

CHAPTER VII

FEBRUARY—MARCH 1925

Second Draft of Peace Pact sent to Paris: Herriot's discretion—Modification of England's views regarding German initiative—Triangular negotiations between Berlin, Paris and London—An opinion on the Kaiser—A story of Bismarck—Stresemann, disappointed at its reception, threatens to withdraw offer of Peace Pact—Germany and the League of Nations—Chancellor on Germany's position at Geneva—Death of Lord Curzon—Chamberlain's speech at Geneva—Expert's views on the "Danzig Corridor"—Augustus John's portrait of Stresemann—Revival of Pact offer.

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BERLIN, *February 11, 1925.*—The plot thickens. Two days ago the Chargé d'Affaires of the German Embassy in Paris handed to Herriot a Memorandum, essentially identical with that communicated to me on January 20th. The German Ambassador was ill himself, but thought it expedient not to delay delivery of the Note until his recovery. Herriot of course knew almost all the contents of the Note already, having heard them from London. He appears to have received the Memorandum favourably, and promised to keep it absolutely private. It would be fatal if the facts became known prematurely. Extreme parties of the Right, both in France and in Germany, would kill the whole negotiation in two days, even if they did not kill the negotiators in addition to the negotiation.

BERLIN, *February 14, 1925.*—I remain optimistic. The situation contains immense possibilities. There are admittedly grave difficulties to overcome—serious dangers—but there has never before been such a fair chance of landing a big stake and of establishing peace in Western Europe.

BERLIN, *February 14, 1925.*—Herriot's promise to keep

the German proposal a secret appears to have been most strictly observed. I have seen no mention of the negotiation in the Press.

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BERLIN, *February* 18, 1925.—The Foreign Office system of circulating telegrams and information appears to me wholly excellent. In this way one is able to follow what is going on in every capital in Europe, indeed in the world. And the unravelling of the tangled skein is admirably facilitated by organised system.

LONDON complains of alleged duplicity on the part of the Germans, because in their communication of January 20 they stipulated that it was to be regarded as secret and in a more complete communication to Paris of February 9 a similar stipulation was imposed. This is a misunderstanding of the necessities of the situation. If either the Note to London or the Note to Paris had been communicated to anyone outside the Powers specifically addressed, the contents of these would have become a subject of public debate, and the whole of the work would have been undone. I am amazed at the secrecy which has been preserved; any future success which may be obtained is to be attributed very largely to the strict silence maintained.

LONDON, happily, is coming round to recognise the vast importance of the German proposal. They have taken the sound line that the true path of progress is not to sign the Geneva Protocol, but to proceed from the particular to the general.

It is clear that while a certain guarantee may be entered into by England regarding the Franco-German frontier, a similar obligation for the defence of the Polish Corridor is out of the question.

BERLIN, *February* 18, 1925.—It is satisfactory to get information from London that views there have been changing very considerably during the last month. The

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German initiative regarding Security is no longer considered as inopportune, but as an event of cardinal importance. This is progress.

BERLIN, *February 21*, 1925.—There is difficulty in keeping pace with the triangular negotiations going on between Berlin, Paris and London. One is never quite sure that what is told "A" of conversations between "B" and "C" is more than half the truth. Without any intention to deceive, people—in Berlin not less than elsewhere—are apt to put their own interpretations on what is actually said, and to forget or minimise what they do not like.

IN some circles, the German action is viewed with great suspicion, but I hold that they have been straightforward. They informed us of their intentions some weeks before they approached France, (*a*) to get advice, (*b*) to avoid any suspicion that they were negotiating behind our backs.

FRANCE is regarded as the principal contracting party ("der erste Contrahent") with whom agreement has to be reached. England they consider as a moderating force on France, and as at once fair, reasonable and moderately wise. They listen carefully to any advice we give, and, within limits, they accept it.

FOR the moment, the German Government do not propose to take any further steps in this matter. They will await some move on the part of Herriot.

THE impression they have derived from conversations in Paris is that Herriot has modified his antagonism to the Luther Government. He now enters upon quite confidential exchanges of thought with them, saying he has no right to meddle in German internal politics, and that he considers Luther's action has been far better than he expected it to be. He also discusses his own position with reassuring frankness.

As regards the memorandum of February 9, Herriot appears not to have told the German Government that he

mentioned it to us. Which is just as well. The surmise here is that he is preparing the ground with his ministerial colleagues, so that when they see the text of the memorandum they may be prepared to welcome it.

