

THE HON. MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S TRIPLE ALLIANCE SPEECH

The frankness with which modern British statesmen discuss international politics is enough to make the diplomatists of days gone by turn in their graves. Up to a period in the memory of those now living, the foreign policy of Great Britain, as it is to-day in the case of the continental powers, was regarded as almost of exclusive interest to the officials of the foreign office. Members of the Cabinet were taken into their confidence, as was also the reigning monarch. But, even this was not the invariable rule, for the Queen having been seriously offended by Lord Palmerston sending dispatches without them being first submitted to her, a course which he called "playing off his own bat," wrote to the Prime Minister on 12th August, 1850, saying: "To prevent any mistake for the future the Queen thinks it right to explain what it is she expects from the Foreign Secretary. She requires, first, that he will distinctly state what he proposes to do in a given case, in order that the Queen may know as distinctly to what she has given Her royal sanction." This letter shows Her Majesty to have had a strong will of her own, and a wise conception of Her duty as a constitutional sovereign. But it also shows how secretly foreign affairs were conducted when even the Queen was not made cognizant of the doings of the Foreign Office. Another illustration of old time diplomacy is shown by the Conference held in 1862 in reference to the Schieswig-Holstein question, refusing to hear a deputation from the duchies whose political existence was at stake, their agent being bluntly informed that, "diplomacy made no account of them!" When Great Britain sent, on 27th February, 1854, the ultimatum to Russia which was the prelude to the Crimean war, the fact of there having been irritating negotiations with that power was only known in a narrow circle. Now all is changed, the whole British nation, the Empire indeed, is taken into the confidence of the Foreign Office, and members of the Cabinet discuss in public, such questions as, in earlier days, were diplomatic secrets until a stage was reached when Parliament has to be consulted. The new system has its advantages and its drawbacks. The strength of the Government, as Lord Salisbury recently said, is materially aided by finding it has the support of the people, and it is cautioned by discovering that any proposed course will not be in accordance with the mind of the nation. Those are great advantages enjoyed by the modern system. The main drawback of taking counsel with the people is that the foreign power with whom critical negotiations are being carried on are made fully aware of the policy of the British Government. If foreign diplomatists learn that the course proposed by the British Foreign Office is disapproved by the people, they can precipitate a conflict between the nation and the Government by compelling it to follow up an unpopular course by which it will be overthrown. Thus, the new plan of Ministers taking the British people into their confidence about foreign

affairs enables foreign diplomatists to drive a British Government into a corner from which they cannot emerge with honour, as they must persist in a policy which will deprive them of office and bring on them public condemnation or abandon their proposed policy to save their positions, which course will certainly entail the contempt of foreign diplomatists, with probably also the sacrifice of British interests.

The Honble. Joseph Chamberlain is the chief exponent of the new system. On several occasions he has startled Europe by his frankness. Had he misjudged his fellow-countrymen, his ruin as a statesman would have been disastrous to his career. But he seems to be the incarnation of British public opinion. He has a positive genius for coining popular patriotic phrases, such as, "What we have we will hold," and, in reference to the present conflict, "The war has given us a clean sheet on which we may write whatever we will." Another of his happy phrases was uttered in Philadelphia where, alluding to America's ignorance of British sentiment, he said, "A new Columbus is wanted to set out from America, discover the British Isles, and return to tell the people of the States what was the character of the strange people of those Islands!"

In his recent speech at Leicester, he made another graphic remark which will be remembered, when he said: "Our critics think we ought to have skulked back to our holes when Mr. Kruger refused to listen to our peaceful representations. That would have lost us South Africa, weakened our hold on India, and earned us the contempt of mankind." His allusion to the attitude of the States and Germany is profoundly significant. He declared: "The union, the alliance, the understanding between Great Britain and America is a guarantee of the peace of the world. I cannot conceive that any point can arise in the immediate future which can bring ourselves and Germany into antagonism of interests." He emphasized this important, this historic pronouncement by foreshadowing an alliance between Great Britain and Germany, so that there would be a combination of the three leading nations of the world whose union would be a guarantee of peace. Mr. Chamberlain being Colonial Minister has been told to leave foreign affairs alone. Those who have tried to snub him forget that, in busying himself with diplomacy he is only following old country traditions, as, up to a few years ago, the same Minister was Secretary for war, and Secretary for Colonial affairs. Mr. Chamberlain has been censured for telling France: "She will have to be taught better manners" if she continues to permit the Queen to be insulted by the press of Paris. This sharp rebuke is deserved. A score of cases could be cited of foreign powers demanding that England cease to give tacit countenance to insults of their sovereign. That the indecent attacks upon the Queen emanate only from thoughtless French journalists goes without saying, as the age, the sex, the character of Her Majesty protect her from the insults of any but thoughtless men. The comity of nations, civilization indeed, however, de-