

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FOREIGN POLICY

IN a preceding contribution to this Review\* I endeavoured to show that Russia had, to some extent, been driven into the policy of encroachment she followed in Asia during the last fifty years, by the perennial antagonism evinced towards her by this country from the Crimean War onwards. When expressing this opinion, however, I in no way proposed to myself to extenuate the errors—such as inordinate ambition, greed of territory, and somewhat tortuous methods of acquiring it—with which she has been habitually charged by her critics here and elsewhere. A conqueror's hands are seldom quite clean, and it is therefore well to bear in mind that the task which Russia set herself to accomplish in Central Asia unquestionably made for civilisation as against barbarism. The Khanates of Turkestan were foul nests of the worst tyranny and fanaticism. Under Russian rule or supervision they now enjoy a degree of order and well-being unknown to those regions since the days of Timur.

And in this connection I may mention that many years ago a well-known and distinguished Russian proconsul made no secret, in conversation with me, of the rule which mainly guided the Imperial agents beyond the Caspian. "En Asie," he said to me, "nos frontières marchent avec nous!" These words well expressed one of the chief troubles we had to deal with in those remote days. For a long period it was almost impossible to rely on the assurances given us by the Cabinet of St. Petersburg, because its delegates on the spot too often deliberately ignored the instructions they received, and acted on their own responsibility in defiance of them. If the coup that was meditated proved successful, well and good; if it failed, the too venture-some commander was simply disavowed. The process of

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military penetration and occupation went on none the less steadily, and with it marched the Imperial boundaries.

Thus much of my theme as regards the policy of Russia. I must attempt now to make clear in what degree, and with what results, our own attitude in foreign affairs was in my opinion influenced, during the period under review, by the obsession under which we long laboured that the great Russian autocracy was potentially the most formidable adversary we might have to encounter.

For my part, I confess to being one of those who have throughout believed the power of Russia for aggression to be much overrated. History teaches us that within her own borders she is practically impregnable, and vulnerable only at extreme points of her huge territory, such as her outlying maritime fortresses. She has at all times shown heroism in the defence of her soil. Of her foreign military expeditions, on the other hand, the wonderfully brilliant campaigns of Suwarroff have almost alone shed real lustre on her arms. At Plevna and in the Schipka Pass her splendid battalions—devoted, but indifferently led—were repeatedly hurled in vain against the Turkish entrenchments. Anyhow, it is certain that, as regards ourselves, she was of all possible foes the one with whom we had scarcely any means of really grappling. At no spot could we strike her effectually, while she was unable to strike us anywhere except by that highly problematical enterprise, a successful invasion of India. Our mutual powers of offence and defence were never more aptly summarised than in the Bismarckian gibe of a fight between a whale and an elephant.

Our statesmen, nevertheless, appear to have been chiefly solicitous to guard against danger from the Russian quarter. And it thus happened that for a considerable period their attention was only partially bestowed on the growth of new forces, which in the brief space of a few years radically transformed the whole course of European affairs, and entirely upset what in the good old days used to be known as the balance of power.

Thus the great trilogy that opened in 1864 with the Schleswig-Holstein war, was followed in 1866 by its inevitable consequence, the short Austro-German contest for supremacy in Germany, and ended barely five years later with the overthrow of France, although its successive scenes were watched by us with intense interest, and earnestly discussed in Parliament and in the Press, seemed to convey no direct lesson, and certainly no serious warning, to those who then had charge of the destinies of Great Britain.

Long-inherited traditions and prejudices no doubt had some influence on the course followed by our rulers throughout these events. The popular sympathies in those days, when the heart of the nation had been but lately won by the charm of the most winsome of Princesses, were unquestionably with Denmark in the gallant stand she made against crushing odds, and at one time there was a decided inclination to intervene in her favour. We got, however, but scant encouragement from the other neutral Powers, while dynastic ties and considerations further served to check whatever action may have been contemplated by our Government.

