

CHAPTER XXV.

GENERAL ANGLO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS, 1903-7.

I.—THE FIRST STAGE OF THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT, 1903-4.

[*ED. NOTE.*—The negotiations leading up to the Anglo-Russian Entente are here generally indicated. The more specific problems of Thibet, Persia, and Afghanistan are dealt with in separate and subsequent chapters.

The report of Sir Charles Hardinge's conversation given in No. 181 (*b*) below, is a copy of Sir Charles Hardinge's letter, preserved in the Embassy Archives. The original is not in the records, and it is not possible to tell whether the marginal markings and underlinings are by Lord Lansdowne or Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. All except one are in red ink, and might therefore be assumed to be by the Foreign Secretary, but some Ambassadors (*e.g.*, Sir F. Bertie) were in the habit of using red ink in commenting on documents in their own archives. Though endorsed "Russo-Afghan affairs" the letter really deals with all Anglo-Russian relations, and represents the origin of those ideas of *rapprochement* which were interrupted by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. It should be compared carefully with Lord Lansdowne's conversation of October 26, 1903, with M. Paul Cambon (*v. Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, pp. 217-8, No. 250) and with the despatch of November 17 immediately below.]

No. 181 (*a*).

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Mr. Spring-Rice.

F.O. China 1747.

(No. 980.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 17, 1903.

. . . . (1) I then asked His Excellency whether he was able to make any proposals to me as to the most convenient way of examining the other questions which he had been authorized by Count Lamsdorff to discuss with me. He did not seem to have any specific suggestions to make. He said the questions to which I referred seemed naturally to group themselves into (1) questions concerning China in which Russia had a special interest (2) questions concerning India, in which Great Britain had a special interest and (3) questions concerning Persia in which both Powers were interested. He let fall the observation that the Russian Government did not favour any arrangement which would place Northern Persia under Russia and Southern Persia under British influence, but they recognized our predominance in the Persian Gulf, although they would probably require a commercial *débouché* in those waters.

I observed that an arrangement upon the lines thus indicated did not seem to me to present any particular advantages for us, and I asked whether the commercial outlet involved the acquisition of a harbour and a strategic base. Count Benckendorff replied decidedly in the negative.

After the exchange of a few desultory remarks in regard to Manchuria and Afghanistan I asked His Excellency whether it would not be possible for him to put upon paper as a basis for our discussion his own views as to the different questions at issue. He said that he feared he had not sufficient materials at the Embassy to enable him to do this.

I asked him whether he had any authority to make specific proposals as to any of these questions.

He replied that he had no authority to do so but that he was instructed to discuss them with me ("d'en causer avec vous").

(1) [The first part of this despatch deals with Thibet and is quoted in ch. XXVI, pp. 306-7, No. 289.]

As I was unable to prolong the conversation it was decided that we should meet again.

From the want of precision of His Excellency's language and ideas I am disposed to think that our discussions are not likely to have much result.

[I am, &c.]

L[ANSLOWNE].

No. 181 (b).

Mr. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

Russo-Afghan Relations: Mr. Hardinge's Conv[ersation] with C[ount] Benckendorff.

F.O. Embassy Archives, Russia, 181/793. *Windsor Castle,*
My dear Lord Lansdowne, *Sunday, November 22, 1903.*

I had a very long talk with C[oun]t Benckendorff this afternoon on the many points at issue between us and the Russian Gov[ernment]t. and, although our conversation was quite informal, I think it has thrown some light on Russian aspirations and on the question as to how far the Russian Gov[ernmen]t will go to meet our views.

I spoke to him very plainly and showed him that although our policy in Asia had for many years had in view the maintenance of the *status quo*, the Russian Gov[ernmen]t had been continually treading on our toes and pursuing an aggressive policy in China, Persia and Afghanistan. I told him that although we had shown great patience in China, had always urged our counsels of moderation on Japan, and had loyally supported the Austro-Russian scheme of reforms in Macedonia, they treated us with a want of frankness and had even gone so far as to address us a note on a matter of grave importance to British interests, which was peremptory in tone, and almost discourteous in its terms.⁽¹⁾ I said that having heard from both St. Petersburg and Paris that he would discuss terms for a general settlement on his return to London, you had been very much disappointed that he had no proposals to make and was apparently without instructions.

Count Benckendorff did not dissent from what I said; he admitted that Count Lamsdorff had spoken to him without appreciation of our attitude at Peking and Constantinople, and said that the moment was riper now for a friendly understanding than at any time during the past twenty years. On my suggesting to him that we should discuss informally what each Gov[ernmen]t wanted, he repeated what I think he told you, that Manchuria should be discussed as a question where Russian interests preponderate, Central Asia from the point of view of the defence of Indian interests, and Persia as a country where both England and Russia have important and equal interests.

