so much that there is no language permissible in a letter to a lady in which I can say *how* much I love them.'

There was, however, still worse to come. On June 22nd, Sir Henry Wilson was murdered on his own doorstep in Eaton Place, just as the House of Commons was assembling, and Austen at once moved the adjournment of the House. This tragedy reacted upon the position of the Government, for it seemed to justify the critics of the Irish Treaty, while in the public it produced a feeling of revulsion against Sinn Fein and everything for which it stood. For Austen personally the severity of the blow was increased by the expressed unwillingness of Lady Wilson that he or any of his colleagues in the Government should be present at the Field Marshal's funeral ; when, however, it was represented to her that to persist in such an attitude might be construed into a slight upon the Crown, she at once withdrew her objection. Nevertheless, to one of Austen's temperament the incident was extremely distressing.

Abroad, as has already been mentioned, the Government was faring no better than at home. The real ruler of Turkey was Mustapha Kemal, with whom Lord Curzon had utterly failed to come to terms, and as the former persisted in keeping in the interior of Asia Minor out of the range of the guns of the British Fleet there was no means of bringing effective pressure to bear upon him, for the Turk was perfectly well aware that public opinion in England would not allow an army to be sent against him in his mountain fastnesses. The French had by this time already come to terms with Kemal, and this in its turn not only affected the situation in the Near East, but also in Europe where it strengthened the already powerful forces which were driving London and Paris ever further apart over the attitude to be adopted towards Germany. Meanwhile, the Greeks had been encouraged to try their luck in Asia Minor (on territory originally promised to Italy), and for a time they were successful in spite of their internal political differences. However, Kemal showed that he had not lost the art of generalship which had stood him in such good stead at Gallipoli, and in August he launched a counter-attack which in a few short weeks drove the Greeks back to the sea. British prestige felt the full force of this blow, and there was

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angry resentment among all parties against a Government which had allowed matters to come to such a pass.

In a letter to his sister, dated September 24th, Austen outlined the situation at home and abroad as it appeared to him :

Politics continue sufficiently perplexing. The P.M.'s speech to the Press will tell you our policy. That of France is 'Funk and Cringe.' Poincare has behaved shamefully—I had almost said treacherously. He has abandoned an Ally in the face of the enemy, and he was madder than the Mad Hatter when told so by Curzon. He raged up and down the room ; shrieked and roared and refused to allow G. to say a word until at last G. left the room. After reflection P. came out and apologized, and G. withdrew the word 'abandon'—the sting of which was in its truth—and they set to work again. C. has done very well, behaving with great self-restraint, dignity and firmness, but it was an incredible scene.

And as to the facts, just consider. The positions were occupied by the Allies in common and held by a joint decision. When the Greeks threatened the Chatalja lines held by the French, Harrington at once warned the Greeks off and sent British troops up alongside the French. When Kemal won his victory, Poincare replied to us that he agreed that the neutral zones must be protected, and at Harrington's request the French General sent a company of French soldiers to Ghanak to show the flag alongside the British. But, *without informing us*, P. ordered them by telegraph to be withdrawn as well as any French soldiers at Ismid where the Allied Generals had planned that the French should hold about a third of the line.

Was my language too strong ? I *think* we shall secure our aims without war, but the situation is still obscure. I am sure that our only chance to avoid war was to make our position perfectly plain both to Kemal and Poincare. P. has got himself pledged up to the neck to the Turks and is now frightened at the completeness of their success. The Turks use and despise him. They are very angry with us—and respect us.

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I cannot now deal with domestic issues, but here is my calculation for the next election :

Labour	. 200-250)	Against either Coalition or
Wee Free	. 60- 40	Conservative.
Ulster	. 15-13	Not to be counted on.

275-303

Out of a House of 613 or thereabouts.  
Lloyd Georgians 50-60.

No Govt. is possible without Coalition. No Coalition on present lines and *in present conditions* is possible with Co-Libs., except under a LI. G. premiership.

And the Natl. Union in November may declare—

- (a) Against Coalition of any sort.
- (b) Against Coalition, except under a Unionist P.M.

What a kettle offish ! Envy me my job !

One further foreign complication remains to be mentioned, and that was the Balfour Note of August on the subject of War Debts. It laid down the principle that in no circumstances did Great Britain propose to ask more from her debtors than was necessary to pay to her creditors. The document bore the signature of Mr. Balfour as he was temporarily in charge of the Foreign Office in the absence, owing to ill-health, of Lord Curzon, but it foiled of its purpose since it met with a hostile reception both in France and in the United States. In this case Austen was opposed to the policy of the Government of which he was a member, though he acquiesced in the decision of his colleagues. He described the Note itself as 'reason expressed in perfect language,' but he felt that President Harding's administration had probably been permanently alienated, while the French would merely be encouraged to adopt a more intransigent attitude than ever towards Germany.

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Much of this, however, is to anticipate, for Austen had already received warnings that the dissatisfaction among his followers was more serious than he had been inclined to believe. Accordingly, on July 20th, he had a meeting with the junior Ministers, and there was some very plain speaking. The consensus of opinion was in favour of preserving the Coalition as such, but under a Conservative Prime Minister, and with this Austen did not disagree, though he wished first to await the result of the General Election which clearly could not be much longer delayed. The discussion showed that on the whole Scotland, Newcastle, Birmingham, East Anglia, Devonshire, and Cornwall, were in favour of the existing state of affairs, while London and the Home Counties, the Midlands, Yorkshire, the South and South-west generally, and Liverpool (in spite of the influence of Sir Archibald Salvidge) desired a change. In consequence of this meeting Austen put the views of the Under-Secretaries before his Conservative colleagues in the Cabinet :

They *unanimously* advised that it would be madness to break up the Coalition. I agreed, but we decided to meet again in October to see if there was any change in the situation. This was conveyed to the Under-Secs. who then asked to meet the Cabinet Ministers. They repeated their doubts and dislikes. Then F.E. scolded and browbeat them with an intellectual arrogance which nearly produced a row there and then, and did infinite harm (I remonstrated very courteously but very strongly with him next day). Balfour spoke persuasively, but it is astonishing how little weight he now carries with the Party. I spoke gravely in the same sense.<sup>1</sup>

During the holidays, for reasons already mentioned, the situation deteriorated, and at the beginning of September a letter reached Austen from Lord Derby to say that he could no longer support the Government on account of its policy in the Near East. A few days later Sir George Younger wrote to Austen :

<sup>1</sup> This was on August 3rd.

Leckie

*16th September, 1922*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

I am very much obliged for your letter of the 13th inst. which I found here on my return from a flying visit which I paid to the Central Office yesterday.

Amongst other things I had a long interview with Bonar, the gist of which will be given to you by Malcolm Fraser to-day. He is by no means happy about the future, but in the event of the present P.M. deciding to take a holiday for a time, you can, I feel certain, rely on Bonar's help. I doubt whether in the event of your forming a Government he would take office, as he seems to dread the effect of worry on his health, and I think he has a sort of feeling that having occupied the position he did, he would have to take his full share of responsibility, together with the worry inseparable from such a position. I think that if it did happen that he was in your place, and the offer of the leadership was made to him, he might have run the risk ; but one thing is very clear to me, and that is his loyalty to you, and nothing would induce him to take any action or do anything which would, in the slightest degree, supplant your position.

Bonar, the last time I saw him, seemed to think that the P.M. rather wished to have a rest, but he has seen him since, when his advice was again asked, and there seemed not to be quite the same inclination to efface himself. You will, no doubt, be able to gauge this better at your meeting at Chequers to-morrow, but undoubtedly the feeling in the constituencies is becoming more and more pronounced against any continuation of the present situation. Fraser will give you the fullest information about this to-day, and to attempt to continue as at present would appear to be courting certain disaster.

Our policy, therefore, ought to be directed to securing a change without in any way quarrelling with our friends. It seems to me essential every effort should be made to prevent any rupture, or we shall in many constituencies find Labour romping in where, under present conditions, they have little chance of success.

Gilmour tells me that even in Scotland the feeling of opposition to the present arrangement is growing. That is

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a bad sign, as we have always been the underdog there, and the feeling of dissatisfaction must be very strong if our people are prepared to risk a rupture with our Liberal friends.

The Eastern mess is most serious, but I am glad to see from this morning's papers that the Allies are in accord with regard to the Turks. I have never myself approved of the P.M.'s policy in backing the Greeks, notwithstanding the fact that the Turks played us false in the war. After all, they fight in a gentlemanly way, and the rank and file, so far as my information goes, detested being pitted against the British. They are no doubt truculent and ruthless, but most of these Easterns are the same, and to compare a Turk with a miserable Levantine Greek is to compare gold with dross. Venizelos and some men of his type are quite an exception, but Venizelos is a Cretan and not a Greek, and belongs therefore to a race I have always regarded as superior to the other.

I hope we shall get safely through the embroglio, but here again the Government will be judged by results. Doubtless there may have been many good reasons for their attitude in the past in this area, but explanations are no use in the face of results. By this alone politicians are judged, and there is no single policy either abroad, in India, or in Ireland, on the results of which it is possible to found any claim for success.

I hope you will be able to get away for a bit and secure a decent holiday.

Yours ever,

GEO. YOUNGER.

The party at Chequers consisted, in addition to Austen, of the Prime Minister, Lord Birkenhead, Mr. Winston Churchill, Sir Robert Home, and Sir Laming Worthington-Evans. What happened is best described in Austen's own words :

I told them that I had seen Malcolm Fraser, our Chief Agent. Younger and he calculated that if Natl. Libs. and

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Unionists pulled together (the most favourable assumption) the result of a careful survey of the constituencies showed that Labour would get at least 200 seats at a General Election and might get 250. Asquith would get 50 ; LI. G. say 40 or 50. In all 300 to 350 out of a House of 615 of whom 13 would be Irish. If we split with the National Libs., Labour might get 300 or even a majority of the whole House. Therefore, we must not quarrel with Lloyd George.

But here came the rub. Some 80 members or candidates of our Party were already pledged against *any* Coalition and more would be getting daily pledged under pressure from their Associations unless LI. G. would retire and allow the Coalition to be reformed under a Unionist. They were not really against Coalition but they distrusted LI. G.

Therefore I must get rid of LI. G.—induce him to retire—and keep enough of his colleagues to preserve the Liberal support that they could bring.

The whole of this I told frankly to the group at Chequers, only representing the feeling against LI. G.'s premiership as the result of the natural desire of the largest section to have their own leader in the first place, and slurring over, tho' not wholly omitting, the purely personal aspect.

I added that M. F. said that when the Natl. Union met on Nov. 15th it would carry a resolution against Coalition if the Die-hards were reasonable in their speeches unless Balfour and I and F. E., etc., went down *en masse* and argued our case with them. On this statement of the case I added that delay seemed to me certain to result in a bad split, that we should not get through the Autumn Session without defeat and that I was in favour of immediate dissolution. The only question was : were we to go as a Govt, as we had decided in July or not ? In any case there must be reorganization after the Election and the Unionist Party must have a larger share of the offices.

If they decided to go to the Election as a Govt. I was prepared to take my risks, but they must clearly realize theirs. I thought F. E. and Home too sanguine, and I warned LI. G. that I might fail to carry the Party and be unable to deliver the goods. And to my Unionist colleagues I said that if I tendered this advice to the Party and they

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rejected it, I should of course cease to be, and indeed refuse to continue as 'Leader,' and that might be the end of my career. They must consider what their positions would be.

LI. G. at once said that he would not accept such a sacrifice from me if that were likely to be the result. Worthy was the least sanguine, but all seemed to think the contingency impossible. F. E. and Home added that in such a case they would of course go out with me.

After two long talks we decided to play out our hand and dissolve at the first moment the Turkish crisis would allow. (It was the Saturday and Sunday when Curzon went out of town without a word to any of us and informed us by telephone in response to a most urgent personal message from me that he didn't propose to return till Tuesday because his establishment at Carlton House Terrace was not *monte* !)

If the others had felt success to be as doubtful as I did, I think that LI. G. would have retired, but he is naturally sanguine and F. E., Horne, and Winston were very optimistic.

When this decision was communicated to Lord Curzon and to Lord Balfour, who was at Geneva when it was taken, they entirely agreed. Austen then informed Sir George Younger, Sir Malcolm Fraser, and Sir Leslie Wilson, of what had happened at Chequers, and of the intention of Ministers to go to the country as a Coalition Government. Sir George replied that he was 'frankly appalled'; Sir Malcolm feared there was 'much trouble ahead, all round'; while Sir Leslie was 'very disturbed.' To all this Austen replied that the discussions at Chequers had satisfied him that it was impossible to get rid of Mr. Lloyd George while retaining the support of his followers, but that if after the election the Prime Minister found himself with a mere fifty or sixty supporters of his own he would probably say that the new Parliament was not his, and would retire in favour of himself, Austen. Moreover, to turn Mr. Lloyd George out would be a great humiliation as it would constitute a triumph for the Die-hards. 'Younger and Leslie Wilson only wrung their hands and lamented—and proceeded to work against me.' All the same, on the 25th

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there was another meeting of the Conservative members of the Cabinet to hear the views which the Chief Whip and the Central Office had put before Austen, 'and again all agreed except Baldwin, who clearly showed his dislike but did not definitely refuse assent. He got no support.'

External events were also assisting to precipitate a crisis. The Executive Committee of the National Union was due to meet on October 10th, and standing in the name of Miss Fardell was a motion that 'the Executive Committee of the National Unionist Association desires to call the attention of the Leaders of the Party to the grave conditions of unrest in the Party, and to represent to them the necessity of bringing the Coalition to an end on friendly terms before the General Election which may be in the near future.' True to his policy of hearing all points of view Austen asked Miss Fardell to come and see him, when he put to her the arguments which had convinced himself and his colleagues at Chequers, stressing especially the probability of extensive Labour victories at the polls if the Coalition was dissolved before the General Election took place. In deference to his request Miss Fardell consented to withdraw her motion, but Austen realized that this was only a danger averted.

Then there was the impending by-election at Newport. The seat had been held by a Coalition Liberal, a Mr. Haslam, in 1918, and its tradition was Liberal. This time there were three candidates, namely, Mr. Lyndon Moore, a Liberal 'without prefix or suffix'; Mr. J. W. Bowen, on behalf of Labour; and Mr., later Sir, Reginald Clarry, as a Conservative. The Coalition Liberal was receiving the support of the Coalition Liberal organization in London, and the contest was generally regarded as a test case for the Coalition, more particularly since the Die-hards were actively assisting Mr. Clarry. Austen regarded this election as 'a beautiful illustration of the results of a split. At every stage we are being forced further and further apart, and it is difficult to see what the end will be. Lyndon Moore is, of course, a Coalition Liberal and he means to support the Coalition; but since he cannot obtain Conservative support he is forced so to trim his sails as to get the largest amount of support possible from other quarters.' Austen, therefore, told Sir Malcolm Fraser, 'Do the least you can

without making a breach with our Conservative friends. They are going to be beaten whatever you do or don't do, but I do not want them to attribute their defeat to you. I want you to be in a position to point the moral when the election is over and the seat is lost.'

On October 10th there was another meeting of Conservative Cabinet Ministers at which Sir Leslie Wilson was also present, and it was again agreed to continue the Coalition under Mr. Lloyd George, but to hold a General Election as soon as possible. Sir Leslie, it is only fair to state, was not in agreement with this decision, and he desired that before there was an appeal to the country the whole matter should be discussed at the coming Party Conference. Somewhat surprisingly, however, he did not resign, but contented himself with outlining his views in a letter to Austen which the other described as giving him 'infinite pain and regret.' The narrative of what then happened may be continued in Austen's own words :

On Oct. 15 we dined at Winston's. Curzon had a row on with LI. G. about the conduct of foreign affairs and refused to come at the last moment. The wind had been getting up in the interval and he saw which way it was blowing ! But Leslie Wilson was there. He had been pressing hard that I should either wait for the meeting of the Natl. Union or call a special meeting. I refused saying that this would certainly split the Party in two for I and the colleagues who agreed with me would have to attend and debate the question, and you couldn't debate in a gathering of three or four thousand without bringing out temper on both sides, and in the end we might be nearly equally divided, and at best there would be a large minority with heightened tempers, confirmed prejudices and a resolve to continue the struggle throughout the constituencies. At Winston's dinner I offered a compromise. I would summon all the M.Ps. to the Carlton. I asked Leslie point blank after others had spoken : \* Now are we all agreed ? Leslie, do you accept that ? ' and he replied, ' Yes, I accept that.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir Leslie Wilson's own account of this incident must be given : ' I replied, " I do," having gained my point as to the Party being asked

Next morning I had the Unionist Cabinet again. Curzon then demurred to an immediate election (*not* to Coalition) on the ground of the Lausanne Conference. We said that we could get it over before Lausanne and that in any case an election was inevitable, for as things were we should be tripped up over some minor matter in the autumn session and it wasn't safe to meet Parit, without a fresh mandate.

Baldwin this time definitely declared his policy to be to tell L. I. G. that he must go. Nobody supported him, tho' Boscawen hedged somewhat on Curzon's line.

That afternoon there was another meeting with the Under-Secretaries, who were by this time in open revolt. Austen explained the decision which had been reached, but he did not succeed in appeasing the Junior Ministers to any appreciable extent. Nor, it may be added did the course adopted recommend itself to the Executive Committee of the National Union, which considered that it, rather than the M.Ps., should have been consulted.

On the morning of the 17th the Under-Secretaries, together with Mr. Baldwin, Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, and Sir George Younger had a meeting with Sir Leslie Wilson, when there was a long discussion as to the personal position of those present, and Mr. Baldwin and Sir Arthur expressed themselves very strongly against serving under Mr. Lloyd George again. That afternoon Mr. Amery came to see Austen, and the two men had a long talk, though without the views of either being in any way modified in consequence. However, after leaving Austen it occurred to Mr. Amery that a compromise might be found on the basis of an election as things stood, but with the proviso that there should be a Party Meeting after the election to consider the whole situation. Accordingly, he secured,

to give their opinion, but I also added, " I have not, however, changed my own opinion." From that hour to the Wednesday of the meeting (i.e. at the Carlton Club) I tried to get Austen to change his views, and, having failed, I had no alternative but, as Chief Whip, knowing the facts and the views of over 180 Conservative Member\* of Parliament, to speak at the meeting/

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not without difficulty, the consent of the other Junior Ministers to this the next morning, and Sir Leslie Wilson at once informed Austen of what had happened. At first Austen was inclined to accept this compromise, and there was a general feeling at the Carlton Club at lunch that day that a settlement had been reached. On consulting his colleagues, in particular Lords Birkenhead and Balfour, however, Austen found that they were opposed to Mr. Amery's suggestion, and he felt it his duty to stand by them.

As the 19th, the date fixed for the meeting at the Carlton Club, drew near it became increasingly obvious that everything turned upon the line taken by Mr. Bonar Law. His attitude little more than a month before has already been indicated, and he long remained undecided as to the course which he would adopt. Indeed, he was so worried that he actually drafted a letter to his constituents resigning his seat in Parliament. Later in the afternoon of the day preceding the meeting he saw Austen, and spoke with much sympathy for the other's position. 'He thought he would plead the state of his health and keep away from the meeting altogether, but in that case he must leave Parliament and give up public life. If he came to the meeting, he must speak against me. I told him that his speech would be decisive ; the vote would go in his favour, the Government would have to resign and he would have to form a new one.' As Austen took his leave, Mr. Bonar Law said, 'Well, it's a hateful position ; I expect that if I had remained in your place I should have acted like you.' After this interview Austen had no doubt of the attitude which Mr. Bonar Law would adopt at the meeting or of the result of the vote.

The morning of Thursday, October 19th, brought news which drove the final nail into the coffin of the Coalition, for contrary to all expectation Mr. Clarry was returned for Newport by a majority of over two thousand, with Labour second, and the Liberal a bad third. Of this result *The Times* said : 'The country will see in it a most complete condemnation of the Coalition Government as such and a vindication of those Conservatives throughout the country who have been so determined to preserve their individuality in previous by-election contests.' As if this were not enough,

it was also announced that the Executive Committee of the National Unionist Association had unanimously passed a resolution to summon an emergency conference of the Party, so that even should Austen carry the day at the Carlton Club his victory would in no way be final.

The meeting was at eleven o'clock, and it was significant that at the very commencement the volume, of cheering was very much greater for Mr. Bonar Law than it was for Austen. The latter was under no illusions that the majority was against him, and he therefore made no effort to conciliate his opponents. He took the line that in the face of the growing Socialist strength co-operation with the Liberals was essential, and that though there would be a reconstruction of the Government after the election there must be no proscriptions in advance, for policies of exclusion and co-operation were incompatible. The existing Government would go to the country as a Government, and it would be time to talk of changes when the victory had been won. These remarks were rather quietly received, and Mr. Baldwin met with a much warmer welcome for his short speech that he did not wish the dynamic force of the Prime Minister to break up the Conservative Party.

At this point Colonel Prctyman moved, and Colonel Lane-Fox seconded, a resolution to the effect that 'this meeting of Conservative Members of the House of Commons declares its opinion that the Conservative Party, whilst willing to co-operate with the Coalition Liberals, should fight the election as an independent party with its own leader and its own programme.' After one or two other speeches there were continued shouts for Mr. Bonar Law, who rose with obvious hesitation, and after a certain amount of soliloquizing made it clear that he thought the Party ought to come out of the Coalition and go to the country with a mind to winning on its own. This statement evoked tremendous enthusiasm, and really decided the meeting which, however, listened patiently, if without conviction, to a philosophical analysis of the situation by Lord Balfour, who urged that no difference of principle was at stake. Austen wished to take the vote then, but Sir Leslie Wilson, to his great annoyance, jumped up, and strongly repeated Mr. Baldwin's general argument. When Colonel Pretyman's

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motion was put to the meeting it was carried by 187 votes to 87.

Of the Ministers present only nine voted with Austen, while among the private members who supported him were Sir William Bull, Lieutenant-Commander (later Sir) Warden Chilcott, Mr. Walter Elliot, Sir Thomas Inskip, and Sir Kingsley Wood. Mr. Neville Chamberlain was on his way back from Canada when the meeting took place, and so was unable to vote.

Austen had received too many reverses in the course of his political career not to take this, the latest of them, philosophically. Not long after the meeting he thus analysed its significance :

What was the result of the revolution finished at the Carlton Club ? It is of course nonsense to describe it as a Belgravia intrigue or a revolt in the kitchen. It was first and foremost the matured result of eight years' rule by one Govt, which had to bear the blame not only for their mistakes but for all that went to make the general discontents ; secondly of the Irish Treaty and of the consequent Die-hard movement which became formidable when it rallied round Salisbury and afforded an organization for the discontented ; thirdly of the growth of party feeling and party jealousy in the machine which is far too much run by old men and paid agents ; lastly of the defects of LI. G.'s character.

As soon as the meeting was over Austen and his colleagues stated their position in the following manifesto :

The decision reached to-day by the Meeting which was held at the Carlton Club has in our opinion made it necessary for us to hand in our resignations to the Prime Minister.

It is true that the resolution upon which the decision was taken was not in its express terms such that it might not have been modified so as to secure agreement ; but it was made absolutely plain in the course of the discussion that its authors regarded it as involving us all in an under-

taking that here and now we should give notice to the Prime Minister that in no circumstances would the Conservative Party, if it rested with them, consent to his retaining the Premiership after a successful Election however much he and his Party might have contributed to the result. Of such a message we could not be the bearers.

The Prime Minister in our judgment rendered incalculable service to this country during the war. With high courage and resource he devoted himself to the single object of achieving victory. In that purpose and in those exertions many of us bore a part.

The problems which have required solution since the Armistice have been hardly less grave than those which preceded it. Trade disputes on an alarming scale, revolutionary activities, chronic unemployment, financial stringency, and recurrent European crises have presented a series of problems the like of which has never before confronted a British Government. During the whole of this period most of us have shared the anxieties and labours of the Prime Minister, and we desire expressly to record our unanimous view that his resource, energy and patriotism have been as strongly exhibited during this period as during the war itself.

None the less we have been invited by members of our own Party to send to the Prime Minister a message of dismissal. There has been no difference, be it observed, between us on matters of principle or policy. Our personal relations with him have diroughout been close and intimate, but we are nevertheless expected to say to him in effect : ' We do not differ from you at the present moment. We have not differed from you during the period of our co-operation. Your prestige greatly assisted us at the last election : we made the fullest use of it. But at the present moment we have considerable differences in our own Party, your value to us is much less than it was even a few months ago, we therefore propose to you in the most civil language at our disposal that you should relieve us of your embarrassing co-operation.'

We think it necessary to make it plain to our friends that we cannot and will not consent to carry such a message to the Prime Minister. The counsels which we have finally

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rejected seem to us as unwise as they are ungrateful. In such a responsibility we cannot be partners.

Unless our successors are more fortunate than ourselves the anxieties of the next few years can hardly be less grave than those which have harassed our minds since 1918. The contingencies of domestic policy are incalculable, but one thing surely is plain—the exertions of all men who are in agreement upon the policy which is conservative in the national as distinguished from the party sense will be required if in the vicissitudes of politics we are to defeat legislative proposals disruptive of the economic and financial system of this country.

Confronted by such possibilities we advised the Unionist Party not to take a course which must repel powerful allies in the anxious campaigns which lie in front of it. The meeting to-day rejected that advice. Other men who have given other counsels must inherit our burden and discharge its consequent responsibility.

We remain, what we have always been, Conservatives and Unionists ; and no Conservative and Unionist Government need fear factious opposition at our hands. But we cannot believe that the principles we hold in common with the majority at to-day's meeting will be promoted by the course they have shown themselves firmly resolved to pursue.

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.  
BIRKENHEAD.  
BALFOUR.  
R. S. HORNE.  
L. WORTHINGTON-EVANS.  
LEE OF FAREHAM.  
CRAWFORD AND BALCARRES.  
ERNEST M. POLLOCK.  
C. D. MURRAY.  
LESLIE SCOTT.  
W. MITCHELL-THOMSON.  
JOHN GILMOUR.  
GEORGE A. GIBBS.

These events cemented the growing friendship between Austen and Lord Birkenhead, and this continued unimpaired

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until the latter's death in 1930. Lord Birkenhead made many enemies—among those who did not know him—and his inability to suffer fools gladly did not endear him to those who came within this category. He had, too, a biting tongue and an abhorrence of hypocrisy which further estranged a large section of the public ; but all this was on the surface, and was in no way typical of the real man. A more loyal friend, as Austen was now discovering, than Lord Birkenhead it would have been impossible to find, and if he seemed to take a delight in parading his comparatively few defects he was more than careful to conceal his many virtues. Failure or success made no difference to him, and those who had fallen by the way on the road of life were accorded the same sympathetic reception as those who had won the ' glittering prizes ' to which he once somewhat incautiously alluded in a Rectorial Address. To have gained the friendship of such a man was for Austen some compensation for the blows which fate was now dealing him.

On the other hand, one result of the meeting at the Carlton Club might well have been an estrangement between Austen and his brother. Mr. Lloyd George was succeeded as Prime Minister by Mr. Bonar Law, and in the new administration Mr. Neville Chamberlain figured as Postmaster-General.

I was not surprised by Neville's decision but it *hurt* awfully. But we both cared more for one another than for anything that politics could bring. When he found that I could not say that I wished him to join Bonar or that by joining he would help me, he said that he should refuse but that having thus refused to serve under both LI. G. and Bonar he would feel that he had no future and would get out as soon as he could with fairness to his constituents. What more could affection offer ? And equally of course I could not accept such a sacrifice, so I changed my attitude and said ' accept ' and telephoned the same word next morning. So I have learned the depth of his affection.

Meanwhile, the dissolution of Parliament had taken place and Austen found himself engaged in a very hard

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fight in West Birmingham against a Socialist opponent. The responsibilities of office had prevented him from paying much attention to his constituency, of which the character, too, had changed considerably since the days of his father. 'Why, anyone who lives in such slums,' Austen wrote, 'should not be a Socialist, a Communist or a Red Revolutionary I am at a loss to say. In all St. Paul's there isn't a resident elector above the smallest class of shopkeeper, and All Saints tho' a *little* better equipped with leaders is the more Socialist of the two, or was believed to be so.' In these circumstances victory was a notable personal triumph for Austen and his wife ('she came and saw and conquered'), as was seen when the result was announced :

Chamberlain	.	.	15,405
Smith	.	.	9,599

Majority 5,806

The voting all over the country showed that the recent by-election at Newport had been no mere flash in the pan, and that Austen and his colleagues in the previous Government had miscalculated, for Mr. Bonar Law had a majority of over seventy in the new House of Commons. Austen, of course, rejoiced in the Conservative victory, although the policy which led to it had been adopted against his advice, but, not unnaturally in the circumstances, he was a little sceptical of the composition of the new Ministry :

B. L.'s health is none too good. He has never before gone into action without a stronger man beside him. There is the first uncertainty. Then his young men may blossom out, but Curzon is weak and ill ; Baldwin had the reputation both in business and in the Treasury of being unable to take a decision ; Amcry is a poor Parliamentarian, very unhandy so far in spite of his brains ; Peel is good, Salisbury and Devonshire are good too in their several ways, but it is rather of the House of Commons that I am thinking. Lloyd



CHANCELLOR OF READING UNIVERSITY



WITH SOME OF HIS CONSTITUENTS AT HIS 1931 ELECTION

His daughter Diana is at the extreme right of the group.



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Greame is the most promising of his Cabinet and Neville outside it, but they do not look a strong team.

The change of Government meant, of course, that the Austen Chamberlains had to leave 11 Downing Street, and they took a flat in Morpeth Mansions. Not that Austen proposed to be much in London in the immediate future. He was determined to take full advantage of the opportunity to have that real holiday which had so long been denied him, and also to spend as much time as possible in his garden at Twitts Ghyll. First of all, however, he and those who acted with him at the Carlton Club meeting had to define their attitude towards the changed political situation.

As soon as the General Election was over Mr. Lloyd George and his old colleagues dined together at the house of Sir Philip Sassoon to consider the position. On this occasion Austen stated quite firmly that he would not join the Government, but that he would not attack or criticize it unless he felt compelled to do so : he would always remain a Unionist, and would have nothing to do with any Centre Party. This attitude won general approval, and the only dissentient was Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, who was in favour of taking office under Mr. Bonar Law. On November 30th Austen was entertained to dinner at the House of Commons by a number of his friends with Lord Birkenhead in the chair. After thanking those who had organized the dinner Austen adverted to the events of the past few weeks :

Like Lord Birkenhead, I regret nothing that we did. If the choice were to be made over again with the fuller knowledge that I now have, it would still be the same choice that I would make, and I do not feel called upon for justification or for argument, and least of all for excuse.

He then explained why he had not called a special meeting of the National Union, and expressly disclaimed any intention of slighting that body. Austen admitted that the result of the election had surprised him, but he pointed

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out that although the victory had gone to the new Government, the Socialists had displayed a strength which was extremely disquieting.

Everywhere the questions which were agitating the electors were not the old political questions, but new social, economic fiscal questions. None of us could fight the election, certainly not in any urban district, without becoming aware that there had been created what its exponents called a 'class consciousness/ but what I should call a class prejudice, which is something new in our political life.

In the old pre-war days our divisions were vertical, nowadays there is a real effort to make them horizontal. It is a portent of the first magnitude. It is a danger to the State such as we have never had confronting us, a danger such as has shaken the very foundations of other States and one which may shake this old State unless those who, are in substantial agreement can sufficiently get rid of prejudice and personalities and names to enable them to unite in defence of those great convictions which they hold in common.

Austen proceeded to examine the future of the Conservative and Unionist Party in the light of this development, and concluded :

We mean to remain members of the Unionist Party. We desire to support and sustain the Unionist Government, but we think a profound mistake was made by the majority of our party when they needlessly and artificially created a difference between the Unionist party and those Liberal allies who fought with us, and we mean from within our own party, as long as those Liberal allies are ready to meet us, to stretch out the hand of fellowship to them, and keep the way open to re-union which we are convinced will sooner or later be necessary.

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So ended one of the most important chapters in Austen's life.

Like most people who are suddenly allowed the privilege of a holiday after a long spell of work, Austen found himself more tired than he had believed to be the case, and even a visit to Morocco by no means satisfied his need for a rest. Accordingly, when Lord Peel, through Mr. Neville Chamberlain, asked him to take the chairmanship of a Royal Commission on the Indian Civil Service in January, 1923, he refused, and it was not until the 19th of the following month that he gave his vote for the first time in the new Session—for the Government and against Mr. Lloyd George, significantly enough. It was not, however, only a desire to prolong his holiday that kept Austen away from Westminster. He had no wish to attack an administration which was after all Conservative, and of which his brother was a member, but he felt that he could not support it with conviction, as his private correspondence at this time testifies. 'I bless my stars that I am not responsible for the Ruhr business and do not admire Bonar's policy there; nor am I lost in admiration of Curzon's handling of the Lausanne Conference. It seems to me that he has only stood his ground when he could not run away.' A few weeks later he was writing that 'the occupation of the Ruhr could and ought to have been prevented.' With these mixed and conflicting views it is not surprising he should have observed, 'I am best away.'

Even so the time passed rapidly. 'The days are not long enough for what I find to do, and when I have read *The Times* and written such letters as I must write, there seems little time left for all the reading that I have promised myself.' One visit he paid at this time gave him special pleasure, and it was to Mr. and Mrs. Lee Warner at Swaffham. 'I owe him an immense debt, for he made the happiness and the interest of my Rugby days, and did more for my education in the full sense of the word than any man except father.'

As the weeks passed politics began to attract him almost in spite of himself. Gradually he began to draw further apart from Mr. Lloyd George, and by the beginning of March he had come to the conclusion that if he were ever

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to co-operate with his old chief again it could not be under the other's leadership. All the same, he was no more reconciled to the Government. 'If Neville had not joined this Govt. I'd have had them out in six months, for with Neville out none of my people would have joined, and they would be weaker still. I must say that *now* I hope that Neville will not be forced to take the Ministry of Health and the Cabinet, for I think that in his own interest he would be better out of it' That was on March 4th. A few days later Mr. Neville Chamberlain became Minister of Health, and Austen sent his good wishes, though he felt unable to congratulate his brother, 'I felt strongly inclined to advise him to refuse, but I might have been misunderstood, and in any case it was taking too great a responsibility.'

Whether it was due to the lumbago from which he was suffering, or to the reaction after years of office, Austen was in very low spirits :

As for myself the more I think (and I have thought a good deal) the less prospect do I see of any future for myself in politics. . . . Obviously the Die-hards have not forgiven me and do not mean to forgive me, nor do the new men wish to yield their places to the old men, nor Leslie Wilson & Co. desire that I should have my choice of Whips. . . . That breach will only be healed by a disaster, and by the time that the disaster comes I shall be too old to care to take up the burden of leadership again for four years in opposition with a possible Premiership in the distance. Nor can I conceive that anything will make me join this Govt, under Bonar's leadership or take over his Govt, if he breaks down. I cannot join him, for I think him unfitted to be Prime Minister, and I feel too deeply his conduct towards me to make it possible for me again to act under him.

I think, therefore, that my real political life is ended. I am sorry, since I am nevertheless still in politics, and of course I should have liked to be Prime Minister and to have tried whether I could not do some good work in that capacity. But I do not complain, and except as above I have no regrets as to my conduct last year. . . . Well, I have had a very interesting and, except where Bonar has

twice tripped me up, a very lucky 30 years. I wish that I could go out of Paris altogether but Ivy says 'Yes, if you had been 10 years younger and could really have made for yourself other work,' and I add to myself that at this stage it would be unfair to those who stood by me.

Others, however, did not take so gloomy a view of Austen's prospects, and less than a month after he had written in this pessimistic strain he was approached by Lord Beaverbrook, on behalf of the Prime Minister, with the suggestion that he should resume his old position as Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons. The argument was that owing to ill health Mr. Bonar Law would ere long be compelled to resign, and that he would advise the King to send for Lord Derby, Lord Gurzon, or Mr. Baldwin; if, however, Austen would join the Government, then Mr. Bonar Law would stay on until August 1st, when he would resign in Austen's favour. This scheme did not appeal to Austen, not least because it came through a third party, and he also realized that he might easily be put in a false position. Accordingly he rejected the overture, and departed with his wife for Vernet-les-Bains, where he was enjoying his holiday when, on May 20th, Mr. Bonar Law resigned.

Two days later Austen received a telegram from Commander Lockcr-Lampson to say that his friends thought he ought to come to London, but asking him to call at the Hotel Crillon in Paris for any further message. The telegram had been delayed since on the preceding day there had been *a. fete* at Vernet, and the telegraph office was closed. It was not, therefore, until noon on the 22nd that Austen left Vernet, and he was actually in the train before he learned from the French papers that Mr. Bonar Law had resigned. When he arrived in Paris the next morning he received a message to the effect that Lord Birkenhead would be there that night, so he took rooms and waited. When Lord Birkenhead arrived he and Austen had a long conference, with the result that Austen decided to remain in Paris until the situation was a little clearer. While he was there he received a communication from Sir **Laming**

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Worthington-Evans urging the propriety of the ex-Ministers taking office if asked to do so, and hoping that his old comrades would understand if he himself did so. Austen at once telegraphed his approval so far as Sir Laming and others were concerned, and followed this up with a letter in which he stated his point of view :

Hotel de Crillon,  
Place de la Concorde, Paris  
*May 24th, 1923*

MY DEAR WORTHY,

Many thanks for your full letter. I confirm the message that I have telegraphed to you for all my friends. You have discharged every claim of friendship to old colleagues, and are absolutely free to accept any offer with perfect honour and public credit, and nothing could distress me more than that any of you should be excluded from office on my account or from friendship for me. You have only to consider what you as individuals would wish and think it right to do.

For many reasons I wish that I had been in England so that we could have talked freely over the situation, but to have hurried home from the Pyrenees would have put me in an entirely false and very humiliating position. I should have appeared in one of two characters equally discreditable—either as an eager solicitor for office or as a self-satisfied fool who thought himself indispensable and believed that everyone would throw themselves at his feet.

Now I do not desire office, and I am under no illusions as to my unpopularity with the Die-hards who are in the ascendant in the management and councils of the Party, and I have not the least intention of thrusting myself into company where I am not wanted. I think, indeed, that I am as much out of favour with the Party for having held my tongue as F. E. is for having made speeches. The leaders might like to have me back humbled and subservient and to use my debating powers for what they are worth, but they have no intention of treating me as an equal. That is at least how the position appears to me.

You know from our talk at Chequers last August that I measured the risks and was content to take them. I am

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not complaining now. If any offer were made to me, I would not answer it without coming to London to see you all, but I have had no indication at any time of any desire for my advice or co-operation. I do not expect any approach to be made to me whatever may be proposed to others, and I must absolutely forbid anything being said to any member of the Government from me or on my behalf which they could construe as an offer on my part to serve or as a request to be employed.

If any advance is to be made it must come from the Prime Minister. None will come, and I shall not be disappointed for I do not expect it. I shall take up my Parliamentary work again in due course. There is no Party with which I can act except the Conservative Party, and I shall give them an independent support.

I believe that the views I have expressed are shared by Balfour and F. E., but they will best speak for themselves. Only on one point do I perhaps differ from them. I believe that the sentiments expressed by Amery do represent the mind of the Government ; they are very well satisfied with themselves, think that they are doing well and growing stronger. . . .

Please show this letter if you can to Home, Pollock, Scott, and Oliver. I should like Balcarres and Jack Gilmour also to know my views if it is not giving you too much trouble. If any of you decide to join the Government, you will have my most hearty good wishes, and it shall never be said in my presence or with my knowledge that you acted otherwise than as good friends and public spirited men.

I finished my 'cure' two days before leaving Vernet, and did not know what to do as none of the other places in the Pyrenees that I meant to visit were going to open before June 15th. Oliver's telegram decided me to come here where I shall pass a week pleasantly amidst French plays and cooking.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The morning after he had written this letter Austen received a telegram from Sir Warden Chilcott asking him

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to come to London at once, so he crossed that afternoon. In the evening he saw Lord Birkenhead, Sir Warden Ghilcott, and Commander Locker-Lampson, while there was a telephone message from the new Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin, asking if he could come to Chequers on the following day. Austen replied that he would so in the afternoon.

The next morning, Saturday, May 26th, Austen had a conference with Lord Birkenhead, Sir Robert Home, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Sir Ernest Pollock, Sir Leslie Scott, Sir William Bull, Sir Philip Sassoon, and Commander Locker-Lampson. The proceedings began with a request from Sir Ernest Pollock for guidance upon two points : first, should they or should they not attend the Party Meeting, and secondly should he accept Sir Leslie Wilson's invitation to support Mr. Baldwin's nomination as Leader which was to be proposed by Lord Curzon and seconded by Sir Frederick Banbury. He said that at first he was prepared to comply with the Chief Whip's request, for he had been given to understand that Austen had been asked to join the Government, but when he found this was not the case he had drafted a letter of refusal. Sir Laming Worthington-Evans then said he had seen the Prime Minister, who offered him the office of Postmaster-General. Sir Laming asked whether he could accept this, and said that if he refused it would not be easy to justify the refusal, while there was a danger that the Party as a whole might consider the old Coalition Ministers as definite obstacles to Conservative re-union.

At this point Austen asked Sir Robert Home whether he considered that he had refused the Chancellorship of the Exchequer when he was last with the Prime Minister. Sir Robert replied that he had seen Mr. Baldwin twice on the previous Thursday : on the first occasion he thought that the Prime Minister still intended to include Austen in the Cabinet, but that his attitude seemed to have changed between the two interviews, and as Sir Robert had made it clear that he would not take office without Austen the Prime Minister was quite entitled to treat his reply as a refusal. After a few words from Lord Birkenhead, Austen stated his point of view :

I said that my opinion was perfectly clear on the two points which Pollock raised. I had thought at first from the inspired paragraphs in the Press that the new Prime Minister intended to make a serious effort to secure complete re-union, and that he would make proposals to me as the natural spokesman of our group with that object. It appeared from what they now told me that this had been his intention, but that it had been vetoed by certain Die-hards in the Cabinet who had threatened resignation if I was admitted to the Government. Had Baldwin made such a proposal to us, I should of course have had to consult my friends, but I should have told Baldwin at once that I knew that they would all appreciate the spirit in which he had acted, and that whatever our answer might be the course which he had taken would not be forgotten by us and would not be otherwise than advantageous to his Government. We should have recognized that he could not turn out all the men who now filled the offices that we had formerly held, and that it would be unreasonable to expect more than two or three Cabinet posts with perhaps an equal number of minor positions. It would have been perfectly easy for Baldwin to avoid anything like the proscription of an individual, and by the very character of the offices which were vacant to invite those of us whose services he wished to secure without any offence to us or our friends. Had he done so I thought that public opinion would have forced us to join them even though some of us would have been most reluctant to join any Government from which the others were excluded.

All those present agreed with Austen's presentation of the situation, and, headed by Lord Birkenhead, specifically said that in such circumstances they would have advised acceptance of office.

I continued that what had happened was the exact reverse. No communication of any kind had been made to me. I must say that I thought that I had been treated with discourtesy, and it was clear that in spite of Baldwin's wish I was a proscribed man. In these circumstances I

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to come to London at once, so he crossed that afternoon. In the evening he saw Lord Birkenhead, Sir Warden Chilcott, and Commander Locker-Lampson, while there was a telephone message from the new Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin, asking if he could come to Chequers on the following day. Austen replied that he would so in the afternoon.

