

WHAT ENGLAND DID FOR PEACE

An Illuminating Extract From a New Book on the Origin and Conduct of the War

MANY people imagine that the most England did to stave off the present war was done by Sir Edward Grey during the few high-strung weeks between the shooting of the Archduke Ferdinand and the declaration of war by England on Germany, August 4, 1914. Most people forget that England spent nearly ten years of diplomacy trying to make a general European war impossible. In his great recruiting speech, in West Lancashire, last week, Kipling observed that Germany had spent as much energy for 45 years preparing for a war as England had spent trying to convince herself that wars should not be prepared for. That fact must be kept in mind in reading the article on this page extracted from Sir Gilbert Parker's latest book, "The World in the Crucible." With the knowledge and the skill of a trained parliamentarian, Sir

WITH the accession of the Liberal party to power in England at the end of 1905, the relations between Great Britain and Germany entered upon a new phase. Hitherto England has been content to go her own way, pursuing a policy of national defence, based upon a proportionate two-power preponderance of naval strength. This had long been accepted as the minimum of security; but it had become increasingly difficult to maintain with the growth of the German navy. With this great naval strength, however, England had sought to avoid giving or taking offence; she had, excepting in the Crimean War, steered clear of European conflict for a century. At the same time she had been much occupied in adjusting differences between other Powers; never attempting to base her own naval and military policy on abstractions, or to influence unduly the policy of other nations. Indeed, relying on her insular position, she had effectively abstained from international agreements.

When the Liberal Government took office they inherited a well-defined naval programme. Consistently with their former protests against "unproductive" expenditure on armaments, they resolved, and entered upon a policy of retrenchment; they sought to make arrangements with Germany which would enable them to combine economy with national security. Their first step was to present reduced Naval estimates in March, 1906; but in the same month Germany amended her Navy Law of 1900—which itself doubled the Von Tirpitz programme of 1897—by adding six large cruisers to her fleet.

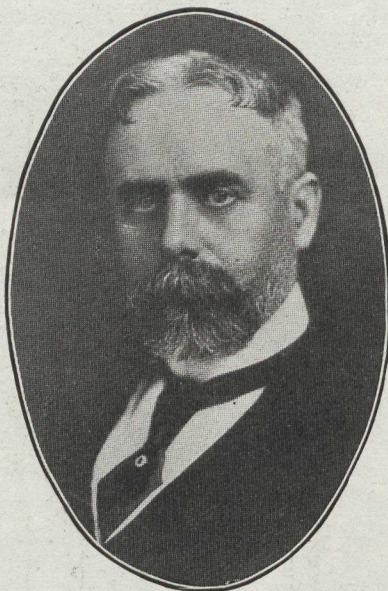
MAGNIFICENT BUT NOT POLITICS.

A GOVERNMENT less honest in its desire for peace might well have seen in this act a reason, perhaps an excuse, for abandoning professions which had well served their electoral purposes, but which also represented the long-sustained and expressed policy of their party. The Government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, however, refused to be diverted from their pacific aims. Their reply to the increase of the German naval programme was, in July, 1906, to put forward amended Naval Estimates which reduced the March programme 25 per cent. in battleships, 33 per cent. in submarines, and 60 per cent. in ocean-going destroyers. Their professed reason for this bold step was declared to be the invitation of the Tsar to the powers for another conference on the reduction of armaments. The failure of the previous conference gave little hope for the second; but, that nothing should be left undone to increase the chances of success, England resolved to prove her own sincerity; to give a lead to her neighbours and rivals by reducing her own rate of shipbuilding actually below a fair margin of safety.

The step was sensational and apparently gallant, but it was not politics; and, as was prophesied by many critics, it proved futile and even dangerous to British interests. The policy failed completely. It became an error which Great Britain never quite repaired. So far from moving Germany to respond with a similar measure of curtailment, it gave her an opportunity to reduce the lead of England; and she seized it. The Kaiser refused to hear of disarmament in any degree, or of anything that restricted the will and ambition of Germany. He thought the Conference nonsensical, and roundly declared that if disarmament was to be on its agenda, Germany would stay outside. He was aiming at naval strength as an instrument of diplomacy, as a symbol of national strength, as a "big stick" to be used when "the Day" was come.

VON BUELOW'S CRAFTY HAND.

NEVERTHELESS, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman would not yield without further effort. In an article in *The Nation*, early in 1907, he pleaded that a subject so urgent as the reduction of naval and military expenditure should not be excluded from the Conference; and that Great Britain would even make substantial reductions on her 1906 programme if others were willing to follow her. Within a month the answer came from Prince Bulow, that any discussion of such a subject would be impractical "even if it should not involve risks." This declaration he emphasized in March, 1908, by an acceleration of the Kaiser's naval programme. This had the effect of increasing the German navy by four battleships in



By SIR GILBERT PARKER

advance of the original programme. That was the cynical and challenging answer to the British Government's desire, free from ulterior motives, for a reduction of armaments.

OUR FLEET CONCENTRATED.

ENGLAND took alarm. Experts began to calculate how soon, at the then rate of progression, the German navy would become a really formidable and dangerous rival of the British. It was no longer a question of building against two Powers. It was a case of preserving a superiority over one Power, almost at England's very door. Other nations might exist and flourish without maritime power; in her position, with a vast mercantile marine which had to carry out her manufactures and bring back her food and raw material, it was life or death. Not looking forward to taking part in a war on the Continent, she had never sought to form a great standing army; but a navy of preponderating strength was imperative. Every man in the country knew this, as all our island people had accepted it over the generations in which England was free from naval warfare. In the light of the resolution made by Von Bulow, in 1907, the whole policy of naval defence had to be reconsidered, the strategy remodelled, and the ships redistributed. There were no longer Channel Squadrons, Atlantic Squadrons, and Mediterranean and Home Fleets. The new disposition gave virtually one Fleet only, concentrated in the North Sea to meet the menace there. That policy was inevitable, and it has proved itself wise, as the events of this war have shown. Had it not been adopted, a German army would probably have been occupying England in the autumn of 1914.

