

## CHAPTER XII

### A GAME OF CHESS

"IN England men will learn with amazement and incredulity that war is possible over the question of a Servian port, or even over the larger issues which are said to lie behind it. Yet that is whither the nations are blindly drifting. Who, then, makes war? The answer is to be found in the Chancelleries of Europe, among the men who have too long played with human lives as pawns in a game of chess, who have become so enmeshed in formulas and the jargon of diplomacy that they have ceased to be conscious of the poignant realities with which they trifle. And thus will war continue to be made, until the great masses who are the sport of professional schemers and dreamers say the word which will bring, not eternal peace, for that is impossible, but a determination that wars shall be fought only in a just and righteous and vital cause."

— *The Times*, November 26th, 1912.

When the House of Commons met on Thursday, July 30th, Mr. Bonar Law asked the Foreign Secretary for information. "There is very little that I can say," Sir Edward Grey replied. "I regret I cannot say that the situation is less grave than it was yesterday. The outstanding facts are the same. Austria has begun war against Servia, and Russia has ordered a partial mobilization, which has not hitherto led to any corresponding steps by other Powers, so far as our information goes. We continue to pursue the one great object, to preserve European

peace, and for this purpose are keeping in close touch with other Powers. In thus keeping in touch, we have, I am glad to say, had no difficulties so far, though it has not been possible for the Powers to unite in joint diplomatic action as was proposed on Monday." British interests in Servia were nil, but the Admiralty had armed forty merchantmen all the same; the arsenals, factories, and depots were working at high pressure; and yet the Foreign Secretary could not understand why Germany on the 29th, was dilatory in joining the four Powers to use mediating influence. That was what he telegraphed to the British ambassador at Berlin on July 29th, notwithstanding the fact that he had the day before given up the notion of a conference, and adopted the idea of direct conversations between Austria and Russia, according to his despatch to the same embassy. Early on the 29th, he heard from the British ambassador at Berlin that Germany was giving advice to Austria. Then the Austrian Government declined definitely direct conversation with Petersburg. Why? Russia would not stop making all military preparations; she had been at work since the 25th, and had left no stone unturned to perfect her mobilization, which was five days ahead of the issue of the ukase.

Now when the Foreign Secretary told the House on July 30th, that there was very little he could say, he was in possession of the information contained in despatch No. 85; the document which records the "infamous proposal," so described by Mr. Asquith in the House eight days after it was received at the Foreign Office. It would be better to glance at the whole of it than to tear sentences from their context:

No. 85.

SIR E. GOSCHEN TO SIR EDWARD GREY.

(Received July 29th.)

"BERLIN, July 29th, 1914.

"I was asked to call upon the Chancellor to-night. His Excellency had just returned from Potsdam.

"He said that should Austria be attacked by Russia a European conflagration might, he feared, become inevitable, owing to Germany's obligations as Austria's ally, in spite of his continued efforts to maintain peace. He then proceeded to make the following strong bid for British neutrality. He said that it was clear, so far as he was able to judge the main principle which governed British policy, that Great Britain would never stand by and allow France to be crushed in any conflict there might be. That, however, was not the object at which Germany aimed. Provided that neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British Government that the Imperial Government aimed at no territorial acquisitions at the expense of France should they prove victorious in any war that might ensue.

"I questioned his Excellency about the French colonies, and he said that he was unable to give a similar undertaking in that respect. As regards Holland, however, his Excellency said that, so long as Germany's adversaries respected the integrity and neutrality of the Netherlands, Germany was ready to give His Majesty's Government an assurance that she would do likewise. It depended upon the action of France what operations Germany might be forced to enter upon in Belgium, but when the war was over, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany.

"His Excellency ended by saying that ever since he had been Chancellor the object of his policy had been, as you were aware, to bring about an understanding with England; he trusted that these assurances might form a basis of that understanding which he so much desired. He had in mind

a general neutrality agreement between England and Germany, though it was of course at the present moment too early to discuss details, and an assurance of British neutrality in the conflict which present crisis might possibly produce, would enable him to look forward to realization of his desire.

"In reply to his Excellency's enquiry how I thought his request would appeal to you, I said that I did not think it probable that at this stage of events you would care to bind yourself to any course of action and that I was of opinion that you would desire to retain full liberty.

"Our conversation upon this subject having come to an end, I communicated the contents of your telegram of to-day to his Excellency, who expressed his best thanks to you."

And this we are told to accept as coming from a man whose Government had planned the whole of the terrible business which startled the world at the beginning of August. Why, panic is large in every paragraph of it; and that is not surprising. The German Chancellor had just returned from Potsdam where no doubt he learned that M. Sazonof was saying one thing about Russian mobilization to the German ambassador, while the army was acting in quite a contrary manner. We in Britain were busy enough on the 29th, and we had a deal less reason, on the surface, to prepare for "all emergencies" than Russia. The telegram from the Kaiser to the Czar which was sent at midnight on the 29th, is indicative of the alarming reports received at Berlin. The Kaiser said, "If, as appears from your communication and that of your Government, Russia is mobilizing against Austria-Hungary, the rôle of mediator which you entrusted to me . . . is jeopardized. . . . The whole burden of decision now rests upon your shoulders."