THE truth of the matter appears to be that in all three countries the Foreign Ministers could come to an arrangement constituting a real guarantee of peace. But in each case there is some doubt as to how far they can carry public opinion.

BERLIN, *February 22, 1925*.—An interesting conversation to-day with a high official who is not only in an excellent position to know currents of opinion which prevail here, but who had exceptional opportunities of dispassionate observation under the old regime.

HE attributed the Emperor's mistakes before 1914 to family circumstances and to family quarrels. The Emperor affected airs of superior morality which not only brought him into conflict with King Edward, but also with many members of his own family circle—Prince Henry, Princess Charlotte, etc.

WHENEVER the less puritanical members of the Hohenzollern family came to Berlin they were lectured and told that their conduct was "unmoralisch." This did not stimulate cordiality.

FURTHERMORE, the Emperor was not only unpopular with his own family, but also with aristocratic circles in Germany. They objected to his indulgent attitude towards the Jews, and to what they regarded as his "parvenu" manners.

THE Emperor's feelings towards England were derived in part from the old Bismarck hatred of the Empress Frederick. Even after Bismarck had fallen the Emperor resented the attitude of friends of the Empress Frederick and the assumed superiority of English ideas which this circle, somewhat tactlessly, affected and advertised.

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CONCEIVABLY, however, an agreement with England might have come about but for the Emperor's objection to Germany being treated by England as a junior partner.

IN the view of my informant, the Tirpitz influence was less important as a factor of general policy than the family causes indicated above.

IT is difficult to say whether my informant is right in his views, but there can be no doubt that the Emperor William was extremely jealous of his uncle King Edward, resented his authority and his popularity on the Continent, criticised his manner of life, and was not indisposed to regard himself as entrusted by Providence with a mission to raise the morality of the English Court and put England in her place in relation to Germany.

BERLIN, *March 3, 1925.*—The following story is characteristic of Bismarck.

A FEW days after his wife's death one of his friends called at his country place, expecting to find him depressed and sorrowful, since the marriage had been a most happy one. Instead of that he found Bismarck in a tearing rage about the bills which had come in since his wife's death for small things she had ordered for the house. Every post brought him in fresh accounts. As a matter of fact, the bills were not for any personal requirements of the Princess, but merely household necessities. These, however, completely upset the equanimity of the Iron Chancellor.

BISMARCK was a bad farmer, and mismanaged his land in the manner usual to statesmen and to those who can only give partial attention to their own affairs.

WITH all the extraordinary success of his policy and his immense position in the world, he said he had only enjoyed two happy days in his life. On all the others annoyance and worry pursued him.

THE details one gets in Berlin of his relations with the

different political parties in Germany, of his relations with the Court, and still more his relations with the ladies of the Court, show that he never had a smooth and easy time. There was constant opposition and constant intrigue against him.

EVEN with the military he did not easily get his way. In the 1870 War he had to learn the plans of the generals almost through keyholes and back doors, mainly through his personal relations with princely and royal personages attached to the different staffs.

HE also learned a good deal through Press correspondents, with whom he took care to maintain very friendly relations.

BERLIN, *March 5, 1925*.—Stresemann has become more difficult lately, and is certainly less inclined to follow English advice than he was.

THIS is mainly due:

- (a) To our coldness regarding the pact.
- (b) To our attitude over Cologne.
- (c) CONVERSATIONS reported to him from London in which the language used has been very unfriendly to Germany. The recurring theme has been: "How clumsy the Germans are! how they mismanage this and that!"

As a matter of justice, I must record that in my opinion they have been particularly intelligent lately, and have helped things on more than others.

THE only counter to these tiresome and injurious reports is to dilate upon the services England has rendered to Germany—the extreme breadth and generosity of our policy. I was talking on these lines the other night, at the Afghan supper, to Stresemann and his wife, dilating, in a friendly manner, on Germany's great ingratitude for English assistance in the different problems of the last four years.

STRESEMANN broke in to say that he fully recognised that without England's assistance Germany would have lost the

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Rhineland. He added, however, that if Poincaré had carried through his policy, Germany would have formed a coalition with Russia, and together they would have swept over Europe. I told Stresemann at once that this seemed to me quite an impossible combination. The German Army could only co-operate with the Russians if they adopted bolshevistic ideas, or were converted by bolshevistic propaganda. How would the German generals have lent themselves to such a conversion? What would have been the feeling in industrial, commercial and bourgeois circles in Germany if any Ministry had attempted to adopt such a policy?

