CHAPTER VII

THE COMING OF WAR

1914-1916

LORD CURZON had long been apprehensive of a European war; and he had long foreseen whence it would arise. "In my opinion," he had written as far back as the autumn of 1901, "the most marked feature in the international development of the next quarter of a century will be, not the advance of Russia—that is in any case inevitable—or the animosity of France—that is hereditary—but the aggrandisement of the German Empire at the expense of Great Britain; and I think that any English Foreign Minister who desires to serve his country well, should never lose sight of that consideration."[1]

On his return from India, his attention was drawn to military matters by the introduction of Mr. Haldane's Territorial Army Scheme; and his study of the position very soon satisfied him not only that the country was unprepared to cope with an emergency of the kind which he believed might quite probably arise, but that under the proposed scheme there was very little likelihood of her ever becoming so. He admired and heartily commended the public spirit of all who, by joining the Territorial Army, showed that they were willing, often at no small sacrifice, to take up on their own account the burden which ought to fall equally upon all. But he regarded the Territorial Army as altogether inadequate to the demands which he felt certain would sooner or later be made upon it. He never could persuade himself that the force, in spite of the

[1] Letter to Lord George Hamilton, September 25th, 1901.

admirable spirit by which it was animated, would prove equal either in numbers, in equipment, in training, or in knowledge of the art of war, to holding its own against the highly trained troops of Continental Europe. And he threw himself whole-heartedly into Lord Roberts' campaign in favour of National Service.

He believed that universal military training for home defence, as advocated by the National Service League of which he became a Vice-President, would have a moral, spiritual and educative value of the highest order—an argument in itself which influenced him powerfully in its favour. But he was also satisfied that some form of compulsion was essential on purely military grounds. He had not at first thought of British troops—even of the regular army—as being ranged up along side of the battalions of continental nations on a European battlefield. "We require an army, not in order that we may march about on the continent and bombard or attack foreign towns—that is the very last purpose to which a British force is ever likely to be put," he told a crowded audience at Hanley; "but we want it to garrison our own foreign possessions, to defend them against invasion or attack, and above all to prevent our enemy from effecting a successful landing upon our own shores."[1]

Gradually the conviction was forced upon him that circumstances might quite probably arise in which British troops would be called upon to play a part in a still wider field. His reading of events as he cast his gaze over Europe lent little support to the easy optimism of those who argued that popular Governments would insist on a peaceful solution of international rivalries. In all that was going on around him he saw little sign of the near approach of the millennium. On the contrary, neither the ideals nor the ethics of modern democratic Governments seemed to him to differ materially from those of the more autocratic forms of Government which they were in process of, or had succeeded in, supplanting. Their ambitions and their methods were the same. In his view it was a case of *plus c'a change plus c'est la même chose*. "I believe there has never been a time in modern history when the standard of international honour has been lower or more unashamed. . . . Meanwhile old Carnegie goes about prating of peace; a great palace is built

[1] Speech at Hanley on October 21st, 1910.

for the tribunal at the Hague, and the newspapers gush about arbitration. The real master of the situation is primitive man."[1] He was not alone in his belief. Early in the summer of 1911, M. Clemenceau signalised a brief visit to England by becoming a member of the National Service League. The fact that he did so was not in itself a matter of any great consequence; but it was, assuredly, a little unusual. M. Clemenceau himself was well aware of this. It was always a delicate matter he admitted to Lord Roberts, the President of the League, for a public man to intervene even indirectly in party or national movements in a country other than his own; but he excused himself for having done so on the ground that in the circumstances of the time, the creation of an English army, truly representative of the British people and of their position of authority in the counsels of the world, was a matter not merely of domestic, but of European interest.

