CHAPTER I

THE FIRST ATTEMPT WITH GERMANY

MARCH-AUGUST 1898

"It is true, though painful, to say that towards the end of March 1898 the British Government as a body did not know what to do. Yet the country demanded action. Time and trouble pressed as seldom on a Cabinet in search of a policy." [1])

Various Cabinet ministers, however, held more or less strong views on the policy to be pursued. It is not surprising that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, although ageing and ill, was still convinced that England could quite easily hold her own. It had always been that way and in his experience, which covered the whole of the second part of the century, no combination of Powers strong enough to challenge seriously the forces of the Empire, had ever been able to arise. He had no objections to closer relations with any country; he wanted to be a "good neighbour" of every Power, but he looked upon the word "alliance" with distrust. England needed no help and he therefore saw no reason to accept the help of others, who always wanted something in return. In his famous "Dying Nations" speech, he squarely stated the position: "We know that we shall maintain against all comers that which we possess, and we know, in spite of the jargon of isolation, that we are amply competent to do so." [2])

The heir-apparent to the Premiership, Mr. A. J. Balfour, did not fully share his uncle's conviction. He had his doubts, which was not surprising, as his philosophical mind had its doubts about almost anything. He was not quite sure whether his uncle's policy would not at some time or other in the near future bear some ill fruits for his country, but on the other hand he was too much of a Cecil not to be rooted deeply in the British "aloofness".

The nominal leader of the Liberal Unionists, however, the Duke of Devonshire, was rather in favour of a new course in foreign policy. The alarm in Lancashire about the future of its cotton trade on the Chinese market, as well as his wife's urging for better relations with Germany (she was by birth Countess Alten) had made him aware that steps in a new direction should be taken. [3]) He wrote: "If the panic that has seized the Lancashire cotton industry as to its Chinese markets goes on this way we shall soon have the greater part of the mills stopped and their hands out of work." [4])

But there was one man, Joseph Chamberlain, who with all the force of his burning conviction argued that "splendid isolation" was a lost cause and that

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[1]) Garvin III p. 254. [2]) Annual Meeting of the Primrose League; Albert Hall May 4th 1898. [3]) Garvin III p. 256; Eyck p. 213. [4]) Devonshire to Eckardstein, Eckardstein p. 93.

something drastic ought to be done to safeguard the position of the Empire. He did not consider "good neighbours" or "better relations" to be sufficient, but advocated a clear-cut and well defined alliance with one of the great European Powers.

These differences were, although not common knowledge, a point of discussion in political circles, and the Belgian Minister in London [1]) quite correctly reported: "Il existe depuis longtemps certains dissentiments au sein du Cabinet où il y aurait deux courants opposés. D'une part Lord Salisbury est partisan d'une politique conciliante et très prudente et d'autre part M. Chamberlain préconiserait au contraire une attitude plus énergique de la part de l'Angleterre. Il y aurait donc un certain antagonisme entre ces deux hommes d'Etat." [2])

The day after this report had been written, an opposition paper, the "Westminster Gazette" published an editorial under the title: "Wanted – Concentration"....

> "The number of the complications in which we are involved at the present moment.... Beyond the two great jobs with France in West-Africa and Russia in the Far-East we stand committed to an expedition in the Soudan, which is still the cause of no little anxiety.... The late Government was much assailed for its lack of concentration in domestic politics, but that fault was as nothing to the lack of concentration which has been the vice of the present Government in the far more burning and dangerous questions of foreign politics.... It was the principle of the slave in Plautus, when things were mixed, to mix them more, but the rule of the Statesman is precisely the opposite.... What application is there, it may be asked, of this elementary wisdom? This, we think in the main, that among the more important questions at issue we must, if possible, clear the ground of every one which can be honourably settled by negotiation or arbitration. We cannot play all the games at once, and we must be careful that we do not play a weak game everywhere, owing to the consciousness that we have a free hand nowhere. Let us ask ourselves as regards France for instance, whether there are not points which can rightly be submitted to arbitration, that is which can be produced for verification and scrutiny, exchanges which can be made.... The ground must be cleared."

It was about this time that Chamberlain told his son Austin: "Nous ne pouvons rester isolés. Nous avons le choix entre deux solutions: l'alliance de la France, celle de l'Allemagne. L'Allemagne est plus forte; son armée unie à notre marine représente une force à laquelle personne n'osera se mesurer. C'est la sécurité avec la paix. La France est la seconde solution possible; une entente avec elle représente également la sécurité, mais peut-être par la guerre." Austin, however, answered his father: "Vous ne pourrez avoir l'Allemagne, parce qu'il lui faudrait choisir entre les Russes et nous et cela, elle ne le voudra pas." [3])

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[1]) Baron E. Whettnall. [2]) Corr. Pol. le 9 mars 1898. [3]) Maurois p. 177.

Notwithstanding his son's clear reasoning, Chamberlain first tried to reach an understanding with Germany and as the years went by, it only dawned gradually upon him that this could not be done. He did not believe that to settle with France and Russia would be impossible in the last resort, and he never dreamed of negotiating with Berlin on other than equal terms or of regarding his country as reduced to dependence on Germany. [1])

In his first efforts at this time, he was greatly helped by Baron von Eckardstein, a former member of the German Embassy staff, and by Alfred de Rothschild who, like no other private financier since, was deservedly on confidential terms with leading members of successive British Governments.

But although the personal sentiments of the members of the Cabinet differed, there was no doubt that the international situation was extremely grave, on account of Russia's pressure on China for the lease of Port Arthur which, if granted, would probably mean a gradually increasing Russian influence in China, which "Britain alone could not limit and nothing but some combination of Powers could prevent." [2]) In this international political struggle the drawbacks of "splendid isolation" were brought very sharply into focus. In January 1898 this situation had caused Lord Salisbury to make an overture to Russia for "a partition of preponderance" [3]) in China, but these negotiations had broken down on account of the conditions Russia made for such an arrangement, [4]) and in March 1898 these same circumstances led Chamberlain to make an effort to close with Germany.

The story of Chamberlain's first endeavour to make a deal with Germany starts on the 20th March 1898, [5]) when the stately home of Alfred Rothschild in Seymour Place was the scene of a small private dinner party attended, apart from the host, by Chamberlain, the Duke of Devonshire, Henry Chaplin and Baron Eckardstein. [6])

The three Cabinet-members knew that the news from the Far East was grave, and that as for trade through China's "open door" the future looked very gloomy.