In the drama of *l'année terrible*, too, the current of feeling set in strongly on the side of the French people in the severe ordeal to which they were subjected. But here again the attitude of our Court and Government was at the outset determined by the same dynastic exigencies, and also by a certain distrust of the Napoleonic régime, and doubts as to the aims of the Court of the Tuileries in what was at first looked upon as a wanton war of aggression on its part.

At the close of the war the overwhelming German victory was on the whole viewed with satisfaction. There was a very general conviction that, with the reconstitution of the Empire, a strong conservative element had arisen in the Centre of Europe which would act as a desirable curb on the Russian power in the North, and would greatly help to secure the general peace. We knew our German kinsmen, and quondam allies in the Napoleonic contests, to be an essentially cool-headed, peace-loving race. After their magnificent effort and its crowning triumph, they would, it might be taken for granted, devote their energies to the arts of peace, to the development of their industries, to the increase of their trade. In them we should have the best of friends and customers. Some such belief obtained with us, if I do not greatly err, down to a fairly recent period. It was shaken seriously for the first time when a relatively unimportant incident in the heart of South Africa brought to the surface in Germany unfriendly sentiments towards us of the existence of which the great body of the British public had been until then utterly unaware.

The fact was that our conception of the vigorous race which had now, by the help of the most perfect military organisation of modern times, achieved a real unity never before recorded in its annals was more or less founded on our experience of the Germans of almost another age. The Germany of our illusions was—not counting Austria and Prussia—the cumbrous con-

federation parcelled out, under the arrangements of 1815, in ever so many mediocre or infinitesimal sovereignties, held together by a loose bond under the easy, unaggressive leadership of Austria, and, it might be said, paralysed by the latent rivalry always existing between Vienna and Berlin. It was obvious that such a conglomerate of States could scarcely indulge in extraneous aims or ambitions.

Above all we took but insufficient account of the keen, masterful Prussian spirit which now dominated the Fatherland, and of its incarnation in the stupendous statesman who, in founding the Empire anew and placing the Germans in the front rank of the world, had transformed them from a nation of dreamers and idealists into a hard, practical race, bent on getting their full share of influence and dominion by land and sea.

Nor did we, I believe, clearly understand that the work of the great Chancellor was but the realisation of yearnings long felt in German homes from the Niemen to the Rhine, from the North Sea to the Bodensee, for the full dignity of a national existence. In 1848 that longing had, indeed, manifested itself in abortive insurrections and the yet more abortive Parliament of Frankfort. But fully a decade before this I could myself, in my boyhood, remember the same craving being ardently discussed by a group of young Germans, fresh from the universities, and then living in self-imposed exile, with whom circumstances threw me much together. Few things, I then learned, contributed more to this demand for national unity than the sense of inferiority which, say, a Hessian or a Würtemberger, whom business took to some distant commercial centre, experienced when finding himself deprived there of any diplomatic or consular assistance, beyond that of a few widely scattered Austrian or Prussian agents, and, in time of trouble, without a single ship flying the German colours that he could look to for succour or protection.

Bismarck had been but the magician who called to light and gave a body to these long-repressed aspirations, and worked out their fulfilment by the power of the sword. It is curious to note, by the way, that, with all his exuberant Chauvinism, he does not seem to have favoured, at this period, that indispensable complement of empire, an efficient navy, and still less any attempt at colonial acquisitions. "I will have no colonies," he said to the faithful Busch; "their only use would be to provide posts [*Versorgungsposten*] for certain people." \*

\* This refers to a report which was spread during the negotiation of the preliminaries of peace at Versailles that the German demands comprised the cession of Pondicherry and twenty ironclads, besides an indemnity of ten milliards (Moritz Busch, *Graf Bismarck und seine Leute*).