I do not know how far Stresemann was serious in his retrospective threat, but I am pretty convinced that no German Government could have carried out the scheme, however great the temptation.

REVERTING to the subject of English services or disservices to Germany, Stresemann said he could never forget the promises made by Lloyd George regarding Upper Silesia at the time of the occupation of Duisbrug, and how badly these promises had been kept. He still nourished rancour on this subject.

WHAT were the circumstances to which he referred? I do not remember any definite pledge of Lloyd George regarding Upper Silesia which was not kept by England. We were undoubtedly weak at Geneva, and undoubtedly the decision was unfavourable to Germany. But there was no deliberate change of policy.

BERLIN, *March 7, 1925*.—Eric Drummond, the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, was here on Monday. He met Schubert at luncheon, and paid a formal visit to Stresemann in the afternoon.

FROM the two conversations he formed two different impressions. Schubert was satisfactory, in the sense that he thought some arrangement could be made regarding

Article XVI¹ on the basis that the League recognised “*ultra posse nemo obligatur.*”

STRESEMANN was, however, sharp and loud against the possibility of Germany agreeing to carry out even commercial boycott. He said it might easily lead Germany to war—how was Germany then to defend herself?

DRUMMOND was clear that it was not possible for the League of Nations to grant Germany a privileged position in the League, or to create two categories of members. He was, however, equally clear that the League did not expect any Power to perform the impossible, and I presume that suicide is outside the boundaries of possibility.

MY view remains that Germany's real reason for hesitation in entering the League is fear of alienating Russia. They will only risk forfeiting Russian support when they are sure of getting something equivalent on the Western frontier. It is foolish to expect them to enter upon a bargain where the dangers and disadvantages are immediate, while the positive gains are remote and nebulous. Make the latter substantial and the caravan moves on.

BERLIN, *March 10, 1925.*—The Chancellor was greatly surprised to-day when I told him that the view prevailing at Geneva and in western capitals was that Germany, having last year asked only for equality, now demanded a privileged position—something like a specially reduced subscription on entering a club.

HE said: “With regard to Article XVI, Germany requires no exceptional treatment—what we want follows as a necessary consequence of the circumstances.” I rejoined: “In that case, the ‘*ultra posse*’ clause meets you.”

REGARDING Poland, he said: “Poland gains more than anybody from an increase of European Security. Poland is the danger-point; war will centre there if war breaks out at all, therefore Poland is more interested than anybody else.”

¹For Art. XVI of Covenant of League of Nations see App. IX.

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As to the Presidential Election, nobody could know anything.

BERLIN, *March* 10, 1925.—A telegram from London announces the sudden death of George Curzon.¹ An hour after this was received, a letter from him was brought to me:

“MY DEAR EDGAR,—

“I am to have an operation to-morrow, as I suddenly began to bleed two days ago from the bladder, and they are to investigate and, I hope, remove the source of the mischief. I am not in the least afraid.

“Yours ever,

“CURZON.”

A GRAVE loss for English statesmanship; for me, a real grief. We were at Eton together in 1874. The friend of fifty years' standing, dead.

GEORGE was masterful to the end. He insisted upon having his own way about the dressings, and the surgeons who attended him were powerless. This precipitated, if it did not cause, the catastrophe.

BERLIN, *March* 15, 1925.—It is worthy of note that after some weeks of hesitation, caused mainly by the cool reception given to the Pact proposal, the German Government are now again anxious to push on with the preparation of an instrument which will give them security. They are prepared to be precise in their engagements regarding the western frontier, but not regarding the eastern frontier. There they would renounce the use of war as a method of altering existing conditions, but would not declare themselves satisfied with those conditions. I doubt if the Ministry will go much further. I doubt also whether,

¹ For personal appreciation see vol. i, pp. 48-52; also entries vol. ii, pp. 111 and 221.

if they did go further, the Ministry would obtain the Reichstag's consent. It is satisfactory to find that the Treaty of 1839, safeguarding the neutrality of Belgium, was quite simple in its phraseology. If, to-day, we accept without elaborate clauses and without contemplation of all possible but improbable contingencies what proved adequate ninety years ago, the drafting of a Pact of reciprocal guarantee should not be a difficult matter.

