

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WORK OF DIPLOMATISTS

“THERE is another great gulf which separates the differences between Austria and Russia, howsoever they may be decided, from the affairs of the Western Powers. Britain and Germany, Italy and France are at peace. They desire peace; they need peace; there is no ground of quarrel between them — absolutely none. They have only to continue to pursue together the simple and sincere policy they have been following, they have only to trust one another in this time of trouble, they have only to take hold of one another’s hands in confidence and good-will, and there is no power under the sky that can drive them from the paths of sanity and honour. No one can measure the consequences of a general war. The original cause would soon be lost in the greater and more terrible issues which would be raised. . . . The only epitaph which history could write on such a catastrophe would be that this whole generation of men went mad and tore themselves to pieces.”

— Winston Churchill, November, 1912.

That epitaph will serve for the stone that will be raised by our heirs on the grave of our madness. Never was peace needed by the peoples of Europe so urgently as in June, 1914. But men went mad in July; statesmen led the way, pushed by diplomats, and kings followed; not along the paths of sanity and honour, but into those terrible labyrinths where reason is abandoned by all who enter in. In 1914 the economic and political condition of Britain

and Ireland was serious enough to employ fully all the wisdom of our statesmen. Declining trade; grave labour trouble approaching; the revolt in the army; Ulster's preparation for civil war; sedition in the Privy Council and in India; riots in South Africa and Dublin; were only some of the outstanding features of our own disorders.

When Parliament met on February 10th, 1914, the King's speech contained two striking points on foreign affairs:

"My relations with Foreign Powers continue to be friendly. I am happy to say that my negotiations, both with the German Government and the Ottoman Government as regards matters of importance to the commercial and industrial interests of this country in Mesopotamia, are rapidly approaching a satisfactory issue, while questions which have long been pending with the Turkish Empire in respect to regions bordering on the Persian Gulf are in a fair way towards an amicable settlement."

There seemed to be no international friction in Europe; the chancelleries gave no indication of the coming storm. Even the Balkans seemed to be at rest. At home all was strife. The Government, entering on its fourth year of office under the Parliament Act, had to deal for the third and last time with the Home Rule Bill. Many other highly contentious measures, in various stages of legislative development, were to be dealt with. The church, the land, and the ascendancy parties were intensely alarmed; and urgent was their work in the country to forestall at any cost the power of the Parliament Act to pass measures against the opposition of the House of Lords. The Unionists had succeeded on two occasions in turning the House of Commons

into a disorderly place; and threats were made again and again to use similar methods in the new session. The old ways of reason and argument were fast giving place to riot and clamour. No one could look forward to the passing of the Home Rule Bill with certainty that the House would conduct itself decorously. Another pot-house brawl was the least that could be expected. For the time being, foreign affairs and armaments were forgotten. In the recess some Ministers had, however, referred to these questions in their speeches. Lord Haldane at Hoxton on January 15th, 1914, said:

“During the eight years in which the Government had been in office the peace of Europe had been preserved. The Great Powers had grouped themselves; the piling up of armaments had gone on; we had increased our armaments; and Europe was an armed camp, but an armed camp in which peace not only prevailed, but in which the indications were that there was a far greater prospect of peace than ever there was before. No one wanted war. If armaments were piled up it was not for aggression but for fear. That would go in time, and would certainly go if the beneficent tendency of the last few years was kept up, and if this country preserved its policy while remaining in one of the groups, yet seeking to bring about good relations between that group and the other group. It was with pleasure that he thought of the great power for good of the two statesmen in Europe, Dr. Bethmann-Hollweg and Sir Edward Grey. These two had worked for all they were worth, and we had seen the fruits of it during a period of great anxiety and crisis, when probably without that group system we might have had a conflagration in Europe. These groups had a new value and meaning. They did not exist to break the peace, but to keep the peace.”

This only about six months before Europe was

engulfed in the horror of the centuries! There was then no doubt in Lord Haldane's mind as to the way the two heads (Sir Edward Grey and Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg) of the armed groups, the Entente and the Alliance, had worked for the peace of Europe. No one wanted war! The groups did not exist to break the peace but to keep the peace! It is like a grotesque nightmare now to read such a speech, delivered only a few short months before the greatest nations of Europe plunged into war. To read that speech, now that nine nations are at war, and try to get one gleam of hope for democracy out of all the gloom of battlefields is a task of utter despair. Every sophism, every platitude, every pretext of statesman, diplomatist, soldier and sailor for armaments, groups, and treaties has been smashed to atoms. Truth, like a battered drab, in burning shame hides her head in the shadows of an empty brothel. Either Lord Haldane knew then he was not speaking the truth or numbers of British journalists who have written on diplomacy since the war began are brazen liars. Both cannot be right; but as Lord Haldane, with all his political faults, is one of the great intellectual forces in Britain, and would be apt to know what he was talking about, the jingoists of the gutter-press may be left to enjoy what they earn. Lord Haldane was a bad prophet; and though he told us so recently as July, 1915, that he "was bound to make friendly speeches," he might have had the courage to tell the country earlier all he learned in Berlin in 1912. Here is the curse of the whole despicable business of diplomacy: a man like Lord Haldane must make friendly speeches (which in this case meant hiding the truth) when

he had not the "smallest doubt about the imperative necessity of our taking part in the war,"— as he told us in July, 1915.

It is almost a futile task to attempt to reconcile the utterances of our statesmen made before July, 1914, with those delivered since the war began. To those who would urge the excuse that members of a Cabinet cannot speak straightforwardly on delicate questions of foreign affairs for fear of precipitating an international crisis, it might be asked what particular benefit have the people derived from the policy of secrecy and hyperbole? If the conduct of foreign affairs precludes the possibility of the truth being given to the people, is it necessary to mislead them by making friendly speeches? Would it not be better to preserve an ironclad silence? Why tell the people anything about foreign affairs and armaments? Perhaps the policy of the future will be: get the money and say nothing. A rhetorical loss might at any rate mean a dialectical gain.