The outcome of the after-dinner conversation was that Eckardstein should try to arrange a meeting between the German Ambassador, Count Hatzfeldt, and Chamberlain, in order to enable them to find out whether Germany and Britain could not be of any help to each other in the present situation. The invitations for a dinner-party to be held on Saturday March 26th, were duly sent out (i. e. to Balfour and Chamberlain), and Eckardstein intimated to Hatzfeldt that a noteworthy occasion was arising. This made the latter tele-

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1) Garvin III p. 255. 2) Garvin III p. 255. 3) Br. Doc. I no. 9. 4) Br. Doc. II no. 5 no. 25. 5) Eckardstein p. 93. 6) Baron von Eckardstein had been a member of the German Embassy staff since 1891, but had resigned his post in April 1898 on account of his candidacy for the Reichstag elections. After his defeat in the elections he returned to London, where, up till his appointment as First Secretary of the German Embassy in December 1899, he acted as an unofficial agent for the German Ambassador.

graph to Berlin "Ich habe den Eindruck, dass die Sache nicht von Rothschild allein ausgeht, und dass dabei der Gedanke massgebend ist, den vertraulichen Versuch einer Annäherung an Deutschland zu machen." [1])

The speed, however, with which the scene changed, brought Hatzfeldt and Balfour together on March 25th at Rothschild's home for a discussion on the state of affairs, notwithstanding the fact that they both held invitations for a dinner-party at the same house on the next day. [2])

In a letter written some days later (on April 14th) Balfour told his uncle that Rothschild "provided a sumptuous déjeuner between the courses of which there was an infinity of talk, out of the nebulous friendliness of which (he) gathered very little except that the Germans did not at all like Joe's method of procedure in Africa, and felt aggrieved at our protest about Shantung Railways." [3])

That afternoon the Cabinet met from 3.30 to 7 p.m. in Downing Street, "took their courage in both hands" and decided to occupy Wei-hai-wei on account of a materially changed balance of power in the Far East, brought about by Russia's seizure of Port Arthur. [4]) It was a grave decision and the fact that not one Power could be found to stand by them, must have been deeply felt during the discussions.

There is little or no doubt that these circumstances, which gravely imperilled Britain's position and enormous trade interests in China, were the decisive factors in making Chamberlain to press for the German alliance.

He informed Balfour that he had been asked to meet Hatzfeldt, and as no objections were raised the first conversation took place on March 29th. The Ambassador complained that there was a general impression on the Continent that Britain's policy was to bring about a war between other Powers but not to take part in it herself. Chamberlain admitted that for many years the policy had indeed been one of non-entanglement in alliances but that the course might be changed by circumstances which were too strong to be resisted and he outlined his idea that an alliance might be established by Treaty of Agreement between Germany and Great Britain. It would have to be of a defensive character based upon a mutual understanding as to policy in China and elsewhere. [5])

It has been very often suggested that Chamberlain on this occasion tried to outwit Salisbury and Balfour and pursued a foreign policy of his own. Nothing is further from the truth, as he not only asked Balfour's consent to see Count Hatzfeldt, but he reported the outcome of the meeting to Balfour on the same afternoon and to the Cabinet on March 30th. [6])

The report from their London Ambassador and his request for instructions

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[1]) Hatzfeldt to Holstein, March 24th 1898, G. P. XIV no. 3779. [2]) Garvin III p. 258. The records do not make it clear whether this dinnerparty was ever held or not.
[3]) Dugdale p. 259. [4]) Dugdale p. 259. [5]) Garvin III p. 259, 260; G. P. XIV no. 3782.
[6]) Garvin III p. 259; Dugdale p. 259.

inspired the German Foreign Minister, Von Bülow, and his "Eminence Grise", Holstein, to the drafting of an answer which reveals much of the inner motives of the Imperial Foreign Policy at that time. [1])

Two days earlier, the Reichstag had passed the first Naval Bill, founding the new German Navy, and there was obviously no need for such an instrument if an alliance with Britain came about. Without a Fleet, however, Germany would never, in their opinion, be able to influence decisively the wavering scales of the balance of Power and that was the aim of their "Weltpolitik". Russia's growing strength in the Far East and her activities on the Indian frontiers were clearly recognised by Britain as an increasing menace and as, therefore, "time was telling against England", it was obviously in Germany's interest to await coming events. By not making a definite choice and strengthening her arm she could only increase her price. [2])

During the next conversation, taking place on April 1st, Hatzfeldt used as a pretext the argument that the English parliamentary system made it doubtful whether an agreement concluded with the Government would be upheld by the next Government, if the opposition came into power. Apart from this, Germany would never be a partner in a combination against England; she knew perfectly well that, should England's sea-power be crippled in a struggle against an alliance of Germany and some other Power, it would then be the turn of Germany to be attacked by her former ally. Chamberlain told him that he could not conceive it possible that a Treaty accepted by any British Parliament on behalf of the nation would be repudiated by another Parliament. He added that if a clear understanding with Germany could be realised there could be a joint policy for a stronger attitude towards Russia in which the basis of a settlement in China would be laid down, which neither France nor Russia was likely to resist. His proposal was that if Russia went to war with England she would find Germany on that side too and he was convinced that in return for such a promise Britain would come to Germany's assistance if she were attacked by Russia. The Colonial Secretary emphasized once again that he considered the interviews strictly private and that the opinions he had expressed did not in any way commit his colleagues. [3])

Hatzfeldt reported immediately to the Wilhelmstrasse and Chamberlain communicated the result of the meeting to the Committee of Defense on the same day. [4])

In Bülow's reply [5]) we find already the first signs of the ever present undercurrent of hostility towards Britain in which this and other proposals in the future for a closer understanding were going to founder. He did not share Chamberlain's opinions about the compatibility of a parliamentary regime with a policy of alliances and if Britain wanted Germany's help she ought to start

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[1]) G. P. XIV no. 3783, March 30th 1898. [2]) Garvin III p. 262; G. P. XIV no. 3783. [3]) G. P. XIV no. 3784; Garvin III p. 263–266. [4]) Garvin III p. 266. [5]) G. P. XIV no. 3785.

by changing her stubborn resistance towards Germany's demands in Africa.

