

CHAPTER VIII

APOSTLES OF PEACE

“THAT friendly relations may ultimately be established between England and Germany without the arbitrament of war I earnestly hope and occasionally believe. It depends mainly on the English people. They must not allow themselves to rest in self-complacency, nor, in ignorant nervousness as to the susceptibilities of foreign powers, slacken their efforts to increase the present power of the navy. They must, moreover, insist on military reforms absolutely necessary if England is to maintain her place among the nations, and that the destinies of this country shall be in the hands of persons acquainted with the march of opinion and with the strength and tendency of political forces in the leading countries of Europe. Those who counsel Englishmen to be vigilant in these matters are true Apostles of Peace. England and Germany will never be brought together until the Germans thoroughly realize that there is no hope of substituting as the symbol of sea power the German eagle for the white ensign of the British Navy.”

— Sir Rowland Blennerhassett
in *The National Review*, December, 1903.

It has been said that every politician sooner or later must eat his own words and swallow his own principles. The exigencies of party warfare demand metamorphosis at some stage or another; nothing is more potent in bringing these changes about than office; it is the sarcophagus of the idealist. A man may be never so firm in his principles

when he is a private member; but once he is taken within the walls of a Government department the lime of it seems to eat through him and petrify his soul. The House itself is bad enough in this respect, and it has been called, not without reason, the mausoleum of ideals. But a private member need not vote unless he likes; he might support his party in some legislation and vote against it on measures he objects to, or not vote at all. It is different when a man takes office; he must conform to the tradition of the department or resign his post. Few resign, voluntarily. The attractions outweigh the shock one's principles must undergo. The "slings and arrows" of criticism from an Opposition press may be hard to bear, but there are only between fifty or sixty posts of honour in the Government, and opportunity comes but once to the young man without lineage or a safe seat. Ambition nursing an ideal on a back-bench, stirred by the vigour of its principles, murmurs to it, "it will not be so with thee." That is what "makes calamity of so long life." We bear the ills of office, rather than fly to others we know not of.

After the machinations of our Foreign Office in 1911, Germany could have no doubt at all that the policy of the Entente Powers was to isolate Germany by any means and at all costs. There were in the autumn of 1911 men in France who did not hesitate to speak severely on the question of isolating Germany, though leading statesmen in England denied the charge in vain. Our naval policy dictated by the "Commander of the Forces," no doubt, was continued by Mr. Churchill when he was made

First Lord and in one of the first speeches he delivered after he took charge of the navy, he said:

“Our naval preparations are necessarily based upon the naval preparations of other Powers. . . . Next year the Naval Law . . . prescribes that the limit of expansion has been reached, and that the annual quota of new ships added to the German navy will fall to half the quota of recent years. Hitherto that law, as fixed by Parliament has not been in any way exceeded, and I gladly bear witness to the fact that the statements of the German Ministers about it have been strictly borne out by events. Such is the state of affairs in the world to-day that the mere observance of that law, without an increase, would come to Europe as a great and sensible relief.”

Again we have it from a Minister that the German Government kept strictly to the letter of their declaration and did not accelerate building; but the old bogey of basing our policy on the preparations made by other Powers is laid down again by the new First Lord. After the admission of Lord Haldane that we were in agreement with France and Russia, it would have been more straightforward to have said our naval policy is based on the preparations of Germany, or the Triple Alliance. The Admiralty however stuck to the keep-it-dark policy of the Foreign Office. In both departments secrecy was essential for the needs of the “experts,” no matter how inimical that policy might be to the interests of the people. Still it was like getting money out of the taxpayer under false pretences. First scare him to death, and then rob him. And the policy is not to be excused because it may be said that the taxpayer seemed to like it; nor is it to be forgiven because the fleets of the Triple Alliance are com-

paratively idle at present. What must be considered is to what extent that policy fostered international hatred and strife. Look at the figures for 1911 and 1912, and see the way the game was worked:

NEW CONSTRUCTION OF ENTENTE POWERS AND
TRIPLE ALLIANCE

	<i>1911</i>	<i>1912</i>
Great Britain	£15,148,171	£16,132,558
France	5,876,659	7,114,876
Russia	3,216,396	6,897,580
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	£24,241,226	£30,145,014
Germany	£11,710,859	£11,491,187
Italy	2,677,302	3,227,000
Austria	3,125,000	5,114,206
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	£17,513,161	£19,832,393

So basing our naval preparations on the naval preparations of other Powers could have no other meaning in practice than working in with France and Russia against the preparations of the Triple Alliance. When the latter showed an increase of £2,319,232, it was necessary for our preparations to be increased by £5,903,788, for one year. But the public are not supposed to know that the preparations of France and Russia have always been regarded by Germany as the chief factors governing her naval policy.

The debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords on the Moroccan trouble were notable in many respects. Mr. John Dillon's criticism of the actions of the Foreign Office was one of the most brilliant pieces of denunciation heard in the House for many a day. Even so, the public stood outside, oblivious of its meaning to them.

Their attitude might be summed up in the cry of the man, at a political meeting in the North, who said, "To hell with Foreign Affairs,—when am I going to get thirty bob a week?" There is, however, a passage in Mr. Dillon's speech which must be remembered:

"I do not believe any representative assembly in the history of the world has ever been called upon to discuss a matter so vital and so far-reaching as that which the House of Commons has before it to-day to consider, and with so absolute a lack of information. This present discussion in this respect beats all records. The House was summoned for this discussion to-day without any papers whatsoever. What is it that the House ought to have had before we were asked to embark on this discussion? We ought to have had a *Blue Book* containing the diplomatic history of the Moroccan question, including the secret treaty with Spain. The Algeiras Act has already been published. I refer to the secret treaty with Spain, published for the first time the other day, and which the Foreign Minister of France declared three weeks ago he had never heard of, and was not aware of the existence of a treaty to which this country was a party. We should have had the text of the German Agreement of 1909, with an explanation of how it came about that France jockeyed Germany in regard to that agreement, and withdrew from carrying into effect—a matter that was one of the immediate causes of the recent friction. We ought at all events to have had an account of diplomatic correspondence between the four great Powers intimately interested in the question of Morocco, as is customary to be given to the House of Commons on such an occasion. This would have enabled members of the House before the debate commenced, to form a really well-grounded judgment upon the whole matter. We have heard a good deal to-night of the secrecy of the Foreign policy of this country. It is no use attempting to deny it. Those

of us who have been a long time in this House, and can remember the methods of the Foreign Office twenty-five years ago, know as a matter of fact, which cannot be successfully denied, that the Foreign Office policy has become during the last ten years progressively more secret every year. Until this present year this has gone on, when the intense pressure of Foreign Affairs and the danger of war has forced the hands of the Minister to give some time for the discussion of Foreign Office affairs. For ten years the Foreign policy of this country has been conducted behind an elaborate screen of secrecy. Some of us pointed out years ago that the secrecy of Foreign Affairs was the inevitable and logical result of that new departure which was heralded about ten years ago, and which we heard praised once more on the floor of this House to-night. I refer to what is known as the policy of the continuity of the Foreign policy of this country; of the withdrawal of the Foreign policy of this country from the sphere of party politics."

Mr. Dillon might have thanked his stars that he got as much as he did, for if the Paris papers, *Le Temps* and *Le Matin*, had not published the secret articles for the partition of Morocco between Spain and France, precious little information would have been volunteered on the subject by the Foreign Secretary. There was a passage in the speech of the Foreign Secretary that should be noted; for it indicates his attitude of mind towards Germany, and, indeed, shows how utterly futile it was, while such sentiments were expressed, to try to make Germans believe that the policy of our Foreign Office aimed at anything else than isolation. Sir Edward Grey said:

"One does not make new friendships worth having by deserting old ones. New friendships by all means let us make, but not at the expense of the ones which we have.

I desire to do all I can to improve the relations with Germany, as I shall presently show. But the friendships which we have, have lasted now some years, and it must be a cardinal point of improvement of relations with Germany that we do not sacrifice one of those. And what I desire and what I hope may be possible, though it may seem difficult at the present time, is that the improved relations may be such as will improve not only ourselves, but those who are our friends."

The warmth of the proposal must have chilled the lady to the marrow. And this after all the indignity and contumely thrust on Germany by our Foreign Office since 1904! No one who cares to look at the speeches of the Foreign Secretary in and out of the House, could deny that his consistently frigid overtures to Germany for "affection" and "friendship" was one of the chief features of his administration. What hope was there of better relations with our own stock when we were in diplomatic agreement with Germany's ancient foes, France and Russia? Would the Foreign Secretary say the Franco-Russian Alliance helped in any way to bring about improved relations with Germany? Why talk about making new friendships by deserting old ones, when the policy of making the old ones was the cause of limiting the number of new ones?