Take another instance of where statesmen's utterances before the war come in conflict with the screeds of jingoists. Sir Edward Grey spoke at Manchester in February, 1914, on International Affairs and Armaments. He said:

"While British naval expenditure is a great factor in the naval expenditure of Europe, the forces which are making that expenditure increase generally are really beyond our control. I admit that we had some responsibility originally in building the first dreadnought. No doubt we are open to the criticism that we set the example. . . . At the present moment what is causing the increase of dreadnoughts in Europe? It is going on without reference to British expenditure. The ships which Germany is going to lay

down in this coming year are being laid down to carry out a naval programme, a naval law (which cannot be altered without the consent of the Reichstag), which was laid down many years ago and a naval law which would not be altered this year by anything we could do. When you come to the shipbuilding of France, Austria, and Italy, and ask yourself why they are building dreadnoughts, I do not think you can say in the case of any one of them that they are building dreadnoughts because of British shipbuilding. Whatever motives they have, it is not competition with us in particular which is causing them to build dreadnoughts, and if we were to decide to build nothing this year or next year, I do not believe it would cause any alteration in the shipbuilding of the other great Powers of Europe as a direct consequence."

In the first place this statement proves conclusively how preposterous was the notion of Mr. Churchill's naval holiday, and how absurd is the grudge of the Jingo press against Germany for not adopting the suggestion of Mr. Churchill. In the second place Sir Edward Grey laid the spectre of Germany's violation of her naval pledges to us, and the surreptitious acceleration of her naval programme. In the third place it proves positively that Germany was not building against us, and that we were blameful in forcing the armament pace.

One has only to go to *Hansard* or the public prints to find speeches of Ministers which contradict ninety-nine per cent. of the stuff published against Germany as to her foreign affairs, naval and military development, literature, music and science. But what is to be done with a public largely fed on the garbage printed in most of the British dailies and weeklies now that war is a paying game for jingoists? It was bad enough in times of panic before

hostilities began; but now every day in the week the public is brutally assaulted by columns in the press more dangerous to the British people than all the Kaiser's legions past and to come. At the dinner of the Foreign Press Association, May, 1914, Sir Edward Grey said the press "controlled the atmosphere, and the temperature of the atmosphere would decide what policy it might be possible for Governments to carry out." Whether or not the foreign press controlled the atmosphere at the time of the Balkan crisis, there is no doubt about the control of atmosphere of the British press now. Decent journalism lies under a cloud of suspicion and dare not deal thoroughly with all the causes which brought about the war. The worst features of Prussian administration are rampant in the land, and a free press has been ousted by a press free chiefly to lie and traduce honourable men. But it is not the people's fault that the culture of frenzy and fright is the order of the day; it is the fault of the Government. The people have not been given a chance to select a culture compatible with true liberty. Slaves must take the culture their masters impose. If there was one reform more than another needed in Britain in the spring of 1914 it was education. Nationally not one-half as much was spent on education as on the navy. But the navy was all right. And the army was ready. The Minister for War in the Commons on March 10th said, "We stand well for the purposes of immediate war on any basis which you may consider. . . ." The First Lord of the Admiralty told the House of Commons that forty merchant ships had been armed with two 4.7 guns apiece. On the debate on the Naval Position

in the Mediterranean, March 18th, Sir Edward Grey was sure "the good understandings which have existed and which exist between ourselves and France and Russia have undoubtedly during the last troublous times contributed to the peace of Europe. . . . We consider that they make for peace." The debates in the Commons on the Army and Navy were of deep interest. Mr. Amery intervened again and dealt with the position in Europe :

"It is not a question of our dealing single-handed with one of the great European Powers. We have been committed by our foreign policy to the support of a certain grouping of Powers and it is our duty to supply not only naval strength but military strength to prevent that grouping being broken down. What good would it be to us winning a victory at sea if our allies were crushed and defeated on land?"

Then in the debate on the Navy Estimates, March 18th, 1914, the question of our position in Europe was raised by several members. Lord Charles Beresford dealt severely with the First Lord:

"I ask the First Lord: Are we going to trust to France to defend us in the Mediterranean? That is a very definite question. If we are, what are we to give France in return? It has come out quite lately that we have not got an Expeditionary Force that we could send away to France if France needed it. The Secretary for War could not answer that question, and we know — everybody knows — we could not afford to send that Expeditionary Force away if England and France were engaged in a war against some one else. I say that is a very dangerous position. We are metaphorically to sell our friends. They are to look after our enormous interests in the Mediterranean because we

cannot have a fleet there. What are we going to do for France? It may be very disagreeable but we are liable with these ententes and alliances. When we had command of the sea and trusted to our own right hands we wanted no ententes and alliances and the British Fleet was a factor for peace."

Yes, indeed: and Lord Charles Beresford was not alone in casting back a glance to the days of Britain's splendid isolation. There were many men who heartily disliked the international prospect, but on reflection they consoled themselves with the assurances so often given by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that we were under no obligation to give armed support to France or Russia. In the Commons Sir Mark Sykes and Mr. Herbert delivered speeches full of foreboding as to Russian influence and aspiration. When the question of troops for Ulster was raised, Colonel Burn asked the Foreign Secretary "whether in the event of troops being employed in Ulster over an extended period, the Government are in a position to carry out our military understanding with France." Sir Edward Grey said the Prime Minister could not "undertake to reply to a purely hypothetical question."

It was a stormy session and the House lost heavily in dignity while the Government gained little in prestige. The party of law and order preached sedition and anarchy in the House and in the country, and the young bloods of Toryism at the same time planned to stop procedure by shouting Ministers down. Manners fell to the depths of vulgarity, and wisdom in disgust often flew away and found refuge in the jug-and-bottle corners of lowly pubs.

How was it with Germany before the murder of

the archduke? First, let us avoid making the mistake of many publicists that every speech of Kaiser or Chancellor which bristled with phrases of Treitschke was aimed at Britain. Bernhardi has told us war with England was hopeless from the German position, and he can be accepted as an authority. It was hopeless. With our navy for the North Sea, and France guarding the Mediterranean, no one save a Jingo lunatic could really believe for a moment that the time had come for Germany to try her strength with us. Bernhardi said, "The English Government knows well that Germany cannot think on her side of attacking England, because such an attempt is in itself hopeless." Furthermore, in the report sent in the summer of 1913 from Berlin to M. Pichon, the then French Minister for Foreign Affairs (see No. 5, in French Yellow Book), we are told:

"It is hardly likely that Germany will take the risk if France can make it clear to the world that the Entente Cordiale and the Russian Alliance are not merely diplomatic fictions but realities which exist and will make themselves felt. *The English fleet inspires a wholesome terror.* It is well known, however, that victory on sea will leave everything in suspense. On land alone can a decisive issue be obtained."