Although the African affairs were in Chamberlain's hands, Hatzfeldt now tried to appeal to Balfour, which led to a rather amusing incident. Obviously the two unofficial negotiators had agreed at their meeting on the 1st of April to have another talk within a few days and as Chamberlain was leaving for the country on the evening of the 5th, Balfour had agreed to give up his room in the House of Commons in the late afternoon of that day in order to enable his colleague and the Ambassador to carry on their talks. Balfour himself had an appointment with Hatzfeldt at 5 p.m. (in the House of Commons) on the same day and was very amused, as he wrote to Salisbury, "when Hatzfeldt altogether repudiated any wish for such a meeting (with Chamberlain). He said that if Joe wanted he was of course ready, but that he had nothing to say." [1]) This same letter, written on April 14th gives a full account of Balfour's appreciation of the negotiations referred to and the people concerned, which makes it worth while to give it in full, as well as Salisbury's letter of the 9th, to which Balfour's is the answer. [2])

April 9th 1898
"La Bastide"
Beaulieu.

"My dear Arthur,

I told you I would write to you when I thought I was up to work again. I think that epoch has arrived for everything that can be conveniently sent out. If any matters arise which require immediate decision I must ask you kindly to decide them.

I am exceedingly indebted for the trouble you have taken over my work and for the admirable manner in which you have done it. I am afraid that for some weeks the strain must have been severe. But I could not help myself in throwing it on you.

Jim [3]) gave me your message about Hatzfeldt and Chamberlain. The one object of the German Emperor since he has been on the throne has been to get us into a war with France. I never can make up my mind whether this is part of Chamberlain's object or not. The indications differ from month to month. As to France's future conduct, these elections will tell us a little more. But France certainly acts as if she meant to drive us into a German alliance; which I look to with some dismay, for Germany will blackmail us heavily.

Ever yours affly.,
Salisbury."

"My Dear Uncle Robert,

April 14th 1898

If I had your morals with regard to correspondence I should have answered you two days ago, – but somehow Golf and F.O. combined have prevented me from doing more than keep abreast of necessary work, and

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1) Dugdale p. 260. 2) Dugdale p. 257–261. 3) Lord Cranborne; Lord Salisbury's eldest son.

when letter-writing is concerned I find the spirit tolerably willing, but the flesh invariably weak.
As regards F.O. work do you think that in future it might be found possible for me or some other colleague to take it over for (say) a month each year when nothing very particular is going on? It is not the severity of the work which I at all fear for you, it is its unrelieved continuity. Some real holiday is really desirable.
Since I saw Jim there has been a further development in the matter about which I asked him to speak to you. The general outline of their amateur negotiation is perhaps worth putting on record. Among the minor actors in it are Harry Chaplin, Alfred Rothschild and Eckardstein, – the principal roles being filled by Hatzfeldt and Chamberlain – a very motley "cast". The drama opened by a suggestion that much might be done if there was a friendly, private, and quite unofficial conversation between Hatzfeldt and myself on strictly neutral territory. It was at the moment when things were approaching their hottest in connection with Port Arthur: and as I thought that some good and no harm could come of it, I accepted – Alfred Rothschild accordingly abandoned his dining-room to us and provided a sumptuous "déjeuner", between the courses of which there was an infinity of talk, out of the nebulous friendliness of which I really gathered very little except that the Germans did not at all like Joe's method of procedure in Africa, and felt aggrieved at our protest about Shantung Railways.
This took place on Friday the 25th – the day on which at an afternoon cabinet, the Govt took their courage in both hands and (Joe dissenting) agreed on the Wei-hai-wei policy.
The next incident was that Joe informed me that he had been asked to meet Hatzfeldt under like conditions. I raised no objection and (again I believed at Alfred's) another unofficial and informal conversation took place. Joe is very impulsive, and the Cabinet discussion of the preceding days had forced on his attention our isolated and therefore occasionally difficult diplomatic position. He certainly went far in the expression of his own personal leaning towards a German alliance; he combatted the notion that our form of Parliamentary Government rendered such an alliance precarious (a notion which apparently haunted the German mind), and I believe he even threw out a vague suggestion as to the form which an arrangement between the two countries might take.
Hatzfeldt, who had thus spent the morning unofficially with Joe, came to see me officially in the afternoon. Not a word did he say of his previous interview – a reticence which rather amused me, who had just had an account of what passed from the mouth of the other interlocutor!
In the meanwhile the results of the interview had been wired to Berlin and received an immediate response. As far as I can remember, Von Bülow in his telegraphic reply (paraphrased to Joe at a second interview) dwelt again on the Parliamentary difficulty, – but also expressed with happy frankness the German view of England's position in the European system. They hold (it seems) that we are more than a match for France, but not more than "a match for Russia and France combined." The issue of such a contest would be doubtful. They could not afford to see us succumb – not because they loved us, but because they knew that they would be the next victim – and so on. ....The whole tenor of the conversation (as represented by Chamberlain to me) being in favour of a closer union