Beginning with Manchuria he urged that we should not press them hard on the subject of evacuation. He said there were two parties in Russia, one for evacuation and the other against, and that at the present moment the Russian Gov[ernmen]t did not know its own mind. It would be better for us not to press this point but to seek for compensation elsewhere. I told him that we felt very strongly on the subject of Newchwang which was a Treaty port and where we had important treaty rights and a considerable trade. He said that the Russian Gov[ernmen]t would certainly be ready to hand over Newchwang before long to the Chinese authorities and that they do not hold to the banking and Customs, but that all they want is the formation of an International Sanitary Commission where Russia, in view of her great interests and the proximity of her frontier, should have a privileged position. I asked him if he

⁽¹⁾ [This is apparently the communication referring to Afghanistan, mentioned *infra*, pp. 186-7, No. 182; p. 519, No. 465, and printed *infra*, p. 621, *Appendix II.* v. also *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, p. 223, No. 258.]

meant by this an International Commission where, for instance, Russia should have two votes to other countries' one vote, and he replied that he thought an arrangement might be made on some such basis.⁽²⁾ I then said that we expect Russia to fulfil her promises as to the opening of other ports in Manchuria and as to the maintenance of the "open door." He said that he was authorised by Count Lamsdorff to say that the promise to open other ports would be fulfilled, but he begged us not to press too hard on the subject of rates and tariffs, explaining that in every country where British and Russian trade competed, British goods drove Russian goods out of the market, and that we knew this to be the case.

As regards Afghanistan, Tibet and the countries conterminous with the Indian frontier the Russian Gov[ernmen]t would be ready to consider them as entirely within the British sphere of influence with all its consequences, the only point upon which they insisted being their right to have direct relations with Afghan officials on purely non-political questions. This would not imply diplomatic representation in Afghanistan nor any interference in Afghan affairs. It would be necessary to find some formula to meet this case, and the Russian Gov[ernmen]t would give guarantees for its observance. He said that Count Lamsdorff maintained that the Russian Gov[ernmen]t had never surrendered the right to have direct relations with the Afghan officials, but had voluntarily never exercised it. It was consequently their right to resume such relations. To this statement I demurred but did not discuss it further.⁽³⁾

With respect to Persia the question was, he said, more difficult. The Russian Gov[ernmen]t would not agree to a division of spheres of interest in the North and South, as they saw no reason why their commercial development should be limited to the northern half. I reminded him that he had in conversation with you talked of a "débouché commercial" in the Gulf and asked what he wanted, as surely there was no obstacle to their exporting their merchandise from Bushire, Bunder Abbas and elsewhere. He said that what he meant was a railway to the South, without a naval base, fortifications or troops to guard the road as in Manchuria. He remarked "You may guard it if you like!" I told him that I thought we would never allow any special privileges to any foreign Power on the shores of the Gulf for over a hundred years and had special Treaties with many of the Chiefs. He asked me if we wanted the Gulf to be a "mare clausum" and not open to foreign ships of war, and I replied that I had never heard this suggestion made. I added that the question of Seistan, being conterminous with the Afghan and Indian frontiers was of the greatest importance to us, and that we could never allow Russia predominance in that province. To this he answered that Seistan would come under the category of those countries [*sic* countries] which might be considered as entirely within the British sphere of influence and as involved in the defence of Indian interests. I remarked that the independence and integrity of Persia had always been a cardinal principle of British policy in Persia, and in any arrangement come to would probably be reaffirmed by us, upon which he made a sign of dissent but said nothing.

These are practically the chief points of our conversation which lasted over an hour. I impressed upon him that I had absolutely no authority from you to say anything, and that my remarks were purely academic, but that I should tell you what he said. To this he consented.

My opinion is that, although he is without any instructions and is told to do his best by Lamsdorff in making some suggestions, these questions have been discussed

(2) [For references showing the position in *Newchwang, v. Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. I, p. 87, No. 56, *min.*; p. 41, No. 61; Vol. II, pp. 1-3, No. 1; p. 2, *note*; p. 88, No. 47; pp. 184-5, No. 144; p. 201, No. 228, *encl.*; p. 203, No. 231; p. 231, No. 271.]

(3) [Early in 1904 Count Lamsdorff stated that Russia had no present intention of appointing such agents in Afghanistan, but Lord Lansdowne did not think this assurance adequate, *v. Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, pp. 247-8, No. 295 and *note*; p. 250, No. 296.]

between them in a formal way, and that it is not unlikely that the views expressed represent to a certain extent those of Lamsdorff, although he has very likely kept something back.

Please excuse the length of my letter which is written hurriedly and very late at night.

Yours, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

P.S. The King told me that he had had an interview with Benckendorff in which he spoke to him very openly on Russian foreign policy.

No. 182.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Mr. Spring-Rice.⁽¹⁾

F.O. Embassy Archives, Russia. 181/791.

(No. 384 [No. 334].) Very Confidential.