But when, after the fall of the old Chancellor, the helm was grasped by younger and no less strong and capable hands, the natural and inevitable impulse towards maritime and colonial expansion was allowed free scope. Already, in the scramble for Africa some years before, Germany had secured a vast domain which now extends over nearly 2½ million square kilometres. To guard this and her possessions in the Pacific, to protect her commerce, and most of all to render effective the *Weltpolitik* on which she was confessedly launched, she required, and set herself to build, a strong and thoroughly well-equipped navy. Thus in a surprisingly short time—indeed, almost insensibly—she came to loom on our horizon as a rival, and even a possible antagonist. As regards any rivalry between the two nations, it would be satisfactory to be able to believe with Doctor Friedrich Paulsen, in his *Problems of World-Politics*, that it will maintain a peaceable character. There is some force in his claim that the Germans are principally devoted to civilising tasks, as well as comfort in his assurance that the Pan-German programme for the absorption of the German provinces of Austria, of German Switzerland, the Netherlands, &c., is but the dream of a few ardent spirits, and is repudiated by the sober sense of the nation. Certainly those preachers of Pan-Germanism whom I remember at work at Vienna a few years ago were more blatant and offensive than actively mischievous, and since then an unmistakable *quietus* has been administered to them at the first General Elections carried out in Austria under universal suffrage.

All these indications, however, of a possible rivalry between our German kinsmen and ourselves—which soon showed themselves in strenuous commercial and industrial competition—would not have seriously affected our relations with them but for the ill-will they allowed to appear during our South African troubles. This unfortunately led to a newspaper war, which went on daily embittering the feeling on both sides, and creating, as it is too much in the power of the Press to do, a decidedly difficult situation.

Not that our Governmental spheres allowed themselves to be unduly disturbed by this. Our relations with Berlin were never seriously strained, even when this Press clatter was at its worst, and at a comparatively recent period sagacious statesmen such as Mr. Chamberlain were believed to be not wholly opposed to the overtures for a closer understanding that reached us from the Wilhelmstrasse.

We still stood, however, at that time, if I am not much mistaken, on our old habitual lines. We continued on our guard as:

regards Russia, as, for that matter, did the three Central Powers which, under German inspiration, had bound themselves together against eventual Russian or French aggression. Besides noting distrustfully the progress of Russia in Asia, we could not well forget the attempts made at various times from St. Petersburg, and notably during the Alabama difficulty, to arrive at some intimate agreement with the United States that must have been detrimental to us. In fact, it was not until the Japanese War had laid bare the shortcomings of the clay-footed Colossus that we ceased to look to the North-East as the quarter whence complications and trouble were to be expected. Nevertheless we went on steadfastly adhering to our traditional principle never to conclude alliances except for a specific purpose, and kept, as it were, aloof in Europe, while round us the other five Great Powers were leagued together in separate groups for mutual aid and support. Splendid or not, our isolation was as complete as those who set so much store by it could possibly desire.

At last, with the new century, there came a remarkable change in our general attitude in foreign affairs. There could be no more fitting time for a careful review of our international situation. The termination of the war that had absorbed all our attention, and taxed to the utmost our energies and resources, left us free to scan the political horizon and take stock of our position towards our nearest and most powerful neighbours.

Much the most salient feature in the prospect was, of course, the rapid growth of the power of Germany, and the leading part assumed by her rulers, not only in the affairs of Europe, but in those of the world at large. She could not be rightfully charged with aggression, for, except in the joint Chinese expedition, she had not fired a shot in anger since the peace of Frankfort. Yet her unremitting care in military and naval preparation, together with a certain touch of unrest in her policy, had for some time past kept the Cabinets of Europe, so to speak, on the *qui vive*. It was a case which might perhaps be described as that of the legitimate influence of a very great Power being asserted with over-abundant vigour. Hence some degree of *malaise* pervaded the international atmosphere, and even such encouraging manifestations of good-will and concord between nations as those of which The Hague was the theatre lost much of their reassuring effect.

Some counter-balancing influence was needed to dispel this vague sense of uneasiness, and such a moderating force had in old times been found in Great Britain. To exert this, however, it became first of all indispensable that our Government should

discard what I would call the *pose* of reserve and aloofness which it had kept up so long. Without this it would be impossible to work with success at composing differences and clearing up misunderstandings, and in general helping to restore confidence where it had been most disturbed.