The next morning, Saturday, May 26th, Austen had a conference with Lord Birkenhead, Sir Robert Home, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Sir Ernest Pollock, Sir Leslie Scott, Sir William Bull, Sir Philip Sassoon, and Commander Locker-Lampson. The proceedings began with a request from Sir Ernest Pollock for guidance upon two points : first, should they or should they not attend the Party Meeting, and secondly should he accept Sir Leslie Wilson's invitation to support Mr. Baldwin's nomination as Leader which was to be proposed by Lord Curzon and seconded by Sir Frederick Banbury. He said that at first he was prepared to comply with the Chief Whip's request, for he had been given to understand that Austen had been asked to join the Government, but when he found this was not the case he had drafted a letter of refusal. Sir Laming Worthington-Evans then said he had seen the Prime Minister, who offered him the office of Postmaster-General. Sir Laming asked whether he could accept this, and said that if he refused it would not be easy to justify the refusal, while there was a danger that the Party as a whole might consider the old Coalition Ministers as definite obstacles to Conservative re-union.

At this point Austen asked Sir Robert Home whether he considered that he had refused the Chancellorship of the Exchequer when he was last with the Prime Minister. Sir Robert replied that he had seen Mr. Baldwin twice on the previous Thursday : on the first occasion he thought that the Prime Minister still intended to include Austen in the Cabinet, but that his attitude seemed to have changed between the two interviews, and as Sir Robert had made it clear that he would not take office without Austen the Prime Minister was quite entitled to treat his reply as a refusal. After a few words from Lord Birkenhead, Austen stated his point of view :

I said that my opinion was perfectly clear on the two points which Pollock raised. I had thought at first from the inspired paragraphs in the Press that the new Prime Minister intended to make a serious effort to secure complete re-union, and that he would make proposals to me as the natural spokesman of our group with that object. It appeared from what they now told me that this had been his intention, but that it had been vetoed by certain Die-hards in the Cabinet who had threatened resignation if I was admitted to the Government. Had Baldwin made such a proposal to us, I should of course have had to consult my friends, but I should have told Baldwin at once that I knew that they would all appreciate the spirit in which he had acted, and that whatever our answer might be the course which he had taken would not be forgotten by us and would not be otherwise than advantageous to his Government. We should have recognized that he could not turn out all the men who now filled the offices that we had formerly held, and that it would be unreasonable to expect more than two or three Cabinet posts with perhaps an equal number of minor positions. It would have been perfectly easy for Baldwin to avoid anything like the proscription of an individual, and by the very character of the offices which were vacant to invite those of us whose services he wished to secure without any offence to us or our friends. Had he done so I thought that public opinion would have forced us to join them even though some of us would have been most reluctant to join any Government from which the others were excluded.

All those present agreed with Austen's presentation of the situation, and, headed by Lord Birkenhead, specifically said that in such circumstances they would have advised acceptance of office.

I continued that what had happened was the exact reverse. No communication of any kind had been made to me. I must say that I thought that I had been treated with discourtesy, and it was clear that in spite of Baldwin's wish I was a proscribed man. In these circumstances I

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myself should not go to the Party Meeting, but I thought my colleagues should do as they did on the occasion of the election of Mr. Bonar Law—in other words, that those of them who felt that they could with credit appear should attend the meeting, but that they should take no part in it. It was obvious, however, that neither Birkenhead nor I could possibly go to the meeting where our appearance would at best be ridiculous and might very likely lead to insult. I purposely left unanswered Worthington's question as to his own position.

Some discussion then followed as to the presence of the leading ex-Ministers at the Party Meeting, but the final decision was in favour of their attendance. Before, however, the gathering broke up there were one or two other points to be settled. 'Worthington-Evans was evidently anxious to accept the offer of the Postmastership and uneasy at the prospect of refusal.' He once more raised the matter, and was promptly told by some of those present that he could not with dignity or propriety take office so long as Austen was excluded. This caused Austen to repeat what he had said to Sir Laming in his letter two days before, and the other then said he would postpone his decision until Austen had seen the Prime Minister.

Lastly, Sir William Bull said it was essential that Austen should make some public statement as to the attitude of himself and his friends before the Party Meeting on the ensuing Monday. This suggestion met with general approval, and Austen agreed to write a letter to the Chairman of the West Birmingham Unionist Association. It was as follows :

2 Morpeth Mansions, S.W.i  
*26th May, 1923*

DEAR COUNCILLOR TALBOT,

You and my friends in West Birmingham showed so much kindness and consideration to me in the difficult position which arose last autumn, and have so often expressed to me since the hope that I might soon rejoin the Unionist

Government, that I feel I owe to you some explanation of my present position.

This is not the moment for me to express my feelings towards my late colleague and leader. When the news of Mr. Bonar Law's resignation was announced, I was at Vernet and wholly unprepared for this serious result of what I, like others, supposed to be only a temporary indisposition which a few weeks' rest would overcome. At the request of the friends with whom I have been more particularly associated in these latter months, I came to Paris in order to be immediately available if any consultation with me was desired. I was led to think that it was the desire of the new Prime Minister to heal such differences as had arisen in the Party, to let bygones be bygones, and in the presence of what was not only a personal tragedy but a great national misfortune to secure the complete re-union of the Conservative Party. If my help had been asked, it would gladly have been given for such an object, whether by personal co-operation in the work of Government or by the use of such influence as I may possess among my friends ; and from my knowledge of their views I can say with confidence that my colleagues in the late Government were actuated by the same feelings, and that there was not one of them who would not have been willing to sacrifice any personal claims which he might possess in order to secure the complete re-union of our Party.

I cannot but believe from the first indications of the Prime Minister's intentions, given to the Press immediately after his acceptance of office, that he had the same wish for oblivion of past differences and the same desire for complete union in the future. It would seem that other forces intervened. I do not care to enter into this aspect of the question ; but what you and my friends in West Birmingham are entitled to know, and I, in fairness to myself and those with whom I am most intimately associated am entitled to state, is that if that complete re-union has not been accomplished it has not been because of any unwillingness on our part to forget past differences, or because of any pretension on the part of any of us that our inclusion in any new combination was essential. No opportunity was given to us to make our contribution to Party unity and no communication

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from the Prime Minister was made to me until he had formed his Ministry.

Yrs. sincerely,  
AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

After lunch that same day Austen set out for Chequers where he arrived at four o'clock, and was met by Mr. Baldwin at the door. The Prime Minister welcomed Austen cordially.

\* We are old friends,' said Austen, ' and remain friends even when we differ.'

' Yes, and are friends still.'

' Yes, and are friends still ; and it is therefore easy for me to offer you personal congratulations on your appointment as Prime Minister and Leader.'

Mr. Baldwin then took Austen into the house, and almost at once proceeded to tell him what had happened during the previous few days. It was not until late in the evening of the preceding Saturday that he, after being summoned to London earlier in the day, realized how serious was Mr. Bonar Law's illness, and on the following Sunday morning he saw Mr. Bonar Law himself. The sick man told him that he was resigning at once by letter, and that he would not make any recommendation as to his successor, but another forty-eight hours elapsed before Mr. Baldwin knew for certain that he was to be Prime Minister. His first act was to ask Lord Curzon, who he knew would be despondent at the failure of his hope of succeeding Mr. Bonar Law, to remain at the Foreign Office, but if he refused it had been Mr. Baldwin's intention to offer the Foreign Secretaryship to Austen. Lord Curzon did not refuse, and when Mr. Baldwin announced his intention of offering Austen some other post two or three of his colleagues threatened to resign if that were done. The new Prime Minister told Austen that he had done his best at repeated interviews to change this opinion, but had found it impossible to do so, and he felt he could not quarrel with men who had 'joined the boat when it was a very rickety thing.' Mr. Baldwin then told Austen of his approach to Sir Robert Home, of which, as we have seen, the other had heard from Sir Robert himself a few hours earlier.

Baldwin then with considerable hesitation and, I think, choosing his words rather carefully, said he wanted to ask me a question—he did not want an immediate answer but he wanted me 'to have it in my mind.' If the position changed and he was able—say, in three months' time—to offer me office, would I then be willing to accept ?

After this, Mr. Baldwin asked Austen if he would prefer to go as Ambassador to the United States. Austen at once said he supposed that this idea had been mentioned to Lord Curzon, and on being informed that such was the case added that he presumed the Foreign Secretary had explained that he had refused the Washington Embassy on a previous occasion. Mr. Baldwin said he knew nothing of this. Austen then observed that he thought Lord Curzon should have told him, and proceeded to inform the Prime Minister that he had also declined the posts of Ambassador to France and Viceroy of India.

You will see, therefore, that when I was holding office, when I could have accepted with perfect honour and without any reflection upon the Government which made the offer to me or on myself for accepting, I declined. I am not very easily made angry, but when I heard, as I did from my colleagues, that you intended to make me this offer, I frankly say that I lost my temper. You have made it, however, with such consideration and with such evident goodwill and sincerity that I cannot be angry with you now. But, of course, I refuse absolutely, and that not only because having given the best years of my life to Parliament I am not prepared to take up an appointment abroad, but because it would neither be to your credit nor to mine that the offer should be made or accepted. You would have the appearance of trying to buy off possible opposition, and I of accepting a fat salary as compensation for the discourtesy shown to me.

On this Mr. Baldwin repeated that he had known nothing of what Austen had just told him, and that he would

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at once withdraw the proposal, which he asked Austen to treat as if it had never been made.

But he rather naively went on to explain that whether he could carry on and make a success of the job or not, he was now Prime Minister ; that he was a younger man than I ; that if he succeeded, then he blocked my path, and he had thought perhaps that under these circumstances I should like a diplomatic appointment ! It is perhaps to my credit that I did not lose my temper again.

Austen then referred to his contingent willingness to accept office in the future, and said that he was not prepared to be treated as a boy on probation who was told that if he behaved well he might get a remove next term, or to have a bundle of carrots dangled before his nose to induce him to gallop. He would give independent support to Mr. Baldwin as he had done to Mr. Bonar Law.

I then turned to the general question. I said to him, ' My dear Stanley, why didn't you send for me ? If you wanted to offer me office with some of my colleagues in order to restore the unity of the Party, why didn't you ask me to come and see you ? I had gone to Paris in order to be readily available. I should have come at once at any moment if you had sent for me, and I think agreement might have been secured.'

He said that, as he had explained to me, this was what he wanted to do but had been prevented from doing by the resistance of colleagues.

I continued, ' But even so, Stanley, why didn't you send for me—we are old friends. You could have talked to me with the same frankness that you have shown to-day. You could have explained your difficulty and made your appeal to me to help you with my colleagues. I can tell you that there would have been no insistence by any of them on personal claims—as it was, I had set them free as far as lay in my power from any sense of obligation to myself; but Home had refused without consultation with

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me before I knew anything of what was passing. Suppose the position had been reversed and I had tried to secure your services whilst excluding Bonar Law and without communicating with him. You know you would not have accepted. No man of honour could. How could you think that Home would do differently? Why, my dear Stanley, why didn't you send for me?'

The Prime Minister twice repeated slowly and, as I thought, sadly, 'I am very sorry, I never thought of it.'

The conversation then drifted to other topics, and Austen referred to the position of Mr. McKenna whom it was generally supposed Mr. Baldwin was about to appoint as Chancellor of the Exchequer. 'I could not help feeling that there was a certain humour in the attitude of his Government who were so jealous for the purity of the Conservative faith that they proscribed me and accepted McKenna.' Austen also told the Prime Minister what he had said to Sir Laming Worthington-Evans.

The interview had lasted about an hour and a half. It had been conducted throughout, as any such talk between old friends should be, with the utmost candour and good temper, and we parted most cordially. I was left with the impression that Baldwin sincerely regretted that he had not communicated with me at once, even if he had felt unable to invite me to join his Ministry.

All the same, Austen confessed to Lord Birkenhead that he had been 'deeply wounded' by Mr. Baldwin's attitude, and although he gave no indication of his feelings in public, letters which he exchanged at this time with his brother bear witness to his resentment at the treatment he had received:

2 Morpeth Mansions, S.W.i  
*June 1st, 1923*

MY DEAR NEVILLE,

I should like you to see the letter that I wrote to Worthy

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engrossment at that moment and the fact that . . . he doesn't enter into your feelings as you would have done with anyone else. But I feel sure that he never meant discourtesy.

Second, I have seen Baldwin, and told him bluntly, as he would have put it himself, how you had been wounded by his treatment. I suggested that if he ever wanted to talk to you again he should remember that I was your brother and at his disposal, and he gladly accepted my suggestion and promised that in future he would come to me before approaching you himself or through anyone else.

I think he does understand now something of what you have felt.

I have had my time of scorching humiliation, and don't need to be told what it means. But you will live this down and anyway you still have the respect of the country.

Goodnight, my dear Austen, and don't brood over it.

Your affectionate brother,

NEVILLE.

Austen thus hid his resentment in public, and gave the Government independent support in the House of Commons and on the platform as he had promised. He paired, indeed, against Ministers on the Land Value Returns at the beginning of July, and he included an attack on Mr. McKenna in his speech in order to put a stop to the talk about an early offer of office. The holidays he and his wife spent with Sir William Peterson at Eigg, and he was there when he heard of Mr. Neville Chamberlain's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Extracts from two letters he wrote to his brother at this time show how he received this news :

28.8.23

The papers just received give definite news of your appointment as Chancellor, and I must send you my hearty congratulations and affectionate good wishes. I am sorry that fate has separated us instead of, as I once hoped, uniting us in the same Cabinet, but you are making a fine career,

and I am proud of your success. How it would have rejoiced father's heart. . . .

30.8.23

It is an immense regret to me that you and I do not see eye to eye and are no longer acting together. I do and say as little as I can, for politics are hateful to me since we two parted. I shall see this Parit, out, but my position is very difficult, and I think it not unlikely that I shall not stand again. The fact that you and I both sit for B'ham makes my position more difficult, for whilst I will not argue with you anywhere, B'ham is the last place I would choose for the theatre of our differences—and without B'ham I am nothing.

Well, fate has so willed it and it's no use kicking against the pricks, but it's d——hard that fate should separate the fortunes of two brothers who are to one another as you and I.

The middle of September, by which time he had returned to Twitts Ghyll, found Austen still somewhat critical of the Government :

On the whole I don't think that the Govt. does badly in home affairs, tho' they would do better if their Ministers of Agriculture and Labour<sup>1</sup> had brains, but I dislike their foreign policy whether in the hands of Gurzon or of Bob Cecil. It seems to me that we are becoming the scold of Europe. We run about shaking our fists in people's faces, screaming that this must be altered and that that must stop. We get ourselves disliked and distrusted and misunderstood, and in the end we achieve nothing and relapse into humiliated silence or laboriously explain how pleased we are. . . . Curzon is convinced that all is well if he delivers an oration or pens a 'superior' despatch.

Nevertheless, as so often in the case of those in public

<sup>1</sup> Sir R. A. Sanders and Sir C. A. M. Barlow.

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life, the very moment when Austen was seriously considering the idea of quitting the political arena for ever was the eve of his return with reborn enthusiasm to that stricken field.

At the General Election of 1922 Mr. Bonar Law had given a pledge that no change would be made in the tariff system without a further appeal to the country, and when Mr. Baldwin came to the conclusion that Protection was necessary if the Budget was to be balanced and unemployment reduced, an appeal to the electorate was clearly inevitable. Austen first learned of the Prime Minister's intentions from his brother, to whom, after some reflection, he wrote as follows :

2 Morpeth Mansions, S.W.i

*15th October, 1923*

MY DEAR NEVILLE,

I have been thinking very seriously over what you told me on Friday night. If the Government should eventually decide upon such a policy as you indicated as possible, I am of course pledged by all my traditions to throw myself wholeheartedly into the fight and give them any support that I can. I should like nothing better than to see such a policy firmly established, though I had not myself thought when acting as Leader that I could have relied on such a measure of support from our own Party as would have justified me in attempting it ; for to attempt again, and again to fail, would I think definitely rivet the present system on us and would very probably produce a reaction that would undo the little that I was able to accomplish. However, a good deal has changed since that time and among other things the Party is much more inclined to support its leaders. Therefore that may be possible now which would not have been possible a year ago.

But as brother to brother I want to put two things to you. First, I think it not unlikely that the working-man has had such a dose of unemployment that he will now grasp as he never did before that work is the first essential and that without work there is no food. Again, he may be brought to see, what I think is now absolutely true and clear though it was by no means as certain a little time

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back, that the recovery of Europe will be excessively slow and that it is useless to look either to Europe, or indeed to South America, for any speedy alleviation of our troubles. All this is on the side of the movement. But what about the women? Will their minds work in at all the same way? May they not be even more scared than the male voters of ten years ago at the idea of any duty on food? If you get the women voters into a panic you are done.

Secondly, if you make up your minds that you are going to move in that direction—or even if you think that you are likely to move in that direction—is it not worth while, and indeed essential, to any chance of success, that you should begin to talk confidentially to some of your friends on the Press? The Labour members will, of course, be against you. Rothermere and Beaverbrook make it clear that they will be hostile. Such references as there have been in *The Times* before this Conference<sup>1</sup> have rather ruled any such policy out of consideration, and Garvin, who was a pillar of strength to the old movement, now repeats weekly that in present circumstances it is inopportune and impossible.

I dare say these thoughts have already occurred to you and in any case my letter calls for no answer. You will see that it is dictated only by the most cordial good wishes.

I do not believe that you will have any difficulty with your increased preferences. I doubt very much whether the whole of the National Liberals could be induced to oppose them and even whether Lloyd George would wish to do so; but I think that any extension of individual protection may very probably bring the storm about your ears, and that before Baldwin speaks at Plymouth he ought to know very clearly how far he is going. The worst possible for him, for you, and for the Party, would be that he should seem to indicate a new and very bold policy and then that nothing should come of it. Do not repeat in this matter the mistake of the Curzon despatch—a great opening, a pause and then nothing!

Yours affectly.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

<sup>1</sup> The Imperial Economic Conference.

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On October 23rd the question was considered by the Cabinet, though there was not that full discussion of the proposals in all their details which might have resulted in the avoidance of some of the mistakes that were subsequently made. Two days later the Prime Minister spoke at Plymouth, and outlined his policy. He proposed to place a duty upon manufactured articles, while there was to be a bounty on arable land of £1 per acre, together with a minimum wage of 30<sup>5</sup> s. a week to labourers as a condition of the grant of the subsidy. Nothing was said about food taxes, for Mr. Baldwin felt that they had got to come, so he deliberately abstained from committing himself against them in order that it might be open to him to include them when appealing to the country if he felt that by then the time was ripe. When making this speech he did not anticipate a General Election until after Christmas at the earliest.

Mr. Neville Chamberlain kept his brother informed of what was intended, but from the first Austen was extremely critical of the procedure that was being followed :

2 Morpeth Mansions, S.W.i

29th October, 1923MY DEAR NEVILLE,

Many thanks for your note which reached me at Peper Harow. Two or three ladies there had been at Plymouth and they did not give me a very encouraging account of the reception of the Prime Minister's speech, but they all agreed in saying that his declaration in favour of Protection to the home market was the one passage which aroused any enthusiasm.

At the Conservative Club <sup>1</sup> to-night I shall launch myself on his side, but of course I must not know more than he has chosen to tell the public, and indeed, in spite of the additional information given by you, his speech leaves me in as great doubts as to his intentions as it has left the public.

I assume that he means business—but it is not the way

<sup>1</sup> At Birmingham.

to hunt a pack of hounds. You give me one impression of his objects : Joynson-Hicks flatly denies that he has anything of the kind in his mind. He himself makes a declaration—not on behalf of his Government, but expressly and with twice repeated emphasis—for himself only. The Unionist Press is puzzled and half-hearted, and unless in one of this week's speeches he makes his position plain and definite I think we shall go to destruction. I will take my stand on your side, but I do not conceal from myself that the campaign has not been opened in the spirit or form which makes for success.

I am greatly concerned about your programme for the Autumn Session. If I understand Baldwin rightly, he is going to introduce partial legislation for particular industries, not under the Safeguarding of Industries Act—the procedure of which would take too long—but in some analogous form. His right to do so having regard to Bonar Law's pledge and to his own challenge is, I think, certain to be disputed. But even if that were not so, will not the most limited legislation that you can propose at once introduce you to all the difficult details of the tariff question without raising the broad issues or inviting the wide support upon and by which you alone have any chance of carrying the country ? Surely when a Prime Minister says that unemployment is the overriding question of the hour and that there is only one remedy for it, he has no choice but to seek power to apply that remedy at once. He has taken his party and his Press by surprise. If there is any shilly-shally the army will be defeated even before battle is joined.

One other consideration I desire to press upon you. I trust that the Board of Trade will at once publish the material which you have collected as the basis for your new policy. At present we are without any literature or statistics. Cannot you also get the Central Office to give a handsome fee to Professor Ashley and any other suitable men of whom you can think to prepare material for our campaign ? When I think of the vast mass of material which we had to work upon at the time of father's great effort and of his wonderful expositions alike of the situation and of his policy, I am aghast at the dearth of any similar preparation for this struggle.

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I see that you are making several speeches next week. I should be very grateful if you would send me copies of the reports in the local Press, for in these days the London papers are useless for this purpose.

Yours affectly.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen was as good as his word, and in his speech at Birmingham he definitely ranged himself on the Prime Minister's side, so that the schism in the Conservative ranks was at an end. All the same, he came increasingly to feel that if the right thing was being done it was being done in the wrong way. 'We have had six columns and more of speeches from the P.M. in less than a week, and no one knows what he means. You can't hunt hounds that way. Unless he takes control quickly all the hounds will be scattered after different foxes—unless, indeed, the bulk of them hunt a rabbit. Oh, for an hour of Glasgow!'<sup>1</sup> What a contrast is this dreamy, muddled opening of the new campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Lord Birkenhead was in America when the Prime Minister made up his mind to adopt Tariff Reform, but Austen kept him informed of what was happening, and on the ex-Lord Chancellor's return he received a message from Mr. Baldwin to say that he would like to see him. An immediate meeting proved impossible to arrange, and this gave Austen and Lord Birkenhead time to talk matters over. They met on the morning of Saturday, November 10th, and discussed the situation in all its bearings, but decided that it was impossible to take a final decision until they knew the Prime Minister's intentions. That afternoon Austen went down to Twitts Ghyll, but the more he reflected on the conversation of the morning the more important he felt it to be that he should see Lord Birkenhead again before the latter met Mr. Baldwin. Lord Birkenhead was spending the week-end with Lord Beaverbrook at Leatherhead, and thither Austen went on the Sunday afternoon. He had a long conversation with his host and

<sup>1</sup> The allusion is to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's speech at Glasgow on October 6th, 1903.

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Lord Birkenhead, and put to them the suggestion that if he and the ex-Lord Chancellor were invited to join the Government they should only do so on the condition that Mr. Baldwin's policy was enlarged by the inclusion of Preference on wheat and meat. The others, however, felt that this was too great a demand for the Prime Minister to grant, and Austen then suggested that they should accept the Government position, but ask that Dominion wheat and beef should be dealt with on the analogy of the proposals which were put forward for home agriculture, in other words by some form of bounty on import, probably in the shape of cheapened freights. This idea commended itself to the others.

The next morning, November 12th, saw both Lord Birkenhead and Austen back in London, where the former had his interview with the Prime Minister, who 'began with enquiries about his American visit, and talked of the relative merits of different hotels and steamship companies like a man who was rather diffident about approaching the real object of the meeting.' When he did so it was to say that he had been wondering whether the time had not come to re-unite the Conservative Party. Lord Birkenhead said that this was also his desire, but he suggested that Mr. Baldwin should also discuss the matter with Austen, so it was arranged that there should be another meeting after lunch. This began with an explanation in some detail by the Prime Minister why he had adopted his present policy.

'But what do you mean,' Austen at length remarked, 'by re-uniting the Party? Do you mean merely that we are to fight together, or that we are to join your Government?' He then added, 'Let me say at once, whatever the result of our interview, I shall, as I have already publicly stated, fight on your side.'

'So shall I,' interjected Lord Birkenhead.

On this, the Prime Minister said his hope was that if they fought together at the General Election they might become

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colleagues afterwards. Austen repeated what he had said in May, and declared that he would not be put on probation, at which Mr. Baldwin exclaimed, 'Oh, do not put it that way.'

I replied that that was how it inevitably appeared, and it was in any case an impossible position. He was contemplating that we should take ministerial responsibility for a policy about which we had not been consulted, and which I must frankly say I thought went either too far or not far enough. But there were still questions about which no decision had been taken. He said that was principally agriculture. I assented, but added that there was also the question whether within his Manchester pledge something might not still be done in favour of Dominion wheat and beef on the analogy of what he contemplated doing for home agriculture.

In any case if we were not members of the Cabinet they might be taking decisions in the interval on one subject or another which would raise new differences between them and us. It was therefore quite impossible to give any contingent undertakings. If we were to join at all, we ought to join at once : that I did not suggest that there should be any displacement of existing Ministers at the moment, but that if he wished it, F. E. and I could join temporarily as Ministers without portfolio and without salary.

But I must be quite frank with him—I thought he would have understood from what passed at Chequers (though I had tried to speak with great restraint) that I felt that I had at that time been subjected to great and public indignity, and that I was not prepared to join the Government myself, nor could I ask or advise F. E. to join, except in positions which would show clearly that we returned to the counsels *of* the Party on the same footing of influence and authority as we had previously held. I said that in my case this did not mean a claim to any particular office such, for instance, as the Foreign Office.

The resumption of the Privy Seal, or, indeed, several other alternatives, would equally satisfy my view ; but that the case of a Lord Chancellor was different. There was

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no other office which an ex-Lord Chancellor could accept without derogating. Baldwin at once said that this raised the question of Cave's position, and I said that I was very sorry that private and public interests should clash in this way—that I had not a word to say against Cave and had nothing but the most friendly feelings for him—but it was, I feared, inevitable. We added that there were one or two men to whom we were bound in honour and whose ultimate inclusion in the Government would be necessary to enable us to take part in it.

The Prime Minister asked to whom Austen referred, and the others said they thought Sir Leslie Scott should be appointed Solicitor-General in place of Sir Thomas Inskip, who might be promised a puisne judgeship, while office should also be given to Lord Crawford, Sir John Gilmour, and Commander Oliver Locker-Lampson. The discussion terminated with an expression of opinion on the part of Austen and Lord Birkenhead that the General Election should take place as soon as possible, and the Prime Minister then left for Buckingham Palace. When Austen got back to Morpeth Mansions he noted : ' Baldwin was evidently unwilling to commit himself, and was anxious to find out exactly where we stood without committing himself, except to the pious hope that we might re-join the Government in unspecified capacities after the election. Whether I was wise under these circumstances to talk so frankly depends upon whether he is genuinely anxious for re-union or only manoeuvring for position.' Austen was, however, to see Mr. Baldwin again before the day was out, for after his audience with the King the Prime Minister asked Lord Birkenhead and Austen to come to Downing Street again to meet Lord Derby, then Secretary of State for War, who was unconvinced of the necessity of an immediate election. This they did, and duly converted Lord Derby to their way of thinking. Mr. Baldwin, it may be added, took no part in this conversation except to say that he entirely agreed with Austen and the ex-Lord Chancellor.

The next day was marked by further developments in these curiously complicated negotiations. In the morning

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the Duke of Devonshire, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Lord Derby apparently agreed to resign for reasons which Austen did not profess to understand, but after Lord Derby had lunched with Lord Birkenhead the situation again changed, for when the latter was informed of Lord Derby's decision he at once said that in those circumstances he would certainly not join the Government. Indeed, if the account which was given to Austen was correct, there was some very plain speaking, during the course of which Lord Birkenhead said that he was not going to undertake the responsibilities of the fight in Lancashire if Lord Derby withdrew, and that the responsibility of completely wrecking the Party would rest with Lord Derby. At this the other said he must telephone to the Duke of Devonshire, which he proceeded to do ; after this he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, which he read to Lord Birkenhead, to the effect that he could not take responsibility for Lancashire without the assistance of the ex-Lord Chancellor who must be included in the Government, otherwise he would himself be compelled to resign. That evening Lord Birkenhead had a further—and none too friendly—talk with Mr. Baldwin, but it was wholly inconclusive, though the Prime Minister let it be understood that he was having difficulties with some members of his Government. The not inappropriate comment of Lord Balfour upon the two days' proceedings was that they would be the richest comedy if the consequences had not been likely to prove so serious ; what especially excited his merriment was that the Prime Minister should have called in Austen and Lord Birkenhead in a perfectly undefined capacity to persuade one of his own colleagues. ' Obviously/ he said, \* Baldwin is an idiot—the only question is whether he is an inspired idiot ! '

The events of the following day, Wednesday, November 14th, can be told in Austen's own words :

No further communications passed on Wednesday morning, but I went to F. E.'s house by appointment at four o'clock in the afternoon. Beaverbrook had called and was waiting to see F. E., who returned a few minutes later.

F. E. in making the appointment by telephone had suggested that the time had come for him and me to give a time limit to Baldwin. The same idea had occurred to me during the morning, but I had rejected it on consideration and for reasons which I explained to them and they approved. I sketched as an alternative a letter which, a little later, I put in writing and which was then typed and delivered by hand at Downing Street a little before seven o'clock.

After I had drafted the letter and while we were waiting for it to be typed, Derby came in in a great state of excitement. William Bull, Wargrave, and Oliver<sup>2</sup> had also joined us. Derby said that he was to meet the Lancashire members at six o'clock—that he was going to tell them that he had been wholly opposed to an immediate election—that he was not in favour of a general tariff—and that he had urgently pressed as necessary to success the inclusion of F. E. and myself. When asked what he would say if the Lancashire members enquired whether the Prime Minister was in favour of a general tariff, he said that he should have to reply that he did not know. I pointed out to him that he had been anxious to co-operate with us, but that I was certain that a policy of the character sketched by the Prime Minister could not be carried out without a general tariff and that I must say so.

On the general position he said that the Prime Minister's action was inconceivable—that when we were called to Downing Street for the second meeting on Monday afternoon to meet him, he understood that we were called in as colleagues and he had spoken to us on that footing—that after we had left, the Prime Minister had spoken to him of the necessity of bringing us in, and that he had replied that in so speaking to him the Prime Minister was forcing an open door, but that the Prime Minister had perhaps better prepare Salisbury. The Prime Minister had said that he would do so. Derby had accordingly expected to see us at next day's Cabinet and on finding that we were not there

<sup>1</sup> This letter said that since the inclusion of Lord Birkenhead and Austen in the Cabinet was apparently distasteful to some of the Prime Minister's colleagues they were no longer willing to join the Government, but would give Mr. Baldwin platform support as promised.

<sup>2</sup> Locker-Lampson.

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asked the Prime Minister for an explanation. The Prime Minister then apparently said difficulties had arisen outside the Cabinet and that he could not proceed any further with the idea.

This information, it will be seen, I received only after I had written my letter which I then read to Derby.

. . . I went to dine at Grillions. . . . Stamfordham sat next to me. . . . I thought it well to tell him the whole story. He was completely astonished and confided to me that the Prime Minister had sought, and the King had given his assent, to our appointment. Derby told the Lancashire members what the Prime Minister had told F. E.—that no Cabinet minister had objected to our appointment. The objection is said to have been taken by Under-Secretaries.

This episode, relatively unimportant in itself, is interesting for the light it throws upon those concerned and on the political scene at the time.

The General Election was now imminent and Austen was extremely pessimistic as to the probable result, for he felt that Mr. Baldwin had allowed the situation to get thoroughly out of hand. Events justified his forebodings. The Conservatives lost 86 seats and came back 258 strong, while the new House of Commons also contained 191 Socialists, 159 Liberals, and 7 Independents. Austen had the same opponent as in the previous year, Mr. Frank Smith, and the figures for West Birmingham were :

Chamberlain	.	.	13,940
Smith	.	.	9,983

Majority 3,957

All the Birmingham seats remained Unionist, but several of them, like Austen's own constituency, with considerably reduced majorities.

A constitutional issue of the first importance thus arose, and there were three choices before Mr. Baldwin in view of the fact that his followers formed the strongest single party

in the new House of Commons. He could meet Parliament and leave it to the Socialists and Liberals to combine to put him out : he could resign, and advise the King to send for Mr. Ramsay MacDonald ; or he could attempt to arrive at an understanding with Mr. Asquith. Austen himself had no doubt as to the right course to pursue, and shortly afterwards he wrote to his brother :

I think that I stood quite alone in my view of what was the right thing to do when the election results were known. It was that the King should be advised to send for Ramsay and Asquith together, and ask whether either of them could form a Govt, with a Parliamentary majority. Obviously any two parties can destroy. The only question is can any two maintain. I believe that this was sound policy and sound constitutionalism.

What did happen, namely, that the Government was beaten on the Address by the vote of the combined Liberal and Socialist Parties, was the one solution which Austen felt ought to have been avoided. He would have preferred to see the Liberals put into office on conditions, and kept there for a time, but he eventually came to the conclusion that the relations of Mr. Baldwin with Mr. Asquith rendered this impossible. For the rest, he spent the Christmas holidays and a large part of January at Twitts Ghyll reading a biography of Sir John Moore and finishing ' my hedging—a tough job ending up with saw and hatchet on a bit of hedge that had, I should think, not been touched since it was planted.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the first Labour Government had come into power.

Adversity now brought about what had hitherto proved impracticable, namely, the re-union of the Conservative Party, and that this was at last effected was due to Mr. Neville Chamberlain. On Tuesday, February 5th, 1924, he invited Austen and Mr. Baldwin to dinner ; no one else was present except Mrs. Chamberlain, who left as soon as the meal was over. Mr. Neville Chamberlain then asked the ex-Prime Minister to say what was in his mind.

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'Well,' Mr. Baldwin replied, 'I think that in present circumstances and in the position in which we are now it is time for all of us to get together.' He went on to say that he had asked the members of the late Cabinet to meet him on the following Thursday to consider policy, and he wanted to know whether Austen would attend this meeting and take his seat on the Opposition Front Bench. If Austen accepted, he proposed to ask the other Conservative Ministers who had left office with him, and Lord Balfour had already agreed to come if they came. After a moment's hesitation Austen replied that to such a proposal he could only give one answer, and that was to accept ; he was also in a position to state that Lord Birkenhead would do the same.

We then had a long conversation on policy. I told Baldwin that, whilst I would not separate myself from him if he decided to stand by his Plymouth policy, I could not advise that course. He and Neville appeared to agree that the proper course was to get back to the pre-election attitude on tariff questions. I also protested strongly against Baldwin resigning the leadership and submitting himself for re-election like a company auditor. Such procedure would be indignified and farcical. If he had come to the conclusion that he could not, or ought not, to carry on, there was only one course for him to take. It was to withdraw definitely and absolutely and leave the Party to choose another Leader. As this was not his view, his proper course was to come as Leader to the meeting, and to make to his followers a clear statement of the policy which he recommended to them. There might be some grumbling, but he would certainly get his vote of confidence and very probably by acclamation.

Accordingly Austen, and those who had resigned with him when the Coalition fell, resumed their old place in the counsels of the Party, but, even so, the prospects were none too bright. Austen considered the Conservative Front Bench to be inferior to any that he had known, and the only really good speakers according to him, were his

brother, Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir Philip Lloyd Greame, and Major Edward Wood. He had no very high opinion of Mr. Baldwin as Leader of the Opposition. Of the Government he wrote at Easter that 'it is too much a one-man show.' He was ready to pay a tribute to Mr. Wheatley, though he felt the other had much to learn before he could become a Parliamentarian of the first rank, but it was Mr. J. H. Thomas whom he considered to be the ablest and most experienced of the new Ministers.

Complicated as the political situation was it was rendered even more confused by the condition of the Liberal Party. When Mr. Asquith had put the Conservatives out and Labour in, he had acted in the belief that he could overthrow Mr. MacDonald at his pleasure without the risk of a General Election, and that the King would then entrust him with the task of forming a Government which the Conservatives would be morally bound to support without conditions. Whether this plan would have materialized had the Liberal Party remained united is a moot point, but from the time that Parliament met it was plain that Mr. Asquith's followers were thoroughly divided. 'The Liberal Party,' wrote Austen, 'is "visibly" bursting up. It holds constant Party meetings to decide its course; then 40 vote with the Govt., 20 vote with us, and the rest (including the leaders) walk out, or absent themselves.' The struggle between the Socialists and the Conservatives thus largely became one for Liberal votes, and in a speech at Northampton on July 17th, Austen said :

Let us welcome in no ungrudging spirit and in no ungenerous manner recruits that may ultimately gain for our own Party, men who at this moment, without joining our Party, see eye to eye with us in this great issue.

Unfortunately, Mr. Baldwin, who was by agreement to have taken the same line, phrased his remarks in such a way as to give Austen the impression that he had changed his mind at the last moment, and this led to further, if temporary, misunderstanding between the two men.

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August and September were spent by Austen with his family *in* France or at Twitts Ghyll, and he paid no great attention to politics during this period. Meanwhile, **the** Labour Government was tottering to its fall. The proposed loan to Russia, the Geneva Protocol, the Campbell case, and the Zinoviev letter brought increasing unpopularity, and when Ministers were defeated in the House of Commons they appealed to the country in October. Austen once more had to fight for his scat, this time against a Communist, with the following result :

Chamberlain	.	.	.	14,801
Dunstan	.	.	.	7,158

Majority    7,643

He had not done so well as he expected, and wrote of the election : ' We have had a rude shock here which I confess took me entirely by surprise. I was justified in feeling that Dunstan's opposition was not dangerous, but even an avowed Communist is able to poll seven thousand votes in West Birmingham.' Elsewhere the Conservatives swept the country, and the final returns showed that the new House of Commons would consist of 415 Conservatives, 151 Socialists, 44 Liberals, and 5 Independents, thus giving the Conservatives a clear majority of 215 over all other parties. Mr. MacDonald at once resigned, and Mr. Baldwin became Prime Minister for the second time. His Cabinet was composed as follows :

Prime Minister	.	.	S. Baldwin.
Lord Chancellor	.	.	Lord Cave.
Lord President of the Council.			Earl of Balfour.
Lord Privy Seal	.	.	Marquess of Salisbury.
Chancellor of the Ex- chequer.			Winston Churchill.
Home Secretary	.	.	Sir W. Joynson-Hicks.
Foreign Secretary	.	.	Austen Chamberlain.
Dominions and Colonial Secretary.			L. S. Amery.

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Secretary for War	.	Sir L. Worthington-Evans.
Secretary for Air	.	Sir S. Hoare.
Secretary for India	.	Earl of Birkenhead.
First Lord of the Admiralty.		W. G. Bridgeman.
President of the Board of Trade.		Sir P. Cunliffe-Lister. <sup>1</sup>
Minister of Health	.	Neville Chamberlain.
President of Board of Education.		Lord E. Percy.
Minister of Labour	.	Sir A. Steel-Maitland.
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.		W. Guinness.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.		Lord Cushendun.
Secretary for Scotland	.	Sir John Gilmour.

Of his own appointment Austen wrote : \* I feel no elation, but only a very sobering sense of the great difficulties in my path. . . . Pray for me. Ramsay did well with the Dawes Report and Egypt, but he has left an awful mess about Russia, and an equally bad and even more delicate situation in regard to the Geneva Protocol.<sup>5</sup> His new colleagues he estimated thus :

Setting aside the exclusion of Home, which is not only a great grief, but a great loss to me, and with the exception of Labour I think all the Ministries adequately and some of them exceptionally well filled. Health, India, Exchequer and Agriculture are the ones I class as exceptionally well filled. Hoare very good at Air, Bridgeman and Worthy adequate at Admiralty and W.O. . . . Jack Gilmour obviously the right man for the Scottish Office, and Hicks probably equal to the Home Office though Hogge would have been a much stronger appointment. . . .

S. B.'s way of doing things, as apart from the things done, has bitterly wounded Home who was a real friend of his as well as of mine, and in a lesser but sensible degree

<sup>1</sup> Formerly Sir Philip Lloyd Greame.

hurt Derby. I have not had the smallest influence on any of his appointments except the inclusion of Fred, and have been left entirely in the dark about them till I heard Club gossip or read them in the Press. On the other hand he has shown the greatest consideration for me personally, especially by naming me deputy leader of the House. I had no hint of this beforehand or I should have begged him not to do it lest it should give rise to expectations of my playing a part in the general debates which is impossible, and I can only accept it as a compliment and not as a duty to be fulfilled. But the motive is obvious and I have thanked him in the spirit of his kindness.

## CHAPTER VI

### LOCARNO

AUSTEN took up his new post in circumstances of exceptional difficulty, of which, as we have seen, he was fully aware. The Foreign Office had not, indeed, been too fortunate in its chiefs since the resignation of Sir Edward Grey eight years before. Mr. Balfour was not seen at his best when in control of his country's external relations, though his foreign policy had left little ground for criticism when he was Prime Minister during the opening years of the century ; Lord Curzon was a failure, chiefly because he could not be brought to believe in the importance of persons or problems of whom or of which he disapproved ; while Mr. MacDonald, although an undoubted improvement upon his immediate predecessor had laid far too heavy a burden across his shoulders by combining the posts of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Austen's own views of those who had preceded him at the Foreign Office are not without interest, and he gave expression to them when, in 1927, it was decided to hang portraits of the six greatest Foreign Secretaries since the post came into existence in 1806':

My six Foreign Ministers are Castlereagh, Canning, Palmerston, Salisbury, Lansdowne and Grey—Lansdowne as the minister of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Anglo-French Entente. I rejected without hesitation Fox, for whatever his greatness (as to which I have my own opinion) it was not shown as Foreign Minister ; Grenville because whatever claims he had were of an earlier date when he was Pitt's mouthpiece ; Lord Aberdeen (Peel's ministry), Malmesbury, and Lord John Russell (whom I reserve with Granville for the Chamber of Horrors), Lord Dudley, Lord Stanley (of Dizzy's first Ministry, the Derby of his second), Lord Rosebery, and Lord Clarendon. The last is the only one for whom a serious claim has been advanced to come in front of any of the six whom I have chosen. He had a considerable reputation, but I cannot,

hurt Derby- I have not had the smallest influence on any of his appointments except the inclusion of Fred, and have been left entirely in the dark about them till I heard Club gossip or read them in the Press. On the other hand he has shown the greatest consideration for me personally, especially by naming me deputy leader of the House. I had no hint of this beforehand or I should have begged him not to do it lest it should give rise to expectations of my playing a part in the general debates which is impossible, and I can only accept it as a compliment and not as a duty to be fulfilled. But the motive is obvious and I have thanked him in the spirit of his kindness.

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My six Foreign Ministers are Gastlcreagh, Canning, Palmerston, Salisbury, Lansdowne and Grey—Lansdowne as the minister of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Anglo-French Entente. I rejected without hesitation Fox, for whatever his greatness (as to which I have my own opinion) it was not shown as Foreign Minister ; Grenville because whatever claims he had were of an earlier date when he was Pitt's mouthpiece ; Lord Aberdeen (Peel's ministry), Malmesbury, and Lord John Russell (whom I reserve with Granville for the Chamber of Horrors), Lord Dudley, Lord Stanley (of Dizzy's first Ministry, the Derby of his second), Lord Rosebery, and Lord Clarendon. The last is the only one for whom a serious claim has been advanced to come in front of any of the six whom I have chosen. He had a considerable reputation, but I cannot,

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even after reading Herbert Maxwell's *Life* for that very purpose, find anything to justify it, so I stand by my six. They are not all favourites of mine. I don't much care for Palmerston ; Canning inspires the same kind of mistrust in me that he did in his contemporaries ; and Salisbury in his later years was, I think, weakly temporizing and without initiative to meet the new conditions of a rapidly changing world. But viewed objectively I don't think you could omit any of the six or prefer others to them.