The significance of M. Clemenceau's gesture was not lost on some at least of those who were watching with grave misgiving the trend of events in continental Europe. None knew better than Lord Roberts with what anxiety the military authorities in France looked on at the modest provision made by successive British Governments against possible military requirements; and he turned instinctively to Lord Curzon for counsel and assistance. "No one in the present Government or, so far as I know, in the late Government," he wrote on June the 6th, 1911, "seems to take a serious view of the change that is taking place in Europe and in the world generally to our detriment. Both parties seem either blind to what is going on, or desire to keep the public in ignorance." In Lord Curzon, he found a sympathetic listener; and, encouraged by the aid which he had already rendered to the National Service League, both in Parliament and in the country, he laid his anxieties plainly before him. What chance was there, he asked, of other countries accepting arbitration and curtailing their military preparations? It was only necessary to glance at what was being done elsewhere to find the answer to that question. France was putting the whole of her able-bodied men under arms, and, dissatisfied with the number which this heroic measure gave her, was working out a scheme for raising

[1] Letter to Lord Lansdowne, September 29th, 1911.

a formidable force of Senegalese to aid her; Germany was adding yearly to her naval and military forces; Austria, by changing from a three to a two years' enlistment, was greatly strengthening the land forces at her disposal; Turkey, with the aid of German officers, was building up a considerable army; while Russia and Japan were both engaged on vast and costly schemes of re-organisation based on actual experience of recent war "Are all these countries governed by fools and idiots," he asked, "and have we the monopoly of brains? Or are we the fools and idiots, and are they governed by wise and patriotic men?"[1] History, he feared, would provide the answer.

Lord Curzon shared to the ful alike his views and his misgivings. In 1909 he had wound up a two days' debate in the House of Lords on a National Service Bill introduced by Lord Roberts; and, in spite of the united opposition of the Government and Opposition front benches, had had the satisfaction of securing for it 103 supporters in the division against 123 mustered against it by the Whips of the two parties. Two years later he had again spoken strongly in favour of some change on a Motion brought forward by Lord Roberts which, without specifically raising the question of compulsory service, denounced the Government for the inadequacy of their military preparations. The division on this occasion followed the usual party lines, and the Motion was carried by a large majority. But experience had now convinced him that little was to be gained by pursuing the matter along the lines of party; and when, in 1913, he again took part in a debate on the preparedness of the country, he adopted a different course. He urged that the question should be lifted out of the arena of party politics and should be submitted to a conference of representatives of both parties in the State.

The proposal was received with silence by the Government and with ill-disguised suspicion by the Radical press; and, at a Primrose League gathering at the Albert Hall, Lord Curzon took occasion to repeat and elaborate what he had said in the House of Lords. The proposal, he said, was no random suggestion of his own; it was a *bona fide* offer made with the full knowledge and approval of the Conservative leaders; there was no *arrière-pensée* behind it; it

[1] Letter from Lord Roberts to Lord Curzon, June 6th, 1911.

concealed no stratagem; it was put forward in all sincerity in the interests of the security of the nation.

Lord Curzon was, however, too deeply tarred with the brush of compulsion for him to be *persona grata* to those who were determined to countenance no departure from the voluntary system. The attitude of the Government was reflected in the comments of the Liberal press.

> "Lord Curzon shows us the objective when he represents Sir John French as saying that voluntary effort is quite inadequate for the due defence of these islands. The Liberal party is certainly not going to confer with its opponents on this basis; but we are bound to take Lord Curzon's speech as another step forward in the conversion of the Tory party to compulsory militarism."[1]

Nothing, therefore, came of a contribution offered in all sincerity towards the solution of a problem of steadily increasing gravity, and the country continued its march towards the abyss which was presently to open out in front of it, hoping that, somehow or other, the admitted deficiencies of the Territorial Army would be made good and that, in the last resort, Providence or the British Fleet would intervene to save the Nation from disaster. "How different the war would have been," Lord Curzon wrote, a short time after the die had been cast which brought the people of Great Britain face to face with the greatest crisis in their history, "had the country adopted National Service ten years ago. We could then have poured thousands into the field and have turned the scale. As it is we cannot contribute more than 100,000, without incurring serious risk."[2]

It was not only in the matter of its military preparations that he found the country unorganised for war.

