CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND COUNCIL IN SESSION

WITH a tact and sagacity as great as his courage, the Lord Paramount gathered about him a number of counsellors who were in effect his ministers. He consulted and directed them, but they had no collective power; their only collective function was co-operation upon the schemes he outlined for their guidance. Occasionally in council they would offer suggestions which were received with attention, considered and commented upon by the Lord Paramount. Sometimes, but rarely, their suggestions would be allowed to sway the course of the national policy. But on the whole he preferred that they should come to him privately and individually with their proposals, rather than interrupt the proceedings of the Council meetings.

The Council included all that was best among the leaders of English life. The mighty barons of the popular press were there, and prominently Lord Bothermey. The chief military, naval and air experts were intermittently represented. Coal and steel magnates were well in evidence, particularly those most closely associated with armament firms, and one or two rather evasive personalities of the Sir Bussy Woodcock type attended by command. Sir Bussy might or might not be there; he

continued to be difficult to locate. He seemed to become present suddenly and then to become conspicuously absent. The Governor of the Bank of England was present ex officio, though the Lord Paramount found he smiled far too much and said far too little, and there were several leading representatives of the Big Five, who also proved to be markedly silent men with a far-away facial habit. Labour was represented at the Lord Paramount's invitation, by Mr. J. H. Humbus, and women by the Countess of Crum and Craythorpe. Lord Cato was of course a member, and, for some reason that the Lord Paramount never had very clear in his mind, Mr. Brimstone Burchell seemed always to be coming in or going out or talking in much too audible undertones to someone while the Council was in session. No one had asked him; he just came. It was difficult to find an appropriate moment to say something about it. On the whole he seemed to be well disposed and eager to take entire charge of army, navy, air force, munitions, finance, or any other leading function which might be entrusted to him. In addition to these already prominent members a number of vigorous personalities hitherto unknown to British public life, either chosen from among Mr. Parham's Young Men, scions of noble families, or connected with the militant side of the Duty Paramount League, took a silently active part in the proceedings. Alfred Mumby, Colonel FitzMartin, Ronald Carberry, Sir Horatio Wrex, and the young Duke of Norham, were among the chief of these. Mrs. Pinchot, the only

reporter present, sat in a little low chair at the Lord Paramount's right hand and recorded all that happened in shorthand in a gilt-edged notebook. Hereward Jackson, the faithful disciple, also hovered helpfully close to him.

The procedure was very simple and straightforward. The Council would assemble or be collected according to the alacrity of the individual members, and the Lord Paramount would enter quite informally, waving a hand to this man and greeting that, and so make his way to the head of the table. There he would stand; Hereward Jackson would say "Ssh!" and everyone standing or sitting or leaning against the wall would cease to gossip and turn to listen. Explicitly and simply the Lord Paramount would put his views to them. It was very like a college lecturer coming in and talking to a batch of intelligent and sympathetic students. He would explain his policy, say why this had to be done or that, and indicate who it was should undertake whatever task opened before them. An hour or even more might be spent in this way. Then he would drop into his seat, and there would be questions, mostly of an elucidatory nature, a few comments, a suggestion or so, and, with a smile and a friendly word of dismissal, everything was over, and the Council went about its business, each man to do what he knew to be his duty. So simple a task was government now that the follies of party, the presumption and manœuvres of elected people, the confusion and dishonesties inseparable from the democratic method had been swept aside.

The third meeting of the Council was the most important of the earlier series, for then it was that the Lord Paramount gave these heads of the national life a résumé of the policy he proposed to pursue.

Let them consider at first, he said, the position and the manifest dangers and destinies of this dear England of ours and its Empire to which they were all devoted. He would ask them to regard the world as a whole, not to think of it in a parochial spirit, but broadly and sanely, looking beyond the immediate to-morrow. Directly they did so they would begin to realize the existence and development of a great world struggle, which was determined by geography and by history, which was indeed in the very nature of things. The lines of that struggle shaped themselves, rationally, logically, inevitably. Everything else in the world should be subordinated to that.

Something almost confidential crept into his manner, and the Council became very silent and attentive. He indicated regions upon the green baize table before him by sweeping gestures of his hands and arms, and his voice sank.

"Here," said the Lord Paramount, "in the very centre of the Old World, illimitably vast, potentially more powerful than most of the rest of the world put together—" he paused dramatically—"is *Russia*. It really does not matter in the least whether she is Czarist or Bolshevik. She is the final danger—the overwhelming enemy. Grow she must. She has space. She has immense resources.