What then was Germany's special aim in Europe in the spring of last year? Russia. Most undoubtedly; and Germany made no pretence of hiding her design. Russia was regarded as a peril. Dr. Dillon himself said, "Among the new or newly intensified currents of political life now traversing the Continent of Europe, none can be compared in its cul-

tural and political bearings and influence with the rivalry between the Slav and Teutonic races." The feeling in Russia was quite as deep as it was in Germany. "Europe is not big enough for both Slav and German aspirations," was the way a Russian put it two winters ago. Men who are steeped in the atmosphere of the chancelleries are prone to give their opinions in the colours of the last foreign office they have visited, and that is the only way one can explain so much of the bewildering rubbish written in the British reviews since the beginning of the war. It might have been planned by Germany to force Russia into a conflict; Germany might have arranged with Austria to take the murder of the archduke as the favourable moment for forcing Russia's hand; Germany might have counted at one time on the Triple Alliance holding good in the event of war; but that Germany was prepared last year for a struggle in which she and Austria alone would meet the Triple Entente and Belgium, is an assumption which the facts do not support. At least as early as the beginning of July, 1914, when the tip came from Rome to London, Germany must have known for certain that she could not count on Italy. There were, however, many other problems of a political nature that might have urged the Kaiser and his friends to find a solution of them in a big war. Social Democracy was one, and a serious one. In the forefront of their programme, at the last General Election, was placed, Abolition of Compulsory Military Service; then the vote of Social Democracy increased by 1,250,000, and the party became the biggest in the Reichstag. At bye-elections the Kaiser saw Social Democracy win its way into Junker

strongholds. Moreover, the problem of the unemployed taxed the wit of the bureaucrats at headquarters to the utmost; and during the winter of 1913 they did not know how to grapple effectively with it. Germany was faced with another winter of still greater trade depression, and the position may be imagined by what the *Berliner Tageblatt* said then about unemployment: "Things are the same all over the Empire. Whoever looks about our building-places, factories, offices, and public businesses knows that work is often going on only at half-power,—that is, where it has not ceased altogether. At the present moment, dismissals not only of ordinary workmen, but also of clerks and other employés, are more numerous than probably at any time in the past." Prices were rising higher and higher; discontent was growing in every district; and the "enemy at home," to use Prince Henry of Prussia's phrase for Social Democracy, were extremely restless.

Furthermore, the dislike of Prussian arrogance on the part of the southern German States had been growing in intensity since the days of Prince Hohenlohe. Bavaria was not seeing eye to eye with Prussia in the all-military ambitions of the Kaiser. There was not that unanimity in the Empire that some writers believe; and in many small States there was grave discontent when the new taxation for military purposes was imposed, not so long ago. Saxony, Württemberg, and Bavaria were not happy under Prussian rule; they had lost much of their individuality, their ambitions and characteristics, in the confederation. There may be more than a few who live in these smaller States who will not spend many

days in mourning if Prussia is overthrown in this struggle.

Let us for a moment look at the territorial question. All imperial ambition on the Continent must have a western goal. Germany with a population of 65,000,000 finds her way blocked by Holland with a home population of only 6,000,000, and colonies containing over 800,000 square miles; finds her way blocked by Belgium with a population of 7,500,000; and again finds her way blocked by France with a population of 40,000,000. These countries standing in the way of her westward progress all have far superior maritime advantages; besides, Germany has no outlet to the Mediterranean. Her geographical position, for a great maritime power, is not dignified; so German opinion has often said. Indeed it has been pointed out by great merchants in articles on this matter that international justice, whatever that may be, is not meted out to Germany for her gigantic development in ships and sea-borne commerce. The German says, "You people don't know what we have done; we have two lines, the Hamburg-American and the North German Lloyd, with a tonnage of over 2,000,000." To this the German thinks the great western nations reply, "Build your *Vaterlands* in the Baltic, and be content with Hamburg and Bremen for your ports, though you have to spend an extra day in getting to the Atlantic. Don't come bothering us with your worries." Nevertheless, it is just as well these nations should realize the *Vaterland* is typical of Germany's ambition. She was built for the west. Consider Germany's disadvantages, those under which she must compete, and then think of the recent rise

of Russia and her unrivalled resources. Russia also must push west. She is no more content to build the fleets of her maritime dreams on the Baltic than Germany is to build those of her present need. Russia is pressing Germany, urging her west, further west, every year; and the enormous weight of 140,000,000 of people in European Russia, with almost unparalleled attractions for financiers, is a battering-ram the Teutonic people cannot withstand for long, without something breaking. But the great western maritime nations say, "What we have, we hold." Germany replies, "Then we must have a look at your title deeds, for Russia intends to have a look at ours."

The position in France was chaotic enough to inspire the Kaiser with hope of tackling Russia without effective French aid. It is, however, not likely that the Kaiser accepted all the statements of the gossips as to French unpreparedness. True, there were the revelations in the French Senate, and the campaign against the new conscription laws. Certainly France was looking forward to bigger strikes than those she had left behind. New conscription laws might help to avert industrial catastrophes such as that which threatened France in Briand's day; but on the other hand labour was making certain that in the future no strike would go off at half-cock. Jaurés was a power for peace, and always an outspoken critic of French foreign policy. It was Jaurés more than any one who brought about the downfall of Delcassé in 1905.

Italy was suffering from a most unpopular war in Africa. There were scandals connected with military administration; the unpreparedness of the army

to meet European complications was notorious. The greatest strike she had ever known had alarmed the authorities from one end of the country to another; and, what is of some consequence, when journalists and statesmen were praising Italy for her neutrality, anti-Austrian feeling was far more evident than was her chagrin at the action of France and the speech of M. Poincaré about the seizure of French steamers by the Italians.