News had reached Berlin that Belgium had issued as early as July 24th, a mobilization circular, and an undated instruction to Belgian ambassadors which contained the information they were to give to the chancelleries as to her "strengthened peace footing." Small wonder the British ambassador at Brussels "seemed somewhat surprised at the speed with which we (Belgium) had decided to mobilize our army," according to the despatch of the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Potsdam must have realized on the 29th that all the Powers of the Entente were well ahead of the game, while Germany was "pressing the button" at Vienna. The Russian ambassador telegraphed to Petersburg that "the German ambassador has asked Grey why Great Britain was taking military measures on land and sea. Grey replied that these measures had no aggressive character, but that the situation was such that each Power must be ready." The jargon of diplomacy! No Power had the slightest wish to be aggressive. Not at all. Millions of men were being set in motion and millions of money spent, because British interests in Serbia were nil; because every Power was earnestly seeking peace. Will a credulous public go on forever believing that Belgium was acting quite alone, entirely on her own behalf, when her Foreign Minister sent out his circular on July 24th, to the five Powers signatory of the Treaty of 1839, "in the event of a war breaking out on her frontiers"? Do people realize that the Belgian despatch was sent out on the same day Austria handed to Serbia the famous note, which began all the trouble? Will our European diplomatists, "men who have too long played with human lives as

pawns in a game of chess," to use the phrase of the *Times*, tell us that the first despatch in the Belgian official report, from M. Davignon, was the work of an exceedingly gifted prophet? This is what the Belgian despatch says:

"In these circumstances I have proposed to the King and to my colleagues in the Cabinet, who have concurred, to give you now exact instructions as to the steps to be taken by you if the prospect of a Franco-German War became more threatening."

This from the Belgian Foreign Minister the day before Servia replied to the Austrian note; and two days before Sir Edward Grey proposed the Conference of the four Powers. It seems incredible. The Belgian Government on July 24th anticipated a Franco-German war; and began to make preparations for it on the very day Russia started to mobilize, and two days before the first public order to the British Fleet was issued.

If we are to believe all that has been said of the highly efficient spy system of the German Government, it needs no stretch of the imagination to suspect that by July 29th the German Chancellor knew pretty well how things were with all the Governments of the Entente Powers. Therefore, to understand the inwardness of the "infamous proposal" in despatch No. 85, it is absolutely necessary to be in possession of at least the facts set down above. Besides, the Russian official report tells us that the Russian ambassador at London had heard from Sir Edward Grey on July 27th; that he had told the German ambassador that

“if Austria were to begin hostilities in spite of the Servian reply she would prove her intention of crushing Servia. Looked at in this light, the question might give rise to a situation which might lead to a war in which all the Powers would be involved.” The wording of despatch No. 85 leads one to imagine that the question of Belgian neutrality was mentioned for the first time by the German Chancellor. There is no evidence that the British ambassador was instructed by the Foreign Secretary to question the German Chancellor about his intentions towards Belgium. It must have been known at our Foreign Office that Germany in April, 1914, had declared she would respect the Treaty of 1839. It was, however, France, not Belgium, that was troubling the German Chancellor after his return from Potsdam on July 29th. The German Secretary of State had told the British ambassador earlier in the day that “he was much troubled by reports of mobilization in Russia, and of certain military measures, which he did not specify, being taken in France.” The German Chancellor must have known what Russian mobilization really meant, and how that affected France and Belgium. Anyway, the terms of the Franco-Russian Alliance were not hidden from him; and as early as the 20th, he must have guessed what was in the mind of Franco-Russian circles in Petersburg when according to Reuter’s correspondent at the state banquet the toasts implied the support of England. The German Chancellor might be as wicked a diplomatist as there is in Europe to-day; he might have known the terms of the Austrian note; he might be the most colossal liar to be found at any

embassy; but he was not quite so great a fool as those who believe that the whole story of this affair is contained in the British White Paper.

Is it to be imagined that the German military authorities did not know as much as Mr. Amery did when he spoke in the debate in the House of Commons on July 4th, 1912? Blinking whenever a fact against our diplomacy has to be faced, will not help the people of Britain or Europe to root out the awful cancer which lies at the base of all the evil system of diplomacy. By shutting one's eyes to facts some men may do loyal service to a party, or a Government; but the time is come when a higher standard of political life is called for. Therefore, in getting at the inwardness of the "infamous proposal," we must regard it as the desire of a desperate diplomatist, hemmed in,—hoist, if you like, by his own petard—to know the worst his Government had to cope with. The time had come for him to test the British diplomatic position.

Sir Edward Grey was in possession of all these facts when he spoke to the House on July 30th. The next day the Prime Minister made a statement after business:

"We have just heard—not from St. Petersburg, but from Germany—that Russia has proclaimed a general mobilization of her Army and Fleet, and that in consequence of this, martial law was to be proclaimed for Germany. We understand this to mean that mobilization will follow in Germany if the Russian mobilization is general and is proceeded with. In the circumstances, I should prefer not to answer any questions till Monday next."

Up went the signboard "Not in the public interest"; and the representatives of the free and en-



lightened electors were dismissed for three days' recreation. Representative government! Presumably the war party in the House would have carried the day had the Prime Minister given the Commons the information then in possession of the Foreign Office; but what the country on July 30th would have said if that day the whole truth had been told of the agreement of 1906, when conversations began between French and British military and naval experts, is another matter. The week-end made all the difference in public feeling, and indeed in the feeling of Ministers themselves. The *casus belli* had not been determined on July 30th. Suppose the Prime Minister had told the House on the 30th that the Foreign Secretary had been informed by M. Cambon, the French ambassador, the day before, that, "He anticipated a demand from Germany that France would be neutral while Germany attacked Russia. This assurance, France, of course, could not give: she was bound to help Russia if Russia was attacked." Of course. The jargon of diplomacy translated into plain English meant, France through her agreement with Russia must fight when trouble arose between Germany and Russia, therefore Belgium must be prepared, for her territory would become the battleground of the operations in the west; and Britain, because of her secret understanding with France and Belgium, must hasten to their assistance. We were, for good or for evil, engaged in a Continental system. Sir Edward Grey had warned the German ambassador on the 29th, that he did not wish him to be misled by the friendly tone of our conversation into thinking that we should stand aside. Then the German ambassador, accord-

ing to the Foreign Secretary's despatch to Berlin, No. 90, said emphatically, that some means must be found of preserving the peace of Europe. Rapidly the scene was changing from the Danube and the Neva to the Meuse and the North Sea. Still the actors in the drama talked as if the action of the play lay in the east. They were obliged to do so, for any indication to the audience that the unities were disregarded, would have led to the danger of springing the whole plot on the audience too soon.

