

CHAPTER III

THE RT. HON. DAVID MAYOT

“I once did see
In my young travels through Armenia,
An angrie Unicorne in his full carier
Charge with too swift a foot a Jeweller,
That watcht him for the Treasure of his browe;
And ere he could get shelter of a tree,
Naile him with his rich Antler to the Earth.”

GEORGE CHAPMAN, *Bussy D'Ambois*.

I

I MUST make it clear at the outset that I was not in Mayot's confidence during the year the events of which I am about to record. Good-eve and Reggie Daker confided in me, and, through a series of accidents, I stumbled into Tavanger's inner life. Also I came to have full knowledge of Charles Ottery's case. But I only knew Mayot slightly, and we were opponents in the House, so, although our experiences at Flambard brought us a little nearer, we were far from anything like intimacy. But I realised that, under Moe's spell, he had seen something which had affected him deeply, and I studied closely his political moves to see if I could get a clue to that something. As a matter of fact, before Christmas I guessed what the revelation had been, and my guess proved correct. Later, when the whirligig of politics had brought Mayot and myself into closer touch, I learned from him some of the details which I now set forth.

First of all let me state exactly what he saw. For a second of time he had a glimpse of the first *Times* leader a year ahead; his eyes fell somewhere about the middle of it. The leader dealt with India, and a speech of the Prime Minister on the subject. By way of variation the writer used the Prime Minister's name in

one sentence, and the name was Waldemar. Now, the Labour Party was then in office under Sir Derrick Trant, and Mr Waldemar was the leader of the small, compact, and highly efficient Liberal group. Within a year's time, therefore, a remarkable adjustment of parties would take place, and the head of what was then by far the smallest party would be called upon to form a Government.

This for a man like Mayot was tremendous news—how tremendous will appear from a short recital of the chief features in his character. He was that rare thing in the class to which he belonged, a professional politician. A trade-union secretary looks to a seat in Parliament as a kind of old-age pension, and the ranks of Labour are for the most part professional. But nowadays the type is uncommon—except in the case of a few famous families—among the middle and upper classes. Mayot would have made a good eighteenth-century politician, for the parliamentary game was the very breath of his nostrils. All his life he had been the typical good boy and prize pupil. At school he had not been regarded as clever, but he had worked like a beaver; at the University there were many who called him stupid, but nevertheless he had won high honours in the schools. It was the same with games. He was never a good cricketer, but he was in his School Eleven, and at Cambridge, by dint of assiduous professional coaching in the vacations, he managed to attain his Blue—and failed disastrously in the 'Varsity match. He seemed to have the

knack of just getting what he wanted with nothing to spare, but, since the things that he wanted were numerous and important, he presented a brilliant record to the world.

He was the only son of a well-to-do Lancashire manufacturer, and had no need to trouble about money. He was devouringly ambitious—not to do things, but to be things. I doubt if he cared much for any political cause, but he was set upon becoming a prominent statesman. He began as a Tory democrat, an inheritor of some threads of Disraeli's mantle. He went to Germany to study industrial problems, lived at a settlement in Rotherhithe, even did a spell of manual labour in a Birmingham factory—all the earnest gestures that are supposed to imply a tender heart and a forward-looking mind. He got into Parliament just before the War as a Conservative Free-trader for a Midland county constituency where his father had a house, and made himself rather conspicuous by a mild support of the Government's Irish Home Rule policy. In the War he lay very low; he had opportunely remembered that his family had been Quakers, and he had something to do, from well back at the base, with a Quaker ambulance. After peace he came out strong for the League of Nations, bitterly criticised the Coalition, was returned in '22 as an Independent, made a spectacular crossing of the floor of the House, and in '23 was the Labour member for a mining area in Durham, with a majority of five figures. He was an under-

secretary in the Labour Government of '29, and, when Trant became Prime Minister, he entered his Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. As such he was responsible for the highly controversial Factory Bill to which I have referred earlier in this story.

A rich bachelor, he had no other interest than public life, or rather every other interest was made to subserve that end. He used to say grandly, in Bacon's phrase, that he had "espoused the State," which was true enough if husband and wife become one flesh, for he saw every public question through the medium of his own career. In many ways he was not a bad fellow; indeed, you would have said the worst of him in calling him an *arriviste* and a professional politician.

The first point to remember is that he had not a very generous allowance of brains, but made his share go a long way. He carefully nursed his reputation, for he knew well that he had no great margin. He cherished his dignity, too, cultivated a habit of sardonic speech, and obviously longed to be respected and feared. A few simple souls thought him formidable, and most people esteemed his industry, for he toiled at every job he undertook, and left nothing to chance. For myself, I never could take him quite seriously. He was excellent at a prepared statement, which any Treasury clerk could do as well as a Minister, but when you got to grips with him in debate he funked and rode off on a few sounding platitudes. Also I cannot imagine any man, woman or

child being moved by his harangues, for he had about as much magnetism as a pillar-box.

