THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGN POLICY: A CONSIDERATION OF PRESENT DANGERS AND THE BEST METHODS FOR MEETING THEM

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BY

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PREFACE

THE publication of this little book was interrupted by an incident which made me realize how easy it is for one who spends much time in trying to study sincerely a political problem to find himself out of touch with average opinion. The discovery has made me re-read what I have written. But re-reading has not led to any weakening of my expressions, rather the reverse. I wish only to make a brief general statement about the point of view from which I write.

I start from the profound conviction that what the world needs is peace. There has been too much war, and too much of many things that naturally go with war; too much force and fraud, too much intrigue and lying, too much impatience, violence, avarice, unreasonableness, and lack of principle. Before the war I was a Liberal, and I believe now that nothing but the sincere practice of Liberal principles

will save European society from imminent revolution and collapse. But I am conscious of a certain change of emphasis in my feeling. Before the war I was eager for large and sweeping reforms, I was intolerant of Conservatism and I laughed at risks. The social order had then such a margin of strength that risks could safely be taken. Now I feel a need above all things of the qualities that will preserve civilization. For that preservation, of course, Liberality in the full sense is necessary, and constant progress and a great development of democracy.

But what is needed most is a return to a standard of public conduct which was practised, or at least recognized, by the best Governments of the world before the war, and which now seems to have been shaken, if not shattered. I am not demanding in any wild idealist spirit that Governments should act according to the Sermon on the Mount — though they well might study it a good deal more than they do. I am only saying that they must get back to the standard of veracity, of consistency,

of honesty and economy, and of intellectual competence, that we had from Peel or Lord Salisbury or Gladstone.

I do not say that is enough. It is emphatically not enough. We need in foreign policy and home policy a higher standard than we had before, the standard implied by the League of Nations in international affairs and the ideal of Coöperation in domestic affairs. But the first thing is to recover our wholesome tradition.

I think few serious students of public affairs will dispute that the long strain of the war, confusing our ideas of good and evil, and at times centring our hopes upon things which a normal civilized man regards with loathing, has resulted in a widespread degradation of political conduct. Things are done now, in time of peace, which would have been inconceivable before 1914. And they are done now because we grew accustomed to worse things during the war. I do not wish to attack any individuals; but, as an instance of what I mean, one finds a Ministerial newspaper complacently remark-

ing that certain country towns sacked by the police in Ireland were very small and poor places in any case, and the sacking not nearly so complete as the sacking of Belgian towns by the Germans on less provocation. I find to-day (November 4, 1920) the Chief Secretary for Ireland announcing in the House of Commons that he has had a court of inquiry into the alleged murder of John Conway by the police, and presenting an official report that Conway "died from natural causes"; while at the same time the *Times* special correspondent writes: "I went to the cottage in Rock Street of John Conway, who was shot on Monday evening, and saw him lying on his bed with a bullet wound in the temple." This is one case out of dozens. It is not a slip or an isolated crime. I put it to any man who can remember the years before the war that this represents a startling degradation of the standard of government. Such things used to happen in Mexico; now they happen in Great Britain.

Of course I supported the war. I believe it was necessary. I make no self-righteous claim

to throw the guilt of it upon others, who did the fighting by which I and mine were saved. Let me therefore try to make clear why certain things shock me profoundly, while I supported others which can loosely be called "just as bad."

One of the worst things about war, as Thucydides has remarked, is that it takes away your freedom and puts you in a region of necessity. You may choose whether or not to fight; but, once fighting, your power of choice has gone.

Take the treaty with Italy in 1915. Italy demanded a certain price, if she was to come into the war on our side. Another party in Italy was negotiating with the Germans, to see what inducement could be offered for Italy to come in on the other side. (I make no complaint whatever of the conduct of these Italian statesmen; they naturally consulted the interests of their country.) The price was high, and involved the transference to Italy of territory to which, on principles of self-determination, she had little claim. But who could refuse the