Germany was in a desperate fix at midnight on the 29th. At once she began bringing pressure on Austria. She has, however, received no thanks for her trouble. Indeed, it has been said that she never tried to influence Austria. Strange it is how war seems to close the gates of simple justice on mankind. Why even the British ambassador at Vienna in his despatch, No. 95, said:

"The French ambassador hears from Berlin that the German ambassador at Vienna is instructed to speak seriously to the Austro-Hungarian Government against acting in a manner calculated to provoke a European war. Unfortunately the German ambassador is himself so identified with extreme anti-Russian and anti-Servian feeling prevalent in Vienna that he is unlikely to plead the cause of peace with entire sincerity."

We now have proof of this. And it may be pointed out how a people may easily be at the mercy of the antipathies of their own ambassador. On July 29th, the German ambassador at Petersburg telegraphed to Berlin that the Vienna Cabinet had sent a negative reply to the wish expressed by the Russian Government to enter into direct negotiations.

Thereupon the German Chancellor sent the following message to Vienna :

“BERLIN, July 30th, 1914.

“The report of Count Pourtales does not harmonize with the account which your Excellency has given of the attitude of the Austro-Hungarian Government. Apparently there is a misunderstanding which I beg you to clear up. We cannot expect Austria-Hungary to negotiate with Servia, with which she is in a state of war. The refusal, however, to exchange views with St. Petersburg would be a grave mistake. We are indeed ready to fulfil our duty. As an ally we must, however, refuse to be drawn into a world conflagration through Austria-Hungary not respecting our advice. Your Excellency will express this to Count Berchtold with all emphasis, and great seriousness.

“BETHMANN-HOLLWEG.”

When the contents of this despatch were made known the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs told the German ambassador there had indeed been a misunderstanding, but that it had been explained and the Austrian ambassador at Petersburg had already received instructions to begin negotiations with M. Sazonof. But notwithstanding diplomatic misunderstandings, M. Sazonof would not and could not stop mobilizing. He was ready to meet Austria, make and re-make formulas, but all these expedients carried no conviction at Vienna or Berlin so long as Russian mobilization was continued. Poor M. Sazonof! he was not in the position of our Foreign Secretary, who was regarded by Lord Haldane as the “Commander of the Forces.” All would depend on Russia and all did depend on Russia. The German Secretary of State told our ambassador at Berlin to impress on Sir Edward Grey the difficulty

of Germany's position in view of Russian mobilization and the military measures which he heard were being taken in France. Only officers on leave had been recalled; nothing special done in the way of military preparations. But, "something would have soon to be done for it might be too late, and when they mobilized they would have to mobilize on three sides. He regretted this, as he knew France did not desire war, but it would be a military necessity." Perhaps the Secretary of State thought it was time to take his finger off the button and place it on the trigger. At the same time, he told the British ambassador that the warning Sir Edward Grey had given the German ambassador at London, as to Britain's neutrality, had not reached the German Chancellor until after the "infamous proposal" was made.

"His Excellency added that telegram received from Prince Lichnowsky last night contains matter which he had heard with regret, but not exactly with surprise, and at all events he thoroughly appreciated the frankness and loyalty with which you had spoken. He also told me that this telegram had only reached Berlin very late last night; had it been received earlier Chancellor would, of course, not have spoken to me in the way he had done."

Why our Foreign Secretary should telegraph on the 29th to our ambassador at Paris that he "was about to warn Prince Lichnowsky" that Germany must not count on Britain standing aside, before he telegraphed the same grave information to our ambassador at Berlin, is a mystery.

It is worth while looking a little closer at this phase of diplomatic negotiations because it touches

the second point in the White Paper which has raised so much uneasiness in the minds of some of the most intelligent men in Britain. Most fair-minded people now admit that there would have been no war if the British Government had boldly announced on receipt of Sir George Buchanan's despatch on July 24th that the Triple Entente would proclaim their solidarity. Now that the truth is leaking out and intelligent people have had time to reflect, this is found to be the first point in the White Paper that is the cause of widespread regret. The "warning" is the second point. Analyzed chronologically, it seems to be a thoroughly discreditable affair.

On the morning of Wednesday, July 29th, Sir Edward Grey told M. Paul Cambon (see despatch No. 87, British White Paper, to Sir Francis Bertie) that he meant to tell the German ambassador that day that he must not be misled from the friendly tone of their conversation that Britain would stand aside.

In the next despatch, No. 88, July 29th, from Sir Edward Grey to Sir E. Goschen, there is not one word about warning the German ambassador.

In despatch No. 89, Sir Edward Grey told Sir E. Goschen that he saw the German ambassador that afternoon, July 29th, and told him not to be misled by the friendly tone of their conversation into thinking that Britain would stand aside.

Despatch No. 90 proves Sir Edward Grey saw the German ambassador *twice* on July 29th.

It is evident that Sir Edward Grey did not warn the German ambassador when he saw him that morning. It is also evident that Sir Edward Grey notified M. Paul Cambon and the British ambassador at Paris that he was about to warn the German

ambassador that Britain would not stand aside, several hours before he gave the warning to Prince Lichnowsky.

