CHAPTER XI

DISLOYALTY

For the truly great, dark days are inevitable. Purple is the imperial colour. All great lives are tragedies. Across the splendour of the Lord Paramount's ascendancy there began now to fall the shadows of approaching disaster. His mood changed with the mood of his adventure. America had misunderstood him, had almost wilfully refused to respect the depth and power of his tremendous purpose. He had not realized how widely she had diverged from the British conception of history and a European outlook upon world affairs. And suddenly all his giant schemes were straining to the breaking point. The incident of the *Beauty of Narragansett* and the note from the American President was the turning point of his career.

He had known this adventure with human affairs was heroic and vast; he had not realized its extreme and dangerous intricacy. He felt suddenly that he was struggling with a puzzle. It was as if he had been engaged in an argument and had been trapped and involved and confused. His mind was curiously haunted by that dispute of Mr. Parham's with Camelford and Hamp and Sir Bussy. They seemed always in the back of his picture now, welcoming any setback, declaring his values false

and his concepts obsolete, and foreshadowing some vague and monstrous new order of things in which he had no part. That vague and monstrous new order of things was at the same time the remotest, least distinct, and most disconcerting element in all this side-show of unpleasant apprehensions.

He had believed himself the chosen head of the united British peoples. Under the stress of the presidential note he was to discover how extremely un-British British peoples could be. That realization of the supreme significance of the Empire, of which Seeley and Kipling had been the prophets, had reached only a limited section of the population. And the intensity with which that section had realized it had perhaps a little restricted its general realization. Had imperial patriotism come too late? Had it yet to penetrate outwardly and *down*? Had it failed to grip, or had it lost its grip on the colonial imagination?

Not only the masses at home, but the Dominions had drifted out of touch with and respect for, or perhaps had never really been in touch with, the starry pre-eminence of Oxford and Cambridge thought, with army and navy and ruling-class habits and traditions, with the guarded intimacies of London and all that makes our Britain what it is to-day. These larger, vaguer multitudes were following America in a widening estrangement from the essential conceptions of British history and British national conduct. For some years the keen mind of Mr. Parham had sensed this possible ebb of the imperial idea. It had troubled his sleep.

Failing it, what was there before us but disintegration? Now the heroic intelligence of the Lord Paramount was suffused by those anxieties of Mr. Parham. Could it be that he might have to play a losing game? Might it be that after all his destiny was not victory but the lurid splendour of a last stand for ideas too noble for this faltering world?

When he had seized power the London crowd had seemed oafishly tolerant of this change of régime. It had not applauded, but it had not resisted. Evidently it did not care a rap for Parliament. But, on the other hand, had there been enthusiasm for the dictatorship? Now it became apparent that whatever enthusiasm there might be was shot and tainted by the gravest discontent. As he drove down Whitehall in his big blue car with Mrs. Pinchot and Hereward Jackson to take the air in Richmond Park for his one precious hour of waking rest in the day, he discovered an endless string of sandwich men plodding slowly up the street.

"Leave Russia alone," in red, was the leading inscription. This when we were actually at war with Russia. That at least was open treason. Other boards more wordy said: "Leave China alone. We have enough to worry about without grabbing China." A third series declared: "We don't want War with America." That was the culminating point of the protest. These men were plodding up the street unhindered. Not a patriot was in action. No one had even thought of beating them about

their heads. And yet sandwich men are particularly easy to beat about their heads. The police had done nothing.

What on earth did the people want? National dishonour? He could not disdain these sandwich boards. He was taken too much by surprise. He looked. He turned his head about. He gave himself away. People must have observed his movements, and it was necessary to do something promptly. The car pulled up. "Get out," he said to Hereward Jackson, "go back and have this stopped. Find out who supplied the money."

He went on his way past the Houses of Parliament, locked up and, as it seemed to him that day, silently and unfairly reproachful. He was moody with Mrs. Pinchot in Richmond Park. "They are stirring up my own people against me," he said suddenly out of a great silence. Some interesting work was being done in the park with military telpherage, but his mind was preoccupied, and his questions lacked their usual penetrating liveliness.