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 25, 1903.

I had a further conversation to-day with the Russian Ambassador in reference to the questions which we had previously discussed on the 7th and 17th instant.

Count Benckendorf mentioned to me that during his visit to Windsor the King had spoken very earnestly to him on the same subject, His Majesty expressing his desire that an attempt should be made to establish a better understanding between the two Governments in regard to the different points at issue. I told His Excellency that, as he was aware, I was prepared to discuss them with him as frankly as possible, and I had no objection to grouping them in the manner which he had himself suggested (*vide* my despatch No. 330 of the 17th November).⁽²⁾ I would, if he liked, give him an idea of the kind of arrangement which, speaking for myself, I should be ready to lay before my colleagues, and the Government of India, whom we should, of course, have to consult as to the Afghan question.

We should expect Russia to recognise in the most formal manner the position of Afghanistan as being entirely within our sphere of influence and guided by us in regard to its external policy. Subject to this I was prepared to admit that there might be direct communication between Russian and Afghan officials in regard to matters of a purely local character, and of a non-political complexion. Such communications should pass only between officials connected with the local administration of affairs adjoining the frontier. Any arrangement arrived at would, of course, have to be subject to the concurrence of the Ameer. Russia would have to agree to abstain from sending agents into Afghanistan.

Count Benckendorff raised no objection to any of these proposals. He asked me whether I believed that the Ameer had any officers on or near the frontier who could be employed in such a manner. I said that I thought no difficulty would be experienced in designating suitable agents for the purpose.

Count Benckendorff admitted that nothing could be done unless the Ameer was a consenting party.

I then told His Excellency that I thought it right to let him know, though I did so only for his private information, that His Majesty's Government had so deeply

⁽¹⁾ [The text here given is from the Embassy Archives and is the original. Some corrections in ink are visible on the original printed document. The number of the despatch should be 334 but was erroneously printed 384.]

⁽²⁾ [*v. supra*, pp. 183-4, No. 181 (a).]

resented the tone of the Russian communication of the 5th October⁽³⁾ in regard to our relations with Afghanistan that I had, by desire of the Cabinet, addressed to you a long despatch intended as a defence of our conduct, and, I was afraid I must add, as an indictment of that of the Russian Government.

That despatch was written on the 5th November, but in consequence of the extremely conciliatory character of the communication which Count Lamsdorff had desired his Excellency to make to me on the 7th instant on his return to his post, I had telegraphed to you desiring you to take no action for the present upon it.

I then gave his Excellency a copy of the despatch in question (No. 305 of the 5th November), and begged him to read it attentively, adding that I for one should be glad if we should find ourselves in a position to instruct you to withhold it altogether.

Passing to Thibet I said that we should expect Russia to recognise that, owing to the geographical position of that country, it also was within our sphere, and we should expect an undertaking that Russia would not send agents into Thibetan territory.

As regards the Far East I said that, in my view, it would be reasonable that we should recognise the predominating interest of Russia as the limitrophe Power in Manchuria. We had no desire to interfere with her control of her Manchurian railway system. The two Governments had, indeed, agreed that railway development in this part of the Chinese Empire should fall to the Russian Government. Nor could we, I thought, take exception to any reasonable measures of precaution which the Russian Government might adopt for insuring the safety of the line. On the other hand, it was essential that our Treaty rights in all parts of the Chinese Empire should be respected, and that our trade should receive equal treatment in those regions. I dwelt upon the deplorable effect which had been produced on the public mind in this country by the neglect of the Russian Government to fulfil its pledges regarding Manchuria. If circumstances had arisen rendering it impossible that these pledges should be fulfilled, it was surely due to us that some explanation should be given of those circumstances. I trusted that the Russian Government was now in a position to fix a date for the evacuation, or at any rate explain why this was not done.

Count Benckendorff dwelt upon the danger of giving these pledges in circumstances which, as experience had shown, rendered it not always easy to fulfil them.

I asked him whether, at any rate, in the case of Newchwang it could not be at once arranged that an early evacuation should take place. I attached the greatest importance to this, owing to the extent of our interest in the trade of that port. We should also expect the Russian Government to put an end to the arrangement under which the Newchwang Customs were at present paid to the Russian and Chinese Bank, and a part of the proceeds intercepted by the Russian Government.

In reply to an observation by his Excellency I said that it seemed to me reasonable that Russia should be adequately represented on the Board of Health, and that we had no desire to prevent this.

We then discussed the question of Persia. I said that I saw no reason why we should not recognise that the position of Russia, as the limitrophe Power gave her a certain preponderance in the north, nor did we desire to deny to her commercial facilities in the south of Persia, and on the Persian Gulf. His Excellency would, however, remember that Russia had herself forbidden Persia to construct railways for a term of ten years, and if that arrangement held good, there could, while it lasted, be no question of a line connecting Persia with the sea. Should the embargo be removed, and should there be any idea of carrying a line through southern Persia, we should expect to be consulted, and an amicable arrangement might be made under which we might be given control over the southern portion of the line and its approaches to the sea.