BERLIN, *March 15, 1925*.—There has been solid progress during the last fortnight. In the first place, on what is perhaps now a subsidiary point, the German Government have finally made up their minds that they must come into the League of Nations. The reserves which they made, and which I communicated in my telegram to Geneva, appear to be adequately taken into account in the reply of the League, which is published in the German papers this morning. Provided Luther has the genuine desire to come into the League, he can agree to the conditions formulated.

I REGARD this question as nearly settled.¹

THE constant friction between Germany and Poland over the unsatisfactorily drawn German-Polish frontier, coupled with the fear that Germany was bound to fight for the territorial reunion of Western East Prussia, had led in British and other diplomatic circles to the careful consideration of some alternative solution of the Polish Corridor and Danzig Free City. The only solution which met with a measure of favour, but which was rejected as in any case premature at this date by the British Foreign Office, was the so-called "Memel" solution. This would have implied the abandonment by Poland of the seaboard of the Corridor and the retrocession to the Reich of Danzig. In return for these Polish concessions Poland would receive economic privileges on the railways leading from Poland to Danzig and perhaps a free zone in that port. In addition, Poland would obtain an alternative outlet

¹ THIS view was erroneous. Germany only entered the League eighteen months later.

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of her own to the sea at Memel. This port, which under the Memel Convention was about to pass under the sovereignty of Lithuania, would be linked with Poland by a narrow strip of territory—another corridor. Since, however, this strip of territory would have to be taken from Lithuania, who would therefore be deprived of her only direct and convenient outlet to the sea, some concession in return would have to be made by Poland to Lithuania, possibly in the form of the retrocession of the Vilna territory in whole or in part. This Polish-Lithuanian agreement, however, considering more particularly the existing tension between Warsaw and Kovno, would probably be the most difficult part of the arrangement from the point of view of general acceptance.

It is curious to recall the little-known fact that during the Versailles Conference of 1919 the Italian diplomat, Signor de Martino, who strongly opposed the idea of the Danzig Corridor as calculated to lead sooner or later to a Polish-German conflict, then advocated the concession of Memel to Poland as her direct outlet to the Baltic.

March 18, 1925.—Philip Kerr, who is here and knows more about the Versailles Conference than anybody, tells me that the Danzig Corridor—which is the cause of so much trouble—was carried directly against Lloyd George by Clemenceau and Wilson. Both of the latter had a kind of romantic attachment for Poland. Clemenceau thought that every subject gained by Poland was a German the less and therefore an enemy the less for France.

Wilson had been influenced by the statue of Kosciusko, which stands outside the White House at Washington. Beneath it are the lines, "Freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell." Now it is Kosciusko who is inclined to shriek irrespective of Freedom's rise or fall.

I ASKED Kerr what alternatives there were to the present arrangement. He said, "The only plan would be ultimately to have a plebiscite in the northern portion of the Corridor, i.e. in the country between Bromberg and the sea—the strip of West Prussian territory lying west of Danzig and inhabited by a population neither very German nor very Polish." He did not think it was now possible

to give Poland an outlet to the sea at Memel, Lithuanian nationality having developed so strongly.

IN equity he considered that Poland was no more entitled to a port than Czecho-Slovakia. She ought to have been satisfied with free port facilities, similar to those accorded to Czecho-Slovakia at Hamburg and Stettin.

KERR agrees with me that it should be possible for Germany to make Poland a sufficiently attractive offer to induce her to agree to some rectification of the frontier. National prejudice may, however, intervene, and the feelings Germans have about Poles are analogous to that of the Northern Irish for the Southern. The Germans detest Polish defects and have little appreciation of their unquestionable attractions and accomplishments; it is the contempt of the bass for the tenor—unfounded and incurable.

BERLIN, *March 19, 1925*.—It is now two months since the German Draft Proposal was sent from Berlin to London.

THE French Press continue to call it the "Stresemann-D'Abernon Memorandum." I am not sure that in the Wilhelmstrasse the wisest counsellor has not been Gaus, the legal adviser of the German Foreign Office. This mysterious individual I have never seen, but he is always quoted as a great legal luminary, and I surmise he must be a man not only of technical qualifications but of broad outlook.