between the countries. This is how the matter stood when Jim left for Beaulieu on Monday 4th. On Tuesday 5th, just before I made my statement, Joe informed me that Hatzfeldt had expressed a desire for a third interview, but it seemed difficult to arrange as he (Joe) was going that evening into the country. I then told him that Hatzfeldt was coming to see me by appointment that afternoon at 5 (in the House of Commons), and that I would give up my room to him and Joe when my business was finished. Conceive my amusement when H. altogether repudiated any wish for such a meeting. He said that if Joe wanted he was of course ready, but that he had nothing to say. This sudden change was not due to any diplomatic reticence as to his unofficial communications with one of my colleagues, for by this time he was aware that I knew everything that had passed. It was undoubtedly due to some change of weather in Berlin. For he went on to discuss the difficulties in the way of an Anglo-German alliance. The old parliamentary objection was trotted out again with amplification. Where would Germany be, if, after a treaty was concluded, it was repudiated by the H. of C. Germany would then be left helpless between Russia and France, whose emnity would have been incurred by her seeking our alliance, but not rendered innocuous by her obtaining it. She was not so happily placed as England. She had no "silver streak". Moreover, the condition of public opinion in Germany, and so far as he could judge, in England also, was unfavourable to such a step. It might indeed have to be taken; it might even have to be taken soon. But for the present – and so on. In the meantime, what he, H., advocated was those small concessions between the two nations which Joe (he said) was so reluctant to make, but, if made, would soften international prejudices and prepare the way for stricter and more formal union!! I was much entertained by this conclusion, but took care to express no dissent from it, as, although I am inclined to favour an Anglo-German Agreement, it must, if possible be made at the worst on equal terms. Of this loving couple I should wish to be the one that lent the cheek, not that imprinted the kiss. This, I take it, is not the German view; and they prefer, I imagine, reserving their offers until "they are sure of being well paid for them." I reserve discussion of policy, however, till we meet. This letter, even as it stands, will exhaust your stock of patience, as it has already exhausted my stock of industry. I thought it, however, necessary that a certain period, of which no record will be found at the F.O. should not vanish without leaving a trace; – and I thought I ought to add that H. Chaplin informs me by letter received yesterday, that behind Hatzfeldt's back, Eckardstein (you know that fat fellow who married Maple's daughter?) is still engaged (by his own account successfully) in persuading his Emperor of the transcendent value of the English alliance, and the opportuneness of the present moment for concluding it! I return to London on Monday; and foresee no Parliamentary work which will make it difficult to take any amount of F.O. work until you return.

Love to all
Your aff. Nephew
A. J. B."

Hatzfeldt's account of his conversation on the 5th with Balfour, points

towards a possible personal animosity between the latter and Chamberlain and runs as follows:

> "On April 5th I had other business reasons for calling on Mr. Balfour and he took occasion to mention my conversation with Mr. Chamberlain, which the latter had evidently reported to him.
> When I described the consideration forbidding us at present to enter into so sudden and far-reaching a proposal as that formulated by Mr. Chamberlain, I found Mr. Balfour somewhat unexpectedly ready to admit the weight of our arguments. He confessed that it could not be foreseen with certainty how Parliament would accept a treaty of alliance with the Triple Alliance, for which public opinion had been so little prepared. He did not deny that the leader of German policy would be undertaking an immense responsibility, if, in view of this parliamentary uncertainty, he was ready to conclude a treaty, which if rejected by Parliament, would almost inevitably result in an attack by France combined with Russia against Germany.
> Another remark, added by Mr. Balfour, that Mr. Chamberlain sometimes wished to advance too quickly, gave me the impression that this personal ill-success of Mr. Chamberlain's in this matter was not altogether unwelcome to him." [1])

As negotiations had more or less come to a standstill, Eckardstein tried, acting on a suggestion from Rothschild and with Hatzfeldt's approval, to interest the Kaiser himself in the matter. [2]) He travelled to Homburg, was duly invited to the Palace on April 9th and spent part of the evening after dinner walking up and down the terrace with his Imperial Master explaining to him the advantages of a German-British alliance. Although he left full of hope, the next day the Kaiser instructed his Foreign Minister that "to Count Hatzfeldt's skilful hands will fall the difficult task of putting off the conclusion of a formal alliance, not by a rejection wounding to English feeling but so as to manifest a cordial wish for beneficient co-operation." [3])

Eckardstein confirms [4]) that within a week from his return to London, the Ambassador told him that neither the Wilhelmstrasse nor the Kaiser seemed to have any sympathy for a real understanding with Britain, but notwithstanding this he called on Chamberlain on April 22nd and explained that negotiations ought to be carried on with great speed "as the Emperor was most anxious that an agreement should be come to." [5])

By invitation from Eckardstein, Chamberlain met Hatzfeldt once again on April 25th and during their conversation the controversy was brought out very sharply. Bülow wanted England to make concessions on the colonial questions, thereby improving the good feeling between the two countries and keeping open the possibility of a future alliance. The German Government, as Hatzfeldt explained, had to be very cautious as there was a possibility of information

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[1]) Dugdale p. 256, 257. [2]) Eckardstein p. 94. [3]) G. P. XIV no. 3790. [4]) Eckardstein p. 95. [5]) Garvin III p. 271.

leaking out before any Treaty could be arranged, (which in their opinion would bring about a Russian attack on Germany) and they doubted whether public opinion in England and Germany was as yet fully prepared for the responsibilities of such a Treaty.

Chamberlain retorted that he did not hold it advisable in dealing with Germany or others to settle the smaller questions by English concessions except in connection with a simultaneous general settlement and reminded Hatzfeldt, on account of the German Government's feelings that a direct defensive alliance between Germany and England was premature, of the French proverb "le bonheur qui passe". [1])

Hatzfeldt did not repeat these words but in his report he added the warning "that he could have no doubt that Mr. Chamberlain in these utterances meant very deliberately to indicate that, in case of a definite rejection on our side, England, so far as he has to do with it, will work for an understanding with Russia or France, and that if no political understanding can be reached with us we must cease here to expect any concession in colonial matters from him." [2])

Eckardstein having heard these results from his Chief, was very disturbed and called on Chamberlain the next day to try to smooth matters over and to hold out the Kaiser's assurance that an alliance with England would be the best thing in the world, to which the Colonial Secretary very logically answered that "either Hatzfeldt's language was that of the Emperor, in which case the matter was ended or it was not, in which case it was for the Emperor to make the next move." [3])

At this stage of the negotiations Chamberlain sent all his papers covering his conversations with Hatzfeldt to Lord Salisbury, who had returned on April 29th from his séjour in Beaulieu, and in the covering letter said: "Recent experience seems to show that we are powerless to resist the ultimate control of China by Russia and that we are at a great disadvantage in negotiating with France as long as we retain our present isolation, and I think the country would support us in a Treaty with Germany providing for reciprocal defence. I think such a Treaty would make for peace and might be negotiated at the present time." [4])

The Prime Minister, however, as Chamberlain's biographer puts it "shared the wish but not the faith" [5]) and after having a talk with Hatzfeldt on May 2nd he answered his Colonial Secretary's letter by writing: " I quite agree with you that under the circumstances a closer relation with Germany would be very desirable, but can we get it?" [6])

This wish, but in more general terms had been referred to by Balfour in the Commons during a debate on Chinese affairs, (April 5th, 1898), when he spoke about a time: "when the Great Powers primarily interested in the commerce of the world might feel that their interests draw them together and require them

