CHAPTER XIV

FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN

1920–1921

So long as the conduct of the Peace negotiations was in other hands, Lord Curzon was able to devote a large share of his attention to those Eastern problems which always bulked so large on the horizon of his mind. But when, in October 1919, Mr. Balfour withdrew from the Foreign Office, he found himself confronted with a host of difficulties nearer home to which, whether he would or not, he was obliged to turn his mind.

Once before—when at long last he had become a Cabinet Minister—disillusionment had come upon him with something of a shock. Now, as he gathered the strings of British foreign policy into his own hands, he was assailed once more with feelings of acute disappointment. Neither the position of the Foreign Minister, nor the part which he was called upon to play, bore any resemblance to the picture which he had painted of them in those far-off Oxford days, which had slipped imperceptibly but inexorably into the limbo of the past. The conception of the Foreign Secretary and his work which he had formed in those days, had been based on his study of the personalities and times of Palmerston and Disraeli. The story of British Foreign Policy as he had read it had been one of "dazzling strokes of policy, of baffled rivals and discomfited opponents; of perpetual shouting of challenges and waving of flags."[1] He himself would have been an impressive figure on such a stage as

[1] Statement on Foreign policy made by Lord Curzon to Representatives of the United Kingdom, British Dominions and India, on June the 22nd, 1921.

Palmerston and Disraeli trod. Even as Under Secretary during Lord Salisbury's tenure of the Foreign Office, he had exhibited impatience at a Foreign Policy conducted in what he had regarded as a minor key. And the post-war policy of Great Britain had inevitably to be conducted in a minor key. If there was one thing more than another that had to be excluded from it, it was "the perpetual shouting of challenges and waving of flags." Caution rather than brilliance, self-abnegation rather than assertion, were the qualities which the sombre circumstances of the time demanded in the direction of the country's Foreign Policy. "We have, as I read the lessons of the time," he declared, "to keep what we have obtained, sometimes almost against our will; not to seize anything else; to reconcile, not defy; to pacify, not to conquer."[1]

On the other hand, a policy of splendid isolation was no longer possible even if it had been desirable. Great Britain had been sucked into the vortex of the European maelstrom and she could not afford to stand aside now that the task of salvage was being taken in hand. The gigantic work of reconstruction could only be carried through by continued co-operation between the Great Powers who had won the war and who were now trying to gain the peace. Decisions of momentous consequence had constantly to be taken; but they were not the decisions of this Power or of that Power, but of four Great Powers acting, or at least attempting to act, in unison. In such circumstances frequent consultation was unavoidable. "The papers are fond of deriding the meetings of the so-called Supreme Council," Lord Curzon observed. "The Supreme Council is merely a name given to the Allied Conferences held from time to time of the Representatives of the Four Great Powers."[2]

This constant meeting for consultation—the necessity of an unprecedented situation—was a feature of his work as Foreign Secretary which Lord Curzon himself disliked. "Believe me," he declared, "it is no particular enjoyment to those who take part in these Conferences to have to attend them. They break up one's Parliamentary and public life and duties at home; they take one for indefinite periods to foreign countries; they involve long, com-

[1] Statement on June 22nd, 1921. [2] *Ibid.*

plicated and sometimes vexatious discussions." But he saw no possible alternative—"for the time being they are the only means of maintaining the peace of Europe and recovering the lost equilibrium of the world."[1]

And if no one realised more surely than Lord Curzon that the keystone of the arch on which the ruins of continental Europe must be rebuilt was the closest possible union between Great Britain and France, no one was more acutely conscious of the difficulty of maintaining so intimate a relationship. There were differences inherent in the history, the mentality and the national character of the two peoples. And, apart altogether from these differences of a fundamental nature, it was inevitable, in the circumstances of the case, that the French view of the German problem should differ essentially from the British view of it. It was true enough that while the war lasted the feelings of the British people had been deeply stirred against Germany. Her conduct had excited in their minds burning anger and righteous indignation.