It has been said by Italian statesmen that Austria wished to send in August, 1913, an ultimatum to Servia, "substantially identical with that sent last July," and that the Marquis di San Giuliano communicated the information to the Italian ex-Premier, Signor Giolitti. Italy, however, declined to support her ally in a war against Servia, and Germany also refused to be a party to that note. *Post bellum* literature, of many colours, contains a great number of striking contradictions. In the official documents published by the Governments not only are there to be found innumerable alterations of dates and suppressions of facts, but also stupid errors which reveal peculiar kinks and cavities in the diplomatic memory. Take, for instance, the revelations of the Italian ex-Premier as to the communication of the Marquis di San Giuliano in August, 1913, that Austria then desired to send to Servia an ultimatum "substantially identical with that sent last July."

M. Barrère, the French ambassador at Rome, on July 27th, 1914, sent to his Government the following information:

"The Marquis di San Giuliano returned to Rome this evening, and I saw him immediately after his arrival. He spoke to me of the contents of the Austrian note, and as-

sured me that he had had no previous knowledge of them whatever. He was well aware that the note was to be vigorous and energetic in character, but he had no idea that it could take such a form. I asked him if it was true, as is stated in certain newspapers, that in this connexion he had expressed in Vienna approval of Austrian action, and had given the assurance that Italy would fulfil her duties as an ally towards Austria. He replied, 'In no way have we been consulted; we have been told nothing whatever. We have therefore had no reason to make any communication of this nature in Vienna.'

The Marquis meant, presumably, that a "substantially identical" note had been submitted to him by the Austrian Government in August, 1913, but he had no diplomatic recollection of it when he saw the note of July, 1914. So free from all the prejudices of common life are the minds of diplomatists, that Austria's wish to crush Servia made no difference at all to the friendship of the Powers of the Triple Alliance; their relations moved along as smoothly after the knowledge of Austria's desire as before. Italy in all probability knew exactly what the true state of affairs was, and as she was not ready to undertake the cost of another war, in which Austria would find not Servia, but Russia, the dominant force arrayed against her, Italy played for safety. Her wisdom in that was counted for righteousness by those countries which benefited through her ulterior motives; then the Entente Powers were so delighted with her decision to remain neutral that they all desired to let her have the honour of joining the forces of the Allies in the field.

After a period of diplomatic huckstering with Germany and Austria — whom she could not sup-

port in an offensive war — she decided to make a seventh against her former allies and joined in the fray “for the sake of honour, justice, and Christianity.”

The revelations of Italian diplomatists seem to throw the onus of instigating the war on Austria; an unpopular thing to do, for the information of Austria's desire to send an ultimatum to Serbia in August, 1913, makes it awkward for those who insist on placing the authorship of the Austrian note of July 24th, 1914, on the Kaiser.

Racial feeling in Austria was deep. Her many different races were not living in peace and contentment under the Dual Monarchy. Industrial depression in the large towns was quite as severe as it was in Germany. Vienna had become fretfully expectant of riots. High prices and low wages were problems which gave the Government grave concern; and the housing difficulties in Vienna were growing every day in intensity, more alarming indeed to the Imperial Government than Narodna Odbrana. Austria was threatened with as grave an internal crisis as any country ever faced.

And Russia, the latter-day heaven of French and British financiers. How was it with Russia? Baricades on Monday, with yells of “Down with the Government!” and solidarity on Tuesday with hal-lujahs of “Freedom for Slavs!” A change so electrical that it completely paralyzed the French. From strikes such as Russia had never known, to one complete accord in twenty-four hours, was one of the most mysterious conjuring tricks any government ever accomplished with a people. No one in western Europe believed the Little Father and the

icon were so powerful. It must have startled the German Emperor and Count Berchtold out of their diplomatic wits! What had become of all the unrest in the army? What about Russia's largely-advertised unpreparedness for war? How could a country whose financial condition was said to be desperate, be enthusiastic for war? And so soon after the crushing defeat inflicted by Japan! No wonder many marvelled at the change. This, the country that sent her ships down the North Sea a few years ago when her Admirals were scared to death by a lot of innocent trawlers! This, the Russia whose monarch not so long ago dare not land in England! Where were anarchism, nihilism, and the intellectuals? Was Siberia forgotten?

To the keen observer of European affairs, not affected in his views with the schemes and intrigues of the chancelleries, the change which overcame the workers in the different nations during July was most amazing. From predictions of tumbling thrones to war-like unanimity in a few days, beat all the aspirations of Monarchial Leagues to smithereens. But how many publicists, now so busy whitewashing Entente Powers, realize all those great political causes which underlie the actions of all the Powers in July, 1914? It is not remembered that Russia, not so many years ago, was regarded in British diplomatic circles as a danger to the peace of Europe, and a Power beyond the European pale, inimical to western civilization. As our diplomatists looked upon Russia in Lord Granville's day, so have German diplomatists looked upon her; at least since she fostered the growth of Slav power in the Balkans. Germany's fears of Russia to-day are the fears of

Britain in our fathers' time. Germany knew that it was predicted that the Slav would be all ready in 1916 to try conclusions with her. Who would attempt the task of trying to convince German and Austrian diplomacy that Russia diplomacy was not at the back of the Greater Servian propaganda? It is all very well to concentrate public attention on the task that lies before Britain now, but some one must think of what the future is to be. And it is not wise to hide the diplomatic welter behind this business from the people who are supposed, by shortsighted journalists and politicians, to pass from it into an era of peace, and milk and honey. Alison told us long ago that the civilization of western Europe must finally fall before the fresh vigour of the rude but mighty hordes of Russia and northern Asia. Nietzsche, too, was conscious of that probability. All highly industrialized civilizations must in the long run go under to millions of pastoralists. It is not so long since deeply religious men and women in Britain prayed earnestly to be protected from the power of Russia. The Russia of Tolstoy and of Dostoevsky is not the Russia we have to fear, or the one Germany fears. It is the Russia of grand dukes, exploiting financiers, corrupt bureaucrats, and a diplomacy which aims at Slav domination in Central Europe!

Now, to look into the White Paper and try to unravel the maze of diplomatic entanglements. The Austrian archduke was murdered at Serajevo, June 28th. There followed a strange diplomatic silence for three weeks. The first despatch in the White Paper is dated July 20th, and it was sent by Sir Edward Grey to our ambassador at Berlin, not Vienna.

