

## CHAPTER IX

### “ NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST ”

“ SOMEWHERE there are still people and herds, but not with us, my brethren: with us there are states.

The state? What is that? Well! now open your ears, for now I deliver my sentence on the death of peoples.

The state is called the coldest of all cold monsters. And coldly it lieth; and this lie creepeth out of its mouth: ‘ I, the state, am the people.’

It is a lie! Creators they were who created the peoples and hung one belief and one love over them; thus they served life.

Destroyers they are who lay traps for many, calling them the state: they hung a sword and a hundred desires over them.

Whatever a people is left, it understandeth not the state but hateth it as the evil eye and a sin against customs and rights.

This sign I show unto you: every people speaketh its own tongue of good and evil — not understood by its neighbour. Every people hath found out for itself its own language in customs and rights.

But the state is a liar in all tongues of good or evil: whatever it saith, it lieth; whatever it hath, it hath stolen.

False is everything in it; with stolen teeth it biteth, the biting one. False are even its intestines.

Confusion of languages of good and evil. This sign I show unto you as the sign of the state. Verily, this sign pointeth to the will unto death! Verily, it waveth hands unto the preachers of death!

Far too many are born: for the superfluous the state was invented.

Behold, behold, how it allureth them, the much-too-many!  
How it devoureth, cheweth, and masticateth them!"

— Nietzsche.

It is not necessary to go further back than 1911, the first year of this Parliament, for evidence of the Foreign Office and the Admiralty's method of hoodwinking members and shielding their own systems of evasion, hyperbole, and secrecy. This Government is not the first to set up absolutist systems in the departments, but from Liberal statesmen the mass of people expect democratic treatment. When Toryism finished its mad career in 1905, the vast majority of the electorate imagined Tory methods would be interred with the party. "Not in the public interest," was the phrase it was thought might satisfy over-curious Conservatives, but Radicals were not to be put off with cryptadia. However galling it may be to make such an admission in these "democratic" days, it must be confessed that the House of Lords is not the only place that thrives upon an hereditary system. All departments more or less live and move and have their being just as prolific noble houses do; with this difference, of course, that permanent officials are not so easily shifted. Heredity is the evil influence which has destroyed Democracy; and now, like Oswald Alving, it is struck down just as it was about to ask for the sun. Yes, continuity of the diplomatic errors of our predecessors is the reason for our deplorable position in Europe.

In the early days of the first session of this Parliament the Government hung up the stereotyped text,

"Not in the public interest," to scare off the inquisitive. A private member asked the Secretary for Foreign Affairs whether he had responded to the speech of the German Chancellor (in which was expressed the opinion that an open and confident exchange of views would do much to remove suspicion arising from naval and military expenditure) and whether he could lay upon the table of the House any papers relating thereto? The Under-Secretary replied that the informal discussions were continuing, and the Government hoped that they would "help to promote the maintenance and growth of the existing friendly relations between the two countries"; but, "it would not be in the public interest to lay papers."

To understand thoroughly how thick a barrier members had to pierce to get at the source of information which determined the action of the Admiralty in 1909 (to build the four extra ships) one has only to look through the long series of questions put to Mr. McKenna, and the evasive replies given by him during the first weeks of the session. Behind the sign, "Not in the public interest," the Government hid their errors of judgment and all the criminal machinations of the scaremongers outside the House. Publicity is considered to be one of the blessings of our Parliamentary procedure; but there are affairs of vital interest to the public that private members cannot get at: and, on the other hand, probably because of the congestion of business, floods of oratory unstemmed for at least eight hours a day for four days each week, and much is overlooked by the press that should for mere party reasons be given to the public. Sometimes a question

is put which contains matter of deep importance to the people, but a non-committal reply, or an evasive answer, checks the interest it would have if revelation and not secrecy were the chief aim and desire of Ministers. Take the following question and reply which passed almost without comment in the House and the press. The date was March 8th, 1911:

“ Mr. Jowett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if, during his term of office, any undertaking, promise, or understanding had been given to France that, in certain eventualities, British troops would be sent to assist the operations of the French army?

