CHAPTER XXI

THE SUMMER OF 1923

THE spring of 1923 was a troubled one for Lord Curzon. During the three months that he had spent at Lausanne he had found little time to devote to the solution, or even to the consideration, of problems other than those with which he was directly dealing. It was of deliberate purpose that he had gone to Lausanne in person instead of issuing instructions from London and delegating to others the actual work of negotiation, as had been done by the Foreign Ministers of the other leading Powers represented at the Conference. For the fact was that his heart still dwelt in Asia rather than in Europe. He had once quoted with obvious approval an *obiter dictum* attributed to Napoleon—"Cette vieille Europe m'ennuie!" And it was one which must often have been on the tip of his own tongue as he endeavoured to thread his way wearily through the maze of conflicting interests and cross-purposes, from which the protagonists in the political and diplomatic struggle in progress on the Continent seemed wholly unable to extricate themselves.

News of the trend of opinion and of events in Paris, Rome, Brussels and Berlin was, of course, constantly obtruding itself upon him; but it fell for the most part upon an inattentive mind, and the visions which it conjured up flitted smudgily across the background of his consciousness with much of the inconsequence of passing dreams. He was not capable, as he himself frankly admitted, of skimming the cream from a basin of milk. If he took up a question at all, he must take it up thoroughly; study it *ab ovo;* read and assimilate everything that was on record concerning it; familiarise himself with its smallest details. And, with his mind absorbed by the

daily complexities of the Turkish negotiations, he shrank from the labour of thus taking up the question of Reparations, which by the dawn of the year 1923 had become for the Allied Powers the question of the hour. "As I could not take part in the Reparations talks," he told Lord Crewe, who, at his request, had recently accepted the Paris Embassy, "I have preferred not to interfere at all, but to leave it entirely to Bonar."[1]

He did so with all the more readiness because he realised that in the attitude which the French Government were determined to assume would be found one more obstacle in the way of any real re-establishment of peace in Europe—"of which," he impressed upon Lord Crewe, when sending him to represent Great Britain at Paris, "a clear and solid understanding between France and ourselves is an essential condition." For the letters which he received from time to time from the Prime Minister left little room for doubt as to the extent of the divergence which was opening up between the two Governments on this issue. "As regards our Conference," Mr. Bonar Law wrote on December the 12th, 1922, "it has been a complete failure, as indeed was inevitable, for Poincaré came determined on two points: (1) that whatever happened he would occupy Essen, (2) that he could not reduce the amount of the French claims except to the exact extent by which we reduced their debt to us. . . . I made it clear to him that no British Government could agree to the occupation of the Ruhr, to enforce demands which everyone recognised as impossible."

There, indeed, lay the crucial difference between the views taken by the Governments of France and Great Britain respectively. The British Government faced the economic realities of the situation with a gaze unclouded by other considerations. They may have suspected the motives with which the German Government had embarked upon the policy of inflation which had started the mark on what Lord Curzon described as "the first downward movement to its final catastrophic descent"; but they did not allow their suspicions to influence their judgment. They surveyed the situation dispassionately as it existed; saw that, before any substantial sum in Reparations was possible, some sort of order must be evolved out of

[1] Letter dated December 25th, 1922.

the chaos into which German finances had fallen, and made proposals accordingly. Briefly, what Mr. Bonar Law proposed when he proceeded to Paris in January was that the Reparation debt should be reduced to £2,500,000,000; that bonds of that amount should be immediately issued; and that, subject to the establishment in Berlin of a foreign Financial Council to supervise the reorganisation of German finance, a four year moratorium should be granted. He accompanied his proposal with an offer, in the event of the above suggestions being accepted, to cancel the French and Italian war debts to Great Britain, less certain sums representing gold deposits already in British hands and various minor financial adjustments; and he added that should Germany fail to satisfy the Council that she was making adequate efforts at financial reorganisation, he would be prepared to join in the forcible seizure of German revenues and assets and in the extension of the occupation.