The second thing to remember is that he knew that he was second-rate, in everything except his industry and the intensity of his ambition. Therefore he was a great student of tactics. He was determined to be Prime Minister, and believed that by a close study of the possible moves of the political cat he might succeed. So far he had done well, for he would never have had Cabinet rank if he had remained a Tory. But one realised that he was not quite easy, and that his eyes were always lifting anxiously over the party fence. Let me add that most people did not suspect his gnawing ambition, or his detachment from anything that might be called principles, for there was a heavy, almost unctuous, earnestness about his oratorical manner. He was clever enough, when the ice was thin, not to be too fluent, but to let broken sentences and homely idioms attest the depth of his convictions.

Believing firmly in Moe, he believed in the fragment of revelation which had been vouchsafed him, and was set on making the most of it. Waldemar, the Liberal leader, would be Prime Minister a year hence, and he pondered deeply how he could turn this piece of news to his advantage. . . . The first thing was to discover how it could possibly come about. He naturally thought first of a coalition between Labour and Liberal, but a little reflection convinced him of its unlikelihood, for Trant and

Waldemar were the toughest kind of incompatibles.

Waldemar was a relic of Victorian Liberalism, a fanatical Free-trader, an individualist of the old rock. He was our principal exponent of the League of Nations, and had made an international reputation by his work for world peace. By profession a banker, he looked like a most impressive cleric—Anglican, not Non-conformist—with his lean, high-boned face, his shaggy eyebrows, and his superb, resonant voice. He was far the best speaker in the House, for he could reel off, without preparation, model eighteenth-century prose, and he was also a formidable debater; but he was a poor parliamentarian, for his mind lacked flexibility. He awed rather than conciliated, and, with his touch of fanaticism, was apt to be an inept negotiator.

Derrick Trant was his exact opposite. He was the most English thing that God ever made, and, like most typical Englishmen, was half Scots. He had drifted into the Labour Party out of a quixotic admiration for the doings of the British rank-and-file in the War, and he proved extraordinarily useful in keeping that precarious amalgam together. For all sections both liked and trusted him, the solid Trade Union lot and the young bloods alike, for his simplicity and single-heartedness. He had clearly no axe to grind, and the ordinary Labour man was willing to be led by one whose ancestors had fought at Crécy; the extremists respected his honesty, and the moderates be-

lieved in his common sense. He represented indeed the greatest common denominator of party feeling. He had instincts rather than principles, but his instincts were widely shared, and his guileless exterior concealed a real shrewdness. I have heard him again and again in the House pull his side out of a mess by his powers of conciliation. He made no secret of his dislike of Waldemar. It was the secular antipathy of the nationalist to the internationalist, the Englishman to the cosmopolitan, the opportunist to the doctrinaire, the practical man to the potential fanatic.

Mayot soon decided that there was nothing doing in that quarter. The alliance, which would put Waldemar into office, must be with the Tories. At first sight it seemed impossible. The party to which I have the honour to belong had been moving steadily towards Protection, and had preached a stringent policy of safeguarding as the first step towards the cure of unemployment. Waldemar had taken the field against us, and seemed to hope to engineer a Liberal revival on a Free-trade basis, and so repeat the triumph of 1906. On the other hand, there was the personality of our leader to be remembered. Geraldine was by far the greatest parliamentarian of our time and the adroitest party chief. Like Mayot, he was a professional, and the game was never out of his mind. Being mostly Irish in blood, he had none of Trant's Englishness or Waldemar's iron dogmas; his weapons were endless ingenuity, audacity and humour. He wanted to

return to power, and might use the Liberals to oust the Government. But in that case why should Waldemar be Prime Minister? Geraldine would never kill Charles to make James king. . . . Mayot could reach no conclusion, and resolved to wait and watch.

The parliamentary session through six blistering weeks dragged itself to a close. The Budget debate was concluded after eight all-night sittings, the Factory Bill passed its third reading and went to the Lords, and there was the usual massacre of lesser measures. It had been Mayot's habit to go to Scotland for the autumn vacation, for he had a good grouse moor and was a keen shot. But that year he changed his plans and resolved to stalk Waldemar.

Now, Waldemar was something of a valetudinarian, and every year, after the labours of the session, was accustomed to put himself for some weeks in the hands of an eminent physician who dwelt in the little town of Erdbach in the Black Forest. Moreover, Waldemar was not like Geraldine and Mayot himself; he had hobbies other than politics, and, just as Sir Derrick Trant was believed to be more interested in Gloucester cattle, wild white clover and dry-fly fishing than in Parliament, so Waldemar was popularly supposed to prefer the study of birds to affairs of State. So Mayot, professing anxiety about his blood pressure, became an inmate of Dr Daimler's *kurhaus*, and prepared himself for his task by a reading of small popular works on ornithology.

At Erdbach he spent three weeks. I happened to meet him there, for I stopped at the principal hotel for two days while motoring to Switzerland, and ran across him in Waldemar's company while taking an evening walk. Waldemar had no particular liking for Mayot, but he had nothing definitely against him except his politics, and the two had never been much pitted against each other in the House. When I saw them they seemed to have reached a certain degree of intimacy, and Mayot was listening intelligently to a discourse on the Alpine swift, and trying to identify a specimen of tit which Waldemar proclaimed was found in Britain only in the Spey valley. The Liberal leader was in a holiday mood, and he was flattered, no doubt, by Mayot's respectful docility.