Mr. Bonar Law, the new leader of the Opposition, in striking contrast to the speech of Sir Edward Grey, referred to Germany with warmth:

"It is an idea prevalent, especially on the Continent, that there is in this country a feeling of hostility to Germany. In my opinion that belief is entirely unfounded. So far as I am concerned — the House will acquit me of egotism in

making these remarks; I am making them not only because I happen to be the leader of the party behind me, but also because I think I can express the view of the great mass of our countrymen—so far as I am concerned, I never had, and certainly have not now, any such feeling. During my business life I had daily commercial intercourse with Germany. I have many German friends, I love some German books almost as much as our favourites in our own tongue, and I can imagine few, if any, calamities which would seem so great as a war, whatever the result, between us and the great German people. I hear it also constantly said—there is no use shutting our eyes and ears to obvious facts—that owing to divergent interests, war some day or other between this country and Germany is inevitable. I never believe in these inevitable wars. . . . If, therefore, war should ever come between these two countries, which heaven forbid, it will not, I think, be due to irresistible natural laws. It will be due to the want of human wisdom."

He might have added, all wars are due to want of human wisdom. War begins where wisdom ends. Lord Morley, in the House of Lords, in the Moroccan debate, contributed a fine passage on Germany's position in the world of art, science, and literature:

"Whether France, or Italy, or Germany, or England has made the greatest contribution in the history of modern civilization—however that speculative controversy may be settled, this at least is certain, that those are not wrong who hold that Germany's high and strict standard of competency, the purity and vigour of her administration of affairs, her splendid efforts and great success in all branches of science, her glories—for glories they are—in art and literature, and the strength and character and duty in the German people entitle her national ideals to a supreme place among the greatest ideals which now animate and guide the world.

Do not let us forget all that. German ambition is a perfectly intelligible and even lofty ambition. Who can wonder that a community which has made the enormous advances in every field that Germany has made, certainly since 1866, in maritime power and wealth and population, should desire to find territories where her surplus population may emigrate and establish themselves without losing either their nationality or their ideals of modern life. There is the place in the sun. In all these great achievements I have ventured to enumerate there is the German place in the sun."

It is so strange nowadays to think that any responsible statesman ever held such views. Lord Morley must have heard of Treitschke and Nietzsche, to say nothing of all the other poisoners of the German mind. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was published long before Lord Morley spoke that day in the Lords. Prussian militarism was not unknown in 1911, and what Bismarck had said was no Foreign Office secret. Let us hope that Lord Morley knows the whole truth of the matter now that he has had an opportunity of reading the British newspapers since the beginning of the war. But then he might quote from his own *Aphorisms* that, "People who get their wisdom out of books are like those who have got their knowledge of a country from the descriptions of travellers. Truth that has been picked up from books only sticks to us like an artificial limb, or a false tooth, or a rhinoplastic nose; the truth we have acquired by our own thinking is like the natural member."

Early in January, 1912, the fateful year, Lord Rosebery spoke on Foreign Affairs at Glasgow. He was no lover of the Franco-British Agreement.

In Glasgow, after six years of Liberal foreign policy, he said:

“This we do know about our foreign policy, that, for good or for evil, we are now embraced in the midst of the Continental system. That I regard as perhaps the gravest fact in the later portion of my life. We are, for good or for evil, involved in a Continental system, the merits of which I do not pretend to judge, because I do not know enough about it, but which, at any rate, may at any time bring us into conflict with armies numbering millions, and our own forces would hardly be counted in such a war as they stand at present.”

Lord Rosebery was Foreign Secretary of this country in 1886 and in 1892. He knew the traditions of the Foreign Office, and his experience of Cabinet affairs fitted him peculiarly as a critic of the Foreign Office policy which committed us to a Continental system. But he was not the only critic; there were many other fully qualified critics of foreign policy, who, in 1912, knew Britain had been enmeshed in the Continental system. And Sir Edward Grey was fully conscious of the opinion of his critics:

“I do know that a considerable amount of fault has been found with what some people think is and what they call my foreign policy, but which, of course, ought not to be called my foreign policy because it is quite impossible for any individual Foreign Minister to carry out a policy which is not also, in its main lines, the policy of the Cabinet of which he is a member.”

That statement was true up to a point; but it was a little wide of strict accuracy in regard to the au-

thorization of the conversations between the British and French military and naval experts. The Cabinet as a whole was not told until long after the conversations were begun. Anyway, many people blamed the Foreign Secretary for the misunderstandings which existed between Germany and ourselves. So deep was the feeling of animosity that the two Governments in January consented to the visit of a British Minister to Berlin with the object of making a frank statement that would dispel the notion that Britain had sinister designs on Germany. In the debate on the address, Mr. Asquith said:

“Both Governments, the German Government and our own, have been and are animated by a sincere desire to bring about a better state of understanding. In the course of last month we had indications that the visit of a British Minister to Berlin would not be unwelcome, and might facilitate the attainment of our common object.”