As for my own share in the genesis of the Pact, I have steadily advocated something of the kind for the last three years. Since October I have frequently talked matters over with Schubert, more particularly after the set-back concerning the evacuation of Cologne. These conversations probably resulted in the German move of January 20, but whatever was done previous to that date was of minor importance compared with the obstacles overcome or avoided during the last six weeks. How "Das Kind" survived passes comprehension. A chilly suspicious

public; a putative parent more than half inclined to repudiate the obligations of paternity; no frank support from any side—all this to surmount in the first few weeks of existence.

BERLIN, *March* 19, 1925.—Augustus John has been staying at the Embassy for the last fortnight, and has begun several portraits.

THE principal one is that of Stresemann. John is painting the portrait for his own pleasure, and will carry off the canvas to add to the Worthies of the Versailles Conference whom he painted some years ago. The portrait is a clever piece of work—not at all flattering; it makes Stresemann devilish sly, but extremely intelligent. The sitter is indeed most intelligent, but not sly.

AUGUSTUS JOHN intends to have an exhibition here during the autumn, and has evidently taken a liking to Berlin.

HE told me a good story last night of a quarrel with one of his principal supporters—an Irish-American named Quinn—who used to buy a great many of his canvases before the War.

IN the early days of the War John wrote to him saying, "I have done a portrait of a soldier, if you care to see it." Quinn replied, "Khaki doesn't interest me, and I don't care much about Englishmen." To this John replied, "I like khaki, and I like Englishmen—but this particular portrait happens to be one of a damned Irishman like yourself." Upon this they quarrelled, and did not make it up till five years later.

JOHN has a keen admiration for Ingres. When I said "Ingres has too hard a line," he replied, "A hard line is what is wanted in drawing if you can obtain it without being ugly or ridiculous. . . . The hard line is the perplexing ideal."

HE also has a vast admiration for the semi-modern French school—Degas, Manet, Boudin. Of the English school

he places Gainsborough first, and he expresses admiration for Beardsley, envying his wonderful fate: once a poor boy in a Brighton Grammar School—now a constant theme of discussion all over the world.

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REVERTING to Stresemann, I am convinced he will make a considerable figure when the history of this period comes to be written. Like so many of England's finest political intellects—Disraeli, Peel, Gladstone, Balfour, Lloyd George—he is more remarkable for the distrust he arouses than for the admiration and confidence he inspires. Nobody much likes him and no party trusts him, but he makes himself indispensable by his power in debate, his clear-cut views in council, and the correctness of his analysis.

THE sittings to John have been a unique opportunity to discuss with Stresemann the Pact of Reciprocal Guarantee. When these sittings began he was still affected by the chilly reception of his first initiative, and was apparently on the verge of dropping the whole negotiation. In conversation during the sittings I did my utmost to encourage him to persist, and have, I believe, succeeded in instilling new life into "Das Kind." A symbolic group might be designed "Diplomacy assisted by Art."

BERLIN, *March* 20, 1925.—If the German Government want the Reciprocal Pact they will have to take a wider view of the negotiations. They must realise the necessity of tranquillising Poland. In this connection I am pressing them to conduct their negotiations for a Commercial Treaty with Poland on genuinely broad lines. It would be wise to turn over in their minds what advantages they can offer Poland in order to obtain some modification of the Corridor. If, as they say, and as I believe, the Corridor is unbearable, they ought to be willing to give Poland good terms. But I fully recognise the probable impossibility of devising a solution acceptable to both Governments, and to public opinion in the two countries.

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THERE is nothing definite from Paris regarding the French Government's attitude towards the Pact of Reciprocal Guarantee, but Stresemann has the impression that Herriot, personally, is friendly to the idea; he is delaying matters with a view to reconciling French opinion to the reciprocal basis. Chamberlain has been in Paris lately on his way back from Geneva, and appears to have advanced matters in the course of conversations there.

BERLIN, *March 23, 1925*.—The best notice of Curzon's career was that by T. P. O'Connor in the *Daily Telegraph*. On the whole, a friendly and understanding picture. But no one has adequately portrayed Curzon's great good humour, his immense sense of fun and his capacity for enjoyment. Nor have they laid sufficient stress on the peculiar quality of his friendship. I know no man who was more attached to his own circle, or who would do as much for those within it. It was perhaps devotion to a group rather than affection for any individual; indeed, in it he had no real confidant—seeking intimacy outside his own set.

PERHAPS Crewe, though opposed to him in politics, was the man with whom he was most in sympathy. He appreciated Crewe's reticence and reserve—the complete absence in him of the facile, the florid and the exuberant—a character outwardly in direct contrast with his own.