She strikes at us, through Turkey as always, through Afghanistan as always, and now through China. Instinctively she does that—necessarily. I do not blame her. But preserve ourselves we must. What will Germany do? Cleave to the East? Cleave to the West? Who can tell? A student nation, a secondary people, a disputed territory. We win her if we can, but I do not count on her. The policy imposed upon the rest of the world is plain. We must circumvent Russia; we must encircle this threat of the Great Plains before it overwhelms us. As we encircled the lesser threat of the Hohenzollerns. In time. On the West, here, we outflank her with our ally France and Poland her pupil; on the East with our ally Japan. We reach at her through India. We strive to point the spearhead of Afghanistan against her. We hold Gibraltar on her account; we watch Constantinople on her account. America is drawn in with us, necessarily our ally, willy-nilly, because she cannot let Russia strike through China to the sea. There you have the situation of the world. Broadly and boldly seen. Fraught with immense danger—yes. Tragic—if you will. But fraught also with limitless possibilities of devotion and courage."

The Lord Paramount paused, and a murumr of admiration went round the gathering. Mr. Brimstone Burchell's head nodded like a Chinese automaton's to express his approval. The statement was so perfectly lucid, so direct and compact. Yet it was identically the same speech that Mr. Parham had delivered to Sir Bussy, Mr. Hamp, Camel-

ford, and the young American only a month or so previously, at the dinner table of the former! How different now was its reception when it came from the lips of the Lord Paramount speaking to understanding minds! No carping criticism, or attempts to disregard and ignore, no preposterous alternatives of world organization and the like follies, no intimation of any such alternatives. If Sir Bussy had whispered his habitual monosyllable it was done inaudibly.

"And that being our general situation," the Lord Paramount continued, "which is the most becoming thing for a Great Nation to do? To face its Destiny of leadership and championship, open-eyed and resolute, or to wait, lost in petty disputes, blinded by small considerations, until the inevitable antagonist, grown strong and self-conscious, its vast realms organized and productive, China assimilated and India sympathetic and mutinous against its established rulers, strikes at the sceptre in its negligent hands—maybe strikes the sceptre clean out of its negligent hands? Is it necessary to ask that question of the Council of the British peoples? And knowing your answer to be what it must be, then plainly the time for Duty and Action is now. I exhort you to weigh with me the preparations and the strategy that have to be the guiding form of our national policy from this time forth. The time to rally western Europe is now. The time to call plainly to America to take up her part in this gigantic struggle is now."

This time the little man sitting at the table was

clearly heard. His "Gaw!" was deep and distinct.

"Sir Bussy," said the Lord Paramount in a penetrating aside, "for six long years you have said that word 'Gaw' at me, and I have borne with you. Say it no more."

He did not even pause for an answer, but went on at once to sketch the determinations before the Council.

"It is my intention," he said, "so soon as home affairs are regularized, to make an informal tour of Europe. Here, between these four walls, I can speak freely of an adventure we all have at heart, the gallant efforts of Prince Otto von Barheim to overthrow the uncongenial republican régime that now disfigures, misrepresents, and humiliates the loyal and valiant German people. It is a lukewarm thing, half radical and Bolshevist and half patriotic, and Germany is minded to spew it out. I have had communications from a very trustworthy source, and I can say with confidence that that adventure is on the high road to success. Prince Otto, like myself, has a profound understanding of the philosophy of history, and like myself he recalls a great nation to its destiny. The good sword of Germany may soon be waiting in its scabbard for our signal.

"Yes! I know what you think at this moment, but, believe me, it will be with the consent of France. Nevermore will Britain move without France. M. Parème shall be consulted and I will see to that. The situation would be delicate had we still a parliamentary régime. Happily no

questions in the House now can disturb our negotiations. Snowfield is gagged and Benworthy silenced. Trust France. She is fully aware that now it is we alone who stand between her and a German-Italian combination. We reconcile. The French mind is realistic, logical and patriotic. The other European nations may need Dictators, but in France, the Republic is Dictator; the army and the nation are one, and, guaranteed security, suitably compensated in Africa and Nearer Asia, France will be ready to take her proper place in the defence of the West against its final danger. The age-long feud of the Rhineland draws to an end. The peace of Charlemagne returns. Even the speeches of M. Parème lose their belligerent note. Such little matters as the language question in Alsace and various repayments and guarantees find their level of unimportance. We have been living too much in the counting house. Europe draws together under pressure from the East and from the West. These things I propose to confirm by personal interviews with the men I shall find in charge of the European nations. Then to our course of action: first a renewal, a confirmation and intensification of the blockade of Russia—by all Europe, by the United Strong Men of Europe; secondly a vigorous joint intervention to restore the predominance of European ideas and European finance in China; thirdly a direct challenge to Russian propaganda in India and Persia, a propaganda in reality political—social and economic now only in phrase and pretension. If we mean to en-

circle this mighty threat to all we hold dear, then the time for encirclement is here and now. And so, when at last the Day comes it will not be the Slav aggressive we shall have facing us, but the Slav anticipated and at bay."