The French Government looked at the matter from a different point of view. They needed money badly enough and were determined to get it if they could. But when it came to a question of the means by which the object which they had in view could best be effected, their judgment was always influenced by considerations which were predominantly political; and from first to last the lure of "productive pledges," involving an advance into the Ruhr, proved too strong to be resisted. In these circumstances there was nothing to be done but to agree to differ; and on January the 11th, with Great Britain standing aside, the occupation of the Ruhr began.

When, therefore, early in February 1923, Lord Curzon returned to England from Lausanne to resume his normal duties at the Foreign Office, he found Great Britain and France severed by what was euphemistically referred to as a *rupture cordiale*, and himself committed to a policy of benevolent neutrality towards a venture which he agreed with the Prime Minister in thinking was doomed to failure. A policy of benevolent neutrality in such circumstances was one which it was a good deal easier to criticise than to defend. The spectacle of a British Government looking on impotently while her chief Ally got tangled up in a situation which was little removed from war, was certainly not an impressive one. "Public opinion here is getting more restive," Lord Curzon wrote on

March the 18th, "and will not stand benevolent neutrality *ad infinitum*."[1]

Not the least of the disadvantages of the policy, from the point of view of a man of Lord Curzon's sensitive nature, was the equivocal position in which it inevitably placed him personally. As the representative of a Power which had openly declared its neutrality, he could not refuse the frequent approaches which the German Government made through the agency of the German Ambassador in London; nor could he be unaware of the jealous eye with which the French Government regarded the constant visits to the Foreign Office of the representative of a Government with which they themselves had broken off relations. And when, in March, Herr von Sthamer asked him what he thought of a tentative proposal which he declared the German Government would be willing to bring to the notice of M. Poincaré through the good offices of the British Prime Minister, he made little attempt to conceal his irritation. He felt sure, he said, that Mr. Bonar Law would agree with him in saying that no more unfortunate step could be taken than for Germany to communicate her proposals to a single Power alone, and more particularly to Great Britain. Whatever the merits of the proposals themselves, they would be prejudiced from the start and would be likely to meet with instantaneous rejection at the hands of France. As to the nature of the particular proposals, it was not for him to advise the German Government; but he would venture to suggest that they should consider the extreme unwisdom of putting forward proposals which were almost certain to be rejected because of their inadequacy. In his private correspondence he made his feelings plainer still:

> "Bonar and I saw the German on Friday and told him that his Government must get a move on, and that it was no good dishing up bread and milk to the French, who would require some rather stronger sustenance."[2]

These worries brought on an attack of the complaint with which he had been prostrated during the previous summer, and he felt

[1] Letter to Lord Crewe.
[2] Letter to Lord Crewe dated March 18th, 1923.

obliged to seek a renewal of the treatment which had then proved efficacious. "I detest having to come abroad again for another phlebitis treatment," he told Lord Crewe on March the 29th; "but the strain upon me recently has brought back the swelling and pain in my leg and I must really do something."

On his return to England three weeks later, he dealt exhaustively with the situation in a speech in the House of Lords; and, tired of abortive conversations behind the scenes, he took occasion to repeat in public the advice which he had frequently tendered to the German Government:

> "If Germany were to make an offer of her willingness and intention to pay, and to have the payment fixed by authorities properly charged; and if she were at the same time to offer specific guarantees for the continued payments, an advance might be made. That is the substance of the advice which I have consistently given to the German Government, the general wisdom of which I see no reason to doubt."[1]

The first fruits of this tentative eirenicon were scarcely flattering to Lord Curzon's hopes, for the speech drew from the French little but disparaging comment and from the German Government an absurdly inadequate response. "You will return to a time of exceptional anxiety," he told Lord Crewe, who was on his way back to Paris after a brief absence. "The French have given a very poor and niggardly reception to a speech from me that did not certainly suffer from a lack of generosity . . . I suppose that whatever the Germans put forward, he (Poincaré) will turn down, and we shall be plunged again in the old morass."[2] At a later date—on June the 7th—the German Government made a second and more hopeful overture, offering to accept the decision of an impartial international body as to the amount of the Reparations to be met and as to the method of payment, and proposing certain guarantees including the security of the customs and railways. But by then the financial aspect of the matter had been wholly submerged by the political, and France

[1] Speech in the House of Lords on April 20th, 1923.
[2] Letter dated April 28th, 1923.

was bent less upon obtaining Reparations than upon breaking the passive resistance and spirit of the German people. Moreover, there intervened an unforeseen crisis in the domestic situation in Great Britain which was destined profoundly to affect Lord Curzon personally.