At the same time Austen had certain very definite advantages. It was always the custom of Mr. Baldwin to allow his Ministers a free hand, and a Foreign Secretary in his Cabinet was particularly favoured in this respect, for the Prime Minister had little knowledge of, or interest in, international affairs. Austen enjoyed, for example, far more freedom both in the initiation and execution of policy than had been allowed to Sir Edward Grey by Mr. Asquith, but he could also count, as experience was to prove, upon Mr. Baldwin's loyal support in a crisis. In many ways Austen, with his great prestige and long practice in control of the House of Commons, was in an exceptional position, and during the four and a half years he was in office he was subject to little, if any, interference in the affairs of his Department.

As Foreign Secretary he was to prove, what he had already shown himself to be at the India Office, a practical idealist. He always knew what was possible, and although at first some of the members of the secretariat of the League of Nations were inclined to look askance at what they considered to be his lack of idealism, they soon came to realize that the objects which the League had been created to promote were quite safe in his hands. Austen had, too, one great asset, and it was his ability to make the best use of experts, without, however, becoming a mere instrument in their hands. Indeed, few men have gone to the Foreign Office with such qualifications, as his brother had long realized.

Nor was this all, for Austen not only had himself a capacity for team-work, but he was also extremely fortunate

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in his team. The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office was Sir Eyre Crowe, an outstanding figure among British Civil Servants, but he died in the spring of 1925, when he was succeeded by Sir William Tyrrell, with whom Austen's relations were always of the most friendly. The Principal Private Secretary was Mr. (now Sir) Walford Selby, who soon became a close personal friend. Mr. Selby's previous experience was of particular value to Austen, for he had been First Secretary in Cairo for three years, and was thus fully acquainted with the problems of Egypt, which were soon to prove so troublesome ; he had also been in earlier years Assistant Private Secretary to Sir Edward Grey, for whom he entertained the most profound veneration, and he was to perform a very valuable service in acting as a link between Austen and his great predecessor. The British Ambassadors abroad with whom the new Foreign Secretary was brought into closest touch were the Marquess of Crewe in Paris, Lord D'Abcrnon in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold in Madrid, and Sir Ronald Graham in Rome. All were of exceptional ability, and with all Austen was on extremely cordial terms. The following letters exchanged in the summer of 1926 vividly depict the friendliness which existed between Austen and the members of his staff :

To the Grand Cham of the Foreign Office ; Protector of the Poor, of all Ministers, Councillors, Secretaries, Attaches, Staff Officers and Second Division Clerks ; Terror of the Secretary of State, his Lord, Master and Keeper, etc., etc.,

the petition of his poor servant.

Is it essential to Your Lordship's well-being or to the enjoyment of Your Lordship's dinner or to Your Lordship's proper rest on Sundays that such formal signatures as are required from the Secretary of State on the papers in this box should be habitually required of Your Lordship's poor slave after midnight or on Sundays ? If so, Your LordsLip's wishes are a law to your servant and shall be obeyed.

But if this is merely a practical joke on your part, Sir William Tyrrell, why damn it, Sir, it has gone on long enough, and I beg you henceforth to send them to my

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Private Secretary with instructions to choose a convenient moment to put them before me or, by heavens, there will be the deuce of a row and Mr. Bland<sup>1</sup> will find himself in the middle of it.

All which is nevertheless most humbly submitted for Your Lordship's favourable consideration, observing however that it would not appear to matter a tuppenny dam whether such papers are signed at Christmas or Midsummer as they are habitually dated days and sometimes months before signature.

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Secretary of State.

Less than the dust beneath your chariot wheels, the unwitting and regretful disturber of your midnight and/or Sabbatical reflections submits his most humble apologies for the continuance of an outrage which has now brought down the vials of your wrath upon his unworthy head. He has the temerity, however, to attempt to shelter himself behind the precedent of years, and to plead, in excuse for a perhaps slavish and unoriginal attachment thereto, that until to-day he had received no inkling that, an immemorial practice, which satisfied Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and evoked no complaint even from the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, was distasteful to Sir Austen Chamberlain.

Sir Austen has but to command, and his humble servant will have no inconsiderable relief in interposing, for the future, between himself and the thunderbolts of Olympus the person of Ganymede, featured by Mr. Walford Selby.

N. BLAND.

14 July, 1926.

In submitting this Counter Petition of a most unworthy slave the Grand Cham ventures to go out of the picture.

W. T.

It was well that Austen could rely upon so competent a team, for the difficulties which faced him were consider-

<sup>1</sup> Then Private Secretary to Sir William Tyrrell.

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able. By far the most important problem was that of French security, which remained unsolved although seven years had elapsed since the Armistice. When the war finished the French had been desirous of annexing the whole left bank of the Rhine, and they were only deterred from pressing their claim by the promise of an Anglo-American Pact of Guarantee, which, however, never matured. In these circumstances they had not unnaturally adopted an intransigent attitude towards Germany, of which the occupation of the Ruhr was only one, if the most outstanding, example. This, in its turn, exacerbated German feeling, and tended both to encourage the extremists in the Reich itself, and to bring Berlin and Moscow closer together—an approximation which boded ill for the peace of Europe. Furthermore, relations between Great Britain and France had been severely strained by French policy both in Europe and the Near East, while neither Lord Curzon nor M. Poincaré was the man to understand another's point of view. In effect, when Mr. Baldwin's first administration went out of office in January, 1924, the international situation was extremely disquieting.

There had been a distinct improvement under Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. M. Poincaré had been overthrown at the elections in May, and a majority more to the Left came into power with M. Herriot at its head ; with such a Government the new British Prime Minister was more in sympathy than he had been with that of M. Poincaré. Mr. MacDonald realized the problem with which he was called upon to deal, and he attempted to solve it by means of the Protocol of Geneva. This document, which on October 2nd, 1924, was unanimously recommended to the various Governments by the Assembly of the League of Nations, 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 ' ; and it went on to propose the amendment of the Covenant, with a view to rendering really efficacious Article VIII, which prescribed ' 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 achieved were :

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(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 consider 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 ; and (7) To take part in an international conference on the reduction of armaments, as a preliminary to rendering the Protocol operative. \* A state engaging in hostilities should be presumed to be an aggressor unless a unanimous decision of the League Council should declare otherwise.'

The Protocol was from the first extremely unpopular in many circles in Great Britain, and it was generally regarded with the gravest suspicion in the Dominions. It seemed to imply the surrender by the British Parliament to what might be a group of unknown men in no way responsible to it of those powers of peace and war which had been exercised for centuries, and there was widespread repugnance to the idea of placing the British Navy at the disposal of foreigners. This feeling was especially strong in those circles which had contributed most to the Conservative victory at the polls, and it was universally believed that this event had sounded the death-knell of the Protocol. Austen shared the feelings of the majority of his fellow-countrymen, but he realized that if he discarded the Protocol he must, if Europe was to enjoy real peace, put something in its place. Austen saw his task as that of giving security to France, while at the same time bringing Germany into the comity of nations and keeping there the new Fascist Italy.

He approached very cautiously the problems before him, and he set to work to study them in detail before he expressed any opinion, just as he had done when he became Postmaster-General more than twenty years ago. His first speech as Foreign Secretary, at the Guildhall Banquet on November 10th, thus gave little indication of the policy

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which he would pursue, though it did lay down the principles upon which that policy would be based :

You have enjoined upon me, my Lord Mayor, that I should propose the toast of the Ambassadors and Ministers accredited to the Court of St. James's. I count myself fortunate in the accident which makes this my first public act after receiving the seals of the office which I now hold. With many of these gentlemen I am already on terms of personal friendship, and with all of them I hope to work frankly, cordially, and sympathetically for the good of our respective countries and the welfare of the world. There are gathered at your table the representatives of many nations widely scattered upon the surface of the earth, but however much their countries may be divided from one another by continents or oceans, none of them is far removed from the British Empire. And the first thoughts of any Englishman on appointment to the office of Foreign Secretary must be that he speaks in the name, not of Great Britain only, but of the British Dominions beyond the seas, and that it is his imperative duty to preserve in word and act the diplomatic unity of the British Empire. Our interests are one. Our intercourse must be intimate and constant, and we must speak with one voice in the councils of the world.

My Lord Mayor, the aim of every statesman in the British Empire is, and must ever be, to preserve peace. As we expect others to respect our own national dignity, so we will respect theirs ; as we hope from them for sympathetic understanding and regard for our special interests and feelings, so we will endeavour to bring the same sympathy and understanding to the consideration of their peculiar position and problems. In this spirit we will deal with all nations, but for those our Allies and associates by whose side we fought in the Great War we cherish a deeper feeling, and with them we desire a more intimate friendship. We rejoice that, with the invaluable co-operation of the United States, some of the difficulties that recently vexed us have been removed from our path, and we trust that that co-operation, in whatever form may

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appear fitting to the President and Senate of the United States, may not be withheld from us in the difficulties which we have still to face. Nor do we forget the great service already rendered to humanity by the League of Nations, or the immense possibilities of good which it holds if wisely and prudently directed.

Hardly had Austen taken possession of the Foreign Office than he was asked by the British representatives abroad for some guidance as to the policy which the new Government was going to adopt with regard to the Protocol, but in every case he replied that it was too early for him to make any definite announcement. He had a discussion with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald on November 18th, when the ex-Premier defended the Protocol on the ground that Great Britain did not incur any new obligations, but that the old ones were very much tightened up and rendered more precise and specific. As regards the signatures already obtained, Mr. MacDonald complained that he had been 'let down' by M. Herriot, who had definitely agreed that the Protocol should only be accepted at Geneva *ad referendum* to the Governments and Parliaments of the Powers represented. A further difficulty also presented itself to Austen the more he considered the Protocol in all its bearings. There seemed to him to be a fundamental difference between the policy pursued by British and French Governments in respect of the League and the question of security. The last two British administrations had desired to substitute a League guarantee in some form for bilateral or tripartite Treaties of Guarantee, while Paris, although anxious to secure the most complete League guarantee obtainable, would not regard it as any substitute for mutual treaties of defence. If, therefore, the British Government accepted the Protocol without amendment it would at once be confronted on the part of France and Belgium by a demand to supplement it with a tripartite treaty.

After having thus thought the matter over carefully in all its bearings Austen wrote to the Prime Minister :

LOCARNO

Foreign Office, S.W.i  
25th November, 1924

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

I have been giving some thought to our domestic procedure in considering the Protocol. I understand that the first discussion is to be taken in the Committee of Imperial Defence, with the military representatives present as usual. But I would venture to suggest to you that after a preliminary canter on this basis it may be expedient to establish *apolitical* Sub-Committee to decide the fundamental political issues which are absolutely of the first consequence in determining our relations with the rest of the world.

When you received me on the day on which you accepted the commission to form a Government, you will remember that you told me that you were asking Balfour to join the Committee of Imperial Defence. I met him yesterday and began talking on this subject on the assumption that he had already received your invitation but he quickly corrected me and told me that he had heard nothing from you on the subject. Would it not be well that you should send your invitation at the earliest possible moment? Because of his experience of the League of Nations and of the careful study he has made of proposals for defensive alliances or guarantees, his assistance would, I think, be of first-rate value to us.

But, if you will allow me to do so, I would like to make a further suggestion. If you form such a political Sub-committee—or, indeed, whatever be the body which considers these matters—would it not be worth while to invite Haldane, and perhaps Grey, to join as representatives of the two other parties. We have no more thorny a question to deal with than this matter of the Protocol. So much I already see, though I do not profess at the moment to have found a right or indeed any solution; but it does seem to me of much consequence to reach, if we can, a *national* policy; and I do not believe that we shall ever do this unless the three parties are by representative men brought into consultation from the beginning.

As soon as by this or by other means we have got some idea of the lines upon which we ought to move, I suppose you would call in the Dominions. Ought not Amery to

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be putting up to you an enquiry to them as to the means by which they would desire to be kept informed and make their views known ? I feel sure that unless we can get into direct personal touch with their representatives we shall never come to an agreement.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Probably a decision on the subject of the Protocol would have been reached earlier but for the progress of events in Egypt, which completely absorbed the attention of the Government and of the Foreign Secretary. Then there was, at the beginning of December, the meeting of the Council of the League in Rome, which Austen attended in person, thereby establishing a precedent that he followed throughout his tenure of office save when prevented by ill-health. On his way to Italy he had a conversation in Paris with M. Herriot, who impressed him more favourably than he had anticipated, and in Rome he made for the first time the acquaintance of Signor Mussolini ; he also paid a visit to Geneva. In this way he was at once put into touch with the views of the other Powers on the Protocol and security, and he returned to London with a much clearer idea of what was and what was not possible. While Austen was thus exploring the possibility of establishing peace on a secure basis a prisoner was released from Lansberg gaol who was one day to undo the Foreign Secretary's work ; his name was Adolf Hitler.

Soon after Austen's return to London he and his colleagues were coming to the conclusion that the Protocol must be discarded, but the only substitute which they could think of to put in its place was a defensive alliance with France. Service opinion was strongly in favour of such a solution, but it was likely to be unpopular in the country as a whole, and for that reason the Cabinet did not view it with any particular relish. At this point there came an overture from Berlin which was to prove the first step along the road to Locarno, and the circumstances which caused it to be made have been well described by Mrs. Vallentin in her biography of Dr. Stresemann : ' Rumours of the

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proposed pact had found their way to Berlin, the French newspapers were already preparing public opinion, and a new development in international politics seemed imminent. If this pact came into being, Germany, for years to come, would be excluded from her proper place in the community of Europe. . . . Strcsemann saw the door into Europe, which had been opened for him in London, shut once more.' <sup>1</sup> Lord D'Abernon at once realized that such an attitude on the part of Dr. Stresemann afforded an opportunity of extricating the British Government from the embarrassing situation in which it found itself, and he accordingly encouraged the German Foreign Minister to take the initiative in proposing an arrangement of a different nature from that which was causing so much concern in Downing Street.

It was not, indeed, the first time since the war that action of this nature had been taken in Berlin. In December, 1922, the then Chancellor of the Reich, Dr. Guno, had suggested that 'Germany and France, in common with the other Powers interested on the Rhine, should enter into a mutual pledge, of which a Power not interested on the Rhine should be trustee (namely the United States), not to wage any war against one another for a generation without a plebiscite.' The suggestion was deemed inadequate in point of time and security, and as it implied an American guarantee it was in any event unrealizable. A not dissimilar offer was made by the German Government in May of the following year, but it was again complicated by conditions unacceptable to the Allies, and was consequently refused by them. Finally, four months later, Dr. Strcsemann, who had become Chancellor, made a further suggestion for a bilateral pact between the Great Powers interested on the Rhine with a view to a mutual guarantee of existing frontiers, but the proposal was curtly rejected by M. Poincare.

On January 20th, 1925, Lord D'Abernon sent to the Foreign Office a memorandum from the German Government, and he wrote a covering note in which he said that it was fully realized in Berlin that in France the question

<sup>1</sup> P. 165.

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of security against possible German aggression played a considerable part, and Germany was ready to take this point of view into consideration by entering into an agreement of a general nature the object of which would be to secure peace between Germany and France ; with this end in view Germany was willing to guarantee the existing frontier in the West. A few days later Austen received a letter from Lord Crewe which confirmed his belief that the French did not consider that the Protocol solved the question of security, and M. Herriot shortly afterwards gave expression to this point of view in the Chamber of Deputies. Circumstances thus seemed exceptionally favourable for the reception of Dr. Stresemann's proposal, but in submitting it the German Government committed the blunder of endeavouring to secure a promise from Austen that he would not at this stage mention the matter to the Quai d'Orsay ; the result was that Austen at first saw nothing in the proposition but a somewhat clumsy German attempt to drive in a wedge between Great Britain and France. Accordingly, when the German Ambassador, Dr. Sthamer, came to see him on January 30th, Austen said that he ' could not receive confidential communications from the German Government on the footing that I was not at liberty to mention them to our French allies. Any appearance of negotiations between Germany and this country behind the back of France would arouse suspicion and destroy any influence which the British Government might have with the Government of France.' Three days later, on February 2nd, Austen, in a speech at Birmingham, gave further expression of this point of view : ' The task of a British Foreign Secretary is to cement old friendships and to allay old differences and bitternesses. But you cannot allay old differences by forgetting old friendships.'

In these circumstances it is not surprising to find Austen writing on February 3rd to Lord D'Abernon that \* these overtures were premature and that the moment was not opportune for their successful prosecution.' He went on to urge that the best method by which Germany could allay French suspicions would be to join the League of Nations. Another difficulty related to the occupied area, for January 10th was the date fixed for the evacuation of

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Cologne and most of the Ruhr which had remained under military occupation for the past two years. However, the discovery by Italian officers of the Military Commission of some infringement of the Treaty of Versailles caused a postponement of the evacuation, and this question was under somewhat acrimonious discussion between the Powers concerned while the German Government was formulating its proposals.

These were definitely made on February 9th in a memorandum presented to the French Government. According to this document Germany was ready to join in a pact between the Powers interested in the situation on the Rhine, notably France, Great Britain, Italy, and Germany, 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 situation, and that the signatory States might further guarantee the fulfilment of the obligation in regard to the demilitarization 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 Czechoslovakia. 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. In reply, M. Herriot expressed his appreciation of the German action, and said that the French Government would proceed to an examination of the memorandum in conjunction with its allies.

By this time Austen was more favourably disposed to the German suggestion, in which he now saw a possible escape from his difficulty over the Protocol, and this change of attitude was reflected in a letter to Lord Crewe :

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Foreign Office, S.W.i  
16th February, 1925  
(dictated 14th)

MY DEAR CREWE,

The pressure of work here has again been very severe during the last few days, and though I have worked very long hours I have not had time for as close a correspondence with you as I should have liked. I am glad that I sent you my correspondence with D'Abernon since it has helped to fill the gap. A three-handed game, such as is now going on between Paris, Berlin, and London, is not an easy one to play, but I do my best to keep both you and D'Abernon fully informed. . . .

What amazing people these same Germans are ! First they hand a copy of their secret memorandum on a pact to D'Abernon and ask my advice about it, whilst attempting to enforce the condition that I shall say nothing to the French. I repudiated the condition, as you know, and one would have thought that they might have learned the lesson ; but they next sent the same memorandum to Herriot—as I learned in the first instance from D'Abernon, with the addition that they have told Herriot that he must not communicate with me. Herriot very properly responds to my confidence by giving me his confidence. But what earthly object do they think that all this tortuous duplicity would serve ?

As to the memorandum itself and the spirit which it discloses, I think that they are the most helpful sign that I have yet seen. I am absolutely precluded from saying a word to any Ambassador which would indicate what the ultimate attitude of the British Government to the question of French security will be. Public opinion in this country is intensely suspicious of any particular undertaking, and both the Liberal and Labour Parties in their present mood are ready to start on the warpath at the first indication that I could be contemplating a regional pact. The League of Nations Union is equally on the alert and equally predisposed against partial and particular arrangements.

Yet I am firmly convinced that the true line of progress is to proceed from the particular to the general, and not, as has hitherto been embodied in Covenant and Protocol,

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to reverse the process and attempt to eliminate the particular by the general. A form of guarantee which is so general that we undertake exactly the same obligations in defence, shall I say of the Polish Corridor (for which no British Government ever will or ever can risk the bones of a British grenadier) as we extend to those international arrangements or conditions on which, as our history shows, our national existence depends, is a guarantee so wide and general that it carries no conviction whatever and gives no sense of security to those who are concerned in our action.

If, then, we are to relieve the tension of Europe in the only way in which it can be done, namely, by relieving French fear, a more particular and specific guarantee is in my opinion necessary. I am not sure that in 1919, or even a little later, public opinion would have been prepared to admit the signature of Germany, so lately and so flagrantly dishonoured, to any pact of that character, but I am disposed to think that in the circumstances of to-day a guarantee of the Eastern frontiers of France and Belgium by Great Britain would be rendered a much more practical policy if Germany was associated with it. For this reason I attach immense importance to this new move on the part of the Luther Government—more particularly because Stresemann intimated to D'Abernon that a similar local arrangement might be possible with the Powers on the Eastern frontier of Germany, and because, as I have ascertained through private correspondence with D'Abernon, the German Government did not make their proposal conditional on the shortening of the 15 years' period of the Allied occupation of Germany territory.

As Fleuriau<sup>1</sup> said nothing to me about the German memorandum, and as I did not know whether Herriot had thought it right to inform him of its existence, I did not mention the subject to him, nor could I at the present stage of our deliberations even hint to him much of what I have here written to you. I know exactly what I would do if I were an autocrat, but I cannot yet forecast what the Cabinet's decision will be.

<sup>1</sup> French Ambassador in London.

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I shall send a copy of this letter to D'Abernon, but both of you must please treat it as very confidential and as dictated by my desire that a perfect understanding and the most intimate confidence shall prevail between the three of us, since on the completeness of our understanding the success of any policy must depend. As far as any immediate use of this sketch of the position is concerned, there is nothing to be done except if occasion arises to let both Governments know, if they again refer to the matter, that I attach great importance to the German *demarche* and that I consider it would be a great mistake for the Germans to withdraw it or for the French net to consider it with all the serious and even appreciative attention which it demands.

I should like to say more and to show you how I think that it can be used, but I have no right to do that until I am better assured that the Government share my view or am in a position to give you instructions based upon their decisions.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen had indeed to walk warily, for British public opinion would clearly require a great deal of preparation. The Protocol might be dead, but it had yet to be buried, and the Liberal and Labour Parties were certain to display violent resentment when that event took place ; if they could at the same time rouse the country against Austen they would certainly not neglect such an opportunity. Then there was the League of Nations Union, in those days a great force, which was extremely suspicious of any arrangement which might even seem to conflict with the Covenant of the League. Above all, there was the intense reluctance of the ordinary citizen to enter into any further European commitments. This feeling was largely unorganized, but it was none the less extremely powerful and it was especially strong among the rank and file of the Conservative Party both in and out of Parliament. To those who held such views Austen addressed himself in the House of Commons in March 5th :

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Lord Grey, in his speech last night, said that the whole meaning of British co-operation lies in the work of really pacifying Europe, and he emphasized the importance of the part that we may possibly play. He said :

' It was for British public opinion to recognize that the one thing it could do to help the European situation was to make some firm offer to promote European security in which the British Empire can join.'

I am sure that it is far too early for me to have formed in my own mind, and much less to express, any idea of the shape which our co-operation should take, but I do say that it is in the spirit of the passage I have read from Lord Grey's speech that His Majesty's Government, and I as their spokesman, approach the whole consideration of this subject. We have not merely the general interest of all the world in attaining to a sense of security and a sense of stability in Europe. We have also our own interests, as Lord Grey pointed out. We are far too near the Continent to rest indifferent to what goes on there.<sup>1</sup>

At periods in our history we have sought to withdraw ourselves from all European interests. There have been moments—and in the life of our nation they have only been moments—of isolation, sometimes it may have been splendid and sometimes not ; but no nation can live, as we live, within twenty miles of the shores of the Continent of Europe and remain indifferent to the peace and security of the Continent. If our history shows, as it does show, that that is the case, then, as Lord Grey again pointed out, it is more important to-day than ever before that we should not regard ourselves as so protected and so separated from the rest of Europe and its misfortunes by the narrow strip of sea that divides us, as to remain indifferent to what happens, and callous and deaf to any appeal for help. It is not in that spirit that we have exercised when it rested with us alone in the United Kingdom ; nor is it in that spirit of selfish and, at the same time, shortsighted isolation,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lord Bolingbroke : ' We must remember that we are not part of the Continent, but we must never forget that we are neighbours to it.'

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that we shall exercise now, when we speak in consultation with the free self-governing Dominions of a great Empire, our mission and our influence in the world. Our power to help to a peaceful solution of our difficulties, and the use which we may be in removing from the minds of men the shadow of future trouble which haunts our minds and recalls the agonies of a few years ago—that possibility of usefulness and that influence are a great call to endeavour, to effort and to service for the British Empire, to which, I believe, that Empire will gladly respond.

The fact was that in these negotiations all three Governments were in advance of public opinion in their respective countries, and they had to carry on their discussions while at the same time educating those upon whom their success or failure would in the last resort depend. M. Herriot had to move at least as cautiously as Austen, 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. German opinion too was highly suspicious, and the position of Dr. Luther and Dr. Strescmann was still further complicated by the fact that the President, Herr Ebert, died at the end of February, and Germany was thus about to be plunged into an election to choose his successor, with all the bitterness which that would necessarily entail. Furthermore, when details began to be considered every kind of difficulty presented itself. Germany, for instance, pleaded her defenceless condition as a reason why she should be promised special treatment in respect of Article 16 of the Covenant ;<sup>1</sup> at the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay, however, it was suspected that the real reason for putting forward this request was fear of losing that Russian support which had of late been so useful to Berlin.

Then there was the question of Germany's Eastern frontier. Dr. Strescmann refused to guarantee it, and the French, who had an alliance with the Poles, were fearful of a situation in which Germany might be free to attack

<sup>1</sup> The Article relating to the imposition of Sanctions.

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their ally while they were precluded from coming to her assistance by an offensive in the West. Dr. Stresemann at one time suggested that this difficulty might be met by the reunion of Danzig and the Corridor with the Reich, while Poland received compensation in the direction of Kovno ; but this proposal, the adoption of which would have cut Poland off from the sea, merely had the effect of deepening French suspicions. Was there, too, to be a separate Allied Pact ? Paris began to clamour for this as essential for the satisfaction of French public opinion, which would otherwise consider that an agreement on the basis of the German memorandum was but a reaffirmation of the Treaty of Versailles. On the other hand, it was in the highest degree unlikely that Germany would become a party to any arrangement at all if it was to be accompanied by a pact from which she was excluded. Such were the problems that came up for solution as February passed into March.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet had decided to reject the Protocol, and Austen went to Geneva to announce their decision. On his way through Paris on March 7th, he saw the French Prime Minister and told him that the idea of an Allied Pact was repugnant to British public opinion ; he went on to point out that it would, moreover, be useless to France for it would certainly be repudiated by the Socialists if and when they came into office, so he advised M. Herriot to work on the basis of the suggestions contained in the German memorandum. The French Premier refused to be mollified, and he was obviously annoyed at the fate of the Protocol. Of Germany he said, ' I tell you I look forward with terror to her making war upon us again in ten years.' The attitude of M. Herriot so alarmed Austen, who realized the necessity beyond everything else of preventing an open breach between Great Britain and France, that he wrote asking guidance from the Prime Minister ; what he himself wanted to do was to take a firm line with the French over the evacuation of the occupied territory, and to gild the pill by promising to sign a pact on the basis of the German memorandum, upon which, incidentally, the Cabinet had already agreed. Austen was to see M. Herriot again on his way back from Geneva, and he wanted to be sure that he had his colleagues behind him.

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The immediate result was a minor crisis. Mr. Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, and Mr. Amery had not been enamoured of the idea of the pact when it had been before the Cabinet, and they now denounced it at an informal meeting at which Mr. Baldwin asked them to express their opinions, and at which Sir Eyre Crowe was also present. The latter, whose life was now nearing its close, wrote Austen a long and extremely gloomy account of these proceedings which could only give the other the impression that his colleagues had taken advantage of his absence to stab him in the back, and that the Prime Minister was either unable or unwilling to restrain them. Accordingly, in spite of the receipt of an extremely friendly letter from Mr. Baldwin, Austen telegraphed to Sir Eyre Crowe from Geneva :

Your Strictly Private Letter of the 12th instant, I am very grateful to you. You will please inform the Prime Minister that if the discussion reported by you really represents the intentions of the Cabinet I have been placed in a wholly false and absolutely untenable position. If it were not for the grave results which must immediately follow the public announcement of a change of plan I should cancel my engagement with M. Herriot and proceed at once to London to place my resignation in his hands.

I am sorry to say that in face of the discussion as reported by you his letter gives me no guidance and no support. A Foreign Minister who does not possess the confidence of his colleagues is worse than useless to his country and the world, and I at any rate will not consent to hold the post if the policy of the Cabinet is to be changed every few days, if the whole effect of the conversations I have held since I left home is to be destroyed, and if my word is to be repudiated and I am to be dishonoured. Please transmit this message verbally.

The storm died down in face of Austen's firmness, and when he got back to London he was able to write to Lord Crewe : ' I found on my return home that the alarms which I had confided to you were quite unnecessary.'

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While these events were taking place in London, at Geneva the doom of the Protocol was pronounced by Austen on March 12 th, and a few paragraphs from his speech will indicate the line he took :

The Protocol purports to be little more than a completion of the work begun, but not perfected, by the authors of the Covenant. But surely this is a very inadequate description of its effects. The additions which it makes to the original document do something quite different from merely clarifying obscurities and filling in omissions. They destroy its balance and alter its spirit. The fresh emphasis laid upon Sanctions, the new occasions discovered for their employment, the elaboration of military procedure, insensibly suggest the idea that the vital business of the League is not so much to promote friendly co-operation and reasoned harmony in the management of international affairs as to preserve peace by organizing war, and (it may be) war on the largest scale.

Now, it is unhappily true that circumstances may be easily imagined in which war, conducted by members of the League, and with its collective assistance and approval, will become a tragic necessity. But such catastrophes belong to the pathology of international life, not to its normal conditions. It is not wholesome for the ordinary man to be always brooding over the possibility of some severe surgical operation, nor is it wise for societies to pursue a similar course. It is more likely to hasten the dreaded consummation than to hinder it.

And it certainly seems to His Majesty's Government that anything which fosters the idea that the main business of the League is with war rather than with peace is likely to weaken it in its fundamental task of diminishing the causes of war without making it in every respect a satisfactory instrument for organizing great military operations should the necessity for them be forced upon the world.

Austen spoke at some length, and as he neared the end of his speech he made a passing reference to the type of

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agreement which the British Government felt would be preferable to the Protocol :

Since the general provisions of the Covenant cannot be stiffened with advantage, and since the ' extreme cases ' with which the League may have to deal will probably affect certain nations or groups of nations more nearly than others, His Majesty's Government conclude that the best way of dealing with the situation is, with the co-operation of the League, to supplement the Covenant by making special arrangements in order to meet special needs. That these arrangements should be purely defensive in character, that they should be framed in the spirit of the Covenant, working in close harmony with the League and under its guidance, is manifest. And, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, these objects can best be obtained by knitting together the nations most immediately concerned, and whose differences might lead to a renewal of strife, by means of treaties framed with the sole object of maintaining, as between themselves, an unbroken peace. Within its limits no quicker remedy for our present ills can easily be found nor any surer safeguard against future calamities.

It would be idle to maintain that Great Britain's rejection of the Protocol was any more acceptable to the statesmen assembled at Geneva than it had been to M. Herriot, but from the first it was clear that the dissatisfaction expressed in public was at least an exaggeration of their real sentiments. Austen's visit to Geneva was not, however, wholly negative in its character, for it enabled him to exchange views on the proposed pact. For example, he took advantage of the opportunity to tell the Poles that Great Britain would not enter into any guarantees relating to Eastern Europe, while he was able to ascertain that Italy would be willing to play her part ; indeed, it was not long before Signor Mussolini was expressing the opinion that the proposed pact should ' be placed under the safeguard of the League.' On his return home Austen wrote to Lord D'Abernon describing the position as he then saw it :

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Foreign Office, S.W.i  
*18th March, 1925*

MY DEAR D'ABERNON,

I am well content with what we have achieved so far since the German proposals were first made—little though it seems to my critics—and I am not unhopeful of ultimate success. You know my general lines which may perhaps be briefly summarized as follows :—

- (1) Great Britain is not prepared to accept a universal extension of her covenanted liabilities under the Covenant, such as was embodied in the Geneva Protocol.
- (2) On the other side, she is equally unprepared to enter into a pact with France and Belgium specifically directed against Germany.
- (3) The Germans propose that there should be separate pacts by which the Powers interested in particular frontiers should mutually renounce recourse to war and give a common guarantee of those frontiers.
- (4) As regards the frontiers on the West, I understand that Germany would renounce all desire to change them ; whilst in regard to the frontiers of the East, she would preserve her rights under Article 19 of the Covenant on becoming a member of the League of Nations.

It seems to me that this affords a basis on which Great Britain can co-operate and that the co-operation of Great Britain is essential to any chance of success. We should take no fresh obligations in respect of any boundaries, except those between Germany on the one side and France and Belgium on the other ; but by giving our guarantee to this Western frontier we should remove the acute fears which distort French policy and which prevent any improvement in Franco-German relations and threaten, unless removed, to make those relations steadily worse.

In obtaining additional security in the West, I think we do in fact lessen the danger of war in the East ; but undoubtedly the Eastern Powers, and particularly Poland to which France is bound by her alliance, are very suspicious

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lest in taking fresh guarantees for the West we should seem to weaken the existing guarantees for the East. The solution of this difficulty must be sought : first, in the entry of Germany into the League with full acceptance by her of the obligations of Article 16 which is the correlative of her enjoyment of rights under Article 19 ; and, secondly, by renunciation, as she has suggested, of recourse to anything but the peaceful methods Article 19 prescribes for a solution of the difficulties which the present territorial situation involves. If Germany will accept this position, she can, I feel confident, make treaties of arbitration, and so forth, with her Eastern neighbours. These, of course, must be on the basis of the existing frontiers.

But if she comes into the League and plays her part there in a friendly and conciliatory spirit, I myself believe that within a reasonable number of years she will find herself in a position where her economic and commercial support is so necessary and her political friendship so desirable to Poland that, without having recourse to the League machinery, she will be able to make a friendly arrangement on her own account directly with the Poles. This is what Briand said to me and what other members of the Council repeated. For the success of such a policy goodwill, patience, and tact are necessary. If the German public and Press could be restrained from talking so much about the Eastern frontiers, they might get more quickly to a solution.

Of course I recognize the immense difficulty of bringing France and Germany together. . . . But the result of my visits to Paris and Geneva and of my speech in the House of Commons is that the Allies know exactly the *cadre* within which the British Government believe their co-operation to be possible, and that French statesmen, though profoundly disappointed, are setting themselves seriously to consider what can be done within the framework thus traced. As I say, I come back not unhopeful that . . . we have made some progress and have a fair chance of doing a great work.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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The scene soon changed to the House of Commons where, on March 24th, the Opposition launched what it was hoped would prove a most damaging attack upon Austen and the whole foreign policy of the Government as revealed in the rejection of the Protocol. Austen's reply was one of the last debating speeches he ever delivered. He appealed specially to the Conservative majority upon whose support he was dependent, and he began by laying considerable stress upon the very restricted liberty of action which would be left to a British Government under the Protocol. Then he turned to an examination of the principles upon which it was based, and, amid the evident approval of those who sat on the Government benches, he declared :

I profoundly distrust logic when applied to politics, and all English history justifies me. Why is it that, as contrasted with other nations, ours has been a peaceful and not a violent development? Why is it that, great as have been the changes that have taken place in this country, we have had none of those sudden revolutions and reactions for the last 300 years that have so frequently affected the more logically-minded nations than ourselves? It is because instinct and experience alike teach us that human nature is not logical, that it is unwise to treat political institutions as instruments of logic, and that it is in wisely refraining from pressing conclusions to their logical end that the path of peaceful development and true reform is really found.

Austen had been too long in the House of Commons not to realize how effectively humour can reinforce an argument, and he continued :

There has been a great deal of talk of late in this country about the safety and security of St. Paul's Cathedral. A great many experts have been consulted, and not all of them, I understand, have taken the same view; but, as far as I know, no expert, however eminent, has thought that the

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security of that building would be promoted by putting another dome on the top of the existing dome and whatever their differences have been, they have all agreed that it is by underpinning the foundations that the building will be best preserved. That is our view in regard to the Protocol. We do not think that it would add to the strength of the League or that it would add to the security given by the Covenant.

From this he passed to the history of the question of security, and then 'like a dexterous conjuror, he produced the German proposal from his pocket'<sup>1</sup> :

I am convinced—and I say so in my place here—from what has passed . . . that the German Government are making a sincere and an honest attempt to lead to a better state of things ; and it is in the hope that we may assist to carry that effort to a fruitful conclusion that we have engaged in our serious discussion of their proposals.

He gave an outline of the German proposal, and said that in the East as in the West the German Government was prepared to renounce war as a means of securing the revision of the Treaty of Versailles. The rest of his speech was an account of his interview with M. Herriot, and he concluded with the statement that the policy of the Government was to seek a settlement along the lines of the German memorandum. In face of this the Opposition attack was reduced to a fiasco.

Among those who had been listening to Austen was Dr. Sthamer, and when he had finished the German Ambassador sent him a message to say that he wished to see him urgently. Austen sent back word by Mr. Selby that he must listen to one or two speeches, but that he would let him know as soon as he was free, if the other would not mind waiting. When Austen was disengaged, Dr. Sthamer

<sup>1</sup> Vallentin, A., *Stresemann*, p. 175.

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told him that he had gone rather too far in what he had said about Eastern Europe. 'Do you mean,' replied Austen, 'you reserve the right to make war in Eastern Europe in furtherance of your political aims? If so I will go back into the House and revoke what I have said about going through with the German proposals.' Faced with this threat Dr. Sthamer hesitated, and on reference to Berlin the German Government accepted Austen's interpretation of their policy. In this way prompt and firm action saved the negotiations from shipwreck in their early stages, and tied Germany down on a most important point. Austen had turned what might have been a fatal embarrassment into an opportunity to make considerable progress. He confessed later that if he had been compelled to revoke what he had said, immediately after saying it, he would have felt bound to resign.

If the idea of a pact was in its origin German, the practical application of that idea was due to Austen alone. Once he had become convinced of its usefulness he exerted his full power to bring the scheme to fruition, and his insistence bore down all opposition just as his tact smoothed over every difficulty. By the beginning of April he was becoming quietly confident of success, though he was fully cognizant of the rocks ahead :

Foreign Office, S.W.i  
2nd April, 1925

MY DEAR D'ABERNON,

... As to the larger question of the mutual pact, I am satisfied with the progress that we have made up to date and hopeful of the future, though there are moments when I am a little discouraged by the thought of the many difficulties we have yet to overcome. As factors making for success I put first the wholehearted adoption by my colleagues of the policy for which we are now working, and the growing body of public opinion which supports us. There is, for instance, in to-day's *Times* the report of a brief speech made by Lord Grey at a League of Nations Union party at Lady Salisbury's two night ago, in which he defines my policy and my hopes in terms which I can

## THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN

unreservedly accept, and on that basis expresses his full concurrence. So, too, Ramsay MacDonald, while necessarily critical of our attitude towards the Protocol, was careful to indicate in his speech in the House of Commons that he did not exclude any other method of reaching the objects at which he himself had aimed, and added that if we could achieve that end by the plans which we were pursuing he would not be opposed to them.

... If I had not spoken as I did in the House of Commons before I went to Paris, in Paris on my way to Geneva and on my way back, and whilst at Geneva in the several conversations which I held there, it is clear that the new German overture would have fallen still-born as did the Cuno proposition. ... I felt when I returned from Geneva that the position was sensibly better than when I set out for Paris, and all that has happened since confirms me in this belief; but that does not relieve me of anxiety lest some clumsy word spoken in Paris should lead to a more clumsy reply in Berlin, or *vice versa*, and thus shatter all our hopes. Much as I like Sthamer as a man, I feel that he is quite useless as a medium of communication with the German Government, and I do not suppose that his opinions have the slightest weight with them. It is, therefore, upon your influence and your discretion that I rely for keeping things straight at the German end.

At this moment I understand from Fleuriau that the French Government are considering the terms of a reply to be made by them to the German offer. I see talk in the newspapers of a questionnaire. This seems to be a most unhappy phrase, likely to misrepresent the real intentions of Herriot and his government, and to arouse the suspicions or offend the pride of the German Government. As far as I am informed, the intention of the French Government is to show that they are giving a serious, and, I would say, even a friendly attention to the German suggestions, and that they are sincerely desirous of finding in them the basis for an improved relationship between Germany and the Allies. As a first stage, therefore, they propose to ask the German Government to elucidate some of the suggestions rather vaguely presented in their memorandum. If the German Government accept their note in this spirit, which



GROUP AT THK SIGNING OF THE GOLDEN I



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is I believe the spirit in which it will be framed, I do not think that Berlin will find it difficult to answer their questions simply and directly, and thus carry us a stage further on our road.

I have had so far no indication of the contents of this French note except those which I can derive from Fleuriau's account of the advice he had tendered to Monsieur Herriot, but neither in the questions which Monsieur Herriot put to me, nor in the suggestions made by Monsieur de Fleuriau, do I find anything which should occasion difficulty to the German Government, still less anything which should give them umbrage ; but I hope that you will get an opportunity of learning the nature of the contemplated Germany reply, and of offering observations upon it should it seem to you that it is less friendly or less helpful than it ought to be. I think that we have a right to expect the German Government to have regard to our position, and to take account of what we have done for them, and to treat us with confidence in this matter, and to attach importance to any advice which we may tender.

As to the Eastern frontier, I am not at this moment quite clear what the countries immediately concerned or the French Government would wish. I take it that the German Government mentioned the Eastern frontiers in order to meet in advance any possible objection from France, that they were only attempting to stabilize the situation in the West in order to be free to work for the destruction of the treaty position in the East, and I took their reference to the Eastern boundaries as a fact of great importance and as an earnest of their good faith and their pacific intentions.

At first sight it appeared to me that the proper policy would be to carry on simultaneous though separate negotiations as to both the West and the East, but I am now led to infer that the French Government would prefer to deal in the first instance with the West alone, only making it perfectly clear that because we added an additional security to the West we were not destroying any of the existing treaty stipulations in regard either to the Eastern frontiers or to the inclusion of Austria in the German Reich. I believe that this is the view now held by the French Government, and

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probably by the Polish Government. If so, I see no difficulty in working upon that line.

I do not expect Germany in any circumstances to renounce formally all hope that time and diplomacy may lead to some modification of the arrangements in the East, but for the moment I think the less that is said about the East the better it will be, and that at any rate on this subject Germany should confine her reply to answering such enquiries as may be addressed to Berlin. The one thing about which I hope there will be no bargaining and no hesitation in any reply that is sent is the entry of Germany into the League of Nations. You will have seen that Herriot, and still more the French opinion with which he has to reckon, would have liked to make this a preliminary condition of any negotiations. Against such an attitude I have protested strongly, but the adhesion of Germany to the League, if not a necessary preliminary, is an absolutely essential condition of the conclusion of any pact, and I hope that the German reply will make it clear beyond a shadow of doubt or contention that, if these negotiations are conducted to a successful conclusion, Germany will seek admittance to the League without any other conditions than that which has already been accepted, namely, that we shall all support her application and the attribution to her of a permanent seat on the Council.

This is a long screech, perhaps unnecessarily lengthy. What I want above all to impress upon you is that the French note, when it comes, is to be treated as a not unfriendly response to the German advance, that its phrases and questions should be interpreted in that spirit, and that the answers should be framed to make as easy as possible the course of a French Government which, in face of much prejudice and many difficulties, is trying to open a new chapter.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen sent a copy of this letter to Lord Crewe with a covering note in which he said, ' You will see how in Berlin as in Paris I am trying to play the part of the " honest

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broker," perhaps even a little more honestly than the author of that famous phrase ! '

Nevertheless events did not move very rapidly during the next few weeks in spite of all Austen's efforts to accelerate them, and various questions cropped up which required careful consideration before progress could be made. Were the Netherlands to be included in the pact? Was Germany sure of a permanent seat on the Council of the League in view of the Spanish claim to one? Then there was the German Presidential election which resulted in Marshal von Hindenburg being returned. This at once alarmed French and Belgian opinion, and some little time had to elapse before it again calmed down. Even Austen was for a brief space perturbed at the prospect that the old soldier might try to override Dr. Stresemann, but Lord D'Abernon, who knew everything that went on in Berlin, soon relieved his mind on that score. Lastly, there was the inevitable French political crisis, as a result of which Austen had M. Briand to deal with at the Quai d'Orsay in place of M. Herriot.