There is no reference at all in M. Paul Cambon's despatch of July 29th, No. 98 in the French Yellow Book, to Sir Edward Grey's warning. Strangely enough, the French ambassador, after receiving the news from Sir Edward Grey of the warning to be given to the German ambassador, told the French Government:

"My German colleague having asked Sir Edward Grey what the intentions of the British Government were, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs replied that he had nothing to state for the present. Sir Edward Grey did not disguise the fact that he found the situation very grave and that he had little hope of a peaceful solution."

Why there should be no reference to the warning in despatch No. 98, in the French Yellow Book, (the only despatch sent by the French ambassador at London to his Government on July 29) is as difficult to understand as the statement attributed to Sir Edward Grey which is quoted above. The news of the warning was, however, known in Berlin on the afternoon of July 29th. In despatch No. 92 in the French Yellow Book, from M. Jules Cambon, the French ambassador at Berlin, we learn:

"The attitude of the Chancellor (German) is very probably the result of the last interview of Sir Edward Grey with Prince Lichnowsky. Up to quite the last days they flattered themselves here (Berlin) that England would remain out of the question, and the impression produced on the German Government and on the financiers and business men by her attitude is profound."

This is illuminating. Indeed it explains a great deal which seemed dark and difficult in the early days of August. It was then thought by a certain school of Jingo journalists that the threat or warning of Sir Edward Grey, on July 29th, was the influence which forced the German Chancellor to bring pressure to bear on Austria to obtain direct conversations with Russia. But the German Chancellor knew nothing about the threat or warning when he saw Sir Edward Goschen on the afternoon of July 29th. M. Jules Cambon was evidently misled when he sent his despatch, for the Berlin Foreign Office knew nothing then about "the result of the last interview of Sir Edward Grey with Prince Lichnowsky." Still, M. Cambon might have been in possession of the information which was to be given to Prince Lichnowsky, for it had been given to his brother in London that morning.

It is quite clear that neither Sir Edward Goschen nor the German Chancellor knew anything about the warning when they had their interview on the afternoon of July 29th. There is no evidence at all that Sir E. Goschen received despatch No. 89, in which Sir Edward Grey told him that he had warned the German ambassador. It was not telegraphed. If he had received it, he would have known what the German Secretary of State was referring to on July 30th when he was told that the telegram received from Prince Lichnowsky did not reach Berlin until very late on the night of July 29th. Sir Edward Goschen was so much in the dark about this matter that Sir Edward Grey had to telegraph on July 30th and tell him that he (Sir Edward Grey) had warned Prince Lichnowsky.

The whole of the basis Mr. Asquith took for his case on August 6th was despatch No. 85, British White Paper, from Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey; this contained the "infamous proposal." No notice at all was ever taken of despatch No. 98 from Sir Edward Goschen to Sir Edward Grey. It was not "infamous" to let the French ambassador at London and the British ambassador at Paris know on July 29th that Sir Edward Grey was about to warn Prince Lichnowsky that Britain would not stand aside; it was not "infamous" to let the British ambassador at Berlin meet the German Chancellor on the afternoon of July 29th, ignorant that Prince Lichnowsky was about to be warned,— though the French ambassador at Berlin seemed at that time to be pretty fully acquainted with the news of the warning; it was not "infamous" that the British ambassador at Berlin should not know what the German Secretary of State was referring to on July 30th when he told Sir Edward Goschen:

"That telegram received from Prince Lichnowsky . . . had only reached Berlin very late last night; had it been received earlier Chancellor (German) would, of course, not have spoken to me in way he had done."

So the infamous proposal would not have been made had Sir Edward Grey dealt with the Berlin Foreign Office and the German ambassador at London with the ordinary courtesy that one business man extends to another. Yet it will be seen that Sir Edward Grey in despatch No. 101 to Sir Edward Goschen, July 30th, does not refer at all to despatch No. 98, though after he had sent No. 101 he had to telegraph to Sir Edward Goschen, in No. 102, that he had warned Prince Lichnowsky.



Is it any wonder that intelligent, fair-minded people now smile when the British White Paper is referred to, and shake their heads sorrowfully when the uninitiated talk about the "infamous proposal"? Why neither Sir Edward Grey nor Mr. Asquith has ever referred to despatch No. 98 is one of the first-class mysteries of this terrible business. But this mystery may help to teach Members of Parliament a lesson in diplomatic methods. In future they may wish to see papers giving a full statement of the case in good and ample time to scrutinize closely what diplomatists have been doing and saying. If, on Friday, July 31st, the House of Commons had been in possession of the British White Paper, and all the despatches up to midnight, July 30th, so that the members could have studied it closely over the week-end, there might have been a very different set of circumstances to record of the first week of August, even though we were entangled with France and Russia.

But Prince Lichnowsky was not the only person not warned in time in that dreadful last week of July. The members of the British House of Commons were not warned. During that week our allies seemed to have no doubt that the peace of Europe lay in the hands of Great Britain; and Russia and France constantly warned Sir Edward Grey of the fact. The Foreign Secretary knew that the President of France had told our ambassador at Paris on July 30th, that he was convinced that peace between the Powers was in the hands of Great Britain. He said:

"If His Majesty's Government announced that England would come to the aid of France in the event of a conflict

between France and Germany as a result of the present differences between Austria and Servia, there would be no war, for Germany would at once modify her attitude."

The Russian ambassador at Paris told the President of the French Council on the night of July 30th that war was imminent and that:

"She (Russia) counts on the help of France as an ally, and that she considers it desirable that England should join Russia and France without loss of time. France is resolved to fulfil all the obligations of her alliance."