He talked, it seemed, a great deal of politics, and one of Mayot's suspicions was confirmed. He was slightly more civil about the Tories than about the Government. Geraldine, indeed, he profoundly distrusted, but he was quite complimentary about certain of Geraldine's colleagues. And he made two significant remarks. British politics, he thought, were moving back to the old two-party division, and in his opinion the most dangerous reactionary force was Sir Derrick Trant. Trant was the legitimate leader and the natural exponent of die-hard Conservatism—a class-consciousness which would in the long run benefit the capitalist, and a chauvinism which might plunge his country into war. . . . After a rather tedious three weeks

Mayot returned to his neglected grouse, with a good deal of vague information about birds, and a clear conviction that there had been several *pourparlers* between Waldemar and the Tories. He seemed to have got the pointer he wanted.

But a fortnight later he changed his mind. Geraldine's chief lieutenant, a man of whom Waldemar had spoken with approval, addressed a political demonstration in the park of an Aberdeenshire castle. The speech, which became famous as the "Issachar speech," was a violent attack upon the Liberals. Labour was dismissed as a confusion of thought based upon honourable inclinations, but Liberalism was denounced as a deliberate blindness, an ossification of heart and an atrophy of brain. What were the boasted "Liberal principles," the speaker asked, but dead and decomposing relics? Waldemar was described as Issachar, an "ass between two burdens," one being his precious dogmas and the other a deadweight of antediluvian jealousies and fears.

Mayot, who read the speech one evening after coming in from a grouse-drive, decided with a sigh that he must try a cast on another line.

II

The autumn session began under the shadow of unemployment. The figures were the worst since the War, and it was generally believed would pass the three million point by Christmas.

Industries which six months before had been slightly on the up-grade were now going back, and industries which had been slightly depressed were now going downhill with a rush. People began to talk of a national emergency Government, and a speech of Trant's was interpreted as a feeler. Mayot pricked up his ears and set himself to study the omens.

It was clear that there was no friendliness between Waldemar and Geraldine. The spirit of the Issachar speech was apparent in the first debate, and there were some brisk passages in the House between the two leaders. Then Geraldine went on the stump in Scotland and the industrial north. His one theme was unemployment, and he had enormous meetings everywhere, with enthusiastic overflows. He really felt the tragedy of the situation, and he gave the unemployed the feeling that he understood their case and would stick at nothing to find a remedy. There was no doubt that he made headway as against the inertness of the Prime Minister, who was in the hands of the Treasury officials, and the stubborn formalism of Waldemar.

At Durham he outlined his programme, the chief point in which was a new emigration policy. Thousands, he said, had been permanently disinherited from the work for which they had been trained; certain industries must face the fact of a permanent reduction to a lower level; what was to be done with the displaced? Trant had a transference scheme working, but it could only account for a frac-

tion. The resources of the Empire must be brought in to meet the deficiencies of one part of it. The Dominions had virgin land, unharnessed power ; Britain had the human material ; the situation was ripe for a deal. Geraldine proposed to short-circuit the whole existing emigration machinery. He had been in Canada the year before, and had fixed upon two areas, one in British Columbia and the other on the Peace river, for a great national experiment. He proposed to buy or lease the land from the Canadian Government, exactly as a private citizen might acquire a Canadian estate. Then he proposed to call the best business talent in Britain and Canada to his aid, and to establish a new chartered company to develop the area. Roads and railways would be built, townships laid out, water and electric power provided, just as in a scheme of private development. Unskilled jobs in the preliminary construction would be found at once for thousands of the unemployed in Britain, and in the meantime others would be put into training for farm and industrial work later. The new settlements would be not only agricultural, but also industrial, and whole industrial units would be transplanted bodily from Britain. Each British district would contribute its quota of emigrants, and it was believed that, in a scheme which appealed so strongly to the imagination, so far from there being a disinclination to emigrate, there would be a brisk competition to get on the quota. He foreshadowed a new chartered company of adventurers, like the Hudson

Bay and the East India Companies, and he hoped to have it run by able business men whose reputation would be pledged to its success. It would be financed by a twenty million loan, issued with a guarantee by the British Government, and Geraldine believed that a good deal of money would be forthcoming for the purpose from the Dominions and even from the United States.

This policy, preached in depressed areas with Geraldine's eloquence to audiences deep in the mire of unemployment, had a considerable success. Waldemar was, of course, in violent opposition. He harped on the iniquities and corruption of chartered companies in the past, and he ingeminated the word "inflation." Trant pooh-poohed the whole thing. You could not cure an ill, he said, by running away from it; he was a simple Englishman, who disliked a grandiose Imperialism run for the benefit of Jews. But the most serious disapproval was in Geraldine's own party—the "big business" group, who were afraid of the effect of such a loan on the markets. The younger Tories as a whole were enthusiastic, and, what is more significant, the Left Wing of Labour blessed it cordially. It was their own line of country, the kind of thing they had been pressing on their otiose leader. Trant's life was made a burden to him by endless questions in the House from his own people, and Collinson, a young Labour member from the Midlands, declared that Geraldine was the best Socialist of them all, since he alone had the courage to use

in an emergency the corporate power and intelligence of the State.