“ Mr. McKinnon Wood (Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs): ‘ The answer is in the negative.’ ”

Numbers of members knew the answer was untrue, but not even a single supplementary question was put. The sacred veil over foreign affairs must not be torn aside. It is, however, more than probable the Under-Secretary believed the answer he gave was quite true. We know now the answer should have been, “ Yes! ” But if that answer had been given there would have been great diplomatic trouble in the chancelleries of Europe; and, which is of deeper concern, the Government would have suffered an immediate storm of protest from the vertebrata of the Liberal party in the country. Many members were loath to press the question because they had nothing but rumour to go on; and there was, besides, this to be considered, namely: the pledges given to the constituencies to support the Government in bringing certain first-class measures of reform to the Statute Book. This was indeed the

ever-restraining reason why so many Radicals did not vote against the Government on naval expenditure. So the complexities and the multiplicities of our Parliamentary system make it an almost impossible feat for a member at all times to vote according to his conscience. The legislator after all is the real Jesuit.

Foreign Affairs got precious little discussion in the House in 1911. In 1910 there was less; no Foreign Office vote was put down that year. Many complaints on all sides of the House were heard, that so little opportunity should be given to members to worm a statement of policy out of the Foreign Secretary. The Anglo-Russian Agreement was made the subject of severe criticism on a day when the debate on Foreign Affairs was interrupted at a quarter past eight by a long discussion on a railway bill! But, if foreign affairs got little attention, the army certainly came in for particular notice; and Mr. Haldane's reorganization of the Expeditionary Force was subjected to criticism from the militarists. It was awkward for the Minister for War to deal effectively with the censure poured upon him, for the debate was more in the nature of a sham fight than a real battle. One felt that Mr. Haldane was doing the best he could to meet the demands of General Staffs; but that it would never do to carry out all the suggestions of the military experts for fear of alarming his own party, who knew nothing about the secret understanding the Foreign Secretary had made with the French Government. Several Opposition members found it very difficult to make headway against the secret; and in their speeches only slight references were made to the Expedition-

ary Force having to meet Continental armies. Some members frankly said its numbers were insufficient; Sir Reginald Pole-Carew said, "it would be murder to send them."

The navy estimates brought about one of the most instructive debates of the session. Private members on the Liberal side completely riddled the forecasts of Ministers made in 1909 and 1910, as to the naval position of Germany, though they were unable to check the headlong rush of our armaments. That debate was particularly interesting; for in it Mr. Dillon, in referring to France, proved himself a far bolder man than all the Opposition soldiers were in the debate on the army. Mr. Dillon said:

"I interjected an observation on Monday in the speech of one of the speakers who was talking about this question of building against the Triple Alliance, and who insisted for the safety of this Empire on building against the Triple Alliance. I said, What about France? I thought that one of the glories of the British Government had been that it had formed an Entente with France."

"Mr. Lee: 'It is not the same thing as an alliance.'

"Mr. Dillon: 'I should like to know what it is. Some of us have had very uneasy feelings since the other day we read that M. Pichon, the Foreign Minister for France, spoke of constant military conversations going on with England. I say that there is a very uncomfortable feeling among many honourable members that there is a secret alliance with France, or some understanding which is not known to the members of this House, and if we are to be told that that is the result of all these alliances and understandings, this country must be prepared to build not according to the two Power standard, but up to the three Power standard which was put forward here to-night.'"

Why Mr. Dillon should be alarmed at a state-

ment made by the French Foreign Secretary (when in answer to a question put by Mr. Jowett only eight weeks earlier our own Foreign Secretary said that no undertaking, promise, or understanding, had been given to France) was very strange. Perhaps Mr. Dillon did not believe our Foreign Secretary. Anyway, he showed a superb disregard for the courtesies which should acknowledge the privilege of all public departments to keep their secrets from private members.

A fortnight after Mr. Dillon's reference to the statements made by M. Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Jowett put another question to the Foreign Secretary:

"Mr. Jowett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, if, when he came into office, there was in existence any understanding or undertaking, expressed or implied, in virtue of which Great Britain would be under obligations to France to send troops, in certain eventualities, to assist the operations of the French army?"