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1) Garvin III p.274. 2) Garvin III p. 273, 274, 275; G. P. XIV no. 3793. 3) Garvin III p. 276, 277. 4) Garvin III p. 279. 5) Garvin III p. 278. 6) Garvin III p. 279.

to join an alliance which no man can resist, for the purpose of seeing that China shall not fall a prey to any exclusive interests." [1])

Sir Edward Grey had seen eye to eye with him in that debate when he stated: "Isolation is sometimes apt to be mistaken for indifference and in future years, when it is required, is likely to become unsuccessful. We must not look to isolation. We must find a common ground of interest with other Powers" and Lord Charles Beresford added: "I believe that the time of our splendid isolation is gone. It was very useful to Noah, but it is not suitable for the present time and I believe if the Government of this country would try to make an alliance with Germany, that really would make for peace for a very long period." [2])

Four weeks later on Lord Salisbury addressed a solemn warning to the world, (Albert Hall, May 5th 1898) not to confuse an incidental set-back in China with a general weakness when he sketched the position as follows:

> "We know that we shall maintain against all comers that which we possess, and we know, in spite of the jargon of isolation, that we are amply competent to do so. But that will not secure the peace of the world. You may roughly divide the nations of the world as the living and the dying.... the weak States are becoming weaker and the strong States are becoming stronger.... the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying and the seeds and causes of conflict amongst civilised nations will speedily appear." [3])

The wide attention caused by this speech was followed by a very pointed remark by Salisbury during a conversation with Hatzfeldt on May 11th, when the latter was once again asking for British concessions as a token of her goodwill and was stopped by an abrupt interruption: "You ask too much for your friendship." [4])

All this, however, was overshadowed by the ringing appeal Chamberlain made to the public, (Liberal Unionist Association, Birmingham May 13th) to reverse the long-standing policy of isolation:

> "Now, I want, according to my manner, to submit to you a plain statement of the situation as it appears to me. Ours is a democratic Government. We gain all our strength from the confidence of the people and we cannot gain that strength or have that confidence unless we show confidence in return; and therefore to my mind, there is no longer any room for the mysteries and the reticence of the diplomacy of fifty years ago. You must tell the people what you mean and where you are going, if you want them to follow....
> Now, the first point I want to impress on you is this – it is the crux of the situation – since the Crimean War, nearly fifty years ago, the policy

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[1]) Times April 6th 1898. [2]) Langer II p. 497, 498. [3]) Garvin III p. 281. [4]) G. P. XIV no. 3796.

of this country has been a policy of strict isolation. We have had no allies – I am afraid we have had no friends [Laughter]. That is not due altogether to the envy which is undoubtedly felt at our successes; it is due in part to the suspicion that we are acting in our own selfish interests, and were willing that other people should draw the chestnuts out of the fire for us; that we should take no responsibilities whilst we were glad enough to profit by the work of others. In this way we have avoided entangling alliances, we have escaped many dangers, but we must accept the disadvantages that go with such a policy. As long as the Great Powers of Europe were also working for their own hand and were separately engaged, I think the policy we have pursued – consistently pursued – was undoubtedly the right policy for this country [Hear, Hear]. It was better we should preserve our liberty of action than become mixed up with quarrels with which possibly we had no concern [Hear, Hear].

But now in recent years a different complexion has been put upon this matter. A new situation has arisen; and it is right the people of this country should have it under their consideration. All the powerful states of Europe have made alliances, and as long as we keep outside these alliances, as long as we are envied by all and suspected by all and as long as we have interests which at one time or another conflict with the interests of all, we are liable to be confronted at any moment with a combination of Great Powers so powerful that not even the most extreme, the most hot-headed politician would be able to contemplate it without a certain sense of uneasiness [Hear, Hear]. That is the situation which I want you to have in view, which you must always have in view when you are considering the results of the foreign policy of any Government in this country. We stand alone and we may be confronted with such a combination as that I have indicated to you. What is the first duty of a Government under such circumstances?

I say, without hesitation, that the first duty is to draw all parts of the Empire closer together [loud and prolonged cheers], to infuse into them a spirit of united and Imperial patriotism [Cheers]....

What is our next duty? It is to establish and to maintain bonds of permanent amity with our kinsmen across the Atlantic [Loud cheers]. They are a powerful and generous nation. They speak our language, they are bred of our race [Loud cheers]. Their laws, their literature, their standpoint on every question are the same as ours; their feeling, their interest in the cause of humanity and the peaceful development of the world are identical with ours [Cheers]. I do not know what the future has in store for us, I do not know what arrangement may be possible with the United States, but this I know and feel – that the closer, the more cordial, the fuller and the more definite, these arrangements are with the consent of both peoples, the better it will be for both and for the world [Loud Cheers]. And I even go as far as to say that, terrible as war may be, even war itself would be cheaply purchased if in a great and noble cause the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack should wave together – [Loud and prolonged cheers] over an Anglo-Saxon alliance.... it is one of the most satisfactory results of Lord Salisbury's policy that at the present time these two great nations understand each other better than they have ever done since, more than a century ago, they were separated by the blundering of a British Government."

Chamberlain then turned to the difficulties in the Far East and the position in regard to Russia and China:

> "It is impossible to overrate the gravity of the issue. It is not the question of a single port in China – that is a very small matter. It is not the question of a single province. It is a question of the whole of the fate of the Chinese Empire and our interests in China are so great, our proportion of the trade so enormous and the potentialities of that trade so gigantic, that I feel no more vital question has ever been presented for the decision of a Government and the decision of a nation....
> The present Government did try to come to an understanding with Russia. We took care to inform her that we had no jealousy, no objection to what we understood to be her commercial objects, or to the development of her trade or to the expansion of her legitimate authority, but we sought to induce her to give up the idea of political predominance and military occupation. We failed – that was not consistent with the ambition of her Government – we failed to persuade her....
> As to the representations that were made and repudiated as soon as they were made, as to the promises which were given and broken a fortnight after, I had better perhaps say nothing – except that I have always thought it was a very wise proverb: "Who sups with the devil must have a very long spoon".....
> If the policy of isolation which has hitherto been the policy of this country is to be maintained in the future then the fate of the Chinese Empire may be, and probably will be, hereafter decided without reference to our wishes and in defiance to our interests.
> And if, on the other hand, we are determined to enforce the policy of the open door, to preserve an equal opportunity for trade with all our rivals, then we must not allow our Jingos to drive us into quarrel with all the world at the same time, and we must not reject the idea of an alliance with those Powers whose interests are most nearly approximate to our own." [1])