> "When the war broke out," he wrote on August the 22nd, "I offered myself to Asquith for non-political work in any capacity. But none has been offered me; and there is some-

[1] The *Westminster Gazette* of May 3rd, 1913.
[2] Letter to the Hon. F. N. Curzon, August 28th, 1914.

thing rather pitiful in the thought that at 39 one was thought fit to rule 300 millions of people, and at 55 is not wanted to do anything in an emergency in which the national existence is at stake."[1]

The time was not far distant when he was to have a very different story to tell—"As for me," he wrote in December 1916, "I am to be the Conservative watch-dog in the War Committee of four, besides, I believe, being President of the Council, Leader in the House of Lords and a few other things. Quite enough to break me down."[2] But this was not until after the fall of Mr. Asquith's Coalition Government and the succession of Mr. Lloyd George to the Premiership; and during the early days of the war Lord Curzon fretted miserably under the sentence of inaction which seemed to have been passed upon him.

For a time he found occupation in addressing crowded meetings in different parts of the country, on the origin of the war and the nature of the task which faced the people, in pursuance of a programme of education which he had himself propounded in the columns of *The Times*. But the public work which came his way—even after he became a member of the first Coalition Government in the summer of 1915—still left him long hours of bitterly resented leisure, felt all the more acutely because in the uncertainties of the times he regarded it as his duty to remain at home. "I don't think that any of us will go north at all," he wrote in August. "I don't like the idea while all this is going on. We may be called upon at any moment for local or other work and I feel we ought all to stay at home."[3]

Lack of definite occupation led to morbid pessimism—

> "I do not like the way things are going, the unthinking optimism of everyone, the selfishness of the sporting and pleasure loving world, the slackness of the middle classes, the indifference and money squabbles of the lower, the foolish reticence and mystery of the Government. All these are unpleasant symptoms."[4]

[1] Letter to Lord Lamington. [2] *Ibid.*, December 7th, 1916.
[3] Letter to Hon. F. N. Curzon, August 28th, 1914.
[4] Letter to Lord Lamington, March 21st, 1915.

LORD CURZON AT TATTERSHALL CASTLE
Bequeathed by him to the nation

And in despair he fell back upon his pen, the never failing companion of his busiest and his most idle hours. It was during the year 1915 that the elaborate Report of the Committee of Trustees of the National Gallery—written by Lord Curzon himself—was presented to Parliament; and during the summer of the same year there appeared within a few days of each other two volumes, one of selected speeches and essays delivered and written by Lord Curzon since his return from India, with the title "Subjects of the Day," the other of War Poems and other Translations which, as he informed his readers in the preface, had at different times lent distraction to his leisure hours.

The circumstances during the early phases of the war were, indeed, such as to place an almost intolerable strain upon a restless nature like Lord Curzon's; for while little work worthy of his abilities or of his position in public life was forthcoming, he was equally debarred by a fine conception of patriotic duty from the normal activities of a leader of the Opposition, since criticism of those burdened with the responsibility of guiding the country through the perplexing maze of these times of biting anxiety, seemed more likely to damage than to assist the national cause. As the days passed, something of the uneasiness of spirit from which he suffered became apparent in his public utterances. At his urgent request the period over which the Government had intended that Parliament should stand adjourned, after the rising of the two Houses at the end of November 1914, was curtailed so far as the House of Lords was concerned; and at its meeting in the first week of January 1915, Lord Curzon, in the absence of Lord Lansdowne from illness, referred frankly to the position in which the Opposition found themselves. They had no share either in official responsibility or in executive authority in connection with the war. He himself knew little more of what was happening than anyone else outside the charmed circle of the Government and their professional advisers. These disabilities, he hastened to add, did not deter them from giving the Government their unstinted support. They had refrained and would continue to refrain from making speeches and asking questions "where speech was tempting and criticism would have been easy." Yet they could not forget that they represented a considerable

portion of the nation and that in their representative capacity they held a watching brief and were under an obligation to voice the feelings, the anxieties and the fears of those whom they represented. Governments, he delicately reminded them, were very human institutions and a Government that was subjected to no criticism, even in a great national crisis, tended "to become careless, to mistake silence for acquiescence, and very likely to develop an extravagant and almost pontifical sense of its own authority."[1]