"Sir Edward Grey: 'The extent of the obligations to which Great Britain was committed was that expressed or implied in the Anglo-French Convention laid before Parliament. There was no other engagement bearing on the subject.'"

The Cabinet perhaps acted on the method of Solon who in his original constitution denied the people initiative, and allowed them only to propose what had first been thoroughly considered and approved by the senate. Let us say then that in March, 1911, the Cabinet were not agreed on the matter referred to in Mr. Jowett's question, and the time had not arrived for letting the House into the confidence of the Foreign Secretary. But then there

is this to be remembered: Did all the Cabinet in March, 1911, know any more than Mr. Jowett?

For an example of the Government's method of hanging out the sign, "Not in the public interest," the following is hard to beat:

"Mr. Yerburgh asked the Prime Minister whether, in stating in his speech on our standard of naval strength on 26th May, 1909, that the end was to ensure for this country in any conceivable condition, and against all possible hazards, unassailable naval superiority which would give us complete command of the sea, and make any attempt to interfere with any part of the Empire or sea-borne commerce an impossibility, he is to be understood as ruling out of calculation, in computing our requisite naval strength, the fleets of any other Power with whom we may, at the time, be on terms of intimate friendship?

"The Prime Minister: 'I do not think that matters of this kind can be conveniently or adequately dealt with by question and answer. I can only refer the hon. member to the speech which he quotes and to the speech made on the same occasion by the First Lord of the Admiralty.'

"Mr. Arthur Lee: 'Is the right hon. gentleman aware that in his absence an entirely new definition of the two-Power standard was laid down by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs?'

"The Prime Minister: 'I am not aware of that.'

"Mr. Yerburgh: 'May I ask whether or not we are to understand that the Government arrived at no decision upon this particular question? Is the right hon. gentleman not aware that this is a question of supreme importance, and that in arriving at our standard of naval strength previous governments had regard to the power of the fleets of other countries?'

"The Prime Minister: 'I think this question shows the inconvenience of dealing with these matters by way of question and answer.'

“Mr. James Hope: ‘May I ask whether it takes a longer time to make a battleship or an enemy?’”

Most pertinent this last question, and not easily answered; one indeed requiring notice.

On the motion for adjournment for the Easter recess, Mr. Swift MacNeill raised the subject of secrecy in foreign affairs. He said:

“From generation to generation, you have allowed treaties involving the highest international obligations — involving questions of peace and war — to be taken absolutely out of the hands of the House. It is no exaggeration to say, so far as international policy is concerned, you have rendered the House as little effectively powerful as any man walking over Westminster Bridge. Over and over again treaties involving matters of life and death, involving questions of first-class importance, have been ratified behind the back of Parliament. . . . The people themselves must be allowed to know all about this diplomacy and what it is. And there should be no secrecy in regard to high diplomatic statecraft about it. The House of Commons is ample judge of what is discreet and what is indiscreet, and it is a complete absurdity for others to treat us as children or for us to allow ourselves to be so treated in matters of such high international importance as those involving questions of peace and war.”

The Foreign Secretary replied that there must be secrecy up to a certain point, and that the ratification of treaties was one of far too great importance to be discussed on an occasion of that kind; and he asked the House to bear in mind that not until the House of Commons was really free to devote itself to the discussions of Imperial affairs would it get control.

The House had not long to wait for an illustration of the gravity of the charge directed by Mr.

Swift MacNeill against the Foreign Office. On May 2nd, 1911, a question was put down concerning the French expedition to Fez:

"Mr. Dillon asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether the British Government had been consulted by the French Government in reference to the proposed military operations against Fez; and whether the British Government had in any way approved or made itself responsible for this attack on the independence of the Empire of Morocco?

"The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Sir Edward Grey): 'His Majesty's Government have been informed by the French Government of the measures which are being adopted for the succour of Europeans in Fez, and they understand that information has also been given to other Governments. The action taken by France is not intended to alter the political status of Morocco, and His Majesty's Government cannot see why any objection should be taken to it.'"

