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# Secret Diplomacy

By FRANCIS NEILSON

I KNOW OF NO BOOK by an English writer which takes a full view of the panorama of events that arose in Europe after the Boer War. The student may search through the accounts given in works written by British ministers and look in vain for a straightforward story of what took place concerning the making of the Entente and what followed from it.

The three chief British ministers have left their recollections, but in the case of each one, the knowledgeable reader discovers peculiar contradictions and omissions. Asquith, Grey and Haldane shy away completely from the indictment of Lord Loreburn who was Lord Chancellor. And Lloyd George's version of what happened is, in many respects, totally different from those of his colleagues in the cabinet. It is here I would suggest an intensive search through their apologetic volumes, for the purpose of straightening out the story of the complicity of those in authority in London and Paris in making arrangements for a war with Germany, while the masses of Great Britain and France demonstrated clearly at the by-elections a desire for peace.

The Entente Cordiale was regarded by many Europeans as a pitiful confession of England's weakness. However, it should not be considered an agreement shaped by the administrations. For, in France King Edward VII was acclaimed the author of it. This I may assert without fear of contradiction, for much of my life at the beginning of the century was spent among men of great influence in the political parties of Great Britain and France. In 1900 I became stage director of the Royal Opera, which position gave me many chances of hearing what was said in high social circles about the politics of the day. It is true many of these people knew I was labelled a pro-Boer, but somehow, in my case, that did not seem to concern them much, for they were chiefly interested in my work behind the curtain and the part I played in the then promising movement for a national opera.

I remember distinctly the night when a gala performance was given for Émile Loubet, the President of the French Republic. A demonstration took place when he took his seat in the royal box. The Sunday following I attended a garden party at the house of a peeress I had met at Bayreuth when I was there with Anton Seidl. During the afternoon I heard people

talking about the war with Germany, and how speedily she would be defeated, if she were so foolish as to start one.

The visit of Loubet to London was hailed by the new nobility and the jingo Tories as a blessing. But the masses regarded it merely as a show, and no belligerent throb came from their hearts. The contrast was so evident that some of the Liberal newspapers remarked it.

#### The Entente Cordiale

THE REAL AUTHOR of the Entente was not Lord Salisbury's government; it was King Edward VII, who engineered the business without the consent of the government. All this has been made plain in several works. From a political standpoint, it was hailed as an achievement. But an English parliamentarian would be obliged to condemn it. For it in no way reflected the mind of the British public. At the by-elections the masses were showing their resentment at the scandals of the South African War and the cost of it in blood and treasure. The defeat of the Tories at Leeds in July, 1902; at Rye, March 1903; Argyle, August 1903; Newmarket, January 1903; and the reduction in the Tory vote at earlier by-elections showed conclusively the political temper of the electors.

Nevertheless, the enterprise of cementing this strange friendship was carried on secretly. Although it suffered many setbacks behind closed doors, now and then something leaked out in Paris papers about it, for little took place in government circles that escaped the notice of the vigilant editors of three French newspapers, particularly *L'Humanité*.

Each year between 1900 and 1905, I spent two or three months of the autumn on the Continent. I visited most of the chief centers from Paris to Vienna. Usually my headquarters were at Munich. I had many friends in the capitals, people I had met with Seidl, musicians and singers, composers and conductors who had appeared at Covent Garden and at the Metropolitan in New York. From them and their friends I learned something about the activities of their governments and public opinion.

Only those Englishmen who have traveled much upon the Continent realize the great difference that exists between groups met socially in Paris, Berlin or Vienna and those in London. Abroad the groups seemed to be internationally minded; but in England one rarely entered a circle in which people conversed about the subjects that were of interest to foreigners.

In Paris, although I spoke little French (but read it easily) and few of my friends could converse fluently in English, there were always present ready interpreters who, often enough, were the correspondents of English and American newspapers. The little German that I knew was only

sufficient to make myself understood when I directed the rehearsal of a German opera, and usually a couple of weeks after the season was over I forgot what I had learned. Still, I gathered from foreign minds ideas about England which were totally different from those that became the provender of the propaganda that bred hate.

#### Political Feeling in Victorian England

PERHAPS I AM THE LAST of the Englishmen who still retain a lively recollection of the conditions in Great Britain and on the Continent before Queen Victoria died. In 1897 I went to London with William Gillette to play in *Secret Service* at the Adelphi Theatre. Anton Seidl was engaged by the Royal Opera Company to conduct the season of German opera. I saw him three or four times a week, and if there had been any feeling then against Germany, he would have learned about it from his friends, for he was entertained by the nobility. He told me his experience of spending a weekend at Lord de Grey's place and how warm was the feeling for Germany, as expressed by those who knew he was to go to Bayreuth at the invitation of Cosima Wagner to conduct *Parsifal*.

So far as I can remember, the political atmosphere was clear of animus, and the shadow of the troubles that were to come in South Africa did not appear on the horizon. Even the Jameson Raid and the House of Commons Committee hearing of Rhodes seemed to be forgotten. The work of Chamberlain and Milner was carried on in secret, as we now know from the evidence of Flora Shaw, as given in *The History of the Times*, Volume III.

It was only from my American friends who visited London that year that I heard any adverse criticism of British politicians. It is needless to say that my friends did not consider John Hays Hammond an estimable person, because of his activities in South Africa. However much they might have sympathized with the Boers, I feel sure they would not reveal their feelings to English people with whom they were merely acquainted. With me it was quite different because we had been friends for many years before I left America.

When the opera season was over at Covent Garden in 1897, Seidl left for Bayreuth to begin rehearsals, and I resigned from Gillette's company to follow him. When I reached the town where Seidl had spent some years as secretary to Wagner, I soon discovered that he was the lion of the occasion. He told me that he had declined every invitation to lunches and dinners during rehearsals, and that he had taken a firm stand against would-be interviewers.

When I think now of the people who gathered to hear the works at the *Festspielhaus*, it is hard for me to believe that Germany and Great Britain would ever be at odds about the balance of power or any crisis arising from a desire for territorial expansion. The Princess of Wales was there, accompanied by a distinguished retinue. Lady de Grey and the Princess de Polignac had houses in the country for the season. Ambassadors, artists, music critics from many different countries were quartered in the Bavarian town. German royalty occupied villas and entertained lavishly. From first to last Seidl never once entered the Villa Wahnfried, although Cosima invited him to visit her.

It has often been said that my European experience, beginning with this visit to Bayreuth, was unique. For a man of only thirty, who was merely an actor playing small parts, it was a rare opportunity to meet people seldom encountered by men of years and influence. After the performances began, Seidl was free several days each week to accept invitations, and I went everywhere with him. I was with him the day he conducted the royal party, gathered together by Lady de Grey, over the *Festspielhaus*. It was through meeting Lady de Grey at Bayreuth that I went to the Royal Opera three years later. This assemblage of people at Bayreuth in 1897 was regarded as a perfect international gathering, expressing good feeling, with the hope that music, as Wagner desired, would be the means to unite the people of Europe.

#### The Origin and Development of Pan-Germanism

WHAT, THEN, WAS THE REASON for the disastrous change that took place within a few years? Many have said that it was the growth of the movement called Pan-Germanism. But Pan-Germanism at that time was merely a cultural movement. It was not political in any sense of the term. It is perfectly clear now how it arose. An estimate revealed that five per cent of the German people left Europe in 1881, 1882 and 1883. It was the desire of those at home to keep in touch with the emigrants by encouraging the latter to preserve their language and German habits, with the hope that ultimately they would be drawn back to the Fatherland. This interpretation is quite in line with the facts, for most of the twelve years I lived in America before 1897, I spent in the company of musicians and actors, through Seidl and Victor Herbert. Writing librettos for the latter, and composing my poem *Manabozo* for Seidl to set to music, I met most of the leaders in the German societies. I saw the initiatory movement of Pan-Germanism at work, and perhaps I am the only man alive now who remembers it. I can say without fear of contradiction that it was America's gain in the cultural arts, a fact which should never be forgotten.

Dr. Roland Usher, in his invaluable work, *Pan-Germanism*,<sup>1</sup> states the case in a concise and lucid manner. This is a work that is indispensable for those who wish to trace the causes of wars of this century and gather information that cannot be found in any of the State documents. In reading Usher, the student must keep in mind that his book was written before the War of 1914 began. It is true he states the case as the Germans considered it. But that is not a disadvantage, for a close examination of his précis yields evidence that is necessary for an understanding of the English case against the country that saved her from defeat at Waterloo.

The desire of Great Britain's politicians (which became almost a phobia after the Boer War) to dictate to her second best customer, and keep her within bounds that did not conflict with those of the empire, revealed a tyrannous position that no self-respecting people would tolerate. Usher puts the case as many an English writer did at that time:

. . . For Germany to be thus forced to remain static in population and in wealth, while her neighbors continue to expand, England in her colonies, France in Morocco, Russia in Siberia and Turkestan, means that the date of her annihilation will be fixed by the rate of their growth. And such action on her part would compel her in fact to be an accessory to her own destruction, for her emigrants must strengthen her rivals both in the field and in the factory. To ask a German, therefore, whether the expansion of Germany is desirable, is merely to ask him whether he believes it desirable from any point of view for the German nation to survive.<sup>2</sup>

The cartoon that appeared in *Punch*, depicting a John Bull dog-in-the-manger, had its counterpart in a French illustrated paper shortly after the Boer War. The French showed a hen-pecked cock with feathers tousled, crowing on the top of a midden. Indeed, it may be safely said that the severest critics of the balance of power theory were Englishmen. No foreigner ever penned articles and doggerel so severely critical of Great Britain's wars as Henry Labouchere did in *Truth*. The famous journalist, W. T. Stead, was no mean second to him in castigating British policy.

Englishmen who thought as Cobden did, did not die out when he passed away, and I protest against all those critics of England who make no exceptions and denounce the lot for the crimes of politicians. The men who stood for the best of the English tradition at the time of the Boer War were true disciples of Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, the Earl of Chatham and Cobden. The long line of men who stem from George Savile, Earl of Halifax, and the Duke of Shrewsbury, were those who believed that the English tradition was founded upon justice.

<sup>1</sup> Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

There never was a Radical of consequence in England or Scotland who imagined for a moment that the policy of balance of power meant anything else but war and the impoverishment of the people. There were Tory statesmen in England, before Bismarck was dismissed by the Emperor, who desired an understanding with Germany; but owing to the apathy of the masses, it was never fulfilled. Both Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Salisbury were advocates of a policy that would unite Germany and Austria with Great Britain; not indeed, for any warlike purpose, but merely to insure a barrier of peace across Europe which would cool the enthusiasm of Russian and French chauvinists. We read in the documents that this was Bismarck's idea and that to make it complete, as I have said before, Turkey was to be added.

It might be asked why Germany or any other country in the world was, at the behest of England, not permitted to do what the latter had done in the way of colonization and establishing an empire upon which her statesmen boasted the sun never set. Was there any valid reason in the political code why Germany should not expand and carry on her trade wherever she could find customers? No one—even the most bitter jingo—ever made an acceptable defense of the arrogance of Great Britain's attitude in this matter. A stage had been reached in German development when she had become conscious that she had to break the bounds which hemmed her in between Russia and France, and do what Great Britain had done so far as her trade was concerned. Usher puts the case in plain terms when he says:

Pan-Germanism is, therefore, in the first place, a defensive movement for self-preservation, for escaping the pressure of France and Russia, both bent on her destruction.<sup>3</sup>

This refers to a type of Pan-Germanism quite different from the cultural movement of the early days. It is true it had a dangerous appearance and was aggressive in its intention. At this point, Dr. Usher fails to fill in some gaps which would explain why and how the change came about.

#### The Beginning of England's Warlike Attitude

IN HIS *Memories*<sup>4</sup> Lord Fisher makes no clear statement about when the idea came to him of "copenhagening the German Fleet." He does say, however, it was in 1900, "when the first thought of the Dreadnought came into my brain."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

He became Sea Lord of the Admiralty on Trafalgar Day, 1904. By a peculiar coincidence, this is the very year Grey says the conversations began between the French and British military staffs. The first Dreadnought was laid down by England in 1904, and Lloyd George says: "The laying down of the Dreadnought seemed to many of us a piece of wanton and profligate ostentation."<sup>6</sup> Later on Sir Edward Grey, in a speech on naval expenditure, stated: "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."<sup>7</sup>

In searching works which deal with this subject, I have been unable to find a line that gives us the approximate date when the idea of Copenhagenizing the German fleet entered the mind of Lord Fisher. Still, putting two and two together, I make the guess that it was about the time when King Edward visited Paris and took the first steps toward shaping the Entente Cordiale. In a letter Fisher wrote to King Edward in March, 1907, he said: "*Germany has been paralyzed by the Dreadnought.*"<sup>8</sup> (Italics in original)

There was no doubt in the mind of any intelligent German who was interested in foreign affairs that the building of the dreadnoughts meant war and that Fisher was intent upon destroying the German fleet before the Kiel Canal was completed. The uproar in England was so intense when the naval panic was created that Churchill, in a speech he delivered at Swansea, in 1908, said:

. . . . Look at it from any point of view you like, and I say you will come to the conclusion in regard to the relations between England and Germany that there is no real cause of difference between them, and although there may be snapping and snarling in the newspapers, and in the London clubs, those two great people have nothing to fight about, have no prize to fight for, and have no place to fight in. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Churchill was president of the Board of Trade when he delivered this speech. It was hailed as a complete reply to the jingoes who had raised the naval panic of that year. The sentiments he expressed for Germany were generous, and no one doubted their sincerity, but there were men in the Tory party who were sorely skeptical about the performance. Certainly Balfour, Walter Long, and some other leaders of the opposition seemed to think there was "a fly in the ointment." There was. In a

<sup>6</sup> *War Memoirs*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1933, Vol. I, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *The Liberal Magazine* (London), XXII (March 1914), p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> *The Liberal Magazine* (London), XVI (September 1908), pp. 476-7.



letter to Lord Esher, dated January 1, 1908, (seven months before Mr. Churchill's Swansea speech was delivered), Lord Fisher wrote:

. . . . I had two hours with him [Churchill]. He is very keen to fight on my behalf and is simply kicking with fury at —— & Co., but I've told him the watchword is "Silence." He is an enthusiastic friend certainly! He told me he would get six men on both sides to joint in com amore, F. E. Smith, &c., &c. I forget the other names. It was rather sweet: he said his penchant for me was that I painted with a big brush! and was violent! . . .<sup>10</sup>

What does this mean? What was the information given to him that called for "Silence"? Fisher makes it quite clear in his *Memories*. He tells us he had a secret conversation with the King "in which I urged that we should 'copenhagen' the German Fleet at Kiel à la Nelson, and I lamented that we possessed neither a Pitt nor a Bismarck to give the order."<sup>11</sup>

For downright duplicity the Swansea speech is an example hard to beat. Although Fisher states that the plan was abandoned, he admits it was necessary to concentrate our whole naval strength in the decisive theater of the war, "for our inevitable war with Germany."<sup>12</sup> Further on he reminds us of that sensational article which appeared in *The Scientific American*, from the pen of Admiral Mahan, who "drew attention to the fact . . . [that] 88 per cent. of England's guns were pointed at Germany."<sup>13</sup>

The publication of Lord Fisher's *Memories* caused a sensation when the book was read by those Liberal editors who were for neutrality at the end of July, 1914, and suddenly became thoroughgoing jingoes on August 4.

After Churchill went to the Admiralty in 1911, much was made of the suggestion he offered to reduce the dreadnought-building plan. This was a dodge for the sole purpose of calming the Liberal dissidents who protested against the expenditure on the navy. What would the electors have thought if they had known that Lord Fisher wrote to Lord Esher, president of the Committee on Imperial Defence, the following letter:

1908.

Feb. 21st.

. . . . *Secret*. Tirpitz asked a mutual civilian friend living in Berlin to enquire very privately of me whether I would agree to limiting size of guns and size of ships, as this is *vital* to the Germans, who *can't go bigger*

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

than the Dreadnought in guns or size. I wrote back by return of post yesterday morning "Tell him I'll see him d——d first!" (*Them's the very words!*) I wonder what Wilhelm will say to that if Tirpitz shows him the letter!<sup>14</sup> (*Italics in original*)

The student should note the date of this letter because it contains information concerning Germany's desire to reduce armaments three years and nine months before Churchill became First Lord.

After the Agadir crisis, Asquith sent Churchill to the Admiralty as First Lord, and only a dull-witted nationalist could believe he did not carry with him to that cabinet position the information he received from Fisher. It is quite unnecessary to labor the point about the change which took place in the minds of German admirals and generals regarding Great Britain's intention. During the naval panic they had learned quite enough to convince them they had to prepare for war. Whether Germany was actually encircled or not, she knew for a fact that another power had joined up with her old foes and that she would have to meet a combination of Russia and France together with Great Britain.

It should be plain to the unprejudiced reader of today, as it was to the mass of the British public in 1908, that the change in the idea of Pan-Germanism from the original cultural movement, uniting those who had gone abroad with the Fatherland, to a totally different concept, which was aggressive and fraught with danger to European peace, was brought about by Lord Fisher's determination to destroy the German fleet and Balfour's desire to cripple a competitor in trade.

#### The Role of War Propaganda

IN 1904 AND 1905 in Paris I learned of affairs my friends in London knew nothing about. As a political candidate I was in touch with the leading Liberals, and found the information they gathered from the London journals about French and German political actions was unbelievably naive. A most amusing book was written at that time about the way men at cafe tables on the "Boul. Mich." and Unter den Linden roared with laughter at the screeds and cartoons published by the *Daily Mail*.

But you cannot have a war without propaganda. It is well said that, when a war begins, the first casualty is truth. This is not to say that the Parisians and the Germans did not have a propaganda of their own. The French and the Teutons had their *Daily Mails*, but somehow they seemed not to be taken in so easily as English readers were. Several enlightening works on this matter might be read by the student: *Propaganda for War*,

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

by Dr. H. C. Peterson (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1939); *Publicity and Diplomacy*, by Professor Oron James Hale (New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940). But valuable as these books are for acquainting us with the role played by the propagandists at a time of crisis, they do not go quite so deeply into the matter as Irene Cooper Willis does in *England's Holy War* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1928). Another work I should mention, which is a most important study, is *The Neuroses of the Nations*, by C. E. Playne (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1925).

Many French books dealing with propaganda may be traced from quotations in the works above mentioned. How strange in an age of enlightenment, with all the money spent on schooling and education, that a few men can create an atmosphere of hate and throw against each other millions of men who have never had the chance of meeting to begin a quarrel among themselves. And this in spite of many centuries of Christianity.

So that the Entente could proceed to the goal its sponsors had in view, it was necessary to fettle the public mind with lies day in and day out. This process took about three years to develop, for not until April 1905 was Lord Lansdowne prepared to propose an alliance to Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London. This was the first signal indicating the British Government desired to make the Entente Cordiale a definite agreement concerning action to be taken toward war. Of this the public knew nothing—neither the French nor the British; indeed, influential men in the Tory party did not know of it when the war broke out in 1914. From this time to the beginning of hostilities, the work of diplomacy and preparation for war was carried on in secret.

Balance of power, as an integral part of Britain's policy of splendid isolation, was abandoned, for the understanding with France placed England in the invidious position of being at the mercy of the cross currents of French governments. Furthermore, Britain was committed (although we did not know it at the time) to the provisions of the treaties France had made with Russia in 1892. Although there was another opinion about that, expressed after August 1914, I have found nowhere in the record the slightest evidence of knowledge of it on the part of British ministers. The only person who got wind of it when the Entente Cordiale was announced, was Robert Dell, the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, but he did not divulge the information until after the war was over.

Great Britain was hamstrung by Delcassé and Izvolsky. To lose the opportunity of being in a position to say at a time of European crisis that Great Britain would throw the weight of her armament on the side of the

power which would assist her in protecting her interests, was a blunder of extraordinary magnitude. Moreover, Great Britain became involved in the nefarious complications of groups of international concessionaires. One has only to read the record of the evidence given in the trial for libel which was brought against *L'Humanité*, to understand how little was known by the electorates of Great Britain and France of the dangers of war arising from the desires of the *Comité des Forges*.

I feel sure Lord Lansdowne, the Foreign Minister in Balfour's Government of 1900–1905, was quite ignorant of the traffic of backstairs diplomacy, save in one particular. That was the real reason for the consent he gave to the partition of Morocco by France and Spain.

It has been overlooked by some of the recorders who wrote after the First World War that the crusade for colonial preference, begun in 1902 by Joseph Chamberlain, "to cover up and hide the scandals of the Boer War" (as the secretary of the Tariff Reform League confessed when it was begun) played no small part in the drama of supplying the clouds of war with the thunder of hate. Yet, it must be said the clamor about Germany dumping cheap goods, and the tariff reformers' claim that her working men were taking the bread out of the mouths of English artisans, failed to convince the majority of the electors that they should adopt Mr. Chamberlain's proposals. The by-elections during the campaign revealed the determination of the electorate to uphold the system of free trade.

There were so many contributing causes to the disaster of August, 1914, that it is almost impossible to deal with them all in a series of articles; it would require a lengthy volume, which would include most of the work undertaken by politicians and a servile press to make the people war minded.

#### Secret Understandings Between England and France

THE ONE QUESTION widely debated for years after the First World War concerned the date when the conversations began between the military staffs of France and Great Britain. Several ministers in Asquith's cabinet have left in their memoirs much information upon this question, which does not redound to the credit of Edward Grey. Lord Loreburn's book, *How the War Came*,<sup>15</sup> has stood the test of the debate. Lloyd George in his memoirs confirms the information to be found in the Lord Chancellor's book. Lord Morley and John Burns resigned, and on August 2 several other members were ready to do so but changed their minds when the pretext of protecting Belgium was brought forward as a reason for challenging Germany.

<sup>15</sup> London, Methuen, 1919.

We know now that the British Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay together drew up the plan of presenting Grey with an alibi which would help him to surmount some of the difficulties in which his policy had entangled him. This was done so that he could face the House on August 3 with a semblance of courage. His difficulty was of his own making. He had maintained for years that there was no secret understanding with the French staff. When questioned upon the matter, he had replied that there was no secret treaty or understanding. Asquith also had deceived the House upon this matter. What was Grey to do when the secret had to be divulged?

In my books, *The Tragedy of Europe*<sup>16</sup> and *The Makers of War*,<sup>17</sup> the student will find an account of his dilemma which so far has not been challenged. Yet, I have friends who still believe Grey was perfectly honest, but being a simple-minded man, he was deluded by his people in the Foreign Office. There is no doubt that Eyre Crowe filled his mind full of anti-German propoganda, such as Leo Maxse published in the *National Review*. Sir Arthur Nicolson (afterwards Lord Carnock) was then Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office, and it has been said in his favor that he did not know the part that Eyre Crowe played in directing the mind of Grey. Well, the men who have made up their minds to reject evidence of what really did occur should not complain when they are taxed nearly out of existence for a war that would not have taken place if the story of the conversations between the two military staffs had been laid bare to the House of Commons when Grey became Foreign Secretary.

A question was put to the House by Jowett on March 30, 1911, more than three years before the war began. He asked the Foreign Secretary if, when he came into office, there was in existence any understanding or undertaking, expressed or implied, in virtue of which Great Britain would be under obligations to France to send troops, in certain eventualities, to assist the operation of the French Army?

Sir Edward replied:

The extent of the obligations to which Great Britain was committed was that expressed or implied in the Anglo-French Convention laid before Parliament. There was no other engagement bearing on the subject.<sup>18</sup>

At that time, no one in the House knew the reply would cause some-

<sup>16</sup> Five vols., Appleton, Wis., C. C. Nelson Publishing Co., 1940-46.

<sup>17</sup> Appleton, Wis., C. C. Nelson Publishing Co., 1950.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by John Scanlon in *Very Foreign Affairs* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1938), p. 34.

thing of a sensation at the Quai d'Orsay. The Paris papers wanted to know what it meant, and the tension was of such a nature that Grey was obliged to write to the British Ambassador in Paris the following letter:

My dear Bertie,

There would be a row in Parliament here if I had used words which implied the possibility of *a secret engagement unknown to Parliament all these years committing us to a European war*. But I send you a copy of the question and answer. I purposely worded the answer so as not to convey that the engagement of 1904 might not under certain circumstances be construed to have larger consequences than its strict letter. [Italics supplied]

E. Grey<sup>19</sup>

When the war was over, Grey's supporters made an attempt to defend his policy by saying the understanding with France was not a firm proposal to send British troops to her aid in case of war. They maintained that at all times, after the conversations began, Great Britain's hands were free. The biographers and editors, such as Spender and Gardner, were deeply shocked at critics who challenged this view of the matter, and to this day there are men, now far advanced in years, who believe this was so. But I feel sure such people do not know of Grey's letter to Bertie and the many confirmations of what it contained as cited in the books of French authors.

Is it reasonable to think that the French believed for a moment that Great Britain's hands were free, when their mobilization depended entirely upon the dispatch of British troops, according to the plan of war, determined by the chiefs of the two armies, which had taken at least ten years to perfect?

I was in the House when Lord Hugh Cecil put his question to the Prime Minister. Asquith replied in similar terms to the one given by Grey to Jowett.

When the war was over, there came from the presses an avalanche of works from the pens of politicians, admirals, generals, and journalists, giving accounts of why and how the war began. Many of these were based on the propaganda that had been used since the Agadir Crisis to prepare the minds of the masses for war. One work was by Colonel Repington, *The Times* correspondent: *The First World War, 1914-1918*.<sup>20</sup> In it we are informed by the author that he was instrumental in bringing to the notice of Sir Edward Grey the necessity of continuing the conversations that had been in progress before the dissolution of Parliament in Decem-

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Two vols., Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1920.

ber, 1905, by the French and British military staffs. Repington says he sent an express letter to Grey on December 29, while the General Election was in progress. In it he told Grey of a conversation he had had with Colonel Huguet, the French military attache at the Court of St. James. Grey replied from Fallodon next day:

I am interested to hear of your conversation with the French Military Attache. I can only say that I have not receded from anything which Lord Lansdowne said to the French, and have no hesitation in affirming it.<sup>21</sup>

Grey was elected upon a program of free trade, reduction of armaments, peace and good will. Now arises the question whether Grey informed the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, of the promise that he had given to the French. Several ministers, in their books, have tried to make us think that he did. But when I set to work to examine the evidence of this, I found no reason to believe it. The student might turn to my supplement to *How Diplomats Make War*, called *Duty to Civilization*.<sup>22</sup> There he will find my reports on the whereabouts of the four principal ministers of the government during the period when it was said the information was given to Campbell-Bannerman. The stories concerning this matter of Lord Haldane, Grey and Asquith cannot be accepted.

It took a long time to establish the fact that these conversations between the military staffs had been in progress many months before the autumn of 1905. Indeed, Repington tells of his conversation with the First Naval Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher, which took place at the Admiralty December 30. Fisher told Repington that a British Channel Fleet was alone strong enough to smash the whole German Fleet, and the admiral informed him that he had seen on paper Lord Lansdowne's assurances to Paul Cambon, which were quite distinct in their tenor. Furthermore, Fisher told Repington that he had shown them to Sir Edward Grey, and declared that they were part of the engagements taken over from the last government, and would hold good until denounced.

Colonel Repington was not the only one who gave a false impression concerning the period the military staffs of Great Britain and France had been at work upon the plans for the war. The defenders of Grey were equally responsible for deluding the readers of their books about this matter. However, when Lord Fisher published *Memories*, there was consternation among those who believed Grey had been at liberty at any time to put an end to the conversations and that he was free to decide whether

<sup>21</sup> Repington, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923; see pp. 25-8.

the Expeditionary Force (which Lord Haldane had spent years on organizing) would be sent to the Continent to aid France. Here is an example of the absurd trustfulness of the taxpayers. Grey, in his letter to the British Ambassador at Paris, says definitely that the secret engagement was made in 1904, at least eighteen months before he became Foreign Secretary; indeed, it is safe to say that it was a secret engagement attached to the Entente Cordiale.

One reason why there was so much debate about this matter was that the French did not know until August 2, after the second cabinet meeting that day, whether they could count upon the Expeditionary Force to take its stand on their left flank. Bitter words passed between French politicians and soldiers about the indecision of the British government. It is on record that Paul Cambon, when he came to the Foreign Office in Whitehall to learn what the French could expect, asked if the word "honor" were to be expunged from the dictionary.

The question that arose when the war was over was whether there would have been a war if Grey had told the truth when he was questioned by Jowett in March 1911. Not a few men of political influence voiced the belief that Germany would not have fought, if she had known definitely that Great Britain would place her forces on the Continent with the French Army. Sir Austen Chamberlain and Bonar Law were fairly confident about it, and several French politicians were sure of it. André Tardieu and Georges Clemenceau spoke of it in bitter terms. In 1922, Austen Chamberlain, in the House of Commons, said:

Suppose that engagement had been made publicly in the light of day. Suppose it had been read before this House and approved by this House, might not the events of those August days of 1914 have been different? If our obligations had been known and definite, it is at least possible, and I think it is probable, that war would have been avoided in 1914.<sup>23</sup>

#### The French Indictment

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN, people used to talk proudly about the "power of Parliament" and that every government had to toe the mark or it would be beaten in a division and have to go to the country. This idea was not dead when I entered Parliament in 1910; certainly ninety per cent of the members of the House—Radicals, Liberal-Imperialists, Tories, and Home Rulers—believed that each member had the right to ask a minister a question on an important matter and receive an answer. Sometimes when the reply did not satisfy the questioner, he would move the adjournment of

<sup>23</sup> Speech of Feb. 8, 1922, as quoted in *Foreign Affairs* (published by the Union of Democratic Control, London), 3 (March 1922), p. 132.



the House. That meant the business of the day would cease if the adjournment was voted for, and the matter upon which it was moved would be debated. Alas, we soon found out we were quite mistaken about the power of private members.

There were two men in the Irish party who knew more about French affairs than any one in the cabinet: John Dillon and Swift MacNeill read the French journals that came each day to the library of the House. Grey could neither read nor speak French. Indeed, the only man in the cabinet at that time who knew the Continent was Lord Haldane, who spoke French and German fluently. Both Dillon and MacNeill questioned Asquith and Grey repeatedly about secret understandings and affairs in Morocco. They were the first to reach the conclusion that members were being humbugged by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. What was more startling, seventy-five per cent of the members of the cabinet knew no more than private members did. That fact was borne out on August 2, when so many threatened to resign because of Grey's commitments to France.

When the war was over, something of an avalanche of books came from the presses. Very soon the principal bookstalls were freighted with volumes written by Asquith, Grey, Haldane, Churchill, Lloyd George, and other politicians. General French wrote for the army, and Lord Fisher for the navy. No account quite fitted with any other. The contradictions and omissions were most noticeable. However, there was one book which was written during 1921-22 by Colonel (afterwards General) Huguet, French Military Attaché to the Embassy in London. It was a revelation to those who could read French. When the English edition was published in 1928, it caused something of a sensation.