Mayot considered hard. The omens pointed to an alliance between Waldemar and the Tory Right Wing. But how was that possible? The anti-Geraldine Tories were to a man Protectionists, and Waldemar and his party would die in the last ditch for Free Trade. . . . What about a grouping of the Labour Left and the Tory Left? On the matter of ultimate principles, no doubt, there was a deep cleavage, for the most progressive young Tory would have nothing to do with Marxism. But after all, Marxism was becoming a very shadowy faith, and in practical politics it was easy to conceive Tory and Labour youth lining up. Both were natural Protectionists, and abominated Whiggism and all its ways. He noticed how in the House the two groups seemed to be friendly, and mingled constantly in the smoking-room. A volume of political essays had recently been published, to which Geraldine had written a preface, and the contributors included Collinson, Macleish, the Glasgow firebrand, and young Tories like Lord Lanyard and John Fortingall. . . . But no! It was impossible, he decided. For the leader of such a combination would be Geraldine, whereas, as he knew, in eight months Waldemar would be Prime Minister. Victory would not follow such banners, so he tried another cast.

At this point Sally Flambard took a hand. She suddenly appeared as a political hostess, and I do not think that Mayot had anything to

do with it. Her husband was of course a Tory of an antique school, but Sally had not hitherto shown any political interest. Now she discovered that she believed in constitutional government and the old ways, and profoundly distrusted both Labour and Geraldine. The move, I think, was only another phase of Sally's restless activity. She had had her finger in most pies, and wanted a new one. Also she had acquired a regard for Waldemar. Being a New Englander, she had in her bones an admiration for the type of statesman represented by the fathers of her country—large, grave, gnomic, rhetorical men—and Waldemar seemed to her to be a judicious compound of Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln.

Anyhow, she took to giving luncheon parties in Berkeley Square, at which much nonsense was spoken, especially by the hostess. You see, she misread Waldemar, and the initial mistake spoiled all her strategy. She thought that he was a natural leader and an original thinker, whereas he was primarily a mechanical instrument, discoursing—very beautifully no doubt—traditional music. She was convinced that she had only to bring him into touch with some of the solidier Conservatives for them to feel that he was a dæmonic figure, a wedder of current realities to historic wisdom. So she got together some amazing gatherings of incompatibles. The materials, so far from being the essentials of good fare to be cooked by a skilful hand, were more like chemicals turned by their juxtaposition into explosives.

Mayot was to be the *trait d'union*, the adroit outsider, who could combine the ill-assorted guests, preparatory to Waldemar's treatment. I don't know where she got her notion of him—probably from himself. I attended two of the luncheons, and they gave me some idea of Mayot's game. The plan was to unite the Tory Right and Centre (*minus* Geraldine) with the Liberals through a common dislike of viewy extravagance and a common trust in Waldemar.

The result was high comedy. Waldemar, honest man, did his best. He tried to be civil to everybody in his pleasant old-fashioned way, but he had no single thing in common with nine out of ten of the Tories who sat at Sally's table. I could see Mayot trying to guide him into diplomatic paths, but Waldemar was far too hard-set a being to play a part, even if he had wished to. He talked books and the classics to Sir Penton Furbast, the press magnate, who was more or less illiterate. He told stories of Gladstone, and expatiated on the glory that had died with him, to old Isaac Isaacson, whose life had been spent in a blind worship of Disraeli. Once he thought he had got hold of a batch of country gentlemen, and discoursed on a scheme he had for lightening the burdens on rural land by means of an ingenious tax on inflated stock-exchange values; but it was champagne, not country air, that gave them their high colour—all were noted market operators, and his talk scared them into fits. An impish fate seemed to brood over those luncheons. Waldemar

talked disarmament to the chairman of the Navy League, and acidly criticised America to Wortley-Dodd, who had an American mother and mother-in-law. His only success was with me, for I had always rather liked him, and could talk to him about birds and the inaccuracies of the Greville Memoirs. But the real rock on which the thing shipwrecked was Protection. Every one of Sally's Tories was an earnest Protectionist, and, at the last luncheon just before Christmas, Waldemar told Ashley Bridges that Protection meant four million unemployed and the dissolution of the Empire, and Bridges retorted in so many words that he was a fool.

Sally's parties were a most valuable experience for Mayot. He was progressing in his quest by the time-honoured method of trial and error. By this time he was perfectly clear on one point. No alliance was conceivable between Waldemar and the Tory rank-and-file, for a strong dislike of Trant and a growing suspicion of Geraldine would never surmount the tariff difficulty. So he turned to the only remaining combination which would suit his book—the Liberals and the Labour Right.

I should have said that hitherto Mayot had never identified himself with any group in his party. He had been of the Centre, a Labour man *sans phrase*; one who would be able, without any compromising past, to incline, when the occasion arose, to the Right or to the Left. But clearly this detachment would soon be impossible. If Waldemar was to form a

Government, it could only be with the help of the Labour Right, for it was difficult to imagine Collinson and his like having anything to do with one whom they had repeatedly described in public as a fatted calf. If he, Mayot, were to play a prominent part in that Government, it was therefore obligatory to get some hold on the section of his party which would support Waldemar. He must edge discreetly towards the Right Wing.

Discretion was essential, and secrecy. He could not afford as yet to break with the Left, and he must give no sign of disloyalty to Trant. He needed a confederate, and he found in old Folliot the man he wanted.