For some time past Mr. Bonar Law's health had not been good, and by April rumour had become busy as to his possible intentions; so much so that Lord Curzon wrote in some alarm from Tours, where he was himself undergoing his cure, enquiring if there was any foundation for the stories which were in circulation. The Prime Minister's reply was reassuring:

> "Your rumour is without foundation. I have not been up to the mark for a month or six weeks, but I have no intention of resigning unless my health should make it impossible to continue."[1]

Nevertheless, he found it necessary to take a rest abroad; and on Lord Curzon's return from Tours he found himself called upon to preside at meetings of the Cabinet pending the Prime Minister's return. "I have had a very busy and anxious time over this Ruhr crisis," he wrote on May the 7th; ".... I had a Cabinet this morning at which my policy and Despatches were unanimously endorsed."[2] News of the Prime Minister's health did not improve; and when it became known that instead of returning to England he had been advised to take a sea voyage, it was natural enough that Lord Curzon's friends should be telling him that the crowning ambition of his life was about to see fulfilment.

There were, unfortunately, only too good grounds for the rumours concerning the Prime Minister. The results of the voyage were disappointing. "During the trip on board the boat I was very miserable, suffering pain all the time," he wrote afterwards; "but I trusted that after I got on land I would feel the benefit of the fresh air."[3] This hope was not realised, and he asked Sir Thomas Horder

[1] Letter dated April 5th, 1923.
[2] Letter to Lady Curzon.
[3] Letter to Lord Curzon, dated May 20th, 1923.

to visit him in Paris. When the latter expressed grave dissatisfaction with his condition and suggested a consultation in London, Mr. Bonar Law realised that the burden of the Premiership was one which he was no longer able to bear. He spent the afternoon of Thursday, May the 17th, with Lord and Lady Crewe, explaining the whole situation so far as it affected him. "It was a pathetic moment which we shall not easily forget," Lord Crewe wrote a few days afterwards.

Parliament had risen for the Whitsuntide recess and Lord Curzon was at Montacute when, on the morning of Monday, May the 21st, he received a letter from Mr. Bonar Law announcing his resignation. The consultation had been held in London on the 19th, and had left him no choice, he said. "I understand," he added at the end of his letter, "that it is not customary for the King to ask the Prime Minister to recommend his successor in circumstances like the present and I presume that he will not do so; but if, as I hope, he accepts my resignation at once, he will have to take immediate steps about my successor."[1] This, if indefinite, was at least not discouraging.

Montacute was not connected with the outside world by telephone; and since Lord Curzon conjectured that a hurried return to London on Whit Monday might give rise to unpleasant comment, he remained where he was, a prey to the inevitable anxieties and uncertainties of the situation. To few men could the ordeal of that day have been a more fiery one. Some there may have been who, while not desirous of the Premiership, may yet have been willing to accept it for the sake of duty; others who have toyed pleasantly with the idea of some day attaining to it; others, again, who have frankly and vehemently coveted it; but there can have been few, indeed, who from early youth have planned their lives on the assumption that the Premiership was to be an integral and essential part of the structure. If it is too much to say this of Lord Curzon, it is at least certain that in the minds of some of those who knew him from his boyhood, had taken root the conviction that, ever since his Oxford days, if not, indeed, since his last years at Eton, he had set before himself the ambition of being the one Englishman of whom

[1] Letter dated May 20th, 1923.