> "But we are the kind of people who, although fierce in conflict, are not lasting in resentment or bitter in revenge, and when the war was over, more particularly when our signatures had been placed to the Peace Treaty and we had a German Ambassador back in London, I believe there was not one of us who was not quite content, to the best of his ability, to wipe out the past, to start again on a new basis, and gradually to build up relations which in time may be those of friendship in the future."[2]

With France it was not so. Great as had been our own sufferings, the sufferings of the French people had been infinitely greater. Her losses on the battlefield had been larger; vast tracts of what had been smiling and prosperous country still lay ravished and mouldering to ruin before her eyes. And, above all, in the case of France there still remained, unaffected by the Treaty wrung from Germany, the apprehension of an open frontier on the East. Hence it was that she snatched at every opportunity for the military occupation of

[1] Statement on June 22nd, 1921. [2] *Ibid.*

German territory across the Rhine. The supreme task confronting British diplomacy in Europe was, consequently, that of exercising a restraining influence upon France. The delicacy and difficulty of the task were being constantly illustrated. Early in 1920 the violation of the neutral zone by Germany in the course of operations forced upon her by a Communist outbreak in the Ruhr, led France —in spite of the advice of the British Government to the contrary— to occupy Frankfurt and four other German towns. Later on the British Government had been reluctantly persuaded to agree to the occupation of three towns at the entrance of the Ruhr Valley. And Lord Curzon was apprehensive of further projects for the occupation of German territory; for mixed with French fears he thought that he discerned certain well-defined ambitions which loomed large in the mind of the French Chamber, whose sentiments the French Government were unable to ignore. Elected after the war, the Deputies certainly appeared to reflect the mood of triumphant aggressiveness induced in the French people by the sudden turn in the tide of battle which had opened up a dazzling prospect of scarcely hoped for victory in the autumn of 1918. Fear of defeat had been succeeded by the amazing realisation of victory, and the reaction was not more extreme than was to be expected in a people of the Latin race. Moreover, the goal of French chauvinism was a sufficiently alluring one. With Lorraine, the Saar Valley and the Ruhr in her grasp, she would become the mistress of Europe in respect of coal, iron and steel; and with those countries under her military control she would become the military Dictator of the Continent.

At all these many Conferences, consequently, to which, as Lord Curzon once remarked, he looked back "with a shudder almost of horror," the task of the representatives of Great Britain, if difficult and uninspiring, was at least clear. They had first and last to restrain France from such action as might precipitate a fresh outbreak of war. The task was rendered all the more difficult by the failure of the German Government to execute the Treaty to which their representatives had appended their reluctant signatures. Lord Curzon, though he sometimes lost patience with what he regarded as the ineptitude of successive German Governments, was usually ready

to make allowances for the difficulties of their position. In 1920 they held precariously to office between the Scylla of Communism on the one side and the Charybdis of Monarchical reaction on the other. And at any moment the patient and painstaking work of British diplomacy at the Conference table was liable to be upset by news of a German internal crisis.

> "Our Foreign Office is upside down," Lord Curzon wrote on March the 12th, 1920. "There is a Monarchical revolution in Berlin! Feisal has been proclaimed King of Syria! The Egyptians have declared their independence! One needs nerves of steel to stand this strain—all the more that the Powers are not acting loyally together. I am here (in London) over Sunday and shall be too busy to stir out."[1]

The Monarchical revolution—the Kapp "Putsch," as it came to be spoken of—flared up and then petered out, a flickering rush-light where a flaming torch had been intended; but this and similar troubles provided the German Government with an excuse for their own dilatoriness in discharging their obligations to the Allies. And their failure to do so, whether due to impotence or to deliberate evasion, provided France in her turn with undeniable justification for a policy of aggression. Over and over again the fate of Europe trembled in the balance while men of strangely different temperament and outlook argued endlessly round the Conference table.