Folliot, as I have mentioned, was an elderly gossip, who had been a notable figure in the Edwardian era, but who since the War had become a bore. He appeared less regularly at smart dinner-parties, and fewer country houses were open to him. When I first came to London men drew near him, when the women had left the room, to hear his stories, and youth in the clubs made rather a cult of him. I remember congratulating myself on the privilege of being acquainted with one who had known all the great men in Europe for half a century. Now the poor old fellow was allowed to drink his port in lonely silence. He was a pathetic figure, and what chiefly grieved him was his exclusion from politics. He had never been anything of a serious politician, though he had twice sat for short terms in the House, but he had been a useful go-between. One of his

virtues was that, though a notorious gossip, he could be trusted to be as secret as the grave in any business in which he was employed. He used never even to mention the things he had done—his negotiations as a young man with the Liberal Unionists, or his very useful work over the House of Lords question in 1910—only grinned and looked wise when the topics came up. Folliot had his own point of honour.

Lately he had come to affect Labour out of disgust at the neglect of his own people. He did not love Trant, who laughed at him, but he had some vogue among the feudal aristocracy of the trade unions, who liked what they regarded as a link with historic British policy. Mayot easily enlisted him, for he was a gullible old gentleman, and was flattered at being consulted. He discovered that he had a mission to restore the two-party system by a union of all soberly progressive forces. He himself had begun life as a follower of Hartington, and so had never cared for the straiter sect of the Carlton Club, and had always had his doubts about Protection. He foresaw a chance of reviving that decorous Whiggism for which he had always hankered, based upon the two solidest things in Britain—the middle-class Liberal and the intelligent working man.

So during the early part of the new year he was happily busy. He gave a great many dinners, sometimes at his flat and sometimes at Brooks's, to which were bidden trade-union members of Parliament, one or two members of the Government who were supposed to be

disaffected towards Trant, and a number of carefully selected Liberals. Waldemar came once or twice and Mayot was invariably present. These dinners seem to have gone off very well, and no hint of them leaked into the press. It was a game which Mayot could play to perfection. He could see that already he was regarded with favour by the Liberal stalwarts, and a certain type of Labour man was coming to look with a new respect upon one who could interpret his honest prejudices and give them an air of political profundity. By the end of January he was very well satisfied. He had decided that he had forecast correctly the process which would lead to Waldemar's premiership, and had put himself in a position to reap the full advantage of his foreknowledge. What he hoped for, I think, was the Exchequer.

III

But with February came one of the unlooked-for upheavals of opinion which make politics such a colossal gamble. The country suddenly awoke to the meaning of the unemployment figures. These were appalling, and, owing to the general dislocation of world credit and especially to the American situation, held no immediate hope of improvement. The inevitable followed. Hitherto sedate newspapers began to shout, and the habitual shouters began to scream. Hunger-marchers thronged the highways to London; there were mass-meetings in

every town in the North ; the Archbishops appointed a day for public prayer ; and what with deputations, appeals, and nagging questions in the House, the life of Trant became a burden.

The crisis produced a prophet, too. It is curious how throughout our history, whenever there is a strong movement from below, the names of the new leaders are usually queer monosyllables. It was so in Jack Cade's rebellion, and in Venner's business during the Commonwealth, and in the early days of the Labour movement ; and now we had the same phenomenon, as if the racial maelstrom at the foot of the ladder had thrown up remnants of a long-hidden world. The new prophet bore the incredible name of Chuff. From Tower Hill to Glasgow Green he stumped the land, declaring that our civilisation had broken down, that the crisis was graver than at the outbreak of the War, and demanding that the Government should act at once or admit their defeat. The remarkable thing about Chuff was that he was not an apostle of any single nostrum. He was a rather level-headed young man, who had once been a sailor, and he was content to bring home to the national conscience the magnitude of the tragedy ; the solution, he said, he left to cleverer people. He had real oratorical gifts, and what with Chuff on the platform and Collinson and his friends in the House, there was high confusion in domestic politics.

Opinion was oddly cross-divided, but presently it sorted itself out into two groups. The Activists demanded instant and drastic action,

and the Passivists—the name was given them by their opponents and made prejudice owing to its resemblance to Pacifists ; they called themselves Constitutionalists—counselled patience, and went on steadily with local relief works, transference, the expediting of one or two big public utilities, and the other stock remedies. The Activists were a perfect Tower of Babel, all speaking different tongues. Some wanted an immediate application of Marxian Socialism. A big section, led by Collinson, had a fantastic scheme of developing the home markets by increased unemployment pay—a sort of lifting up of one's self by the hair. Most accepted Geraldine's emigration policy ; and a powerful wing advocated a stringent tariff with a view to making the Empire a self-contained economic unit. The agreed point, you might say, of all sections was direct and immediate action, a considerable degree of State Socialism, and a very general repudiation of Free Trade.