What had been taking place in the chancelleries since June 28th? The Austrian royalty had, after many family squabbles, buried the archduke, and by the time our Foreign Office began despatch-making, the world outside diplomacy had begun to forget that there had been an archduke to bury. Not until July 27th, was the question of Austria and Servia referred to in the House of Commons. Then Sir Edward Grey told the House that he had proposed a conference the day before. He was asked by Mr. Lawson if it were true that the German Emperor had that morning accepted the principle of mediation which the Foreign Secretary had proposed. Sir Edward Grey's reply to that question was, "I understand that the German Government are favourable to the idea of mediation in principle as between Austria-Hungary and Russia, but that as to the particular proposal of applying that principle by means of a conference which I have described to the House, the reply of the German Government has not yet been received."

Now let us see where we are. The special fleet mobilization took place on July 13th. In despatch No. 66, French Yellow Book, M. de Fleuriau, French *chargé d'affaires* at London, informed his Government on July 27th that:

"The attitude of Great Britain is confirmed by the postponement of the demobilization of the Fleet. The First Lord of the Admiralty took this measure quietly on Friday on his own initiative."

That Friday was July 24th; the day after the Austrian note was delivered to the Servian Government.

The fleet sailed from Weymouth on July 27th: as the *Times* of that day said, "a welcome earnest of our intention to be ready for any course which the national interests may render desirable." The Foreign Secretary had been in communication with ambassadors since July 20th. Not for a week after the first despatch was sent did the House of Commons get a word from the Foreign Secretary about the business; and then the gist of his statement was that he had proposed a conference of four Powers, France, Italy, Germany, and Great Britain. But a great deal had happened before he made that proposal. Though he told the House that Britain had no title to interfere so long as the dispute was one between Austria-Hungary and Servia alone, he was fully conscious when he saw the German ambassador on July 20th, that a war between any of the great Powers over Servia would be detestable, and the German ambassador "agreed wholeheartedly in this sentiment." On the 23rd, Sir Edward saw Count Mensdorff and learned from him that all would depend upon Russia, but that he was under the impression that the attitude in Petersburg had not been favourable recently. The Austrian note to Servia was published on the 24th.

The despatch of July 24th from Petersburg, No. 6 in the White Paper, is a document of great significance. Our ambassador in this despatch says that M. Sazonof, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, said some of Austria's demands were quite impossible of acceptance. He hoped that the British Government would not fail to proclaim their solidarity with Russia and France. The French ambassador at the same time told our representative that

France would fulfil all the obligations entailed by her alliance with Russia. When the British ambassador pointed out that Britain's interests in Servia were nil, and that he saw no reason why Russia should expect any declaration of solidarity from Britain to support Russia and France unconditionally by force of arms, M. Sazonof replied that Britain must not forget that the general European question was involved; Britain could not efface herself from the problems then at issue. Our ambassador said that M. Sazonof and the French representative continued to press him for a declaration of complete solidarity. The Russian Minister said that he thought Russian mobilization would at any rate have to be carried out. In concluding the despatch our ambassador said it seemed to him from the language held by the French ambassador, that, even if Britain declined to join them, France and Russia were determined to make a strong stand.<sup>1</sup>

None of this was communicated to the House when the Foreign Secretary made his statement on the 27th. What on earth then was the good of saying our interests in Servia were nil, when the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs had decided on July 24th, "that the general European question was involved, the Servian question being but a part of the former"? Russia began to mobilize on July 25th, according to the Czar's own telegram to the Kaiser. In Vienna, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs told the Russian representative that the Dual Monarchy felt that its very existence was at stake,

<sup>1</sup> This sentence, and the one in the despatch referring to the return of the French President and the President of the Council from Russia to France, are suppressed from the French Yellow Book.

and that the step taken (the strong note to Serbia with a short time-limit) had caused great satisfaction throughout the country. That meant the Dual Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, must be preserved from internal disorder at all costs. Germany said it was a matter which concerned Austria and Serbia exclusively, and that other Powers should keep out of it, owing to different treaty obligations. Sir Edward Grey in the toils is one of the most pathetic pictures in history; European entanglements were then weaving the net for his destruction. The *retiaris* of the Continental system were not so nice about the rules of the arena as our Foreign Secretary. How powerless he was to avert the strife is shown in his own despatch of the 24th to our ambassador at Paris, No. 10:

“M. Cambon said that, if there was a chance of mediation by the four Powers, he had no doubt that his Government would be glad to join in it; but he pointed out that we could not say anything in St. Petersburg till Russia had expressed some opinion or taken some action. . . . I said that I had not contemplated anything being said in St. Petersburg until after it was clear that there must be trouble between Austria and Russia.”

But the French ambassador told him that it would be too late after Austria had once moved against Serbia. The first communication Sir Edward sent to Russia was on July 25th, when he instructed our ambassador that Austria had explained that the note to Serbia was not an ultimatum, but a step with a time-limit. Russia did not however accept that view. She was willing enough to leave the question in the hands of the four Powers, if Serbia would appeal to them to arbitrate. In the despatch from our

ambassador at Petersburg, July 25th, No. 17, we learn:

“On my expressing the earnest hope that Russia would not precipitate war by mobilizing until you (Sir Edward Grey) had had time to use your influence in favour of peace, his Excellency (Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs) assured me that Russia had no aggressive intentions, and she would take no action until it was forced on her. Austria’s action was in reality directed against Russia. She aimed at overthrowing the present *status quo* in the Balkans, and establishing her own hegemony there. He did not believe that Germany really wanted war, but her attitude was decided by ours. If we took our stand firmly with France and Russia there would be no war. If we failed them now, rivers of blood would flow, and we would in the end be dragged into the war. I said that England would play the rôle of mediator at Berlin and Vienna to better purpose as friend who, if her counsels of moderation were disregarded, might one day be converted into an ally, than if she were to declare herself Russia’s ally at once. His Excellency said that unfortunately Germany was convinced that she could count on our neutrality. I said all I could to impress prudence on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and warned him that if Russia mobilized, Germany would not be content with mere mobilization, or give Russia time to carry out hers, but would probably declare war at once.”

The day before that conversation took place the British House of Commons had been discussing a Housing Bill. The House was up the next day, and who of its great body of private members had the faintest conception of what was taking place in diplomatic circles? Well might Juvenal ask who shall guard the guardians themselves.