Later in his speech the Prime Minister gave an indication of the gravity of the situation which arose in the summer and autumn of 1911:

“We are told that there are masses of people in Germany who firmly believe that, at some time or times during the summer and autumn of last year we were meditating and even preparing an aggressive attack upon their country, and that the movements of our fleets were carefully calculated with that object in view. I am almost ashamed to have to contradict so wild and so extravagant a fiction. It is pure invention. There is, I need hardly assure the House, not a shadow of foundation for it, nor was there anything anywhere, or at any time, of an aggressive or provocative character in the movements of our ships. But the very fact that such rumours find credence, not, indeed, with the German Government, but in the minds of large

numbers of intelligent and fair-minded people in Germany. is, surely, in itself a significant and most regrettable symptom.”

The Prime Minister might have added that it was also a regrettable symptom that large masses of intelligent people in our own country had very good reason for believing implicitly the same “extravagant fiction.”

In the Reichstag, the day after the debate in the House of Commons, the German Chancellor, Herr von Bethmann Hollweg, gave his version of Lord Haldane's visit:

“When the English Minister of War, Lord Haldane, was here he talked over with us — without authorization to enter into binding agreements, but nevertheless at the instance of the British Cabinet — the points in which the interests of the two countries come into contact — (hear, hear, in all parts of the House) — with the object of establishing a basis for relations of greater confidence. (Hear, hear.) The exchange of views, which was heartily welcomed on our side, took place in numerous conversations of an exhaustive and frank description, and will be continued. (Cheers.) I do hope that the House will agree with me that I cannot at this stage of the matter speak about the details. (‘Quite right!’) But I do not wish to delay in communicating to the Reichstag the fact of the conversations and the nature of their aims. (General cheers.)”

The basis for relations of greater confidence was blown into the air three months after the visit to Berlin. “Strategy must respond to policy,” said Lord Haldane, on March 21, “the policy of the Foreign Office.” The navy estimates were introduced on March 18th, and they registered a superficial decrease of £307,100, but before the year was over

there was an increase of £2,498,624. The two-Power standard was abandoned, and a new policy directed straight against Germany adopted. In presenting the estimates to the House, Mr. Churchill said:

“ I propose, with the permission of the House, to lay bare to them this afternoon with perfect openness the naval situation. It is necessary to do so mainly with reference to one Power. I regret that necessity, but nothing is to be gained by using indirect modes of expression. On the contrary, the Germans are a people of robust mind, whose strong and masculine sense and high courage do not recoil from and are not offended by plain and blunt statements of fact if expressed with courtesy and sincerity. Anyhow, I must discharge my duty to the House and the country. The time has come when both nations ought to understand, without ill-temper or disguise, what will be the conditions under which naval competition will be carried on during the next few years.”

It was a bold policy initiated by the new First Lord; candour and openness would certainly be welcome features of the new administration. It was a good point gained to know it was henceforth unnecessary for us to consider France and Russia as a combination of naval force against us. There was one passage in the speech which was not quite as frank as it might have been:

“ All slowing down by Germany will be accompanied naturally on our larger scale by us. I have to say ‘ within certain limits,’ because, of course, both Great Britain and Germany have to consider, among other things, the building of other Powers, though the lead of both these countries is at present very considerable over any other Power besides each other.”

If France and Russia, separately or combined, were no longer factors, which Britain had to consider in framing navy estimates, were they not formidable factors to Germany? Her policy was controlled by the actions of three Powers, one of which, Britain, aimed at an overwhelming superiority in itself against Germany. The figures for new construction of France and Russia in that year should have proved to Mr. Churchill the utter hopelessness of relying on such an argument. Germany had to reckon with the nations of the Franco-Russian Alliance, the Anglo-French Agreement, the Anglo-Russian Agreement, and the plans of General Staffs arising out of the conversations between the British and French military and naval experts; to say nothing of whatever other secret commitments there might be connected with the diplomacy of the Entente Powers. "Strategy must respond to policy, the policy of the Foreign Office!" What earthly chance was there for a holiday for a year? Mr. Churchill was undoubtedly sincere when he made the suggestion; but so long as France and Russia were the governing factors in German naval policy the thing was impossible. Though we gained a considerable amount of kudos for making the suggestion, time has shown how futile the notion was from the first.

