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HOW BRITAIN STROVE FOR PEACE

A Record of Anglo-German Negotiations
1898—1914

TOLD FROM AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES

BY

SIR EDWARD COOK



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PREFACE

IN a pamphlet recently published I explained, in a short and (I hope) readily intelligible form, "Why Britain is at War." The statements contained in it were in all cases based on official documents and cannot be refuted. The summary showed, among other things, with regard to the immediate causes of the war, that England had striven to the last moment to preserve the peace of Europe, and that the efforts thus made by her and other Powers were frustrated by Germany. It showed, further, that the factors which compelled England to take part in the war were in relation to France the call of honour and self-interest, and in relation to Belgium the same double call — combined with direct and positive obligation.

In the present pamphlet I take a backward glance and show by reference to political discussions during many previous years "How Britain strove for Peace." My summary is based, for the most part, again, upon official documents or ministerial speeches, and for the rest upon information which, I have good reason to believe, is irrefutable. This history of Anglo-German

negotiations upon the limitation of armaments and cognate matters will be found to conform, in a curiously instructive way, to the conclusions which every candid mind must reach from a survey of the negotiations immediately preceding the war. It will be seen, first, that England persistently strove to abate the pressure of armaments, and that each and every attempt was negatived by Germany. It will be seen, further, that the only conditions on which Germany was prepared to come to terms with England were in effect the same as those of the now historic and "infamous" proposals of July 29th, 1914—namely, that England should turn her back on her friendships with France and Russia, and agree to regard her treaty obligation to Belgium as "a mere scrap of paper."

E. T. C.

* * * It is hoped that this pamphlet, like its predecessor, may be found useful, not only by speakers and teachers, but by the general public. If any reader should desire to buy copies for distribution, special terms may be obtained on application to the Publishers.

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HOW BRITAIN STROVE FOR PEACE

*A Summary of Anglo-German Negotiations,
1898-1914*

IN the war with Germany Britain is fighting in fulfilment of her obligations, in defence of her honour and her safety, and in spite of persistent efforts, during the negotiations immediately preceding the outbreak, to preserve the peace of Europe. In the ensuing pages a summary is given of previous Anglo-German negotiations. The course of those negotiations shows once more who was the peace-seeker, and how and by whom the efforts for a permanently good understanding were thwarted. The story begins with the Emperor of Russia's proposal in 1898 for an International Conference to consider the reduction of armaments, and ends with the German Emperor's declaration of war against Russia in 1914. Two preliminary points, however, deserve brief attention.

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Germany's "Place in the Sun"

It is sometimes said by opponents of British policy that England, moved by envy of Germany, has been reluctant to see her occupy any "place in the sun"; and it has sometimes been asked, by way of supporting that suggestion, why, when an Anglo-French and an Anglo-Russian Agreement were made, there was no corresponding Anglo-German Agreement? The answer to this question, which could puzzle those only who have short memories, disposes entirely of the suggestion that England has been impracticable and unfriendly in her dealings with Germany. One reason why no Anglo-German Agreement was made in the early years of the twentieth century is that many such had been made in the latter years of the nineteenth. There was no Anglo-German Agreement made in 1904 at the time of the Anglo-French one because there were then no tangible and concrete differences requiring adjustment between England and Germany, such as were composed in that year between England and France. The comparable differences between England and Germany had already been adjusted by Lord Salisbury, whose "graceful concessions" to Germany included the cession of Heligoland, at which island the German Emperor arrived from Osborne in 1890 to assume the sovereignty, and which, presently converted into a great fortress, is now a protection of the German fleet. When, later on, definite and concrete differences arose, England showed herself ready to compromise with Germany, even as she had compromised

other points in her agreements with France and Russia. In regard to the Bagdad Railway, for instance, in the early summer of 1914 she came to terms which showed that she did not adopt any attitude of a dog-in-the-manger towards the expansion of German influence.

The Naval Challenge.

The feature in modern German policy which caused political apprehension in the minds of English statesmen was neither the growth of Germany's commerce nor her desire for a place in the sun, but the continual development of her navy. A little consideration will show that such apprehension was most reasonable. It would have been felt in any case, but it was increased by the circumstances in which the new naval policy of Germany arose. The German Emperor's declarations that he meant to "grasp the trident" and that "Germany's future was to be on the sea" would, for reasons presently to be explained, have caused at any time some suspicion in this maritime Empire; but the particular time at which these declarations began to receive embodiment invested them with additional significance. The first formidable increase in the German Navy was made by the law of 1900—the year following the outbreak of the South African War. How differently, it was said in Germany, might the course of events have run in that war if Germany had been in possession of a more powerful fleet! When, therefore, the German Navy Law was