history would be able to say that he had held the two offices of Viceroy of India and Prime Minister of England. And when the first part of this vaulting ambition had been accomplished before the age of forty, there had been many who had not hesitated to predict the accomplishment of it in its entirety. ". . . . but what to us all is much more important," a friend had written when congratulating him on his appointment to the Viceroyalty, " you will come back in a few years ready to be Prime Minister. As I have long prophesied that you would go to India, perhaps you will accept this prophecy also."[1]

When Lord Crewe had written his account of the afternoon which Mr. Bonar Law had spent with him, he had added: " Of course I had anticipated that you would be asked to succeed him, and except for what one sees in the papers I am still quite in the dark about the cause of the actual selection."[2]

The Fates, indeed, could hardly have devised a more cruel way of inflicting the blow which they had in store, than circumstances actually conspired to bring about.

On Monday evening the state of suspense in which Lord Curzon had spent the day was relieved to some extent by the receipt of a message from Lord Stamfordham in which he expressed a desire to see him the next day. The great moment of his life which was to place the crown upon a long and meritorious career of service to the State was, surely, at hand. The state of pleasurable anticipation in which he travelled up to town was heightened by the comments of the morning papers. " I found in the morning press," he jotted down, " an almost unanimous opinion that the choice lying between Baldwin and myself, there was no question as to the immense superiority of my claims and little doubt as to the intentions of the King. The crowd of press photographers at Paddington and my house—deceptive and even worthless as these phenomena are—at least indicated the popular belief."

At 2.30 p.m. Lord Stamfordham called at 1 Carlton House Terrace. There is no need to dwell upon the interview, which cannot have been anything but painful either to Lord Curzon or to his

[1] Letter from Sir F. Jeune, dated August 11th, 1898.
[2] Letter dated May 23rd, 1923.

LORD AND LADY CURZON
arriving in London from Montacute, May 22, 1923

visitor. It was Lord Stamfordham's unpalatable task to convey to Lord Curzon the decision of the King that, since the Labour party constituted the official Opposition in the House of Commons and were unrepresented in the House of Lords, the objections to a Prime Minister in the Upper Chamber were insuperable. This possibility had occurred to Lord Curzon himself some years before; for he had told Sir G. Cunningham in 1917 that, with Labour so strongly represented in the Lower House, he doubted whether even so outstanding a member of the peerage as the late Lord Salisbury would have been Prime Minister.[1] Yet, in his heart of hearts, he could not really bring himself to believe that with his long record of public service behind him he could be passed over. And he asked leave to submit for consideration certain aspects of the case which he thought might not have been given due weight. When, however, he learned that it was too late and that Mr. Baldwin had already been summoned to Buckingham Palace, bitterness flooded in upon his soul. And in the account which he committed to paper of this, the most galling experience which life had brought him, he poured out his pent-up feelings in a torrent of agonised despair. "Such," he exclaimed, "was the reward I received for nearly forty years of public service in the highest offices; such was the manner in which it was intimated to me that the cup of honourable ambition had been dashed from my lips, and that I could never aspire to fill the highest office in the service of the Crown."[2]

The poignancy of his feelings was added to by the confident assumption made by some of his friends that the prize was already his. On the very day on which the blow fell, the friend of his boyhood, Oscar Browning, was writing in jubilation from Italy:

> "This morning's *Piccolo* says that you are Prime Minister, and I hope it is true. Please accept my warmest congratulations. I always told you that I should not be satisfied unless you were. I shall look forward with great interest to all the great things you are going to do."

[1] In the course of a conversation recorded by Sir G. Cunningham on September 13th, 1917.

[2] From a note written in pencil describing his interview with Lord Stamfordham.