These words, carefully chosen and spoken with due restraint, reflected what was passing through his mind. In council with his colleagues on the Conservative benches he spoke his thoughts with greater freedom. Much had happened to give rise to legitimate uneasiness in the public mind. The admitted loss of three cruisers, the Hogue, the Cressy and the Aboukir; the suspected loss of a still more important unit of the fleet, H.M.S. Audacious; the fall of Antwerp and the disaster which had overtaken Admiral Craddock, to mention but a few, were incidents which called for explanation. Yet they were expected to give a mute and almost unquestioning support to all that the Government did; to maintain a patriotic silence about the blunders that had been committed; to give their active support to recruiting while kept in ignorance of the results. Recent proceedings in the House of Lords had painfully emphasised the impotence—almost the humiliation—of their position. The Secretary of State for War had read them exiguous memoranda of platitudes which were the common knowledge of the music-hall and the market-place; had interpolated a curt affirmative or negative to the solitary speech to which he had deigned to listen, and had then marched out of the Chamber and left the rest of the debate to colleagues who either affected ignorance or screened their silence behind the convenient mask of his authority. They were, in fact, caught up on the horns of a particularly painful dilemma: if they subjected the Government's conduct of the war to effective criticism they laid themselves open to a charge of unpatriotic action; if, on the other hand, they preserved silence it was generally presumed that they shared with the Government responsibility for what was done.

[1] Speech in the House of Lords on January 6th, 1915.

The position was undoubtedly a difficult one; but it was the inevitable outcome of the British Parliamentary system and there seemed to be only two possible ways out of it. A statement agreed to by the Leaders of both political parties might be published, setting forth in as precise terms as possible the relations between the Government and the Opposition and making clear the extent, if any, of the responsibility for what was done that might properly be attributed to the latter; or, provided that the Government were prepared to share the direction of affairs with their political opponents, an equal measure of responsibility might be accepted. In other words a Coalition Government might be formed.

This latter alternative was always viewed by Lord Curzon with dislike. It would tie the hands and seal the lips of those who entered it. It would make them responsible for many things which they ought in due course to subject to searching criticism. And with men so fundamentally divided on all the outstanding questions of the day, he feared that it might lead at the nerve centre of the British Empire to a fatal and irretrievable collapse. And when, four months later, this device, so alien to British practice and tradition, was suddenly seen to provide the only means of escape from an untenable position, he still viewed the prospect with serious misgiving.

> "Suddenly the Ministerial edifice has crumbled," he wrote on May the 18th, "kicked over by old Jack Fisher. Winston has been shot out of the Admiralty; a lot of other people, including Haldane, are to go permanently and the long expected and (by me) much dreaded Coalition is to come into being. Whether I shall be wanted or not in some minor capacity I do not know."[1]

He was not left long in doubt, and on May the 27th, he kissed hands on his appointment to the Cabinet, and received from His Majesty the Privy Seal. "I joined the Government to-day as Lord Privy Seal," he wrote. "It is a big experiment dictated by forces almost outside personal control."[2]

[1] Letter to Lord Lamington. [2] Letter to Sir Rennell Rodd

The day should have been a great one in Lord Curzon's life. The goal of which he had dreamed twenty years before had at length been reached. Yet the fulfilment of the dream differed strangely from the dream itself. The keen enthusiasms of those earlier days had lost something of their edge, worn down by the passage of the years and the disillusionment wrought by the chequered experiences of public life. Ill-health and physical suffering beyond the ordinary gnawed ceaselessly at the springs of his vitality. "I see pictures of you at Murren, robust and happy," he wrote to one of the congenial companions of earlier days. "I am never the former and only negatively the latter."[1] And with such apprehension did he view the prospect of a Coalition Government that, when at last the chance of becoming a Cabinet Minister was within his grasp, he hesitated on the very threshold. "I am sorry that you are in doubt," wrote a friend while his decision hung in the balance; "but for the country's sake I hope you will try to be one of them. I have watched your career for the last thirty years . . . and if you will allow me to say so, I feel that in this crisis you are a needed man—one with the indispensable singleness of aim."[2]