The debate on the navy estimates of March, 1912, is worth reading again and again. Lord Charles Beresford made a frontal attack of great severity on the First Lord, and his speech was of great value for the manner in which he proved how much to blame we were in inspiring irritation and hatred in Germany by our bombast and our methods. He quoted many German papers to show how the speech

of the new First Lord, at Glasgow, earlier in the year, was received by the press of the Fatherland, and blamed the Admiralty for all the unrest in German naval spheres. Later in the debate Mr. Robert Harcourt referred to Bernhardi's book, *Germany and the Next War*:

"I have read in the last day or two a very interesting book, by a German General, General Bernhardi, and it bears out a good deal that the noble Lord said. It is not a piece of Jingo pamphleteering, but a serious military consideration of what the writer calls in his title *Germany and the Next War*. It is far more depressing than the worst Chauvinistic literature, because it gives a feeling of hopelessness in the unshakable conviction of a representative German that we are inspired by active and aggressive animosity against his country. I only take a sentence or two from that book. He says:

"The Moroccan negotiations of the summer of 1911 gave an irrefutable demonstration of the unqualified hostility of England against us. It was clearly shown that England is determined to prevent by force every real extension of German power. One can scarcely doubt that England is thinking in dead earnest of attacking Germany in certain circumstances.'

"He speaks of the increase of the English fleet as a preparation for aggressive war, and he says:

"It is impossible to regard the English preparations as merely measures of defence. The English Government know well that Germany cannot think on her side of attacking England, because such an attempt is in itself hopeless.'

"He points out that the Entente with France is really a warlike alliance against Germany, and, as to a land war, he points out that probably Germany will be supported by Austria, though nothing is said about Italy, but he specifically says that in a sea war it is practically certain that Ger-

many will stand absolutely alone, and he repeats again, writing, I presume, for the German public, that he regards an attack on England as absolutely hopeless. . . . What after all has been the result of all these firm resolves and panic programmes? Have we frightened Germany out of building? Have we even convinced her of our sincerity? We have only, apparently, unhappily produced the impression, false, as I earnestly believe, of bitter and unrelenting hostility. She is firmly convinced that we are forcing her deliberately into a position of isolation."

Not long after the holiday idea was started, Lord Haldane, who visited Berlin to allay the fears of the Germans as to our naval and military designs, broke out in a fresh place, and, in London, in June, he said:

"Keep up a fleet and secure command of the sea, and then their problem was a simple one. . . . At no distant time we ought to be the most powerful military and naval nation combined which the world had ever seen."

Was that one of the sentences used in the "exhaustive" conversations in Berlin at the beginning of the year, which gave so much satisfaction to the German Chancellor? Surely the rapid changes, the comings and goings of Ministers, the fine phrases, and polite interchanges, following on the heels of bitter recrimination, give some justification to those men who jeer at the whole business as a put-up job to keep the peoples of Europe and Britain in a state of economic slavery; a kind of twentieth century Monarchical League for the preservation of the thrones, royal and republican, of European states.

Then Lord Crewe followed Lord Haldane with a little flag waving, presumably to show Germany

how keen we were to rest for a year on our naval laurels, while Germany lost a year in competition with France and Russia. Our superiority, as Lord Crewe understood it, when he spoke in the House of Lords early in July, was of such a nature that the suggestion of a naval holiday must have struck Germany as a rather cruel joke. Lord Crewe said:

“So far as our existing position in any part of the world is concerned we are not afraid to declare that we consider the security of the country is achieved. . . . Taking March 31st, this year, we find that we have sixteen battleships and battle cruisers of the dreadnaught type as against fifteen possessed by all other Powers in European waters.”

It was then a period of all-round congratulation that the scare, “without the slightest foundation in fact,” of 1909, had been the means of placing the British navy in a position to tackle the Triple Alliance and a few smaller states thrown in. Ministers, however, did not stop to consider what the other side of the account was: the effect on Germany. They did not see the items the other page would bear within three years. Visualization is not a Ministerial gift. The prophecy of Bernhardt was not a subject for Cabinet discussion, and the repeated warnings of the British pacifists were contemptuously flung aside by the “apostles of peace” as mere drivel of drooling millennialists.

The naval position in the Mediterranean was the subject of a debate in the Lords later in July. Lord Haldane admitted the country was face to face with one of the most trying naval situations that had existed for a very long time:

“The Government have made up their minds that the

position of this country depends on sea power. We have told the only Power which is our rival — we have told them in the most friendly fashion — that that is our view, and whatever efforts may be put forth, they must reckon on our making efforts still greater than any they make.”