From the beginning neither Russia nor France ceased trying to get the British Foreign Secretary to declare openly what Britain would do. Procrastination was the offspring of secrecy, and the "Commander of the Forces" was about as free to move as Laocoon.

A leader in the *Times* on July 30th, said:

"The instinct of self-preservation, which is the strongest factor in national life, therefore compels us—if the efforts of our Government to keep the peace should fail—to be ready to strike with all our force for our own safety and for that of our friends."

At last M. Cambon had to resort to some compulsion, as the supplications of neither Russia nor France were of complete avail; and he on the 30th wrote reminding Sir Edward Grey of the secret engagement entered into in January, 1906, and enclosed copies of the letters they had exchanged in November, 1912. It is only necessary now to look at the letter from M. Cambon:

" FRENCH EMBASSY, LONDON.

" November 23rd, 1912.

" *Dear Sir Edward:*

" You reminded me in your letter of yesterday, 22nd November, that during the last few years the military and naval authorities of France and Great Britain had consulted with each other from time to time; that it had always been understood that these consultations should not restrict the liberty of either Government to decide in the future whether they should lend each other the support of their armed forces; that, on either side, these consultations between experts were not and should not be considered as engagements binding our Governments to take action in certain eventualities; that, however, I had remarked to you that, if one or other of the two Governments had grave reasons to fear an unprovoked attack on the part of a third Power, it would become essential to know whether it could count on the armed support of the other.

" Your letter answers that point, and I am authorized to state that, in the event of one of our two Governments having grave reasons to fear either an attack from a third Power, or some event threatening the general peace, that Government would immediately examine with the other the question whether both Governments should act together in order to prevent aggression or preserve peace. If so, the two Governments would deliberate as to the measures which they would be prepared to take in common; if those measures involved action, the two Governments would take into immediate consideration the plans of their general staffs and would then decide as to the effect to be given to those plans.

" Yours, etc.,

" PAUL CAMBON."

With the letters the French ambassador enclosed a communication he had received from the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, which said that the

German patrols had twice penetrated French territory, "yesterday (Friday)," which was not correct, for the communication was dated July 31st, and the 31st was Friday. According to despatch No. 106 in the French Yellow Book German patrols penetrated French territory on Wednesday, July 29th, but not until August 2nd did M. Viviani think it worth while notifying Berlin of the violation of the French frontier by German troops. Then he informed the French ambassador in despatch No. 139 that "German troops having to-day violated the eastern frontier at several points, I request you immediately to protest in writing to the German Government." To the request of M. Cambon the Foreign Secretary replied that the Cabinet would meet in the morning (Friday) and that he would "see him again to-morrow afternoon." In Sir Edward Grey's despatch to the British ambassador at Paris, he states that M. Cambon had reminded him of the letters of November, 1912, and that the French ambassador had also given him a copy of the communication from the French Minister for Foreign Affairs. But as the communication is dated "Paris, July 31st, 1914," and the British despatch to Paris, No. 105, is dated July 30th, it is a little difficult to understand how M. Cambon and Sir Edward Grey could have been in possession of a document on the 30th, which did not leave Paris until the 31st. This communication is a specimen of how diplomatists make war. The dates are all wrong, so wrong indeed that the Foreign Office in issuing the second edition of the White Paper cut out the dates and day, Friday. Compare the communication (Enclosure 3 in No. 105, British White Paper) with No. 106 in

the French Yellow Book and judge to what extent the collaboration of M. Paul Cambon impressed the British Foreign Office. The phrase "As you see, Germany has done it," is not to be found in the despatch from M. Viviani. But more remarkable things than that happen in diplomatic circles; so, like many other curious slips in the despatching business, we may leave the dates for future Macaulays and Guizots to set straight.

Friday, July 31st, was perhaps the blackest Friday the world has ever known. Millionaires came from the city to their homes in the west end, trembling with anxiety, wondering what their financial position would be within a week. Prices of foodstuffs went up with a bound. All would depend on Russia! On Friday the whisper was "All will depend on Germany!" From Berlin came the following despatch:

No. 108.

SIR E. GOSCHEN TO SIR EDWARD GREY.

(Telegraphic.)

(Received July 31st.)

"BERLIN, July 31st, 1914.

"Chancellor informs me that his efforts to preach peace and moderation at Vienna have been seriously handicapped by the Russian mobilization against Austria. He has done everything possible to attain his object at Vienna, perhaps even rather more than was altogether palatable at the Ballplatz. He could not, however, leave his country defenceless while time was being utilized by other Powers; and if, as he learns is the case, military measures are now being taken by Russia against Germany also, it would be impossible for him to remain quiet. He wished to tell me that it was quite possible that in a very short time, to-day perhaps, the German Government would take some very serious step; he was, in fact, just on the point of going to have an audience with the Emperor. His Excellency added that the

news of the active preparations on the Russo-German frontier had reached him just when the Czar had appealed to the Emperor, in the name of their old friendship, to mediate at Vienna, and when the Emperor was actually conforming to that request."

To the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, Sir Edward Grey telegraphed that he did not see how Russia could be urged to suspend military preparations unless some limit were put by Austria to the advance of her troops into Servia. Then to Berlin he sent a message saying Austria has declared her willingness to respect Servian sovereignty and the integrity of Servian territory; and that while Germany sounded Vienna, and Britain sounded Petersburg, all Powers would suspend further military operations or preparations. At the same time he warned the German ambassador that if France became involved, Britain would be drawn in. Soon, however, news was received in Berlin that the whole Russian army and fleet were being mobilized, and Germany then announced that she must certainly prepare for all emergencies. *Kriegsgefahr* was immediately proclaimed. The Foreign Secretary had failed utterly to influence Russia's military preparations.

