

FROM BISMARCK
TO THE WORLD WAR

Oxford University Press

London Edinburgh Glasgow Copenhagen

New York Toronto Melbourne Cape Town

Bombay Calcutta Madras Shanghai

Humphrey Milford Publisher to the UNIVERSITY

FROM BISMARCK TO THE WORLD WAR

A HISTORY OF
GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

1870-1914

BY

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD

1927

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

MISS ANNIE ELIZABETH ADAMS, who had undertaken the translation of this book, died on 7th February, 1926, when the work of revision was still incomplete. Her long task had been complicated by the appearance of the second German edition, and the need for incorporating the important new matter contained in it. Another hand could not easily gather up the threads, and if the translation shows unevennesses, it is hoped that the reader will pardon them.

PREFACE

THE disastrous consequences of the World War and of the Treaty of Versailles affect the whole world, but Germany most of all. Hence it is natural for us to keep on asking how did this war come about, could it have been avoided, and who is responsible for having started it? At Versailles, Germany was compelled to sign an admission of guilt because the victors required such justification for their exorbitant demands. It was necessary to convince the world that these heavy burdens were being laid upon us in the interests of public morality, not as conquered foes but as the deliberate disturbers of the peace of the world. Since then public opinion everywhere has generally believed in our guilt; only isolated voices in the enemy countries have ventured to dispute the verdict. From the historical point of view an official admission of guilt, extorted under pressure, has very little significance. In order to understand the origin of the World War, the facts must be examined from the real sources, free from all considerations of party politics. It is only when these facts lie before us, clear and significant, that it is possible to proceed to estimate their real weight and worth.

The accompanying volume is the first attempt to give a description of this kind, based on documents in the German Foreign Office, for free access to which I am deeply indebted. I need scarcely add that this is a mere beginning of the examination of this difficult problem. I have only examined those portions of the huge mass of materials which seemed to me significant for the vital points. Many matters will require—and will receive, once the publication of the Foreign Office records is completed—more exhaustive treatment in details. But even then one indispensable condition will be lacking for a

final estimate, the publication of the records of the other contending Powers. Till then we may succeed in producing an accurate picture of German policy, but we must rest content with more or less well-founded surmises as to the aims and means of the other Powers.

It has been my endeavour to give a reliable picture of Germany's policy during the last decades before the war, founded on the facts as revealed in our archives.

In many places I would gladly have given sharper expression to my own views, but I have exercised no small self-restraint and have sought instead to put my reader in a position to judge for himself. Where I have stated an opinion, I have given it as my own conviction. I wish to say with emphasis that there has been no attempt in official quarters to influence my judgment or to hamper me in the choice of documents used. Had I not been assured of this condition, I would not have undertaken the work. Such being my aim, any ignoring or minimising of German faults and frailties was out of the question. I have admitted these so frankly that many compatriots may find such candour unfair. In my opinion there is no sense in disputing what is undeniable, because it is only when our ways are absolutely straightforward that we can expect and demand consideration for them from an opponent. When we calmly admit that faults have been committed we are the better able to insist that the main reproach of the enemy—the war-like aim of German policy—is absolutely unfounded and refuted by every serious study of the official facts.

Some will be surprised at seeing the plans and deeds of the enemy Powers—England especially—in so far as anything definite can be said about them, in a different light from that in which they are usually presented. But it seems to me that it is the historian's duty, in a case where the official materials on one side are meagre, not to attribute a motive unless he can supply actual proof of it. We would willingly discuss these matters with representatives of the other nations; we offer them our sources of information without reserve; but we cannot expect them to meet us in this matter if we previously accuse them, without proof, of the basest intentions. That this has happened on the other side has made it much more difficult to

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initiate a really effective discussion. It makes it no easier for us, however, if we commit the same fault. It is as incumbent on us as on our enemies to avoid prejudices formed under the obsession of war.

So much for my own position. This book has been written, often in anguish of heart, in the belief that it is necessary. The readers I desire, be they in Germany or elsewhere, are those who seek earnestly to see things as they really were.

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APPENDIX

VISCOUNT GREY'S MEMOIRS

LORD GREY'S Memoirs, bearing the title, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916*, appeared while this book was in the press. It is naturally of the greatest interest to hear from the man who stood at the head of English policy in the decade before the War, by what motives he was actuated in making important decisions, and what aims he was pursuing.