Now who were the Europeans to be succoured? Well, in the first place they were not in Fez. In the second place they were all powerful enough to dispense with the services of the British Government. Many of the people asking succour were great bankers, armament makers, British newspaper correspondents, philanthropic millionaires intimately connected with royalties, and sundry "representatives" of the people. Succour! these were the gangs that bled Morocco to death. Anyway, the military operations of the French against Fez were merely steps taken to destroy that "scrap of paper," the Algeciras Act. The secret articles of 1904 were not then made public. So when His Majesty's Government could not see why any objection should be taken to the military operations against Fez, the British

Government were really fulfilling all the obligations of its secret diplomacy, knowing the public of Britain would acquiesce because it would be misinformed by the Jingo press in league with the advertising department of the Foreign Office.

What really went on in and about Fez has been fully described by M. Francis de Pressensé:

“At this point the *Comité du Maroc* and its organs surpassed themselves. They organized a campaign of systematic untruth. Masters of almost the entire press, they swamped the public with false news. Fez was presented as threatened by siege or sack. A whole European French Colony was suddenly discovered there, living in anguish. The ultimate fate of the women and children was described in the most moving terms. . . . At all costs the Europeans, the Sultan, Fez itself must be saved. . . . As ever from the beginning of this enterprise, the Government knew nothing, willed nothing of itself. With a salutary dread of complications it would have preferred not to move, perhaps, even, had it dared, to withdraw from the hornet's nest. But the greater fears it experienced from another quarter prevailed; those inculcated by the so-called patriotic shoutings, the concerted clamours of the orchestra of which the *Comité du Maroc* holds the baton, and whose chief performers are to be found in *Le Temps* and *Le Matin*. The order to advance was given. . . . Already while the expedition was on its way, light began to pierce. Those redoubtable rebels who were threatening Fez had disappeared like the dew in the morning. Barely did a few ragged horsemen fire off a shot or two before turning around and riding away at a furious gallop. A too disingenuous, or too truthful, correspondent gave the show away. The expeditionary force complains, he gravely records, of the absence of the enemy; the approaching harvest season is keeping all the healthy males in the fields! Thus did the phantom so dexterously conjured by the *Comité du Maroc* for the benefit of its aims disappear in a night. . . .

Avowals and disclosures then began in right earnest. One of the correspondents who had contributed his share to the concert of lying news, wrote with an admirable *sang-froid* that, in truth, there had been some exaggeration, that, in point of fact, at no moment had the safety of Fez and its inhabitants been seriously menaced; that the idea of a regular siege and of a sudden capture had been alike chimerical and that, moreover, so far as the provisioning of the place was concerned, he could reassure the most timorous that there was sufficient corn in the city to feed the whole population, plus the expeditionary column, for more than a year! The farce was played. After Casablanca, Fez! France without realizing it, without wishing it, almost without knowing it, had taken a decisive step. An indefinite occupation of the capital was the natural prelude to a Protectorate. For the clever men who had invented and executed the scenario there only now remained the task of reaping the fruit of their efforts. The era of concessions, profits, dividends, was about to open. Premature joyfulness! It was the era of difficulties which was at hand."

His Majesty's Government could not see why any objection should be taken to it! The Foreign Office could not see that it marked the beginning of the end of European peace!

But the people are helpless. They are being ground to powder every day by the diplomatic machine which never in the history of European affairs consummated a single treaty that worked for the real benefit of the people. Juggernaut! Look where the car has passed across the fair plain of western Europe. Who can describe the woe this Kumbharkarna has wrought! Not until "a crescent-headed arrow from Rama's bow" strikes down the foul idol, which Bright fifty years ago thought overthrown, will the people know any rest from war.

As an example of how quickly news travels across the desert to the House of Commons when British "interests" are in "danger," and how easy it is for "British subjects" who are not in danger to find British legislators eager to force the Government to move something of an extensive military character to protect them, the following taken from *Hansard*, April 25th, 1911, is a gem:

"Major Archer-Shee: 'I beg to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he can inform the House as to the number of British subjects residing in Fez at the present time, and what steps the Government propose taking to safeguard British interests in that part of Morocco?'

