

ments and the fullest opportunity of developing French interests in Africa and Asia. Russia stood in need of loans from French financiers. France on her side felt that a Russian alliance would protect her against Germany, and might be a valuable support in her colonial rivalries with England. Some such measure of insurance was necessary to France; her population was becoming stationary, her colonial policy required the maintenance of a strong navy, and her military resources, relatively to those of Germany, were rapidly declining. But even in Bismarck's time the German Empire had watched with apprehension the growth of the Russian power on its eastern flank; and this apprehension was intensified as German statesmen, after Bismarck's fall, committed themselves more and more deeply to the support of Austrian designs in the Balkans. It was impossible for Russia to tolerate the prosecution of those designs, which involved the destruction or the mutilation of small Slavonic states. Germany and Austria-Hungary were steering a straight course towards a racial war of Teuton against Slav. They counted themselves superior to Russia in military organization, and were not afraid so long as Russia stood alone. But they feared that the Dual Alliance of France and Russia would be too strong for them; and they vented their irritation upon France.

From 1897 it was apparent that an armed conflict, of the Triple Alliance or its two Teutonic partners against the Dual Alliance, was well within the range of possibility. Neither Russia nor France desired a continental war; but their union was the most dangerous obstacle which German and Austrian projects of expansion had hitherto encountered. The one redeeming feature of the situation, from the German point of view, was that England also viewed the Dual Alliance with some