Our relations with our nearest neighbours furnished a perfect case in point. There still lingered between the French and ourselves a few traces of the ancient historical antagonism which certain regrettable incidents in Nigeria and the Marchand expedition had partially revived. Nor had it been, at first sight, possible for us to view with indifference the French alliance with Russia, founded though it was, as soon appeared, on considerations which were in no way hostile to this country. There were, however, other more tangible causes of disagreement which must be removed before our intercourse with France could be placed on a permanently satisfactory footing. Of these the Newfoundland fisheries controversy and the state of things arising out of our occupation of Egypt were of old standing, and required specially delicate handling.

The understanding with France is to my mind the most praiseworthy and memorable piece of work that his Majesty's Government have set their hand to in our time, and the *entente cordiale* which has grown out of it the strongest mainstay of the peace of the world. Of the difficulties attending that part of the agreement which relates to Egypt, only those who during a long course of years have had a privileged access to Lord Cromer's more confidential reports can form any adequate idea. Approached, however, with perfect frankness and cordiality, the knotty task was happily solved, Lord Lansdowne and the distinguished representative of France at our Court greatly contributing to its accomplishment.

Nevertheless it may well be doubted whether this eminently beneficial arrangement could have been carried through without the aid of our ablest diplomatist, as the great statesman who has just retired from his Egyptian labours only the other day characterised King Edward the Seventh. With his Majesty's accession to the throne a fresh element has quietly come into play in our international concerns, the value of which, it seems to me, can scarcely be overrated. I am one of those who sincerely rejoice at the weight and prestige of the Crown—certain as they are to be rightly used by its present wearer—making themselves felt in the field of foreign affairs. It is a field that may very properly, I think, be said specially to come within the province of the Sovereign. No Minister can bring such

unquestioned authority to bear in the important and often delicate matters that have to be treated. Far more effective than the practised skill of any ambassador, the immense personal popularity of the King achieved at Paris successes which were afterwards renewed at Carthage and Naples, and at the lovely Austrian mountain resort where the venerable Emperor who has been our life-long friend and well-wisher seeks a richly earned respite from State worries and anxieties. Satisfactory as were already our relations with Italy and Spain, their character has been more than confirmed and strengthened by these Royal visits.

As regards the agreement with Russia, it has been said, and not without probability, that much interest was taken in it in the same exalted quarter. With all deference to that irreconcilable Russophile, Professor Vambéry, the convention, in as far as it closes an unprofitable era of mistrust and latent hostility, and has laid to rest what has always seemed to me the phantom of mostly imaginary dangers, should be accounted a work of thoroughly sound policy. Whatever strain may have been put on India by former doubts and fears ought now to be fully relieved. The circumstance, too, that the pact has been concluded by us in a liberal spirit at a period when Russia is cruelly hampered by internal difficulties ought, one would hope, to commend it to the generous instincts on which we fondly pride ourselves. The convention has, indeed, been criticised from the point of view of our trade interests in Persia, but when considered from the higher standpoint of its political significance, it may reasonably claim to be exempted from attack in Parliament or in the Press from purely party motives. Of its strict and loyal observance by the young Emperor, who on several important occasions has given us unmistakable proof of his friendly sentiments, there can be no manner of doubt.

And now, at the very time these lines were being penned, the voice of another mighty Emperor, a much-honoured guest, sent ringing through our great civic chamber generous and eloquent pledges of peace and friendship which must have gone home to the hearts of all but the most hardened sceptics. For this visit also, which—although undertaken, we are told, for no special State reasons—will, we are willing to hope, form the turning-point in an undesirable situation, we are in great measure indebted to the genial influence of our Sovereign. Family bonds have been drawn closer, the sense of kinship has warmly and happily asserted itself, and even the vast multitudes which have had no opportunity of coming in any way into contact with him