Then his greater struggle with his Continental friends began. Both Russia and France pressed him again and again to declare that Britain would support them. In vain he strove to put France off by saying British treaties and obligations were not yet involved. The French ambassador "urged His Majesty's Government to reconsider this decision." From Paris came a message saying the German Government had sent an ultimatum to the

Russian Government to demobilize their forces, and that a reply must be made by Russia within twelve hours; failing that, the German Government would consider "it necessary to order the total mobilization of the German army on the Russian and French frontiers." The French Minister for Foreign Affairs asked what the attitude of England would be, for the German ambassador at Paris was to call at one o'clock the next day (Saturday) to know what the French Government would do in the circumstances. M. Cambon still pursued the Foreign Secretary; he told him if Britain would only declare definitely on the side of Russia and France it would decide the German attitude in favour of peace. The British Cabinet had, however, decided "not to give any pledge at the present time." Then in despatch No. 119 we read:

"Though we should have to put our policy before Parliament, we could not pledge Parliament in advance. Up to the present moment, we did not feel, and public opinion did not feel, that any treaties or obligations of this country were involved. Further developments might alter this situation and cause the Government and Parliament to take the view that intervention was justified. The preservation of the neutrality of Belgium might be, I would not say a decisive, but an important factor, in determining our attitude. Whether we proposed to Parliament to intervene or not to intervene in a war, Parliament would wish to know how we stood with regard to the neutrality of Belgium, and it might be that I should ask both France and Germany whether each was prepared to undertake an engagement that she would not be the first to violate the neutrality of Belgium.

"M. Cambon repeated his question whether we would help France if Germany made an attack on her. I said that

I could only adhere to the answer that, as far as things had gone at present, we could not take any engagement. M. Cambon urged that Germany had from the beginning rejected proposals that might have made for peace. It could not be to England's interest that France should be crushed by Germany. We should then be in a very diminished position with regard to Germany. In 1870 we had made a great mistake in allowing an enormous increase in German strength, and we should now be repeating this mistake. He asked me whether I could not submit his question to the Cabinet again. I said that the Cabinet would certainly be summoned as soon as there was some new development, but at the present moment the only answer I could give was that we could not undertake any definite engagement."

Neutrality of Belgium! Mr. Amery had told Parliament, two years before Sir Edward Grey sent his message to France and Germany, asking the Governments if they would respect the Treaty of 1839, that:

"Germany has added 80,000 men to her army for the express purpose of strengthening the force that is to march through Belgium to crush the French left. It is upon our Expeditionary Force that the brunt of that march would fall. . . . Our opponents (the Germans) will have the choice of two objectives. They can attempt either to interfere with the despatch of the Expeditionary Force or to cover an invasion, a counterstroke intended either to bring us to our knees or at any rate to prevent a considerable part of the Expeditionary Force from going, and so clear the field for the German advance through Flanders."

Neutrality of Belgium! M. Davignon in his despatch of July 24th, showed that his precautions were at least a week ahead of those of Sir Edward Grey. M. Cambon must have been amazed at the



attitude of the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet. And what must M. Davignon have thought? No wonder those brave fellows at Liége could not understand why they were not supported by the French and English. Many men in France and Belgium must have wondered what had happened to the plans of the General Staffs. Friday, July 31st, was a black one for many people in London, but to none so black as it was to M. Cambon.

In Russia the people were in high spirits on that day. The *Times* correspondent told us what took place in Petersburg:

“About 11.30 a concourse numbering 50,000 surrounded the British Embassy. ‘God save the King’ alternated ‘Bozhe Tzara Khranie,’ and even ‘Rule Britannia.’ The procession also visited the French Embassy. Truth compels me to say that Russians, high and low, are waiting with the intensest anxiety to learn Great Britain’s decision. The articles in the *Times* have done much to inspire hope, but if, contrary to reasonable expectation, the British Parliament insists on neutrality, there will be a terrible revulsion of feeling here.”

Germany’s reply to the question of the neutrality of Belgium was not satisfactory; the Secretary of State made a note of it, but was doubtful whether the German Government would return any answer at all. Hostile acts had already been committed by Belgium, so our ambassador was informed. France, of course, sent a satisfactory reply; the President of the Republic had spoken of it to the King of the Belgians. The first despatch in the White Paper addressed to the British ambassador at Brussels is dated July 31st, but M. Davignon in the Belgian official report states that, “The British Minister

asked to see me on urgent business, and made the following communication which he had hoped for some days to be able to present to me,"— and then follows the question of Belgian neutrality. So the urgent business had been delayed for some days, though the British Minister saw the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs on the very day he received instructions from London to put the question in Brussels about the neutrality of Belgium!

The diplomatic correspondence in the Belgian White Paper is unique; it is too naïve, too premonitory, for acceptance without question. According to the undated enclosure in the note of July 24th, to ambassadors, we are informed that:

“All necessary steps to ensure respect of Belgian neutrality have nevertheless been taken by the Government. The Belgian army has been mobilized and is taking up such strategic positions as have been chosen to secure the defence of the country and the respect of its neutrality. The forts of Antwerp and on the Meuse have been put in a state of defence.”

This was done in prospect of a Franco-German war. Then Belgium must have been convinced that she had no reason at all to guard her French frontier; all her preparations were made against Germany. The area to be protected was that through which the Meuse ran: Liège, Namur, and Dinant. But Belgium less than four months before, had received specific declarations from Germany that she would respect the neutrality and independence of Belgium. Why then should Belgium, before Servia replied to the Austrian note, leave the French frontier open, and concentrate all her military strength on

the Meuse and at Antwerp? What were the plans of the General Staffs? The British Secretary of State for War was asked in the House of Commons, in 1912, for an "explicit statement of the relative forces which would take the field in France and Belgium at the outbreak of the conflict" with Germany. On July 31st, the Belgian Minister for War issued the mobilization order to carry out the operations that were completed before the 24th.