The German-speaking amateur diplomatist, as he was referred to by the Opposition leader, gave a comic touch to a friendly bit of advice. Still, it is hard to believe such a statement could be made by Lord Haldane only six months after his visit to Berlin. Anyway, it was a sad commentary on the suggestion for a naval holiday.

At this time there is perhaps no sadder reflection one can indulge in than the position of the masses in Europe from 1912 to the middle of July, 1914. In Britain at any rate the millions of workers went about their business utterly oblivious of the Continental danger. Those who addressed large audiences frequently can testify there was no notion of war in the minds of the people. Safe in the idea that a great navy was our supreme insurance against strife, they laughed at the prognostications of the orators of the Lord Roberts school. Ireland was the topic one party dealt with, almost to the exclusion of all others. Sir Edward Carson bemoaned the fact that all his labours could not rouse the British electorate out of their profound apathy and unwillingness to regard that question from his point of view. They knew nothing of the imminence of battle. No Minister warned them; labour leaders were as ignorant as themselves of our jeopardy in being entangled in the Continental system. The wealth-producers of these islands, somehow, in a strange subconscious way, relied on a Liberal Gov-

ernment keeping them out of the toils of rotten diplomacy and the schemes of militarists. Their faith, their patience, their credulousness, are qualities that make one sad to think on now that their homes are making vast sacrifices of bread-winners, and, later on, the weak ones left behind will have to bear the greater part of the cost. There were warnings, but as they came not from members of the Government little heed was paid to them. In the House of Commons, on the Defence Vote, in Committee of Supply, Mr. Bonar Law said:

“ My instinct tells me that there is no danger; but my reason, such as it is, is in conflict with instinct. But when I use my judgment as best I can in considering what the facts of the position are, I say deliberately that in my judgment Lord Roberts did not exaggerate when he said the other day that this country had never been in a position of greater peril.”

What did Lord Roberts know? Was his alarm occasioned because we were, as Lord Rosebery said, for good or for evil, now embraced in the midst of the Continental system? Did Lord Roberts know that an outbreak of hostilities on the Continent, no matter how slight the cause, might at any time drag us into a great European struggle? What peril were we in? And why were we in peril? Was all Lord Roberts' activity, in urging the Government to adopt drastic military changes, for the purpose of raising an army large enough to meet all requirements of our commitments? Did Lord Roberts know that we were committed to the obligations of war, and that we were bound to assist France, if she were attacked by a third Power? The secrets

of foreign policy, no matter how well they are kept from the rank and file of the House and the general public, are often enough the common property of a certain class whose connections are always in touch with the departments and the great armament firms. It is "not in the interest of the public" to answer questions in the House, when a member asks for information from Ministers which has been the gossip of clubs and dinner tables. This Government has treated the private members of the House, as to foreign policy and naval affairs, as if they were Sunday-school scholars not of an age to read Deuteronomy. Why, even the girls at Queen's College had the benefit of the militant and brilliant Cramb!

In July, 1912, just two years before the first despatch from Germany in the White Paper, Mr. Churchill made a statement on the Supplementary Naval Estimates, on our position in the North Sea and in the Mediterranean. In this amazing addition to the estimates introduced in the year of the Berlin visit, and the year of the suggested holiday, we find the First Lord striking out in another direction, not because the new German Navy Law, be it observed, increased in new construction of capital ships, but because of the increase of striking force of ships of all classes available at all seasons of the year. Here it should be pointed out that there had been no increase at all in the money spent by Germany on new construction: in 1911 she spent £11,710,859, in 1912, £11,491,187, in 1913, £11,010,883, and in 1914, £10,316,264. A steady reduction in the figures for new construction. But suppose all the arguments laid down by the First Lord were accepted; was it fair, in making a statement of the

position in the North Sea and in the Mediterranean, to lead the country to believe that Germany alone was the factor which affected our policy? The Cabinet must have known in July that the plans of the British and French General Staffs were complete, and that we should have to defend the northern and western coasts of France while her fleet was concentrated in the Mediterranean. Did Germany know that much? What are military and naval attachés for if they fail to learn facts of that nature? Anyway, in times of peace it is no difficult business for one navy to know pretty accurately the general disposition of another, particularly when that other navy happens to be its chief rival.