His earliest experiences as a Cabinet Minister did little enough to reconcile him to the difference between the glowing visions which he had once formed of Cabinet office and the crude realities of the position as he found them. He was in charge of no great Department of the State; he was the arbiter of no one's destinies. There was little scope, consequently, for the application of the outstanding administrative ability which had won for him so great a reputation while in India. Moreover the haphazard method of transacting business greatly shocked his precise and methodical mind. The meeting at uncertain intervals of a body of more than twenty members, with no agenda to warn them of what was to be discussed and no record of the decisions which had been reached to refer to after they had dispersed, contrasted oddly with the business-like procedure of the small and efficient Executive Council over which he had himself presided in India and struck him as providing an outstanding and almost ludicrous example of the traditional amateur-

[1] Letter to Mrs. Asquith, afterwards Lady Oxford.
[2] Letter from Sir R. Haggard.

ishness of the British people. The peculiar genius of the race for muddling through somehow, had its limitations; it failed when the art of Government ceased to be a pastime and became an exact science; its virtue passed from it when it was brought up against the hard realities of a mechanically efficient age. A system under which cases frequently arose when matters were left so much in doubt that a Minister went away and acted upon what he thought was a decision, which subsequently turned out to be no decision at all, or was repudiated by his colleagues, stood self-condemned. "No one will deny," declared Lord Curzon at a later date, "that a system, however embedded in the traditions of the past and consecrated by constitutional custom, which was attended by these defects, was a system which was destined, immediately it came into contact with the hard realities of war, to crumble into dust."[1]

Yet change was not effected without a struggle, and many months were to elapse before the unwieldy Cabinet of 1915 was supplanted by a smaller and more business-like body of half-a-dozen during the closing days of 1916, and the happy inconsequence of pre-war days by the method and precision demanded by a sterner age. And until these changes were brought about, Lord Curzon moved restlessly hither and thither in quest of work which might prove of definite value to the State.

The contemplated Ministry of Munitions seemed to offer the opportunity which he sought, and after piloting the Bill authorising the establishment of the new Department successfully through the House of Lords, he looked forward eagerly to taking a share in its activities. The story of his disillusionment is told in a letter written four months later to Lord Crewe as Leader of the Government in the House of Lords.

> "As regards munitions, as you know, I was invited by the Prime Minister and Lloyd George to go into the Department and represent it in the House of Lords. Since the Committee meetings at which you and I were present, I have never once been invited inside the place or been made a party to any of the proceedings. I offered at the beginning to go there and work

[1] Speech in the House of Lords, June 19th, 1918.

if they would give me a room. No notice was taken of the offer and I have never received a single paper or item of information about the work. In these circumstances I naturally preferred to resign my connection with the Department."[1]

In whichever direction he turned he found his hopes of definite and sustained work disappointed.

"Do you not think we might have a more equal distribution of labour in the House of Lords?" he asked Lord Crewe. "I have now been a member of the Government for over seven months and during that time I have only (apart from the representation of Departments) spoken once for the Government in the House, and on that occasion at my own suggestion. On no single occasion have I been invited to bear my share in the burden. . . . Indeed I often wonder why I was invited to join or am in the Government at all."[2]

The sense of uselessness preyed heavily upon his mind.