From Berlin our ambassador telegraphed to Sir Edward Grey that the German Minister for Foreign

Affairs said that he had given the Russian Government to understand that the last thing Germany wanted was a general war, and that he would do all in his power to prevent such a calamity. If the relations between Austria and Russia became threatening he was quite ready to fall in with Sir Edward's suggestion as to the four Powers working in favour of moderation at Vienna and Petersburg. The Servian reply did not satisfy Austria, and her Minister left Belgrade on the 25th. Sir Edward then telegraphed to Petersburg that in his opinion the only chance of peace was for the four Powers to join in asking the Austrian and Russian Governments not to cross the frontier, and to give time for the four Powers acting at Vienna and Petersburg to try and arrange matters. Desperate efforts were made by Sir Edward Grey on the 25th, and 26th, to bring about the conference, but without success. The British ambassador at Vienna telegraphed on the 27th, that "the country had gone wild with joy at the prospect of war with Servia, and its postponement or prevention would undoubtedly be a great disappointment. It seemed to him that the Austrian note was so drawn up as to make war inevitable." France was willing to join the conference, but until it was known that the Germans had spoken at Vienna with some success, she thought it would be dangerous for the French, Russian, and British ambassadors to do so.

That is a fair summary of what had taken place when Sir Edward Grey made his statement to the House on Monday, July 27th. Now, Germany would have nothing to do with the suggestion of the four Powers acting together, for it had the appear-

ance of a court of arbitration; and she preferred an exchange of views between the Austrian and Russian Governments. In despatch No. 43, our ambassador at Berlin recorded a conversation he had on July 27th, with the German Minister for Foreign Affairs:

“Secretary of State said that as yet Austria was only partially mobilizing, but that if Russia mobilized against Germany latter would have to follow suit. I asked him what he meant by ‘mobilizing against Germany.’ He said that if Russia only mobilized in the south, Germany would not mobilize, but if she mobilized in north, Germany would have to do so too, and Russian system of mobilization was so complicated that it might be difficult exactly to locate her mobilization. Germany would therefore have to be very careful not to be taken by surprise.”

But Germany was taken by surprise; for although Russia might not have begun mobilizing on the north, she had been mobilizing on the south for two days, and her complicated system of mobilization was complicated further by a rumour which was sent out that she feared an insurrection in Russian Poland. The British ambassador at Petersburg urged the Russian Government on the 27th, to defer the mobilization ukase for as long as possible, and that troops might not be allowed to cross the frontier even when it was issued. To this the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs replied that, until the issue of the Imperial ukase, no effective steps towards mobilization could be taken; and the Austrian Government would profit by delay, in order to complete her military preparations, if it were deferred too long. Yet the Czar in his telegram to the Kaiser said on July 30th, “The military measures now com-

ing into operation were decided upon five days ago for reasons of defence against Austria's preparations"!

Later in the day on the 27th, our ambassador at Petersburg sent word that Russia rejected Sir Edward Grey's proposal of a conference of the four Powers. Direct conversation between Vienna and Petersburg was to be Russia's way of dealing with the question.

In reading the British White Paper, one should bear in mind that it was not in the hands of members of Parliament until August 6th; and that, shortly after the war began, the great mass of the British people learned through our press that everything German was "Potsdam nonsense" and chicanery; that the German ambassador at London was worse than a fool; that the German Chancellor planned the whole calamity; and that nothing in our diplomatic relations with Germany should be accepted from German sources as containing a scintilla of truth. Editors and journalists of German extraction have done not a little in educating British opinion up to that standard of patriotism which rejoices in the notion that all opponents are liars. Notwithstanding, Sir Edward Grey had to deal with the German Foreign Office, and extend the courtesies of diplomacy to the German ambassador up to the time he left London. On July 27th, Sir Edward sent a despatch to our ambassador at Berlin saying:

"German ambassador has informed me that German Government accept in principle mediation between Austria and Russia by the four Powers, reserving, of course, their right as an ally to help Austria if attacked. He has also been instructed to request me to use influence in St. Peters-

burg to localize the war and to keep up the peace of Europe."

Whether the information tendered by the German ambassador was to be accepted as an honest endeavour on Germany's part to assist in keeping peace or not, it was too late to bring the conference to work effectually; for Russia had that day decided that direct conversation between Vienna and Petersburg should be the method of finding a solution. But the pressure of France and Russia was too much for the British Foreign Secretary. What our ambassador at Petersburg told him on the 24th, was the chief consideration,—namely, British solidarity with Russia and France,—was begun by him on the 27th, the day he told the House of Commons that it was necessary in the interests of peace to suspend all military operations pending the result of the conference. The very day he urged the German ambassador to press for moderation on Austria's part, he sent the following despatch to our ambassador at Petersburg:

"I have been told by the Russian ambassador that in German and Austrian circles impression prevails that in any event we (Britain) would stand aside. His Excellency deplored the effect that such an impression must produce. This impression ought, as I have pointed out, to be dispelled by the orders we have given to the First Fleet, which is concentrated, as it happens, at Portland, not to disperse for manœuvre leave. But I explained to the Russian ambassador that my reference to it must not be taken to mean that anything more than diplomatic action was promised."

Orders were issued to the Fleet on the 25th. The third Fleet was mobilized on the 13th. Several pa-

pers, with well-informed naval correspondents, have told us "Mr. Churchill was almost the only Minister who appreciated the gravity of the situation, and is understood to have given early orders 'on his own' for the mobilization of the entire British Fleet," and "a fortnight before the Servian coup. . . . Italy was told there was going to be a storm . . . the English ambassador got the tip. Hence the assembly of the whole Fleet for inspection by the King. Mr. Churchill's extraordinary courage, decision, and foresight were never excelled by his great ancestor. England, thanks to Mr. Churchill, begins the war at her selected moment, not at the chosen moment of the Mad Dog of Europe." These, and many statements of the same kind, were made at the outbreak of hostilities. No one will wish to take one bit of credit from Mr. Churchill for his courage, foresight and administrative skill, but here we are dealing with diplomacy, and Mr. Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty, not Foreign Secretary. Therefore, when Sir Edward Grey sent despatch No. 47 to Petersburg, the Admiralty intended France and Russia to understand that the British Fleet was all for the solidarity of the Entente Powers, no matter what the Foreign Secretary said. But the House of Commons as a whole knew nothing about it at all, save that "British interests in Servia were nil," and that the European situation was exceedingly grave.