A thousand rushing currents were carrying us on in the autumn of 1912 to the European whirlpool. Lord Roberts and Lord Curzon, in October, spoke, at Manchester, on Compulsory Military Service. The feeling abroad had been intensely aggravated by the trend of events in Britain, but the speech of Lord Roberts did even more to create deep bitterness than the policy of our Admiralty. He said:

“Now at the present day, in the year 1912, just as in 1866 and just as in 1870, war will take place the instant the German forces by land and sea are, by their superiority at every point, as certain of victory as anything in human calculation can be made certain. ‘Germany strikes when Germany’s hour has struck.’ That is the time-honoured policy of her Foreign Office. That was the policy relentlessly pursued by Bismarck and Moltke in 1866 and in 1870; it has been her policy decade by decade since that date; it is her policy at the present hour. And, gentlemen, it is an excellent policy. It is, or should be, the policy of every nation prepared to play a great part in history.”

This speech was not only deeply resented in Britain; it caused in Germany an acrimonious flood of comment to be poured out in her press. Our own *Evening Standard* said such language would be "scarcely justifiable if it (Germany) were at open war with us." In the House several members raised at question time the wisdom of a Field Marshal of the British army making such speeches, but they got little encouragement from the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for War. The Foreign Secretary icily declined to do anything. Lord Roberts was free to go up and down the country breathing out threatenings and slaughter against Germany, but Tom Mann had to cool his heels in a cell for giving soldiers the advice of Tolstoy! The bitter agitation of the conscriptionists continued all through the autumn, and Germany was the one country referred to in their bellicose speeches. The men who fomented war were "apostles of peace" and true Englishmen, the men who worked for peace were traitors and cowards. It was an edifying spectacle; one to make a cage full of monkeys silent with envy. And the public thought little about it. Well might Chamfort cry, "The public! — how many fools does it take to make a public?" The position at the end of 1912, and some events that followed hard upon that year, remind one of the agitation of the Corinthians in the first book of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*.

"It becomes you rather, on many accounts, with manly confidence to declare for war. The oracle of a god prescribes it; that god himself has promised his assistance; and the rest of Greece is ready to join you in the contest, some from a principle of fear, and some from a principle of interest. Neither on you will the first breach of the peace

be charged. The god who advises war plainly judges that to be already broken: you will only act to redress its violation: for the breach is not to be charged on those who armed to revenge it; but on those who were the first aggressors. Since then war, considered in every light, appears honourable in regard to you, ye Lacedæmonians: since we with united voices, encourage you to it, as most strongly requisite for our general and separate interests, defer no longer to succour the Potidæans, Dorians by descent, and besieged by Ionians (the reverse was formerly the case), and to recover again the liberty of others. The business will admit of no longer delay, when some already feel the blow; and others, if it once be known that we met here together, and durst not undertake our own defence, will in a very little time be sensible of the same. Reflect within yourselves, confederates, that affairs are come to extremities: that we have suggested the most advisable measures; and give your ballot for war. Be not terrified at its immediate dangers; but animate yourselves with the hope of a long-lasting peace to be procured by it; for a peace produced by war is ever the most firm; but from tranquillity and ease to be averse to war, can by no means abate or dissipate our danger. With this certain conclusion, that a state in Greece is started up into a tyrant, and aims indifferently at the liberty of us all, her arbitrary plan being partly executed, and partly in agitation — let us rush against, and at once pull her down."

We know well what happened to the Lacedæmonians.

Nineteen hundred and twelve was undoubtedly a fateful year for Great Britain, and November in that year was a fateful month. Wild speeches were delivered up and down the country on the navy and the territorial forces. On November 14th, London was struck by a Tory orgy. There was a meeting at the Albert Hall for the leaders of the Opposition; at

the Queen's Hall one for the back-benchers; and at the Hippodrome another for Mr. R. G. Knowles the comedian, and the Ulster party. It was a great night in the history of empire. At the Queen's Hall Lord Percy gave his audience a shock:

"It would require courage to tell the country the truth that they are living in a 'fool's paradise,' and that it was not merely our army but the army of France which was our present defence against German invasion. And it was a base betrayal of our obligations not to be able to support France with an adequate military force of our own."