From fragmentary descriptions contained in letters and occasional speeches it is possible to construct an interesting picture of the proceedings behind the closed doors of these fateful gatherings. And, against a background of grave international discussion, carried on between the flock-papered walls of the rococo buildings of various continental resorts, are to be seen delineated the likenesses of two men—two men thrown by Fate into intimate association, but standing in all that makes for personality as far as the poles asunder.

> "I have a big fight on presently—at 4 p.m.—at the Allied Conference," Lord Curzon wrote on March the 24th, 1920.

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon.

"I had to ring up P.M. just now, 3.20 p.m., at Walton Heath. Reply came that he is fast asleep in bed. Extraordinary man! I wish I could sometimes get to bed or to sleep except at 3 a.m."[1]

That was Lord Curzon's trouble. All his life he had lived at high pressure, driving body and mind relentlessly to the utmost limit of endurance. And now, with the pressure remorselessly maintained, the mechanism gave increasingly ominous signs of wear and tear. "I am so dead beat," he wrote one day in August 1920, "that I fell asleep after dinner and can only just pull myself together to write this."[2] More often his complaint was of inability to sleep. "I tried to sleep without any drugs," he wrote on another occasion. "No good—awake 11.30 to 2.30. Then I took a mild chloral and got about two hours' light sleep, the first for ten days; then awake again till 8.30 a.m."[3] Yet warnings were no more heeded now than they had ever been. "On Wednesday night," he wrote in reference to his departure from London for one of the many conferences in Paris, "I did not get to bed till 3.20 a.m.—so much to do before starting."[4]

Mid-April of the year 1920 saw him at San Remo—"a very poor sort of place confined in a very narrow strip between the hills and the sea, much less tidy and spick-and-span than the French Riviera." Outside the hotel in which the British Delegation were quartered, big Italian gendarmes in heavy black uniforms and cocked hats patrolled the paths, and there was "an eternal twitter of the engines of Italian motors, which seem to make quite a different noise from any other."[5] He was oppressed by the nature of his surroundings; by the constant presence of the gendarmes—"of whom there are six hundred walking about and dogging us as though we were criminals"; by the pressing attentions of the photographers—"of whom there must be thousands"; by the pressmen and the crowds of interested people from every land under the sun—Syrians, Zionists, Armenians, Poles, Ukrainians, Chaldeans, everyone who wanted to influence the Conference. "They take rooms in the same

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon [2] *Ibid* [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid*

hotel as we are in and they dog our footsteps wherever we go." The one cause for satisfaction was the discovery that his bed-room was equipped both with venetian blinds and with shutters—so that he hoped to be able to sleep at nights.[1]

The Conference met for discussion on April the 18th. "We had our first meeting in a great showy, pretentious villa high up on the hills behind, called Villa Devachon. It was built by an Earl of Mexborough, who was, I believe, a Buddhist. After his death it was bought by a rich Italian." He noted with interest the attitude of the chief delegates—"Nitti in the chair, very affable and bland. Millerand quite subdued; Lloyd George rather taking the lead." The earlier sittings, while the Conference was settling down and its members getting to know one another, were devoted to consideration of some of the smaller matters on which decisions were required. The discussions which took place were sufficient to show that even on matters of comparatively minor importance it was not always easy for men of such different personality to find common ground. Nor were the differences always between the delegations of the countries represented at the Conference; there were occasions on which the members of a delegation differed amongst themselves.

Outside the Conference Room the delegates met in excellent spirits. "In the evening he (Lloyd George) gave a dinner to Millerand, Berthelot and Co. Lots of good stories were told. A.J.B. talked atrocious French with perfect imperturbability. The P.M. was in tearing spirits." And so long as the big question—the German problem—was kept in the background all went well. "We have made pretty good progress with our work," Lord Curzon wrote at the end of the second day, "and the members of the Conference, who now know each other well, get on excellently. But some of the biggest questions have not yet been faced." And when he wrote on April the 24th, the main question was still untouched. "Foch at dinner was most interesting, so precise, emphatic, almost epigrammatic in speech"; but—"We have not got to the discussion about Germany yet. It is always hanging over our heads." So difficult was the task of the British Delegation, where Franco-

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon.