The depths of his disappointment provide a measure of the moral greatness which at times, though not always, he was able to summon to his aid. Letters of sympathy poured in upon him from all sides; and the burden of the greater number of them was a prayer that, great though the sacrifice must be, he would yet consent to remain at his post. And if under the first shock of bitterness he shrank from the course thus pressed upon him, he could not long remain insensible to the significance of an appeal so movingly and so widely made, and on May the 23rd he replied to the invitation which had reached him from the new Prime Minister:

> "My dear Baldwin,
>
> Allow me to congratulate you warmly upon your appointment to be Prime Minister and to wish you every success in your administration. I have seriously considered your kind invitation to me to continue in the office which I recently filled. I have every desire to retire. But, as there are certain things which in the public interest I ought, perhaps, to endeavour to carry through, and as my retirement at this moment might be thought to involve distrust in your administration, which would be a quite unfounded suspicion, I will for the present continue at the Foreign Office."

"Of course it is a great disappointment," he wrote on the following day. "But public life is made up of such, and the only thing is to go on and do one's best, as I shall try to do."[1] And four days later, in a letter to the same correspondent, he mentioned—"I am just off to the meeting at which I am to propose that Baldwin be elected Leader of the Conservative Party." No one will be likely to question the nature of the ordeal through which he was called upon to pass or the moral courage which enabled him to emerge triumphant from it. His bearing, indeed, made a great impression upon those who, knowing the immense emotional deeps of his ardent nature, could gauge the strength of the turmoil that raged within. And he was the recipient of many moving tributes:

> "I hope you will not think it impertinent of me to write to

[1] Letter to Lord Crewe, dated May 24th, 1923.

say how much I admired the manner in which you presided over our meeting to-day and the good taste and eloquence with which you spoke in proposing Mr. Baldwin's election to the leadership of the party. Your speech was magnificent and the manner in which the whole affair was conducted will, I am sure, conduce greatly to the harmony of the party and the strength of the Government."[1]

Thus, with a gesture of singular magnanimity, Lord Curzon smoothed the way for the formation of Mr. Baldwin's first Administration.

When Lord Curzon told the Prime Minister that there were certain things which he supposed that, in the public interest, he ought to endeavour to carry through, he had in mind more particularly the renewed negotiations with Turkey at Lausanne, of which a brief account has been given in the preceding chapter; the controversy upon which he had entered with Soviet Russia, and the attempt upon which he had recently embarked to find some way out of the disastrous impasse in which the leading nations of Europe found themselves as a result of the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr.

The Trade Agreement with Soviet Russia, entered into by Mr. Lloyd George's Government in the spring of 1921, had always been looked on by Lord Curzon with feelings of cold disfavour. He had never believed that the stipulation prefixed to the Agreement, that the Soviet authorities should refrain from hostile propaganda against Great Britain, would be observed. And looking back over the events of the two years during which the Agreement had been in operation, he saw on all sides incontrovertible evidence of the fulfilment of his forebodings. It was, indeed, notorious that from the first the undertaking given by the Soviet Government had been consistently and flagrantly violated. As a result of representations made during the autumn and winter of 1921 some curtailment of the baleful activities of the Soviet agents had been noticed. But the lull had been of short duration, and by the spring of 1923 acts of hostility had become so numerous and so grave that Lord Curzon determined to tolerate so anomalous a state of affairs no longer. In

[1]Letter from Sir J. P. Hewett dated May 28th, 1923.

Irak, in Persia, in Afghanistan—even in India itself—Russian agents, controlled and financed from Moscow, were fostering and organising the forces of sedition and, where possible, inciting the peoples of Asia to rebellion. Nor was this all. Outrages committed on British subjects in Russia itself, including one notorious case of judicial murder, remained unatoned; and British fishing trawlers, seized in defiance of the almost universally accepted conventions of international law, remained imprisoned in Russian ports. Demands made for compensation for the lives of British sailors sacrificed in the course of these piratical onslaughts, were treated with cynical indifference; while, to crown everything, representations made by the British Government against acts of religious persecution, the brutality of which had excited widespread consternation and had provoked the indignant remonstrance of the civilised world, were met by replies of so insolent a character as to be returned by the accredited British Agent to whom they were addressed.