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introduced in the middle of the South African War the question naturally arose—and it was asked even in the Reichstag—Against whom could the new fleet be used, if not against England? Germany, it was officially explained, must be so strong at sea that even “the strongest naval Power” should not be able to challenge her with any confidence. Great Britain, as we shall see in the following pages, had no desire whatever to challenge Germany; but from the very nature of the case, and apart from the special circumstances above noticed, the great and continuous increases in the German Navy constituted, in the minds of our statesmen and in the public opinion of the country, a challenge to Great Britain. The frontiers of Germany are in the main land frontiers. Those of England are on the sea. The British Empire is, in Sir John Seeley’s phrase, “a world-wide Venice with the sea for streets.” In the matter of food-supply Germany is in large measure self-supporting, or fed overland. Great Britain might speedily starve if she lost command of the seas. There is thus no comparison, as Sir Edward Grey said in Parliament (March 29th, 1909), “between the importance of the German Navy to Germany, and the importance of our Navy to us. Our Navy is to us what their Army is to them. To have a strong navy would increase their prestige, their diplomatic influence, their power of protecting their commerce; but it is not the matter of life and death to them that it is to us.” Germany was already by far the strongest military Power in the world. To appreciate the legitimate apprehension which her naval ambitions

caused in this country, it is only necessary to reverse the case, and to ask what would have been felt and thought in Europe, if Great Britain, already the first Naval Power, had set to work to build up a vast standing army comparable to that of Germany herself.

It was thus obvious that naval rivalry of the nature set on foot by Germany must embitter the relations of the two countries and might lead in the course of time to dangerous situations. Having explained this point, and having recalled England's friendly "deals" with Germany in earlier years, I now proceed to detail the negotiations by which England sought to avert such dangers and to secure the peace.

I.—*Attempts at International Agreement:*
1899, 1907.

In 1898 the Emperor of Russia proposed an International Conference for the purpose of devising means for reducing expenditure on naval and military armaments. The proposal was received with much popular sympathy in this country, and the views of the Government were defined in Parliament by the First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Goschen), who declared that, while it was not possible to alter the *relative* position of Great Britain, yet "if the other great naval Powers would be prepared to diminish their programme of ship-building, we should be prepared on our side to meet such a procedure by modifying ours" (March 9, 1899). The Conference

which met at The Hague a few months later was unable to find a formula acceptable to the Powers as free from ambiguity, fair to all, and enforceable by any practicable sanction. The resolution adopted recommended the proposal to the consideration of the several Governments as one of great importance to the moral and material welfare of humanity.

In 1900, the year after the Conference, the German Government passed (as aforesaid) a new Navy Law, amending that of 1898 and embodying a programme which would almost double the German Navy. This may be taken as Germany's answer, on the naval side, to the proposed reduction of armaments by international agreement.

The question of the restriction of armaments continued, however, to occupy serious attention in this country; and when, on the Tsar's invitation, a second Peace Conference had been asked to assemble in 1907, the leading Naval Powers were informed of the earnest wish of the British Government that the problem should again be considered. As evidence of their own good faith, and as a lead which it was hoped others might follow, they announced in July, 1906, that the British programme of naval construction, laid before Parliament in the previous March, would be reduced by 25 per cent. in battleships, 60 per cent. in ocean-going destroyers, and 33 per cent. in submarines. This reduction was proposed despite the fact that, in March, 1906, the German Navy Law of 1900 had been amended by the addition of six large cruisers to the existing programme.

The attitude of Germany towards this overture was

soon disclosed. The German Emperor said to the British Ambassador (Sir F. Lascelles) that if the question of disarmament were to be brought before the Conference he should decline to be represented at it. Each State, he said, must decide for itself the amount of military force necessary for the protection of its interests and the maintenance of its position, and no State would brook the interference of another in this matter. In August, 1906, King Edward, attended by Sir Charles Hardinge, visited Cronberg, and the German Emperor's opinion expressed to the latter was that the approaching Hague Conference was great nonsense. Talk about reduction of military forces only made Germans smile. In the following month Mr. Haldane, then Secretary of State for War, was invited to visit the Emperor at Berlin, and was told, like the others, that if disarmament were to be proposed at the Conference, Germany could not allow her representative to agree.

The British Government, however, persevered. On March 2, 1907, an article signed by the Prime Minister (Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman) was published in *The Nation*. It was urged therein that British naval power, though it must necessarily remain predominant, was throughout the world recognised as non-aggressive. It was announced that the British Government, who had already given an earnest of their good faith by reductions in the estimates of 1906, were prepared to go further if they found a similar disposition in other quarters. The whole article was a plea that the subject of

reduced expenditure on armaments should not be excluded from discussion at the Conference. In the same month the British Government's desire in that sense was officially communicated to the seven chief naval Powers. The Russian jurist, Professor Maartens, who was sent to the various European capitals to discuss the programme of the Conference, found strong objections at Berlin and Vienna to the inclusion of the limitation of armaments; and in April, 1907, the Chancellor (Prince Bülow) declared in the Reichstag that "the German Government could not participate in a discussion which, according to their conviction, was unpractical, even if it should not involve risks." As a result of the attitude thus taken by Germany, the Conference of 1907 could not be induced to do more than confirm the resolution of 1899. This was proposed by the British Plenipotentiary, Sir Edward Fry.