"Twenty years ago I was thought good enough by Lord Salisbury to represent the Foreign Office single-handed in the House of Commons; but now apparently I am not qualified to represent the Government in any debate on any subject whatever. I have accepted the position without a murmur and have been content to sit in silence for seven months. But I have now decided to speak, since I can really find no ground for continuing to be a member of a Government to which I am not permitted to render any service, all the more that I am excluded from the Committee which deals daily with questions and countries to the study of which I have devoted thirty years of my life."[2]

His exclusion from the War Committee which came into existence in the autumn of 1915 did not deter him, however, from taking

[1] Letter dated January 6th, 1916.
[2] Letter to Lord Crewe, January 6th, 1916.

a leading part in the discussion of such questions as came before the Cabinet as a whole. The new Government had not been long in Office when they were called upon to take a decision of far-reaching importance affecting the whole strategy of the war. On the Gallipoli Peninsular a position approximating to that of stalemate seemed to have been reached. During the summer a Cabinet Committee charged with the duty of supervising the Dardanelles operations had pressed on vigorously with the campaign. Lord Curzon, who at the invitation of the Prime Minister had joined the Committee, impressed by the ever expanding vista of possibilities which success seemed likely to open up, was constant in urging the despatch of the reinforcements necessary to ensure it. At the first meeting of the Committee on June the 7th, it had been decided to send out three divisions of the new army, and before the end of the month to add to these two Territorial divisions, making a total reinforcement of five divisions of fresh troops in all. With these additions to his force, Sir Ian Hamilton gave the Committee to understand that success might be regarded as assured ; and Lord Curzon had been prominent in urging their early despatch.

The story of the disappointment of these too sanguine expectations is now a matter of recorded history. Failure in the field on the Gallipoli Peninsular was followed by changes both in the plan of campaign itself and in the body entrusted with control of it in London. Under stress of events in Eastern Europe the Governments of France and of Great Britain pledged themselves to the despatch of 150,000 troops to Salonika, and with large drafts made upon the forces under Sir Ian Hamilton in fulfilment of this promise, all hope of any spectacular success in the neighbourhood of the Dardanelles was for the time being abandoned.

In London the Dardanelles Committee gave place to a smaller body, which came to be known as the War Committee, charged by the Prime Minister with the duty of co-ordinating and supervising operations not in the Eastern Mediterranean alone, but in all the different theatres of war. To the question what should now be done with the troops still entrenched on the rugged slopes of the Gallipoli Peninsular, the War Committee, on which Lord Curzon found no place, at once addressed itself. Military opinion, though

not unanimous, was on the whole in favour of partial evacuation, advising the abandonment of Suvla and Anzac but the retention of Helles.

To this course, when recommended by the War Committee to the Cabinet, Lord Curzon took strong exception. "We are to be asked in Cabinet to-morrow," he wrote on November 23rd, "(1) to evacuate Gallipoli; (2) to hang on to Salonika; (3) to concentrate on Egypt. I am so anxious and miserable about this policy that I shall raise a debate about it—in which I hope that you may, if you agree, lend support." [1] At the discussion on November the 24th, he undertook in the event of the Cabinet agreeing to a brief postponement of their decision to present a case in writing. He was as good as his word. Within twenty-four hours he had drawn up an elaborate presentation of the case against evacuation, covering a dozen printed pages. With his accustomed skill he had analysed the military evidence, showing that even on purely military grounds there was no large balance of opinion in favour of retreat; pitting against such military arguments as had been advanced the grave political and moral considerations which weighed heavily in the scale against a policy of withdrawal; and painting a graphic and moving picture of the horror of the final scene which must inevitably be enacted if the estimates of the probable losses which had been placed before them by every military authority who had been consulted, proved to be even approximately correct.

> "I ask my colleagues to picture the situation, and I wish to draw it in no impressionist colours, but as it must in all probability actually arise. In the case of all three positions, the evacuation and the final scenes will be enacted at night. Our guns will continue firing until the last moment, notably those on or near to the beaches, but the trenches will have been taken one by one, and a moment must come when a *sauve qui peut* takes place, and when a disorganised crowd will press in despairing tumult on to the shore and into the boats. Shells will be falling and bullets ploughing their way into this mass of retreating humanity. On the water the motor lighters and

[1] Letter to Mr., afterwards Sir, Austen Chamberlain.

launches and row boats will be coming to and fro, and doing what they can. Conceive the crowding into the boats of thousands of half-crazy men, the swamping of craft, the nocturnal panic, the agony of the wounded, the hecatombs of the slain. It requires no imagination to create a scene that, when it is told, will be burned into the hearts and consciences of the British people for generations to come. What will they say of those who have brought about this supreme and hideous disaster?