Lord Curzon drew up his indictment; submitted it to the Cabinet; asked and received authority to present his demands in the form of an ultimatum; gave the Soviet Government ten days within which to make a satisfactory reply, and awaited with interest the result. It was not to be supposed that the Soviet Government were going to admit themselves in the wrong; but they made a reply from which it was clear that they attached far too great importance to the Trade Agreement to run the risk of losing it; and after some further exchange of Notes, they complied substantially with all Lord Curzon's demands. A new and more explicit declaration on the subject of propaganda was accepted and signed; the Russian representative, whose recall from Kabul Lord Curzon had demanded, was transferred to another post, "in accordance with the normal arrangements governing the movements of members of the Russian Diplomatic Service"; the letters which the British Agent had refused to receive were withdrawn; compensation was agreed to in respect of the "repressive measures" taken against British subjects in Russia; and orders were issued to the Soviet maritime authorities to refrain from interfering with British fishermen plying their business outside the three mile limit, pending the conclusion of an international agreement on the whole question. If there was

little to give ground for complacency in the foreign outlook as a whole, Lord Curzon found some crumbs of satisfaction in the outcome of this controversy. "I think that I may claim to have won a considerable victory over the Soviet Government," he wrote on June the 13th, "and I expect them to behave with more circumspection for some time to come."[1]

He found far less reason for complacency as he surveyed the situation in the Ruhr. It is true that in the German Note of June the 7th he saw the prospect of a possible settlement; and he commended it, therefore, to the favourable consideration of the Allies. The points of view from which the French and British Governments had all along regarded the question remained, however, unaltered. More than ever since she had met with the unexpected and obstinate resistance of Germany did France look at it as essentially a political matter; more than ever since Great Britain saw the German market, which had gradually been assuming importance as a factor in her export trade once more, incontinently collapse, did she regard the question from a strictly economic point of view. And, in plain and unmistakable language, Lord Curzon repeatedly enforced this point:

> "As long as the most highly developed area of German industrial life remains under military rule, and is made the scene of political agitation, it is difficult to see how the economic problem can be solved. It may be possible to break Germany's power of resistance by such means; but it will be at the price of the very recovery on which the Allied policy depends for its ultimate success."[2]

French intransigence caused him infinite worry and annoyance. His constant interviews with the French Ambassador became a positive pain, and, in these circumstances, it is not surprising if something of the acerbity of the conversations which took place behind the closed doors of the Foreign Secretary's room, crept into his written Despatches. His comment on a statement made to

[1] Letter to Lord Crewe, dated June 13th, 1923.
[2] Despatch from Lord Curzon to the Comte de Saint Aulaire, dated July 20th, 1923.

him by the Comte de Saint Aulaire on June the 11th, that the French Government could discuss with their Allies the proposals embodied in the German Note only after passive resistance in the Ruhr had ceased, was indicative of the strained relations existing between them:

> "From the statement which Your Excellency made to me, it would almost seem as if the cessation of passive resistance was regarded by the French Government as equivalent to active co-operation of the German population in whatever measures, coercive or other, the French authorities may see fit to take or order. This would be an excessive and an impracticable demand, even if it were conceded that French action in the Ruhr was justified and authorised under the Treaty of Versailles."[1]

The attitude of the French Government did, indeed, seem to him to be unreasonable. "His (Poincaré's) idea," he wrote on June the 28th, "that he can both obtain a cessation of passive resistance with our aid, and yet persist in unabated military occupation, is quite untenable and must be warmly repudiated."[2]

Nevertheless, in spite of constant discouragement, Lord Curzon persisted in his attempts to find a solution. The rigid attitude of M. Poincaré was, in fact, creating a very unfavourable impression in London; and in his letters to Lord Crewe he sought to warn him of the rising temper of the Cabinet:

> "The gist of it all is that we will not go on drifting any longer. Even the pro-French element in the Cabinet . . . . are indignant with Poincaré, and are hot for independent action. We have shown patience, toleration, even weakness. But now we mean to move. . . . You may rely upon me to go as far as is possible in keeping together the Entente. But act we must and will."[3]

Lord Curzon's next step was to draw up and communicate to the Allied Governments the draft of a reply to the German Note of

[1] Despatch from Lord Curzon to the Comte de Saint Aulaire, dated June 13th, 1923.
[2] Letter to Lord Crewe. [3] Letter dated July 8th, 1923.