It will have been seen from the foregoing recital of facts that a sincere attempt was made by Great Britain to secure some limitation of armaments by general international agreement through the medium of The Hague Conference, and that such attempt was frustrated by the hostile attitude of Germany.

II. *Attempted Naval Negotiations with Germany:* 1907, 1908.

There remained open the possibility of limitation by particular agreement, and to this possibility the

British Government next turned. They had shown their desire by a declaration which Sir E. Fry was instructed to make at the Conference of 1907 that the British Government were ready to exchange naval estimates in advance with any other Power in the hope that the exchange might perhaps ultimately lead to a reduction in expenditure.

In the autumn of 1907 the German Emperor paid a visit to England, and in a speech at the Guildhall professed emphatically sentiments of amity towards this country. Nevertheless, in the following March an acceleration of the German naval programme, amounting in effect to an addition of four capital ships, was proposed ; and it was afterwards carried out.

The situation thus created was such as inevitably to cause apprehension in this country. The German Emperor professed in public friendly sentiments, but it was difficult to reconcile these with the progressive increases in the German fleet. There were no outstanding controversies between the two countries ; their diplomatic relations were perfectly friendly and natural. The naval superiority of this country was, and (as already explained) must be, a cardinal principle of British policy. The naval rivalry set on foot by Germany was sure to provoke suspicions as to its ultimate intentions, and thus to embitter relations between the two countries.

The British Government, feeling this danger and being anxious to avert it in good time, took the occasion of King Edward's visit to the German Emperor, in August, 1908, to open negotiations. The King was again accompanied by Sir C. Hardinge,

who, acting under instructions from the Secretary of State, placed the views of the British Government fully before the German Emperor and the German Government. He elaborated the view of the situation explained above, and he was instructed to urge that some sort of friendly discussion on the subject should take place between the two Governments. These overtures were repelled. The German Emperor renewed friendly assurances, but said emphatically that no discussion about naval armaments with a foreign Government could be tolerated. It is understood that his Majesty avowed his determination to go to war rather than submit to such a thing. Herr von Jenisch, who represented the German Foreign Office, was equally emphatic in declining the British overtures.

This fact should be borne in mind in reading the speech made in the Reichstag in December, 1908, wherein Prince Bülow denied that definite proposals for the limitation of armaments had ever been made to the German Government. The statement was true, but it was not the whole of the truth; and the British Government took occasion of it to make another effort in the direction of a friendly understanding. It was pointed out that the reason why no definite proposals had been made at The Hague in 1907 was Germany's previously intimated refusal to take part in any such discussion, and that a subsequent attempt to open negotiations had been repelled. In view of this attitude of the German Government, Great Britain was compelled materially to augment her naval estimates for 1909-10: but

the British Government were most anxious to come to a friendly arrangement with Germany in the matter.

Sir Edward Grey on this occasion urged that, in order to prevent misunderstandings and allay suspicions between the two countries, the naval attachés in Berlin and London should be allowed from time to time to see the actual stage of construction of the capital ships. This proposal was refused by the German Government.

The summary of events given in the foregoing section shows that the British Government, estopped from seeking an arrangement by general international agreement, endeavoured to open particular negotiations with Germany, and that this endeavour was frustrated by the German Emperor and the German Government.

III.—*The Triple Entente and "Shining Armour."*

The next chapter in Anglo-German negotiations introduces a new phase, which can only be understood aright by reference to some earlier events affecting Great Britain's relations with other Powers. It will be seen that in this new phase, while certain shadowy overtures were forthcoming from Germany with regard to naval expenditure, the substantial price demanded for them was a desertion, on Great

Britain's part, of her political friendships and of her treaty obligations.

In April, 1904, Great Britain (who, as recalled at the outset, had long before settled African disputes with Germany) settled her African disputes with France—France giving England a free hand in Egypt, and England giving France a free hand in Morocco. At the time, Prince Bülow expressed Germany's absence of interest in, and even approval of, the agreement. The question of Morocco was immaterial, he said, to Germany; as, from a commercial point of view, was certainly the case, German exports to Morocco then standing only at £90,000 a year. Presently, however, a different line was taken. A few weeks after the conclusion of the Anglo-French Agreement the German Emperor found occasion to make speeches which not unnaturally caused apprehension in France and attracted notice elsewhere. At Karlsruhe, the Emperor enjoined his subjects to "remember the battles of Wörth, of Weissenburg, and of Sedan. I hope that peace will not be disturbed, and that the events which are taking place around us will cause our eyes to see clearly and will steel our courage so that we shall be found united if it should become necessary to interfere in the policy of the world." Going on to Mainz to open a new bridge, the Emperor expressed his conviction that "if it should have to be used for transport of a warlike nature, it will prove perfectly adapted to its work." These speeches were recalled when, in March, 1905, the Emperor went to Tangier, and the German Government began to take a hot diplomatic interest

in the question of Morocco. At this time, it will be remembered, the battle of Mukden occurred, and Russia seemed powerless to assist France. M. Delcassé, the French Minister who had negotiated the Anglo-French Agreement, retired from office, and France accepted the German proposal for a Moroccan Conference. German diplomacy had scored a success "because," said the *Kreuz Zeitung*, "the *ultima ratio* was visible in the background." In 1907 Great Britain concluded an agreement with Russia settling outstanding differences with regard to Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. In 1908 Austria-Hungary, in violation of the Treaty of Berlin, annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. The German Emperor stood, as he said, "in shining armour," * beside his ally to support this breach of the public Law of Europe; Russia was given to understand that opposition on her part would be met by force of arms, and the annexation was not further challenged.