This change was soon to prove all to the good, for although Austen had found M. Herriot more to his liking than he had anticipated, yet the Frenchman was always inclined to look over his shoulder at the Protocol for which he had been so largely responsible. His successor was one of the most remarkable men in modern French history, and by the time of his death had not only been Prime Minister on twelve occasions, but had held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs for seven consecutive years. M. Briand 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, and had not his government been overthrown in March, 1917, the negotiations for peace which had been initiated by the Austrian Emperor might well have been conducted to a successful conclusion. More recently his game of golf with Mr. Lloyd George at Cannes had brought him into a not altogether acceptable prominence. Austen first met M. Briand at the Council of the League of Nations in Rome in the previous December, and the sympathy between the two men was marked from the beginning. M. Briand had that ready

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wit and repertory of good stories which always endeared its possessor to Austen, but he was also marked by other qualities of more permanent value, and after his death Austen 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. He loved France passionately, yet was ever in his own phrase " a good European " ; he served the cause of Peace with all his might and in some measure it claimed him for its victim.'

On May 14th, the draft of the French reply to the German memorandum arrived at the Foreign Office, and Austen wrote to Lord Crewe that he liked ' the spirit of it.' The document required very careful study because it so obviously implied British concurrence that care had to be taken in case it implied obligations which Great Britain could not accept. In a despatch to Lord Crewe on May 28th Austen clearly laid down the limits beyond which the Government would not go. After stating that the point of departure was to be found in his speeches on March 12th and 24th, he continued :

The basic principle . . . by which His Majesty's Government are guided in their approach to the matter now under discussion is, and must be, that any new obligation which they undertake shall be specific and limited to the maintenance of the existing territorial arrangement, on the Western frontier of Germany. His Majesty's Government are not prepared to assume fresh obligations elsewhere in addition to those already devolving upon them as signatories of the Covenant of the League of Nations and of the Peace Treaties. . . .

They cannot support the proposal . . . that all such arbitration treaties and the Rhineland Pact should form an indivisible whole and be co-ordinated in one general convention.

In adopting this attitude Austen showed his sense of what was practicable, for in the state of British public

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opinion at the time a guarantee of the existing territorial position in Western Europe was the limit to which Government dared to go. By June 8th there was complete agreement between Paris and London, and the French reply was accordingly sent to Berlin.

The first stage in the negotiations which were to lead to the conclusion of the Locarno Pact was now over, but hardly was this the case than two events occurred which for a space imperilled the whole project. The Havas Agency published a statement which gave the impression that what was contemplated was a three-Power Pact of Great Britain, France, and Belgium against Germany. The effect of this message upon British and German opinion was deplorable, but its truth was soon denied. As Austen was at Geneva the Prime Minister dealt with the matter for him in the House of Commons while M. Briand proved conclusively that the statement in question had in no way been officially inspired. The storm then died down as suddenly as it had risen. The second unfortunate incident was due to an incautious remark by M. Briand himself to an American journalist which could lead to the supposition that he did not mind particularly if Austria became incorporated in the Reich: this alarmed Signor Mussolini, who was only pacified with some difficulty.

The correspondence between the British and French Governments was now published, and on June 24th Austen defended his action in the House of Commons. No inconsiderable part of his speech was devoted to answering the arguments *of* the supporters *of* the Protocol and those of the advocates of isolation; this done he proceeded to the pact which was being negotiated:

What, then, is contemplated by His Majesty's Government? The whole of the late conversations and the exchange of notes arise . . . from the initiative taken by the German Government. I have already, publicly, from this place, expressed my conviction of the good faith with which the German Government made the proposals, and of the good faith with which they proposed to maintain and continue the negotiations. I should like to add that I pay

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my tribute not only to their good faith, but to the courage and statesmanship of the men who took this bold initiative. It seems to His Majesty's Government to offer a more hopeful prospect than anything which has yet occurred since the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. So far as Great Britain is concerned, we have held, as I say, that our engagements must be strictly limited to the Western frontier ; but any engagement in regard to that frontier into which we might enter must be, not a unilateral alliance directed against some other nation or group of nations, but a mutual pact, amongst those Powers whose past differences have destroyed peace and provoked war, to maintain peace in future and to avoid recourse to war.

In the second place, we hold it to be essential that, at least contemporaneously with the coming into force of any new mutual arrangement of this kind, Germany should enter the League of Nations, and accept the obligations while receiving the rights of every other member of that society, and thus take her proper place and have her proper influence in the comity of nations and in the councils of Europe. Lastly, we hold that nothing in the new treaty should affect the rights and obligations attaching to membership of the League or Covenant, and that in those cases, and among those nations, where the danger is greatest and trouble has most often arisen, the Covenant shall be reinforced and underpinned—if I may use that expression—by mutual guarantees and treaties of arbitration. . . .

Thirdly, our guarantee becomes effective only—and in this case becomes immediately effective—if in defiance of the treaties of arbitration and of the obligations of the Covenant the wrong-doer resorts to force. For instance, one of the parties refuses to arbitrate, or having gone to arbitration refuses to obey the award. In that case our guarantee cannot be invoked to protect him, though if he does that and no more we retain our right, our liberty, subject always to our obligations under the Covenant, to decide what, if any, action we shall take. If, however, the wrong-doer in defiance of this treaty not only refuses to arbitrate or to carry out the award after that arbitral tribunal has pronounced the award against him, but also resorts to force, in that case our guarantee becomes effective

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to protect the wronged party against the wrong which is done to him. Thus the position is a guarantee to both.

Austen then proceeded to define in some detail British obligations under the pact. His peroration was not unworthy of his subject :

These proposals offer a great and a happy prospect of a better and more peaceful world. Initiated by Germany, and received in this friendly spirit by France, they will come to nothing unless this country will lend its co-operation. In view of suspicions and hatreds, too new as well as too old and too deeply rooted, such a mutual pact has no chance of ever being signed unless we take our part and give to each side the assurance that our co-operation will give, that that mutual pact will be observed not only in the letter but in the spirit which prompts its origination. I plead with my colleagues in this House, and I plead with my countrymen outside to lend this co-operation. I plead not for these proposals as a party measure, but as a national policy. I plead for them with all the earnestness that deep conviction gives, because I believe the peace of the whole world and the peace of our own land depend upon their coming to a successful fruition. Nations, like individuals, have responsibilities proportionate to their opportunities and their powers. Our nation can go to the bar of history and we can plead that we have a good record, and that our fathers were not slow to pay their tribute to the service of humanity. I plead now that we should in our day, for the sake of our children and for the sake of the generations yet unborn, show ourselves worthy of the great position we have inherited, and the great traditions of which we are proud.

Having rallied opinion in his own country firmly to his side Austen now had to ensure that there was no backsliding on the part of Berlin or Paris. The information which reached him from Lord D'Abernon showed that although Dr. Stresemann himself was showing no disposition to falter

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he was subject to a great deal of pressure, and that the Wilhelmstrasse as a whole was becoming frightened of the initiative which it had taken. Many Germans were suspicious of the French attitude, and once more the negotiations might well have broken down had not Austen been at the greatest pains to convince the German Government of his sincerity. The type of argument he addressed to Berlin may be gathered from a paragraph in his letter of July 10th to Lord D'Abernon :

It really is monstrous to allege that the French Note has twisted the original German offer. The French Note is an honest attempt to carry a step further a proposal which was German in its origin and which we assume to have as its intention the preservation of peace, the removal of the sense of insecurity, and the cultivation of more friendly relations between nations which were recently at war. If after such a response as the French Government made with our assent Germany draws back because the German Ministers have got cold feet and are frightened by their public opinion, the world will draw the natural inference. The French Note is a great act of peace. It has been recognized as such not only here but in America. If when brought to the point by such a Note the German Government draws back, all the world will see that Germany does not mean peace and will have to frame its policy in consequence.

When the German reply was received Austen was 'not pleased at all.' Berlin quibbled once more about entry to the League, and Austen told Lord D'Abernon that this was a *sine qua non* of any pact, on which no compromise was possible. As for the introduction in the pact negotiations of the question of the occupied territory, this came 'very near to being a breach of Stresemann's engagement.'

While Austen was employing a judicious mixture of threats and promises to Berlin he was not less firm in his attitude towards Paris, and he was determined that the French should not give the Germans any ground for the

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suspicions which they entertained. On July 11th, for instance, he told M. de Fleuriau that the recent debates in Parliament would have made clear to his Government the emphasis laid by all parties in Great Britain on the necessity of associating the League of Nations in the greatest possible measure with the proposed treaty. He went on to point out that it was scarcely too much to say that British public opinion would not be prepared to endorse guarantees of the far-reaching nature proposed unless it was provided that before those guarantees became operative the question whether the *casus foederis* existed had been submitted to the Council of the League of Nations for decision. Nor was this all, for when the German reply was received, much as he disliked it, Austen observed to the French that the 'outstanding feature of the German Note is its studied caution.'

At the beginning of August there was a meeting between Austen and M. Briand in London :

Foreign Office, S.W.1  
*August 11th, 1925*

MY DEAR D'ABERNON,

I snatch ten minutes to answer your letter of the 7th, and give you news of the result of my first conversation with Briand. We met this morning, he accompanied by Berthelot, Fromageot, Leger, and the French Ambassador, and I by Tyrrell, Hurst, Lampson, Selby, and Bennett.

We started at once upon the consideration of the changes that I wished to suggest in the draft of the French reply to the German Note. The attitude of the Frenchmen was admirable, and indeed, the only points at which we became really argumentative were when Fromageot first resisted an amendment advised by us in the interests of France, and secondly, when he found fault with the logic of a phrase which we had taken straight out of Briand's letter to Fleuriau. But the essential thing from our point of view is not these little details, but that the Note will conclude with a direct invitation to the Germans to enter on conversations on the basis of this correspondence. It will therefore make it easy for them to reply simply that they will be glad to arrange a meeting of representatives.

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As to this meeting, Briand was the first to insist upon a point which I had intended to make, namely :—That we must prepare for a real discussion with the Germans so as to arrive at a mutual agreement, and not another treaty imposed by the Allies upon Germany. I therefore suggested to him that we should invite the German Government to send Gaus to meet Hurst, Fromageot and a Belgian jurist in London for a preliminary exploration of the ground, in the course of which Gaus could be given a copy of the form in which we had put our ideas, and all the explanations which he might require could be furnished to him. He could then return to Berlin and discuss the general lines of our plan with Stresemann and after that Stresemann with Gaus and any other representative he chose to bring could meet Briand, Vandervelde and myself at Geneva or in the neighbourhood of Geneva where we Ministers could enter into conversation. The whole purpose of this, as you will see, is to put the Germans on an equality with us, to enable Stresemann to know in advance the general character of the propositions we shall make, and to enable him to consult, if necessary, with his colleagues in Berlin before he sees us.

You will observe that it is not part of this plan that Gaus should commit himself to anything at the London meeting. He will come here to get information, to make, if he desires, his suggestions ; above all, to ascertain what are the real intentions of the Allies, and thus to avoid misunderstandings which might arise from the presentation of a text without any opportunity for exposition or explanation.

We meet again in five minutes when we shall consider this text ; it is essential to have a text in order to clear our minds and to determine with sufficient precision the general principles which must govern any pact, but I repeat that it is our desire, and that Briand was the first to express it, that we should meet Stresemann on an equality as the representatives of Nations who are anxious to make an agreement equally acceptable to us all, as it is equally in the interests of us all.

6.0 p.m. A second meeting has gone equally well. If not yet absolutely agreed, we are very near agreement and I doubt not that we shall reach complete agreement

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to-morrow—of course, subject to the approval of our two Governments, for I must reserve the rights of the Cabinet.

In sketching the terms of a pact my object has been to secure that there shall be arbitration (judicial or by a tribunal of conciliation) in every case, and that the decision of the arbitrators should be of binding force. The only case justifying resort to force without first exhausting the procedure of conciliation would be where one of the parties had been guilty not of some minor infraction, but of such a flagrant act as constituted an immediate danger to the others. If, for instance, German armies are on the march or troops are being assembled in the demilitarized area, Germany cannot expect those who are threatened to do nothing till they are on French or Belgian soil. In such a case and only in such a case is immediate recourse to force (in order to meet force) contemplated, and what applies to Germany applies of course also to France. In such a case it is we, the guarantor, who would have to be satisfied that the flagrant act had taken place and that the immediate danger existed. If a treaty be framed on these lines Germany ought not to find anything to object to in it. . . .

All this is written very hastily and for your information. Be *very* careful how you use any part of it except in the most general terms at present—and avoid using the word *Conference*. It sounds as disagreeable to French ears as Protocol to English. Let us talk as we do here of *conversations* first between juriconsults for the juridical side of the treaties and then between politicians for the political issues. . . .

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The procedure outlined in this letter was duly adopted, and thereafter all went well for a time. The evacuation of Dusseldorf, Duisburg, and Ruhrort at the same time as the Ruhr, which was entirely due to Austen's representations in Paris and Brussels, reassured German opinion as to French intentions, and by the end of August the Italian Government had expressed its desire to be associated with the proposed pact. At the beginning of September the meeting of jurists accordingly took place in London.

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A few days later Austen was at Geneva for the quarterly meeting of the Council of the League in accordance with the decision always to attend in person which he had taken when he first assumed office. These meetings were a serious strain both upon his time and his health ; while he was in London he rarely saw the representatives of any save the Great Powers, and when they came to him he had a fairly accurate idea of what they wanted to say, so that he was able to prepare himself in advance. At Geneva the situation was very different, for he was liable to be buttonholed at any hour of the day or night by the delegate of any nation, however small, and there was no telling upon what subject he might be called to express an opinion either at very short notice or with no notice at all. This implied at any rate a passing acquaintance with the problems of every country in the world, which could only be obtained by the reading of an enormous number of papers before he went abroad. It was more than once suggested to Austen that he should take with him to Geneva either the Under-Secretary or Sir William Tyrrell, who would be able to relieve him of the necessity of talking with the representatives of the lesser Powers, but he always refused, on the ground that the latter greatly appreciated the opportunity of a discussion with him, and that in this way the influence of Great Britain both in the Council and the Assembly was enhanced. This was undoubtedly true, but it was at the expense of the health of the Foreign Secretary.

On the occasion of this visit Austen wrote a despatch which throws an interesting light upon the League of Nations in the heyday of its power and of its attitude towards the outstanding problems of the moment :

For anyone placed as I am at this moment at the head of the British delegation to the Assembly, and perhaps more particularly for one who, like myself, is also Minister for Foreign Affairs, it is interesting to compare the public debates of the Assembly with the conversations in the lobbies, or at the dinners and luncheons which bring the Ministers together, or again in their private interviews. I say that it is interesting ; a cynic would choose a different word to

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express his thought, for one cannot wholly escape the oppression caused by the wide divergence which exists between the views expressed in the lobby and the sentiments uttered in the tribune.

If Great Britain and the British Empire exercise in the long run the influence which is due to their position and their policy, it will be because we hold but one language whether on the stage or in the coulisses, because our policy and attitude, however strange or insular they may at first sight appear to foreign nations, are found by experience to be the true expression of our thoughts and convictions, and because it may thus in time come to be realized that what we say we mean, what we promise we perform, and that, if we are less ready than others to indulge in fine phrases and to win applause by oratorical appeals, it is not because we cannot experience for ourselves or appreciate in others these elevated sentiments, but because we are less ready to raise hopes which we cannot fulfil or to give lip service to principles which we cannot put into practice. . . .

M. Boncour, M. Hymans, M. Benes, M. Skrzynski, and I know not what others have mounted, or will mount, the tribune of the Assembly to profess the deep and even the passionate attachment of themselves and of the nations which they represent to the Protocol. Yet there is not one of them who in private even effects to pretend that that Protocol, if it had been adopted universally and without the alteration of a phrase or a word, would have settled the question of security and reassured their countrymen. . . .

It is beginning to be seen that the policy of His Majesty's Government offers at once greater prospects of success and, in the case of success, a surer guarantee of peace.

At Geneva, in September, Austen was able to discuss with M. Briand, M. Vandervelde (the Belgian Prime Minister), and Signor Scialoja the exact form of the invitation to be issued to the German Government to the meeting of Ministers which it was finally decided to hold at Locarno to suit the convenience of Signor Mussolini. At the very last moment, however, there was another hitch which might well have proved fatal, for the Germans suddenly announced that the

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question of war guilt must first of all be settled. If they really believed that this particular piece of blackmail would pay they were speedily undeceived. Austen was extremely annoyed at what he considered to be a definite breach of faith, and he wrote, 'The German Government, like a nagging woman, must have the last word.' He flatly refused to give way, and in face of this attitude Germany at once abandoned their demand.

On October 5th the fateful meeting began. Austen was accompanied by Sir Cecil Hurst, and Messrs. M. W. Lampson, Walford Selby, and J. C. Sterndale Bennett ; he had offered to take a Cabinet colleague with him, but Mr. Baldwin replied that this was quite unnecessary, such was his confidence in Austen. The head of the French delegation was M. Briand, of the Belgian M. Vandervelde, and of Italy Signor Scialoja, while the leading German representatives were Dr. Luther and Dr. Stresemann. Austen was slightly prejudiced against Dr. Stresemann, whom he had not previously met, on account of the difficulties which he felt that German diplomacy had quite needlessly placed in his way ; he also believed him to be a typical *junker*. On personal acquaintance being established all feelings of suspicion gave place to a close friendship which lasted until the German statesman's death four years later. Austen neglected no detail, however small, which might contribute to the success of the discussions. For example, he tried to secure a round table so that there should be neither top nor bottom, and when this proved unobtainable, he procured a square one which met his purpose. In the matter of the chairmanship he also displayed consummate tact. He had been asked by the French, Italian and Belgian delegates to preside, but he said he would only consent if the Germans joined in the invitation. This they felt unable to do in view of the state of public opinion in their own country, and suggested that the presidency should be held by each Power in turn. Austen refused to agree, and finally a compromise was reached whereby he took the chair at the first meeting, and when the procedure was settled he declared that all was so simple there would in future be no need for a chairman at all.

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There were in all nine meetings of the conference itself, and two meetings between the heads of the British, French, and German delegations. The discussions were not in the main marked by acrimony, and the sole serious difficulty was when the Germans raised the question of evacuation and reparations. Only then did breakdown appear possible, for the Allies went to the limit of concession without, however, agreement being reached. At the last moment, however, Dr. Strcsemann took his political career in his hand and decided to waive the point. All through the sessions Austen was the dominant influence, and that the pact was finally signed was as much due to his efforts in the later, as in the earlier, stages of the negotiations. There was, too, another factor without which success would never have been attained, and that was the personality of Mrs. Chamberlain, who had come to Locarno with her husband. Her sympathy and charm were never exhibited with greater effect, and without exception the delegates came under her spell. On October Ioth, which was her birthday, the French and German representatives were invited for a sail on a small steam yacht, and in that pleasant atmosphere agreement on outstanding points became possible.

On the 16th, Austen's birthday, the Pact of Locarno was initialled, and for this ceremony Signor Mussolini arrived from Rome ; he came, as he was careful to tell Sir Ronald Graham, almost entirely to see Austen, and because he knew Austen wished him to be present. What the British Foreign Secretary himself felt at this—the greatest—moment of his career is well described in a letter to Sir William Tyrrell :

British Delegation, Locarno.  
*October 18th, 1925*

MY DEAR TYRRELL,

The wonderful week is over. I have lived such days and celebrated such a birthday as it is given to no man to experience twice, and in the calm and sunshine of this Sunday morning I try to disengage my real feelings from the excitement of the moment and to winnow the corn from the chaff.

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Beyond and above all else is my sense of profound thankfulness for the success attained and for the way in which it was attained, and my deep gratitude that I was allowed to take part in it.

Next comes my wonder at the simplicity of it all. To me as I look back, it all seems so simple, so natural, so easy. Once the policy was accepted, each step followed the other as of course. We did what we did because it was inevitable that we should do it, because it was the only thing to do. Only once did I hesitate and nearly go wrong—when I thought of leaving the first drafting of a Pact to the French—and then Lampson saved me. I admit that it would have been a crucial error.

And this brings me to another reflection and a most happy one—the excellence of our team work. Everyone has done his part here. I *believe* that Hurst spoke the decisive word in the German-Polish negotiations—you know, I think, the instructions which I gave him—and everyone—• Hurst, Lampson, Selby, Bennett, and Bcntinck—has done the right thing, spoken the right words and helped the cause. I believe the stenographers and typists, the cypher room, even the melancholy Jones and his still more melancholy colleague have had their hearts in our success as much as any of us and would have felt failure as deeply ; and love does not blind me when I say that my wife by her charm and grace won all hearts and helped largely to establish and fortify the personal relations which made success possible. Indeed, I shall demand that her expenses be paid, not for the sake of the payment itself, but because it is the only outward sign that I can give of the help that she gave us. It was not wholly an accident that our birthdays mark as red-letter days in the calendar of the Conference.

I wish that I could convey to you even the least impression of the closing scene. The Press asked that it should be public. I refused, for I was determined that the end should be as simple as the beginning. We put the last touches to our work at 4 o'clock, then adjourned till 6.30 for the texts to be completed which we were to sign and initial. But before separating, we allowed three photographers to take pictures of us seated at the great square table, made by

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sawing one long table in two, which was the nearest that Locarno could come to the round table which I had tried to secure. There was no one in the room, but those who had been there at every meeting (Mussolini, of course, excepted, who now sat on my right in what had been Scialoja's place) and the Syndic who joined us at the end as he had welcomed us at the beginning.

And then the delegations went quietly away to await the hour of initialling and I brought my wife and the ladies of our delegation into the room as they wished to see it. Then Ivy proposed a cup of tea in the teashop under the arcade a few hundred paces away and we all walked out together, not thinking it worth while to use the car for so short a distance. And suddenly the great crowd of journalists, Locarnesi and visitors which lines the sidewalks of the avenue broke into applause, and cheers rang out in French and Italian, German and English till, as Lady Hurst said later, she felt that she was walking in a marriage procession.

It was a moving moment, but not so moving as when at half-past six we again took our seats quietly in that memorable room, now brightly lit, and Berthelot at my request read the *acte final*, and Hurst then took round the bound volume of all the treaties made here and the representatives of each nation in turn signed the *acte* and initialled the treaties to which his country was a party.

And then the closing scene and last words. None of us who were there will ever forget them. You might think that it would have lost something for one who like me had helped to arrange it that morning. It was not so ; it was too tense with emotion, too perfect in execution, too profoundly sincere and generous.

First, Stresemann in a few simply spoken sentences told how the representatives of Germany initialled with a full sense of their responsibility and made the Pact their own, and then in a few words of great restraint, with no direct mention of those things which lay nearest to their heart, added that they initialled in the sure confidence that these accords would have their natural consequences 'in the political and economic sphere.'

My dear Tyrrell, there are silences that say more than words and make a greater appeal than any rhetoric !

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And then Briand, large-hearted, generous Briand spoke, and I was proud for my friend and proud for his country. There spoke the true heart of chivalrous France. There shone the spirit of a Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*, of all that is best and noblest in her people and her history, as he told—his mandate exhausted, the task for which he had come completed—how he would never have begun this work, if that was to be the end, of how he was sure he spoke the mind of his Government and the great majority of his countrymen, but that be that as it might, he pledged himself immediately on his return to set to work to give the largest measure of satisfaction to the hopes which the German representatives had left unuttered but which he understood so well and found so natural and so sympathetic.

I added a single sentence. Vandervelde and Mussolini followed and the Conference was over.

And yet not quite over. For Briand in the name of all thanked me and then led by the Chancellor they all clapped their hands.

I could hardly utter my broken words of thanks.

We rose. Someone threw open the windows and held aloft the Pact in view of the waiting crowd below, and Briand and Luther appeared together at the window and then they called for me, and I too showed myself.

And then we parted, but not before the Chief Delegate of each nation, Luther the foremost, had come to thank me for the part that I had played, and Briand finding my wife waiting for me in the passage had taken both her hands in his and with tears in his eyes had spoken of my help and support, repeating again and again, '*Ah, sans lui, je ne Vaurais jamais tente!*' And next moment Mussolini, the simplest and sincerest of men when he is not posing as the Dictator, had caught her hands in his and was covering them with kisses.

The short drive home ; again the cheers of the waiting crowd, and a birthday dinner given by the whole of my staff with a real birthday cake with candles. I felt myself a little child again in spirit.

Yrs. sincerely,

dear friend and helper,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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That the conference had proved so speedily successful was in no small measure due to that careful preparation upon which Austen had insisted, and its work was finally embodied in 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 each other, and to settle all disputes between them by peaceful means. The five signatories, collectively and severally, guaranteed the maintenance of the territorial *status quo* in the West as fixed by the Treaty of Versailles, and the observance of the conditions laid down for the demilitarized zone. In all cases save one the decision whether a *casus fader is* 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 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. As Austen had provided, 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 debate in the House of Commons on the ratification of the Treaty of Mutual Guarantee took place on October 16th. In opening the debate Austen recounted the circumstances of the meeting at Locarno, and then proceeded :

I turn to the actual Treaty of Locarno, that Treaty of Mutual Guarantee which is the only treaty that His Majesty's Government propose to sign. I would first make three observations about it. In the first place, it is a treaty which is aimed at nobody, pointed at no one, threatening no one and menacing no one. In the second place it is a Treaty of Mutual Guarantee. The obligations of France to Germany are the same as the obligations of Germany to France ; the same is true of Belgium and Germany ; and

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the obligations of the guaranteeing Powers, Italy and Great Britain, are the same to Germany as they are to France or as they are to Belgium. This is not, then, a treaty directed by one group of Powers against any other Power or group of Powers, but is a Mutual Treaty of Guarantee among the Powers concerned to preserve peace on their frontiers and between themselves. The third point that I would ask the House to observe is that all the agreements initialled at Locarno conform strictly to the spirit of the Covenant and the spirit of the League of Nations, that they are placed under the guardianship of the League, that the League is the ultimate authority in regard to the issue which may be raised, and that what we have done is not to subtract from the power or the authority of the League, but to support and to underpin that authority and power for the settlement and reconciliation of conflicts between nations.

Austen then went on to analyse the articles of the treaty in detail, and to show that, as would not have been the case under the Protocol, 'the British Government of the day remains the judge, the only judge, of whether . . . immediate danger has arisen.'

I believe that a great work of peace has been done. I believe it above all because of the spirit in which it was done and the spirit which it has engendered. It could not have been done unless all the governments, and I will add all the nations, had felt the need to start a new and better chapter of international relations ; but it could not have been done unless this country was prepared to take her share in guaranteeing the settlements so come to. . . .

We who live close to the Continent, we, who cannot dissociate ourselves from what passes there, whose safety, whose peace and the security of whose shores are manifestly bound up with the peace and security of the Continent, and, above all, of the Western nations, must make our decision ; and we ask the House to approve the ratification of the Treaty of Locarno in the belief that by that treaty we are averting danger from our own country and from

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Europe, that we are safeguarding peace and that we are laying the foundations of reconciliation and friendship with the enemies of a few years ago.

The Locarno Pact was signed at the Foreign Office on the morning of December 1st, but the ceremonies attendant upon this event were necessarily curtailed by the recent death of Queen Alexandra. One incident, to which allusion has already been made, in connection with the signing of the Pact is significant. The evening before this was to take place Austen went into the room where the Pact was to be signed, and noticed a blank space on the wall. He enquired why this should be the case, and was told that the portrait of James II which usually hung there was away for the frame to be cleaned, but that it would be in its place the next morning. On reflection it seemed to Austen that the unhappy Stuart was hardly the right person to be commemorated in this way on such an occasion, and he accordingly asked Lord Londonderry if he could lend a portrait of Lord Castlercagh. This was readily forthcoming, and so the moving spirit of the Congress of Vienna looked down upon the signing of the Locarno Pact.

For his share Austen was created a Knight of the Garter, and, what pleased him even more, his wife was made a G.B.E. He was not a little doubtful about accepting such an honour for himself, but, as he wrote to his sister,

' . . . it sets, in the eyes of all foreigners, the seal upon my work ; it endows it with additional importance and me with additional authority ; and though I regret the plain \* Mr. C.' which Father wore and tho' I can \* step outside and look at myself' with a smile halfironic and halfpathetic, I have not the same affection for the ' Mr. A. C to which Neville's success condemns me, and I can reconcile myself to the ' Sir ' with the Garter while it would have been abhorrent to me in any other connection.

So much has happened since the Pact of Locarno was signed that it is none too easy to view it in the correct

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perspective. Nevertheless, it was the best-known episode in Austen's career, and by it he is often praised or condemned. In the light of what took place in the ensuing fourteen years it is not difficult to sneer at the whole business as a pious hope which was not fulfilled. There is, it must be admitted, something in the gibe, for Locarno was meant to be, not an end, but a beginning ; that this was not so was due to circumstances, chiefly economic, over which the signatories had no control. No one will deny that it brought about an amelioration of the international situation for several years, and it would be difficult to point to any other agreement between the two great wars of the present century **that** effected as much. So far as Great Britain was concerned this relaxation of the tension on the Continent allowed Mr. Baldwin to carry on his policy of appeasement at home, and it must not be forgotten that the year which followed the conclusion of the Locarno Pact was that of the General Strike. When all is said and done, Locarno enabled peace to be maintained when it would otherwise not have been, and as peace, based on justice, is the primary British interest, the Pact very definitely served a national purpose.

Austen has been accused of over-partiality to France at Locarno, but it is impossible to substantiate the allegation. For the first time since the conflict which had terminated seven years before he brought Germany into a conference with her former enemies on a basis of perfect equality, he secured her election to the Council of the League, and he persuaded the French so to modify their treaty with Poland that in the event of the latter making an unprovoked attack on Germany they would be unable to count on the support of their Western ally. It has been objected that one of the purposes of the Pact, namely the disarmament of France, was not accomplished, and that Great Britain and Germany were therefore deceived. On this point at least Austen can be heard in his own defence : ' The object of the Treaty 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.' In fine, the Locarno Pact gave Europe a breathing-space, and if Europe took but little advantage of it the fault did not lie with its author.

## CHAPTER VII

### CARES OF STATE

THE twelve months which had terminated so gloriously with the signing of the Locarno Pact had entailed very hard work, and when this immediate task was accomplished Austen obtained permission from the King to take seven weeks' holiday out of England. The original idea was that he and Lady Chamberlain should spend Christmas with Lord Lloyd, who had recently been appointed High Commissioner for Egypt, and his wife at Cairo, but on reflection Austen came regretfully to the conclusion that a political interpretation would inevitably be put upon such a visit so he decided to go to Rapallo instead, and from there he went over to Tunis for a few days. Like so many eagerly awaited holidays this was most disappointing : Lady Chamberlain had two attacks of influenza, Diane and Lawrence were in bed most of the time, and Austen himself narrowly escaped pneumonia ; only Joe enjoyed good health. The weather, too, was exceptionally severe. All the same it was a change from the routine at the Foreign Office, and Austen always enjoyed a visit to Italy. Both that country and her redoubtable dictator attracted him, and on the morrow of Signor Mussolini's visit to Locarno he had written of the Duce :

. . . All my pleasant impressions of him gained in Rome were renewed and confirmed. It is not part of my business as Foreign Secretary to appreciate his action in the domestic politics of Italy, but if I ever had to choose in my own country between anarchy and dictatorship I expect I should be on the side of the dictator. In any case I thought Mussolini a strong man of singular charm and I suspected of not a little tenderness and loneliness of heart. Meeting me but seldom and quite alone and finding me sympathetic I expect that he shows me" a side of his character which the public is never allowed to see, and even his most intimate friends but seldom if ever. I believe him to be accused of crimes in which he had no share, and I suspect

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him to have connived unwillingly at other outrages which he would have prevented if he could. But I am confident that he is a patriot and a sincere man ; I trust his word when given and I think we might easily go far before finding an Italian with whom it would be as easy for the British Government to work.

Signor Mussolini was not, it may be remarked in passing, the only dictator for whom Austen entertained feelings of respect, for he was a great admirer of Oliver Cromwell, and was always ready to take up the cudgels in the Protector's defence whenever he was afforded an opportunity.

When Austen returned to the Foreign Office he at once found himself confronted with a very difficult situation in connection with the election of Germany to a permanent seat on the Council of the League which was due to take place in March. 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 band. The fact, however, that an alteration was to be made served to whet the appetites of other nations which felt they were entitled to a permanent seat, and accordingly Poland, Brazil, and Spain all preferred claims, while more or less openly threatening to veto the election of Germany and to shake the dust of Geneva from their feet if they did not receive satisfaction. This was bad enough, but what made the situation ever worse was the fact that the Great Powers had their own favourites. M. Briand, for example, supported the Polish claim, for in the absence of Poland at the Council the French representative was forced to act as her mouthpiece, and this had many drawbacks. Signor Mussolini, too, favoured Poland, and was wholly indifferent to the pretensions of Spain and Brazil. As for Great Britain, she had been sympathetic to the Spanish claim four years before, and Austen stated her position in the House of Commons on March 4th when he said : ' I see nothing in what has happened since which should make His Majesty's Government change their attitude to that claim on principle, though the time when that claim should

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be pressed is a different question, with which I am not dealing at this moment.'

On the other hand the Germans claimed 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. In this they were supported by the Scandinavian Powers, Belgium, and Switzerland, who declared their opposition to the creation of any new permanent seat save for Germany.

In these circumstances Austen went to Geneva with the following instructions from the Cabinet :

No change in the Council can be admitted which would have the effect of preventing or delaying the entry of Germany. 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.

The rule that only Great Powers should be permanent members of the Council should, in principle, be maintained. Spain is in a special position, and may require exceptional treatment.

Neither Poland nor Brazil should be made permanent members at present, but Poland should be given a non-permanent seat as soon as possible.

The subsequent negotiations were among the most difficult that Austen had to undertake, but they were not understood in England, and he was consequently bitterly attacked 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. Further trouble was caused to Austen by differences with Lord Robert Cecil.

British Delegation, League of Nations,  
Hotel Beau Rivage, Geneva  
*March 18th, 1926*

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

Bob told me that he was sending to you the letter which I received from him late on Tuesday night. I do not

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know whether he has said anything to you of the circumstances out of which it rose. . . .

There has been a certain difference of opinion between Bob and me, not as to the object of our efforts but as to the methods by which it should be pursued. Bob being more of a pacifist than I am is naturally more prone to forcible methods and has a tendency to think that the best way of reaching agreement is by Punch's method of taking a thick stick and banging on each head as it pops up. . . .

We were confronted with so many difficulties from the moment that we got here that it was difficult to know where to begin, but in accordance with the invitation addressed to the Germans I thought it right to begin with the Locarno Powers. For more than a week we met at intervals, argued and argued and suggested one solution after another without success. A difference in the Council was a thing to be averted at almost any cost, but a difference which split the Locarno Powers into two camps on the old lines would, it seemed to me, be a disaster of unequalled magnitude.

All my efforts, therefore, were bent to averting that danger. When at last, thanks to Unden and Benes,<sup>1</sup> it had been overcome and agreement restored between us and the Germans, I felt a relief which I cannot exaggerate and I was hopeful that, in the face of this accord, Brazil would withdraw her opposition. On Thursday morning, however, Brazil's attitude was still very threatening. When, therefore, Briand came to see me in response to the urgent message which I had sent to him to say that to attempt to take the Swedish seat for Poland and to give Benes' seat to another member of the Little Entente would be regarded as a dirty trick and that I could have no part or share in it, and when he had admitted that, as I expected, this proposal emanated from Roumania and he quite agreed that it was impossible, we naturally turned our attention to what was to be done if Brazil proved immovable. I proposed to him that he and I should at once go across to discuss this matter with the Chancellor and Stresemann. He agreed, but, owing to the engagements of the Germans, we were unable to meet them till half-past two. We then explained the situation to them as follows :

<sup>1</sup> Representatives of Sweden and Czecho-Slovakia respectively.

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AFTER GENEVA : THE DUEL BETWEEN LLOYD GEORGE AND  
CHAMBERLAIN .

*Chamberlain* : I am not in the habit of sacrificing my friends for the sake of  
winning the friendship of my old enemies.

From the cartoon in *Le Soir*, Paris, March 29th, 1926.

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There was now complete agreement between the Germans and the other Locarno Powers. Whatever Spain might do after the Council vote, she was not going to place any obstacle in the way of the attribution of the permanent seat to Germany. The only obstacle that remained was therefore the attitude of Brazil. Mello Franco had declared that his instructions were imperative. Briand and myself had both telegraphed urgent remonstrances to Rio and, as I learnt for the first time from the Germans, the South American Powers had made similar representations to Mello Franco, though the terms of their declaration, which was subsequently published, only became known to me at midnight on that day. What then were we to do? Were we to take a vote in the Council in which owing to the attitude of Brazil the German claim would be rejected, or should we, adopting a view which Underhill had already expressed at an earlier stage, adjourn the whole matter to September? The Germans at once said that they would prefer adjournment to an adverse vote which would be considered in Germany as insulting and might probably result in the withdrawal of the German request for admission; but they themselves suggested that, in order to save Locarno, we should issue an agreed *communiqué*, the terms of which were dictated by Briand in their presence and accepted in principle subject to close examination of the wording.

From this meeting Briand and I went straight to a public meeting of the Council where I hastily gave to Bob the results of our gathering. He at once said that he disapproved of my action, but discussion between us was impossible as the public business of the Council was proceeding and I had to attend to it. The public sitting was followed immediately by a private gathering of the members of the Council, at which I asked Bob to be present (as I have done at all the gatherings at which his presence was possible) and there we communicated to our colleagues the decision and the terms of the proposed *communiqué*. Bob then passed me a scribbled note to the effect that he entirely disapproved the arrangement and that he could take no responsibility for it. I replied in the same way that it was obviously impossible for me to withdraw then and that I must and would take the whole responsibility.

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As a result of the Council discussion, some alterations of form were made in the *communiqué* and as soon as the Council finished I returned to inform the Germans of the result. They had no difficulty in accepting these changes, as we had none in accepting the changes which they had introduced, but it had been thought better by our colleagues in the Council that an alteration should be made in the procedure which we had agreed with the Germans for the meeting of the Assembly next day. We had contemplated that, as was eventually done, Briand should come to the tribune after I had spoken and moved a resolution expressing the regret of the Assembly at our present failure and its confident hope that the difficulties would be overcome in September. It had first been suggested that I should move this resolution, but I thought that it would have additional importance if it were moved by Briand. The members of the Council objected that the resolution would lead to an angry debate and proposed that Briand and I should speak but without making a motion. The Chancellor and Stresemann at once said that this was a fundamental alteration from their point of view. They attached great importance to a gesture of welcome from the Assembly, which they thought would go far to allay or avert irritation in Germany. I accordingly sent for Briand to join us and he at once agreed that in that case he would move the resolution.

I got back to my hotel at 8.45 p.m. having been due to dine with the President of the Council at 8.0 p.m. I dressed in a great hurry and we were able to sit down to dinner shortly after nine. Just as I was leaving at something after 11.0 p.m., Ishii informed me that a member of the Spanish Delegation who was dining with him said that if I announced in the Assembly that the veto of Brazil prevented the entry of Germany, the Brazilian Delegate would follow me in the tribune and say that the opposition, if any, did not come from Brazil. On hearing this amazing statement, I asked Ishii to summon a private meeting of the Council for 9.45 the next morning (Wednesday) so that we might consider it before the Assembly met. At this meeting I said that in view of this statement and of the representations made by the South American States, I must decline to go to the tribune to make my report as President of First Committee

until I knew exactly where Mello Franco stood. Did he maintained his statement that he had formal instructions to veto Germany's claim to a permanent seat unless a permanent seat was at the same time accorded to Brazil, or had he received fresh instructions, or, again, was there any chance that if there were a further adjournment such fresh instructions might be received in consequence of the action taken by the South American States? And I said that if there were the slightest chance of these instructions being sent, I would propose an adjournment. Mello Franco replied that his instructions were imperative and final and that it was impossible that he should ask for their reconsideration.

The rest you know.

That is, I believe, the whole story. My instructions were to make it my chief business to get Germany in and in the last resort to agree to any proposals having that result which could secure unanimity in the Council. These instructions I faithfully fulfilled, as you know. When it became probable and finally almost certain that nevertheless Brazil would block the way, I devoted, and I am sure I was right, all my energy to preventing that misfortune being turned into a disaster by its creating a new divergence between Germany and ourselves. In this I have succeeded. Had it not been for the patience and the sympathy I showed with the point of view of other nations, this result would not have been achieved.

I had been working something like sixteen hours a day for several days on end and it seemed to me an unnecessary addition to my anxieties that when I got back to my hotel at midnight on Tuesday, I should be met with the threat of immediate resignation by Bob. It was the more unexpected since even if there had been a difference between us that afternoon about procedure, it was only the day before that, when in a private meeting of the members I altered my position in some particular to meet his views and pleaded strongly in favour of them without betraying my own, he had passed me a similar pencil note of thanks adding \* it is a pleasure to work with so loyal a colleague.'

What a screech! However, I thought you ought to **know** the whole story. I am in great hopes that as I said

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at the beginning the incident will have no sequel and that you will not be further troubled about it.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Events proceeded as outlined in this letter, and in September the election of Germany to the Council took place, although the membership of that body had been increased in the meantime.

Strenuous as had been the League meeting in March the rest of the year did not make the same calls upon Austen as the previous twelve months had done, though in April he was writing to his sister 'd——Brazil or its President especially, and may the Yellow River blot China off the map and King Fuad die of any of the plagues which afflicted his ancestors.' Egyptian and Chinese affairs, however, will be treated in their proper place, and apart from them the year was not unduly troublesome ; he liked the work, and ere long he wrote : ' The Foreign Office really is terrific work if you do it. Not only is there so much of it, but the issues are so big and the consequences may be so serious if you decide wrongly. But it is fascinatingly interesting and it is really rewarding to find for how much we count and how high our influence now stands.' At home the spring was marked first by the coal strike (' happily for me coal is other men's business') and then by the General Strike ; these difficulties served to enhance the reputation of the Prime Minister in his eyes ; ' Baldwin has the right character for the job since all men trust him and rightly, but I wonder whether he is quick enough to see and to seize an opportunity when it presents itself, or himself to create it. All I can say is that he has developed amazingly since he became Prime Minister a second time.'

Although Austen did not appear in the public eye during the year 1926 as much as had been the case during its predecessor, he was extremely active in seeing that the seeds sown at Locarno bore their due fruit. His task was, in short, to ensure that the Germans were reasonable and that the French gave them reason to be so. Austen was, as he was himself the first to admit, and as has been

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mentioned before, often accused of being unduly partial to France, and some colour was lent to this belief by a rather unfortunate sentence in which he said, during the course of a speech made the following year, that he loved that country like a woman. However this may be, he never hesitated to impress his views on the Quai d'Orsay, and at the end of July he wrote to M. Briand on the subject of outstanding differences between Great Britain and France :

The first and perhaps the most important of the questions which in this connection are the object of anxious concern to me, and I must add to the British Government, is that of the number of troops for occupation in the Rhineland. I have never left you in doubt as to our views on this question, and more than once I have begged you to use your influence and authority to remove what we cannot but recognize as a well-founded complaint on the part of Germany. I need scarcely recapitulate the facts of the case. In the note from the Ambassadors' Conference of the 14th November last, at the time that arrangements were made for the evacuation of the first zone, the German Government were given an express undertaking that the occupying troops in the remaining zones would be considerably reduced. You will remember the verbal assurances which you gave to the German delegation at Locarno and which you confirmed in London on the 1st December last, that the evacuation of the Cologne zone would not have the result of increasing the number of troops in the second and third zones. Yet this is what has in fact happened. According to the information supplied to me by the War Office the number of troops in the second and third zones to-day is greater by over 10,000 than it was on September 1st last and by nearly 17,000 as compared with November 1st last. It is no exaggeration to say that the false position in which we are thus placed has constantly embarrassed our relations with the German Government and has given them an easy retort (which they have naturally not been slow to use) to the remonstrances which, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, I have from time to time had occasion to



*Americo Pestiti*

WITH SIGNOR

THE MEDITERRANEAN

On Sir Austen's right is Sir Warden Chilcott, on his left the Duce; Lady Chamberlain is facing the camera, talking to Count Pantici (bareheaded); the other figure on the right is Sir Austen's son, Joe Chamberlain.