Grey tells us that his whole political outlook was determined by the years from 1892 to 1895, during which he was Under Secretary of State in Lord Rosebery's Ministry. At that time England more or less co-operated with the Triple Alliance, without being formally bound to it, while her relations with France and Russia were very strained and dangerous. At any moment some perfectly insignificant dispute in China, Further India, or Central Africa might lead to war with one if not both of these Powers. Grey describes the manner in which Germany exploited this situation; how, for instance, she supported Great Britain in the Egyptian question, but then demanded in anything but a friendly tone immediate help in return. It is the results of Herr von Holstein's policy of compensations which are here described from the English point of view. Grey felt the position in which England was thus placed to be so dangerous and so ignoble that even then he fervently desired to withdraw from it. When, therefore, during the subsequent years in which he was not in office, Lord Lansdowne and his colleagues, after the failure of the negotiations for an alliance with Germany, concluded the Entente with France and began to approach Russia, Grey welcomed this turn of affairs with deep satisfaction. When at the end of 1905 he found himself at the head of the Foreign Office, he was determined to continue at all costs the

policy of an understanding with France and Russia, and to resign rather than allow that situation to re-establish itself, under the pressure of which he had suffered so severely before. I have no doubt that the key to Grey's policy is to be found in these experiences and in the temper of mind which they induced.

He then goes on to say that he had never felt any enmity towards Germany and never wished to provoke a war against Germany. As to the latter point I believe him unreservedly, and had already expressed in this book, before I read his Memoirs, my conviction that Grey did not desire the war, but on the contrary did all he could, up to the decisive days of July 1914, to avoid it. But the first part of his assertion I cannot accept so unreservedly. He may not have been fully conscious of it himself, but his whole book bears witness that Germany was to him an unknown and unsympathetic land. He draws a distorted picture of German ways of life and political thought, a picture not, indeed, invented by him, but one considered true to life in many quarters outside Germany even before the war and still more during it. He sees the policy of Germany as governed by a greed for power which no moral considerations could touch, and its goal as the hegemony of Europe and, ultimately, a struggle with England for the lordship of the world. Anyone who has lived in Germany during the last few decades or has studied the utterances of public opinion, which is not represented by a few prejudiced writers, knows that this hypothesis is not true, either of the German people or of the German Government. This question, however, I will not argue here; I only wish to emphasise the fact that long before the War Grey was impregnated with this view of Germany, and that his conviction has influenced his political attitude more strongly than, perhaps, he is himself aware. For at critical moments our feelings are apt to carry us away more vehemently than our understanding either approves of or will admit to be the case.

Grey never doubted, indeed, that if war were unavoidable England would have to side with France and Russia. He states in detail the reasons why it would have been impossible to remain neutral, and one cannot deny a certain weight to his arguments. It is true that he always avoided giving Russia or France a distinct promise of help; but can he never have admitted to

himself that his whole attitude towards these Powers must have led them to believe that in case of trouble England would be on their side, even though no definite promise of the kind had been given?

And this brings me to the point which makes me-pause. It is certain that Grey intends to speak the truth wherever he is describing particular events, or setting forth his motives at particular important moments, and that he is then always most objective, calm, and controlled, and does not attack those who hold other views. He entirely avoids any sort of real misrepresentation in his accounts of particular matters of fact. He always holds fast to the view that in each step he took he was guided by the desire to maintain peace. And thus we get the picture of a very prudent and conscientious statesman who in spite of all efforts could not achieve his true aim, the preservation of peace. Grey himself says that afterwards, in sleepless nights, he turned over and over in his mind, what more he could have done to prevent the outbreak of war, and he comes to the conclusion that nothing would have served, since Germany was resolved to go to war.

Let us, leaving this last point for the moment, put to ourselves the question: Can Grey really have been so naive a statesman as he depicts himself? We learn from him that when he took office he was told that regular conversations had been instituted between the highest military authorities of France and England, on the subject of the co-operation of the armies and fleets if the two countries had to fight together. He gave his approval to these consultations and allowed them to continue without, as he says, troubling himself about the details of what was said in them, since he considered them perfectly harmless. The Government had always reserved to itself the decision, whether the conditions of concerted action were or were not present, and that was all that mattered. Can such an experienced and clever statesman as Lord Grey really not have felt then, and not understand even now, that there is a kind of moral binding force between men as between States, which operates even without written agreements? And that such a moral binding force is involved when the leading statesman of one country not only allows his military colleagues to concert common plans of action

with the military authorities of another country, but even agrees that the peace-time dispositions of the respective fleets shall be determined by the assumption that in case of war the one country's fleet (here England's) will protect the threatened coasts of the other country?