These, briefly stated, are the antecedent facts which it is necessary to bear in mind in following

* The occasions on which the German Emperor used phrases that have now become classic in the history of arms and diplomacy may be worth recalling. Addressing Prince Henry at Kiel on the eve of his departure for the Far East (December 16, 1897), the Emperor said: "Should anyone ever attempt to affront us or prejudice us in our good rights, then strike out with your *mailed fist*, and, God willing, weave round your young brow the laurel wreath which no one in the German Empire will begrudge you."

At Vienna in 1910 (September 21) the German Emperor received an address of welcome from the Bürgomaster. In the course of his reply the Emperor said: "Methinks I read in your resolve the agreement of the City of Vienna with the action of an ally in taking his stand *in shining armour* at a grave moment by the side of your most gracious Sovereign."

the next phase of the Anglo-German negotiations. Germany had "rattled the sabre" against France about Morocco, and against Russia about Bosnia. It seemed to be her policy to challenge the efficacy, and perhaps prevent the solidarity, of an Anglo-Franco-Russian *entente*. This feature of her policy became apparent both in the course of negotiations with England and by German action towards France.

IV.—*German Overtures against the Triple Entente: 1909.*

In July, 1909, Prince Bülow resigned, and was succeeded as Chancellor by Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg, who, shortly after assuming office, began to occupy himself with relations between Great Britain and Germany. He sent for the British Ambassador, to whom he said that he realised that the naval question was regarded by England as the chief obstacle to really cordial relations between the two countries; that the German Government were now ready to make proposals for a naval arrangement, but that discussion on that subject could profitably be undertaken only as part of a general understanding based on a conviction that neither country had hostile or aggressive designs against the other. The British Government were naturally much gratified by the Chancellor's messages and met his overtures cordially. The naval question was the dominant one

for them, but they were ready to consider with the utmost sympathy any proposals for a general understanding so long as these were not inconsistent with Britain's existing obligations to other foreign Powers. This was a proviso obviously required by honourable dealing, and Sir Edward Grey often explained it in Parliament; as, for instance, in these words (November 27, 1911): "One does not make new friendships worth having by deserting old ones. New friendships by all means let us make, but not at the expense of the ones we have." There was no aggressive intention whatever in England's good relations either with France or with Russia. This had been made clear by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1905, when he referred (November 16) to the agreement with France, and foreshadowed a similar one with Russia. "Lord Lansdowne has done well to protest against the idea that the understanding between us implies any hostile feeling or intention towards any other Power. Our stock of good feeling and international goodwill is not exhausted by France. Let us hope that this wise policy may be extended. There is the great Empire of Russia. And again there is Germany." Similarly in 1909 Sir E. Grey explained that there was no reason on the part of England why her good understandings with France and Russia should prevent a similarly good understanding between her and Germany. She desired to be friends with Germany, on condition only that this did not involve breaking off her friendship with others. Such a breach was, it will be seen, precisely what the German proposals involved.

The naval proposals made by Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg were somewhat vague. There could be no question, it was explained, of any departure from the German Navy Law as a whole, as that would meet with insuperable opposition in the Reichstag; but the German Government were willing to discuss the question of "retarding the rate" of building new ships. Precise explanation of this formula was not forthcoming. What was understood to be meant was that the total number of ships to be completed by 1918 would not be reduced, but that the number of capital ships might be reduced in the earlier years and equivalently raised in the later. There would, it will be seen, be no ultimate reduction of expenditure, and no definite reduction of the total German programme.

The basis of naval negotiation suggested by the Chancellor was thus undefined, slender, shadowy. The *quid pro quo* which he required for it was positive and substantial. Great Britain was to be party to an agreement declaring that (1) neither country had any idea of aggression, and that neither would in fact attack the other; and (2) that in the event of an attack made on either Power by a third Power or group of Powers, the Power not attacked should stand aside.

To the first condition there was and could be no objection; to the second, the objection from the British point of view was serious. For what did it involve? In the first place it involved a grave risk. If Great Britain accepted the German condition, it became practically certain, owing to the

general position of the European Powers, that she would be bound to stand aside from any Continental struggle. In any such struggle Germany could arrange without difficulty that the formal inception of hostilities should rest with Austria. If Austria and Russia were at war, Germany was pledged to support Austria; while as soon as Russia was attacked by two Powers, France was bound to come to her assistance. The giving of the pledge proposed by the German Government would, therefore, prevent Great Britain from supporting France, no matter what the reasons of the conflict or its results might be. Thus French trust and goodwill would be forfeited, since Great Britain could be of no assistance to France, should Germany determine to press to the ultimate issue of war any demands she might choose to make. It could not be overlooked by Ministers acting as trustees for their country's future that the period of forced British neutrality, involved in the Chancellor's proposals, might be used by Germany strenuously to consolidate her supremacy in Continental Europe. Great Britain would be a paralysed spectator, until Germany were free to devote undivided strength to reducing her, the only remaining independent factor in Europe. Moreover, the German proposal involved, in the second place, a repudiation in certain events of England's treaty obligations to Belgium. Suppose Germany in a war with France were to invade Belgium, England would have been prevented by this proposed agreement with Germany from vindicating Belgium's neutrality. Subsequent events have shown how dishonourable

Britain's acceptance of the proposal would in fact have been. Such acceptance would, moreover, have led to England's immediate isolation and a deserved and total loss of confidence in British loyalty and friendship for the future.

It is not surprising therefore that in the autumn of 1909 the British Government declined the German Chancellor's proposal. Politically, it was open to the gravest objections; on the naval side, it offered no substantial reduction of naval expenditure.

Looking at this phase of the negotiations generally, we must conclude that, in return for a very vague offer on the naval side of the question, Great Britain was invited to be false to her existing friendships and obligations. This the British Government declined to do. At the same time they were desirous, within the limits of fidelity to treaty obligations and existing friendships, to cultivate the most friendly relations with Germany. They had mediated strenuously between Russia and Austria in the Austro-Servian crisis of March, 1909. They assured Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg of their cordial willingness to negotiate for a settlement of specific questions of mutual interest, such as the Bagdad railway; and such a course was adopted, with results which prior to the outbreak of the present war had appeared likely to be mutually advantageous. Moreover the British Government declared, and by their action proved the sincerity of their declaration, that they were at any time prepared to co-operate with Germany in the interests of the general peace. The Triple

Entente had nothing offensive in it; there was no reason in its nature why upon questions of general concern Europe should be divided diplomatically into hostile groups, and in the Balkan crisis of 1912-3, Sir E. Grey's policy made this point very clear (see further below, p. 34).

The good hopes which might have been founded on this state of things were rudely dashed, as all the world now knows, by the substitution by Germany and Austria of arms for diplomacy in July, 1914. It will be seen that something of the same kind happened to imperil the course of Anglo-German negotiations in 1910-11.

V.—*Anglo-German Negotiations Interrupted by the Agadir Incident, 1910-11.*

In consequence of the German attitude, it became necessary to augment the British naval estimates presented in 1910. Speaking in Parliament in July, 1910, Mr. Asquith said:—"We have approached the German Government. They have found themselves unable to do anything. They cannot, without an Act of Parliament repeal their Naval Law. They tell us, and no doubt with great truth, they would not have the support of public opinion in Germany to a modified programme." The German Chancellor replied to this speech that the German Government had not opposed a *non possumus* to the British

approaches; they could not agree to reduce naval construction, but they were ready to discuss temporary retardation. The precise meaning of this proposal was again not defined; but the British Government at once responded to the German Chancellor's overtures, and in August, 1910, abandoning their previous contention that any naval agreement must be based upon a reduction of the existing German naval programme, they intimated their readiness (1) to discuss the suggestion of "temporary retardation"; (2) to negotiate a naval agreement on the basis that the existing German programme should not be increased, and that information should be exchanged with regard to the actual progress of ship-building in each country; (3) with regard to a political understanding, to give assurances that in any agreement between themselves and any other Power there was nothing directed against Germany, and that they themselves had no hostile intentions respecting her.

The reply of the German Government was received in October, 1910, and negotiations continued till the spring of 1911. The course of them may most conveniently be summarised under the three heads just given:—

(1) With regard to "temporary retardation," this proposal, upon which the German Chancellor had relied to justify his denial of a *non possumus* attitude, was withdrawn in May, 1911—a withdrawal which was strange, since the reason given (namely, the importance of feeding the shipbuilding industry with a definite quantity of Government orders)

would have been equally cogent against the offer when first made.

(2) With regard to the negotiation of a naval agreement on the basis of no increase in the German programme and of exchange of information, the German Government agreed to discuss the latter subject: negotiations continued for many months; the final British memorandum, accepting the German conditions on all essential points, was communicated at the end of January, 1912, and was left unanswered. As for the basis of no increase in the German programme, the German Government in October, 1910, asked what equivalent engagement would be made by Great Britain. The British Government were considering their reply, when the German Emperor informed the British Ambassador that he would on no account ever consent to any agreement binding Germany not to enlarge her naval programme. The discrepancy thus apparent between the attitude of the Emperor and the Chancellor respectively was not cleared up, but in May, 1911, the German Government intimated their readiness to examine any proposals for a mutual reduction of expenditure on armaments not involving a departure from the requirements of the Navy Law. The withdrawal at the same time of the offer of temporary retardation (see (1) above) did not inspire confidence; and the professed readiness of the German Government to negotiate a naval agreement on a fresh basis had been preceded by a very uncompromising official declaration in the Reichstag.