A careful study of the text and its implications will show that there was reason for the storm of comments that arose and that Mrs. Chamberlain, when she wrote "I think it was the most impressive [speech] I have ever heard him deliver, both in subject and manner", was not very much mistaken. [2])

Lord Kimberly raised the matter in the Lords when he asked the Prime Minister for further information about "this proposal for a gigantic change in the policy of this country", but Lord Salisbury refused to be drawn and replied that he was not in possession of the text! [3])

Two days before Chamberlain spoke thus in public about the international situation, Salisbury had himself voiced his own anxieties at a dinner of the Bankers' Association. His words were not mentioned in the newspapers because there were no reporters present, but we have from the hand of the Belgian

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1) Garvin III p. 282, 283, 301, 302; Times May 14th 1898; Asquith: Fifty years: p. 258; Langer II p. 470. 2) Garvin III p. 283. 3) Garvin III p. 284.

Minister a fairly accurate report of these proceedings, as well as his comments on Chamberlain's speech: [1])

> "Lord Salisbury a assisté mercredi soir à un diner de l'association des banquiers à l'Hôtel Métropole, et y a prononcé en présence de trois cents des personnages les plus importants de la finance un discours qui a duré plus d'une demi-heure et qui a produit une profonde impression sur toute l'assistance....
> Il y a donc lieu de croire qu'en l'absence des reporters le noble marquis s'est laissé aller à parler à coeur ouvert et d'une façon moins réservée qu'il ne le faut dans des réunions publiques. Les allusions aux événements des derniers mois ont laissé entendre qu'outre les sujets qui ont le plus préoccupé l'attention publique, il existe d'autre causes sérieuses d'anxiété qui réclament toute la vigilance des Ministres de la Reine.
> En envisageant l'avenir, il parait que Sa Seigneurie aurait exprimé des idées assez pessimistes sur les responsabilités de la Grande Bretagne et les situations délicates dans lesquelles elle pourrait se trouver engagée en regard aux modifications qui s'accomplissent et à celles qui se préparent dans les différentes parties du monde. S'adressant à l'assemblée comme étant composée essentiellement d'hommes de bon sens qui dans leurs transactions d'affaires ne se laissent pas émouvoir par le sentiment, Lord Salisbury aurait insisté sur la nécessité pour ce pays d'aborder la situation de face et de se tenir préparé à remplir tous les devoirs que les événements prochains et futurs pourraient lui imposer.
> Le discours du Prime Minister, quoiqu'il n'ait pas été livré à la publicité, acquiert d'autant plus d'importance si on le rapproche de celui que M. Chamberlain a tenu vendredi à Birmingham.... Cette harangue n'est guère plus rassurante et le Ministre des Colonies a parlé avec une franchise que le Chef du Foreign Office ne pouvait montrer, spécialement à l'endroit de la Russie qu'il a accusée sans grands ménagements d'avoir manqué à ses promesses en ajoutant que le Gouvernement anglais est résolu à ne tolérer aucun empiètement de la part de l'Empire Moscovite en dehors de sa sphère d'action qu'il s'est réservée en Chine.
> Ce qui a surtout attiré l'attention, c'est la façon dont le Secrétaire d'Etat pour les Colonies a fait entendre que l'Angleterre serait à la veille de renoncer à sa politique d'isolement et de s'engager dans des relations plus intimes avec les Etats-Unis dont les intérêts sont en beaucoup de points identiques à ceux de la race anglo-saxone.
> Le compte-rendu télégraphique de ce discours a déjà causé à l'étranger un assez vif émoi et toute la presse a commenté les paroles de M. Chamberlain qui semblent avoir occasionné une très grande surprise.
> On est généralement d'accord pour supposer que le Secrétaire Colonial a parlé avec l'assentiment du Prime Minister et un seul journal, le Temps, croit y découvrir les signes d'une espèce de dualité dans la direction de la politique étrangère anglaise et il le caractérise de discours anti-ministériel dirigé contre Lord Salisbury qu'il aurait voulu démasquer surtout en ce qui concerne sa politique vis-à-vis de la Russie. Cette opinion ne parait pas être partagée par le reste de la presse française et européenne.
> En Amérique les paroles de M. Chamberlain ont attiré vivement l'atten-

[1]) Corr. Pol. le 16 Mai 1898.

tion publique, surtout après l'article du "Times" de jeudi dernier qui répudiait, pour l'Angleterre, toute complicité dans le programme éventuel des Puissances Européennes au sujet des Philippines. Le "Times" de New-York caractérise ce discours comme un des plus significatifs des temps modernes; il soupçonne que les négociations entre les deux pays ont dû faire de grands progrès pour qu'un Ministre de la Couronne ait cru pouvoir tenir un pareil langage; c'est une révélation selon lui, plutôt qu'un pronostic.

Cependant il ne croit pas qu'une alliance ait été conclue entre les deux pays....

La presse allemande et autrichienne ont aussi consacré de longs articles au discours de M. Chamberlain et en déduisent toutes sortes de conséquences qui semblent en tout cas prématurées...."

The matter was not raised in the House of Commons until June 10th, when the Foreign Office debate took place. John Morley, the Liberal statesman, was very angry about this delay and reproached the Liberal leader, Sir William Harcourt, in strong terms "I must say plainly that in my opinion no opposition so failed in public duty as we did this afternoon. One of the most flagitious speeches ever made by an English Minister is allowed to pass by without our even asking that we might discuss it...., or putting so much as a question about it....." [1])

In his reply the next day, Harcourt, referred once again to the mystical split in the Cabinet: "If Chamberlain is to be defeated it must be by dissensions on his own side and not by consolidating them on a vote of censure.... It seems to me very important that we should know to what extent Salisbury is at the back of Chamberlain." [2])

The reactions in the New World about the suggestion put forth for an Anglo-Saxon alliance were, on the whole favourable and the following letter (May 25th) from the American Ambassador in London, John Hay, to Senator Lodge, throws some side-light on the origin of the speech:

"It is a moment of immense importance not only for the present, but for all the future. It is hardly too much to say the interests of civilization are bound up in the direction the relations of England and America are to take in the next few months.... Chamberlain's startling speech was partly due to a conversation I had with him, in which I hoped he would not let the opposition have a monopoly of expressions of goodwill to America. He is greatly pleased with the reception his speech met on our side and says he does not "care a hang what they say about it on the Continent"." [3])

As was to be expected, Russian reactions were violent, while the German papers generally pointed out that there was no need for an alliance with Great

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[1]) Gardiner p. 457. [2]) Gardiner p. 457. [3]) Thayer p. 165/169.