Even supposing that a British commander were willing (as he might, in such conditions, very excusably be) to save the lives of his men by surrender—though probably no British commander would do this until the end was drawing nigh and fighting was about to be replaced by wholesale slaughter—can we be sure that an eastern enemy, intoxicated by triumph and maddened by blood, would stay their hands? Is it not more likely that there would ensue one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of mankind?

A parallel exists in the ancient world. Can any student of the history of Greece forget the Syracusan expedition of the ill-fated Nicias? Read the following passage from Grote:

'In this manner the whole army presently became one scene of clamour and confusion wherein there was neither command nor obedience, nor could anyone discern what was passing. The light of the moon rendered objects and figures generally visible, without being sufficient to discriminate friend from foe. The beaten Athenians, thrown back upon their comrades, were in many cases mistaken for enemies and slain. Disorder and panic presently ended in a general flight. The Athenians hurried back by the same roads which they had ascended; but these roads were found too narrow for terrified fugitives, and many of them threw away their arms in order to scramble or jump down the cliffs, in which most of them perished.'

This was one of many incidents in the Athenian disaster. It would be multiplied many-fold by the conditions and implements of modern warfare and by the nature of the terrain

in Gallipoli. Nor can I forbear from pointing out to my colleagues the prodigious effect that was exercised by the above catastrophe, not merely upon the destiny of Athens, but upon the entire Eastern world."[1]

He concluded with an impassioned appeal to them to pause before coming to a decision and to weigh carefully the considerations which he had placed before them, remembering that the decision which they were about to take would be one of the most momentous in British history and that each one of them would have to justify himself to his countrymen and to posterity for what might turn out to be an indelible blot upon the British name.

Military opinion, however, was hardening in favour of evacuation. To the advice tendered by General Monro who had been sent out to take supreme command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, was now added that of Lord Kitchener himself. No one had been more shocked than Lord Kitchener when General Monro's recommendation in favour of evacuation had been received. On November the 3rd, he had telegraphed to General Birdwood his objection—"I absolutely refuse to sign orders for evacuation which I think would be the gravest disaster and would condemn a large percentage of our men to death or imprisonment." On the following day he had left London for the scene of action, and on his return had explained to the Cabinet the reasons which had led him to change the opinion which he had formerly held and to recommend withdrawal. A decision in this sense was accordingly taken and, on December the 20th and January the 8th, the evacuation first of Anzac and Suvla and then of Helles was effected, contrary to all expectations, with negligible losses. That an operation, which in the opinion of every competent authority must be attended with losses amounting to from thirty to fifty per cent. of the entire force concerned, should have been carried through with scarcely any loss at all, constitutes a feat unparalleled in the annals of warfare.

Yet relief at this unexpectedly successful outcome of the operation did not reconcile Lord Curzon to the decision that had been taken.

[1] Note written for the Cabinet on November 25th, 1915.

"This operation (the evacuation of Helles)," he wrote more than a year later, "was carried out with scarcely inferior success on the 8th of January, and the last page was turned down of one of the most tragic, though heroic chapters of English history. Although the two-fold and final withdrawal from Gallipoli was thus accomplished and was generally acquiesced in by the public, I remain of the opinion that it was as great an error as any of the earlier blunders of the Dardanelles campaign. In my judgment persistence, if scientifically conducted, might still have led to victory; and this view I know to be shared by some of the best naval and military authority that was engaged."[1]

[1] Note on the Dardanelles Operations, drawn up by Lord Curzon for the Cabinet, on March 10th, 1917.