There were three courses open to Great Britain when the danger became indubitably sure. She might have fought Germany there and then; or she might have met Germany's challenge by largely increasing her naval estimates. Again there were many who thought that if England had voted a navy loan of, say, £100,000,000, and had declared her determination to build eight, ten, or a dozen battleships a year, Germany might have given up a struggle in which the longer purse must inevitably win. But neither of these aggressive methods was adopted. England now tried to meet the trouble and lighten the grievous burden of taxation—as heavy for Germany as for herself—by direct negotiation for reduction of armaments with that country.

THOUGHT BRITAIN DECADENT.

KING EDWARD explored the difficult field in 1908, and for once his tactful diplomacy failed. The Kaiser was scornfully obdurate. He saw in the attempt at an understanding only that fear which showed a decline of character and patriotism in England. In 1909, Sir Edward Grey tried to reach an understanding between the two countries by suggesting that the naval attaches of the two countries should be allowed to observe the different stages of battleship construction. Again, far from urbanely, Germany refused. She was resolved to go her own way. None could dispute her right to do so; but it was a way which has led to a world-disaster; for it encouraged her to think that Great Britain was shorn of the character which had made her great; of the will and patriotism which had made her strong; that she was "the lath painted to look like iron"; and that she would neither stand by her friends nor sternly defend herself, if a crisis came.

She was mistaken, but she went on her way; building ships strenuously; creating situations in interna-

Gilbert shows how cynically Germany treated all England's efforts since 1905 to preserve the peace of the world. He shows how Germany began to think that England was losing her character and her Imperial spirit because she was trying to work for the world's peace; how the Kaiser imagined that England was becoming decadent and ready to hand over the world's leadership to Germany because she used every cog in her diplomatic machinery for nearly a decade to prevent a world war. Sir Gilbert Parker has written many books more popular than this one since he left Canada and went in for a literary and parliamentary career in England. He has written nothing which so well expresses what an Imperial Canadian thinks of the welfare and the world aims of England. Sir Gilbert knows how to express himself in more ways than one.

tional diplomacy with a growing spirit of confidence and arrogance; trying her ever-growing strength by disturbing the chancelleries of Europe. She over-estimated her success, however, and some suspicion of this fact seems to have entered the mind of the German Government about 1909, when it was found that the Triple Alliance was confronted by the Triple Entente. In 1904 all outstanding differences between France and England had been settled; three years later a similar reconciliation of interests had taken place between England and Russia, greatly to Germany's discomfiture. Great Britain, in harmony with those powerful States, was a different proposition from the Great Britain, separated from them by disputes in Asia, Africa, and America, shut up in the "splendid isolation" of her island home. The German tone, thenceforward, became less emphatic. With the change of Chancellors, in 1909, came opportunity for a change of policy.

The new policy was clearly directed towards detaching Britain from the Triple Entente by suggestions of naval agreement. It was Prince Bismarck's "do ut des" once more, and, indeed, German diplomacy never seems to move out of this rut of bribery, the amount of the bribe being in inverse ratio to the thing it buys. Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg's offer of July, 1909, was drawn on the same lines as his "infamous proposal" of July, 1914, and a similar base suggestion in 1912. In the latter, England was asked to stand by while Belgium was violated and France crushed, and as a reward was promised "friendly relations" with Germany, freedom from attack till another time undefined. In 1909, England was to enter into an agreement with Germany declaring, first, that neither country contemplated, nor would commit, any act of aggression on the other; again, that in the event of any attack upon either England or Germany by a third Power, or group of Powers, the one not attacked should remain neutral. The result of that arrangement would be to tie the hands of England and leave the hands of Germany free.

THE INSIDIOUS TEUTON.

SO long as Germany was bound to Austria by offensive and defensive alliance, there was no need for her to take the initiative—Austria could do that for her; and still England would be bound by her bond. So, if Austria went to war with Russia, Germany was bound to assist her. But by the Franco-Russian agreement, France would be bound to attack Germany as soon as Russia was assailed by two enemies. By the suggested ingenious arrangement, therefore, England would be bound to neutrality by the aggression of France on Germany. Not only so, but the proposed agreement with Germany would debar her from protecting the violation of the neutrality of Belgium, or any other neutral State, if it were violated by Germany as the result of aggression by France. Great Britain would thus effectually debar herself from helping her friends in any circumstances; she would lose all claim to be regarded as their friend; she would have to sit quietly while those who might help her in her hour of need were destroyed; and she would have bartered away her honour for ever.

For all this, what was she to get? A reduction of the German navy, a promise that the German naval programme would be abandoned? No. The offer was that the rate of German shipbuilding would be retarded. The naval programme would have to be carried out in its entirety; and the number of ships to be completed in 1918 would have to remain as fixed by the Navy Law; but as a great concession, the number annually laid down in the earlier years would be reduced, with a corresponding increase in the last few years of the statutory period.

ENGLAND STILL WILLING.

NOT the most ardent pacifist could have blamed Great Britain had she refused to discuss proposals so one-sided, indeed so offensive to intelligence; so impossible of acceptance without betraying her friends, smirching her honour, and preparing for her own ultimate debacle, when with pride and "the soul possessed of sacrifice" vanished, Germany, having done her work elsewhere, would turn her attention to her hated rival in the North Sea. Yet England did not refuse to discuss even these proposals; for Germany had ever a way of looking at things which was not to be found in the

(Concluded on page 19.)