"Mr. McKinnon Wood (Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs): 'The number of British subjects residing at Fez on March 27th, 1911, apart from persons of Moorish parentage, was ten. Of these, six were women and two were children. His Majesty's Government do not contemplate any active measures. They consider that the arrangements being made under French supervision will afford the necessary protection to British subjects at Fez. No special measures appear to be called for to safeguard British interests in that part of Morocco.'

"Mr. Dillon: 'Has the Government any information which would give them cause for believing that there is any danger to Europeans?'

"Mr. McKinnon Wood: 'No, we have no such information.'

"Mr. Remnant: 'May I ask whether any representations have been made to the French Government to carry out the suggestions?'

"Mr. McKinnon Wood: 'No representations have been made to the French Government.'

"Major Archer-Shee: 'May I ask whether it is intended to co-operate with other Governments should it become necessary to send a large force to pacify Morocco?'

"Mr. McKinnon Wood: 'No occasion has arisen to make us contemplate any such action.'

"Mr. Remnant: 'May I ask the hon. gentleman whether he will ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether it is his intention to make representations, and, if so, whether he will do so at once?'

"Mr. McKinnon Wood: 'There is no necessity to make representations.'

"Major Archer-Shee: 'In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I beg leave to move the adjournment of the House to call attention to a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the attitude to be adopted by this country in the event of extensive military operations being required for the pacification of Morocco.'

"Mr. Dillon: 'This is for the purpose of creating a scare.'"

Major Archer-Shee did not get the adjournment of the House. But the ten British subjects in Fez must have been deeply grateful to the British legislators who were so anxious to protect them when they were in no danger. And no doubt British "interests" felt under a debt which we hope was paid according to service rendered. What is the good of having a Foreign Office if it cannot be urged by members of the House of Commons to do something for British "interests"?

On May 23rd, the Foreign Secretary said the French Government had no choice but to relieve Fez with the least possible delay. When Mr. Dillon asked whether the House was not entitled to know to what extent this country was committed to "this ill-omened and cruel expedition," the Foreign Secretary replied, "We are not committed at all." The secret articles and letters connected with the Anglo-French Agreement were not yet made public.

But Article VIII of the Agreement of 1904, stated, "The Agreement which may be come to on the subject between France and Spain shall be communicated to His Britannic Majesty's Government." A convention was drawn up between France and Spain on October 3rd, 1904, for the partition of Morocco. A copy of this secret treaty was sent by the French ambassador to Lord Lansdowne, who in acknowledging it said, "I need not say that the confidential character of the Convention entered into by the President of the French Republic and the King of Spain in regard to French and Spanish interests in Morocco is fully recognized by us, and will be duly respected." No, we were not committed,—not publicly. Well might Mr. Swift MacNeill say, "It is a complete absurdity for others to treat us as children, or for us to allow ourselves to be so treated in matters of such high international importance as those involving questions of peace and war."

After Casablanca, Fez; and after Fez, Agadir. Early in July, Germany set about taking a hand in the Moroccan business. Publicly, she was as much concerned in the economic arrangements of the Powers in Morocco as France or Britain. In February, 1909, she had signed a declaration with France maintaining the integrity and independence of Morocco. The *Panther* at Agadir was an indication of what the German Government thought of the French expedition to Fez. Questions were asked in the House of Commons, but the Government immediately put out the sign, "Not in the public interest"; and leaders of the Opposition, following the tradition of continuity, respected the feelings of the Foreign Office. The first question was asked on July

3rd, and although Captain Faber asked “ if it were not safe for British men-o’-war to go ” to Agadir, the Government made no statement until the 27th, July, and then the Prime Minister choked discussion. He said:

“ Too close an analysis at the present moment of causes and antecedents might provoke in more than one quarter recrimination and retorts, which it is on every ground desirable to avoid . . . and I would venture, in the general interest, to make a strong appeal to the House, not on the present occasion to enter into further details or open up controversial ground.”