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make against acts on their side equally alien to the spirit and accords of Locarno.

I know that you desire as much as I do to see these numbers reduced but I am alarmed at our inability to get anything done. As it is, we stand guilty of what the British Government feel to be a clear breach of faith, and while I have hitherto refrained from pressing the point to extremes, I must beg you to remember that we too have our public opinion to consider and that it is becoming increasingly difficult to defend a condition of things which is irreconcilable with assurances given in my presence and to which, through the Ambassadors' Conference, His Majesty's Government actively assented.

A second question is the proposal to maintain troops in the Saar for the purpose of safeguarding the communications of the Rhineland armies. The objection His Majesty's Government have here felt to the French point of view derives not from any express undertaking given to the German Government, but from the terms of the treaty itself, which provides that there shall be no military service in the Saar. It was therefore with much gratification that I heard you announce at Geneva in March last the intention of the French Government to withdraw one battalion of their troops from the territory by May 31st and the remainder step by step. After this declaration it was a profound disappointment to learn that the majority of the Saar Governing Commission (including the French member) proposed in their report to the Council of the 21st May that a minimum of two battalions plus a railway commission of some 70 members should remain in the Saar at the Governing Commission's disposal to ensure the freedom of transport and transit. Our disappointment was the greater when you found yourself unable to accede to my request that the French delegate on the League Council should be instructed not to accept the majority report. Once again, however, I took steps to avoid a public divergence of views with the French Government and accepted your suggestion that consideration of the matter at Geneva should be postponed till the September meeting. . . .

You will not suspect me of any desire to embarrass you in the midst of your other grave preoccupations by

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thus pressing these questions on your attention, nor need I assure you, my dear friend, that I would not show so much insistence on the settlement of these questions if I were not convinced that their continued existence furnishes our critics and other mischief makers with the argument that our countries differ in essentials, whereas you and I know that such divergence is not fundamental. By removing such obstacles we are, therefore, materially strengthening the bonds which already unite us. This is the justification which I plead for my importunity. My sole object is to preserve our unity of thought and action and to secure by friendly discussion in advance agreement on those issues which, unless settled in the meantime, seem to me inevitably destined to place us next September in the embarrassing and indeed distressing position of having to adopt in public opposing attitudes on questions in which I am convinced that the permanent interest of France and ourselves is the same.

Austen went to Geneva in September for the meeting of the League when Germany was admitted to membership, and after that he went for a cruise in the Mediterranean. Signor Mussolini came to Leghorn especially to meet him, and insisted on Austen inspecting an Italian destroyer so that he might be saluted with 19 guns. The change was just what Austen needed, and he enjoyed visits to Corsica and Elba with his wife and elder son. 'We bathe twice or three times a day over the yacht's side ; we sleep on deck ; we eat and admire the view and eat again, perhaps take a short walk on shore, bathe again, cat again and so the day passes. Imagine *me* barefooted in a cotton shirt, duck trousers, a cholera belt *et plus rien!*' On his way home he saw M. Briand in Paris so as to kill the rumours that his meeting with Signor Mussolini had some sinister significance.

Meanwhile, the French Foreign Minister and Dr. Stresemann had had their famous interview at Thoiry. It had taken place with Austen's knowledge and blessing, but he rather felt that the two statesmen 'dreamed dreams and saw visions that will not easily be realized, letting their

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imagination rather run away with them.' Austen has been criticized in some circles for not having done more to bring France and Germany together, but he did not believe that this was a matter which could be hurried, and in any event Locarno was the limit beyond which neither the British Government nor the British people were prepared to go. He was therefore satisfied to let time work, as he thought, on his side, and he contented himself, as we have seen, with smoothing out such differences as arose. He took care that no wedge should be driven in between Great Britain and France, but he was ready enough to meet Germany's just grievances, and there can be no doubt that he, M. Briand, and Dr. Stresemann reposed very great trust in one another. Had he known of the economic blizzard which was so soon to blow across the world, or suspected that Herr Hitler was waiting the opportunity which this catastrophe would bring him, Austen might have acted differently, but all this was hidden from him as from his contemporaries.

The autumn of the year 1926 was not to prove so arduous for Austen as had been that of its predecessor, but it brought its cares all the same. Not the least of them was the Imperial Conference, which arrived at decisions of the utmost importance to the whole British Empire. Save as a member of the Government of the day Austen was not, of course, specially concerned with the constitutional problems discussed on this occasion, but he had to explain his foreign policy to the Dominion statesmen, and this took up a great deal of time: \* Something of a cock-a-doodle,' he described it, 'but justified by the facts.' Moreover, as his father's son, he was always deeply interested in anything that affected the Empire, and he had thus a double cause for satisfaction in the support which he received from the Conference for the attitude which he was adopting in Europe and in the Near and Far East.

When I made to the House of Commons a statement of the results of Locarno, one reproach or objection was offered which I felt in my heart to be untrue, but to which I had no complete answer. It was suggested that the work

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of peace carried out by Great Britain at Locarno might prove a source of division in the councils of the British Empire. I hope you<sup>1</sup> will allow me to recall, not with pride but with profound gratitude, the satisfaction expressed by the Imperial Conference for the work which was accomplished at Locarno, and the congratulations of all His Majesty's other Governments in his widespread Empire to his Government here at home on the contribution we have been enabled to make to the peace of the world.

He acclaimed the decisions of the Conference as proof that 'we have found the secret of making unity develop step by step with liberty', and he told his Bristol audience that he came from the Conference

. . . having sat through its most important deliberations, with the profound assurance that that which lay at the root of my father's policy is henceforth safe ; that, whatever may be the method by which our unity expresses or confirms itself in any time of stress or trouble, the seven self-governing nations of the British Empire will stand one and undivided before the world.

In a private letter he wrote : 'Hertzog goes back with an entirely new conception of the British Empire and declares that we shall have a closer co-operation than ever. Mackenzie King, now master in his own house, has been a different man and most helpful. Even the Irish, with all the sensitiveness and rawness of their public opinion, have worked harmoniously and with a real desire to co-operate, and I am confirmed in my belief that only time is needed to bring them heartily on our side.'

While the Imperial Conference was still sitting, Austen had to deliver, on November 2nd, an address at Glasgow University where had been elected Rector. He chose as his subject 'The League of Nations', and he devoted a great deal of time to the preparation of his paper. He

<sup>1</sup> He was speaking at Bristol on November 23rd.

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referred jokingly to the research ' which is intended to give it a little air of learning and a historical setting suited to the occasion,' and went on, ' I need not add that the " learning " is very superficial, or at least such " as every schoolboy knows." ' In this he was unfair to his own attainments, for, as has been shown, he was widely read, especially in biography and history, and he was able to draw upon an unusually extensive reserve of knowledge in his address at Glasgow.

After a reference to the fact that ' all but thirty years have passed since my father stood in this place to return his thanks to you for the honour you had done him by his election to the high position for which you have now chosen me,' Austen proceeded to discuss earlier efforts to bring about peace on earth. He referred to the mediaeval conceptions on this subject, to the Grand Design of Sully ' which Sully never saw,' and to the ideas of the younger Pitt. Then he passed to the ideas of his great hero, Lord Castlereagh, which he outlined in some detail :

Yet we know the result. The ideas of Castlereagh, never fully grasped by his colleagues at home, never really accepted by his collaborators abroad, were overshadowed by the principles of the Holy Alliance. Viewed from the first with suspicion by the smaller States which were excluded from their meetings, these assemblies of the Great Powers became not a guarantee of peace but an engine of reaction. Castlereagh himself felt that the Congress ' was slipping from us without our quitting it,' and his successor gave a new direction to British policy. The attempt to preserve peace by periodic congresses of the Great Powers failed because there was no real unity in their counsels, no common purpose in their policies, and no force of public opinion to control their jealousies or to direct their efforts.

After this he gave a brief survey of the nineteenth century, during the course of which he was careful to point out that ' it would be idle to assume in the face of history that democracy provides a guarantee of peace.' This

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survey brought Austen to the actual subject of his address, and he spoke at length both on the work which the League had already accomplished, and on what it hoped to accomplish in the future. Here, however, he sounded a note of warning :

It is intended to produce the habit of working together and, by promoting co-operation in work which raises no dangerous international rivalries and gives occasion to no serious international controversy, to engender a spirit of trust and confidence which in more critical matters and on graver occasions may render easier its great task as conciliator and peacemaker.

There is but one danger that I see in this endeavour ; it is that we should allow our zeal for good causes to outrun our discretion, and should be tempted to overlook the limitations inherent in our constitution, and so to meddle with matters which lie wholly within the scope and authority of the individual national governments and are not dependent for their solution on international agreement. We must remember, when deciding what work the League should undertake and what it should decline, that it is an international and not a super-national body—an association of equal and sovereign States, not a super-State with an independent and overriding authority of its own.

Austen held this view to the end of his life, and in January, 1935, he wrote to a correspondent who had asked his opinion of the scheme of Lord Davies for the creation of an International Air Force, ' I myself think that his proposal, if adopted, would destroy the League.'

Having given this warning Austen stated his reasons, based on recent events at Geneva, for suggesting that the wisest policy was to proceed slowly. He developed this theme for some five or ten minutes, and declared that ' the world is not yet ready for a single Parliament of Man. The sense of nationality, the love of national independence, were never stronger than they are to-day ; the very battle-cries of the Great War appealed to them and confirmed them.'

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An examination of the place of the Locarno Pact followed, and Austen concluded with the expression of an optimism which, but a few years later, he was no longer to entertain :

As I conclude my survey, hope predominates. The League of Nations, though not yet universal, is an accomplished, an established fact. It has proved its usefulness by solving problems which, without its aid, would have been a danger to the peace of the world. It has established the practice of international co-operation, and is a standing reminder to all nations of their dependence on one another. It has afforded to disputants a tribunal to whose mediation or decision both parties could yield with dignity where neither could have yielded directly to the other. The peaceful settlement of international differences has been made easier ; resort to war between civilized countries has been made more difficult. A new spirit is abroad in the world. Through blood and tears we have travelled so far. Soon we shall commit to a younger generation the care of the lamp now once more dimly burning within the Temple of Peace.

Austen was justly proud of this address, and among those to whom he sent a copy was Signor Mussolini, with, according to Sir Ronald Graham, the happiest consequences in respect of the Italian statesman's attitude towards the League of Nations.

Another copy Austen sent to his old friend Mr. F. S. Oliver, and in reply to the other's comments he expressed himself more frankly than he had thought expedient at Glasgow :

2 Morpeth Mansions, S.W.i  
*17th January, 1927*

MY DEAR FRED,

I had meant to write to you at Christmas when I had a little more leisure, but there were so many other letters to write that though each night I said ' I must write to

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Fred', the letter which should have accompanied my Rectorial never got written. Now comes your acknowledgment. What I had wanted to say to you was how often you were in my thoughts and how much I missed the almost daily exchange of ideas which we used to have at the Club. I should like such a 'crack' with you as you speak of and I must try to see if I can arrange a visit to you when the weather gets pleasanter and China is less with us.

As to the League, it is, as I said in my Address, already a fact and a fact which those who are conducting the foreign affairs of European nations at any rate cannot afford to ignore. But I profoundly agree with you that its future depends upon the wisdom and moderation with which it is conducted in the present, and upon that modicum of luck which Napoleon said a general was entitled to include in his calculations when he had done all that human foresight could do. Being temperamentally inclined to moderate and unsensational ways, I do not suppose if I had had anything to do with the League's foundation that I should have aimed at anything so ambitious.

However, there it was when I came into office as Foreign Minister, and I determined that as far as possible I would be our representative on the Council of the League while I remained in office. This had not been the general practice of my predecessors, and the result had been that we pursued one policy at Geneva and another in London, and I found that our attitude had aroused great suspicion and was causing even our good faith to be questioned. Being led in this way to attend the League, I found it a much more useful body than I had expected, much freer from intrigue (at least as far as the Council itself is concerned) and with a corporate sense and a homogeneity that surprised me.

There is no doubt that the continuous attendance of the British Foreign Secretary has helped to strengthen this feeling and to increase the importance of the Council meetings. If I had not gone, I doubt whether Briand would have gone. If we were not in the habit of attending, Germany would have been represented by an Ambassador or official instead of by Stresemann. As we all three go (and indeed even before Germany entered the League) it

becomes increasingly a gathering point for the foreign ministers of other countries. At the time of the last Assembly I was told there were no less than seventeen foreign ministers present, and the personal relationships thus established are no small part of the advantage at present derived from the League.

My policy in regard to it is to let it develop slowly and naturally, to avoid radical changes and ambitious attempts to recast its constitution, to pray that it may not have to face a great crisis until it is much more firmly established—but meanwhile to try and keep the four great Powers of Europe together, for if they are in agreement, no great trouble is to be expected.

But I am drifting into another pamphlet, and all I wished to do was to say what a pleasure it was to see your handwriting again and that I shall try to arrange a meeting with yourself. Give my love to Katie. My best wishes to you both.

Yrs. ever,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

December saw Austen at Geneva again, and on the way there he and Lady Chamberlain spent what he described as 'a pleasant two days in Paris.' Austen always enjoyed a French play, and on this occasion he went to see *Maztre Bolbeck* which he considered 'very well acted and wittily written.' What followed showed that he still retained that zest of life to which allusion has so often been made in these pages :

Returning to the Embassy about midnight my thoughts dwelt lovingly on bed, but I was ordered to change my swallowtail and choker for a dinner-jacket and black tie, and in pursuance of a little plot between Ivy and Lady Crewe the Secretaries were dismissed and escorted by Qtiinoncs<sup>1</sup> and young Alington off we went again 'chez Fisher,' champagne and excellent songs, and then on to Josephine Baker, more champagne, poached eggs and an

<sup>1</sup> Spanish Ambassador to France.

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Octaroon in a few glad rags dancing and making the guests dance negro dances. I escaped the ordeal not without difficulty, and after trying yet a third house of entertainment of the same kind got home and to bed at 4.0 !

Austen had special cause for satisfaction with the meeting of the Council of the League which he went on from Paris to attend for not only did he notice a marked increase in British prestige as a result of the events of the previous two years, but he also received notification of the fact that he had been awarded half the reserved Nobel Peace Prize for 1925 ; the other half went to Mr. Dawes, the Vice-President of the United States and author of the Dawes Plan. The Prize for 1926 was awarded to M. Briand and Dr. Strcsemann, so that the protagonists of Locarno were equally honoured. Austen was at least as pleased at the company with which he shared this distinction as he was with the distinction itself.

The new year, which was to be a particularly trying one so far as Egyptian and Chinese affairs were concerned, began in other ways quietly enough. The Home Secretary had gone abroad, and Austen was kept busy signing his papers for him, though he had made it plain that while he had no objection to confirming a death sentence he would in no circumstances be party to any flogging. However, in spite of this, and of his work at the Foreign Office, he found time to get some reading done. One of the books which he read in the opening days of 1927 was Mr. Guedalla's *Palmerston* : he liked it in spite of his lack of enthusiasm for its subject, though he remarked of Mr. Guedalla's style that it was ' too unequal for my taste, reminding me as Birrell said that Winston's book on the war did him of the buzzing of a blue-bottle fly.' Austen also read at this time M. Louis Bertrand's *Louis XIV*, and found it ' a pleasant study of the man.'

If the preoccupation of the year was the troubled state of Egypt and China there were other worries which were only relatively of minor importance. Constant vigilance was required to keep France and Germany on the road on which they had been set at Locarno, and not the least of the

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many difficulties which Austen encountered in this connection was the fact that M. Briand and Dr. Stresemann were liable to become extremely expansive whenever they met at Geneva, while on their return to their respective capitals it was not infrequently found that they had promised more than their colleagues or public opinion would immediately allow them to perform. To prevent the subsequent disillusionment on either side of the Rhine from having dangerous consequences recourse was then often had to Austen's good offices. There was also another neighbour of France, namely Spain, with whom M. Briand sometimes had difficulties, notably over Tangier, in spite of the recent co-operation of the two countries in the campaign against Abd-el-Krim, and without playing too prominent a part Austen did what he could to bring those two Powers together.

Above all there was the tension between Paris and Rome which all the exertions of the Foreign Office and its chief were not really successful in lessening. M. Briand genuinely suspected Signor Mussolini of harbouring the most nefarious designs against France, and in this he was encouraged by the politicians of the Left and by the Grand Orient. The Duce, on the other hand, was irritated beyond measure at the attacks on him in the French Press, and by the continual outrages to which Fascists in France were subjected. Accordingly, the two Powers intrigued against one another in every capital in Europe, and this rendered most difficult the position of Great Britain, which had no other ambition than to keep on the best of terms with both. Austen was continually writing to Lord Crewe and to Sir Ronald Graham bidding them pour oil on the troubled waters of Franco-Italian relations, for he believed in the suspicions neither of M. Briand nor of Signor Mussolini, but the most he was able to accomplish was to prevent the situation getting any worse.

As if this was not enough the attitude of Russia was unsatisfactory in every way. The Soviet Government was everywhere working against Great Britain, and from the moment that he took office Austen was subjected to great pressure by his colleagues in the Cabinet and by the Conservative majority in the House of Commons to break

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off relations with Moscow. As early as November, 1924, Mr. Churchill had advised that the recognition of the Soviets, accorded by the previous Government should be revoked as Russia had violated her engagements, but Austen replied that this would be \* a very grave ' step. Since then evidence of Russian bad faith had multiplied, and in May, 1927, the Arcos raid took place to find a stolen military manual which the police believed was, or had been, on the premises of what was supposed to be a purely commercial organization. Austen was extremely averse from even appearing to give an anti-Bolshevist colour to his policy, for he believed this would only serve to complicate the general European situation by inducing the Russians to work harder than ever against the League ; indeed, in pursuance of this determination not to embitter Anglo-Soviet relations he even discouraged the visit to England of the Grand Duke Nicholas, and thereby annoyed the King not a little. Nevertheless, in spite of all his efforts he met with no response from Moscow, and there was nothing for it but the course of action which he had so long deprecated.

In these circumstances it was small wonder that before the end of the year Austen was beginning to feel the strain again, and on November 6th he wrote to his sister :

I have had a very heavy week. Breakfast each morning at 8.30 and twice to bed at 2.30 a.m. And the character of the work—no one not engaged on it can get an idea of its daily responsibilities and anxieties. Take last Thursday for example. I began work at 9.45. An Egyptian Comtee. kept me thinking my hardest from 11.0 till 2.15. Then a quick lunch at home to talk business with Joe who was up for the day to see his dentist. At the office again at 3.30 and despatches and an interview with a Minister till 4. From 4 till 6.30 with Lord Lloyd on Egypt again—hard thinking, close attention, a delicate and most important interview. As soon as he left, I sent for Tyrrell, but found I must turn aside to take a grave decision involving the use of troops at Hankow (most urgent). No sooner was this done than I was called upon for an equally rapid decision

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on a bootlegging, hi-jacking action of a U.S.A. preventive man—U.S.A. Govt, not unfriendly, but unwilling to do the right thing because it would show up the rottenness of their own service ! Oh, yes, and before you see Tyrrell will you please settle a rather thorny point that has arisen in the Iraq negotiations as the CO. must give King Feisal our decision when the negotiators meet at 10.0 a.m. to-morrow ?

And then Tyrrell. Got home at 7.50. Chilcott waiting to speak to me about another Egyptian matter. Dispose of that in 20 minutes. Dress hurriedly and out to dinner. To bed at 2.30 and at work by 9.30 next morning on further Egyptian papers left over when I went to bed. To the office ; another Chinese crisis at Canton this time, and again the possibilities of a decision on the use of ships and troops.

For quantity and quality there is no such office anywhere, I do believe.

As had been the case in the previous year Austen took his holiday after the September meeting at Geneva ; indeed, it would have been impossible for him to get away earlier as Mr. Baldwin went to Canada in July, and he asked Austen to act as Prime Minister in his absence. On this occasion Austen, too, enjoyed a yachting trip in the Mediterranean, but he did not visit Italy for fear of giving rise to undesirable political speculation, and instead he cruised in Spanish waters. This gave him an opportunity of meeting for the first time the genial dictator of Spain, General Primo de Rivera. The original plan had been that the two men should meet at Barcelona, and Austen subsequently learnt, somewhat to his horror, that in this event the Spaniard's intention had been to give him lunch at Tibidabo and then to walk with his guest along the Ramblas, an advertisement of the stability of the regime with which Austen thought it ' perhaps not very expedient ' that the British Foreign Secretary should be associated. The meeting took place at Palma de Mallorca, and Austen was \* agreeably surprised ' at the manner and outlook of the Spanish dictator :

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He was at once more serious and more reasonable than I had expected to find him. I suppose I had somehow got into my mind the impression that he was rather a swash-buckler and that in international affairs he was very much like a bull in a china shop. This is certainly not the impression that he left upon me, though I did feel that he was very amateurish and, if I may so express myself, 'very young.' Is not this rather confirmed by his suggestion of the stroll down the Ramblas? Is there not something a little childish about this desire to prove to a stranger by a demonstration of that kind the estimation in which he is held by his country? Be that as it may, I found him much more attractive than I had expected. I was extremely glad to have an opportunity of making his acquaintance, and I hope that the establishment of personal relations between us will increase the influence which I think we already have in Spain.

Two months later, at Geneva, Austen made the acquaintance of another dictator, Marshal Pilsudski. Relations between Poland and Lithuania were particularly bad, and the Great Powers were trying to secure a peaceful settlement of the points at issue between the two countries. The chief characteristic of the Lithuanian delegate, M. Voldemaras, Austen found to be 'his intense suspicion of everybody and everything. He is a curious type, half peasant and half professor, and his conversation with me, for example, was a mixture of the logic of the professor with the suspiciousness of the peasant.' Austen's description of the Polish dictator is well worth quoting at length :

Marshal Pilsudski arrived at noon that day. Zaleski invited me to meet him at a luncheon to which Briand, Boncour, and Loucheur were also invited, but I was obliged to refuse the invitation as Stresemann and some other members of the Council were lunching with me. But I suggested that I should call upon the Marshal at 3 o'clock. I arrived a few minutes late but in time to be included in the inevitable photograph. As soon as this ceremony was

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finished the Frenchmen left and I remained for my conversation with the Marshal. I have called it a conversation but it is not easy to converse with Pilsudski as he interrupts at any moment if he does not like or thinks he is not going to like what you are saying, and his own talk is discursive and often irrelevant.

Zaleski had warned me that if I ever had half an hour's talk with the Marshal he would inform me with pride that he was descended from the last pagans in Europe. Evidently Zaleski knows the Marshal well, for I received from him a rambling account of his Lithuanian origin and his family history for several centuries, and the pagan ancestors were not forgotten. When he consented to attend to business, it was to demand that the state of war should cease and that diplomatic relations should be resumed. When I suggested that it might be useful to place two neutral officers upon the frontier to prevent untowards incidents, or to settle them rapidly and peacefully if they arrived, he became extremely irritable and replied very much like a querulous invalid lady who does not wish to take the medicine recommended by her doctor.

When I persisted, he declared that he was sick of League controls, that they had had so many in Poland that the mere name stank in the nostrils of the people, that the last commissioner from the League, on arrival at Warsaw, had been smothered in rotten eggs by a group of angry women, and that the proposal was offensive to him and showed that I doubted his word. He had no hostile intentions towards Lithuania. On the contrary, he was himself a Lithuanian, and he always defended Lithuania in Poland. (Briand afterwards told me that the Marshal in his presence had spoken to Zaleski with the greatest contempt of 'You Poles.') It was impossible, however, in any case for me to carry the matter further and I told the Marshal that as he insisted on misinterpreting my proposal I should not press it. Thus reassured, he became genial and again launched into a long digression, in the course of which he was often amusing and sometimes unintelligible. . . .

On Saturday, Briand invited the Marshal and Zaleski to lunch with the French Delegation and convoked Stresemann, Scialoja, and myself to meet him. I have seldom

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assisted at a more amusing gathering. The Marshal never ceased talking, sometimes in German to Stresemann, sometimes in French to the rest of us. He was in excellent humour, telling stories of his experience on the Austro-Russian front and paying particular compliments to one of the German generals, which were carefully noted by Stresemann. Then he explained that his real ambition was to be Chief of Staff for the League. All the nations should place their troops at the disposal of the League, but the neighbours of an outlawed state should never be asked to act against it. They should only be expected to give free passage to the League troops through their territory.

I remarked that this would not suit me at all, as Great Britain being an island we should be held to have no neighbours and it would always be our troops which would be employed. The Marshal replied that, on the contrary, as an island state we were neighbours to every other, but we should contribute our fleet. I told him the first part of his proposition reassured me and, since our troops would never be employed, I accepted his suggestion on condition that that part of the British fleet which was at the disposal of the League was kept on the Lake of Geneva.

We continued chaffing in this sort of way, the Marshal behaving like an overgrown schoolboy, roaring with laughter at his own jokes and talking down everybody else. But he is a dangerous individual. Briand tells me that he had got his mobilization orders in his pocket and that he actually showed them to Briand. He had come with the idea that the League would not be able to secure the declaration of 'a state of peace,' and was prepared to go straight back to Warsaw to settle the matter forcibly. As, however, the Council was more successful than he had anticipated, he hurried back to prepare for the elections instead of for war. He told us with much glee that he had fixed the feast-day of St. Casimir, patron saint of Lithuania, whose body is buried at Vilna, as the date of the elections.

The year ended with a violent controversy over the Prayer Book, and this caused Austen to write :

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Scratch me and you find the Nonconformist. I may not be a very orthodox Unitarian if there is such a thing as orthodoxy in that very heterodox body, but in every fibre of my being I am Protestant with the biggest 'P' that you can put to it, and though, like Neville, I thought it right to vote for the Deposited Book, I didn't, and I don't like it.

Apart from the troubles in Egypt and China the year 1928 was chiefly remarkable for long negotiations on the outlawing of war and the limitation of armaments ; so far as the former were concerned the practical result was the Kellogg Pact, which professed to outlaw all save defensive war, and which in the long run merely produced a situation where the aggressor found that it paid him better not to declare war on his victim. As for the discussions on disarmament they served no more useful purpose than those which had gone before or were to follow after, and their only result was an abortive Anglo-French agreement. Austen cannot be said to have played a leading part in either connection, but some mention must be made of his activities as they illustrate his conception of the duty of a British Foreign Secretary.

The idea of outlawing war appears to have originated with a Chicago lawyer, Mr. Levinson, and in the spring of 1927 it reached M. Briand through another American, Professor Shotwell. Whether or no the French statesman grasped all the implications of such a proposal it is impossible to say, and at first he probably regarded it merely as a welcome means to improve French relations with the United States, for these were somewhat strained by the recent refusal of France to participate in a new naval conference ; in any event he took it up as a Franco-American, not as a universal, policy. Accordingly, in June, a French scheme, with elaborated conditions for a pact, was sent to Washington, but several months elapsed before a reply was received from the State Department ; when it did come the original French proposal was found to have been changed out of all recognition. M. Briand had thought that outlawry would in practice mean nothing more than the neutrality of

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France and the United States in one another's quarrels. Mr. Kellogg went far beyond this, and was determined to abolish war altogether as an instrument of policy ; furthermore, he expressed a desire to have such an agreement signed by every nation in the world. This would not only entail the abolition of a whole system of military and political safeguards, but would necessitate drastic changes in the League Covenant and in the Locarno Pact. Austen did not at first take the American reply seriously, and on February 13th, 1928, he wrote :

I do not think that there is any reality behind Kellogg's move. His long delay in replying to Briand's proposal, as well as the character of his answer when made, combined to produce upon my mind the impression . . . that Kellogg's main thought is not of international peace but of the victory of the Republican party. It is one more instance of the common practice of the State Department to use foreign politics as a pawn in the domestic game.

All the same, Austen had no desire to do anything that might alienate American opinion, which was in a truculently self-righteous mood at that time. Like his father, he placed great value upon securing the largest possible amount of Anglo-American co-operation, and he had been careful to keep President Coolidge and the State Department informed of the origin and progress of the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Locarno Pact. This latest proposal from Washington, however, put a severe strain both upon his patience and upon his diplomacy. ' I can see many disadvantages in doing anything which Mr. Kellogg may regard as a rebuff, but I confess that I don't think the world will gain anything by merely helping Mr. Kellogg over his electoral fence. How to deal with his proposals in these circumstances is as knotty a problem as he could have found for us.' The multilateral character of the proposed agreement also alarmed Austen. ; It may be one thing to sign such a treaty with a Government and people in whose loyalty you have perfect faith, but it is quite a

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different thing to involve us in signature of a multilateral treaty with Powers who have not our standard and whose past does not encourage us to place unlimited faith in their loyalty to "a scrap of paper." ' The situation was further complicated by Mr. Kellogg's declared intention, if the French declined his multilateral treaty, of proposing it to Japan, Germany, and Great Britain. This would place the British Government in a very difficult position, for if they refused the United States would be offended, while if they accepted they would be signing a treaty with Germany to which France was not a party. Austen fully realized this danger, and was determined to avoid it.

In these circumstances the line he adopted was to adopt the idea of a multilateral treaty, and to persuade Mr. Kellogg so to word this that both Great Britain and France could sign without abrogation of their previous engagements. Accordingly, on May 19th, he informed Washington that it was of the utmost importance to the British Government ' that the principle should be recognized that if one of the parties to this proposed treaty resorted to war in violation of its terms, the other parties should be released automatically from their obligations towards that party under the treaty.' Austen also made it plain that respect for the obligations arising out of the Covenant of the League of Nations and of the Locarno treaties was the foundation of British policy, and that the Government could not agree to any new treaty which would weaken those engagements. These points were duly met, and on July nth Austen was able to notify the American *charge d'affaires* that his Government was ready to sign the pact, but in so doing he called attention to a speech by Mr. Kellogg declaring that the proposed treaty did not restrict or impair in any way the right of self-defence, and in this connection he stressed the importance of ' certain regions with regard to whose welfare and integrity His Majesty's Government have special responsibilities' ; he added that ' interference with these regions or with the discharge of these responsibilities cannot be allowed. Their protection from attack is for the British Empire a measure of self-defence.'

The whole negotiation had puzzled and irritated Austen :

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I can form some opinion as to what France or Germany or Italy may be likely to do in this or that contingency. Except in a narrow field the course which will be taken by the United States is a riddle to which no one—not even themselves—can give an answer in advance. But perhaps this is only saying that the United States has no foreign policy. The ship drifts at the mercy of every gust of public opinion.

Take the Kellogg proposal for example. Who could guess when they left Briand's suggestion unnoticed for months that it would suddenly become the cardinal feature in their attitude to the rest of the world? And what do they mean it to be even now on the eve of signature—a 'moral' gesture, *vox et praterea nihil*, or a new Monroe doctrine? It will be the one or the other according as the trend of American opinion makes the rest of the world think that they are in earnest or the reverse. I end as befits the whole correspondence with an enormous mark of interrogation.

The Kellogg Pact was signed in Paris on August 27th, 1928, but Austen was too ill to be present at the ceremony.

In the matter of disarmament Austen was not so successful in avoiding criticism. During the two years which followed the conclusion of the Locarno Pact a Preparatory Commission had been trying to pave the way for a Disarmament Conference, but its work was hindered by the fact that some of its members did not know what they wanted while others were deliberately obstructive. The whole atmosphere had, indeed, been rendered distinctly unfavourable by the failure of the Three Power Naval Conference at Geneva in June, 1927, owing to the lack of adequate preparation beforehand. At the end of July of the following year, however, Austen announced in the House of Commons that France and Great Britain had arrived at a compromise on naval disarmament and trained reserves. The discussions had been undertaken in consequence of a suggestion made by the American delegate during the meeting of the Preparatory Commission a few months earlier. The agreement now arrived at was based on a scheme proposed by

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M. Paul Boncour, which had already been rejected by the United States and Italy, and considerable indignation was expressed in both those countries when the project made its reappearance in a new guise as the result of secret negotiations.

This was bad enough, but there was worse to follow. An 'important French official' gave an interview to an English journalist in which he hailed the agreement as the most outstanding diplomatic event since the war. He said that while it appeared to be merely a technical agreement it was in fact of the first political 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 command of the naval and military forces of the two countries.' Such an interpretation at once caused the rumour that there were secret clauses by which the Mediterranean was divided into British and French 'spheres of influence.' The immediate effect abroad was to rouse Italian suspicions, and so to undo much of the good which Austen has so patiently accomplished in creating friendly feelings between Great Britain and Fascist Italy. At home there was an uproar, and Austen was widely accused of chaining England to the chariot-wheels of France. His recent flattering references to that country were brought up against him, and the ordinary citizen was induced to believe that the Foreign Secretary habitually took his orders from the Quai d'Orsay. Unhappily, by the time that the campaign against the agreement was in full swing Austen was too ill to defend himself, and some of the mud which was so liberally hurled at him undoubtedly stuck.

Spring and summer saw him at Geneva as usual ; the earlier meeting was chiefly concerned with the question of the Hungarian Optants, and it was marked by a clash between Count Apponyi and M. Titulesco.

I was fairly satisfied with the proceedings at Geneva. I got Sir Ronald Lindsay to come on this occasion as I thought it would be useful for him to see and appreciate the working of the Council before he takes up his duties as

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permanent Under-Secretary.<sup>1</sup> He remarked, I think truly, that he had seen the Council at its best and at its worst—at its best when holding the public discussion on the Hungarian Optants question, and at its worst when, the President having slightly muddled his share of the proceedings, the Council attempted in a private meeting to draft the Resolution which he ought to have moved. I have learned how hopeless it is for a Cabinet to try to draft a paper, but I have never seen a Cabinet in such confusion as the Council then fell into. After about five minutes I withdrew from the discussion and waited till the others had agreed upon a text. At one time it was said that there were fifteen different drafts—in other words a draft from each member of the Council, and the Dutchman said with as much truth as wit that it was '*comme un accouchement dans une gare.*'

The debate between the octogenarian but still marvellously vigorous Count Apponyi and Titulesco who represented the Roumanians was on a high level of skill and debating power, and the two men afforded a dramatic-contrast. Apponyi has been more than fifty years in public life, and always in opposition except for a brief space in which he passed the harshest laws that Hungary ever enforced against its Roumanian minority. He is a fine old gentleman still, over six feet in height and standing erect in spite of his eighty years, speaking French fluently and conducting the discussion with a calmness and dignity which was in sharp contrast with Titulesco's nervous excitement and occasional undignified outbursts. But Titulesco in his own way is as clever as clever can be. Once again we failed to reconcile their conflicting points of view, but at any rate I succeeded in obtaining a unanimous vote from the Council which, considering the difficulties of the case, was in its way something of a triumph.

Titulesco is the gentleman who is always cold even on the hottest day, and on this occasion he sat hunched up in a fur coat in a room which became so hot and stuffy that we English at any rate were almost bursting. Briand remarked that when our friend Titu dies he will be cremated, and as they shove him into the furnace we shall hear his

<sup>1</sup> In succession to Sir William Tyrrell, who had been appointed Ambassador to France.

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voice crying out, 'For Heaven's sake shut that door—there is an awful draught!' It is thus we lighten our labours. Once again, the satisfactory part of the whole session was the way in which all the different Members of the Council pulled together.

Austen had not of late been at all well, and the constant strain and fatigue at last brought on an attack of dyspepsia which he was unable to shake off, with the result, as he put it, that 'I have therefore surrendered at discretion to my doctor and Selby, and between them they have decided that in matters of diet I shall abstain from everything that I like, and that as regards work I shall do none after dinner and as little as possible for the rest of the day.' Unfortunately, while he was in this enfeebled condition he caught a chill which developed into pneumonia, and this in its turn was followed by a bad attack of neuritis in his neck and arm. In these circumstances it was obvious that a long holiday was essential, and so from August until the end of November the Foreign Office was deprived of its chief.

Accompanied by Lady Chamberlain, Diane, and Lawrence, Austen sailed from Liverpool at the end of August. The ship called first at La Rochelle, and then at Santander, where the King and Queen of Spain were spending the summer; King Alfonso asked Austen and his wife to lunch, and when he found that Austen was too ill to land he came on board himself to see him. This act of courtesy was typical of the reception with which Austen met everywhere, and if the change and rest did him bodily good his spirits were cheered by the evident respect in which he and his country were held abroad. From Santander the ship went to Corunna, Lisbon, and Bermuda, and by the time Bermuda was reached Austen was well enough to spend a day ashore. The next place visited was Havana, where he received the—to him—specially welcome present of a large cabinet of cigars, and after that he went to Colon where the Chamberlain party transferred to a Dollar Line ship. The Canal Zone interested Austen greatly, and he was shown de Lesseps' workings and also the Gatun Locks.

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After three days at Colon he and his family sailed through the canal, and at Panama they did another tour of inspection which included the old city with its memories of Henry Morgan.

From Panama they sailed to San Pedro, where the ship was to coal, but before they arrived Lady Chamberlain received a wireless message from Miss Mary Pickford asking them to spend the night when the boat was being coaled, with her and Mr. Douglas Fairbanks at 'Pickfair' on Rye Hill. Always eager for new experiences and delighting in new surroundings, Austen gladly accepted the invitation, and the evening was an enormous success. Mr. Charlie Chaplin was one of the guests at dinner, and although Austen was hardly convalescent he sat up talking politics and films until two o'clock the next morning. A visit to Hollywood before rejoining the boat completed an incursion into a world of which Austen had previously known nothing, but which he found absorbingly interesting. From there they went to San Francisco where they were met by Mr. and Mrs. William Crocker, with whom they stayed for three weeks at Burlingame. From there he wrote to his sister, 'I am wonderfully better, but I am still inconceivably weak. I weighed on arrival just 9 stone (normal 10.2 to 10.5—lowest record 9.6 in the war) and I am still very lame with sciatica, but I must be putting on weight in this comfortable house and with such excellent food. . . . We see four papers daily, but cannot extract a shred of news from any one of them !'

Austen and his party then set out for England ; they stayed a day or two at Vancouver, and then visited the principal cities of Canada ; he also had several extremely useful discussions with the Prime Minister, Mr. Mackenzie King. When he returned to England it was remarked that he looked thinner, and though certainly better he seemed more frail. To a friend he remarked, 'I am very well, but am more easily tired.' He also adhered as far as possible to his new practice of not working after dinner, and a system of weekly summaries was established which relieved him of the labour of reading through so many despatches every day.

On taking his work at the Foreign Office up again

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Austen found that he had been missed while he was away, and he would have been more than human had this not afforded him at any rate a little satisfaction. He was also much gratified by a speech which the Prime Minister had made at Yarmouth when he said :

I want first of all to pay a tribute to my colleague, Sir Austen Chamberlain. The whole country, the whole of Europe, recognizes the devotion and the skill and the patience with which he has handled foreign affairs for four years. I have every hope and belief that he will handle them for four years more. At Locarno, in China, in Egypt, with conciliation, firmness, and the resolution to protect the interests, and in some cases the lives, of our own people, he has constantly pursued peace. A great part of the credit of what has been done in Europe in that direction during these four years belongs fairly to him, and in that cause he has nearly worn himself out.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand the general international situation had deteriorated somewhat. Disarmament was as far off as ever, and Signor Mussolini had by no means forgotten the rebuff which he believed had been administered to him in July. Nor was this all, for a General Election in the near future was inevitable, and there was a natural tendency on the part of foreign Powers to await its result before committing themselves to any proposals which Austen might put forward ; this reluctance increased during the early months of 1929 when the by-elections began to go against the Government, and thus to presage its overthrow.

Austen attended the League meeting in December and also in the following March, and on the second occasion he and Lady Chamberlain went on to Florence where their daughter, Diane, was completing her education. The Tuscan capital had lost none of its attraction for Austen, and a few weeks before his visit he wrote to his daughter :

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, September 28th, 1928.

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You make my mouth water when you write of the sights you are seeing. I love Santa Maria Novella and the fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Medici Chapel and indeed all the things of which you write. I remember too the Last Supper by Ghirlandaio in the Ognisanti. I think it is the best thing he ever did.

On this occasion, however, it was not only paternal affection or a love of art that drew Austen to Florence, for he was desirous of seeing Signor Mussolini again. The meeting took place on April 2nd, and began by an expression by the Duke of his unmixed satisfaction with the recent Lateran Treaty, in which he said that the Pope had shown himself most generous. Signor Mussolini had some pointed remarks to make on Yugoslav policy, where he considered King Alexander's position was none too good. He did everything himself, or, rather appeared to do everything, so that he bore the whole responsibility. A King should always be covered. Let the acts of the dictatorship appear to be those of someone else. Then, if things went wrong, the dictator could be sacrificed; the Crown remained secure. The rest of the conversation was concerned with the general situation, but it was a mere interchange of views, and there was certainly nothing in it to warrant the fantastic interpretations put upon it in many quarters. To allay the rumours that the meeting had any ulterior purpose Austen stated in an interview with an English newspaper, 'It is contrary to my whole conception of international policy that the good relations of two nations should be regarded as detrimental to the interests of a third party.'

After this meeting Austen returned to England to be plunged into the most hotly contested election of his career.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EGYPT AND CHINA

To understand the situation with which Austen was confronted in Egypt when he became Foreign Secretary it is necessary to recall the history of that country, for its present has always been deeply rooted in its past. The salient fact is that for two thousand years Egypt has hardly ever been independent, and that when independence has been achieved it has not endured for more than a brief period. From the beginning of the sixteenth century until that of the nineteenth, Egypt was under the rule of the Ottoman Sultans, but at the latter date an Albanian called Mohammed Ali made himself master of the country, though acknowledging the overlordship of the Padishah at Constantinople. The present King of Egypt is his descendant, though Turkish suzerainty came to an end in 1914 ; it had been wearing somewhat thin for years before, and when the Turkish Government wished to send troops through Egypt to fight the Italians in Tripoli permission was refused.

The permanent British connection dates from 1882. Three years earlier English and French advisers had been appointed to assist the Khedive, as the ruler of Egypt was called, but a Nationalist movement, of a type which was to become very familiar in the East, arose to get rid of the foreigners, and it was led by one Arabi Pasha. Both Great Britain and France had considerable interests, financial and otherwise, at stake, and they were prepared to defend those interests, if necessary by force. Accordingly, British and French men-of-war bombarded the forts at Alexandria, but when it became clear that this was not enough to overawe Arabi the French refused to go any further. However, British troops were landed, and the Egyptians were defeated at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. The British Government, of which Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was a prominent member, declared that it was only occupying the country temporarily to maintain order and to protect the property of foreign residents, and that it would withdraw as soon as these objects had been attained. What Austen in his undergraduate

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days thought of these events has already been related.<sup>1</sup> It proved impossible to evacuate the country, and British troops are still in Cairo. In the meantime the British position was not legalized, and the fiction of Egyptian autonomy under the Sultan was maintained. The Khedive governed Egypt with an Egyptian Cabinet, an Egyptian Legislative Council, and an Egyptian Assembly, while the British Agent and Consul-General, like similar representatives of other Powers, merely conveyed the views of his Government to the Khedive. The facts in no way corresponded with the theory ; the British Agent was the real ruler of the country, British officials had a predominant influence in the administration, and at their back were the bayonets of the British Army of Occupation ; the Egyptian Army, too, was under British command and control.