Activism, as I have said, cut clean across parties. Roughly its strength lay in the Labour Left and the Tory Left, and it was principally a back-bench movement, though Geraldine gave it a somewhat half-hearted blessing. Lord Lanyard and Collinson appeared on the same platforms in the country, and one powerful Tory paper supported the cause and sent special commissioners into the distressed areas to report. There was a debate on the Ministry of Labour estimates, in which the Labour Whips found themselves confronted with something very like a revolt. The Government was saved

by the Liberals, but John Fortingall's motion was only lost by seven votes. This incident made the Passivists sit up and organise themselves. They had on their side Trant and the Labour Right and Centre, the whole of Waldemar's following, and the bulk of the Tories, Geraldine sitting delicately on the fence. But the debating ability—except for Waldemar and Mayot—was conspicuously with their opponents.

It was now that Mayot became something of a figure. The path was being prepared for a Labour-Liberal coalition with Waldemar as leader—though he could not quite realise how the latter event would come about. In such a combination, if it took office, Trant might become Foreign Secretary, while he must make sure of the Exchequer. He made sure by hurling himself into the controversy with a vigour hitherto unknown in his career. He, who had always been a little detached and a good deal of a departmentalist, who had moreover been very respectful to his own extremists, now became a hard-hitting fanatic for moderation. He picked up some of Waldemar's apocalyptic mannerisms, and his parliamentary style acquired a full-throated ease. It shows how much the man was in earnest about his ambitions, that in a few weeks he should have forced himself to acquire a host of new arts. At that time I was so busy at the Bar that I was very little in the House, but, my sympathies being rather with the Activists, I had one or two brushes with Mayot. I found him a far more effective antagonist than before, for, though he

was no better at argument, he could do what is usually more effective—denounce with apparent conviction.

Events in March played into his hands, for India suddenly boiled over, and the new constitution which we had laboriously established there seemed to be about to fail. There was a good deal of rioting, which had to be suppressed by force, and a number of patriots went to gaol. This split the Activist group asunder, for Collinson went out bald-headed against what he called the "fascist" policy of the Government, and most of the Labour Left followed him, while the young Tories took precisely the other line and shudderingly withdrew from their colleagues, like a prim virgin who opportunely discovers deeds of infamy in her lover. Lanyard, indeed, who had humanitarian leanings, seized the occasion to become an Independent, and no longer received the party Whips, but John Fortingall and the others returned hastily to the fold. The Government handled the Indian situation with firmness, said its supporters—with cheap melodrama and blind brutality, said its critics—and it had behind it three-fourths of its own people, all the Liberals, and every Tory except Lanyard. Peace had revisited the tents of Israel.

Mayot in those days was a happy man, for the world was ordering itself exactly according to his wishes. The course of things was perfectly clear. Unemployment was the issue that blanketed all others, and unemployment had to all intents obliterated party lines. India had

broken up the Activist phalanx. The advocacy of quack remedies was left to a few wild men. Geraldine's grandiose emigration dream had faded out of the air, and the Tories were back in their old Protectionist bog, in which he was confident that the bulk of the country would never join them. He thought that he had trained himself to look at facts with cold objective eyes, and such was his reading of them. The economic situation was very grim, and likely to become grimmer, and the solution must be some kind of national emergency Government in which Waldemar would take the lead, for he alone had the requisite prestige of character and was in the central tradition of British policy. Trant would be glad to be a lieutenant instead of a leader, and he himself, as the chief liaison officer between Liberal and Labour, would have his choice of posts. His only anxiety concerned Flotter, now at the Exchequer. But Flotter was nearer the Left than himself, and farther from the Liberals, and could never command his purchase. Flotter was a dismal old man, whose reputation had been steadily decreasing, whereas in recent months he himself had added cubits to his political stature.

So Mayot began to talk discreetly in private about the National Government which facts were making imperative. I heard him airing his views one night at a dinner of Lady Altrincham's, and at a luncheon of Folliot's, where I sat next to him, he did me the honour to throw a fly over me. I asked him what his selections

would be, and he replied that such a Government would have all responsible Labour to choose from, and all the Liberal talent.

"What about us?" I asked.

He looked wise. "That is harder, since Geraldine sticks to his Protection. But we should be glad to have some of you—on terms. You yourself, for instance."

"What puzzles me is, how you distinguish a National Government from a Coalition," I said. "Remember the word Coalition still stinks in the nostrils of most people."

"A Coalition," he said gravely, "only shares the loot, but a National Government pools the brains."

I grinned, and thanked him for the compliment.

IV

Just before the Easter recess I lunched with Sally Flambard. Her craze for Waldemar had gone, she had never liked Geraldine, and, save for Mayot, she had had very little to do with the Labour people. But now she had discovered Trant. She had been staying at a house in his own county, and he had come to dine, and she had at once conceived for him one of her sudden affections. There was a good deal of reason for that, for Trant was an extraordinarily attractive human being, whatever his defects might be as a statesman. Evelyn liked him too, though deploring his

party label, for they were both sportsmen and practical farmers. The consequence was that Trant had become for the past month a frequent guest in Berkeley Square. It was a pleasant refuge for him, for he was not expected to talk politics, and he met for the most part people who did not know the alphabet of them.

Trant and I had always been good friends, and on that April Wednesday when we found ourselves side by side, I had from him—what I usually got—a jeremiad on the boredom and futility of his profession.