Britain. France kept a cool head, but did not refrain from making some carefully phrased remarks in some of her leading journals. [1])

The opposition, however, was still out for Chamberlain's blood and during the debate on the Foreign Office vote (June 10th 1898) in the House of Commons, both Sir William Harcourt and Asquith attacked the Colonial Secretary vigorously, the latter in the following words:

> "If hostility to Russia is to be the end of our foreign policy, is an alliance with some unknown, some unnamed Power to be the means? What have we done? What have the people of Great Britain done or suffered that, after bearing, as we have borne for over fifty years, the ever growing weight of an empire on our own unaided shoulders, and borne it without finding the burden too heavy for the courage, enterprise and self-reliance of our people – what have we done or suffered that we are now to go touting for allies in the highways and by-ways of Europe." [2])

The day before Sir Edward Grey had expressed his doubts about the desirability of committing friendly feeling to paper, when he spoke at a dinner of the Palmerston Club in Oxford. He said that:

> "people were now discussing the question of an alliance between Great Britain and the U.S.A. He had nothing to say on that subject for it did not seem to him to be the point of the moment. The striking thing of the moment was the sentiment expressed. He did not believe in taking a great thing like sentiment and friendly feeling and thinking it would be made stronger by defining it and placing it within the four corners of a piece of parchment. [Cheers]...." [3])

Chamberlain, however, finding himself confronted by a united Opposition, firmly held his ground and in a masterly oratorical effort he outlined his ideas about the foreign policy to be pursued:

> "Nobody ever talked about a permanent alliance. All I said was that the policy of this country, hitherto well known to all nations of the world and declared again and again, was that we could not accept any alliance... But once it becomes known that we are willing to consider alliances, provided they are for mutual interests with reciprocal advantages, I do not think we shall find the difficulty, right honourable Gentlemen suggest, in getting offers well worth our consideration.... It seems to me that any assurance, I will not say of an alliance – I am not speaking of an alliance, but of a thorough and complete understanding – a mutual arrangement for particular interests – with any of the Great Powers could be one of the most economical things that this country could possibly undertake, because it would save at once one, at all events, of the Great Powers from entering into a combination against us – and we should then be satisfied

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[1]) Garvin III p. 284. [2]) Asquith: Fifty years: vol. I p. 259. [3]) Observer June 9th 1898.

that the preparations we have made against all eventualities were absolutely sufficient.
We have sought alliance with Russia.... We have failed and although I do not believe for one moment in absolutely permanent alliances or in absolutely permanent enmities.... so long as you are isolated, can you say that it is not possible, can you even say that it is not probable, that some time or another you may have a combination of at least three Powers against you?.... It seems to me that you have to look forward to the possibilities of the next ten or twenty years, and now it is time to decide how you will meet the contingencies which are evidently ahead.
As I said in my speech I do not advise alliance any more than I rejected it. I only pointed out the consequences of rejecting it, and the advantages which might result from accepting it. But with one exception I admit.... I desire, most earnestly desire a close, a cordial and intimate connection with the United States of America. Well, nothing in the nature of a cut-and-dried alliance is at this moment proposed. The Americans do not want our alliance at this moment. They do not ask for our assistance and we do not want theirs.
But will anyone say that the occasion may not arise, foreseen as it has been by some American statesmen, who have said that there is a possibility in the future that Anglo-Saxon liberty and Anglo-Saxon interests may hereafter be menaced by a great combination of other Powers. Yes, Sir, I think that such a thing is possible and in that case, whether it be America or whether it be England that is menaced, I hope that blood will be found to be thicker than water." [1])

With regard to the charges that there was a split in the Cabinet over foreign policy, they were clearly rejected by him when amongst ringing cheers from his own side he challenged the Opposition:

> "I have not resigned, I am not cast out by my colleagues, I am not rejected by the Prime Minister.... Perhaps they [the Opposition] are thinking of some Government – I have heard of such a Government myself – in which the Prime Minister was said to be not on speaking terms with one of his principal colleagues, and neither Prime Minister nor principal colleague resigned." [2])

There is, we think, reason enough to agree with the comment describing Chamberlain on this occasion as "a peerless debater". Even Balfour in his report to the Queen had some flattering remarks to make:

> "Sir C. Dilke, who was the first speaker [in the debate on Foreign Affairs in the House of Commons] made his principal attack on Lord Salisbury: and by an elaborate and lengthy survey of the events of the last few years he endeavoured to shew that Lord Salisbury's foreign policy had been feeble and yielding: – that he has shewn little care for the commercial interests of the country, or capacity for maintaining its honour.

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1) Langer II p. 509, 510; Garvin III p. 302, 303. 2) Garvin III p. 284.