That was a pretty strong statement to make by one who was not remotely connected with the Foreign Office when the Anglo-French Agreement was drawn up. Precisely what effect that statement had upon the Government is hard to tell, but it is nevertheless true that eight days after it was made Sir Edward Grey wrote to the French ambassador, M. Cambon, reminding him of the understanding of January, 1906, authorizing conversations to take place between French and British military and naval experts. The letter stated that the experts had consulted together from time to time, and though nothing of a binding nature limited the actions of either Government, in the event of one of the countries being attacked by a third Power they would immediately discuss whether both Governments should act together; further, if the measures involved action, the Governments would at once take into consideration the plans of the General Staffs. M. Cambon replied confirming the terms of the agreement. Why Sir Edward Grey should exchange letters with the French ambassador at that

time on this grave matter, is hard to tell, unless the speech of Lord Percy had embarrassed the Foreign Office; but there seems to have been no other reason. There was a rumour in London before the 19th, to the effect that German reservists in the United Kingdom had received notice that they might be required to return to Germany within twenty-four hours. Questions were asked in the House of Commons as to the disposition of the fleet in the Mediterranean and the number of ships there to guard British interests. Mr. Churchill said there were only three armoured cruisers there, if account was not taken of those refitting at Gibraltar, between October 17th and November 3rd. Mr. Yerburgh asked whether it was the policy of the Government at the beginning of the year, and before the introduction of the naval estimates, practically to withdraw our battleships from the Mediterranean; but the First Lord declined to deal with the question. Sir Edward Grey in his letter to the French ambassador pointed out that the disposition of the French and British fleets respectively at that moment was not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war. That was surely a most extraordinary statement for the Foreign Secretary to make. Was it true? Lord Haldane dubbed the Foreign Secretary, "Commander of the Forces," and he also told us that "strategy depends on policy, the policy of the Foreign Office." Yet our command of the Mediterranean, three weeks before he wrote to M. Cambon, amounted to an effective force of only three armoured cruisers, which the First Lord considered an ample fleet. Evidently the plans of General Staffs were well in hand at that time, and it was left to

France to look after the Mediterranean while we devoted our naval attention to the northern coasts of France and the North Sea. How far the plans of General Staffs operated we may never know, but it is a significant fact that an event of an extraordinary nature happened in Belgium just about the time the Foreign Secretary exchanged letters with M. Cambon.

In November, 1912, the Belgian House of Parliament held a secret sitting at the instance of the Belgian King in order to consider urgent precautionary measures. King Albert had become possessed of facts of a threatening nature. These he disclosed to the Parliament, which listened attentively to his warnings, and immediately adopted a drastic military programme which had been delayed for thirty years, and which King Leopold II had advocated in vain. The drastic programme raised the war strength of the Belgian army to 150,000 for the field army, 60,000 for auxiliary services, and 130,000 for garrisons; 340,000 men in all. A gigantic force for a country of seven and a half millions; and when it is understood that Belgium was believed to be protected by five great Powers from aggression, such a military force needs a deal of explanation.

Now what had Belgium to fear in 1912? She knew that three of the signatories of the Treaty of 1839 were allied, and that Germany was not working amicably with the Entente Powers. It is scarcely believable that her Foreign Office did not know that the French and British military and naval experts were formulating plans for the General Staffs. But did Belgium know that these plans included the pos-

sibility of her territory being used as the battlefield of a war with Germany against the Entente Powers? Was it not common talk in military circles that in the event of a war between Germany and France that Germany would be forced to invade Belgium? Could the plans of General Staffs, in the circumstances, leave Belgium out of consideration? Assuredly not. The notion is too utterly preposterous to waste arguments upon for a moment. There was only one route for rapid advance Germany could take and that was through Belgium.

The information the King of the Belgians had to impart to his Parliament was closely connected with the subject of the letters exchanged by Sir Edward Grey and M. Cambon. From the facts it is plain that neither France nor Great Britain was in a position to protect her neutrality and independence. And to compare what was done by Lord Granville in 1870 with the present crisis, is to ignore the fact that Great Britain in 1870 had no agreement with either France or Germany. She was then in a position to insist on the signatories of the Treaty of 1839 observing the neutrality of Belgium. All the talk of Ministers on this point, since the end of July, 1914, has not been worth the ink to print it.

It was laid down in 1908 by the Foreign Secretary that:

“We cannot recognize the right of any Power or State to alter an international treaty without the consent of the other parties to it. We cannot ourselves recognize the result of any such action till the other Powers have been consulted, including especially in this case Turkey, who is one of the other Powers most closely concerned. Because, if it is to become the practice in foreign politics that any single Power

or State can at will make abrupt violations of international treaties, you will undermine public confidence. . . . You cannot expect to see expenditure on armaments diminished if people live under the apprehension that treaties can be suddenly altered without the consent of all the Powers who are parties to them.”

It is to be regretted that the spirit as well as the letter of an essential principle of the law of nations, subscribed to by the Powers in London in 1871 (which is the law upon which the Foreign Secretary based his statement) was not followed by Britain in every diplomatic affair since 1904.