“I’m not like you,” he lamented. “You’ve got a body of exact knowledge behind you, and can contribute something important—legal advice, I mean. But here am I, an ordinary ill-informed citizen, set to deal with problems that no mortal man understands and no human ingenuity can solve. I spend my time clutching at imponderables.”

I said something to the effect that his modesty was his chief asset—that at least he knew what he did not know.

“Yes,” he went on, “but, hang it, Leithen, I’ve got to fight with fellows who are accursedly cocksure, though they are cocksure about different things. Take that ass Waldemar . . .”

Trant proceeded to give an acid, and not unjust, analysis of Waldemar and the way he affected him. The two men were as antipathetic as a mongoose and a snake. He was far too loyal to crab any of his own side to an opponent, but I could see that he was nearly as sick of Collinson and his lot, and quite as sick

of Mayot. In fact, it looked as if there was now no obvious place for Trant in his party, since he was at war with his own Left Wing, and Mayot had virtually taken over the leadership of the Right and Centre. At that time we were all talking about the alliance of Liberal and Labour, and this conversation convinced me that it would not include Trant.

Then he began to speak of ponderable things like fishing. He was just off to a beat on the Wye, and lamented the bad reports of the run of fish. Just as we were leaving the table he said something that stuck in my memory. He asked me what was the best text of the Greek Anthology, attributing to me more scholarship than I possessed. . . . Now, Trant had always been bookish, and had a number of coy literary ambitions. I remembered that once, years before, he had confessed to me that, when he was quit of public life, he meant to amuse himself with a new translation of the Anthology. Meleager, I think, was his special favourite.

I walked down to the House that afternoon with one assured conviction. Trant was about to retire. His air had been that of a schoolboy who meant to defy authority and hang the consequences. He had the manner of one who knew he was going to behave unconscientiously and dared anybody to prevent him. Also there was his Greek Anthology scheme.

By this time I had a pretty shrewd idea of Mayot's purpose. That afternoon I sat next to him in the tea-room and tried to sound him. He looked at me sharply.

"Have you heard anything?" he asked, and I told him "Not a word," but that the whole situation seemed to me fluid.

"Trant won't go till he has made certain of his successor," said Mayot. "And that won't be yet awhile."

But Trant did go, leaving the succession gloriously unsettled. A fortnight later the papers published a letter from him to Flotter, the chairman of his party. It was a dignified performance, and there was finality in every syllable. Trant said he had placed his resignation in His Majesty's hands and that it had been graciously accepted. He proposed to retire altogether from public life, and would not be a candidate at the next election. He made no complaints, but offered his most grateful thanks to his party for their unfailing loyalty in difficult times, and expressed his warm hopes for a brilliant future. . . . I had a line from him from the Spey, chiefly about fishing; but it ended with: "You did not think Master Silence a man of this mettle? Thank God it's over. Now I shall have peace to make my soul."

I ran across Mayot next day, and he was fairly walking on his toes with excitement. His face was prim with weighty secrets. "The Consuls must see to it that the Republic takes no hurt," he said impressively. He was swollen with delicious responsibilities, and clearly believed that his hour had come.

The next event was the party meeting. Mayot was generally fancied as Trant's suc-

cessor, but to everybody's surprise, Flotter, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was elected by nine votes. Flotter was of Mayot's persuasion, but he was slightly nearer to the Left perhaps; at any rate, he had not been so controversial a figure as Mayot, so he had the support of Collinson's merry men. Mayot did not seem to take the defeat much to heart, for he was looking well ahead. In a few weeks Waldemar would be Prime Minister, and he was the chief link between Waldemar and Labour.

I was, of course, not in the confidence of the Cabinet, and can only judge by results. But I fancy that the decision to ask for a dissolution must have been chiefly Mayot's. You see, he knew one fact which was hidden from all the world, and he had to consider how this fact was coming to birth. If Flotter took office at once he would not readily be induced to resign, though he was an old man, not very strong in body, and never credited with much ability. An election was desirable on every ground, for both the Labour and the Tory Parties were deeply divided, and the verdict of the polls would clear the air. Mayot had no doubt that the country was on the whole on the side of the kind of cautious progress represented by Waldemar and himself. The Tory Left had not been making much headway; Collinson and his group were discredited because of their attitude on India; and the appeal of the redoubtable Chuff had lost its first freshness. His chief fear was Geraldine, whose tactical skill he profoundly respected. But an immediate

election would spike Geraldine's guns, since he had no new policy to urge, and, if he improvised one, would not have time to elaborate it.

So Flotter was sent for by the King, and asked for a dissolution, which was granted. His Budget resolutions were hastily passed by a House whose interests were elsewhere, and in the second week of May the campaign began.

V

I have fought in my time seven elections, and can recollect a good many more, but I never knew one like this. My own seat was safe enough, and I was able to speak for our side up and down the land during the hottest May that I ever remember. But the whole thing was a nightmare, for in twenty-four hours all creeds and slogans were mixed up in a wild kaleidoscope. Very few candidates knew quite where they stood, and desperate must have been the confusion of the ordinary voter. Laboriously devised programmes became suddenly waste paper.