⁽³⁾ [The contents of this communication and the course of the negotiation generally are indicated in the summary given *infra*, p. 519, No. 466, and the full text of the communication is printed *infra*, p. 621, Appendix II.]

Finally, there was the question of Seistan. We should expect the Russian Government to recognise that this province was entirely under British influence, and to abstain from interfering with the trade routes leading through it.

His Excellency throughout listened to my observations attentively, and did not, so far as I was able to follow his comments, oppose any serious objections to my suggestions, which he promised to consider.

I am, &c.

LANSDOWNE.

No. 183.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Mr. Spring-Rice.

F.O. Russia 1677.

(No. 176.) Secret.

Sir,

Foreign Office, April 22, 1904.

The Russian Amb[assado]r told me today that he had had an interview with the King who had received him with the utmost cordiality, and given him an account of a conversation which had taken place at Copenhagen between H[is] M[ajesty] and M. Isvolsky in which H[is] M[ajesty] had expressed an earnest desire for the establishment of friendly relations between Great Britain and Russia, and for an amicable understanding on various questions outstanding between the two Powers.⁽¹⁾

Count Benckendorff went on to say that the effect of H[is] M[ajesty]'s language to M. Isvolsky could not fail to be excellent and would certainly tend to improve the relations between the two countries. H[is] E[xc]cellency felt however convinced that Count Lamsdorff would almost immediately ask him what was in fact suggested by H[is] M[ajesty]'s language. What could the Russian Gov[ernmen]t do? What was H[is] M[ajesty]'s G[overnment] prepared to do in order to give effect to H[is] M[ajesty]'s views? Was it possible for anything to be done at once?

I reminded H[is] E[xc]cellency of a conversation which had taken place between us at the commencement of the war when he had expressed the opinion, in which I concurred, that for the moment the conversations which he and I had begun as to a number of outstanding questions could not with advantage be continued. I remained under the same impression.

H[is] E[xc]cellency observed that the King had said much the same thing to him, and he intended to repeat it to the Russian Gov[ernmen]t. No such limiting words were however to be found in M. Isvolsky's report of the conversation at Copenhagen.

I said that I felt little doubt that the King had taken it for granted that it was not possible to do much in present circumstances although H[is] M[ajesty] desired to affirm generally the principles upon which action might be taken when a suitable opportunity occurred.

H[is] E[xc]cellency said that at one point something might be thought to be done at once. Could we say something which would allay the apprehension of the Russian Gov[ernmen]t in regard to our action in Thibet?

I replied that statements had been made in both Houses of Parliament, which ought, I thought, to be highly satisfactory to the Russian Gov[ernmen]t.

H[is] E[xc]cellency fully admitted that no exception could be taken to these statements, but he asked me what we should do supposing the Thibetans refused to send delegates to meet us and left us severely alone at Gyantse. Could we say what we should do, or even what we should not do, in such an event?

⁽¹⁾ [Sir Sidney Lee: *King Edward VII* (1927), II, pp. 284-7, quotes the full account given by M. Isvolski of the interview, and states that it was approved by the King, and that a copy was sent by the latter privately to Lord Lansdowne, with instructions to "keep the copy private and only show it to Mr. Balfour." *ib.* p. 287.]

I said I did not see how I could be expected to reply to such a hypothetical question. If a new situation were to arise the Gov[ernmen]t of India would no doubt report the facts to us and make their recommendations which we might or might not accept.

H[is] E[xc]cellency told me that he was going to Paris for a few days and would probably discuss matters with M. Nelidoff and he repeated his opinion that although a general settlement could scarcely be thought of at the present time, we ought in view of the language used by H[is] M[ajesty] to miss no opportunity of adjusting amicably any minor differences which might arise between our two countries. I said that in principle I entirely concurred with H[is] E[xc]cellency.

I am, &c.

LANSDOWNE.

[ED. NOTE.—As quoted in *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. II, p. 401, the Marquess of Lansdowne informed Sir Edmund Monson on April 29, 1904, that M. Paul Cambon the French Ambassador had spoken to him that day on Anglo-Russian relations. "He told me that His Majesty the King had expressed to him the earnest desire that these relations should be improved, that, if possible, an agreement should be arrived at for the settlement of some of the questions which had occasioned friction and misunderstanding between the two Governments in the past. His Excellency cordially approved of the idea, but recognised the immense difficulties of giving effect to it, particularly at the present time.

I expressed my agreement and added an expression of satisfaction that public feeling in both countries had during the last few weeks apparently become much calmer. I said that we desired to avoid all possible causes of misunderstanding at the present time, and should spare no efforts to do so. There seemed to me, indeed, to be only one point which might, although, I did not think this was likely, give rise to really serious trouble." The remainder of the despatch refers to the Straits question and is quoted on p. 50, No. 43, *note*.]

