

PART II

CHAPTER I

MICHAEL MAKES HIS SPEECH

WHEN in the new Parliament Michael rose to deliver his maiden effort towards the close of the debate on the King's Speech, he had some notes in his hand and not an idea in his head. His heart was beating and his knees felt weak. The policy he was charged to express, if not precisely new in concept, was in reach and method so much beyond current opinion, that he awaited nothing but laughter. His would be a stray wind carrying the seed of a new herb into a garden, so serried and so full that no corner would welcome its growth. There was a plant called Chinese weed which having got hold never let go, and spread till it covered everything. Michael desired for Foggartism the career of Chinese weed; but all he expected was the like of what he had seen at Monterey on his tour round the world after the war. Chance had once brought to that Californian shore the seeds of the Japanese yew. In thick formation the little dark trees had fought their way inland to a distance of some miles. That battalion would never get farther now that native vegetation had been consciously roused against it; but its thicket stood—a curious and strong invader.

His first period had been so rehearsed that neither vacant mind nor dry mouth could quite prevent delivery. Straightening his waistcoat, and jerking his head back,

he regretted that the Speech from the throne foreshadowed no coherent and substantial policy such as might hope to free the country from its present plague of under-employment, and over-population. Economically speaking, any foreseeing interpretation of the course of affairs must now place Britain definitely in the orbit of the overseas world. . . . ("Oh! oh!") Ironical laughter so soon and sudden cleared Michael's mind, and relaxed his lips; and, with the grin that gave his face a certain charm, he resumed:

Speakers on all sides of the House, dwelling on the grave nature of the Unemployment problem, had pinned their faith to the full recapture of European trade, some in one way, some in another. August as they were, he wished very humbly to remark that they could not eat cake and have it. (*Laughter.*) Did they contend that wages in Britain must come down and working hours be lengthened; or did they assert that European wages must go up, and European working hours be shortened? No, they had not had the temerity. Britain, which was to rid itself of unemployment in the ways suggested, was the only important country in the world which had to buy about seven-tenths of its food, and of whose population well-nigh six-sevenths lived in Towns. It employed those six-sevenths in producing articles in some cases too dearly for European countries to buy, and yet it had to sell a sufficient surplus above the normal exchanges of trade, to pay for seven-tenths of the wherewithal to keep its producers alive. (*A laugh.*) If this was a joke, it was a grim one. (*A voice: "You have forgotten the carrying trade."*) He accepted the honourable Member's correction, and hoped that he felt happy about the future of that trade. It was, he feared, a somewhat shrinking asset.

At this moment in his speech Michael himself became a somewhat shrinking asset, overwhelmed by a sudden

desire to drop Foggartism, and sit down. The cool attention, the faint smiles, the expression on the face of a past Prime Minister, seemed conspiring towards his subsidence. 'How young—oh! how young you are!' they seemed to say. 'We sat here before you were breeched.' And he agreed with them completely. Still there was nothing for it but to go on—with Fleur in the Ladies' Gallery, old Blythe in the Distinguished Strangers'; yes, and something stubborn in his heart! Clenching the notes in his hand, therefore, he proceeded:

In spite of the war, and because of the war, the population of their Island had increased by 2,000,000. Emigration had fallen from 300,000 to 100,000. And this state of things was to be remedied by the mere process of recapturing to the full European trade which, quite obviously, had no intention of being so recaptured. What alternative, then, was there? Some honourable Members, he was afraid not many, would be familiar with the treatise of Sir James Foggart, entitled 'The Parlous State of England.' ("*Hear, hear!*" from a back Labour bench.) He remembered to have read in a certain organ, or perhaps he should say harmonium, of the Press, for it was not a very deep-voiced instrument—(*laughter*)—that no such crack-brained policy had ever been devised for British consumption. ("*Hear, hear!*") Certainly Foggartism was mad enough to look ahead, to be fundamental, and to ask the country to face its own position and the music into the bargain. . . .

About to go over 'the top'—with public confession of his faith trembling behind his lips—Michael was choked by the sudden thought: 'Is it all right—is it what I think it, or am I an ignorant fool?' He swallowed vigorously, and staring straight before him, went on:

"Foggartism deprecates surface measures for a people

in our position ; it asks the country to fix its mind on a date—say twenty years hence—a minute in a nation's life—and to work steadily and coherently up to that date. It demands recognition of the need to make the British Empire, with its immense resources mostly latent, a self-sufficing unit. Imperialists will ask : What is there new in that ? The novelty lies in degree and in method. Foggartism urges that the British people should be familiarised with the Empire by organised tours and propaganda on a great scale. It urges a vast increase—based on this familiarisation—of controlled and equipped emigration from these shores. But it has been found impossible, as honourable members well know, to send out suitable grown folk in any adequate quantity, because confirmed town-dwellers with their town tastes and habits, and their physique already impaired by town life, are of little use in the Dominions, while the few still on the English land cannot be spared. Foggartism, therefore, would send out boys and girls, between the ages of fourteen, or perhaps fifteen, and eighteen, in great numbers. The House is aware that experiments in this direction have already been made, with conspicuous success, but such experiments are but a drop in the bucket. This is a matter which can only be tackled in the way that things were tackled during the war. Development of child emigration is wanted, in fact, on the same scale and with the same energy as was manifested in Munitions after a certain most honourable Member had put his shoulder to that wheel—multiplication a hundredfold. Although the idea must naturally prove abortive without the utmost goodwill and co-operating energy on the part of the Dominions, I submit that this co-operation is not beyond the bounds of hope. The present hostility of people in the Dominions towards British immigrants is due to their very reason-

able distrust of the usefulness of adult immigrants from this country. Once they have malleable youth to deal with, that drawback vanishes. In fact, the opening up of these vast new countries is like the progress of a rolling snowball, each little bit of 'all right'—I beg the House's pardon—picks up another little bit; and there is no limit to the cumulative possibilities if a start is made at the right end and the scheme pushed and controlled by the right people." Some one behind him said: "Talking through his hat." Michael paused, disconcerted; then, snatching at his bitt, went on: "A job of this sort half done is better left alone, but in the war, when something was found necessary, it *was* done, and men were always available for the doing of it. I put it to the House that the condition of our country now demands efforts almost as great as then."