On the day the hint was given in a despatch to Russia that the Fleet was ready, Russia took a firmer attitude towards Austria. M. Sazonof said, "It seems to me that England is in a better position than any other Power to make another attempt at Berlin

to induce the German Government to take the necessary action. There is no doubt that the key of the situation is to be found at Berlin." Our ambassador at Petersburg spoke to M. Sazonof on the 27th, and learned from him that he required Austria to guarantee the integrity of Servia and respect her rights as a sovereign State. The position seemed not hopeless, however, for our ambassador at Vienna in despatch No. 56, told Sir Edward Grey that the Russian ambassador at Vienna had just returned from Petersburg, and knew the views of the Russian Government and the state of Russian public opinion:

"He (Russian ambassador at Vienna) had just heard of a satisfactory conversation which the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs had yesterday with the Austrian ambassador at Petersburg. The former agreed that much of the Austro-Hungarian note to Servia had been perfectly reasonable; and in fact they had practically reached an understanding as to the guarantees which Servia might reasonably be asked to give to Austria-Hungary for her future good behaviour."

So the game of diplomatic chess was carried on for at least a week. Despatching to this capital and that capital, interviewing this Excellency and that Minister, recording the gossip of one chancellery and another, while the military and naval men behind all the mask of diplomacy were preparing for the conflict which those "in the know" were for the most part eager to begin. On July 28th, the Prime Minister told the House, "There are no new developments sufficiently definite to enable any further statement to be made, but we hope that no unfavourable inference will be drawn from this. I cannot say more." He said he had no definite informæ-

tion that hostilities had broken out, yet in despatch 56, our ambassador at Vienna was informed by the Austrian Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that "a skirmish had already taken place on the Danube, in which the Servians had been the aggressors." The moving of the British Fleet stiffened the attitude of Russia, and action on the part of Serbia was at no time undertaken without the advice of Russia, if we are to believe a tenth of all the rumours which came surging from the east during the first weeks of the war.<sup>1</sup>

The sincerity of Germany was questioned in despatch No. 60, when the German Secretary of State refused to join the conference of the four Powers, and at the same time said he desired to work with Britain for the maintenance of general peace. Where was the British Fleet on July 28th? Did the action of the Admiralty inspire the German Foreign Office with confidence in working with us to maintain the general peace? What other fleet was there in the North Sea that so urgently required the attention of our Admiralty on July 27th? Anyway, whether Germany tried to influence Austria along the lines of moderation or not, our ambassador at Vienna telegraphed on the 28th, that "the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs declared that Austria-Hungary could not delay warlike proceedings against Serbia, and would have to decline any suggestion of negotiations on the basis of Servian reply. Prestige of Dual Monarchy was engaged, and nothing could now prevent conflict."

<sup>1</sup>"The future of Serbia is secure now that it is the object of Your Majesty's gracious solicitude," so Prince Alexander of Servia telegraphed to the Czar.

What had happened to force Austria to drop the conversations with Russia that were progressing in Petersburg two or three days earlier? Two matters of vital importance: one was the consideration of Entente solidarity, which was, indeed, of far greater consequence to Russia than mere diplomatic armed support; and, the second was the skirmish on the Danube, where Servia had been the aggressor. War was declared by Austria on Servia that day. Then Sir Edward Grey dropped his proposal of a conference like a hot brick, and sent word to the British ambassador at Berlin that "as long as there is a prospect of a direct exchange of views between Austria and Russia, I would suspend every other suggestion, as I entirely agree that it is the most preferable method of all." The German Government then accepted the principle of mediation between Austria and Russia by the four Powers; but again it was too late, for Russia decided to issue the Imperial ukase for mobilization on the 29th without "any aggressive intention against Germany." That, so the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs informed the Russian ambassador at London, put an end to the idea of direct communications between Austria and Russia. Then the British Cabinet was urgently desired to influence Austria to suspend military operations against Servia.

It is amazing how the chancelleries labour with child-like deceptiveness to cover up the work of their armed support. Russia began military preparations on the 25th, according to the Czar, but the mobilization ukase was not issued until the 29th; yet on the 28th, M. Sazonof wanted Austria to suspend her military operations after Servia had begun hostili-

ties on the 27th. The way the world has been duped by the preposterous terminology of the chancelleries is one of the wonders of the age. Why, on the 28th, it was known at the Berlin Foreign Office that Russia had mobilized fourteen army corps in the south; the German Imperial Chancellor told our ambassador that much when the latter telegraphed to Sir Edward Grey that his Austrian colleague said "that a general war was most unlikely, as Russia neither wanted nor was in a position to make war!" If the people of Europe will only apply some sense and understanding to a study of the British White Paper they will find evidence enough in it to condemn every diplomatist concerned.

A great feature of the system of education entered on by our press in the early stages of the war, was the German refusal to join Sir Edward Grey's conference. That was a great black mark against Germany. Learn from despatch No. 72 what our ambassador at St. Petersburg said on the 28th: "As regards the suggestion of conference, the ambassador (German) had received no instructions, and before acting with me, the French and Italian ambassadors are still waiting for their final instructions." Then after Russia issued the mobilization ukase, and Austria had declared war on Serbia, our ambassador at Vienna sent the following despatch, No. 74:

"I am informed by the Russian ambassador that the Russian Government's suggestion has been declined by the Austro-Hungarian Government. The suggestion was to the effect that the means of settling the Austro-Servian conflict should be discussed directly between the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Austrian ambassador at St.

Petersburg, who should be authorized accordingly. The Russian ambassador thinks that a conference in London of the less interested Powers, such as you have proposed, offers now the only prospect of preserving peace of Europe, and he is sure that the Russian Government will acquiesce willingly in your proposal. So long as opposing armies have not actually come in contact, all hope need not be abandoned."

Yet two days earlier the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Austrian Ambassador at Petersburg had practically reached an understanding!