No. 184.

The Marquess of Lansdowne to Mr. Spring-Rice.

F.O. China 1749.

(No. 188 A.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, May 4, 1904.⁽¹⁾

The Russian Ambassador told me to-day that he had received from Count Lamsdorff a message, of which the following is a summary, on the subject of the conversation which M. Izvolsky had had the honour of having with the King.

Count Lamsdorff began by stating that he had heard from M. Izvolsky of the latter having sent to Count Benckendorff a copy of his report of this conversation. The words used by His Majesty were, Count Lamsdorff thought, most significant, and offered fresh evidence of the favourable sentiments with which the King was animated. The war with Japan rendered the present moment unfavourable for entering upon negotiations, but the Russian Government had never shown themselves averse to a sincere understanding, provided that His Majesty's Government would formulate clearly the equitable conditions upon which they desired that it should be established. Count Benckendorff was at liberty to speak very clearly in this sense, and to explain to His Majesty's Government that, on the basis of the assurances and declarations which they had recently given to Russia, the latter would be most willing to arrive at as complete an understanding as possible on all questions interesting the two Governments as soon as the end of the war offered an opportunity of entering on negotiations on this subject, on the assumption, of course, that the attitude of Great Britain during the crisis in the Far East continued to be in conformity with the assurances which she had given.

The private and personal letter which had been addressed by the Emperor to the King, and conveyed to its august destination by Sir C. Scott, was the best reply that could be made to the gracious words which the King had used to M. Izvolsky.

⁽¹⁾ [This despatch was apparently not actually sent until the 10th, although it retained the date of its original draft.]

I told Count Benckendorff that I had listened with satisfaction to the statement which he had been desired to make. His Excellency would remember that I had on more than one occasion expressed my hope that at a more opportune moment we should be able to renew our discussions as to the possibility of a general understanding between our two countries; discussions which had been so unfortunately interrupted by the outbreak of war.

With regard to Count Lamsdorff's observations as to our attitude while the crisis in the Far East continued, it seemed to me that we might well endeavour to deal in a friendly and considerate spirit with any questions which might from time to time arise. His Excellency had, I said, more than once referred to one such question—that, namely, of our attitude towards Thibet. As to this, he had been good enough to express himself in terms of approval of the policy described in our telegram of the 6th November to the Government of India. There was, on the other hand, another question with regard to which it was, I thought, in the power of the Russian Government to gratify us without any sacrifice of Russian interests. I referred to the proposed Khedivial Decree which had lately been prepared in consultation with France. It would be agreeable to us if the Russian Government would give its adhesion to that Decree, and, if they would do so, I felt no doubt that I should be able to give, in reference to Thibet, an assurance that we still adhered to the policy of the telegram to which I had referred.

His Excellency asked me to show him the telegram of the 6th November, and, after reading it through carefully, said that it seemed to him to be all that the Russian Government could desire.

Speaking for himself, he was fully prepared to accept my proposal. Although I had said nothing to him about the Khedivial Decree, he was aware of the importance which we attached to the matter. He expected almost immediately to hear something from Count Lamsdorff upon the subject, and he would call on me again as soon as he had received his instructions.

I am, &c.
L[ANSLOWNE].

No. 185.

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.Q. Russia 1680.

(No. 256.)

My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. May 18, 1904.

R. May 28, 1904.

By preconcerted arrangement I called on Count Lamsdorff yesterday. He gave me a very warm and friendly reception and expressed his pleasure at my return to St. Petersburg as His Majesty's representative. At the same time he expressed his regret that the Emperor was absent for a few days from St. Petersburg, but promised to inform His Majesty at once of my arrival and to ask that I might be received in audience as soon as possible after the Emperor's return on Sunday next in order to present my credentials as His Majesty's Ambassador together with the private letter which the King had been pleased to intrust to me.⁽¹⁾

In the course of conversation I told His Excellency that, in view of the frequent interviews which Count Benckendorff had had with Your Lordship during the last few months, and, after the very clear manner in which you had explained to him the views and attitude of His Majesty's Government on the various questions of interest to both

⁽¹⁾ [This seems to be the letter dated May 12, which is quoted in Sir Sidney Lee: *King Edward VII* (1927), II, pp. 288-9. It succeeded an interchange of letters between the two rulers, following King Edward's conversation with M. Isvolski on April 14, 1904. *cp. supra*, pp. 188-9, No. 183.]