On that Friday night it was no use discussing anything in Berlin but the demobilization of the Russian forces; nothing but demobilization would satisfy the German Government. It was demanded "in order to prevent Russia from saying all her mobilization was only directed against Austria." The German Secretary of State told the British ambassador "that both the Emperor William, at the request of the Emperor of Russia, and the German Foreign Office had even up till last night been urging Austria to show willingness to continue discussions — and telegraphic and telephonic communications from Vienna had been of a promising nature — but Russia's mobilization had spoilt everything." The Czar's telegram of the 31st, to the Kaiser, murdered peace. He said:

"It is technically impossible to discontinue our military operations which are rendered necessary by Austria's mobilization. We are far from wishing for war, and so long as the negotiations with Austria regarding Servia continue, my troops will not undertake provocative action. I give you my word upon it."

To this the German Emperor replied:

"In answer to your appeal to my friendship and your

prayer for my help I undertook mediatory action between the Austro-Hungarian Government and yours. While this action was in progress your troops were mobilized against my ally Austria-Hungary, in consequence of which, as I have already informed you, my mediation was rendered illusory. Nevertheless, I have continued it. Now, however, I receive trustworthy news of your serious preparations for war, even on my eastern frontier. The responsibility for the safety of my kingdom compels me to take definite counter measures. The efforts to maintain the peace of the world have now reached their utmost possible limit. It will not be I who am responsible for the calamity which threatens the whole civilized world. Even at this moment it lies in your power to avert it. Nobody threatens the honour and power of Russia, which could well have waited for the result of my mediation."

On the very day these telegrams passed, the Russian Government issued the following formula :

"If Austria will agree to check the advance of her troops on Servian territory; if, recognizing that the dispute between Austria and Servia has assumed a character of European interest, she will allow the great Powers to look into the matter and determine whether Servia could satisfy the Austro-Hungarian Government without impairing her rights as a sovereign State or her independence, Russia will undertake to maintain her waiting attitude."

Austria conceded everything to Russian demands, but it was technically impossible to discontinue Russian military preparations, though M. Sazonof pledged Russia to maintain her waiting attitude. Waiting to spring! The position of the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs was very much like that of Sir Edward Grey: both were sincere in their efforts to stop a European conflagration, but the mili-

tary and naval authorities in their countries were dead against them. As Mr. Churchill said, "the whole generation of men went mad," and out of the chaotic jargon of diplomacy nothing but war could come. Forty-four years of secret traffickings had raised a Frankenstein's monster and the "men who had too long played with human lives" were incompetent to deal with the consequences of their work.

In no official record of diplomatic correspondence is there to be found a despatch containing so much that is pathetic as that in the British White Paper, No. 123. It reveals a man in desperation at the knees of a symbol powerless to grant hope or mercy. Let it be clearly understood that Austria had on the 31st, agreed to the formula submitted by Russia, and that Sir Edward Grey knew it. He also knew that Russia never once gave the slightest heed to the protests made by the German Foreign Office or by the Kaiser against Russian mobilization. He knew that the "infamous proposal" in despatch No. 85 would not have been made if the warning which he gave Prince Lichnowsky, in London, had been known in Berlin on the 29th, as early as it was known in Paris. Despatch No. 123 is as follows:

SIR EDWARD GREY TO SIR E. GOSCHEN

"FOREIGN OFFICE, August 1st, 1914.

"*Sir:*

"I told the German ambassador to-day that the reply of the German Government with regard to the neutrality of Belgium was a matter of very great regret, because the neutrality of Belgium affected feeling in this country. If Germany could see her way to give the same assurance as that which had been given by France it would materially contribute to relieve anxiety and tension here. On the other

hand, if there were a violation of the neutrality of Belgium by one combatant while the other respected it, it would be extremely difficult to restrain public feeling in this country. I said that we had been discussing this question at a Cabinet meeting, and as I was authorized to tell him this, I gave him a memorandum of it.

"He asked me whether, if Germany gave a promise not to violate Belgian neutrality we would engage to remain neutral.

"I replied that I could not say that; our hands were still free, and we were considering what our attitude should be. All I could say was that our attitude would be determined largely by public opinion here, and that the neutrality of Belgium would appeal very strongly to public opinion here. I did not think that I could give a promise of neutrality on that condition alone.

"The ambassador pressed me as to whether I could not formulate conditions on which we would remain neutral. He even suggested that the integrity of France and her colonies might be guaranteed.

"I said that I felt obliged to refuse definitely any promise to remain neutral on similar terms, and I could only say that we must keep our hands free.

"I am, etc.,

"E. GREY."

Now, was the Foreign Secretary in a position to deal with the German ambassador? Most certainly not. In the first place Sir Edward Grey's hands were not free; he was bound hand and foot by the plans of the French and British General Staffs, and the conversations entered into in January, 1906. In the second place public opinion was not in any way ripe for war; every Liberal, Radical, and Socialist paper in the kingdom was dead against our participation in a European war. There was no Jingo feeling worth speaking of on July 31st. Besides, the

Cabinet was not anything like agreed: it was then in search of a *casus belli*. Then, in the third place, Sir Edward Grey and the Cabinet could not have done anything else but remain neutral, if Germany had given her pledge to respect the neutrality of Belgium; presuming, of course, the neutrality of Belgium were the determining question. If the neutrality of Belgium had been the dominant matter, we should have been obliged to abstain altogether if Germany had given the pledge, and take no action until the neutrality of Belgium were violated. Sir Edward Grey was as powerless to remain neutral as Prometheus to chase the eagle from his vitals.