German relations were concerned, that the ex-Foreign Secretary was called in for consultation. "A.J.B. turned up last night from Cannes," Lord Curzon wrote on April the 21st, "for a discussion about policy *re* Germany, and is going to stay till we go. He is writing a book, and says it does not matter whether he writes it here or anywhere else." And under the shadow of this cloud the Conference lost something of its initial buoyancy. "Lloyd George has fits of impetuosity at the Conference which sometimes take him in the right direction, sometimes in the wrong. The French are depressed and take little part. . . ."

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the San Remo Conference should have dispersed with many of the most important questions still unsolved. The fact of the matter was that the relations between the French and British Governments had been seriously strained by the independent action of the former—to which reference has been made—in occupying Frankfurt and the four other German towns across the Rhine. Lord Curzon himself had been greatly incensed by the action of the French and Belgians, and had spoken his mind very plainly in his conversations with the Ambassadors of those two countries. It must be admitted that he was not without grounds for his irritation. For six weeks he had been presiding over an Allied Conference in London. Over and over again during those six weeks decisions had been postponed owing to the refusal of M. Millerand to give the French Ambassador plenipotentiary powers either in great things or in small. And then, during the opening days of April, Lord Curzon had learned, not through the ordinary official channels, but through reports in the newspapers, that without warning, and in defiance of the plainly expressed wishes of their Allies, France and Belgium had embarked upon what he regarded as their rash adventure.

The gravity of the situation which had thus been created is clear from the tone of the conversations which took place between Lord Curzon and the French Ambassador, as reported by the former to Lord Derby, at that time British Ambassador in Paris.

"The French Ambassador called upon me by appointment at noon to-day. I had just received a series of telegrams—

reporting the action of the French Government, both in Paris and Berlin, in relation to the German request to be allowed to send troops into the Ruhr valley—which revealed a state of affairs so surprising and so disquieting that I seized the opportunity to speak to M. Cambon at once upon the subject. Only yesterday, at the meeting of the Allied Conference, when I mentioned the persistent rumours in the newspapers that M. Millerand had been dealing separately with the German representative in Paris and had made proposals or used threats about the French occupation of Frankfurt and Darmstadt, M. Cambon had himself declined to attach the slightest importance to these rumours, which he had told me were only newspaper gossip, and had said that it was incredible that M. Millerand should have used such language or should have contemplated such action without prior consultation with the Allies . . . . I said . . . . one thing appeared to be quite certain, and that was that what M. Cambon himself had told us yesterday was incredible, had actually occurred. M. Millerand had acted, and was acting, independently of the Allies, and indeed, without even informing them of his action. . . . This, I went on to say, was an impossible state of affairs. There were only two ways of dealing with the situation; either the Allies should act as they had hitherto acted, in combination, or they might act separately. The former was the only sound and practical policy. We were anxious to adhere to it and were prepared to do so. But if M. Millerand was unable to attend the meetings of the Conference here, preferred to remain in Paris and regarded himself, in his double capacity of French Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, as if he were the sole Supreme Council now existing, and if he took advantage of that position to speak and act independently in the way he had apparently done, then we might have to abandon the policy of co-operation, and to consider very seriously whether we should not withdraw altogether from the occupied area, and decline to share the responsibility for action concerning which we were not even consulted."[1]

[1]Despatch from Lord Curzon to Lord Derby, April 18t, 1920.

At a subsequent discussion, in the course of which Lord Curzon felt obliged to lay further stress upon the fact that action such as the French Government had taken was really "incompatible with that mutual understanding and that common action upon which the stability of the Alliance and the security of Europe alike depended," M. Cambon declared that during the whole of his long service in England, amounting now to twenty-two years, this was the most painful and serious moment with which he had been faced.

It was hardly to be expected that M. Millerand should be willing to cry *peccavi*. And, since Lord Curzon was equally unwilling to accord an *ex post facto* adhesion to action which he regarded as ill-conceived and fraught with danger, the attitude of the French delegates at San Remo, if unhelpful, was at least intelligible. It had not been rendered more cordial by a proposal suddenly put forward by Mr. Lloyd George, but eventually dropped, that German representatives should immediately be summoned to the Conference table.

San Remo in April was followed by Spa in July. And at Spa representatives of Germany were admitted for the first time to a Conference with the Allies. For this advance Lord Curzon conceded exclusive credit to Mr. Lloyd George. "I believe the French," he declared at a later date, "would have been ready to go on with the old system of declining to meet them and trying to settle the business by correspondence which would have taken a decade. The whole situation changed when we got these people at the table before us, and when they saw themselves treated not only as human beings but as equals."[1] On July the 8th he was able to report that the Allied terms about disarmament had been accepted. "To-morrow," he added in a letter to Lady Curzon, "we resume with Coal, War Criminals, and Reparations—a rather grim list." The list proved to be not only grim, but a source of infinite difficulty. "Trouble has arisen in the last twenty-four hours," he wrote on July the 12th, "with the Germans and also with the French about coal and Reparations; and the Conference which was to have terminated to-day is to be prolonged all the week."

[1] Statement to the Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India, June 22nd, 1921.

The trouble was not easily allayed. "All the morning," he told Lady Curzon the next day, "I was busy on Foreign Office work, while the Conference discussed coal. This afternoon we had a meeting and it seems as though the negotiations with the Germans might entirely break down, as they are obdurate about the coal that they can furnish under the Treaty. The situation is very serious, as it is impossible to say what a breakdown will involve." At 10.45 the same night he added as a postscript—

> "We have had a day of great perturbations, and this minute I have come up from Lloyd George's room where I have been dining and where Millerand was hastily summoned, to see if we can come to an arrangement at the last minute with the Germans, otherwise there will be a rupture to-morrow and the Allied forces will have to occupy a portion of Germany called the Ruhr Valley. Sir H. Wilson has been hastily recalled from England and arrived ten minutes ago."

Lord Curzon's relations with soldiers in high positions had not always been happy, as the story of his life and work in India has shown. For Sir Henry Wilson he entertained feelings of real regard. He appreciated to the full his Irish humour and he had a high opinion of his ability. And when, all but two years later, news reached him on a bed of sickness of Henry Wilson's tragic end, his feelings were deeply stirred. "F. has this minute been in to tell me that poor Henry Wilson was assassinated this afternoon in his house in London, presumably by a Sinn Feiner. What an iniquity; what cursed scoundrels. Ireland is, indeed, a heritage of woe, a hell on earth with demons for many of its inhabitants."[1] Towards the end of his life, Sir Henry Wilson became a bitter critic of the Government; but Lord Curzon declared that, however caustic his denunciation, he could never lose the high esteem in which he held him.

At Spa, fortunately, Henry Wilson's services were not after all required. A Coal Agreement was reached and signed; and the question of Reparations was left over for future settlement. This thorny question was further debated at a Conference in London

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon, June 22nd, 1922.

early in the following year, which not only proved abortive, but resulted in an Allied ultimatum to Germany; in the fall of one German Government; in the rise of another and in the eventual acceptance by the latter, with Herr Wirth as Chancellor, of the Allied demands.

These difficulties made frequent consultation between the Allies, and in particular between Great Britain and France, imperative; and in the course of them signs of the temperamental friction which later made the relations between the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary so difficult, became apparent. From a bed of sickness—due to the recurring trouble in his back—Lord Curzon wrote on April the 22nd, 1921:

> "I am in trouble about the extraordinary tactics of the P.M. over Lympne. He has been trying by every manner of means to prevent me from going, on the ground that it ought to be a Conference between Briand and himself alone. When, however, it transpired that the former insisted upon bringing Berthelot, as there were other Foreign Office questions to be discussed, I sent Vansittart over to enquire whether I should be expected to go as well. He returned no answer, but telephoned this morning to Vansittart, my Private Secretary, without even consulting me, ordering him to go to Lympne to-morrow in my stead."[1]

To Lord Curzon with his natural sensitiveness keyed up, as it invariably was, by physical suffering caused by the nervous affection in his back, such incidents, however trifling, acquired an exaggerated and sinister significance. He complained to his friends that he was subjected to deliberate ignominy; and he brooded darkly on the possibility of resignation.

On this occasion the breach was healed without great difficulty. It was explained that Lord Curzon was under a misapprehension as to what had happened. His Private Secretary had been invited under the impression that he was too unwell to attend himself, and that in these circumstances he would like to be directly represented.

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon.

Regret was expressed that, owing to a misunderstanding, this arrangement had been made without prior consultation with Lord Curzon himself. And a few days later he was writing as if no contretemps had occurred.

> "I have been at the Conference all the morning. I had two and a half hours with all the members, engaged in a protracted struggle with Briand over the form in which our policy is to be announced. At times agreement seemed impossible, but finally he gave way and we (i.e. the British) realised a decisive victory. When we went over to Downing Street Lloyd George was full of praise and congratulations at the result."[1]

The day had been a heavy one, judged even by Lord Curzon's standards. "Yesterday," he mentioned in a letter on May the 3rd, "I calculated my day—14 hours of work! Worse and more than any navvy." And discussion was not yet over. "The Conference sat this morning, 11 a.m. till 1.30, and now, 3 p.m., we are about to meet again. I hope it may finish to-night." Progress was satisfactory, and he had a word of praise for M. Briand. "We all like Briand for his humour and geniality and utter casualness. He and Lloyd George really have a regard for one another."

The cause of all the difficulty had been, as usual, the difference between the points of view of Great Britain and France—the latter straining at the leash, ready and anxious to spring; Great Britain, determined to reduce as far as possible her commitments, steadily holding back. Lord Curzon—or at least the Government in which he was Foreign Minister—was sometimes accused of being pro-German. Such charges shocked him. He was certainly anxious to see Germany given the same chance of recovery as was given to all those who had fought against the Allies; for he realised more clearly than did some people how closely the economic recovery of Europe depended upon the recovery of its constituent parts, and more particularly upon that of so important a constituent as Germany. But he cherished no feelings of undue tenderness towards the German people. Their mentality struck him as being "at once

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon, May 2nd, 1921.

the most formidable and the stupidest in Europe." They made every conceivable blunder in dealing both with France and with Great Britain, so that they appeared to be absolute children in diplomacy. But in treating with them he admitted that he never quite knew whether they were really perfidious or merely perverse, whether they were actually dishonest or merely dull, whether they were friendly or definitely hostile.

Before Germany's acceptance of the ultimatum issued to her in the spring of 1921, he had agreed to proposals put forward by the French representatives at a Conference held in London in March, for imposing upon Germany certain sanctions, notably the occupation of Duisburg and two other towns on the right bank of the Rhine, and the establishment of special Rhineland customs barriers. On the German Government notifying their acceptance of the ultimatum, he took the initiative in urging the cancellation of the sanctions, and represented to the Cabinet that the matter should be brought up at the forthcoming meeting of the Supreme Council and the concurrence of the Allies pressed for. The French Government took a different view. From the beginning they had made it clear that they were determined not to allow the Rhineland sanction to be cancelled until Germany had given "real proof" of her *bona fides* in executing the terms embodied in the ultimatum. On one pretext or another they postponed the meeting of the Supreme Council. And since it was by the Allied Powers in Conference that the sanctions had been imposed, and only by the same authority that they could be cancelled, they necessarily remained in force.

A meeting of the Supreme Council had at last been arranged for August the 4th when a fresh subject of dispute between the Governments of France and Great Britain arose in connection with events in the eastern districts of Germany. The bone of contention here was Upper Silesia, inhabited to a great extent by Germans, but coveted and claimed by Poland. Pending a settlement German troops had been withdrawn, and an Allied Commission had been set up to administer the area, to conduct a plebiscite of the inhabitants and in due course to demarcate the frontier. To the surprise and chagrin of France and Poland, the plebiscite held in March had resulted in a decision in favour of Germany by a majority of more

than six to four. This had proved to be only the beginning of the trouble. The Allied Commission had failed to agree upon a frontier and, while the Commission deliberated and argued, Korfanty, a turbulent character of Polish extraction, acted. At the head of an armed force estimated at close on 100,000 he swooped down upon Upper Silesia, put out of commission the authority of the Powers, and, but for the resistance of the German inhabitants who organised themselves for defence under a German officer of the name of Hoeffer, would undoubtedly have taken over the country. The contingents of French and Italian troops on the spot did little to stay the incursion, and it was not until the British battalions (which had been withdrawn after the taking of the plebiscite) were sent back, that the position began to improve.

The question in dispute in July was whether the situation in Silesia was such as to call for the despatch of further reinforcements. Lord Curzon was satisfied that the troops already on the spot were sufficient to cope with the situation; the French Government were equally certain that they were not, and without waiting for the approval of the Allied Governments, demanded facilities from the German Government for the transmission of another division of French soldiers across German territory, while at the same time rejecting the British proposal that the Supreme Council should at once meet and settle the frontier. This precipitate action was gravely embarrassing to Great Britain. Under the terms of the Peace Treaty the German Government were under an obligation to grant facilities for the passage of Allied troops across German territory, but only if asked for by the Allies in conjunction. And taking advantage of this proviso they had refused the French demand. To the further embarrassment of the Allies, the Note in which their refusal was conveyed to the French Government was made public. It was interpreted by French public opinion as a rebuff of calculated insolence which no German Government would have dared to administer, except in the belief that in the matter at issue the sympathy of Great Britain was with them.

Relations between France and Great Britain had, indeed, never been so strained since the termination of the war, and in the irritation which was aroused across the channel the value of the Alliance

between the two countries was freely questioned. Nor was this attitude due solely to the annoyance of the moment. Great disappointment had been caused by the failure of the Anglo-American Guarantee; a conviction had taken root in the mind of the French people that at each successive Conference between the representatives of the two nations the British point of view had been upheld at the expense of the French; the Russian policy of Great Britain—particularly the conclusion of a Trading Agreement—was regarded with suspicion and dislike. French public opinion was, in fact, resentful, irritated, definitely hostile. Nor were the French Government one whit behind French public opinion in their resentment. The French Ambassador found himself in the painful position of having to convey to Lord Curzon the deliberate opinion of his Government that the attitude of Great Britain, if adhered to, must lead to a definite rupture between the two countries, since persistence in their refusal to associate themselves with the French demand must inevitably be regarded in France as an indication that, in this matter at least, it was their intention to support Germany against her.

The interview was one which each realised was fraught with the possibility of momentous consequences. Lord Curzon listened at first with astonishment and then with hot indignation to the Note which the Ambassador had been charged by his Government to read to him. So shaken was he by the menace which it seemed to him to convey, that he declined, without further opportunity for reflection and consultation with his colleagues, to say anything on the specific issues which it raised. He could not, however, refrain from observing to the Ambassador that it struck him as "deplorable" that such a communication should have been presented to him by the Government of an Ally. Had the French Government, he asked, fully measured the seriousness of the situation which the Note created, and its inevitable consequence upon the Alliance?