Governments, it was hardly necessary for me to say much on these subjects on the present occasion. I wished however, in conformity with your Lordship's instructions, to express to him the friendly sentiments of His Majesty's Government, to assure him of their firm intention to maintain an attitude of strict neutrality during the progress of the war in the Far East, and of their earnest desire to resume at a more suitable moment the exchange of views which had been initiated before the commencement of the war, with a view to arriving at a general agreement on all questions at issue between the two Governments. In the meantime it was the hope and desire of His Majesty's Government that any question which might arise between the two Governments should be treated on both sides with frank discussion and in a conciliatory spirit.

Count Lamsdorff in reply said that he could warmly reciprocate the friendly sentiments of His Majesty's Government, that he was most anxious to arrive at a friendly understanding with His Majesty's Government, and that every effort must be made by both Governments to arrive at this happy result.

After a few expressions of regret at the present state of affairs in the Far East and a disclaimer of all responsibility on the part of the Russian Government for the outbreak of war, he referred to Your Lordship's conversation with Count Benckendorff on the 10th instant in connection with the Khedivial Decree.

His Excellency said that he wished me to understand that when, by order of the Emperor, the Russian Government had declared their readiness to accept the Khedivial Decree, they had wished to be the first amongst the Powers to give their assent as a friendly act towards both England and France, and as a mark of their appreciation of the happy results to be obtained from the conclusion of the Anglo-French Agreement, but that it had been an unpleasant surprise to them when they found that they were asked to subscribe to a further clause in the Agreement. The Khedivial Decree was a question in which Russian interests were concerned, but the other clauses in the Anglo-French Agreement whether they related to Egypt, Morocco, or elsewhere, did not concern the Russian Government, and he earnestly deprecated any extension of the question at issue.

He said that he could give no reply to Count Benckendorff until he had submitted the matter to the consideration of the Emperor after his return to St. Petersburg next Sunday, but that he feared that the present development would hardly be pleasing to His Majesty after the friendly action which had been taken on the Emperor's initiative.

Turning to the question of Thibet, Count Lamsdorff said that the text which Your Lordship had submitted to Count Benckendorff was ambiguous, in that what was given with one hand was taken away with the other. The general sense of the memorandum⁽²⁾ was quite satisfactory except for the sentence which implied a reserve as to the future action of His Majesty's Government in Thibet, and which entirely spoilt its effect. In reply to my suggestion that there must have been some misunderstanding he admitted that it might possibly be due to a misinterpretation of the sense of the sentence, but that he had asked Count Benckendorff for explanations.

I told Count Lamsdorff that, unless my memory deceived me, the memorandum was framed entirely in the sense of the telegram to the Viceroy of November 6th,⁽³⁾ and that the concluding sentence was drawn up in exceptionally forcible and emphatic terms. At the same time I assured him of my absolute conviction that His Majesty's Government harboured no designs for the annexation of Thibet or for a protection over the country, but that owing to the obstinacy of the Thibetans it had been necessary to take certain military precautions, and that it might even be necessary to go to Lhasa before we obtained satisfaction from the Thibetans and proper guarantees for the observation of their Treaty engagements with His Majesty's Government.

Count Lamsdorff recognized the necessity of obtaining satisfaction from the Thibetans before retiring from Thibet, but was anxious that any declaration of the

(2) [This is apparently the communication made on May 10, *v. infra*, p. 307, No. 201.]

(3) [*cp. infra*, p. 305, *Ed. note.*]

intentions of His Majesty's Government should be clear and explicit, and incapable of misconstruction.

His Excellency then turned to the question of reforms in Macedonia, and, alluding to the recent debate in the House of Lords, expressed his disappointment and regret at the pessimistic tone of Your Lordship's speech,⁽⁴⁾ which he maintained was quite unwarranted by the situation in that province. He enlarged upon the danger to be apprehended from the slightest appearance of a lack of confidence on the part of any of the Powers or of disunion amongst them, as being likely to encourage the revolutionary elements in Macedonia to hope that, by impeding the present reforms, another scheme of wider scope than the present programme might be introduced by some other Power or Powers. He maintained that Europe had every reason to be satisfied with the progress which had been made and which had exceeded all expectations, and the fact that the spring had been tided over without an outbreak of war was to be regarded as an indisputable success of the present policy. The reports which he had received from the Russian Agents in Macedonia were of a most satisfactory and encouraging nature, showing that calm and confidence had been to a great extent restored, while the work of repatriation was being energetically pushed forward. These reports he proposed to publish very shortly.

I explained to Count Lamsdorff that it was not very surprising that Your Lordship's speech should have been in a pessimistic tone in view of the repeated and protracted delays which had occurred in setting the International Gendarmerie in motion, and, although our officers had been ready for months, I gathered that it was only within the last few days that they had started for their posts. The obstructive difficulties which had been raised on points of trivial importance had naturally tended to make both His Majesty's Government and the English people sceptical as to whether the Mürzsteg programme was really intended, and went sufficiently far, to relieve the suffering populations and to satisfy the better class of local reformers, but whatever may have been their feelings His Majesty's Government had loyally supported the policy of Austria and Russia and, in spite of the pressure of Parliament and of public opinion in England had resisted "à contre-cœur" any suggestions to propose an extension of the programme in a sense which might satisfy British public sentiment. I added that, in my personal opinion, if the Russian Government would even now propose some measure of small magnitude, as for instance the nomination of a few agents to supervise the collection of the tithes or any similar scheme, such a proposal would be very warmly received in England, and would be regarded as an earnest of their intentions to obtain more liberal reforms in the future than those limited by the programme of Mürzsteg.