He could see that some members were actually listening to him with attention, and, taking a deep breath, he went on:

"Leaving out Ireland—" (*A voice: "Why?"*) "I prefer not to touch on anything that does not like to be touched—" (*laughter*) "the present ratio of white population between Britain and the rest of the Empire is roughly in the nature of five to two. Child Emigration on a great scale will go far to equalise this ratio within twenty years; the British character of the British Empire will be established for ever, and supply and demand between the Mother Country and the Dominions will be levelled up." (*A voice: "The Dominions will then supply themselves."*) "The honourable Member will forgive me if I doubt that, for some time to come. We have the start in the machinery of manufacture. It may, of course, be five, seven, ten years before unemployment here comes down even to the pre-war rate, but can you point

to any other plan which will really decrease it? I am all for good wages and moderate working hours. I believe the standard in Britain and the new countries, though so much higher than the European, is only a decent minimum, and in some cases does not reach it; I want better wages, even more moderate working hours; and the want is common among working men wherever the British flag flies." ("Hear, hear!") "They are not going back on that want; and it is no good supposing that they are!" ("Hear, hear!" "Oh! oh!") "The equalisation of demand and supply *within the Empire* is the only way of preserving and improving the standards of life, which are now recognised as necessary on British soil. The world has so changed that the old maxim 'buy in the cheapest, sell in the dearest market' is standing on its head so far as England is concerned. Free Trade was never a principle—" ("Oh! oh!" "Hear, hear!" and laughter.) "Oh! well, it was born twins with expediency, and the twins have got mixed, and are both looking uncommonly pecky." (Laughter.) "But I won't go into that. . . ." (A voice: "Better not!") Michael could see the mouth it came from below a clipped moustache in a red, black-haired face turned round at him from a Liberal bench. He could not put a name to it, but he did not like the unpolitical expression it wore. Where was he? Oh! yes. . . . "There is another point in the Foggart programme: England, as she now is, insufficiently protected in the air, and lamentably devoid of food-producing power, is an abiding temptation to the aggressive feelings of other nations. And here I must beg the House's pardon for a brief reference to Cinderella—in other words, the Land. The Speech from the throne gave no lead in reference to that vexed question, beyond implying that a Conference of all interested will be called. Well, without a definite

intention in the minds of all the political Parties to join in some fixed and long-lasting policy for rehabilitation, such a Conference is bound to fail. Here again Foggartism—” (“*Ho! bo!*”) “Here again Foggartism steps in. Foggartism says: Lay down your Land policy *and don't change it*. Let it be as sacred as the Prohibition Law in America.” (*A voice: “And as damned!” Laughter.*) “The sacred and damned—it sounds like a novel by Dostoevski.” (*Laughter.*) “Well, we shall get nowhere without this damned sanctity. On our Land policy depends not only the prosperity of farmers, landlords, and labourers, desirable and important though that is, but the very existence of England, if unhappily there should come another war under the new conditions. Yes, and in a fixed land policy lies the only hope of preventing the permanent deterioration of the British type. Foggartism requires that we lay down our land policy, so that within ten years we may be growing up to seventy per cent. of our food. Estimates made during the war showed that as much as eighty-two per cent. could be grown at a pinch; and the measures then adopted went a long way to prove that this estimate was no more than truth. Why were those measures allowed to drop? Why was all that great improvement allowed to run to seed and grass? What is wanted is complete confidence in every branch of home agriculture; and nothing but a policy guaranteed over a long period can ever produce that confidence.” Michael paused. Close by, a member yawned; he heard a shuffle of feet; another old Prime Minister came in; several members were going out. There was nothing new about ‘the Land.’ Dared he tackle the air—that third plank in the Foggart programme? There was nothing new about the air either! Besides, he would have to preface it by a plea for the abolition of air fighting, or

at least for the reduction of armaments. It would take too long! Better leave well alone! He hurried on:

“Emigration! The Land! Foggartism demands for both the same sweeping attention as was given to vital measures during the war. I feel honoured in having been permitted to draw the attention of all Parties to this—I will brave an honourable Member’s disposition to say ‘Ho, ho!’—great treatise of Sir James Foggart. And I beg the House’s pardon for having been so long in fulfilling my task.”

He sat down, after speaking for thirteen minutes. Off his chest! An honourable Member rose.

“I must congratulate the Member for Mid-Bucks on what, despite its acquaintanceship with the clouds, and its Lewis Carrollian appeal for less bread, more taxes, we must all admit to be a lively and well-delivered first effort. The Member for Tyne and Tees, earlier in the Debate, made an allusion to the Party to which I have the honour to belong, which—er——”

‘Exactly!’ thought Michael, and after waiting for the next speech, which contained no allusion whatever to his own, he left the House.