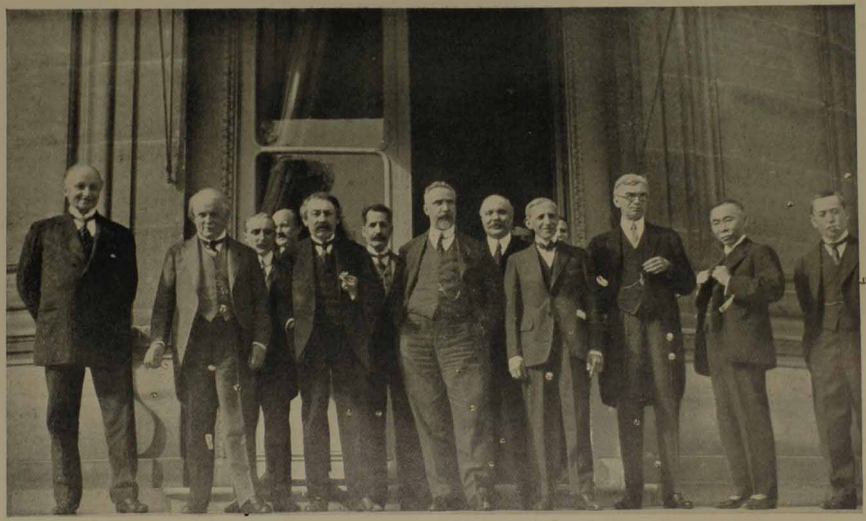
As the door closed behind the retreating figure of the Comte de St. Aulaire, it may well have seemed to Lord Curzon that it had at the same time closed ominously on a chapter of European history. With an open rupture between Great Britain and France he saw no hope of escape from the morass from which a stricken world was

struggling painfully to emerge. The ensuing twenty-four hours were a time of anxious consultation. The Cabinet met to hear Lord Curzon's comments on the situation and to consider the lines of his proposed reply. They met again to listen to the reply itself and, at the close, to accord their unanimous endorsement to a statement of the position of Great Britain which was characterised as "masterly." So grave a view did the Government take of the crisis which had suddenly arisen, that it was considered desirable to call the Prime Ministers of the British dominions and the representatives of India, then in London, into consultation. The reply drawn up by Lord Curzon on July the 28th, and communicated to M. Briand by Lord Hardinge on July the 29th, represented, therefore, the views not of the Government of the United Kingdom only, but of the British Empire. It was a closely reasoned statement in language which, while courteous and dignified, lacked nothing in firmness. It concluded with the assertion that the position which had been reached was one that concerned not France and Great Britain alone, but the whole of the Allied and Associated Powers; and that it was only by that tribunal that the matter in dispute could be resolved.

The crowning disaster of a rupture between the two countries was fortunately avoided and a *modus vivendi* found. A meeting of the Supreme Council took place on August the 8th, at which it was agreed that the question of Silesia should be referred to the Council of the League of Nations and that the Customs barrier on the Rhine should be terminated forthwith, the question of the military sanctions being postponed for future consideration. The corner was thus mercifully turned, though no attempt was made to disguise the gravity of the crisis through which Europe had passed. The meeting of the Supreme Council was described, by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons eight days later, as in many respects the most important meeting held since the declaration of peace. "There were questions there," he stated, "which menaced the solidarity of the Alliance." No wonder that Lord Curzon found the burden of public affairs a heavy one. "Oh dear! it is time I got out of this," he wrote on August the 17th, "and sought a little rest somewhere . . . . I am very tired and stunned and seem never to be out of trouble."[1]

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon.

This much of history has seemed necessary in order to indicate the nature of the background against which, during these years, Lord Curzon moved as Foreign Secretary. We may now pause for a little to see how he reacted to the environment in which he found himself.



MEETING OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL AT PARIS, August 8-13, 1921.

Sir M. Hankey.

M. Cattier[illegible] P. Berthelot M. Loucheur Viscount Ishii.

Lord Curzon D. Lloyd George A. Fa[illegible] B. Bonomi M. della Torretta G. Harvey Baron Hagashi