The Lord Paramount paused and did his best to ignore the one flaw upon that perfect gathering. Sir Bussy, looking exceedingly small and wicked and drumming softly on the table with his stumpy fingers, spoke, addressing, as it were, the blank universe. "And how is America going to take this sort of stuff?"

"She will be with us."

"She may have other ideas."

"She *has* to be with us," said the Lord Paramount with a rising intonation, and a murmur of approval came from the corner in which Lord Cato was standing. His face was very pink, and his little eyes were round and bright. His bearing had the unsubdued aggressiveness of an unsmacked child's. He had always regarded America as impertinent and in need of a good snubbing and, if need be, of further chastening. He could not believe that a nation so new could really consist of grown-up people.

"The Americans," Sir Bussy informed the world, "don't learn history in English public schools."

No one regarded him.

"I have begun by sketching the frame of circumstance about our national life," the Lord Paramount resumed, "because the small troubles of in-

ternal politics—and relatively they are very small —fall into place directly we recognize the fact that we are a militant people, that our empire is a mighty camp of training for the achievement of our enduring leadership. To this great struggle all our history is a crescendo. When you tell me that we have a million unemployed I rejoice to think we have that much man power free at once for the great adventure. Before 1914 our industrial system had a margin, a necessary margin of unemployment of about five to nine per cent. Now that margin has increased to eleven or twelve per cent—I will not trouble about the exact figures. A large element of these unemployed come, out of the coal-mining industry, which was abnormally inflated after the war. But our gross production has not diminished. Note that! What we are witnessing is a world-wide process, in which industry produces as much as ever, or more, but has so increased its efficiency that it calls for fewer hands. Clearly this so-called unemployment is really a release of energy. These people, in many cases young men, must be taken in hand and trained for other ends. The women can go into munitions. If only on account of unemployment, our great Empire needs to take a gallant and aggressive line. What we have saved we must spend. We must not bury our talent in out-of-work sloth. I am no Individualist, I am no Socialist; these are phrases left over by the Nineteenth Century, and little meaning remains in them now. But I say, of him who does not work for his country, neither

shall he eat in it, and that he who will not work generously must be made to work hard; and I say also that wealth that is not active and productive for our imperial ends needs to be called upon to justify itself. Wantoning in pleasure cities, lavish entertainments in huge hotels, jazz expenditure, must cease. A special tax on champagne. . . . Yes a tax on champagne. It is poison for soul and body. No more night clubs for London. A censorship of suggestive plays and books. Criticism by honest police officials—worthy, direct-minded men. Golf only for hygienic ends. Race meetings without special trains. Even the shooting and hunting restrained. Service! Everywhere Service. Duty Paramount. In High and Low alike. These things have been said already upon the slighter stage of Italy; it is for us to say them now, imperially, in tones of thunder, to the very ends of the earth."

It seemed that he had done. In the appreciative silence that ensued, the noise of an elderly and edentate gentleman, talking through a thick moustache, became evident. The speaker had been at the back of the cluster to the right of the Lord Paramount, but now he came forward in a state of agitated resolution, and grasping with his right hand the back of the chair in which Sir Bussy was sitting, crossing his legs and leaning forward at an almost perilous angle, he gesticulated in an oratorical manner with his left. The noise he made rose and fell. Word was not separated from word, but now and then a cough snapped off a length of it. It was

a sort of ectoplasmic speech. Very like ectoplasm. Ectoplasm? Ectoplasm?

(For a moment the mind of the Lord Paramount was blurred.)

This venerable figure was Lord Bylass of Brayne. At intervals it was possible to distinguish the submerged forms of such words and phrases as "tariff" . . . "adequate protection" . . . "safeguarding" . . . "dumping" . . . "insensate foreign competition" . . . "colonial preference" . . . "an empire sufficient unto itself" . . . "capable, sir, of absorbing every willing worker in the country."

For three or four minutes the Lord Paramount endured this interruption with patient dignity, and then he held up a hand to signify that he had heard sufficient for a reply.