Of the benefits conferred upon Egypt during this period it would be impossible to speak too highly. For the first time for centuries she possessed an honest Government, and the *fellaheen* were protected against exploitation. The Sudan was reconquered from the Dervishes. The Anglo-French agreement of 1904 went a long way towards putting an end to foreign complications though the burdensome Capitulations remained, and it was of inestimable importance in freeing the country from the financial embarrassments imposed on her by the foreign bondholders through the Caisse de la Dette. In time Nationalist feeling, which had been crushed with Arabi, began to revive, but for many years the memory of the chaos of the past militated against it, while the British control, if effective in fact, was in law decently obscured. Then, too, Britain gave of her best in Lord Cromer, Sir Eldon Gorst, and Lord Kitchener, and the stress laid upon the fact that the occupation was only temporary, however inconvenient it sometimes proved from the administrative standpoint, was reassuring to Egyptian self-respect. Sir Eldon Gorst, indeed, went so far as to say that the ' fundamental idea of British policy was to fit Egypt for self-government while helping them in the meantime to enjoy the benefit of good government.'

This system worked well until the war brought changes of which Austen was to feel the full effect, and it can hardly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. vol. I, p. 16.

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be denied that from 1914 onwards British policy tended to become precipitate and uncertain. When Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central Powers the following proclamation was issued :

His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gives notice that in view of the state of war arising out of the action of Turkey, Egypt is placed under the protection of His Majesty, and will henceforth constitute a British Protectorate.

The suzerainty of Turkey over Egypt is thus terminated, and His Majesty's Government will adopt all measures necessary for the defence of Egypt, and protect its inhabitants and interests.

A further proclamation announced that the Khedive, Abbas II, who was in Constantinople, had been deposed on the ground of his support of the King's enemies, and that Prince Hussein Kcnial would succeed him with the title of Sultan of Egypt.

This alteration of status was accepted without protest at the time, though in many circles the order in which the proclamations had been issued gave the impression that the new Sultan was nothing but a British puppet. By now, too, there has arisen a generation who knew nothing at first-hand of the old misgovernment, and when the Allies promised independence to the Arabs an increasing number of Egyptians not unnaturally began to ask why they should not be independent too, while President Wilson's adoption of the doctrine of self-determination was as fuel to the fire. Furthermore, much hardship was caused by the requisitioning of animals for war purposes, and Great Britain got the blame. It must also be admitted that many of the British officers and officials who arrived in the country were not of the class, nor did they behave in the way, to which the Egyptians had been accustomed by their predecessors. All this was grist to the mill of the agitator. To quote that great authority, the late Sir Valentine Chirol :  
' Is it surprising that when these humble folk (the *fellaheen*),

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whose ignorance is abysmal, saw their country swarming as never before with Englishmen, and contrasted their own penury with all the outward signs of affluence and extravagance in which Englishmen seemed to live and move and have their being, that they should have lent a ready ear to their educated fellow-countrymen, who told them that it was all the fault of the English and the Protectorate, which was reducing the people of Egypt to unending slavery? Is it surprising that they should have so quickly come to believe that the only remedy was to get rid of the English altogether out of the country, and that the first step towards that happy consummation was to join the crowd of Zaghlul's followers and unite their voices with those of the great patriots, who would free them from the accursed Protectorate and lead them into the millenium of national independence?'

How far the movement for independence would have got without Zaghlul it is impossible to say. He was a lawyer of *fellaheen* origin, and as a young man he had fought for Arabi. Later he gained the goodwill of Lord Cromer, and had held office. A few days after the termination of the war he took a deputation to Sir Reginald Wingate, the High Commissioner, as the former Agent was termed under the new regime, and asked that a delegation might go to London to discuss Egyptian affairs. This was refused by the Foreign Office, whereupon the Nationalists resorted to violence, and in the early weeks of 1919 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 the British Government saw fit to recall Sir Reginald Wingate, and to replace him by Lord Allenby, who was entirely devoid of administrative experience in the East in spite of his great military qualities. The new High Commissioner soon released the deportees, and whatever excellent reasons there may have been for adopting this course they were nullified by the impression that the release was a concession to violence. The next three years were not marked by the pursuit of a consistent policy by Lord Curzon, for Zaghlul was ignored, invited to Downing Street to

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discuss matters, and exiled to the Seychelles. Meanwhile, those who held office in Egypt were but transient and embarrassed phantoms, and there was a considerable amount of sporadic disorder.

Significant of what was to come was the fact that even at this time the Residency at Cairo and the Foreign Office by no means always saw eye to eye. On November 17th, 1921, for example, Lord Allenby reported to Lord Curzon that his British advisers were unanimously of the view 'that a decision which does not admit the principle of Egyptian independence, and which maintains a Protectorate, must entail serious risk of revolution throughout the country. . . . Unless His Majesty's Government are prepared to give substantial satisfaction to expectations, which Egyptians have legitimately formed on the basis of apparent policy of His Majesty's Government during the past two years, it will be impossible to form any Ministry.' 'Strong military force' could, of course, be used, but 'liberal concessions' were necessary. Lord Curzon suggested that this argument was 'to a large extent unsound.' Lord Allenby replied that he wanted to be able to promise the Sultan 'a higher degree of independence' than the British Government 'are clearly disposed to grant/ and he added a few days later that 'no Egyptian . . . can sign any instrument which in his view is incompatible with complete independence. Consequently it is necessary definitely to abandon the idea that the Egyptian question can be settled by means of a treaty.'

By this time it was becoming clear that no progress could really be made until some form of settlement assured the co-operation of the Egyptians. While the British Government was anxious not to surrender a position of vital importance to the Empire without adequate guarantees for the future, yet repeated postponements and fruitless negotiations had produced a situation in Egypt which could only be liquidated either by rigorous military measures or by a voluntary abandonment on the British side of non-essential points.

The following declaration was accordingly sent to the Sultan on February 28th, 1922 :

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Whereas His Majesty's Government in accordance with their declared intentions desire to recognize Egypt as an independent Sovereign State, and

Whereas the relations between His Majesty's Government and Egypt are of vital importance to the British Empire, the following principles are hereby declared :

1. The British Protectorate over Egypt is terminated and Egypt is declared to be an independent Sovereign State.

2. So soon as the Government of His Highness shall pass an Act of Indemnity with application to all inhabitants of Egypt, martial law as proclaimed on November 2nd, 1914, shall be withdrawn.

3. The following matters are absolutely reserved to the discretion of His Majesty's Government until such time as it may be possible by free discussion and friendly accommodation on both sides to conclude agreements in regard thereto between His Majesty's Government and the Government of Egypt : (a) the security of the communications of the British Empire in Egypt ; (b) the defence of Egypt against all foreign aggression or interference direct or indirect ; (c) the protection of foreign residents in Egypt and the protection of minorities ; (d) the Sudan. Pending the conclusion of such agreements, the *status quo* in all these matters shall remain intact.

In consequence of this Sultan Ahmed Fuad became King Fuad, and in April, 1923, the constitution of Egypt as a hereditary monarchy was proclaimed. Equal legal, civil, and political rights were guaranteed to all Egyptians, and compulsory free education for both sexes was established in the State schools. Islam was declared to be the official religion, and Arabic the official language. A Parliament of two Houses was set up. The King nominates two-thirds of the members of the Senate, and the remainder are elected by universal suffrage, there being one senator to every 180,000 inhabitants. The Chamber of Deputies is elected by universal suffrage, one member to every 60,000 electors,

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for a term of five years. All this sounded very well on paper, but the average Egyptian was inclined to take it to mean that Great Britain had yielded so far to agitation, and that more agitation would produce still further concessions. Therefore he voted for the Wafd, as Zaghlul's organization was called.

Such was the situation which confronted Austen when he became Foreign Secretary and such was its background. It has been necessary to describe both at some length because in all his attempts to find a solution to the problem of Egypt he was continually being brought up against the consequences of what had taken place in previous years. Austen had, it is true, no personal knowledge of the country, but he had been Secretary of State for India, and how deep was his understanding of the East has already been shown. Moreover, he had ever by his side in Mr. Selby, who had been First Secretary at the Residency in Cairo from 1919 to 1922, one whose information concerning matters Egyptian was at once recent and at first-hand. As to policy, Austen's aim in regard to Egypt was to carry the Declaration of 1922 to its logical conclusion, and to establish the relations of London and Cairo on a basis of co-partnership.

Fate, however, did not give him long to meditate upon the attitude he proposed immediately to adopt in pursuance of this general scheme, for on November 19th the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army and Governor-General of the Sudan, Sir Lee Stack, was murdered in the streets of Cairo. Lord Allenby acted at once, in view of the fact that the crime was the direct consequence of Zaghlul's inflammatory speeches, and without delay he presented an ultimatum demanding an apology, the punishment of the murderers, the payment of half a million pounds as an indemnity, the consent of the Egyptian Government to an unlimited increase of the area in the Sudan to be irrigated, and its compliance with the wishes of Great Britain in regard to the future employment of European officials. Austen failed to understand why the High Commissioner had not waited for instructions from London, and he did not approve of the demand for an indemnity. Lord Allenby replied that he was actuated by the fear that if he delayed Zaghlul would resign, but, be that as it may, this did not explain the High Commissioner's

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action in presenting his demands in person accompanied by an escort of cavalry while he was himself attired in a lounge suit. The King took very strong exception to this behaviour on the part of his representative, and Austen described it as 'very like the action of the little boy who puts his thumb to his nose and extends his four fingers in a vulgar expression of defiance or contempt.'

Meanwhile, events were moving fast in Cairo. Hard on the heels of Lord Allenby's first communication to the Egyptian Government came a second which set out the specific demands. The Sudanese units of the Egyptian Army were to be made into a Sudan defence force, owing allegiance to the Sudan Government alone, and the details were drafted of what was required in connection with the European officials. The Egyptian reply was quite inadequate, and once again Lord Allenby took drastic action without consulting the Foreign Office. He seized the customs, and proposed to take hostages who should be shot if there were any further murders. Austen disapproved of the first of these measures, and he sternly forbade Lord Allenby to attempt the second ; he also impressed upon the High Commissioner the necessity for considering foreign opinion which had been strongly in support of his firm attitude on the morrow of Sir Lee Stack's murder, but which would be alienated if extreme measures were adopted. Fortunately for both the Residency and the Foreign Office there then occurred the resignation of Zaghlul, but Austen was so alarmed at what he considered to be Lord Allenby's tendency to be precipitate that he sent Mr. Nevile Henderson out to Cairo as Minister and to impress upon the High Commissioner the views of the British Government. Unfortunately, Lord Allenby took this appointment as a personal insult to himself, and in a telegram to Austen he denounced it as ruinous to his position. He went on to say that of course he could not resign in existing circumstances, but that unless his advice was taken he must do so as soon as possible ; in the meantime he would, needless to say, carry out any orders he was given. The elimination of Zaghlul, however, prevented this particular crisis from coming to an immediate head.

In public Austen was stating that these tragic events

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were not to be allowed to divert the Government from its course :

What, then, were the guiding principles of conduct adopted by the Government ? First, there was the Sudan, to whose people we had given a binding pledge that they should not go back to the old and bad Egyptian administration, to whose people we owed direct and immediate obligations ; in the Sudan we must place ourselves in a position wherein our authority to assert our rights and to perform our duties is unquestioned. In Egypt, on the other hand, we desire to interfere with the Government as little as possible. We must fulfil the undertaking we gave at the moment when we restored to Egypt her independence, to keep her from foreign interference. We must also protect British and Imperial interests, bound up as they are in that great highway of the world and artery of the Empire, the Suez Canal. . . .

We have not seized upon the murder of an individual in order to make a whole series of claims which have no connection with that murder and no justification in it. We have acted as we were bound to act when, in the most tragic form conceivable, the forebodings of my predecessor were realized and the life of a great public servant was sacrificed to this campaign of hostility to the British Empire and to all that it stands for in Egypt and the Sudan. We have endeavoured to deal with the crisis in such a manner that, once we have got through our present difficulties, we may resume friendly relations with Egypt, renew the conversations<sup>1</sup> which failed through the unwillingness or inability of Zaghniul Pasha to recognize the facts of the situation, and so, while safeguarding our interests and protecting our rights, give a minimum of interference with Egyptian independence.

When the Egyptian Government had finally submitted to the British demands Austen wrote, on December 22nd,

<sup>1</sup> The reference was to those conducted by Mr. MacDonald in the previous year.

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to Lord Allenby a letter of warm congratulation on the way in which he had handled the situation, but he added ' there is only one fly in my ointment, and it is that at one moment of these negotiations, where each of us had the same purpose and was animated by the same spirit, there should have been a difference between us.' Austen was prepared to admit that he might himself have been in some degree to blame, but he besought the High Commissioner to

let that one small misunderstanding be forgotten ; and when this crisis is passed let me submit your request for permission to resign as the natural desire of a great servant of the Crown to take the opportunity offered by the end of one chapter in our relations with Egypt and the beginning of another as the proper moment to seek relief from the strain of such long and arduous service and the natural and most honourable close of your great career in the Near East, first as soldier and then as statesman.

Nevertheless, the iron of Mr. Henderson's appointment had entered into the soul of the High Commissioner, who replied that he could not agree that his difference with Austen was merely a momentary misunderstanding. He had said that his position would become untenable if steps were not taken \* to correct the impression made by the announcement of Mr. Henderson's appointment as Minister Plenipotentiary ' ; in his opinion these steps had not been taken, and the word \* untenable ' had only one meaning. He could not, therefore, comply with Austen's request. Nothing more was said on the subject until February 14th, 1925, when Lord Allenby wrote that he felt the situation was such that his resignation could be safely accepted, and with this Austen agreed, but it was not until June that he finally left Egypt ; by then, too, wiser counsels had prevailed, and Lord Allenby agreed that Austen should merely say that he had asked to be relieved, and that his resignation had been accepted.

The misunderstanding between the two men is to be regretted, and it was the fault of neither. The statesman

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and the soldier are always inclined to look upon the same problem from different angles, and in these circumstances it was not unnatural that Lord Allenby should have taken offence where none was meant. Austen certainly never bore the great soldier any ill-will afterwards, and there is reason to suppose that before he died Lord Allenby realized that he had been mistaken in Austen. That the difference went no deeper was largely due to Mr. Selby, the friend and admirer of both.

The new High Commissioner was Sir George, now created Lord, Lloyd, an old friend of Austen, as has already been shown, and for whose appointment he was in no small measure responsible. Lord Lloyd had a close personal knowledge of the East, and had for live years been Governor of Bombay. In addition he had been a Member of Parliament, first for West Staffordshire and then for Eastbourne, so that he was fully acquainted with that domestic background which no Foreign Secretary can ever safely ignore. Lord Lloyd arrived in Egypt towards the end of October, 1925, and not long afterwards Austen was writing of him : ' He has begun well and inspires us with confidence, but he has got trouble on his hands sooner than I had hoped. I knew it must come some time—the King being what he unfortunately is, sly, scheming, corrupt and autocratic.'

The intimate terms upon which Austen then was with Lord Lloyd may be gathered from the following letter :

Foreign Office, S.W.i  
*2nd November, 1925*

MY DEAR GEORGE,

I was hurried off to Paris in less than a week after my return from Locarno, and now find great arrears of correspondence as well as of work in spite of all the help that the Office is giving me. You will expect no letter in these circumstances, but I send a line first to repeat my thanks to you and Blanche for your good wishes and congratulations ; and secondly, to confirm my telegram heartily approving your opening moves. You seemed to me to take just the right line in your conversation with the King as well as in your attitude towards Zaghlul ; and your brief

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stay at Tanta <sup>1</sup>gave one of those marks of sympathy which often lay the foundation for more serious things.

When I retire from the Foreign Office I am going to write a series of articles—I need not burden you with the titles of them all, but one will be upon 'the importance of shaking hands/ and another upon the theme that no countries are so insular as those which are situated in the middle of a continent. Perhaps you and I may collaborate, but you will still be in the full tide of your career when I have given way to the garrulity of old age.

Yours sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

Austen and Lord Lloyd were agreed upon the policy to be pursued, namely, to carry the Declaration of 1922 to its logical conclusion, but when it came to putting this policy into practice serious difficulties presented themselves. The most obvious course was to encourage the concentration of all power in the hands of King Fuad, and then to reach a settlement with him ; but to this there were obvious objections which Lord Lloyd set out clearly on March 13th, 1926, in a despatch to Austen :

This form of government, moreover, would more than any other involve our responsibility, for it would not be believed it could exist otherwise than with our support; and to support it in an unrestrained form would be a deviation from traditions of our Egyptian policy dating even from before the occupation, and, in particular, from our attitude of the last few years ; an attitude to which, I may remark, the Egyptians, remembering in particular the report of the Milner Mission, believe us to be more formally committed than we are.

On the other hand, it was by no means easy to find an elected majority which was prepared to conclude a treaty

<sup>1</sup> Where there had recently been a disaster.

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with Great Britain on any terms which a British Government would accept. Even the more moderate Egyptian statesmen were always looking over their shoulders at the Wafd, and thinking that if they agreed to any compromise they would be driven from office with ignominy, and might well lose their lives into the bargain. As Lord Lloyd had put it in a letter to Austen on February 14th, 1926 :

The present constitution is so hopelessly unworkable and so utterly unsuited to the country that the condition of affairs, so long as it exists, must get worse and worse both for the welfare of *the fellaheen* as well as for our position in the country.

Sooner or later we shall have to modify it or lose all respect and regard from the masses here. I recognize that that moment has not come, that we have got to give rein to further trial of the Egyptians under the present system, but if we get another period of trouble or a deadlock we shall, I am convinced, be bound to reconsider policy here.

Before we can do that the Egyptians will have to prove clearly before the world their incapacity for Parliamentary Government ; with a Zaghlist majority it may not be long before they do this. Meanwhile, I am taking great trouble with the French and Italians to keep them solid with us, and I am told that the foreigners here have never been more sympathetic to us than they are at present.

It is one of the most continually anxious and difficult jobs I have ever struck. I only hope that the course I am steering meets with your approval so far as I have gone.

The troubles which faced Lord Lloyd during his first two years at Cairo were largely of an administrative nature, and in any event they belong rather to the history of Egypt than to the biography of Austen ; suffice to say that it was not until the summer of 1927 that there appeared any prospect of concluding a definite treaty. At that time King Fuad paid a visit to England, and he was accompanied by his Prime Minister, Sarwat Pasha. This event led to an attempt to settle the outstanding differences between Great

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Britain and Egypt in circumstances which Austen put on record :

From that time <sup>1</sup> to the moment of King Fuad's visit, I have never sought to open negotiations for a settlement of the ' reserved points ' as I have not thought that agreement was within sight, and held here as elsewhere that it is a mistake to enter into negotiations unless there is a good prospect of their resulting in accord. Nor was it my intention to enter on negotiations with Sarwat. I had contemplated only a clear statement to him of the nature of the interests which we had in Egypt and of the certainty that, whatever Government were in office, those interests would be maintained, coupled with the invitation to him to consider whether the time had not come when Egypt could recognize these facts and make them the basis of her relations with us. If Sarwat on reflection thought there was force in what I said and that the time for an arrangement had in fact arrived, it was my intention to suggest, and I did in fact suggest that, after his return to Egypt, he should continue the conversations with Lord Lloyd. But Sarwat moved much faster than I had expected. He brought me within a few days his own draft of a Treaty, and everyone here and everyone in Egypt who knows what has happened recognizes that this was a fact of outstanding importance without precedent in our relations with the previous representatives of the Egyptian Government.

Such an overture could not be treated lightly. A grave decision confronted us. An Egyptian Prime Minister showed for the first time a real desire for agreement and readiness at least to attempt to meet the requirements which we had stated in the \* reserved points.' That draft could not be accepted by us, but it appeared to me essential that we should meet his advance and that we should submit the alternative which we were ready to accept. In framing this alternative, I was inspired by the principles which were approved by the Cabinet in the first months of its existence and which has formed the basis of our policy towards Egypt ever since. No other policy is indeed possible unless we

<sup>1</sup> I.e. since December, 1924.

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mean brutally to disavow the declaration of 1922 and go back upon all the assurances that we have given. But such action on our part would justly expose us to a charge of gross ill-faith and deception. . . .

If this were ruled out, then we must continue to confine ourselves to the minimum of interference which is compatible with the maintenance of our international obligations. There is in fact no other alternative. Either we try to make a success of the policy inaugurated in 1922 which, in the eyes of all those most conversant with Egyptian affairs, has already produced a sensible and even a remarkable improvement in the situation, or we must proceed to lay violent hands on Egyptian administration and to convert Egypt into something like an Indian provincial Government such as existed before the era of reform. I know no competent Egyptian authority who would advise you to embark on this policy. On the contrary all the advice which reaches me is to make a treaty if it be possible. . . .

No one supposes that the conclusion of a treaty, however satisfactory its terms, will resolve our difficulties, but if we can confirm and extend the improvement which has taken place, we can do much by persuasion that we shall never secure by force. . . . If we want tolerable relations with the Egyptian Government, if we want to avoid a series of crises, any one of which might involve us in decisions and responsibilities of the gravest character, we must be content to work the 1922 declaration loyally, and to give the Egyptians in the largest measure possible the independence which we promised them.

I did not conceal from myself the inconvenience and even the dangers of such a policy. I do not say with confidence that it will be successful, but I do say that no other policy can be justified or will meet with the necessary public support unless and until it has been shown that we have done our best to fulfil our engagements and that the responsibility for the breakdown is not ours.

During the course of the discussions which then ensued Austen came to repose a considerable amount of confidence in Sarwat Pasha, in whom he hoped to find another

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Stresemann who would help him to an Egyptian Locarno. A letter from Austen to Mr. Selby while these conversations were in progress well reflects both the former's point of view and his desire to bring them to a successful conclusion :

Foreign Office, S.W.i  
6.II.27

MY DEAR SELBY,

This note will make it unnecessary I hope for you to ring me up on your return.

You are going to see Sarwat.

Take him a copy of our amended text of the Sarwat-Murray draft. Tell him that I must add to the first annex the provisoes against training Egyptian officers abroad elsewhere than in England and for purchase of war material in England. This I understand he is quite willing to accept.

I have already asked him to consider some form of words giving the Financial Adviser access to *information* on matters concerning foreigners in or outside the Egyptian service, and / *hope that he will be able to help me* in this matter. He will give me his answer to-morrow morning when he comes to the F.O. as I hope he will at 11.0.

Meanwhile, I beg him to consider our latest draft carefully so that to-morrow he may give me the answer to this question.

*If* I can *get* the Cabinet to accept the draft with these additions, is he prepared to accept it also, to make it his own (as Luther and Stresemann did ' Locarno ') to secure the assent of his government and to do everything in his power to carry it through his Parliament ?

I do not know that I *can* secure Cabinet and Dominion approval to it all and particularly to Clause VI (appeal to the Council of the League on location of British troops) but I am prepared to try *if* I have his assurance that, if that be granted, he accepts the rest, makes it his own and believes that he can carry it. His answer may be vital to the result of my appeal to the Cabinet. Let him think the issues well over and give me his answer to-morrow.

Hitherto I have promised only to lay his proposal fairly

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before the Cabinet. I now go farther. I offer on *terms* to make his proposal my own and short of threatening to resign (which is no part of my promise to him) to do my utmost to commend it to the Cabinet and to secure their acceptance of it.

I have placed my confidence in him. I don't think that he will fail me now, but I must be able to speak to the Cabinet with his authority.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

The main points of this proposed treaty, which was to give practical effect to the policy of co-partnership, were that Egypt was to become a member of the League of Nations ; that British troops were to remain in the country for another ten years, at the conclusion of which period a fresh agreement was to be made ; that Great Britain should be represented at Cairo by an ambassador who should always be the *doyen* of the diplomatic corps ; and that the organization of the Egyptian Army and the existing administration of the Sudan should remain unaltered. As his letter to Mr. Selby proves, Austen attached the greatest importance to the conclusion of this treaty, and after Sarwat Pasha had left London he sent to Lord Lloyd a despatch which further testifies at once to his feelings and his hopes :

Foreign Office, S.W.i

NOV. 24, 1927

MY LORD,

When Sarwat Pasha and your lordship left London to return to Egypt, the discussions between His Excellency and myself were practically completed, but time had not permitted me to obtain the final decision of His Majesty's Government in Great Britain on the draft treaty in the form which had been given to it as the result of our long and friendly exchange of views.

2. I was, however, able to inform you just before you left Marseilles in the same ship in which His Excellency

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travelled that, subject only to the settlement of a suitable text for the expression of the agreement on a minor point which Sarwat Pasha and I had already reached in principle and to the concurrence of His Majesty's Governments in the Dominions and India (which, as I had already explained to His Excellency, we considered necessary), His Majesty's Government in Great Britain were prepared to accept the Treaty as then proposed. It was understood between us that on each side ratification would be subject to Parliamentary approval.

3. I need not say that the treaty thus definitely approved differs in many and important respects from the draft which I had earlier offered to Sarwat Pasha on behalf of His Majesty's Government. It embodies large concessions to His Excellency's own views and to Egyptian sentiment, which, after hearing Sarwat Pasha's explanations, His Majesty's Government have felt it possible to make in order to reach agreement. His Excellency was good enough to recognize fully on more than one occasion the friendly and sympathetic spirit in which His Majesty's Government has received and considered his representations, and I gladly acknowledge that His Excellency brought a similar friendly spirit, largeness of outlook and earnest desire for agreement to our common deliberations.

4. In its present form the draft treaty must be regarded as expressing on the one side and the other the limit to which each party can advance in his wish to meet the other. It was so understood between us, and it was on this condition only that Sarwat Pasha no less than I could go thus far. It was common ground to us both that no further changes could be made and that the treaty must now be accepted or rejected as it stands.

5. His Excellency will remember that I found great difficulty in giving even a provisional and personal assent to the existing wording of one passage near the beginning of Article 7. I refer to the phrase \* pending the conclusion at some future date of an agreement by which, etc.' I was concerned lest this wording should give rise at some future time to a suggestion that it necessarily implied that at some time, however distant, His Majesty's Government would make such an agreement. I told His Excellency

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that I had no wish to bar the conclusion of such an agreement should it ever become possible, but that I was unwilling in a document of such importance to both countries to admit any ambiguity, and that His Majesty's Government could come under no engagement, expressed or implied, to withdraw His Majesty's forces from Egypt and to entrust to the Egyptian Government alone the protection of the lines of communication of the British Empire where they pass through or over Egyptian territory. His Excellency was, however, able to assure me that this was not the intention or meaning of the wording which he had proposed to me. He said that it was his hope that if this treaty were ratified a time would come when His Majesty's Government would feel that it was as safe to leave the defence of Egypt and the protection of British interests in that country to the Government of Egypt as they now felt it safe to leave the protection of similar interests in the Dominions to the Governments of those Dominions. He was well aware that that time was in any case a long way off, and he was content to leave to the absolute discretion of His Majesty's Government the decision as to its possibility. All he asked was that His Majesty's Government should not absolutely bar the possibility of realizing an Egyptian aspiration if at some future time His Majesty's Government themselves should become convinced that by the course of Anglo-Egyptian relations the step could then be safely taken.

6. It was on this assurance that I agreed to recommend Sarwat Pasha's proposals to the British Government. I am bound to say that I found my colleagues at first shared my doubts, and for the very reason which I had expressed to His Excellency, namely, their reluctance to use any words which at some future time and by persons unacquainted with what had passed between His Excellency and me might be thought to imply an obligation on His Majesty's Government sooner or later to conclude an agreement of this character. I therefore repeated to His Majesty's Government the explanation which Sarwat Pasha had volunteered to me, and on this understanding and in pursuance of His Excellency's assurance His Majesty's Government have accepted his text.

7. There were other points in the draft which formed the

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subject of long and anxious consideration by Sarwat Pasha and myself and which went so clearly beyond my instructions that I was obliged to reserve them specifically for decision by the Cabinet. His Excellency will observe that the objections which I raised have not been sustained by His Majesty's Government, who have thus shown their earnest desire to make the treaty such as Sarwat Pasha could recommend confidently and without reserve to the Egyptian Government and nation.

8. His Excellency may wish me to repeat the assurance which I offered him and which he in turn gave to me, that the words 'existing,' 'present,' \* already established' and their like in the annex refer to the conditions actually in force at the time when we discussed the draft. They preclude a change in these conditions on either side between that time and the date of ratification of the treaty.

9. I have now the pleasure to inform your Lordship that His Majesty's Government in Great Britain, after communication with His Majesty's Governments in the Dominions and India, accept the draft agreed upon between us of which a copy is attached to this despatch, and that you are authorized to sign the treaty on behalf of His Majesty as soon as His Excellency is in a position to sign for the Egyptian Government. It is our earnest hope that by this treaty, equally honourable to both peoples, ensuring to Egypt her freedom and independence and her due place among the nations of the world, and to the British Empire protection for her vital interests and international obligations, we may have laid the secure foundation of future amity and concord between Egypt and the British Empire.

10. I request that you will read this despatch to Sarwat Pasha and leave a copy of it with His Excellency.

I am, etc.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

P.S.—The text of the treaty which I enclose is in English. As agreed by Sarwat Pasha and myself it is this text which should be signed and which alone is authoritative; but for your convenience in discussing the matter with him I also forward you a French translation.

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Austen was, however, to be disappointed. When Sarwat Pasha returned to his own country his courage began to leave him, and more than two months passed before he took the first steps to secure the ratification of the treaty. In the meantime Austen had instructed Lord Lloyd to do everything in his power to expedite matters, and these orders were strictly obeyed, though the High Commissioner had never had any hope of success.<sup>1</sup> On March 4th his worst fears were realized, for on that day Sarwat Pasha handed him the official reply of the Egyptian Government, and also announced that he had himself resigned. The reply was negative : ' My colleagues have reached the conclusion that the draft, by reason both of its basic principles and its actual provisions, is incompatible with the independence and sovereignty of Egypt, and moreover that it legalizes occupation of the country by British forces.' For some months after this Egyptian politics were extremely confused, but on July 19th Parliament was dissolved by Royal Decree, and thereafter the constitution remained in suspense. No further effort was made to secure a general settlement while Austen was at the Foreign Office.

It now remains to consider those differences of opinion between Austen and Lord Lloyd which were to attain a notoriety out of all proportion to their importance. Whether the High Commissioner had ever been wholly convinced of the feasibility of the British Government's policy is a matter upon which it is possible to have one of two opinions, but that, whatever his personal views, he loyally attempted to put it into practice there can be no doubt whatever. During the first two and a half years that Lord Lloyd was at Cairo there was no real difficulty between Austen and himself; this is not, of course, to say that the two men always found themselves in agreement upon every point, and there are indications that some of the higher officials in the Foreign Office resented the independent position of Lord Lloyd as they had resented that of Sir

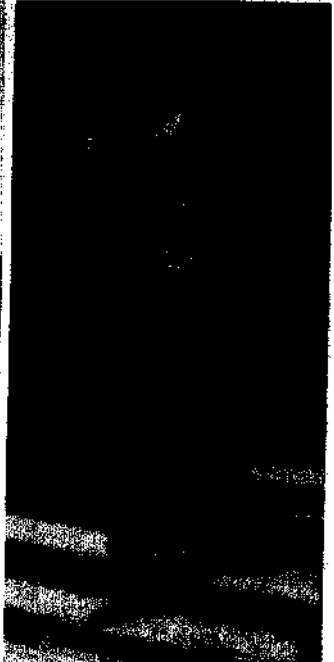
<sup>1</sup> Lord Lloyd's own view must be quoted : ' I had always left the Secretary of State in no doubt of my view, namely, that there was no possible prospect of concluding a definite treaty in the early future, and that the idea was really pushed into Sarwat's mind by permanent officials of the Foreign Office.'

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Reginald Wingate and Lord Allenby. In March, 1928, however, Austen was told that the High Commissioner had to two separate individuals spoken disparagingly of the negotiations with Sarwat Pasha, and he wrote asking for an explanation. Lord Lloyd in reply completely refuted the allegations, and in one instance at least showed the hollowness of the accusation against him, for he had been charged with banging his fist on a table in denunciation of Austen when conversing with an American journalist, while he was able to prove that on the occasion in question there was no table on which he could have thumped. Austen accepted the denial, and the letters between him and the High Commissioner resumed their old cordial tone.

As has already been related Austen was away from the Foreign Office during the latter part of 1928, but the first months of the following year were marked by the closest collaboration between Lord Lloyd and himself in securing, in May, the Nile Waters Agreement. By this Great Britain and Egypt recognized the necessity for a greater supply of water for the development of the Sudan, and agreed that such increase should be made for this purpose as 'does not infringe Egypt's natural and historical rights in the waters of the Nile, and its requirements in respect of agricultural extension.' The agreement then went on to set out the provisions arrived at for co-operation in the Sudan between Egypt and the Sudan and the Sudan and the British Government, and for the amicable settlement of future disputes. It concluded with the words, 'The present agreement can in no way be considered as affecting the control of the river, which is reserved for free discussion between the two Governments in the negotiations on the question of the Sudan.'

While this negotiation was still in progress the Egyptian Government asked for the support of Great Britain in an endeavour to extend to foreign residents payment of those taxes from which they had hitherto been exempt under the Capitulations. The taxes in question were the Ghaffir Tax, the Municipal Tax, the Petrol Tax, and the Stamp Duty ; on May 1st Austen informed Lord Lloyd that he proposed to express 'sympathy in principle' with this



*Barratt*

On his cruise to the West coast of  
Canada in 1928

Secretary of State for Foreign  
in, 1926.

SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN



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request, and asked for the other's comments. Lord Lloyd replied as follows :

I am sorry for any inconvenience which my delay in replying may have caused, but I feel that it would be shorter in the end to carry our commercial opinion with us as far as possible. I have therefore discussed the matter with Sir Bertrand Hornsby<sup>1</sup> and the Presidents of the Alexandria and Cairo Chambers of Commerce.

The following are my observations :

*(a) Ghaffir Tax.*

I agree. The Egyptian Government were informed in 1924 that this measure would be agreeable to us provided they could make satisfactory proposals for assessment.

*(b) Municipal Taxation.*

That the present and largely voluntary imposts to which the municipal authorities are compelled to resort for the raising of revenues they require are objectionable from every point of view, and both Egyptians and Europeans are agreed on this. Means of putting municipal taxation on a sounder basis are now being studied by the Egyptian Government, but my experience of municipal administration in India and elsewhere leaves me pessimistic as to the results.

Nevertheless, I recommend that you should reply to the effect that His Majesty's Government are fully alive to the present unsatisfactory state of the municipal taxation and are in full sympathy with any attempt by the Egyptian Government to clear up the mess. I should be inclined not to go further than this even to giving a general expression of sympathy in the absence of any concrete proposals.

*(c) Petrol Tax.*

We are clearly in sympathy with the Egyptians in their desire to make users of the roads contribute to their upkeep. I feel, however, that a tax based on horse-power would be more favourable to British motor-car industry than a petrol

<sup>1</sup> Then Chairman of the National Bank of Egypt.

tax. I hope, therefore, that if the Board of Trade confirm this impression you may find an opportunity of influencing Hafiz Afifi in favour of the former.

*(d) Stamp Duty.*

The ghaffir and the petrol tax are really only devised with a view to the recovering of payment for services rendered. The municipal tax is an attempt to improve the methods of raising funds already in existence. The stamp duty is in quite a different category, its object being to add to the existing sources of revenue. It has been shown in the enclosure to my despatch that the revenues are more than likely to be sufficient to balance expenditure for many years to come. There appears, therefore, no need to discuss this tax, and I would suggest that no expression of sympathy should be given.

Austen did not share these views, and on May 9th, the day before Parliament was dissolved, he replied :

The gist of the Egyptian complaint is that, for such services as they render, the Egyptians have to pay and foreigners are not legally liable. I am quite aware of the inefficiency of municipalities in Egypt and elsewhere, but it is quite impossible for me to defend the indefensible, and it is not sufficient that I should confine myself to an empty expression of academic sympathy on such an occasion. . . . It is impossible to refuse an expression of sympathy to the imposition of a stamp duty on the ground that it constitutes an addition to the existing sources of revenue. . . . In these circumstances I feel it right to agree generally with the request made to me by Hafiz Afifi.

Lord Lloyd confessed that he was ' somewhat surprised ' <sup>1</sup> by this despatch, and although it was clear that he and Austen did not see eye to eye there was nothing in the

<sup>1</sup> *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. 11, p. 293.

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incident to justify the subsequent statement of Mr. Arthur Henderson : 'The taxes proposed were moderate and reasonable in themselves, and the Egyptians' claim that they were fully justified on equitable grounds in imposing them was unanswerable. Lord Lloyd, however, strongly opposed any concession whatever in respect of most of them. After a telegraphic argument he was overruled.'

Nearly three weeks later the High Commissioner received another despatch signed by Austen of which the opening paragraph ran : 'The correspondence which recently passed between Your Lordship and myself in regard to the suggested extension of certain Egyptian taxes to British subjects in Egypt has led me to think that it may be convenient to Your Lordship and is in itself desirable that I should restate briefly the principles upon which His Majesty's Government desire to regulate their policy in Egypt.' The document continued :

Imperial considerations and the necessity of safeguarding the communications between the different parts of the Empire have caused His Majesty's Government in the past not only to assume a position of authority in Egypt outweighing that of any other foreign government, but also to stand between Egypt and the rest of the world, protecting her from any external pressure. It is the vital character of the Imperial interests thus safeguarded which requires the presence on Egyptian soil of British armed forces and the retention of that special influence which His Majesty's Government exercise through His Majesty's High Commissioner.

From the situation thus created certain consequences flow, secondary in their nature but of the utmost importance. Where the influence of His Majesty's Government prevails, and where their powerful protection is afforded, patent mis-government cannot be tolerated, and since His Majesty's Government have formally announced that they will not tolerate foreign intervention they are bound to see that a reasonable regime is secured for foreign inhabitants.

Because the interests at stake are of supreme importance to the safety and wellbeing of the British Empire, His

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Majesty's Government reserved by their Declaration of the 28th February, 1922, certain matters for their own determination, but even in these cases it is the desire of His Majesty's Government to act with, and where possible, through the Egyptian Government, respecting in the largest measure possible the liberties and independence which by the same declaration they conceded to Egypt.

It is not in the interest of His Majesty's Government to intervene in the internal affairs of Egypt further than is necessary to secure the political objects defined above. The influence which they must ever possess in the councils of Egypt, whether actual or potential, will be best secured by ensuring that the closest harmony shall always govern the relations between the Residency and the Government, and these conditions can only obtain if the interventions of His Majesty's Government in the purely internal affairs of Egypt are reduced to the minimum.

The very fact that in certain limited but most important cases the intervention of His Majesty's Government must be made effective, no matter what the cost, renders it the more necessary that their intervention should be strictly confined to matters of real importance. Since in certain cases it is essential that the wishes of His Majesty's Government should prevail, their influence must not be frittered away on other and less important matters. Above all, in order that their intervention when it takes place may be decisive, it must never be invoked to cover an abuse or to resist reasonable reforms. Save during the period of the war, Egypt has always enjoyed a very large measure of autonomy, though the degree of autonomy may have varied from time to time according to the political situation of the moment. Applying the principles here laid down, I hold at the present time that in considering whether in any particular case recourse is to be had to intervention in the internal affairs of Egypt, the criterion to be applied should not be whether the object aimed at is merely desirable, but whether it is necessary in order to safeguard the interests of the Empire as defined in the earlier paragraphs of this despatch.

The difference between the situation occupied by His Majesty's Government in Egypt and that which they

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occupy in the Sudan lends point to the observations set forth above. In the Sudan, though the condominium continues to be recognized, the responsibility of His Majesty's Government to the population is direct, and to meet it it is necessary for them to feel sure that in any particular case their orders shall be obeyed. In Egypt the responsibility is indirect and contingent, and only in a very limited category of affairs can it be necessary that the authority of His Majesty's Government shall be exercised, though it is to be hoped that when the Egyptians realize the strict limits which His Majesty's Government place upon their own activities, they will be the more inclined to seek on other points of difficulty or delicacy the friendly counsel which His Majesty's Government will always be willing to afford them.

This exposition of policy will, I hope, have made clear to Your Lordship the reasons which inspired my reply to the representations made to me by Dr. Hafiz Afifi during his recent visit to London. I am not convinced that the maintenance of foreign privilege in Egypt, *per se*, is a cause for the defence of which His Majesty's Government is required to exercise pressure on the Egyptian Government. The Capitulations have disappeared, or are in a fair way to disappear, in every country in which they have hitherto obtained, and sound policy would seem to require the gradual acceptance of a similar evolution in Egypt unless it can be shown in any particular case that there are cogent reasons for maintaining them. None such were evident to me in the question of the applicability of the Egyptian taxes under discussion to British subjects, nor could I bring myself to believe that British influence could be strengthened or the interests of British subjects permanently served by insistence on the maintenance of an invidious and indefensible exemption from a fair contribution to services of which they share the benefits.

I am, etc.,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

It is to be noted that this somewhat verbose despatch was sent while Austen was fighting the most fiercely

contested election of his career, and in these circumstances it is not unreasonable to suppose that he was unable to devote his usual care to the wording of the document, which in consequence reflected the feelings of some of the officials of the Foreign Office more accurately, perhaps, than those of their chief. Lord Lloyd replied as follows :

SIR,

I have naturally read with great interest and attention the despatch in which you summarize the principles by which our policy in Egypt is to be regulated.

If I may venture to offer a criticism of the main conclusion at which you arrive, viz., that intervention in the internal affairs of Egypt is to be confined to those cases where vital Imperial interests are directly involved, it will, I think, be this : The Declaration of 1922 was, and still is, a unilateral act. It has never been accepted by Egypt, and even the friendliest Egyptian Government would not voluntarily consider accepting it to-day. If the abortive Sarwat treaty negotiations showed anything it was the difficulty at this date, when we have already given Egypt so much, of finding sufficient further concessions to make it worth her while to accept our minimum desiderata and thus to liquidate 1922. It has always seemed to me, and I must confess that in this respect your despatch has not altered my opinion, a most dangerous course to make further substantial concessions to Egypt, however reasonable in themselves, except as part of a general settlement involving Egypt's acceptance of our minimum requirements. By doing so, we cannot fail further to weaken what the Sarwat negotiations have already shown to be an essentially weak position for the conclusion of a settlement, and if we discard further negotiation assets it can only be in what I am personally convinced is ill-advised reliance on an Egyptian sense of gratitude, which has, to say the least, been consistently inconspicuous since 1922.

I have, etc.,

LLOYD, High Commissioner.

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By the time this despatch reached London the Conservative Government had resigned, and Mr. Henderson had succeeded Austen at the Foreign Office. One of his first acts was to extort Lord Lloyd's resignation, nominally on the ground that the High Commissioner had been continually at variance with his predecessor, a claim which an examination of the relevant documents fails to substantiate. Austen was on holiday in Norway when Mr. Henderson acted in this manner, but he had previously discussed Egyptian affairs with him, and found that since his arrival at the Foreign Office his mind had been somewhat prejudiced against the High Commissioner. In the course of the ensuing conversation Austen admitted that there had been differences of opinion at times, but he told the new Foreign Secretary that he had not made up his mind as to the course he would have taken had the Conservatives remained in power ; so far, however, from advising Mr. Henderson to recall Lord Lloyd he urged that the fact that there had been a change of Government was a reason for not changing the High Commissioner, and he warned his successor that the enforced return of Lord Lloyd would certainly provoke sharp criticism in the ranks of the Opposition, and would tend to exaggerate the hopes and claims of the Wafd, which had already been stimulated by the advent of the Labour Government.