Count Lamsdorff replied that he must adhere to his opinion that any extension, however small, of the policy of the Great Powers could only have an unsettling effect upon the population of Macedonia and would give further encouragement to the revolutionary party. Even if the aims of the Mürzsteg programme were comparatively modest they were nevertheless of a pacificatory nature, and had so far been justified by the very considerable results which had been attained. As soon as the contemplated reforms had been satisfactorily carried out, it would then be the duty of the Governments concerned to consider what further modifications should be introduced into other departments of the local administration for the benefit of the inhabitants of the province.

I have, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

(4) [The speech of May 5. *Parl. Deb.* 4th Ser., Vol. 134, pp. 508-13. *cp. Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. V, p. 75.]

Sir E. Monson to the Marquess of Lansdowne.⁽¹⁾

F.O. France 8666.

(No. 823.) Most Confidential.

My Lord,

Paris, D. May 27, 1904.

R. May 28, 1904.

I said to M. Delcassé the day before yesterday that the effect of the prompt acceptance by the Russian Government of the invitation to adhere to the project of the Khedivial Decree forming so important a part in the Anglo-French Arrangement of April 8th last, had not failed to produce considerable satisfaction in London.

His Excellency replied that he hoped that there would be a reciprocity of conciliation on the part of His Majesty's Government. That Russia having taken a step in advance of a friendly nature had a right to expect a corresponding movement from Great Britain.

I said that His Excellency must well know that there was at this moment, and had been for some time past, a very sincere readiness in London to meet with cordiality any genuine evidence of a friendly policy on the part of Russia.

The existing hostilities in which the latter Power is unfortunately engaged render difficult at this moment any material alteration in the relations between the two countries; but the foreign policy of Great Britain is never characterised by any want of generosity; and I could not doubt that the Government of the Emperor Nicholas would give adequate credence to the assurances of that of my Sovereign as to the attitude of Great Britain towards Russia.

M. Delcassé did not pursue the subject.

I have, &c.

EDMUND MONSON

⁽¹⁾ [This is reprinted from *Gooch & Temperley*, Vol. III, p. 19.]

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Russia 1680.

(No. 272.)

My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. May 27, 1904.

R. June 1, 1904.

I have the honour to inform Your Lordship that I was yesterday received in audience by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress and presented my credentials to His Majesty as the King's Ambassador at this Court.

I was accompanied to Tsarsky Selo by the Master of the Ceremonies, the staff of His Majesty's Embassy and Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, for whom I had obtained at his own request special permission to be present.

On leaving the train we were conveyed in State coaches to the Palace.

Immediately on arrival I was received in private audience by Their Majesties.

The Emperor, who was wearing the uniform of the Scots Greys and the ribbon and star of the Order of the Garter, expressed his pleasure at my return to St. Petersburg, and enquired after the health of Their Majesties the King and Queen. Having assured the Emperor of Their Majesties' welfare I presented my credentials as His Majesty's Ambassador together with a private letter which the King had been pleased to entrust to me to hand personally to the Emperor. At the same time in accordance with the King's commands, I gave to Their Majesties the affectionate messages of friendship and high esteem which I had been charged by His Majesty to convey, together with the assurance of His Majesty's very earnest desire for the establishment of the most cordial and friendly relations between the two Courts, and the hope that

at the conclusion of the war it might be possible to resume and to bring to a satisfactory conclusion the negotiations which had been initiated by Your Lordship with Count Benckendorff but which had unfortunately been temporarily interrupted. The Emperor, in thanking me, replied: "That also is my fervent wish."

After a conversation with Their Majesties which lasted some little time the Empress expressed a desire to make the acquaintance of Sir Howard Vincent and I had the honour of presenting him to Their Majesties who conversed with him for a few minutes. The Empress then retired.

At the Emperor's request I had the honour of presenting the members of the Embassy and, after exchanging a few words with them, His Majesty withdrew.

We returned to St. Petersburg in the same manner as we had come.

I have, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

No. 188.

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Russia 1680.

(No. 283.)

My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. June 8, 1904.