Presently he found himself phrasing the curt sentences of a Decree of public security. That is what things had come to. There would have to be a brief opening, detailing the position of danger in which the Empire was placed. Then would follow the announcement of new and severe laws against unpatriotic publications, unpatriotic agitation, and the slightest suggestion of resistance to the civil and military authorities. The punishments would have to be stern. Real plain treason in war time calls for death. Military men obliged to kill were

to be released from all personal responsibility if their acts were done in good faith. Attacks on the current régime were to involve the death penalty —by shooting. In any case. An Empire that is worth having is worth shooting for.

When he returned, stern and preoccupied, to his desk at the War Office, ready to dictate this Decree, he found Hereward Jackson with a medley of fresh and still more disconcerting news. The sandwich men of Whitehall were only the first intimations of a great storm of protest against what speakers were pleased to call the provocation of America.

All over the country meetings, processions, and a variety of other demonstrations were disseminating a confused but powerful objection to the Lord Paramount's policy. The opposition to his action against Russia was second only in vigour to the remonstrances against the American clash. "Right or wrong," said one prominent Labour leader at Leicester, "we won't fight either Russia or America. We don't believe in this fighting. We don't believe it is necessary. We were humbugged last time—but never again." And these abominable sentences, this complete repudiation of national spirit, were cheered!

"One must shoot," muttered the Lord Paramount; "one must not hesitate to shoot. That would be the turning point," and he called on Mrs. Pinchot to take down his first draft of the Decree.

"We must have this broadcast forthwith," he

said. " This rot must be arrested, these voices must be silenced, or we go to pieces. Read the Decree over to me. . . ."

With the publication of the American blockade message throughout the Empire, all the multiplying evidences of hesitation, disintegration, and positive disloyalty underwent an abrupt and alarming magnification. The Dominions, it became evident, were as disposed as the masses at home toward a dishonourable pacificism. They were as blind to the proper development of the imperial adventure. The Canadian Prime Minister sent the Lord Paramount a direct communication to warn him that in no case could Britain count on Canadian participation in a war with the United States. Moreover, British armed forces in Canadian territory and Canadian waters would have to be immobilized as a precautionary measure if the tension of the situation increased further. He was making all the necessary preparations for this step.

A few hours later protests nearly as disconcerting came in from South Africa and Australia. In Dublin there were vast separatist republican meetings, and there was a filibustory raid of uncertain significance against Ulster. At the same time a string of cipher telegrams made it plain that the insurrectionary movement in India was developing very gravely. A systematic attack upon the railway systems behind the North-West Frontier was evidently going on; the bombing of bridges and the tearing up of the tracks at important centres was being carried out far more extensively than anyone

could have foreseen. The trouble was taking a religious turn in the Punjab. A new leader, following, it would seem, rather upon the precedent of Nanak, the founder of the Sikhs, had appeared out of the blue and was preaching a sort of syncretic communist theology, intended to unite Moslem and Hindu, communist and nationalist, in a common faith and a common patriotism. He was actively militant. His disciples were to be fighters, and their happiest possible end was death in battle.

Amidst the confusion one cheering aspect was the steady loyalty of the Indian princes. They had formed a sort of voluntary Council of India of their own, which was already co-operating actively with the imperial authorities in the suppression of disorder and the defence of the frontier. Their readiness to take over responsibilities was indisputable.

Such events, the Lord Paramount argued, should have raised the whole of Britain in a unison of patriotic energy. All social conflicts should have been forgotten. A torrent of patriot recruits should be pouring into the army from every position in life. They would have done so in 1914. What had happened since to the spirit and outlook of our people?

Well, the Decree of Public Security must challenge them. Its clear insistence on unquestioning loyalty would put the issue plainly. They would have to search their hearts and decide.

A further series of anxieties was caused by the ambiguous behaviour of his promised allies in

Europe. Some of them were taking action in accordance with the plain undertakings of their strong men. France and Italy had mobilized, but on their common frontier. Von Barheim, on the telephone, pleaded that he was embarrassed by a republican and antipatriotic revolt in Saxony. Turkey had also mobilized, and there was complex nationalist trouble in Egypt.

The Lord Paramount became more and more aware of the extreme swiftness with which things happen to responsible statesmen as the war phase comes round. The American situation had developed from a featureless uneventfulness to an acute clash in four days. Hour after hour, fresh aspects of the riddle of Empire elaborated themselves. He had drawn together all the threads of Empire into his own hands. There were moments when he felt an intolerable envy of Paramuzzi with his straightforward peninsula and his comparatively simple problem.