After a protest from Mr. Ramsey Macdonald against the flamboyant speech delivered in the city by Mr. Lloyd George, the House settled down to talk about any other foreign affairs but Morocco and the *Panther*. The next time the question was raised was in November. After the publication of the secret articles in the Paris papers, *Le Temps* and *Le Matin*, the British Government decided to let the House of Commons see them. Late in November Sir Edward Grey made his statement on the Moroccan affairs, and the House had an opportunity of speaking its mind on secret diplomacy, without really appreciating the real gravity of the business. The Prime Minister, relieved no doubt that the Government escaped so lightly, said:

“ The House has heard from my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary, and I believe has heard with universal satisfaction, that the world is now in possession of the whole of our treaty obligations on this subject. There is no secret arrangement of any sort or kind which has not been disclosed, and fully disclosed, to the public, and we

ask, from that point of view, that our conduct should be judged by the measure of our treaty obligations which members of the House are able to ascertain precisely for themselves."

That was good news. And when the Prime Minister emphasized the fact on December 6th, 1911, in reply to a question put by Mr. Gordon Harvey, numbers of members thought the ugly rumour of our being under war-obligations to France would be utterly dispelled. The Prime Minister said:

"As has been stated, there were no secret engagements with France other than those that have now been published, and there are no secret engagements with any foreign Government that entail upon us any obligation to render military or naval assistance to any other Power."<sup>1</sup>

Later in that month we learned that all treaties had not been made public:

"Mr. Swift MacNeill: 'Do I understand the right

<sup>1</sup> In the December, 1911, issue of the *Review of Reviews* Mr. W. T. Stead had something to say on the Moroccan Crisis:

"We were nearly involved in the stupendous catastrophe of a gigantic war with the greatest of all the World-Powers in order to enable France to tear up the Treaty of Algieras by taking possession of the Empire of Morocco whose independence and integrity we were pledged to defend. It is not to our interest to make over to France a vast domain in Northern Africa. . . . The fact remains that in order to put France in possession of Morocco we all but went to war with Germany. We have escaped war, but we have not escaped the natural and abiding enmity of the German people. Is it possible to frame a heavier indictment of the foreign policy of any British Ministry? The secret, the open secret of this almost incredible crime against treaty faith, British interests, and the peace of the world, is the unfortunate fact that Sir Edward Grey has been dominated by men at the Foreign Office who believe all considerations must be subordinated to the one supreme duty of thwarting Germany at every turn, even if in so doing British interests, treaty faith and the peace of the world are trampled underfoot. I speak that of which I know."

honourable gentleman to say that there are other secret treaties besides the secret treaty recently disclosed between this country and France?’

“Sir Edward Grey: ‘Does the hon. gentleman mean between this country and France?’

“Mr. MacNeill: ‘Between this country and any other country. We know about France.’

“Sir Edward Grey: ‘Yes, sir; there are other engagements that have not been published.’”

We have recently been throwing a deal of contempt on the doctrine that *Might is Right*, but wherein does the Kaiser’s Government differ from ours in foreign policy? Are ethics any nearer politics in any modern European state than they were in Machiavelli’s time? For those who hold the notion that a Government stands in the ethical position of an individual and in its operations it should always be actuated by the ethics which should govern the actions of an individual, let it be observed that responsibility cannot be fixed on a Government as it can be fixed on the individual; and ethics and responsibility cannot be divorced. Is it possible to fix responsibility on this Government? Some one says it is responsible to the people. What, in the sense that an individual is responsible for his actions? No, indeed. In the case of the individual when he lies, or steals, or murders, there is no shifting responsibility; but in the case of a Government where is personal responsibility to be fixed?

Is it any wonder that the world of thought is shaken every now and then by a Stirner, or a Bakunin, or a Nietzsche? Statesmen must not always scoff at the notion that “for the superfluous the state was invented.” Injustice and poverty, hatred and

war, will continue so long as men can shift responsibility.

“The ultimate purpose of the State is not to rule men, to keep them in fear, to subject them to the will of others, but, on the contrary, to allow each as far as possible to live in security, that is, to preserve for each his natural right to live without harm to himself or to his neighbour. No, I repeat, the object of the State is not to transform reasonable beings into animals or automata; its object is to enable the citizens to develop in security their bodies and their minds, freely to employ their reason. The true end of the State therefore is liberty.”

Spinoza sounds a bit old-fashioned, but what other basis is there for a State? How far Britain is removed from the foundation laid down by Spinoza is a question which to try to answer would fill any political economist with despair.