On March 13, 1911, Sir Edward Grey made a

speech in Parliament indicating between the lines the course of negotiations with Germany, defining the limits within which alone those negotiations could hopefully proceed, and declaring it to be a paradox that while sentiments of friendship were sincere armaments should increase. This speech met with a favourable reception in the German Press; but on the subject coming up in the Reichstag, the Chancellor took occasion (March 30) to apply cold water. "I consider," he said, "any control as absolutely impracticable, and every attempt in that direction would lead to nothing but continual mutual distrust and perpetual friction. Who would be content to weaken his means of defence without the absolute certainty that his neighbour was not secretly exceeding the proportion allowed to him in the disarmament agreement? No, gentlemen, anyone who seriously considers the question of universal disarmament must inevitably come to the conclusion that it is insoluble so long as men are men and States are States."

(3) While Germany was thus alternately coming forward and drawing back on the naval side of the negotiations with England, the German Government continued to attach great importance to a political understanding. They laid emphasis on this point in their reply of October, 1910; and when negotiations were resumed after the General Election in this country, the British Government assented to the German view that some wider agreement of a political nature should be a condition precedent to a naval arrangement, and submitted suggestions as a

basis for discussing such a political agreement. Sir E. Grey's speech of March 13th, 1911, indicates the nature of those suggestions. An arrangement, as foreshadowed by the Imperial Chancellor (pp. 20, 24), embodying a general political formula, might be considered: more comprehensive, far-reaching, and intimate than any arrangement, short of actual alliance, that England had with any other Power; and such an arrangement, therefore, might cause misunderstanding in France and Russia. The British agreements with France and with Russia were not based on a general political formula; they were settlements of specific questions; and the settlements had transformed relations of friction and pin-pricks into friendship. There was nothing exclusive in those friendships, and the British Government had seen with satisfaction the settlement of some questions between France and Germany, and between Russia and Germany. Why should not something of the same kind be attempted between England and Germany?

The reply of the German Government (May, 1911) to these suggestions seemed not unfavourable, though the withdrawal of the previous naval offer (see (1), above), was discouraging. The German Government declared that the British suggestions might form a suitable basis for an agreement, though they repeated their preference for a general political formula.

The situation respecting Anglo-German relations seemed hopeful. The German Emperor came to

London to attend the unveiling of Queen Victoria's memorial, and was received enthusiastically by the populace. Shortly afterwards the German Crown Prince attended the coronation of King George, and was similarly received. British feeling, it was reported in Berlin, was decidedly friendly to Germany. Then suddenly something happened which changed the whole international situation. The German Government abandoned the method of diplomacy for that of the mailed fist. In the midst of renewed conversations with France on the subject of Morocco, a German warship was sent to Agadir.

VI.—*Political Negotiations*: 1911–12.

The Morocco crisis which supervened necessarily interrupted the course of Anglo-German negotiations. Great Britain had made it clear by the speech of Mr. Lloyd George at the Mansion House (July 21, 1911) and in other ways that she would not be an indifferent spectator in a quarrel foisted upon France in consequence of the Anglo-French agreement. The crisis passed, but this demonstration is the clue to the phase upon which Anglo-German negotiations next entered. It was the aim of German diplomacy, as will clearly appear in this section, to separate England from France and Russia, and by previous agreement to secure English neutrality in any consequences which might ensue from future displays of the mailed fist or shining armour.

By the autumn of 1911 an agreement had been reached by France and Germany on the question of Morocco. Speaking in Parliament thereon (Nov. 27) Sir E. Grey expressed a strong desire for improved relations with Germany. Great Britain intended to keep her existing friendships, but there was no reason why these should prevent friendship with other Powers. Great Britain had facilitated a friendly settlement of the Moroccan crisis between France and Germany. This settlement, it might be hoped, "cleaned the slate" also in respect of German relations with England. So the German Chancellor had said, and Sir E. Grey was delighted to hear it. He would respond heartily to any desire on the side of Germany to improve relations, and there would be nothing of a grudging attitude in England's policy.

At the beginning of 1912 it was made known to the British Government that it would be agreeable to the German Emperor if a member of the Cabinet could go to Berlin to discuss the relations between the two countries. Lord Haldane, who was at the time contemplating a trip to Germany on private affairs, was deputed to go to Berlin and discuss the situation with the German Chancellor. He was in no sense a plenipotentiary; he was instructed to discuss things on a strictly non-committal basis; but he was of course in full possession of the views of the Government, which he expressed with suavity indeed but with great force. Probably no emissary could have been sent who would be more a *persona grata* in Berlin, and the negative results of

his mission are the more remarkable on that account.

The immediate preliminaries were not encouraging. Lord Haldane arrived at Berlin on February 9, 1912, and two days before, the Emperor, in opening the Reichstag, had announced great increases both in the Navy and in the Army. The increases under the new German Navy Law were officially estimated at 3 capital ships, 15,000 men, many submarines, and an expenditure of 13 millions sterling.