June the 7th, to which he hoped they might be willing to subscribe. The situation, he urged, was likely to grow not better but worse with every day of unnecessary delay. "A recurrence to procedure by ultimatums may, indeed, produce tardy and reluctant capitulation; but little satisfaction will accrue if it fails to produce substantial deliveries either in cash or in kind." It was now acknowledged, he asserted, that the Reparation figure laid down in 1921 no longer corresponded to the realities of the situation. A revised estimate of what was practicable must sooner or later be made. And he threw out the suggestion that in the enquiry which would be necessary the co-operation of America, whether in an official or an unofficial capacity, should be sought.

It was not the first time that this suggestion had been made; and it proved in the end the key to the solution of the problem. For it was the enquiry conducted by the Dawes Committee and the plan proposed by them when they reported in the spring of 1924, that proved to be the turning point on the road down which Europe was heading towards a pit of irretrievable financial disaster. And Lord Curzon is entitled to the credit for having consistently urged, and, in the end, secured the co-operation which became so vital a factor in the eventual success of the policy which he unflinchingly pursued. "We have persuaded the Americans to come into the Reparations Committee," he told Lord Crewe on December the 12th.

But before the Reparations Commission, with Lord Curzon's enthusiastic support, decided, on November the 30th, to set up the body which came to be known by the name of its chairman, General Dawes, he had cause to pass through many anxious moments. His Despatch of July the 20th, covering his draft reply to the German Note, met with a cold reception at the hands of M. Poincaré, who firmly refused to admit the necessity for any enquiry into Germany's capacity to pay. What, then, was to be done? There seemed, indeed, little to be done except to re-state, comprehensively and explicitly, the position of the British Government and to continue to hold a watching brief for moderation and common sense. This was what Lord Curzon proceeded to do.

In a Despatch addressed to the French and Belgian Ambassa-

dors on August the 11th, and presented to Parliament immediately afterwards, he indulged in a critical analysis of the Reparations claims which the French and Belgian Governments were now putting forward. These constituted a radical alteration of the percentages of the total sum to be paid by Germany which had been agreed to at Spa, to the grave disadvantage of all their other Allies. The Government of Great Britain could not consent to ignore the legitimate claims of the British people. And it was desirable that the hard facts of the position as it concerned them should be clearly stated. Sunk ships and cargoes rotting at the bottom of the sea might not shock the eye like the ruined villages of France and Belgium. But they were equally material damage caused by German aggression and represented equally heavy losses of national wealth. In a few arresting sentences he painted a picture of the burden which Great Britain was being called upon to bear:

> "Apart from the extensive material damages suffered by Great Britain, His Majesty's Government are now involved in heavy payments to meet unemployment, in respect of which they have been compelled to spend over £400,000,000 since the Armistice. They alone, among the Allies, are paying interest on debts incurred abroad during the War, representing a capital sum due to the United States Government of £1,000,000,000 at the present rate of exchange. They alone have been deprived, in the Allied interest, of foreign securities estimated at from £700,000,000 to £800,000,000 which would otherwise substantially assist in the payment of the British debt in America. Notwithstanding these gigantic burdens, Great Britain made an offer at the Paris Conference of January last to forego her rights to reimbursement of her damages, and expressed her readiness, by reducing the debts of the Allies, to treat her share of German Reparations as if it were a repayment by her Allies of their debts due to her. It would be inequitable, and it is impossible to ask the British taxpayer, already much more heavily burdened than his French and Belgian Allies, to make further sacrifices by modifying the Spa percentages for the benefit of France and Belgium."