Can any one believe in the face of all the shuffling, wobbling threats and restraints, that either Austria or Russia desired peace wholeheartedly? Something,— only lightly hinted at in the White Paper,— was thrusting both Governments on. Peace to both meant very grave internal disorder; war carried the chance of consolidating their various peoples. Small wonder a distinguished personage was heard to gasp on August 1st, "Oh, for ten minutes of splendid isolation!"

From Berlin news came on the 29th, that there was depression at the German Foreign Office. The Secretary of State was "much troubled by reports of mobilization in Russia, and of certain military measures, which he did not specify, being taken in France. He subsequently spoke of these measures to my French colleague, who informed him that French Government had done nothing more than the German Government had done, namely, recalled officers on leave. His Excellency denied German Government had done this, but as a matter of fact it is true." Far more than that was true; the British Fleet was then a long, long way from Tipperary.

Anyway, Russian officers left Switzerland as early as July 15th.

It was on July 28th that the royalties began to take a hand at telegraphing. The Kaiser sent a message to his devoted friend and cousin Nicholas, saying, "Remembering the hearty friendship which for long had bound us two securely together, I am throwing the whole of my influence into the scale to induce Austria-Hungary to seek for an open and satisfactory understanding with Russia. I confidently hope for your assistance in my endeavours to put aside all the difficulties that may arise."

The Czar replied on the 29th,—“To obviate such a misfortune as a European war, I implore you, in the name of our old friendship, to do all in your power to restrain your ally from going too far.” Though the Kaiser and Czar could not, of course, agree with each other as to the respective merits of Austria and Russia in the quarrel, the Kaiser agreed to act as mediator, “which I have readily assumed in response to your appeal to my friendship and help.” Then, if we are to believe ambassadors, the German Government set to work in earnest to influence Austria; to use the phrase of Sir Edward Grey, Germany began to “press the button” in the interests of peace. Few in Britain believe that, since the Jingo press have told us all the diplomatists forgot to put in their despatches. The fourth and fifth telegrams of the German and Russian monarchs are of sufficient interest to give in full:

“July 30th, 1 A.M.

“My ambassador is instructed to draw the attention of your Government to the dangers and serious consequences of a mobilization. I said the same to you in my last tele-

gram. Austria-Hungary has only mobilized against Serbia, and only a part of its army. If, as appears from your communication and that of your Government, Russia is mobilizing against Austria-Hungary, the rôle of mediator which you intrusted to me in friendly wise, and which I accepted at your express request, is jeopardized, if not rendered impossible. The whole burden of decision now rests upon your shoulders, the responsibility for war or peace.

“WILLIAM.”

He might not have meant a word of it; it might have been all bluff, and the Emperor of Russia might have known the true character of the Kaiser almost as well as editors of Jingo papers; nevertheless, the telegram contained downright good sense. The Czar's reply was as follows:

“PETERHOF, July 30th, 1914. 1.20 P.M.

“From my heart I thank you for your speedy reply. I am this evening sending Tatisheff with instructions. The military measures now coming into operation were decided upon five days ago for reasons of defence against Austria's preparations. Most heartily do I trust that these measures will in no way influence your position as mediator, which I value highly. We need your strong pressure on Austria to secure an understanding with us.

“NICHOLAS.”

“All would depend on Russia,” Count Mensdorff said to Sir Edward Grey, on July 23rd. So the Kaiser must have thought after he received the telegram from his devoted friend and cousin, Nicholas. “Go on mediating, and use your strong pressure on Austria, while we make all our preparations to bring a stronger kind of pressure to bear on her later.” The Petersburg correspondent of the *Times*, as early as the 26th, said that the army manœuvres had been

countermanded in view of the impending mobilization, and "military opinion, although ardently desiring war, is constrained to admit that Austria-Hungary is unaccountably dilatory if she really intends war, inasmuch as it is obviously her interest to rush Servia in order to be ready for an attack from the north." At that time the war party in Russia were having things their own way. But the telegrams cannot be thoroughly appreciated without the following from the Petersburg correspondent of the *Times*.

"ST. PETERSBURG, July 27th.

"The Czar left to-night on his trip to the Finnish Skerries. Now that matters appear to have become calmer it may not be amiss to quote a sentence used by the Czar at the close of the Grand Council on Saturday (25th): 'We have stood this sort of thing,' he said, 'for seven and a half years. This is enough.' Thereupon his Majesty authorized the issue of orders for a partial mobilization confined to the 14 Army Corps on the Austrian frontier. At the same time an intimation was given to Germany that orders for the mobilization of the remainder of the Russian Army would follow immediately upon mobilization by Germany."

On July 29th, Reuter's Petersburg correspondent telegraphed, "Confident of England's support, about which doubts have mostly disappeared, the Russian public is prepared to accept war." Up to one o'clock of the morning of July 30th, the court world and diplomatic world (save Austria) seemed to be shouting to the Kaiser to "press the button" in the interests of peace, while all the fleets and armies of his opponents were busily preparing for war.

But what about the freest assembly in the world,

the British House of Commons? What did it know about the business? Did it know as much as the Russian public? The Prime Minister was questioned and said, "As the House is aware, a formal Declaration of War was issued yesterday by Austria against Servia. The situation at this moment is one of extreme gravity. I can only say, usefully say, that His Majesty's Government are not relaxing their efforts to do everything in their power to circumscribe the area of possible conflict." Then the House got to work on an Aliens Bill and Scottish Agriculture, and at intervals sought the ticker for stray scraps of information from the chancelleries. Any clerk in a foreign office might know what the consequences meant to Europe; any pressman "in the know" might get first hand information in Russia, or Austria, or Germany; but private members of the Freest Assembly in the World were told — what they had already seen in the public prints. But why should any private member on the Government side of the House worry for a single moment? They all knew Britain was not under any obligation to go to war to support any Power. British interests in Servia were nil. Our hands were quite free. We had no entangling alliances: Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had time and again told the House so much. Indeed one might have wondered why the Prime Minister should refer to the situation being one of extreme gravity. Such in the universal sense it might very well be; but, in a national sense, we were out of the area of hostilities.

That was the position on July 29th, and the House

rose at twelve minutes after three on Thursday morning after discussing the Inebriates Bill, with the prospect of a debate on the Milk and Dairies Bill after questions that afternoon.