On his return from his holiday Austen wrote :

Well, I am not sorry, or at least not altogether sorry, to have missed the discussions on Lloyd's recall. I had not decided what I should have done myself, but the office was pressing strongly that Lloyd's appointment should not be renewed at the end of its five years, and I was hoping that a place might be found for him as High Comr. in East Africa under the new arrangements. He has courage, energy, and ability, but his qualities are more suited to an administrative post or a time of crisis than to the more diplomatic duties which he was called upon to discharge in Egypt.

I had advised Henderson not to recall him whatever I might have done myself, on the ground that for a new

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Government to change the High Comr. as soon as they came in would be needlessly to arouse suspicion and fear in certain quarters here and to excite hopes, which must be disappointed, in Egypt, and would add to his difficulties there.

As to the manner of his dismissal and its announcement I think Henderson and his colleagues blundered as much as it was possible for men to do, but I should have been a good deal handicapped in the discussion by the last exchange of despatches. I had felt it necessary to restate our policy and Lloyd, replying on the day we resigned, said that if he ' might be permitted a criticism ' of my interesting despatch he entirely disagreed with me I<sup>1</sup>

It was not only the near East that caused Austen great anxiety during the years he was at the Foreign Office for on more than one occasion the situation in the Far East became extremely alarming. It would be out of place here to describe the course of events in China between the fall of the monarchy in 1911 and the date when Austen became Foreign Secretary ; it will suffice to say that in November, 1924, that country was a prey to civil war, in which the principal combatants were the Kuomintang at Canton and various War Lords in the North. The division was, indeed, upon the time-honoured geographical lines, but as the Kuomintang was at once a strongly nationalist and highly revolutionary organization an ideological flavour was given to the contest. The Southerners, for a variety of reasons, received Russian support, and their movement had a definitely Communist aspect. From the beginning the attitude of Austen was wholly consistent, though it was not always to the liking either of those who sat facing, or of those who sat behind, the Treasury Bench. He had more than enough to do in Europe, and so far as China was concerned his policy was to play for time until the wave of Bolshevism had spent itself, in the meantime looking after British interests as well as he could. He was convinced that neither the opinion nor the resources of Great Britain would

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Lloyd, Lord : *Egypt since Cromer*, vol. II., p. 290 *et seq.*, for the High Commissioner's point of view.

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allow him to take drastic action in the Palmerstonian manner.

His real difficulties began in May, 1925. For some time past there had been sporadic strikes in the Japanese cotton mills at Shanghai, and during a riot in May a labourer was killed. On the 30th of that month there was in connection with this incident a demonstration by students and workers, in which four of the former were killed and a number wounded. A few days later Austen gave an account of what had happened to the House of Commons :

A strike took place in a Japanese factory. I do not stand here to defend the conditions in factories. I said so before. I repeat it now . . . but bad factory conditions, however bad they may be, are no excuse for the advance of a murderous mob, crying ' Kill the foreigner ! ' upon the police station in which there were large stacks of arms. It was not, according to the information I have at present, until the police station was in danger, with all the arms that it contained, that the order was given to fire. If that be the case, then I say that the order given to fire saved bloodshed instead of causing it. . . . It was in these circumstances, I believe, that the firing took place, but we are all agreed that into the circumstances there should be the fullest and frankest enquiry.

The enquiry, it may be added, justified Austen's view, and completely exonerated the British police officer who had given the order to fire.

As in the case of Central Europe and of Egypt, Austen did not intend, if it could be avoided, that such set-backs should divert him for long from the path which he was determined to pursue.

We are anxious at the earliest moment to enter upon a full investigation of the best way of improving the relations between China and the Powers in the spirit of the Washington Conference. In our opinion the approaching Tariff

Conference which is to meet China in accordance with the Customs Agreement signed at Washington will give an opportunity for such investigation. We are, therefore, anxious that the conference should meet with the least possible delay, and we propose to consult the other Powers concerned as to the most practicable way of expediting its meeting.

Here I must observe that such a disposition on the part of His Majesty's Government, and of the other Powers concerned, may be helped or hindered or even rendered impossible, according as the attitude of the Chinese authorities, central and local, may be an attitude of goodwill and conciliation, or the reverse. In so far as the Chinese Government and the local authorities of China fail to show their good faith by repressing this agitation—and, mind you, there are parts of China where a word from the Governor has prevented all this agitation—in so far as the Chinese Government and the local authorities fail to show their good faith by stopping agitation, strikes, and boycotts, steps to hasten the meeting of the conference become more difficult. I trust, therefore, that not only among the Great Powers a spirit of conciliation and of helpfulness will be found, but that among the Chinese also we shall be met by a similar spirit of conciliation and goodwill, and that by so working together we may help to pilot China through her difficult transitional period and may establish her government on firm foundations of equity and justice to the foreigner, of independence and liberty at home, and that upon that basis we and they together may build our common prosperity to the advantage of the world.

The hopes expressed in this last sentence were not destined to immediate fulfilment; indeed, the rioting at Shanghai served as the signal for an outbreak of xenophobia which spread with great rapidity. Behind the movement was Borodin, the Russian adviser to the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang, for Moscow was desirous of creating as much trouble as possible for Great Britain in the Far East in revenge for the Locarno policy which was removing Germany from the Russian orbit in Europe.

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During the summer of 1925 the situation went from bad to worse, and it was perhaps at its ugliest at Canton. Austen, in a speech in the middle of September, recapitulated all that Great Britain had done over a period of years to meet the aspirations, and he said that she was 'inspired by nothing but goodwill to the Chinese people.' He was ready to consider the abolition of extra-territoriality, but there must be some response on the part of the Chinese, and there must be

for the full fruition of our hopes and purposes . . . a China at peace within itself, united, with an effective central authority, who can undertake engagements and see them kept, who can provide security for life and property, and who thus can make it possible for the strangers and the guests within her gates to surrender—I will not say the privilege, for it is no privileged position—the special position which under the treaties we and other foreigners have enjoyed.

Not the least of Austen's difficulties was the impossibility of persuading the Japanese to take any action. They were close to China, they were in a position to intervene decisively, and their interests were at stake, but when the Foreign Office besought them to hold even a brigade in readiness to be sent across the Yellow Sea they refused to move. Nevertheless, there was an interval of relative calm after the violence of the spring and summer of 1925 for the Nationalists were sharply divided among themselves. Austen took advantage of this lull to show his friendly intentions, and in May, 1926, the British Government protested against an American proposal to extend the foreign control of the revenues from the Chinese customs. In December of the same year Austen sent a memorandum to the Powers which had signed the Washington Agreement<sup>1</sup> five years before calling for the adoption of a more enlightened and liberal policy towards the new Nationalist

<sup>1</sup> By which it had been agreed to respect the sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial and administrative integrity of China.

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movement in China. This movement, he suggested, should be met 'with sympathy and understanding'; the idea that the economic and political development of China could only be secured under foreign tutelage should be abandoned. The pretence, also, of dealing with a Central Government which had no real existence should be given up, and such regional arrangements as were possible should be made with *de facto* Governments; any reasonable proposals which the Chinese authorities, wherever situated, might make should be considered in a sympathetic spirit, even if contrary to the strict interpretation of treaty rights, in return for fair and considerate treatment of foreign interests by them.

Unhappily this despatch had hardly been penned before it had proved a mere counsel of perfection, for on January 3rd, 1927, the anti-foreign feeling culminated in an attempt to seize the British concession at Hankow. The attitude of the Chinese Nationalists may be gauged from the words of Mr. Eugene Chen, their Foreign Minister: 'Your gunboats and marines are no use for the protection of lives and property; we alone can do that; we can render your lives impossible and your property valueless by boycott and passive resistance. We are no longer the sick man from the East; we do not want you to give us independence, we are independent.' The Hankow concession was occupied, and when Mr. Miles Lampson, the British Minister to China, wished to reoccupy it by force, Austen refused. In consequence of this success the feeling against foreigners grew in intensity, and it was not long before the concessions at Shanghai itself were no longer safe.

What was Austen's attitude towards these events, and why did he adopt a line of action in respect of the concession at Hankow which not a few of his fellow-countrymen roundly denounced as pusillanimous? The answer is that he was endeavouring to steer a middle course which he considered would alone prove acceptable to British public opinion. To reoccupy the Hankow concession by force might easily mean a war—without allies—in the interior of China, and to this he was sure the electorate would be opposed. On the other hand he was determined to protect Shanghai, where British interests were considerable, and

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in this he felt sure he would have his country behind him. In both these suppositions Austen, who had always a clear perception of what was possible and what was not, proved right.

Early in January he was writing :

The revolution at Hankow gave me a rude shock. . . . I felt that a great blunder had been committed. With the later reports . . . before me, I am not by any means so confident, for it would seem that, if they (i.e. the Marines) had put up a fight, they must necessarily have been engaged not only with the mob, but with the Southern army, and for that the forces available were insufficient and a great disaster might have been the consequence. What has, however, very disagreeably impressed me is the fact that the forces were not only insufficient to fight the Southern army—which of course we all know—but that with local volunteers they were insufficient to keep the mob out of the concession. . . .

It would seem that we cannot generalize about all the concessions, and must examine the particular situation of each one before taking a decision in regard to it. . . . We have to move cautiously and carefully to consider not merely what is desirable, but what is possible with the means at our disposal.

The great problem as Austen saw it was whether 'Chen and what he stands for are strong enough in face of Borodin's opposition to accept reasonable terms and to secure the execution of any agreement come to, or are they so tied to the Bolsheviks that in fact no offer however reasonable has any chance of success?' On January 19th, in a speech at Birmingham, he justified his attitude as letting the 'Chinese Communists have enough rope to hang themselves.'

At the same time the Government took precautions to ensure that there was no repetition at Shanghai of the events which had taken place at Hankow, and a force of 20,000 men, complete with tanks, aeroplanes, and artillery, was sent to the former city. In reply to the criticisms of his opponents Austen vigorously defended this measure :

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The seizure of the British concession was an outrageous and unjustifiable attack on the long-established rights of the peaceful British commercial community. It was followed by a similar outrage at Kiukiang. It became clear from these episodes that there was no guarantee for the safety of British lives in Chinese cities under the authority of the Nationalist Government in the present revolutionary state of affairs. Any incident might have led to bloodshed. It was equally true that the British forces on the spot were insufficient for the protection of British subjects. It was obvious that, with the advance of the Nationalist forces towards Shanghai, similar danger might threaten the large British community residing there and the immense interests which British enterprise has built up in that great city.

Further, whereas the comparatively small communities at Hankow and Kiukiang could be safely evacuated in an emergency to Shanghai at short notice, there could be no such speedy evacuation of the much larger British population at the latter town. I do not say—I am far from saying or wishing you to think—that the threat of bloodshed and massacre hangs over Shanghai. I hope and believe that it does not. But it would be a clear dereliction of duty on the part of His Majesty's Government, to whatever party they may belong, after what has passed at Hankow, to leave the British at Shanghai without effective protection. . . .

His Majesty's Government will not be deflected from their policy of patient conciliation, nor will their efforts to reach satisfactory agreements with the Chinese authorities in any degree slacken or cease. . . . His Majesty's Government sympathize with the aspirations of genuine Chinese nationalism. 'China for the Chinese' is a reasonable cry, and we have nothing to say against it, but 'Kill the British' and 'Drive out the British' are the ravings of a mad hatred, and it is not in that way that you can deal with this country or the British Empire.

One great source of satisfaction to Austen in these difficult days was that there were no differences among his colleagues in the Cabinet with regard either to the despatch of the troops or of the conciliatory attitude to be adopted

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towards the Chinese if they refrained from violence. It was well that this should be so, since for a time the situation got worse rather than better. Mr. Chen was so annoyed at the steps taken to protect British subjects that he at first broke off all negotiations, while the Opposition at home were most indignant. The wisdom of what had been done, however, became manifest ere long, for the Southern armies under the command of General Chiang Kai-Shek took Shanghai on March 22nd, and two days later entered Nanking. In the latter city they almost at once began to loot the houses of Europeans, and seven foreigners were shot, while others, including the British Consul-General, were wounded ; a party of 150 were eventually rescued under cover of a barrage from British and American warships. It is only fair to add that General Chiang Kai-Shek was himself in no way responsible for these outrages, which were largely the result of a Russian plot to discredit him with the Western Powers.

While the situation in China was developing in this way Austen was working very hard to keep a united home front, for he knew only too well to what extent the hands of British representatives abroad were weakened by embittered discussions at Westminster. 'I have not been wholly successful, largely because Ramsay MacDonald, who knows the truth and has a very fair appreciation of the facts as they are, is so terribly weak and exercises so little authority or control over the wilder spirits of his party.' It was not only the House of Commons that Austen had to manage with the most extreme tact, for there was also public opinion to be taken into account, and as he wrote to Sir Miles Lampson in China, 'you can have no conception how profoundly pacific our people now are.'<sup>5</sup>

It is for this reason that I was so patient . . . at Hankow. Only by that patience, only by making clear to everyone how earnestly we were seeking a peaceful solution and how liberal our policy was and continued to be, have I kept an almost unbroken public opinion behind the Government when it became necessary to send troops to defend Shanghai, and only by the same means can I preserve this unity in

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future. It is this nice combination of liberality and firmness which has impressed the thinking part of the public and has secured an approval of our policy in the Press far more unanimous and wholehearted than that which accompanied us in our Locarno negotiations.

Co-operation with the other Powers abroad was at least as difficult to achieve as with the other parties at home.

I continue most anxious to secure Japanese and American co-operation, but all reports from Tokyo are discouraging, and the State Department at Washington trembles at every current of air that blows from the Senate and seems to be thinking far more of the coming elections than of the lives and interests of Americans in China. The measures of precaution which . . . we adopted have alone saved Shanghai from the fate of Nanking, but the other Powers are far too much inclined to leave us with all the onus of defence whilst attempting to curry favour with the Chinese by dissociating themselves from it.

Happily for Austen the early months of 1927 witnessed the worst of the trouble, and the firm action taken at Shanghai was not without its effect in strengthening the hands of the more moderate section of the Nationalists. The tide of war, too, receded towards the North, and before Austen left office he had been able to give proof of his friendly intentions towards China by concurring in a commercial treaty which granted her tariff autonomy.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ELDER STATESMAN

AUSTEN was now to have further proof of the truth of a very old maxim in English politics, namely, that while a bad foreign policy may easily lose an election a good one never wins an election. Lord Beaconsfield was defeated in 1880 very largely because of what were considered to be his blunders in South Africa and Afghanistan ; Mr. Gladstone was never forgiven for the death of General Gordon ; and it has already been shown to what extent the Near Eastern policy of Mr. Lloyd George was responsible for the overthrow of his administration in 1922. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the brilliant diplomacy of Lord Lansdowne was worth a single vote to Mr. Balfour in 1906, and Austen was soon to be made to realize how little Locarno meant to the ordinary elector. At first he was optimistic as to the prospects of the Government, and at the end of April he thought Mr. Baldwin would have ' a good working majority.' He had been immersed in the work of his own department ever since his return from his voyage in the previous November, and had missed the significance of the by-elections, but he had not long been in his own constituency before he began to take a less roseate view, and was not prepared to put the Conservative majority at more than 50, so little did the slogan of ' Safety First' appear to appeal to the electorate.

As the date of the poll drew near Austen became, for the first time in his political career, seriously alarmed at his own prospects :

I do not think my prospects are good this time, and I shall not be surprised if I lose my seat. We have so much slum property in the Division that it is an almost impossible fight. The older people remain faithful to their former loyalties, but the young generation are revolted by the horrible conditions in which they are forced to live, and in disgust are turning more and more to the Socialist Party.

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We will hope that all will yet come out right, but the canvass returns are very disappointing, and certainly do not give promise of success.

Austen's opponent was a Mr. Willey, who had fought the Skipton Division of Yorkshire at the previous General Election, and who ran him very close indeed as the figures show :

Chamberlain	.	.	16,862
Willey	.	.	16,819
Majority			43

' Just in by 43 ! ' Austen wrote to his daughter in Italy, ' Not much to spare was there ? Mama was splendid ; Mr. Canning <sup>1</sup> a tower of strength and my agent good, but the housing conditions are so bad that it is a miracle we held the seat at all. That was the one question that counted. The Division has become one vast slum.' Elsewhere Conservative candidates were down by the score, and the result of the election was to return 287 Socialists, 260 Conservatives, 59 Liberals, and 9 Independents. Mr. Baldwin was thus confronted with the same alternatives as in 1923 ; he could resign at once, or he could meet the House of Commons with a reconstructed Ministry and face a vote of ' no confidence ' ; on this occasion, however, the Liberals would have to vote with the Government if such a motion was to be defeated. Austen had no doubt what should be done, and in a speech directly after the result was known he urged Mr. Baldwin to meet Parliament. The Prime Minister, however, thought otherwise, and when the Conservative Cabinet met for the last time on June 3rd he informed his colleagues of his determination to resign at once.

I wrote a farewell letter to the King when it was decided that we should resign, and received a charming message

<sup>1</sup> His chairman.

from him through Lord Stamfordham in reply. He was very gracious when he received us, and said a few words to each of us in turn. He again thanked me for 'all you have done for me in foreign affairs.' We went down to Windsor by special train,<sup>1</sup> and were driven up to the Castle and back in carriages with outriders and white horses. One of the members of the Household explained that the outgoing Ministers always had white horses and the incoming Ministers the bays, but I see from the photos in the papers that the new Ministers also had the whites on this occasion.

On reflection Austen came to the conclusion that the election had been lost partly because 'Safety First' was a bad slogan, and partly because the Conservative programme was not sufficiently precise. For his own part his immediate reaction was a feeling of unfamiliarity. 'I find my leisure rather strange after so much hard work, but it is a comfort to know when the front-door bell rings that it is not a Foreign Office messenger bringing red boxes.' He was naturally interested in the question of his successor, and when he heard that the choice had lain between Mr. Thomas and Mr. Henderson he regretted that the former had not been selected 'because he is by far the abler man and is sound in essentials,' while he had always thought Mr. Henderson 'very stupid and rather afraid of responsibility.' There was one other aspect of his new situation which gave Austen a great deal of anxiety, and that was the financial. 'I have had to leave my private affairs to look after themselves while I have been absorbed in public work and the result has been disastrous.' Rigid economy became essential with a growing family to support, and it was necessary to sell Twitts Ghyll. The wrench was a severe one, but it is no exaggerated claim to make for Austen that he never, whether in public or in private, shirked an unpleasant duty merely because it was unpleasant. He sadly missed his garden, and it is pleasant to relate that thereafter a political opponent, the late Sir Francis Acland, was in the habit of sending him flowers regularly as some compensation for what was a very real loss.

<sup>1</sup> The King was too ill to come to London.

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As soon as the new Parliament had met Austen took a short holiday in Norway, and then, after a brief space in England, he spent a month in the Mediterranean, mainly at Corsica, but on his way home he passed a few days at Barcelona. The period following the General Election was not marked by any great activity on the part of the Opposition for public opinion was clearly against any such action ; the ordinary elector wished the new Government to be given a chance, and for Mr. Baldwin and his colleagues to have run counter to this feeling would have been extremely bad tactics. Austen was himself extremely perturbed at the strain which Mr. Snowden's behaviour at The Hague put upon Anglo-French relations, but though he spoke in the House of Commons from time to time during the autumn, he followed the line which prudence required the Opposition to adopt.

That winter Austen's thoughts were to no inconsiderable extent diverted from politics to the Exhibition of Italian Art at Burlington House which Lady Chamberlain had organized. ' I lead a sort of Prince Consort existence ; I am the husband of the lady who organized the Italian exhibition ; otherwise I am of no account, and no one talks to me of anything but what a marvel my wife is, and what a wonderful success her exhibition is.' It was certainly one of the proudest moments of his life. He probably visited the exhibition more often than anyone else, for his love of art was as strong as ever. ' The surprise to me is Mantegna's greatness. I have long liked him, but I did not know till now how big he was.' This liking for Mantegna, it may be remarked, he shared with one of his political heroes, Oliver Cromwell, for among the pictures which the Lord Protector saved from the collection of Charles I was that painter's ' Triumph of Caesar.'

It was well that Austen had other interests to occupy him, for, as on previous occasions when the fates had been unkind to him, he was subject to attacks of melancholy, though certainly not of despair. He had taken the defeat of the Government in the previous spring philosophically enough, considering the break it occasioned in work which was now to be carried on by one of whose ability he had grave doubts, but once the immediate reaction was over,

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and he was thoroughly rested, he became pessimistic in the extreme—until the time came to go into battle once more. With pardonable exaggeration he wrote : \* It may be partly due to age but I find the outlook very gloomy. I have had my ups and downs, my pleasures and disappointments ; I have fought desperately against heavy odds and been beaten or again floated on a favouring tide, but I have never felt so hopeless as now.' One of the causes of his despondency was the revival of his doubts concerning Mr. Baldwin's adequacy as a leader, though he was careful to confine expression of them to the family circle.

I wish Neville were back<sup>1</sup> ; I see no one but him in our ranks capable of developing a constructive policy and winning confidence. He has trained on wonderfully and I hope that it may come to him before it is too late, and in conditions which are tolerable and have not created a state of feeling which condemns any man's efforts to futility.

How much he did to ensure that it should ' come to ' his brother will be told in its proper place.

Being temporarily condemned to inactivity in the political arena Austen was the more pleased at the opportunity which was afforded him, on February 4th, 1930, of giving an address at Chatham House on \* Great Britain as a European Power.' He made it an apology, in the Greek sense of the term, for his policy when Foreign Secretary. He began by contrasting the English, French, and German methods of approach to any political problem :

We decide the practical questions of daily life by instinct rather than by any careful process of reasoning, by rule of thumb rather than by systematic logic. The Frenchman, trusting thought, endeavours to foresee every case and to regulate every action in advance ; the Englishman, distrusting the purely intellectual and more conscious of the many

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Neville Chamberlain was in Kenya.

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accidents of wind and tide, trusts to his experience to inspire the right act at the critical moment and varies his course with the shifting of the winds. Dr. Stresemann once told me that the trouble with his countrymen was that they would never set out on a journey until they had explored every possible feature of the route and ascertained exactly the character of the accommodation to be met with at the end of it.<sup>1</sup>

As Austen understood the English mind the will always decided, and reason, if appealed to at all, was but the servant of the will, supplying, if need be, arguments to justify a decision which had already been taken. These reflections, he maintained, were closely connected with his theme.

Perhaps as a consequence of my administrative and Parliamentary training, my mind works more easily on a concrete proposition than on a philosophical abstraction, and, when I undertook to address you, I counted on finding without difficulty some broad statement of the principles of British foreign policy either in the speeches of its practitioners or in the studies of historians which would serve me as a text to be illustrated or a thesis to be disproved. But my search has been almost in vain ; the practising politician seems at best to justify the course which expediency has dictated by relating it *ex post facto* to something which he can dignify with the high title of principle, and even historians seem for the most part content to praise or condemn particular acts without attempting to formulate any general rules of conduct.

From this Austen passed to the more practical aspects of the problem of British foreign policy which he maintained had of recent years been profoundly altered by two circumstances. The first of these was the rapid development in

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the Editor of the Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs for permission to publish these extracts.

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the means of communication, and the second was one which could hardly escape the notice of his father's son.

The balance of the British Empire has shifted. Great Britain, from being as it were sole Minister of Foreign Affairs, sole mouthpiece of the Empire in the councils of the world, is now only one among many voices, *primus inter pares* it may be, but no longer alone. The self-governing Dominions rule their own destinies, have their own representatives in foreign capitals, declare their own policy if they will, and are bound by no engagement to which they have not given their explicit consent. . . .

It is obvious that this new distribution of executive power in the Empire must profoundly affect the conduct of foreign affairs. It requires for its successful operation the daily interchange of information and, in all grave issues, prior consultation and pre-arranged co-operation. It renders rapid decision far more difficult, and may tend to that extent to deprive us of initiative and lessen our influence in the world, and it certainly necessitates a development of the means at present existing for bringing into harmony the views and interests of the widely scattered nations of the British Commonwealth.

He went on to deal with the various implications of this, and considered the arguments of those who believed that the British attitude towards European problems should in consequence be revised by a return to the isolation of Lord Salisbury's days. Austen strongly reprobated any such notion, and declared, 'With Germany unfriendly, France embittered, Italy uncertain and Russia hostile, we were indeed isolated, and even though the loyalty and support of the Colonies made that isolation splendid it did not render it safe. In truth even then we were isolated only in the sense that we had no friends.' It was impossible for Great Britain to free herself from the conditions which geography had set for her, and she could not separate her fortunes from those of Europe. In any event she was now a member of the League of Nations, and \* must work wherever possible

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with and through the League.' After pointing out that this in no way implied any change in the fundamental purpose of British policy, Austen discussed this last in the light of what his friend, Mr. F. S. Oliver, had recently written in his study of British politics as exemplified by the career of Sir Robert Walpole. After devoting some minutes to Mr. Oliver's analysis Austen repeated the warning he had given at Glasgow in his Rectorial Address against imposing on the League burdens which it could not bear :

There is nothing inherently impossible in the idea of the willing recognition of the same right to live on the part of our neighbours as we claim for ourselves. To assert that peace can only be secured by the common surrender of their sovereign independence by all nations is to pose as essential a condition which no nation has ever yet admitted, or is ever likely to accept unless under compulsion and as the consequence of defeat. It can only distract our attention from the practical methods which are open to us to avert the danger of war and, by destroying our belief in the possibility of securing peace, lessen the effectiveness of our efforts to maintain it. It is to the League of Nations that we must look to find the solution of the problem, but to a League in which the nations co-operate as equals, not to a super-State of which all are subject provinces.

Finally, quoting from his own experience Austen instanced the beneficent results of the regular gatherings of the world's statesmen at Geneva and the steady pressure of public opinion exercised through the Council and the Assembly, which 'form a new and potent instrument in the hands of men of goodwill.'

To help the continuation and development of this process ; to maintain old friendships whilst cultivating new ones ; to act loyally with the Council ; to promise no more than we can perform ; to strive to keep a reasonable balance between conflicting interests and from our semi-detached

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position to exercise a moderating and harmonizing influence; above all to preserve union among the greater Powers and to prevent Europe settling down again in two great camps—this, as it seems to me, should still be in the twentieth century the aim of British statesmanship, as it was a hundred years ago the policy of Castlcreagh.

Next month the Austen Chamberlains moved into a new house, No. 58 Rutland Gate, and "warmed" it with a dinner of 28 young people (Grandi, Sir Robert Horne, and our two selves being the only elders); shortly afterwards Austen and Lady Chamberlain went to Cap Martin for Easter. However, Austen was not to be left long in even relative idleness, for the Simon Report on India had just made its appearance, and in the discussions with the Government which ensued as to the course to be adopted Mr. Baldwin asked Austen to accompany him. 'He is an odd creature; the natural person for him to have chosen for such a conference as his companion was his Secretary of State for India, but he prefers to take me.' Austen had been deeply interested in India ever since he had been responsible for its destiny, and by June he was writing 'my mind is beset with the Indian problem, and all else seems trifling beside it.' Another, and more personal, matter which exercised his mind at this time was his brother's acceptance of the chairmanship of the Conservative Party organization; Austen was strongly opposed to Mr. Neville Chamberlain doing so, but he failed to carry his point, and he had to console himself with the hope that his brother would not be at Palace Chambers for long.

His acceptance of the chairmanship has given immense satisfaction in the Party, but I remain very sorry that he should have had to undertake it. The fact, however, is that no one was very clearly indicated for the position and most of the people whose names were mentioned were unfitted for it. I hope that Neville will stick to his determination to hand it over before very long. He would sacrifice far too much by devoting himself to that particular

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task. His own unselfishness in taking it even temporarily is recognized on all hands, and I hope gratitude may last as long as he holds the position.

Austen had no longer any ambitions for himself, and all his political hopes were based upon his brother succeeding Mr. Baldwin in the leadership, and thus eventually becoming Prime Minister. He felt that for Mr. Neville Chamberlain to accept the chairmanship of the Party might be to imperil his chances, and to Austen this risk was too great to take. As it turned out he was wrong, for henceforth his brother was possessed both of a knowledge of, and a support from, the party machine which had been denied to Austen and to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.

In these circumstances Austen welcomed the end of the Session with more than ordinary relief, and on August 4th he wrote :

The Session is over and I bid it goodbye with no regrets. The Government has indeed lost its bloom ; the only minister who comes out of it with enhanced reputation is Morrison (Transport) ; the Prime Minister's authority in his Party is gravely impaired ; so is Snowden's ; Thomas's has gone altogether ; Clynes has none. Only Henderson, party manager and wirepuller in the background, Foreign Secretary officially, retains his power and there are many rumours that he intrigues against MacDonald as earlier against Thomas, and seeks to supersede him. With a Government thus shaken, we ought to be on the highroad to success, but our Party is divided, disgruntled, and confused.

In spite of his concern at the political situation Austen was as ready as ever to open his mind to fresh impressions. ' I have collected,' he wrote to his sister, ' Bertram Newman's *Melbourne*, Stephen Gwynn's *Walter Scott*, Seely's autobiography, Petrie's *Canning*, Headlam Morley's *Diplomatic Studies*,

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and Craddock on *India's Dilemma* for solid reading, and *Bengal Lancer* (you should get this), and some other volumes for lighter hours.' It was well that he had taken such a library with him, for the weather was none too good, particularly at first, and many of his friends were hard hit by the slump which was then beginning. Austen and Lady Chamberlain stayed first with Sir Warden Ghilcott at Warsash, where the books above-mentioned and 'the daily crossword puzzle of *The Times* with a nap every afternoon filled in my days, and poker with penny points passed the evenings.' From Warsash he went on to Scotland, where he joined his family, who had preceded him.

That autumn brought Austin one of those sorrows which are the inevitable accompaniment of advancing years, namely, the death of an old friend, for Lord Birkenhead died on September 30th.

The week has been saddened for me by Birkenhead's death. I can well understand anyone who had no more than a passing acquaintance with him detesting him cordially, but if you once got really to know him it was impossible not to like and even to love him. It is striking to see how in everything written of him by those who were ever his friends—no matter how great their difference of outlook, character and faith—it is the loyalty and the generosity of his friendship that is uppermost in their thoughts. I can well believe that if I had not known him intimately, I should have detested him. As it was, I had a great affection for him, and shall never find a truer or more affectionate friend.

The next few months were not marked by any outstanding events in the political arena. Austen continued to be seriously worried at what he felt was Mr. Baldwin's failure to give a fighting lead to his followers, and his belief that his own brother was the only possible successor to Mr. Baldwin was continually receiving added confirmation. The state of Europe he felt was deteriorating, and he was gravely perturbed at the progress of events in India, where the

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attitude of the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, was disquieting him. Austen considered that it was a mistake to convoke the Round Table Conference at all, and he was disappointed at the way in which 'the conservative elements of the Conference seem to have been carried away on the flood time of the popular movement.' He also criticized the Princes for not 'affording a solid conservative ground-work,' and rather temporizing with the forces of revolution while openly showing their discontent at 'what I believe to be the well-founded and proper claim of the British Crown to "paramountcy."' For the rest, Austen passed the winter in carrying out his Parliamentary duties and in performing his social obligations, and he paid a visit to Oxford where he spoke in the Union for the first time since the Eights Week debate of 1914. Housing was another subject which engaged his attention, for what he saw in his own constituency shocked him immeasurably, and he became an enthusiastic supporter of C.O.P.E.C. in its efforts to deal with the problem.

So far as Austen was concerned the commencement of that momentous year, 1931, was in no way remarkable, and although he believed that the Labour Government was growing steadily weaker he had no great confidence in the ability of his own Party to take advantage of their opponents' difficulties. Early in March he spoke in the House of Commons against the Government's proposal to accede to the General Act of 1928 for the settlement of international disputes. His objection was that by 'piling obligation on obligation, signature on signature, document on document' the Government was weakening rather than strengthening the League of Nations. There seemed to him to be no need further to supplement what was already guaranteed by the League Covenant, the Kellogg Pact, and the Optional Clause.

It seems to me that in the search for logic here, as in some other steps taken by the present Government, there is the triumph of the Latin mind and of a policy which the whole of Anglo-Saxon political experience, internal, inter-Imperial, and external, shows to be a bad guide in practical

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affairs, and very much inferior to the greater elasticity and the greater adaptability which our own system affords.

In April he and Lady Chamberlain went to Rome, where they took their sightseeing very easily, and devoted most of their time to excursions in the surrounding country, where they visited Ostia and the Alban Hills. Austen had previously been none too well acquainted with Rome, and he saw the Colosseum and the Sistine Chapel for the first time. He had to confess that Raphael did not interest him, but he was unexpectedly impressed with the roof of the Sistine Chapel. As for St. Peter's, 'that completely pagan temple left me cold except for its magnificent proportions.' Austen's holiday was not by any means wholly confined to visiting ancient monuments, for he met Signor Mussolini once again and also renewed his acquaintance with Signor Grandi. It was, too, while he was at Rome that he was 'saddened by the overthrow of King Alfonso.'

He was such a sympathetic figure and, whatever his failings, Spain was making real progress under his rule. I entirely mistrust the competence of the new governors—not to speak of their honesty. . . . Still it is possible that the republic may not be long-lived and that Alfonso may be recalled ; but on the whole experience seems to show that it is easier to get out than to go back.

During the next three months events moved rapidly to the crisis of August when the Labour administration fell and the National Government came into office with Austen as First Lord of the Admiralty. In the negotiations which led up to this solution Mr. Neville Chamberlain played the most prominent and decisive part on the Conservative side, and it was principally due to his efforts that such a settlement was reached. Austen was kept fully informed by his brother of all that happened, and he cordially approved of the other's attitude. When the new Government came to be

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formed, and he was asked to co-operate, he willingly agreed, but he was bitterly disappointed that it was the Admiralty and not the Foreign Office which was offered to him. He felt that at the latter he might have been of real assistance, whereas at the Admiralty 'except to a few I appear not as someone who gives all he can to help in a crisis but as an old party hack who might be dangerous outside and so must have his mouth stopped with office.'

Austen's tenure of office as First Lord of the Admiralty, the post which he had so much coveted in earlier and happier days, was not destined to be of long continuance, but it was marked by one important event, namely, the naval mutiny at Invergordon. As it is nowhere suggested either that Austen was in any way responsible for this unhappy incident or that his attitude was otherwise than scrupulously correct, it is unnecessary to discuss it in any detail in these pages. Suffice to say that in the desperate state of the national finances cuts were made in the pay of the three Services, and on some naval stations the effect of these reductions was not satisfactorily explained to the ratings in advance. All the available evidence goes to show that the mass of the men affected were swept off their feet by a very real anxiety about the position in which their wives and home would be placed. The 1919 rates, which were the subject of the cut, were, in the lower ratings, so high that they enabled men to marry before they had become eligible for marriage allowance ; rents are very high in the dockyard towns, while their furniture, and, not infrequently, accessories, were bought on the hire-purchase system, the liabilities of the young married men often absorbed every penny of their pay, and they had no margin on which to draw. There were, too, what Austen described as some 'bad hats' in the Navy, and they made the most of the opportunity which the apprehensions of the men gave them to foment the discontent and to organize trouble. Nevertheless, the most careful investigation has failed to show that the outbreak had any political origin.

Austen's feelings are revealed in his private correspondence ; he had no idea, he wrote on September 20th, that 'my " caretaker's " job was going suddenly to become a centre of danger and interest.'

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The trouble at Invergordon was lamentable ; the only bright features were that there was not a single act of disrespect to officers, that the men, tho' refusing duty, stood to attention unordered when the flag was hoisted each morning or when the Admiral's barge passed a ship, and that certainly the general spirit was not revolutionary or Bolshevist. On the Admiral's ship the men in charge of the switch-room picketed it themselves, without orders, when a rumour of sabotage reached them, and no doubt many men joined unwillingly in the refusal of duty, but they did join. They were afraid for their families. I hope that what we shall be able to do will satisfy the mass, and if there is any further trouble enable us to separate the sheep from the goats. I suspect Glasgow reservists as being the nucleus of the trouble.

A few days later, on September 26th, he felt in a better position to attempt an analysis of the situation :

All is going smoothly at present, and I am soberly hopeful but I dare not prophecy. The situation for a time was very grave. There is no use shirking facts ; the confidence both of the Navy and the public in the Board of Admiralty has been much shaken. I am not sure myself that the Board could not have foreseen the effect of the cuts more clearly than they did, tho' it would have been very difficult without having before us sample domestic budgets such as we now possess. We were misled by the fact that men were already serving happily and contentedly on the new rates and did not foresee how great would be the commitments of men who had felt assured of the higher pay. Our fears concentrated on the probable charge that we had broken faith—not on the individual hardships—and the urgency of the situation and the established practice caused us to announce far too abruptly the changes which were made. It is so easy to be wise afterwards.

The beginning of October saw the end of the crisis, and on the 3rd of that month Austen wrote :

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My troubles in the Navy are, I hope, at an end. The next few days will definitely decide. I have got from the Cabinet (who, I may say, treated me very generously) the decisions which I thought necessary, and the Sea Lords are very grateful and enormously relieved. I have completely won their confidence, and I think that they feel that I have done for them what no Minister of less experience and authority could have accomplished. I was in fact prepared to tell the Cabinet that I could not remain First Lord unless they granted our requests ; but I never use language of this kind till it has become absolutely necessary and on this occasion they accepted my view even before I had finished the exposition of my case.

Three days after Austen had written this letter the Prime Minister informed the House of Commons that the King had acceded to his request for an immediate Dissolution, and polling took place on October 27th. Austen was again opposed by Mr. Willey, but he found the whole electoral atmosphere very different from what it had been in 1929. The municipal elections had gone against the Socialists in the previous November, and Austen had altered his tactics in view of the rude shock which he had received at the last General Election. He came to the conclusion that he could not win a scat, such as West Birmingham, by meetings which the same people attended every night, so, instead of making a large number of speeches as on previous occasions, he did a great deal of personal visiting. In one respect he was more severely handicapped than ever before, for Lady Chamberlain had been obliged to go abroad for her health, but he had the assistance of his daughter. 'I cannot tell you how good Diane has been. She has a way with her that breaks down even her father's shyness, and wins all hearts.' A few days before the poll he estimated his majority at about two thousand, but the result widely exceeded his most optimistic expectations :

Chamberlain	.	.	22,448
Willey	.	.	10,507
Majority			11,941

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What had happened in West Birmingham proved to be, not exceptional, but typical of the polling all over the country, for there were returned no less than 554 supporters of the National Government, of whom there were 471 Conservatives, 35 Liberal Nationals, 33 Liberals, 13 National Labour, and 2 National, while the Opposition could only number a beggarly 56. ' I keep speculating,' wrote Austen, ' about what the ultimate result of all this is to be, but I can form no clear idea even in my own mind. But " 'twas a famous victory," and for the moment let us be content with that.'

As soon as the victory of the National Government at the polls was assured the following correspondence passed between Austen and Mr. Baldwin :

Midland Hotel, Birmingham  
*28th October, 1931*

MY DEAR BALDWIN,

Now that the triumph of the National cause in which the Unionist Party has borne so large a share has been secured, the first difficulty that will confront the Prime Minister and yourself is the allocation of offices.

It is necessary that all the Parties which supported the Government should be represented in the Government, and the number of places available for the recognition of the many claims of your own supporters will bear no proportion to their numbers in the new House of Commons.

I have had for some time the probability of such a result present to my mind. I am therefore taking no sudden or unconsidered step when I resign any claim which you might consider me to have and beg you to regard the office which I hold as at your disposal to reward the services of some younger man. I believe that I shall thus best help you and the cause for which I stand. You know me well enough to be assured that as a private member I shall continue to give to you and it all the support in my power.

Yrs. sincerely,

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN.

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Trent, New Barnet  
*1st November, 1931*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

At last I have a lucid interval in which I can sit down and attend to my letters.

Your letter made me proud of having been your colleague and friend for so long. I admire the spirit of it, and I hope that same spirit may be mine in due time.

We do owe something to the many younger men who are crowding on our heels. You and I know the necessary hardship that these combinations of Parties impose on them. And it is worth anything when we say freely and gladly, 'Come along and help; we have held the front line through times good and bad; it is now your turn.'

But, wherever you may be, I know you will always be available for counsel. I hope you are too good a student of history to worry yourself about the judgment of your own generation. I felt very strongly at the '29 election that the country completely failed to appreciate what you had done for them in their foreign relationships and at the League of Nations. But when the history of these years comes to be written, with the fuller knowledge time brings, justice will be done and a place will be secured for you which your father would deem not unworthy for his son.

I shall take good care that our younger men know of your thought for them.

I am, my dear Austen,

As always,

Very sincerely yours,

STANLEY BALDWIN.

Austen had not, as may be imagined, taken this step without the most careful consideration, but once it had been taken he had no regrets for what he had done. By no means the least cogent of the motives by which he was actuated was the desire to help his brother. 'I hope that my elimination will make Neville's accession to the Chancellorship easier to secure. I regard that as his due, and vital to the Party.' In this, at any rate, he was not to be disappointed.

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A few days later Austen wrote to the monarch whom he had so long and so faithfully served, and with whose brother he had been an undergraduate at Cambridge, to explain what he had done. By return of post came the following reply :

Buckingham Palace  
*6th November, 1931*

MY DEAR AUSTEN,

Thank you for your most kind letter and I deeply regret to think that I shall no longer have your wise counsel as one of my Ministers.

You may be assured that, after your devoted service during the last 36 years in Conservative and National Administrations, I feel that I am parting from, though not losing, an old and valued friend.

To-day, as you say, circumstances are wholly abnormal, and I know that your present action in voluntarily withdrawing to make way for younger men, in order to further the best interests of your country and your colleagues, is in harmony with the public spirit and self-sacrifice which have always characterized your career.

You have set a fine example and I trust that you may be given health and strength for many years to continue to help your Sovereign and your country.

Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

GEORGE R.I.

When Austen left office for the last time he had still five and a half years to live, and his position, politically, recalled<sup>1</sup> that of his father between 1886 and 1895 in that he exercised over the House of Commons a control which had not been his when he was a Minister. Advancing years may have prevented him from that participation in the daily round at Westminster which had characterized him during the earlier part of his career, but he was rarely absent when foreign policy was the subject to be discussed. Nor did he treat the House of Commons as if it were a mere platform

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from which to address the country, for he listened to others with the same courteous attention as he expected them to listen to him. At the same time it must be admitted that if the House never failed to hear him with respect, it by no means always followed his advice, and particularly was this the case where the problem of Germany was concerned ; as the war-clouds darkened the European horizon, and when they finally broke, there must have been many a Member, and more than one Cabinet Minister, who regretted that he had not paid greater heed to the warnings of one who knew his Germany better than the vast majority of his contemporaries was prepared to admit.

While the sands of Austen's life were running out there were three considerations by which he was actuated. The first was not to indulge in any factious criticism of, or opposition to, the Government of the day ; the second was to tear the scales from the eyes of his fellow-countrymen where the Nazi regime was concerned ; and the third was to do everything in his power to ensure that his brother should, by becoming Prime Minister, reach that dizzy height which both he and his father had failed to attain. His success in all three of these objectives is universally admitted, but the first two are more widely realized than the third. Few men in English history have worked so hard, and no man has worked harder, for a brother's interest than did Austen. Yet it was no mere family pride which prompted him, for he firmly believed that Mr. Neville Chamberlain alone could lead the country through the increasing difficulties by which it was beset. His faith in his brother was implicit, and if the dead are conscious of what happens on the earth which they have left behind them the spirit of Austen must have rejoiced on that May morning in 1937, after he had himself been in his grave for a little more than two months, when his brother kissed hands at Buckingham Palace as Prime Minister of England. His last, and perhaps his dearest, ambition had been achieved, and he had been the principal architect of his brother's fortunes.