Mr. Curzon in an able and brilliant speech defended the Foreign Office, and said admirably everything that had to be said on this branch of the controversy. The real attack however was not on Lord Salisbury but upon Mr. Chamberlain. His famous speech at Birmingham was the theme of some paragraphs of Sir C. Dilke's speech, of the whole of Mr. Asquith's, and of Sir W. Harcourt's, who rose at 10.20 to conclude the debate for his side. The aim of these various speakers was partly to suggest that there was a difference of opinion on foreign policy between different sections of the cabinet; partly to attack the substance of Mr. Chamberlain's utterances on the subject of Foreign Alliances and to draw unfavourable comparisons between him and the Prime Minister.
Mr. Chamberlain replied in a speech of characteristic vigour. He repudiated the suggestion of differences in the cabinet – with sarcastic allusions to the notorious differences which existed in the cabinet which preceded it. The remainder of his argument consisted substantially of the legitimate contention that he had not intended to enunciate or recommend a new policy, but merely to state facts – shewing that whatever the advantages of isolation might be, such a condition of affairs carried with it characteristic weaknesses. He ended with an eloquent appeal on the Anglo-American Alliance; which infuriated Mr. Dillon! Our majority was about 2–1." [1])

And last but not least "The Times" too in its editorial of June 11th was in complete agreement with Chamberlain:

"... . Mr. Labouchère put into a telling phrase the substance of the speeches of Mr. Asquith and Sir William Harcourt, when he denounced Mr. Chamberlain's contention that an alliance with another strong Power, might in certain circumstances be desirable, as "an abject confession of weakness". If that is so, Germany and Russia and France have all made this abject confession, for all have entered into alliances. Mr. Chamberlain himself stands to his guns. He says he did not profess to lay down a policy, but pointed out the dominating facts of the situation, of which the most important is that, though we are a powerful nation, we are not all-powerful, and that if we elect to stand invariably alone – a position accepted by none of the other Great Powers of Europe – we must surrender some natural and legitimate ambitions. . . ." [2])

On the very day after this debate things started moving again, for the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Frank Lascelles, told Von Bülow during a conversation that "Mr. Chamberlain had spoken in good faith and that in England he was gaining more and more influence on the course of events". Von Bülow did not seem altogether unsympathetic towards an alliance, but wanted a clear-cut answer as to England's position if Germany should be attacked by the Dual Alliance [3]). Sir Frank went back to London on leave and on Saturday, June 18th, the problem put by Von Bülow was discussed at the luncheontable at Chamberlain's house, where in addition to the Ambassador and the Colonial

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[1]) Royal Archives Vol. B 50/no. 49. [2]) Times June 11th 1898. [3]) Garvin III p. 290; G. P. XIV no. 3805.

Secretary, some other Ministerial colleagues of his were present (Mr. Goschen, Lord George Hamilton, Lord Selborne and Mr. Chaplin). [1])

The answer was given in a most definite way by Chamberlain who said with the consent of his colleagues there present that he would approve of a defensive Anglo-German alliance based on mutual help if either were attacked by two Powers at the same time. [2])

The German Emperor himself had in the meanwhile taken a very curious initiative, by asking his mother, Empress Frederick (a daughter of Queen Victoria) to help him in winning British confidence for his plans. As she was still in regular correspondence with her mother, she wrote on July 15th:

> "I do know for a fact that William is most anxious for a rapprochement with England and hopes with all his heart that England will come forward in some sort of a way and meet him half-way. Chamberlain's utterances have made the most favourable impression on William, but he fears that Salisbury does not endorse them. Alas, such a thing as an alliance is too good to be true. English Governments are dependent on the House of Commons – ministries change so – a continuous foreign policy with a plan to be followed up cannot exist in England. Bülow seemed to think that a good understanding could only be the work of time and of slow growth whilst I imagine William thinks the moment propitious – and would be anxious for the idea to take shape and form. If I may say - I also think it would be wise to treat and consider the matter without too much delay. I tried myself to improve the opportunity, and told William what I thought which you know I very rarely do. I also once wrote to Hatzfeldt – quite confidentially – (6 weeks or more ago) but he never answered or took any notice." [3])

This outburst of feeling did not make much of an impression on the Queen or the Prince of Wales, and Lord Salisbury, after reading it, replied that he was not disposed to take any action.

It seems strange that the gist of the conversation at Chamberlain's luncheon-party in June did not come to the Kaiser's knowledge until the 21st August, when he met Sir Frank Lascelles at Friedrichshof, the summer-resort of Empress Frederick. Wilhelm complained bitterly about British opposition to Germany's attempts at colonial expansion. Sir Frank replied that in his opinion there was "a sincere desire for a good understanding [with Germany] in England, which in some influential quarters went so far as a wish for an alliance which should be strictly defensive and should only take effect if either Party were attacked by two Powers at the same time." [4])

The Emperor at that moment must quite certainly have been drawing heavily upon his talents as an actor, because the British Ambassador noted: "His Majesty seemed impressed by this idea and said it was the first time he had heard of it." [5])

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[1]) Garvin III p. 290. [2]) Br. Doc. I no. 122; G. P. XIV no. 3865. [3]) Lee I p. 737.
[4]) Br. Doc. I no. 122. [5]) Br. Doc. I no. 122.

In fact, only a month before his mother had written a letter of which he was clearly the "auctor intellectualis", in which an alliance was suggested, while for some time his London Ambassador had been warning Lord Salisbury of the dangers of any estrangement between the two countries!

Although he intimated at the end of this interview that he was disappointed that his efforts to bring about closer relations with England had not been more successful, he let it be known privately that he now felt confident that matters could be arranged in a manner satisfactory to both countries. [1])

The hopes the Emperor had held out to Lascelles might have been the beginning of a new and this time successful effort to bring about the Anglo-German understanding. The records, however, show that the Kaiser attempted once again to outwit European diplomacy by having the outline of this talk telegraphed to the Russian Czar. Notwithstanding the stipulation of both Great Britain and Germany for strict secrecy about the negotiations, the Emperor had, on May 30th 1898, already made an effort to intimidate the Czar by writing to him about "British offers for an alliance" and asking for advice in the difficult "decision" Germany had to make. Nicolas II had not been attracted by the bait then; neither was he now. [2]) At both times it might have been an effort to maintain a complete neutrality between England and Russia, but Bülow's letter of August 24th points in quite another direction. [3]) Bülow and Holstein were completely convinced that sooner or later Britain and Russia would come to grips, and that Germany had nothing to gain by siding with one or the other of the prospective warriors.

If Germany could maintain an independent position in this struggle by not compromising her relations with either Russia or Great Britain, Germany would be the "arbiter mundi", which is the aim of "Weltpolitik".

The British Colonial Secretary knew nothing about these cunning schemes. But the divergence between the Kaiser's words to Lascelles and the plot which was already taking shape in the Imperial brain, marks clearly the end of the first attempt at an Anglo-German alliance.

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[1]) Br. Doc. I no. 122. [2]) Garvin III p. 287, 288; G. P. XIV no. 3865; G. P. XIII no. 3525. [3]) G. P. XIV no. 3867.