"A state is a militant organization, and a militant organization that is healthy and complete must be militant through and through," he began, with that illuminating directness which had made him the leader and master of all these men. "Tariffs, Lord Bylass, are now the normal everyday method of that same conflict for existence between states which is the substance of all history and which finds its highest, noblest expression in war. By means of tariffs, Lord Bylass, we protect our economic life from confusion with the economic life of other states, we ensure the integrity of our resources against the day of trial, we sustain our allies and attack the social balance and well-being of our enemies and competitors. Here in this

council, free from eavesdroppers, we can ignore the pretence that tariffs are designed for the enrichment or security of the common citizen and that they, by themselves, can do anything to absorb unemployed workers. Forgive me, Lord Bylass, if I seem to contradict your arguments while accepting your conclusions. Tariffs do not enrich a country. They cannot do, they never have done, anything of the sort. That is a deception, and I think a harmful deception, that the squalid necessities of that system of elective government we have so happily set aside have forced upon politicians. We can drop it here and now. Tariffs, like every other form of struggle, involve and require sacrifices. If they create employment in one trade by excluding or handicapping the foreign product, then manifestly they must destroy it in another which has hitherto exported goods in payment, direct or indirect, for the newly protected commodity. A tariff is a method of substituting an inconvenient production for a convenient one. In order to cause greater inconvenience elsewhere. The case for protection rests on grounds higher and nobler than considerations of material advantage or disadvantage. We must have tariffs and pay for tariffs, just as we must have armies and navies and pay for them. Why? Because they are the continuing intimation of our national integrity. Our guns and bombs explode only during the war phase, but a tariff sustains a perpetual friction and menace; it injures while we sleep. And I repeat, for it is the very essence of our faith, it is the car-

dinal belief of our League of Duty Paramount, that a sovereign state, which boasts a history and unfurls a flag, must remain either a militant state through and through, pressing its rivals as hard as it can in every possible way, during peace time and war time alike, or it must become a decadent and useless absurdity fit only to be swept into the cosmopolitan dustbin."

The ringing voice ceased. Lord Bylass, who had resumed his perpendicular attitude during the reply of the Lord Paramount, said something either in the nature of approval, disapproval, extension, or qualification of what had gone before, and after perhaps a dozen minor questions had been raised and compactly disposed of the Council settled down to the apportionment of the mighty tasks in hand. First one and then another would sketch his conception of cooperation, and often the Lord Paramount would say no more than "Do it" or "Wait" or "Raise that again in a week's time" or "Not like that." A few of the members for whom there seemed to be no immediate call withdrew to an ante-room to talk together over the tea, sherry, and lemonade served there. Some of the more restless spirits departed altogether. Among these was Sir Bussy Woodcock.

The mind of the Lord Paramount seemed to go after him and watch him and yet it knew what he would do.

He was to be seen standing pensive on the doorstep of No. 10, Downing Street, that doorstep which has been trodden by every famous man in

British affairs for a couple of centuries, and looking with his mouth askew at the dense inexpressive crowd which blocked the opening into Whitehall. The police had formed a cordon, and except for the chauffeurs of the waiting automobiles there were only a few pressmen, press photographers and obvious plain-clothes men standing about in the street itself. But beyond was that mysterious still congestion of the English people, almost cow-like in its collective regard, giving no intimations of its feelings, if indeed it had any feelings, towards this gallant new rule which had relieved it of any lingering illusions about self-government. It was an almost completely silent crowd, save for the yapping of the vendors of the Lord Paramount's photographs. The afternoon was warm and overcast with grey clouds that seemed like everything else to be awaiting orders. The very policemen were lost in passive expectation. Everybody was accepting the Lord Paramount inertly. Sir Bussy remained quite still for nearly a minute. "*Gaw*," he whispered at last and turned slowly towards the little gate to his right that led down the steps to the Horse Guards Parade.

With his customary foresight he had sent his car round there, where the crowd was inconsiderable.

As he vanished through the gate a plain-clothes policeman with an affectation of nonchalance that would not have deceived a baby, detached himself from his fellows and strolled after him. *By order!*

In another twenty minutes the session was over and the Council was actively dispersing.

Lanes were made in the crowd by the departing automobiles. Its more advantageously situated ranks were privileged to see, afar off, the Lord Paramount himself, accompanied by his little dark woman secretary and a tall, slender, devoted-looking man who was carrying a huge portfolio, cross swiftly from No. 10 to the Foreign Office and vanish under its archway.

Towards seven the Lord Paramount reappeared and went in the big new Rolls-Royce he had purchased on behalf of the nation, to the War Office, and there he remained until long after midnight.