The self-denying ordinance which Austen had imposed upon himself had an extremely adverse effect upon his financial position, and during those last years of his life he

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consequently formed a number of business connections. He became a director of Martin's Bank, the Greater London Trust, the General Electric Company, and Edmundsons Electricity Corporation. He also became chairman of the League Loans Committee when this was formed. Certainly not less congenial as a means of supplementing his income were his journalistic and literary activities ; he soon proved to the public what his friends had always known, namely, that he was the possessor of an extremely able and graceful pen, and it must always be a matter for the deepest regret that he made so late an appearance as an author. As has been shown, all his life he had read widely, and this was apparent in everything that he wrote. In 1935 he published a volume entitled *Down the Years*, which consisted of a number of essays on men and affairs, and which had gone through six editions by the time of his death. In the following year there appeared his *Politics from Inside*, a collection of the letters written to his step-mother during the last years of his father's life. Austen also wrote from time to time for the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*, as well as for several French and American papers. In addition he was Chancellor of Reading University, and chairman both of the London School of Tropical Medicine and the British Postgraduate Medical School ; in all of these capacities he worked extremely hard, for to the very end he displayed all his old zeal on behalf of any activity with which he was associated.

Nevertheless his heart was at Westminster, and it was there that he played his part in public life as an Elder Statesman. One of the tasks which occupied a good deal of his time was the work of the Joint Select Committee on India which was set up in 1933. When he agreed to serve on it he was under no illusions as to the difficulties with which he and his colleagues were confronted, and he wrote, ' I am sure that I shall not like the result whatever it is. It is a fearfully dangerous experiment, but one can't go back on the past, and what one has to ask oneself at every moment as one faces a step one does not like is well and what's the alternative. It will only be contemplation of the alternative that will get me over the fences.' As the Committee proceeded with its work Austen became

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increasingly more critical, and on June 16th, 1933, he wrote :

The Committee is ill-constituted ; I doubt whether any Committee would be unanimous, but what worries me is that there are not enough independent members who might be convinced on this Committee and therefore the majority will not carry the weight it might have done. I don't see a single member who represents the mass of the younger Conservatives—men who might be persuaded to accept the scheme, perhaps with some modifications, but who are full of honest doubt and anxiety.

Further experience of the Committee did not radically change this opinion, though he discovered a method by which he felt that he personally could be of use.

The India Committee is now <sup>1</sup> sitting 18 hours a week in an endeavour to get to the end of the evidence and finish all that has to be done with the assistance (?) of the Indian Delegates. I shall be glad to be rid of them. Two or three of them occupy an interminable time in examining witnesses, and generally do as much harm as possible to their own cause in that process. They are inconceivably stupid and unteachable in this respect. Instead of setting themselves to convince the Committee that the reforms are safe, they think only of the Indian gallery and say and do everything they can to make the Committee suspicious of their intentions, and to convince us not only that all the safeguards are necessary but that we must supplement them by further precautions.

I begin, however, to see my way to gathering together a nucleus of moderate or middle opinion in the Committee which may prove decisive in the long run. Hardinge, Derby, Zetland, Cadogan, and I to begin with. We ought to have help from the Archbishop and Reading, Peel and perhaps Attlee. The last-named has impressed me, and

<sup>1</sup> This was written on October 7th, 1933.

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his help would be very useful as he is the principal or at least most distinguished Labour member.

When the Report made its appearance twelve months later its reception was very much what he expected it to be, 'that is none too good either here or in India.' Although Austen had done his full share of the work of the Committee, he took care not to become a protagonist in the internal strife which was dividing the Conservative Party on the subject of India. He understood, and in no small degree sympathized with, the fears of the Die-hards, and throughout the controversy he remained on the most friendly personal terms with their leader, Mr. Winston Churchill.

India soon gave place to Germany as the source of Austen's preoccupation. As the Nazis fought their way to power he became increasingly alarmed, and he early realized that the menace of the pre-war years was present again and in an even more dangerous form. In the Spring of 1933 Herr Hitler became ruler of the Reich, and on April 13th Austen made his first attempt in the House of Commons to open the eyes of his fellow-countrymen to the peril by which they were confronted.

Is this the time to talk of revision, with what has been happening in Germany before our eyes? A good deal is made in Germany of some sensational propaganda and exaggerations which are said to have appeared in other countries. I dare say such have appeared in this or in other countries, but I do not base my case on that. I have not myself read it, because that is not the kind of paper from which I seek to get information. I have not read it and I do not base anything that I say upon it, but I have read the very restrained accounts of some very responsible correspondents, and I have noted that the *Manchester Guardian* is not considered a fit paper for the Germans to have access to. I do not, however, base my observations upon what I have read even in serious and responsible papers, written by men who carefully sift the information they send home and whose reputations depend

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upon its impartiality and its accuracy. I base my case upon the statements of Germans in authority ; I do not need to go outside them.

What is this new spirit of German nationalism ? The worst of the old-Prussian Imperialism, with an added savagery, a racial pride, an exclusiveness which cannot allow to any subject not of ' pure Nordic birth ' equality of rights and citizenship within the nation to which he belongs. Are you going to discuss revision with a Government like that ? Are you going to discuss with such a Government the Polish Corridor ? The Polish Corridor is inhabited by Poles ; do you dare to put another Pole under the heel of such a Government ?

After all, we stand for something in this country. Our traditions count for our own people, for Europe, and for the world. Europe is menaced and Germany is afflicted by this narrow, exclusive, aggressive spirit, by which it is a crime to be in favour of peace and a crime to be a Jew. That is not a Germany to which we can afford to make concessions. That is not a Germany to which Europe can afford to give equality.

I understood that the promise made by the Five Powers was of equality of status, to be reached by stages. Before you can afford to disarm or to urge others to disarm, you must see a Germany whose mind is turned to peace, who will use her equality of status to secure her own safety but not to menace the safety of others ; a Germany which has learnt not only how to live herself but how to let others live inside her and beside her.

The occasion of this debate was to discuss the proposals for a Four Power Pact, which the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, had recently brought back with them from Rome. Somewhat to the surprise of his Italian friends Austen made a reasoned attack on the Pact, not so much because he disliked its basic assumptions as because he found it at once vague and inopportune. He complained of the lack of information, and of the unrest and confusion which ignorance and rumours had produced.

\* All that we know about the Pact . . . is that it contains

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two ideals, renewed assurances on the part of the four Great Powers that they will not have recourse to force for the settlement of international disputes, and some proposal for the revision of the Peace Treaties. . . . I do not wish by any words of mine to feed the jealousy which does exist among the smaller Powers at the co-operation and agreement among the Great Powers.' He believed that such co-operation was essential, but it did not require a Pact to make it workable. Revision he thought a very dangerous word ; it should not appear in the mouth of any statesman or in the policy of any Government until they were prepared to define very closely the limits within which they considered revision should take place.

This speech was the first advertisement which either the British people or the House of Commons had received of the meaning of recent events in Germany from one of Austen's standing, and it caused a considerable stir, but so far as any action was concerned Austen produced little or no effect ; abroad it attracted widespread notice, and only a bowdlerized version was allowed to appear in Germany itself. A few weeks later the Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Dollfuss, was in London, and Austen entirely agreed with him that Austria was the key to the whole position in Central Europe. Dr. Dollfuss had no doubt that he could hold Austria if the Germans were restrained, and this could be done by a few plain words from England with which Signor Mussolini would be only too pleased to associate himself.

I urged him to put his whole case before Simon as strongly as he could, but will Simon understand or act ? Alas ! none of them seem to turn to Simon or to trust him. It is a terrible misfortune.

Even in these early days of Nazi rule Austen was convinced that the only hope of peace lay in making it plain to the German Government that Great Britain would do her best to meet the legitimate claims of a peaceful Germany but would 'do nothing for a Germany which outrages

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humanity at home and menaces her neighbours' peace.' With this end in view Austen believed that the pressure should be kept up by suitable speeches at Westminster, and if this was done he was not yet unhopeful that there might be a development of the Nazi movement not unlike that which had taken place in respect of Italian Fascism, for at that time Signor Mussolini seemed to him to be pursuing a moderate and pacific policy very different from that which had marked his earlier years. For the moment, however, Austen felt that Austria was the key to the situation, and he was disappointed at the apparent failure of the British Government to realize the fact.

On July 5th he returned to the attack, again in the House of Commons, for he felt very strongly that it was there, rather than upon some purely party platform, that he should give expression to his views on this subject.

I feel strongly on this matter. Perhaps it is because, for four or five very busy and responsible years I worked my hardest, and, as I thought at the time, not without some measure of success, to bring Germany back as an equal into the comity of nations, to end the bickering and pin-pricking which she had no doubt suffered ever since the war, to put our relations on a friendly and even a confidential footing, and to go forward with old friends and new friends to build a better future for our country and the world. I see all these hopes, if not destroyed, adjourned, delayed, postponed, by this new spirit which is prevailing in Germany. It is not only the internal aspect, it is not only the internal events in which the new spirit finds expression. Locarno stood, for a time at any rate, as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, but in the new Germany the name of Stresemann has no respect; Locarno is a word of abuse. . . .

Is there any part of the Peace Treaty which the new Germany accepts? What of those speeches about Schleswig, where the Danes very wisely refused to receive any part of their own territory back again except by the choice of the people who inhabited it, and had restored to them a territory in which a plebiscite showed I think, 75 per

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cent, voting in favour of reunion with Denmark? That is no more sacred than the Corridor or Silesia.

If Germany wants revision of the Treaties, if Germany wants disarmament, she has got to convince the world of two things. She has got to convince the world that a reasonable adjustment of the Treaties will satisfy and end the question. Whether you read the story of the twenty or thirty years which preceded the war, or whether you read the story of the post-war years, you will find the same thing. 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. Until Germany shows that there is a moderate, reasonable, and acceptable readjustment of the Peace Treaties which would be final, and would be treated as final by her, no man serves the interests of peace if he allows the Germans to suppose for one moment that any revision is possible.

The summer of 1933 found Austen extremely worried, and he became severely critical of what he considered to be the inertia of the Government. 'Have we in fact a policy, and is the Cabinet behind it, and do our representatives abroad know what it is if it indeed exists?' This was in August, and not long afterwards came the by-election in East Fulham, where the mere suggestion that there might one day be another war was enough to convert a Conservative majority of 14,521 into a minority of 4,840. Austen might be cheered to the echo in the House of Commons, and praised in the Press, but his counsel was falling upon remarkably stony ground. Ministers were complacent, and their followers were far more afraid of the Whips than of Herr Hitler. The Opposition, it is true, loathed the Nazis with a deadly hatred, but they were not yet prepared to push their sentiments to their logical conclusion by advocating rearmament. As for the ordinary citizen, it had for so long been instilled into him that the Treaty of Versailles was an unjust settlement that he was not greatly perturbed by Herr Hitler's attempts to throw

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off its shackles ; in any event he was glad of any excuse for doing nothing. It is true that Austen received support from Mr. Churchill and Lord Lloyd, but most of the Right Wing Conservatives who might have been expected to have rallied to him were engrossed in the Indian problem to the exclusion of all else. In no quarter was there any real appreciation of what was happening on the Continent, and the national emblem might well have been changed from a lion to an ostrich.

These considerations were never long absent from Austen's mind, and in addition was the reluctance to take any step which might imperil his brother's chances. In October, 1933, Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and from the League itself, and in January of the following year Herr Hitler made a speech which clearly envisaged an attack on Austria. Next month Austen wrote, 'I am gravely disquieted by the way in which Germany is "getting away with it," and the encouragement which she thus receives to raise her demands again and again.' The progress of events thereafter gathered increasing momentum ; Herr Hitler's purge on June 30th, the murder of Dr. Dollfuss, and the death of President von Hindenburg were portents which could be ignored only by the wilfully blind, and Austen was certainly not among their number. The Austrian Chancellor had attracted him, and he felt his death as a personal, not only as a political, loss :

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.

I have never met a man who captured my sympathy more quickly ; he was so transparently honest, so simple and so brave, and withal had a personal charm which is rare.

Nevertheless, even during these worrying years life had its compensations for Austen. Not the least of these was in

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February, 1932, when his brother carried Tariff Reform to its final triumph. As he listened to the speech—' perfect in the arrangement and lucidity '—Austen was taken back in spirit more than a quarter of a century to that meeting at Bingley Hall, the last Mr. Joseph Chamberlain ever addressed, and to the final words of his father's speech on that occasions : ' I hope I may be able to live to congratulate you upon our common triumph, but in any case I have faith in the people. . . . I look forward to the future with hope and confidence, and

" Others I doubt not, if not me,  
The issue of our toil shall see." '

Austen was deeply moved. \* I can say my *nunc dimittis* now with a full and grateful heart. How proud Father would have been of Neville, and how it would have moved him that Neville should complete his work.'

There were, it is true, moments when Austen felt that in his retirement the world was passing him by, and he became somewhat dejected in consequence, but these fits of depression were not of long duration, and they soon disappeared as fresh work began to come his way. He had his family, his wide circle of friends, and his many interests ; there were also those Continental holidays to which he and Lady Chamberlain always looked forward so much, and which they so thoroughly enjoyed. In the summer of 1932 they went to Houlgate, and then on to the Mediterranean for a yachting cruise with Sir Warden Chilcott ; but the holiday was unexpectedly cut short for Austen by a call from Sir John Simon to go to Geneva in connection with the League Loans Committee. Austen was glad in many ways to visit the headquarters of the League again, but he was also saddened.

It was delightful to be received with such genuine pleasure and cordiality by all old friends, but sad to find them all so dejected, the Assembly a dead thing, the Council without confidence in itself or authority elsewhere, and people as little given to hysterics or high-falutin as Benes saying, ' I tell them they are too frightened. We are not

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going to have war now ; we have five years before us, perhaps six. We must make the most of them.'

October of the following year witnessed Austen's seventieth birthday. ' One cannot pretend that one is any longer young at 70, but I don't feel old, and I suppose that that is what really matters. I hated being fifty but since that point was definitely passed, more or less doesn't seem to matter as long as I am not an invalid and a trouble to myself and others.' A few days earlier Mr. MacDonald had offered Austen the Lord Wardenship of the Cinque Ports, which he would have dearly loved to have accepted, but on going into the matter he found that the upkeep of Walmer Castle would have involved an annual expenditure of at least £1,500, so he was compelled to decline the proposal, which he said the Prime Minister made to him ' in the nicest terms' and ' with genuine feeling.' Advancing years in no way diminished Austen's interest in youth, and on two occasions, in January, 1934, and in October, 1935, he was the guest of the Coningsby Club, that eclectic body of young Oxford and Cambridge men which meets at the Junior Carlton Club to eat, drink, and discuss Conservative politics. On the first occasion Austen noted :

The discussion which followed was interesting for the great diversity of view which it disclosed from something indistinguishable from Fascism on the one hand to extreme Pacifism and Socialism on the other. They gave me the impression of extreme *malaise* and uncertainty, a groping after something which eluded their grasp. They need a very clear call and bold leadership. I don't see any sign of their getting it at present.

The second time he addressed them Austen equally enjoyed himself, while the attendance was a record, and it was one o'clock before he managed to get away from the Junior Carlton.

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Earlier in 1935 he had summed up the Government in the phrase they ' can't get their stuff across' :

Hilton Young is a conspicuous example ; Kingsley Wood the brilliant exception. I am not sure that Walter Elliot is a stayer, and Hore Belisha is a young man in a hurry who may easily involve *his* motor coach in a bad smash if he is not more careful. K. W. is the first Postmaster-General I have known who ever succeeded in doing anything worth while at the Post Office, and it is the first time in my experience that P.O. administration has been well spoken of, and the P.O. become an asset to the Government.

The progress of Mr. Eden always interested Austen as that of one whom he had himself launched upon an official career, but he was disturbed by the weakness of the Government as a whole, and he more than once expressed the wish that its basis could be broadened by the inclusion of Mr. Lloyd George, though he fully realized that this suggestion would never meet with his brother's approval in view of past differences, yet he stuck to his opinion : ' I believe that he and Neville, if they could work together, would make a very strong combination.'

The earlier months of 1935 were marked by a further gathering of the storm in Central Europe. On March 4th the British Government published its ' Statement relating to Defence,' which first of all opened the eyes of innumerable people to the grave realities of the international situation. This White Paper, which was by no means enthusiastically received by 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. The publication of this document was seized on by Herr Hitler as an excuse for tearing up the Treaty of Versailles by the reintroduction of conscription and the public announcement of his possession of an air force. On May 2nd there was a debate in the House of Commons on these events, and in this Austen took a prominent part. He did not spare Ministers :

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I think the Government must reckon that public confidence has had a great shock when, after the repeated declarations as to the relative strength in the air of our country and of Germany, so lately renewed and reaffirmed, we now find that our Government have been wholly misinformed throughout.

He then alluded to the Treaty of Versailles :

I am not one of those who think that, in all the circumstances the Versailles Treaty was, in its territorial dispositions, a bad Treaty, but I think our notions at that time of reparations, or of the amount, whether in the form of payment of debt or payment of reparations, which could be transferred without economic disaster bore no relation to the facts. But those economic provisions of the Treaty were swept away long ago. Other aspects of the Treaty have been modified to Germany's advantage, but there is this recurrent talk in certain circles of this peace having been made under conditions without parallel in history—a dictated peace and not a negotiated peace—and there remains with a great many people the idea that Germany has justifiable and legitimate reclamations to make and that in a phrase, our hands are not quite clean, when we censure or blame Germany for her breach of her Treaty engagements. Very well. As I have said, I think you will find it very difficult to draw the borders of European States more justly than they were drawn by the Treaty of Versailles unless you ignore altogether the principle of nationality which, at that time, by common accord, was taken as the guiding principle, and revert to the doctrine of the balance of power or the doctrine of dynastic interest, or one of those older doctrines against which the whole trend of the nineteenth century had been in revolt and for which we and everybody thought we were substituting a better system when we adopted the doctrine of nationality and even carried it to the length of self-determination.

After discussing recent events in some detail Austen

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concluded on a note which was, unhappily, to prove prophetic :

I think it is of vital consequence that this House should be told, not later than to-day, what is the impression gathered by the Foreign Secretary in his conversations in Berlin. Is it a Germany that is really willing and anxious to come to an agreement? Or is it a Germany that is pushing here, seizing there, drilling her own people daily, building up the greatest army of Europe, building this immense air fleet, building a new navy? Is it a nation, I will not say which wants war—for who does want war if he can have his will without it?—but a nation which, instead of being a partner in a collective system, intends to present Europe with a Power so strong that Europe will be at its mercy, and that we shall have nothing to do but obey her commands? That is the question we have got to settle, and that is the question on which we want some light. I am quite certain that if we find Germany really is peacefully intent on entering into a partnership with other nations that she will be welcomed by us as heartily, and perhaps more heartily, than by any other nation. After all, we have made great efforts to bring Germany really into a partnership, and we have perhaps made more efforts than anybody else. If she is of a partner's mind and of a peaceful intent, she will be welcome, but if she will not join the family of nations; if, instead of seeking to persuade, she means to extort or impose her will, then she will find this country in her path again, and with this country those great free Commonwealths which centre round it; and she will have met a force that will once again be her master.

Germany was not, however, the only Power whose intentions were a source of anxiety to Austen, for Italy's designs upon Abyssinia were also becoming very obvious. It was true that in April the Prime Minister had met Signor Mussolini at Stresa, but for some reason which has not been satisfactorily explained no mention of Abyssinia was made on that occasion, with the result that the Duce drew the

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not-unnatural inference that Great Britain was not interested. This deduction soon proved incorrect, and early in May the Foreign Secretary asked Austen to bring his great influence to bear on the Italian Government. Accordingly, on May 11th, he had a conversation with his old friend Signor Grandi, then Italian Ambassador in London, and told him that if Italy sought a solution by armed force the effect on British public opinion would be deplorable, and at the least would give rise to comment, both in Parliament and in the Press, which would inevitably provoke retorts from Italy, and so embitter Anglo-Italian relations. Austen also pointed out that it was impossible to have one law for Germany and another for Italy, and that a painful contrast would be drawn between the position taken up by the Italian Government at Stresa and Geneva and its action in Africa; the public law of Europe would be weakened, and Germany would be encouraged to fresh acts of aggression at the very time when the three Stresa Powers were endeavouring to restrain her.

Knowing Signor Grandi's suspicion of German policy Austen declared that he and other friends of Italy could not view without grave anxiety the prospect of a considerable part of the Italian forces being locked up for an indefinite time in Abyssinia while the situation in Europe was so critical, and while no assurance had been received from Germany that she would respect the independence of Austria or refrain from further interference in the internal affairs of that country; for his part he had no doubts about the issue of a conflict between Italy and Abyssinia, but it might well mean leaving a large body of troops in Africa. Austen came away from this interview 'with the impression that though Grandi saw clearly the disastrous reaction it would have on Anglo-Italian relations and the European situation, he had no hope that Mussolini could be deflected from his purpose.'

Shortly after this incident there was a reconstruction of the Government, and Mr. Baldwin became Prime Minister in place of Mr. MacDonald, while Sir Samuel Hoare succeeded Sir John Simon at the Foreign Office. As the summer wore on the intentions of Italy became crystal clear, and in due course the invasion of Abyssinia took

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place, which in its turn led to the imposition of Sanctions. Austen deeply regretted the necessity of this measure, but he did not question it, though he was by no means enamoured of certain aspects of Government policy. \* I think it was a great mistake to say to Italy that in no circumstances should we cut her communications, though economic sanctions may be all that it is possible to enforce or wise to propose.' Autumn witnessed another General Election in which Austen was again opposed in West Birmingham by Mr. Willey, and again elected by a big majority :

Chamberlain	.	.	16,530
Willey	.	.	9,159

Majority 7,371

It was destined to be the last election in which Austen was to take part, so his impressions of the contest have a peculiar interest :

It is wonderful how Father's memory is still cherished—I saw your dad ; I carried a torch in the procession ; we've always voted Chamberlain ; my dad thought everything of Joe ; and so on and so on in every variety of expression. And yet it's a regular ' slum ' constituency, good wide streets but courts and back to back houses, many still to be condemned, over 3,000 voters fewer than four years ago. Really one's heart is warmed by their kindness, and one's admiration roused by their courage, but thank God there were none of those idle youths leaning against doorposts and railings of whom I saw so many last time. They are all now in work.

Hardly was the election over than there occurred the crisis caused by the Hoare-Laval Pact, and in this Austen was to play the decisive part. As soon as he heard what had been done he became severely critical, and on December 15th he wrote :

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Laval has behaved treacherously, but I fear that Sam Hoare has blundered badly. I don't know what part I shall take in Thursday's debate nor even how I shall vote. Much will depend on the speeches of Hoare and S. B., but they will have an extraordinarily difficult task, for I have never known the political sky cloud over so suddenly nor have I seen blacker clouds on the horizon. Dismay is not too strong a word to use for the feeling among their supporters when the news leaked out, and nothing that has happened since has reassured them. Baldwin spoke very frankly to the four of us who went as a League of Nations Union deputation, and Vansittart gave me even more details, but there was nothing to comfort one in what they had to say.

I am left with the feeling that when all is said and done, and when they have told the House all that they must now tell it and the world, it is still impossible to regard Hoare's action in allowing himself to be associated with the French proposals and to recommend them as other than a bad blunder. If the elections were just about to begin, instead of being just over, the Government would not get half their present majority. It is certain that the Cabinet themselves were wholly unprepared for such developments, and I can only explain Hoare's action by the fact that he was absolutely worn out and that his mind did not take in their effect or consequences. It is a tragedy.

At first the Government intended to stand by the Agreement, though it was already obvious that this would mean the loss of some of the junior Ministers. What decided them to take the opposite course was fear that Austen would attack them. He was clearly the arbiter of ministerial fortunes, for the Back Benches were flocking to him for a lead. Both in the lobby and in upstairs committee-room at the House of Commons he criticized the proposals sharply, and Mr. Baldwin was informed that Austen intended to lead the onslaught, which would then be irresistible, although he had not in actual fact yet decided what line he would adopt. In these circumstances the Prime Minister decided to give way, even at the price of his Foreign Secretary,

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"STILL GOING STRONG"

BIG BEN (*at the Lobby Luncheon. Interval*): "Bravo!  
An innings *that would have been dear and* refreshing  
to his father's heart'!"

(Reproduced from *the Menu of the Luncheon given by the Lobby Journalists to  
Sir Austen Chamberlain July 9th, 1936.*)

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and so the debate on December 19th took the form of an Opposition attack on the Government.

It began with an apology, in the colloquial rather than in the etymological sense of the term, from Sir Samuel Hoare, and before he sat down there were tears in his eyes. Austen wrote of this speech that it 'was the best of the debate ; he did not convince many, but he won general sympathy and respect.' Mr. Attlee made a somewhat violent attack on the Prime Minister for lowering the country's prestige. Mr. Baldwin somewhat abjectly confessed his mistake, and to quote Austen again, 'Had I thought it compatible with the public interest I believe that after S. B.'s miserably inadequate speech and the initial blunder, I could have so reduced his majority as to force his resignation.' Instead, however, of adopting such a course he took advantage of the opportunity which the Leader of the Opposition had given him, and declared that he would vote for the Government, not on account of what Mr. Baldwin had said but because Mr. Attlee had impugned his honour. This saved the day for Ministers, who had a majority of 397 votes to 165 over their opponents.

The next day Mr. Baldwin asked Austen to call upon him, and at once said how much he should have liked to offer him the Foreign Office, but he felt that at his time of life he would almost certainly break down under the strain. The Prime Minister then asked what he thought of Mr. Eden, and Austen replied that he had always thought that Mr. Eden had the making of a Foreign Secretary. On the following afternoon Austen went to see Mr. Baldwin again at the other's request, and was asked if he would join the Cabinet as 'Minister of State,' without a Department, but with the special task of giving advice on questions relating to foreign policy and defence. After some further conversation Austen asked for time to think over the proposition, but he wrote that same evening declining it. 'I have no doubt that my situation if I had accepted would have been most unsatisfactory. Neither in foreign affairs nor in defence should I have had any defined position or authority. . . . I could perceive no prospect of public usefulness in the acceptance of such an offer so conveyed, and I came to the conclusion that what he wanted was not my advice or

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experience, but the use of my name to help patch up the damaged prestige of his Government.'

The following year, the last of his life, was a very full one for him as well as momentous for the world at large. It began with the passing of his old master, King George V.

Well, I have seen two changes of the Sovereign and I had hoped that the King, who is younger than I, would outlive my time. How well he has played his part, and what a place he has made for himself in the hearts of his people. I think that his broadcasts have made him more intimately known to his peoples overseas than any of his predecessors, and have strengthened the attachment of distant peoples to the throne.

The lying-in-state of the dead monarch naturally revived memories of that of King Edward VII :<sup>1</sup>

The actual scene in Westminster Hall is somehow not quite so impressive to me, for the hall is much more lit up and one loses something of the solemnity of earlier days when the roof was a deep vault of blackness and the only lights were, I think, on the stairs and around the coffin. But the great stream of people is the same, the silence of the crowd and the immobility of the Guards, Yeomen, and Gentlemen-at-Arms, and their slow and noiseless, yet perfectly timed, movements when the guard is changed.

February saw politics claim Austen once more, and he made another speech in the House of Commons in which he endeavoured to rouse a somewhat reluctant Parliament and nation to the grave realities of the international situation. This time he did not spare Mr. Baldwin, for reasons which he admitted in private :

<sup>1</sup> Cf. vol. I, pp. 252-253.

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Having done much to save him in December when an adverse vote would have been a direct vote of censure, and necessitated his resignation, I decided to use this non-party debate when no vote would be taken to tell him what not only the older but many of the younger members are privately saying. If there is any truth in the rumour—I don't believe there is—that he proposes to hand over Defence to Ramsay MacDonald there will be a howl of indignation and a vote of no-confidence, nor is Eustace Percy the man for that job. In my view there is only one man who by his studies and his special abilities and aptitudes is marked out for it, and that man is Winston Churchill ! I don't suppose that S. B. will offer it to him and I don't think that Neville would wish to have him back, but they are both wrong. He is the right man for that post, and in such dangerous times that consideration ought to be decisive.

On March 7th Herr Hitler announced Germany's denunciation of the Locarno Treaty and the simultaneous reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland zone by German troops. That this should still further have saddened and alarmed Austen was only to be expected :

That has happened against which we guaranteed France, and Press and public opinion seek excuses for evading our pledge. The Government which asked (and received) promises of support from France when it thought us in danger now hesitates to keep its solemn engagement. Hitler, against the advice of the more moderate elements in his Government, Schacht, and the chiefs of the Army, has marched into the Rhineland to escape an internal crisis, urged on by Goering and Goebbels. The economic crisis will recur, but when it does his army will be much stronger, the Army chiefs will not again seek to hold him back, every country in Europe will feel that England is a broken reed, and the end can only be the complete triumph of Germany and I fear our own ultimate ruin.

## THE ELDER STATESMAN

And our Government has no policy. As far as I can make out it is as much divided as Asquith's Cabinet on the eve of the Great War. My confidence is rudely shaken.

Holding the views he did Austen could not be expected to approve of the appointment of Sir Thomas Inskip to be Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, and in fact he criticized it bitterly for it proved that his conjectures as to the determination to exclude Mr. Churchill from the Cabinet were correct. Yet he was realist enough to appreciate that his opinions were still the exception, not the rule. 'I know that I do not represent our public opinion at present, but what I say needs saying, and can be better said by one like me, who will never again hold office, with a freedom and plainness that Ministers and potential Ministers would be unwise to use.' The reoccupation of the Demilitarized Zone coincided with the evident failure of Sanctions, which were now a purely punitive measure, and Austen was rapidly coming to the conclusion that they would have to be abandoned. He was also alarmed for Austria, and on April 1st he said in the House of Commons :

What attitude shall we take if Austrian independence be threatened or destroyed, whether by an attack from outside or by a revolution fostered and supported from outside, like that which caused the death of Dollfuss ? If we mean anything at all by the declarations that our policy is founded on the League and that we shall fulfil our obligations, possibilities of this kind must give food for thought to every British citizen. For we may have to intervene at any moment. The independence of Austria is a key position. If Austria perishes Czechoslovakia becomes indefensible. Then the whole of the Balkans will be submitted to a gigantic new influence. Then the old German dream of a Central Europe ruled by and subject to Berlin will become reality from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, with incalculable consequences not only for our country but for our whole Empire.

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Shortly after uttering this warning Austen, accompanied by Lady Chamberlain and Lawrence, went on a visit to Vienna where his old friend of Foreign Office days, now Sir Walford Selby, was British Minister. On his return he wrote to his sister an account of his holiday which deserves to be reproduced in full :

The Goring Hotel,  
Ebury Street, S.W.1  
2nd May, 1936

MY DEAR IDA,

I returned on Thursday evening from my Easter holiday, if the word holiday can be applied to it, for in fact I had scarcely a moment to myself, and seem to have been talking or listening to others the whole time I was abroad. However, it was, as you suggest, extremely interesting and though not exactly the rest I had first contemplated, the change of scene and viewpoint proved refreshing. Of course, staying as we did in the Legations, I could not get into touch with the parties in opposition in the three countries we visited, but I saw everyone of consequence in the Governments and representatives of the great families of Austria and Hungary. They were all charming, but to give any detailed account of what they said or of the impressions I formed, it would have been necessary to keep a diary and for that I had no time.

In Vienna we all three lunched with the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister, and Prince Starhemberg gave a men's luncheon in my honour. I had in addition an audience with the President in which I found it possible to understand his German and to carry on two-thirds of the conversation in that language myself, resorting to the interpreter only when I got into difficulties in the exact expression of my thoughts. They were delighted to find a prominent Englishman taking an interest in their affairs and very anxious that England should emphasize that interest. During my stay the air was full of rumours of a new rising, a *new putsch*, or an actual invasion from Germany, but I got the impression that, apart from outside interference, the Government felt that they controlled the situation.

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Schuschnigg, the Chancellor, struck me as a man of sound judgment and force of character, but when I said something of this kind to the Foreign Minister he said that Starhemberg was the stronger man and had greater political flair. My opinion of him was not so favourable, but this may be in part due to the fact that we talked in English, and he was hampered in the expression of his thought by his limited knowledge of that language. The President was a pleasant sensible man with so marked a cast in his eye that it embarrassed me in speaking with him. You know the fatal attraction which the wrong eye has for one in such circumstances.

Apart from these official entertainments, we lunched with one of the Rothschilds, dined with another to meet the King of Spain, had a succession of small parties at the Embassy and one day's trout fishing in a stream in the Semmering where Lawrence and I were the most successful fishermen and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. To complete the tale of my visit, I received at their own request the French Charge d'Affaires, the German ambassador, Von Papen, and the Jugo-Slav and Rumanian ministers, and managed to see something of the various types of workmen's houses, visited one of the great hospitals and saw the principal treasures of the Art Museum (including in particular Titian's and Velasquez's pictures much spoilt by over cleaning, the Cellini Salt and magnificent tapestries), the great Library, the Archives, and the Spanish Riding School.

I thought Vienna itself charming and the view from the Semmering over the city and great plain is wonderful. I have never seen cowslips growing as thickly as they did in the fields through which the railway passed. The cherry, plum, and peach blossom made a magnificent display. Many of the roads run through avenues of these fruit trees.

We spent three nights in Prague. Benes sent his car to Vienna for us, which we left a little before 9.30 in the morning reaching his country house at Tabor, about 50 miles from Prague, at 1 o'clock. We lunched with him and Madame Benes, and Jan Masaryk, and he talked to me without ceasing from the moment luncheon was over until teatime. Prague itself was as picturesque as my memory

of it, but our weather there was unfortunate and I was much bothered by pain in my leg, so that my sightseeing was confined to looking at the Primitives in the picture Gallery, interesting because of the completely different types portrayed from anything one sees in the other early schools and for some really beautiful Church figures carved in wood. Here too, I saw the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Finance Minister in addition to President Benes.

Finally, we stayed two nights in Budapest, where we all lunched with the Regent and his wife and family, and I called upon the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, Finance Minister, and Head of the National Bank came to dinner. Admiral Horthy, the Regent, and his wife were delightful people, and the Prime Minister less attractive but very civil and moderate in the expression of his views to me. The Foreign Minister . . . was a clever man and is now pursuing a sensible policy, but all Hungary is of course Revisionist and thinks of nothing else. He was housed in an old palace with some magnificent Empire furniture and Boucher tapestries.

In speaking of the Vienna galleries I ought to have mentioned their Breughels. I have never been much interested in this painter, but they have a dozen or so of his pictures which undoubtedly give one a new idea of him.

Speaking broadly, the trip confirmed impressions I had already formed and gave them increased precision and life, but did not sensibly modify my opinion. The Danube Basin is a regular Witches' Cauldron. Every country in it has a discontented minority. Austria and Hungary are essentially monarchical in spirit, and the fears, jealousies, and rivalries between the various countries make it difficult to mark out any sensible line of policy. Hitler appears, from a telegram which was shown to me, to have got into a perfect stew about the purpose of my visit and to have attributed to me a semi-official mission to try to effect the restoration of the [*sic*] Habsburgs ! This perhaps is as good an illustration as one could have of the sensitiveness of the body politic and of the capacity of people to swallow any alarmist rumour, however improbable and unfounded.

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Ivy and Lawrence are spending a few days at Salzburg or in its neighbourhood. They return on Thursday. . . .

Your loving brother,

AUSTEN.

As will have been seen, nothing he had heard had diminished his concern over the position of Austria, and in his conversation with President Benes he besought that statesman to do everything in his power to help his neighbour. The trip had, too, finally convinced him that sanctions were of no use save to Germany. On May 5th he had an interview with Signor Grandi, but gave no indication of the line he had determined to take in public ; rather he laid great stress on the faults of Italian policy both in beginning the war and in the manner of waging it, and on the difficulties that these created for anyone anxious to restore good feeling. He then told the House of Commons that the time had come when sanctions must be removed : his speech had a mixed reception, but it was the beginning of the end.

My speech has brought me a sheaf of abusive or reproachful letters. I really did not want to make it, but I felt it would be cowardly to shirk saying what I thought and that it might help Eden and the Government if I belled the cat. They are in an extraordinarily difficult position with a public opinion that is all sentiment and passion and will not face realities. I wish that I could see any issue from our troubles, but I don't see my way at all clearly. That is not because I don't know my own mind, but because I don't believe public opinion will at present allow us to pursue the only wise policy, which is to call off sanctions, to restore what is called the Stresa front and then to sit down seriously to try to come to terms with Germany if possible, and to fortify peace against her if it is not.

During the few short months of life that were left to him, Austen urged this policy very strongly indeed, and almost his last words were, ' You can fight one dictator,

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but not two.<sup>5</sup> His speech, as was his secret hope, gave an opportunity to his brother, and a few weeks later, at the Annual Dinner of the 1900 Club, Mr. Neville Chamberlain announced the demise of sanctions. Austen did not, however, confine his good advice to his own country, but he exerted all his influence upon Signor Mussolini to adopt a conciliatory policy in the hour of victory. He advised the Duce to place Abyssinia under a Mandate, and if he would not go so far as that to accept broadly the conditions applying to Mandated Territories in respect of the treatment of natives and the recruitment of armed forces. In response to this appeal Signor Mussolini did show moderation, and also exhibited a lively desire to turn again towards Great Britain. He gave an interview to Mr. Victor Gordon-Lennox in the *Daily Telegraph*, and Signor Grandi went to the Foreign Office with a copy of that paper, when he officially confirmed the Duce's points to Mr. Eden. Signor Mussolini continued his approaches for some time, but the outbreak of the civil war in Spain further complicated the situation.

The rest of the year was extremely varied for Austen. In July he was given proof of the esteem in which his family was held for the centenary of his father's birth was widely celebrated, and culminated in a great meeting at the Albert Hall before which he 'was ill all day with the emotional strain of the occasion'; of the speeches he wrote that 'Amery was very good' and 'Lennox-Boyd next best'. Two months later he participated in an unsuccessful attempt to effect a settlement between the Emperor Haile Selassie and the Italian Government on the basis of the establishment of the exiled monarch in some part of his former dominions; during the course of these negotiations Austen was interested to hear from Signor Grandi that on the very day on which the Emperor fled from his capital Marshal Badoglio had orders to present to him an ultimatum leaving him a large part of Abyssinia. November included not only a visit to Lyons at the invitation of Monsieur Herriot to receive an honorary degree, but also several conversations with Mr. Eden as to the advisability of a visit to Rome in the hope of improving Anglo-Italian relations. In December there occurred the abdication of King Edward VIII, and in this

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crisis Austen played his part as a Privy Councillor ; deeply as he regretted the solution he had no doubt that circumstances made it inevitable.

The beginning of the new year brought with it no hint of impending tragedy. Austen was rejoicing in the house he had taken in Egerton Terrace, and planning the garden that he was going to have there. In January he and Lady Chamberlain spent a few days in Paris ; † it was a most pleasant visit—everyone pleased to see us and giving us a most cordial welcome.' He met many old friends, and had a long talk with Monsieur Blum, whom he found 'very pleasant and on the whole sensible about the outlook.' What he enjoyed most was 'my visit after more than fifty years to the Ecole des S. P., and the delightful reception which the students gave me.' After the ceremony was over, \* I left the platform and went down to the students' benches where I sat of old.' On his return to London he resumed his social and political life, dining out and attending the House of Commons as was his wont, and writing letters as sparkling with vivacity as those of his undergraduate days. On March 16th he died suddenly in his own house while taking a book from its shelf.

In spite of the many different offices which he held, and of the many different points at which Austen touched life, there was a remarkable unity about his career, and what gave it this unity was his position as a great Parliamentarian. That is the way in which one first thinks of him. From boyhood he had, like the younger Pitt, been brought up to public life, and like his great prototype he left the public life of England the better for having taken part in it. His example is definitely ennobling. All through the bitter controversy over Tariff Reform he refrained from any action which might be construed as unfair even by the strongest Free Trader ; with Mr. Long he reached a height of self-sacrifice in 1911 which will be remembered long after the details of their rivalry have been forgotten ; by his resignation of the Indian Secretaryship he affirmed in his own despite the principle of ministerial responsibility ; when he made his sacrifice in 1931 it was in obedience to

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feelings of which few men in any walk of life are capable ; and at the very end of his life he refused office because he ' could perceive no prospect of public usefulness in the acceptance.' Even about his mistakes there was something noble, as in 1922 when it was his loyalty to his friends, and above all to Mr. Lloyd George, which prevented him from becoming Prime Minister. England has admittedly known greater, and certainly more fortunate, statesmen than Austen Chamberlain, but never one of higher principles or of a deeper sense of honour.

Of the various offices which he held during the course of his career he is likely to be best remembered for his Foreign Secretaryship. In this connection he would seem to have two special claims 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. He was in the line of succession to the greatest of the Foreign Secretaries of an earlier generation, and if the passage of time seemed to nullify his achievement at Locarno it can hardly be denied that what he accomplished there, namely, the admission of Germany to the council-table of Europe as an equal, will one day have to be attempted again ; when that necessity arises what Austen effected is not likely to be ignored. It has been said that he was little more than the mouthpiece of the Quai d'Orsay, and, alternatively, that he was the dupe of Dr. Stresemann. These accusations are mutually contradictory, and neither of them is true. Enough has been said in these pages to show that as Foreign Secretary he was above all else a great realist ; he never hankered after the unattainable, but he did his best with the tools that he had. When all is said and done he laid down office with the world far more settled either than it had been when he became Foreign Secretary or than it has ever been since.

Finally, he devoted the last years of his life to warning his fellow-countrymen of the dangers which threatened them, and even in matters of detail he proved a remarkably accurate prophet. This course often brought him into conflict with public opinion, and with the Party which he had served so loyally and for so long, but ' what I say needs

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saying' however unpalatable it might be. Perhaps the most suitable epitaph is the one which would have pleased him greatly—he never despaired of his country.

Wilt thou do the deed and repent it ? thou hadst better never been born :

Wilt thou do the deed and exalt it ? then thy fame shall be outworn :

Thou shalt do the deed and abide it, and sit on thy throne on high,

And look on to-day and to-morrow as those that never die.



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the utmost efforts, the latter was forced back, and General Riall was severely wounded and made prisoner. In the centre, however, the 89th Royals and King's regiments opposed a determined resistance : and the guns on the hill, which were worked with prodigious rapidity, occasioned so great a loss to the attacking columns, that Brown soon saw that there was no chance of success till that battery was carried; and a desperate effort was resolved on to obtain the mastery of it.

The Americans, under General Millar, advanced with the utmost resolution, and with such vigour, that five of the British cannon at first fell into their hands. So desperate was the onset, so strenuous the resistance, that the British artillerymen were bayoneted by the enemy in the act of loading, and the muzzles of their guns were advanced to within a few yards of the English battery. This dreadful conflict continued till after dark, with alternate success, in the course of which the combatants fought hand to hand, by the light of the discharges of the guns, and the artillery on both sides was repeatedly taken and retaken. At length, after an hour's vehement struggle, the combatants sank to rest from pure mutual exhaustion, within a few yards of each other, and so intermingled, that two of the American guns were finally mastered by the British, and one of the British by the Americans ; so that, on the whole, one gun was gained for England in this unparalleled struggle with her worthy offspring. During this period of repose, the loud roar of the battle was succeeded by silence so profound, that the dull roar of the falls of Niagara, interrupted at intervals by the groans of the wounded, was distinctly heard. Over the scene of this desperate strife the moon threw an uncertain light, which yielded occasionally to the bright flashes of musketry or cannon, when the combat was partially renewed. Drummond skilfully took advantage of this respite to bring up the left wing, which had been repulsed,

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