The German Chancellor's main proposal was that the two Governments should agree upon a formula which was to the effect that neither country should enter into any combinations against the other. Lord Haldane put some pertinent questions to the Emperor, the Chancellor, and Admiral von Tirpitz. What would be the use of entering into a solemn agreement of amity if Germany was going at the same moment to increase her battle-fleet as a precaution against Great Britain, in which case Great Britain would have to increase hers as a precaution against Germany? Would not an agreement for introducing a better spirit into the relations of the two countries be received with world-wide derision if it were to be followed immediately by an increased German shipbuilding programme? The German Government's answer to such questions was that without a general political agreement there could be no naval agreement; and that, in return for an acceptable political agreement, there could be no reduction in the increased naval programme, but that there might be some temporary retardation. The

proposal of 1910 (p. 20), which had been withdrawn in 1911 (p. 24), was thus revived; but with two differences; the scale to which retardation might be applied had been increased in the meanwhile, and the undertaking to retard was to be an "understanding" only, and not a written agreement: it was to be, that is, something less binding than a "scrap of paper."

The proffered naval understanding, such as it was, did not mature, for it was found impossible to satisfy the German Government in regard to a political agreement. Sir E. Grey was ready to put into terms of formal agreement the spirit of British policy as he had often expounded it in speeches, and the following formula, in terms carefully considered by the British Cabinet, was suggested:—

"The two Powers being naturally desirous of securing peace and friendship between them, England declares that she will neither make, nor join in, any unprovoked attack upon Germany. Aggression upon Germany is not the subject, and forms no part, of any treaty, understanding, or combination to which England is now a party, nor will she become a party to anything that has such an object."

Of course, Germany would have been expected to sign a corresponding undertaking. But Sir E. Grey's terms did not satisfy her. She wanted something more than a guarantee against British aggression. The German Ambassador asked for a pledge of British neutrality in the event of Germany being engaged in war. He wanted, in other words, that the defensive Triple Entente should be broken up, and that Germany should be left to deal with France, or

Russia, or Belgium, free from any risk of England concerning herself in the matter.¹

Sir Edward Grey in reply explained frankly to Count Metternich how his proposal was regarded by British statesmen. The language which our Foreign Secretary used in 1912 was much to the same effect as that of various conversations recorded in the White Paper of 1914. There was no aggressive design in British policy, and France knew perfectly well that if she acted aggressively against Germany no support would be forthcoming from the British Government or be approved by British public opinion. Into an agreement embodying those points, Great Britain was ready to enter; but she could not bind herself in advance to remain neutral whatever might happen. A day might conceivably come when a German Government might desire to crush France. If England bound herself in advance to stand aside, she might, after seeing France crushed, have to fight by herself later on. Germany, it should not be forgotten, was greatly increasing her military and naval armaments at the time, and had in recent years threatened both France and Russia with the use of force. The Anglo-German negotiations described in this section presently collapsed.

¹ The words of the German historian, Professor Treitschke, may be recalled: "If our Empire has the courage to follow an independent Colonial policy with determination, a collision of our interests and those of England is unavoidable. It was natural and logical that the new Great Power of Central Europe had to settle affairs with all Great Powers. We have settled our accounts with Austria-Hungary, with France, and with Russia. The last settlement, the settlement with England, will probably be the lengthiest and most difficult."

The reason of the collapse, and the outstanding features of this chapter in Britain's efforts to ensure peace, are very clear. All attempts of the British Government to bring about mutual reduction, or even limitation, of expenditure on naval armaments met with unyielding opposition from Germany. The negotiations for a political agreement came to nothing because Germany was not satisfied with mere guarantees against aggression: she wanted, as a condition even of the most shadowy naval agreement, an undertaking from the British Government to remain neutral in a European war.

VII.—*Proposed "Naval Holiday"; Political Co-operation with Germany: 1912-3.*

The collapse of the negotiations described in § VI. did not cause the British Government either to drop all overtures for a reduction of naval expenditure, or to adopt an unfriendly attitude towards Germany.

The fresh naval increases proposed by Germany in 1912 did indeed make a continuation of actual negotiations seem futile, but our Government in public declaration left the door open. The First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Churchill), in introducing the Estimates in 1912 and again in 1913, made his proposal for a "naval holiday." He pledged himself that any retardation or reduction in German construction should be followed by this country in full proportion. If Germany decided to take a holiday and build no ships in any given year, England would

follow suit and drop her programme for the year likewise. In this way, "without negotiations, bargaining, or the slightest restriction upon the sovereign freedom of either Power," relief might be obtained. Germany did not adopt the suggestion.

But though no progress was thus attainable along the line of direct negotiation with Germany, the course of events in Europe enabled the British Government to show their friendliness towards that Power and their earnest desire to co-operate for the maintenance of European peace. When direct negotiations broke down, Sir E. Grey spoke in this sense to the German Ambassador. What he said privately was what he said publicly. He told Count Metternich that in his opinion all five Powers, including Germany, should be in agreement before any action was taken to mediate between Turkey and Italy; and that in regard to the troubles in the Balkans, the great thing was for all the Powers, irrespective of their grouping in Alliance and Entente, to keep in touch with each other. He said, too, how pleased he would be to see Russia (an Entente Power) come to an agreement with Austria (an Alliance Power). Upon the adoption of such a line of action depended the best hope of European peace. Similarly, speaking in the House of Commons (March 13, 1911), he had said, "We have the strongest desire to see those who are friends on good terms with other Powers; we regard it without jealousy and with satisfaction." And again (July 10, 1912): "Whatever separate diplomatic groups there are, I do not think that ought to prevent frankness

and exchange of views when questions of mutual interest arise; and if that takes place, separate diplomatic groups need not necessarily be in opposing diplomatic camps."