What hope was there for peace after the interview recorded in despatch No. 123? What was the effect at the German Foreign Office when they heard from Prince Lichnowsky the result of his interview with Sir Edward Grey? Still, our Foreign Secretary made on August 1st, another attempt to influence Russia. He sent to the British ambassador at Petersburg instructions that he "should inform Minister for Foreign Affairs and say that if, in the consideration of the acceptance of mediation by Austria, Russia can agree to stop mobilization, it appears still to be possible to preserve peace. Presumably the matter should be discussed with German Government, also by Russian Government." The last message from the British ambassador at Petersburg was sent on August 1st, reached London August 2nd, and its contents referred to the affairs of July 31st. The only bit of news worth mentioning in that long rigmorole is, "The Emperor of Russia read his telegram to the German Emperor, to the German ambassador at the audience given to His Excellency yes-

terday. No progress whatever was made." Of course not. The only way progress towards peace could be made was by demobilizing, and that Russia would not do. No answer came from Petersburg to Sir Edward Grey's suggestion of August 1st. But from Berlin came very serious news. The British ambassador telegraphed:

"Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that Austria's readiness to discuss was the result of German influence at Vienna, and, had not Russia mobilized against Germany, all would have been well. But Russia by abstaining from answering Germany's demand that she should demobilize, had caused Germany to mobilize also. Russia had said that her mobilization did not necessarily imply war, and that she could perfectly well remain mobilized for months without making war. This was not the case with Germany. She had the speed and Russia had the numbers, and the safety of the German Empire forbade that Germany should allow Russia time to bring up masses of troops from all parts of her wide dominions. The situation now was that, though the Imperial Government had allowed her several hours beyond the specified time, Russia had sent no answer. Germany had therefore ordered mobilization, and the German representative at St. Petersburg had been instructed within a certain time to inform the Russian Government that the Imperial Government must regard their refusal to answer as creating a state of war."

The ambassadors at Petersburg and Vienna were perhaps too busy doubting one another's sincerity to spend much time in working for peace. In those capitals the band-of-hope spirit seems not to have pervaded the chancelleries. In London, on Saturday, August 1st, the situation was extremely grave. Late that night Lord Lansdowne, Sir Edward Carson, and Mr. Bonar Law hastened to the centre of the



diplomatic world. Germany had issued orders for the general mobilization of her army and navy; the next day, the Sabbath, to be the first day. Later it was reported that the Russians had blown up a railway bridge between Szezakowa and Granitza. The despatching business was fast drawing to a close, and the period of deeds was taking the place of words, words, words. And the war-weary world rose again, like the phœnix, from the ashes of a million battlefields, to give her best blood and bone to the insatiable god of war. Through the long Sabbath, all over the kingdom, thousands of feet tramped Channel-wards; regiment after regiment with full kit wound through London streets as the bells from tower and steeple called the folk to prayer. Ministers went to a Cabinet meeting, there to yield up to the French ambassador some token of Britain's friendship.

No. 148.

(Telegraphic.)

“ FOREIGN OFFICE, August 2nd, 1914.

“ After the Cabinet this morning I gave M. Cambon the following memorandum:

“ ‘ I am authorized to give an assurance that, if the German fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against French coast or shipping, the British fleet will give all the protection in its power.’

“ ‘ This assurance is of course subject to the policy of His Majesty's Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty's Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German fleet takes place.’ ”

Having been treated to so many “ not binding ”

agreements the French ambassador must have wondered how they all stuck together. It was, however, a fairly safe pledge to give; for the Cabinet knew pretty nearly where the German fleet then was, and just about how much chance it had of interfering with the passage of the Expeditionary Force across the Channel. But there are two more paragraphs:

"I pointed out that we had very large questions and most difficult issues to consider, and that Government felt that they could not bind themselves to declare war upon Germany necessarily if war broke out between France and Germany to-morrow, but it was essential to the French Government, whose fleet had long been concentrated in the Mediterranean, to know how to make their dispositions with their north coast entirely undefended. We therefore thought it necessary to give them this assurance. It did not bind us to go to war with Germany unless the German fleet took the action indicated, but it did give a security to France that would enable her to settle the disposition of her own Mediterranean fleet.

"M. Cambon asked me about the violation of Luxembourg. I told him the doctrine laid down by Lord Derby and Lord Clarendon in 1867. He asked me what we should say about the violation of the neutrality of Belgium. I said that was a much more important matter; we were considering what statement we should make in Parliament to-morrow — in effect, whether we should declare violation of Belgian neutrality to be a *casus belli*. I told him what had been said to the German ambassador on this point."

It is evident the Cabinet was not agreed about Belgium two days after the Foreign Secretary had asked the Belgian Government whether they would maintain to the utmost of their power their neutrality. Sir Edward Grey must have found himself in a very difficult position with the Cabinet on August

2nd. What Continental Governments thought of the situation can be guessed; and our impatient friends in Russia, and France, and Belgium, were no doubt amazed at the delay of the British Cabinet in coming to the support of the military and naval experts. Some members of the Cabinet learned more that Sunday about secret diplomacy and its consequences than they will ever wish to know again in their political lives. Perhaps the replies of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to questions put in the House on several occasions as to our military obligations came like ghosts into the council room. But —

“Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,  
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.”

In Whitehall as Ministers passed along to Downing Street to attend the second Cabinet meeting, a crowd of people parted to let a regiment march through. Save for a short cheer from a few young men, the troops filed along an avenue of silent, respectful friends. Two Ministers strode round the corner into Downing Street unnoticed by the crowd; they were going to a meeting where a *casus belli* was to be found. The troops tramped on past the War Office and the Admiralty, but no one knew their destination.