The supreme fact was that Waldemar went mad, or had a call, or saw a vision like Paul on the road to Damascus. You can take which explanation you choose. He had been lying low for some weeks, touring about the country and scarcely opening his mouth. He must have discovered the horrors of unemployment for himself, just as Geraldine had discovered them seven months before when he started his

emigration scheme. Out of the provinces came Waldemar, like Mahomet from the desert, to preach a new gospel.

It was a complete reversal of all that he and Mayot had stood for. He was still a Free Trader, he proclaimed, and would have nothing to do with a self-contained Empire, chiefly on the ground that it would be a barrier to that internationalism on which the future of humanity depended. But he was quite prepared to prohibit the import of certain rival commodities altogether as an emergency measure, and he had a great scheme for State purchase in bulk and the regulation of prices. He went farther. He, who had once moaned "inflation" when Geraldine's loan was proposed, was now a convert to a huge loan for emergency public works. Moreover, he swallowed wholesale most of Collinson's stuff about increasing our home power of consumption, and proposed measures which made the hair of the ordinary economist stand on end.

But it was not so much what Waldemar said as the way he said it. The old Activism was a stagnant pool compared to his furious torrent. He preached his heresies with the fire and conviction of an Israelitish prophet, and brought into the contest the larger spirit of an earlier age. He was quite frank about his conversion. He had had his eyes opened, and, like an honest man and a patriot, must follow the new light. It was the very violence of the revolution in his creed that made it so impressive. We had got into the habit of saying that the day of

oratory was over, and that all that mattered was that a leader should be able to broadcast intelligibly. Waldemar disproved this in two days. He was a great orator, and he swept over the North and the Midlands like a flame. Gladstone's Midlothian campaign was beaten hollow. He motored from town to town in a triumphal procession, and every gathering he addressed was like a revivalist meeting, half the audience in tears and the rest too solemnised to shout. Wild as his talk was, he brought hope to those who had none, and stirred up the political waters as they had not been moved since the War.

It was an awful position for everybody else. His own party, with a few exceptions, accepted him docilely, though they had some difficulty in accustoming themselves to the language. You see, the Liberals, having been long in the wilderness, were prepared to follow any Moses who would lead them across Jordan. There was a half-hearted attempt to make a deal about seats, so as to prevent unnecessary fights between Liberal and Labour, but it was a little too late for that, and we had the curious spectacle in many constituencies of official opponents saying precisely the same thing. Geraldine was in an awkward fix, for he had been a bit of an Activist and had his young entry to consider. He did the only thing possible—relapsed upon sobriety *plus* Protection, and did the best he could with tariffs and the Empire. But his form was badly cramped, and he had to face the unpleasing truth that he, the

adroit tactician, had been tactically caught bending. His party, however, was well disciplined, and managed, more or less, to speak with one voice, though it was soon clear that many former Tory voters were being attracted by Waldemar.

The Labour people were in a worse hole. Flotter, who was very little use in an election, steered a wary course, welcoming some of Waldemar's ideas, but entering a *caveat* now and then to preserve his consistency. His programme was a feeble stammering affair, for he was about as much of a leader to his party as a baggage pony in a mountaineering expedition. It was Collinson who took charge. He ranged the Labour Left solidly under Waldemar's banner, and became Waldemar's most efficient henchman. In the whirlwind tour before the poll he never left his leader's side.

For the unhappy Mayot there was no place. Miracles do not happen in batches. What in the case of one man may be ascribed to the vouchsafement of divine light will in a second case be put down to policy. Mayot simply could not turn in his tracks. If he had, he would have become a public laughing-stock. His denunciation of Activism had been too wholehearted, his devotion to economic sanity too complete. So he did nothing. He never spoke outside his own constituency, where he was opposed by the formidable Chuff, who stood as a Labour Independent. I gather that he talked a lonely Waldemarism, which Walde-

mar himself was busily engaged in tearing to tatters.

I got the final results at a Perthshire inn. Mayot was badly beaten; a small thing in itself, for another seat would have been found for him if he had mattered anything to any party—which he did not. There had been the expected defection of Tory voters. The Liberals had done well at our expense owing to Waldemar's name, and all the Labour Left were back with big majorities. So far as I remember, the figures were 251 Labour, 112 Liberals, 290 Tories, and 12 Independents. The country had approved a Coalition.

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I went down to stay with Trant for a week-end in the May-fly season. The new Cabinet had just been announced—Waldemar, Prime Minister; Collinson at the Ministry of Labour; Flotter back at the Exchequer; and Lord Lanyard at the Foreign Office.

Trant, in disreputable clothes, was soaking gut and tying on flies.

"There has been a good deal of trouble," he told me. "Our party didn't want Waldemar. They thought that the leader should come from them, and I gather that Waldemar would have been quite willing to stand down if there had been anybody else. But there wasn't. You couldn't put Flotter in charge.

"Poor old Mayot," he went on, his pleasant face puckered into a grin. "Politics are a brutal game, you know. Here is an able fellow

who makes one mistake and finds himself on the scrap-heap. If he hadn't been so clever he would be at No. 10 to-day. . . . Of course he would. If he had even been like Flotter, and trimmed from sheer stupidity, he would have been Prime Minister. . . . I must say I rather respect him for backing his fancy so steadily. He was shrewd enough to spot the winner, but not the race it would win. Thank God, I never pretended to have any cleverness. . . ."