What Sir Edward Grey preached, he practised. His policy during the Balkan crisis of 1912-13 earned for him from some quarters the title of "The Peacemaker of Europe," and from the German Secretary of State (Herr von Jagow) the following words of friendly recognition:—

"One of the last statements—unless I am mistaken, quite the last—made by my late predecessor in the Reichstag dealt with our relations with England. He stated on that occasion that throughout the recent crisis (in the Near East) our relations with England had been specially trustful. He pointed out the good service rendered to the cause of an understanding among all the Powers by the frank conversation conducted in entire confidence between London and Berlin during all the phases of this crisis, and he expressed the expectation that they would continue to render this service. It affords me special satisfaction that on the first occasion which has presented itself for me to speak in this place I can affirm that this expectation has been absolutely and entirely fulfilled. The intimate exchange of views which we are maintaining with the British Government has very materially contributed to the removal of difficulties of various kinds which have arisen during the last few months. We have now seen that we have not only points of contact with England of a sentimental nature, but that similar interests also exist. I am not a prophet, but I entertain the hope that on the ground of common interests, which in politics is the most fertile ground, we can continue to work with England and perhaps to reap the fruits of our labours." (Speech in the Reichstag, Feb. 7, 1913.)

VIII.—*Co-operation for Peace Ended by the
“Mailed Fist,”* 1914.

Unhappily those labours were fruitless. Just as in 1910, when there seemed some hope of a diplomatic understanding it was broken by a sudden resort to the “mailed fist” (above, p. 28): so the favourable diplomatic outlook, just described, in 1913 was fatally clouded over in 1914 by an exhibition of “shining armour.” I have summarised elsewhere the evidence contained in the English White Paper which shows how the British Government strove insistently to maintain the peace of Europe, and how at each stage those efforts were frustrated by Germany. It may be well to add here that the case against Germany—the case that she deliberately pursued the policy of the mailed fist instead of the policy of diplomacy—is proved no less clearly in the *résumé* prefixed to her own White Book. “We were perfectly aware that a possible warlike attitude of Austria-Hungary against Serbia might bring Russia upon the field, and that it might therefore involve us in a war, in accordance with our duty as allies. . . . We permitted Austria a completely free hand in her action towards Serbia. . . . Sir Edward Grey had made the proposal to submit the differences between Austria-Hungary and Serbia to a conference of the Ambassadors of Germany, France, and Italy, under his chairmanship. We declared that we could not participate in such a conference.” No peace-seeking diplomacy, it will be seen, could be admitted;

only shining armour. Yet even that display might not have caused a European war had not the mailed fist of Germany insisted upon it. The crowning tragedy is best told in the dispatch addressed to Sir E. Grey by Sir M. de Bunsen, lately British Ambassador at Vienna :—

The German Government claim to have persevered to the end in the endeavour to support at Vienna your successive proposals in the interests of peace. Herr von Tschirschky abstained from inviting my co-operation or that of the French and Russian ambassadors in carrying out his instructions to that effect, and I had no means of knowing what response he was receiving from the Austro-Hungarian Government. I was, however, kept fully informed by M. Schebeko, the Russian ambassador, of his own direct negotiations with Count Berchtold [Austrian Foreign Minister]. M. Schebeko endeavoured on the 28th July to persuade the Austro-Hungarian Government to furnish Count Szápáry [Austrian Ambassador to Russia] with full power to continue at St. Petersburg the hopeful conversations which had there been taking place between the latter and M. Sazonof [Russian Foreign Minister]. Count Berchtold refused at the time, but two days later [30th July], though in the meantime Russia had partially mobilised against Austria, he received M. Schebeko again, in a perfectly friendly manner, and gave his consent to the continuance of the conversations at St. Petersburg. From now onwards the tension between Russia and Germany was much greater than between Russia and Austria. As between the latter an arrangement seemed almost in sight . . . M. Schebeko repeatedly told me he was prepared to accept any reasonable compromise. Unfortunately, these conversations at St. Petersburg and Vienna were cut short by the transfer of the dispute to the more dangerous ground of a direct conflict between Germany and Russia. Germany intervened on the 31st July by means of her double ultimatum to St. Petersburg and Paris. The ultimatums were of a

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* * “ WHY BRITAIN IS AT WAR ” was prepared primarily for circulation by the Victoria League. A list of other Pamphlets and of Leaflets, issued by the League in connection with the War, may be obtained on application to the Secretary, Victoria League, 2, Wood Street, Westminster S.W.

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