R. June 13, 1904.

When I saw Count Lamsdorff today at his weekly reception, I asked him if Count Benckendorff had transmitted to him Your Lordship's thanks for the adhesion of the Russian Government to the Khedivial Decree attached to the Anglo-French Agreement. His Excellency replied that he had received yesterday a telegram in that sense and that he hoped to receive tomorrow the text of the memorandum which you had given to the Russian Ambassador containing the assurances of His Majesty's Government respecting the scope of their future policy in Thibet.⁽¹⁾

Count Lamsdorff proceeded to remark that the removal of these questions from the sphere of discussion was of happy augury for the future, and that he sincerely hoped that, little by little, other questions arising between the British and Russian Governments might be solved in an equally satisfactory and friendly manner. He wished to impress upon me that certain reports which had been spread at the beginning of the war, but which had since been reduced to their proper proportions, had deeply impressed the Russian people and had forced upon them the conviction that the alliance between England and Japan had been concluded with the idea of encouraging Japan to declare war against Russia. Slowly but gradually people were beginning to understand that the alliance had been contracted by His Majesty's Government with no hostile intentions but rather with a view to the pacification of the Far East, and that, when war had been declared by Japan, His Majesty's Government were in no way to blame for the action of their ally. Nevertheless public opinion in Russia was still very suspicious of the attitude of Great Britain in the present war and the conduct of His Majesty's Government was being very carefully watched and would be regarded as a test of their sincerity in wishing to arrive later at a satisfactory agreement on all questions in dispute between the two Governments. He fully recognised that no negotiations would be possible during the progress of the war, but that if it could be shown that during the war the action of His Majesty's Government had been both friendly and neutral there would, he anticipated, be every reason to hope that such an attitude would be appreciated by public opinion in Russia and would prepare the ground for more friendly relations, the realisation of which had always been the dream of his official career.

I reminded Count Lamsdorff that I had already told him on a previous occasion that it was the desire and intention of His Majesty's Government to observe an attitude of the strictest neutrality during the war and that The King, Mr. Balfour

⁽¹⁾ [*v. infra*, p. 310, No. 293.]

and Your Lordship had spoken to me in the same sense. I felt quite confident of the loyalty of the intentions of His Majesty's Government towards the Russian Government, but that he must remember that His Majesty's Government had similar obligations of neutrality towards the Japanese Government and that he must neither expect nor ask them, while observing a friendly neutrality towards Russia, to take any action which might be construed into a breach of their neutrality towards Japan.

Count Lamsdorff at once replied that there was no expectation nor desire that His Majesty's Government should observe any other attitude than that of the strictest neutrality towards both of the belligerents during the course of the war, and he assured me that there could be no question of placing His Majesty's Government in such a predicament as I had foreshadowed.

I have, &c.

CHARLES HARDINGE.

II.—THE SITUATION ARISING FROM THE PEACE OF PORTSMOUTH AND THE RENEWAL OF THE ANGLO-JAPANESE ALLIANCE.

[*ED. NOTE.*—The promotion of an understanding between Russia and Great Britain was interrupted by various difficulties arising in connexion with the Russo-Japanese War (*v. supra* ch. XXIII, pp. 5-41, *passim*). Better relations began as a result of friendly messages conveyed by Sir Charles Hardinge from King Edward in May, 1905, as the following shows.]

No. 189.

Sir C. Hardinge to the Marquess of Lansdowne.

F.O. Russia 1700.

(No. 950.) Confidential.

My Lord,

St. Petersburg, D. May 30, 1905.

R. June 5, 1905.

I arrived in St. Petersburg yesterday morning and in the afternoon I called upon Count Lamsdorff.

On being received by His Excellency I conveyed to him, by the King's command, the friendly messages which His Majesty had entrusted to me.⁽¹⁾

I told Count Lamsdorff that The King had preserved a very pleasant remembrance of his interview with him nearly three years ago and that His Majesty had confidence in him in the knowledge that his efforts would always be directed towards the maintenance of peace and the promotion of good relations between the two countries.

Count Lamsdorff was evidently very pleased at receiving His Majesty's gracious message and, while asking me to convey to The King his most respectful thanks, assured me that it was his great aim and object to improve the relations between England and Russia, and that he trusted that His Majesty's Government would fully realise that strenuous efforts were being repeatedly made by interested parties to stir up strife between the two countries but that he hoped that the two Governments, while thoroughly appreciating the danger to be apprehended, would succeed in frustrating such a policy by carefully avoiding any incidents likely to stir up animosity or ill-feeling. For this reason he regretted all the more such an incident as that of the detention and return of Colonel Waters⁽²⁾ which, though evidently due to a complete misunderstanding, might possibly create an unfavourable impression which, if it existed, he begged me to do my utmost to mitigate and remove. He fully realised the actual difficulties of the present situation but he was full of hope and confidence that

⁽¹⁾ [These are indicated in Sir Sidney Leo: *King Edward VII* (1927), II, p. 306.]

⁽²⁾ [cp. Colonel W. H. Waters: *Secret and Confidential* (1926), pp. 279-292. This contains an account of the incident from Colonel Waters' point of view.]