Huguet tells the story of the secret conversations. He begins the record at the time of the General Election of 1906. His description of Haldane's organization of the Expeditionary Army fits exactly Haldane's own account. His reflections upon British mentality are extremely bitter. He says the Frenchman finds the Englishman "with little imagination or personality, slow to move, and a creature of habit, imbued with a few ideas which have become part of him as a result of time, and that he drifts from day to day without looking beyond the need of the moment."<sup>24</sup>

Huguet confirms the impression gained before the Entente was agreed upon, that it was King Edward who made "the first attempts at rapprochement with France." He states clearly that the King was responsible for

<sup>24</sup> Huguet, *Britain and the War*, trans. by H. Cotton Minnchin, London, Cassell, 1928, p. 10.

"laying the foundation stones of an entente, soon afterwards extended to *Russia*."<sup>25</sup> (Italics mine)

Huguet is blunt, and some of the stories he tells should make English people think twice before linking themselves up in martial array with any continental power. He records the visit of Foch to England in 1909, when he made the acquaintance of Sir Henry Wilson:

. . . . One day, in his characteristic way, he said to Wilson: "After all it doesn't matter what you send us, we only ask for one corporal and four men, but they must be there right at the start. You will give them to me and I promise to do my utmost to get them killed. From that moment I will be at ease since I know that England will follow them as one man!"<sup>26</sup>

It is a sorry tale he tells of the difference of opinion among cabinet members about the dispatch of the Expeditionary Force. He says, the French general mobilization was ordered on August 1, but "nobody knew then what decision the British Government would take. It was known vaguely that the support of the Fleet had been promised but it was not known if that of the Army would also be included."<sup>27</sup>

Even on August 4, after Great Britain declared war officially, the French did not know if it meant the dispatch of the Expeditionary Force to France. The subtitle of this book is: *A French Indictment*. It is a sad summing up with which he ends his epilogue, for he confesses that the French were mistaken

in the character of our allies, when we believed in the permanence of feelings which were and could only be fleeting, and when we sacrificed our interest and our security for vain promises, which have never been realized and never will be. May we in the future not fall into similar errors, thanks to a better understanding of the character of the peoples who surround us.<sup>28</sup>

Still, it should be remarked, much as General Huguet reveals in his book, he did not begin to know the full import of the causes of the tragedy. It has been said that the French have been the most bitter critics of the British in both wars. There is some truth in that statement, and what amazes me is the stupidity of many of the so-called historians who write about the wars without mentioning such affairs as engaged the attention of Huguet. The lack of information concerning the opinions of their *ci-devant* allies is carrying insularity to an extreme that borders on the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-6.

stupidity that Schiller and Nietzsche condemned as the greatest fault that can be committed.

I could mention over a dozen books that have appeared in the past ten years from reputable French authors, which no historian of any pretension can afford to ignore. Here I shall mention only two by Alfred Fabre-Luce: *Histoire de la révolution Européenne*, which appeared from the press of Éditions Domat, Paris, in 1954; and his historically invaluable *Journal de la France 1939–1944* (Geneva, Les Éditions du Cheval Ailé, 1946, 2 vols.). These contain precise, documented information which makes most of our writers on the causes and conduct of the wars and nearly all their British colleagues look extremely foolish. If history is to be of any value at all to coming generations, it should be treated without prejudice. Still, I know how difficult this is when the thinking of otherwise intelligent people has been distorted during the struggles by partisans who have handled the truth carelessly.

The task of attempting to unravel the tangled skeins wrought by propagandists is one of the most difficult an earnest student can undertake. He must be endowed with Spartan courage to flout opinion formed by political nationalists and party patriots. For he will soon realize that much of the war literature is written by special pleaders. These authors not only use buckets of whitewash to cover the stains of their heroes; they also reject outright the facts presented in official documents and historic surveys of foreign origin. *Etiam diabolus audientur*. Such a notion is scorned by party patriots. No alien devil shall be heard if they can prevent it.

Those who dare to make an effort to tell even an approximately true story of these wars place their literary reputations in jeopardy. The few men I know who have striven to get at the truth have seen their books ignored by the reviewers, who, of course, must retain their positions by bowing to the editorial edict on what shall be printed.

Port Washington, N.Y.

*In cases where total "planning" has been put into effect some goals have been achieved. But they have been attained at the cost of the ruin brought about by a mad and destructive impetuosity which strikes at individual civil liberties, disturbs industrial peace, violates the sacred nature of the family, distorts patriotism and destroys a priceless religious heritage.*

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