While the British Government had indicated their readiness to join in advising the German Government to withdraw without delay the ordinances and decrees which had promoted passive resistance, they could not subscribe to the thesis that passive resistance must cease unconditionally as being a violation of the Treaty of Versailles. On the contrary, basing their opinion on the advice of the highest legal authorities in Great Britain, they held that the action of France and Belgium in the Ruhr, quite apart from the question of expediency, was without the sanction of the Treaty itself. But they were quite willing that this question should be referred to the International Court of Justice at the Hague. In the meantime a continuance of forcible interference with the economic life of Germany could only prevent the realisation of any surplus of Reparation, and by intensifying the disorder of German finance and currency would have the gravest reactions upon trade:

> "In spite of wholesale seizures, the occupation of the Ruhr by France and Belgium has produced, at great cost, less receipts for the Allies, notably of coke and coal, than was forthcoming in the previous year. Moreover, His Majesty's Government feel that the resulting situation involves great and growing danger to the peaceful trade of the world and, not least, of this country. His Majesty's Government regard a continuance of the present position as fraught with the gravest risks, both economic and political. They consider the impartial fixation of Germany's liability at a figure not inconsistent with her practical power of making payment a matter of great urgency and they have suggested what appears to them to be an appropriate means to this end."

If this view was accepted, Great Britain would still be prepared to act upon the proposal which Mr. Bonar Law had laid before the Paris Conference in January—a proposal which meant that, in the interest of a complete general settlement, Great Britain would be prepared to waive a very large part of the amount for which the British taxpayer held the due obligations of the Governments of the Allies.

There, for the time being, Lord Curzon felt that matters must be allowed to rest. And having disposed of the matter to the best of his ability, he left England for another short course of treatment at Bagnolles, and turned his mind characteristically to other matters. "I have brought here to finish," he wrote from that place on August the 12th, "the book which I partially wrote about Government House and other places at Calcutta ten years ago, and then abandoned, as I have all the notes and it costs me no effort to write it."[1] He worked from 1.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. and again after dinner; and he wrote in serio-comic vein of the difficulties under which he laboured:

> "I dine upstairs at 8.30 p.m., then work and bed about 1 a.m. But then I have a terrifying experience. On one side of me is an Englishman who snores badly. Above me (the floors being very thin) is an elderly Greek, whose snores reverberate through the whole building and almost shake the floors. What with both, I did not sleep for one second last night. I hammered at the wall to stop A., and heard his wife expostulating with him. I then went upstairs at 2.30 a.m. and banged and rattled at the bedroom door of B. He neither awoke nor stopped for an instant. It was like the discharge of artillery, and went on without a pause till 8 a.m."[2]

It was not long, however, before his attention was recalled to the Franco-British controversy. The publication of the British Note of August the 11th caused a good deal of fluttering in quite a number of dovecots. It was recognised in Great Britain as a powerful statement of the case from the British point of view. It was widely spoken of as one of Lord Curzon's masterpieces. The Foreign Secretary was pictured immured at Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, sitting up far into the night composing it. It is true that Lord Curzon wrote many of the Foreign Office Despatches himself, just as when Viceroy of India he composed and wrote with his own hand many of the more important State Papers. And there can be little doubt that, in years to come, his tenure of the Foreign Secretaryship will

[1] Letter to Lady Curzon.
[2] Letter to Lady Curzon dated August 15th, 1923.

become famous for the remarkable series of rhetorical productions which emanated from the Department over which he presided. But he was not the chief author of the Despatch of August the 11th, 1923. He laid down the main lines on which it was to be written and he gave to it its final polish. "The famous British Note," he told Lady Curzon, "was written by Crowe, and all I did was to tone down some of its worst asperities and curtail and re-write parts that had been badly expressed."[1]

In France it not unnaturally excited a good deal of resentment. "I see the French papers are covering me with abuse over the Note," Lord Curzon wrote from Bagnolles on August the 15th. And it did little at the time to assist towards a settlement. Passive resistance was, however, coming to an end. It actually ceased on September the 26th; and though some weeks were to slip by before any appreciable advance towards a settlement was made, Lord Curzon had the satisfaction before the year was out of seeing the kind of enquiry into the financial state of Germany which he had long urged, actually being undertaken.

[1] Letter dated August 24th, 1923.