Our doubts become even graver when we learn that Grey had always been convinced that the *revanche* idea had entirely disappeared in France, and that the leading men in France and Russia desired nothing but peace and security against a German attack. We know now from the Russian archives that this was *not* so; we know that Poincaré and Iswolski waited for years for the psychological moment when they could represent their countries to the world as the victims of aggression, and so incline English public opinion to support them. For they realised that at such a crisis Grey would have to consider public opinion and the Parliamentary majority; and they realised that these two forces would hardly be won over for a war of aggression. That Poincaré would see war come without regret had been recognised by Count Benckendorff during the Balkan War. Grey does not seem even now to have read any of the correspondence of Iswolski or of the other documents dating from the last years before the War, which throw light upon these suppressed reasons. This is remarkable in anyone who is writing on the events of these years. Grey might say: I wished to describe only my actions and motives, and therefore I could build only on such evidence as was known to me *at that time*; the documents published later could not influence me then, because I had no knowledge of them; and so, as I was writing memoirs and not history, I could ignore them. Even if we are ready to admit that this point of view can be defended, it still seems to me inconceivable that Grey could at the time have so completely deceived himself about the temper of France and the secret operations of Poincaré and Iswolski. Poincaré's name is not even mentioned in Grey's account of the origin of the War; Iswolski is named once, but the view that he might be partly responsible for the outbreak of the War is rejected with the comment that he had ceased years before the War to be the leader of Russian policy, and that it is well known that an Ambassador has little influence upon the policy of his Government. It surely depends greatly upon

the personalities of the Ambassador and of his Chief. Of course Cambon invariably assured the English Minister that France desired peace; but was there not the English Ambassador in Paris to give him better information? And has not a Minister so many unofficial relations that he can get news in such important matters, if he seriously wishes to do so? It seems to me that Grey shut his eyes a little here, in order not to have to see what would be disagreeable and might disturb his policy. For supposing that the goal of French and Russian policy had been plain to him, and in spite of this he had used neither warning nor restraint, would he then have been able to assert that he had done all that was in his power to maintain peace?

What Grey has to say about German policy in the period before the outbreak of war is even more remarkable. He has as good as no knowledge at all of the German documents. True, he cites them on occasion, but he knows nothing at all of the attempts made by the German Government to induce Austria to draw back at the last hour, and to initiate direct negotiations between Vienna and St. Petersburg. On the contrary he expresses the view that the responsible statesmen in Berlin were at the decisive moment thrust aside by the military party, which he thinks was the power that determined German policy; this party, he thinks, had long been preparing the war and had fixed the hour for it in advance. This in itself is remarkable, for no one could foresee that the heir to the Austrian throne would be murdered in this summer; but without this event war would hardly have broken out. Grey does not tell us whom he means by this 'military party.' Perhaps Count Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, who was known to be very peacefully inclined. Or Admiral von Tirpitz? Or whom? No doubt from the moment of decision that war could not be avoided, military considerations strongly influenced the German Government, but this could not be otherwise. That is not the point: Grey's contention is that the very decision, whether or no there should be war, did not rest with those persons apparently responsible, but with the military leaders. In truth there can be no question of this. The measures of policy of those decisive days all issued from the Imperial Chancellor and the Foreign Office without the military authorities ever being consulted. The whole of Grey's representation of the facts

not merely stands in contradiction to the original evidence but shows how meagre was his acquaintance with German conditions.

That Grey should repeat the old fairy tales spread abroad in the War about Germany's intention to become master of the world by means of a great war, and about the overwhelming importance of an all powerful military party in Berlin, shows that he has not taken the trouble to become acquainted, so far as is now possible, with what went on outside his own camp ; and to do this is surely as important for a statesman writing his memoirs as for a historian. Grey repeats even the threadbare legend about a war of the liberal Western Powers against the militarism and autocratic rule of the Central Powers, without any consideration of the fact that the Western Powers were allied with Russia, the extremest of all autocratic states, and had entered the war in order to help her. All his utterances show that the historical work of the last few years has left him untouched and that he still moves entirely within those modes of thought which were produced by war-hypnotism.

We can only deeply deplore that one who occupied such an influential position at such a decisive time, and to whose words we should therefore be inclined to attach great weight, should still offer such opinions to the world. All that he contributes to the explanation of English policy during those years—and he contributes many important facts and much that is worthy of attention—cannot diminish the gravity of this consideration. To establish historical truth in certain questions his book can certainly be used with profit ; as a whole, as an attempt to make clear the forces and events which produced the World War, in their operation and cohesion, it is no more than the one-sided expression of opinion of a man who, entangled in long exposed prejudices, instead of enlightening his readers, leads them astray.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW.