THEY BETRAYED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

G. J. GEORGE

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G. J. GEORGE

with a Preface by

EDGAR ANSEL MOWRER

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is the work of a journalist, and not of an historian. History will later pass judgment on the occurrences of October 1938. All the statements contained in this book are based upon trustworthy reports and documents. The texts of the letters have been taken from the English White Paper.

G. J. G.

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PREFACE

THE incredible has happened. A little people, pacific, industrious, freedom-loving, has been betrayed. Betrayed and partitioned. Not by ruthless enemies, as Poland was partitioned. Partitioned by a State reputed friendly and by a sworn ally. By the United Kingdom and the French Republic. By Englishmen deliberately and after calm reflection; by Frenchmen in an hour of panic. More, the guilty have accepted praise and rejoicing for their act. For did they not save world peace? Is anything worth more than peace—honour or freedom or democracy? What if it is a German peace, a Fascist peace, imposed on no longer quite free peoples by the threat of war? Faced with the choice between possible (though by no means certain) war and dishonour, the rulers of Great Britain and of France chose dishonour. No wonder they have ever since sought shelter behind specious explanations.

In that, at least, they will not succeed. This is the story of the betrayal by one of the betrayed, a Czechoslovak. In a series of unforgettable scenes he traces the stages of a felony. I cannot imagine any right-minded person in France or Great Britain reading his story without burning cheeks. Mr. George does not tell quite all the story. He does not tell how the partitioning was prepared in advance. But Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain hinted at it.

He had, he told the House of Commons, long been convinced that a settlement of what he called the "Czechoslovak problem" was the "last obstacle" to the appeasement of Nazi Germany. Doubtless his friends in Berlin told him so. We have heard this before. The "disarmed" German Rhineland was the "last obstacle" to appeasement, until Hitler got up his courage to seize Austria against the wishes of probably three-fourths of its inhabitants. Then the last obstacle became Germany's desire to seize the German-speaking rim of Czechoslovakia (with the Poles and Hungarians playing jackal to the German tiger). Mr. Chamberlain said so. He will have plenty of opportunity to say it again. There are still many nuclei of German "race" in the world—in Switzerland, in the Italian Tyrol, in Alsace-Lorraine, in Eupen-Malmedy, on the southern fringe of Denmark, in the Polish Corridor (where they were never anything but a minority), in Memel, in the Baltic States, in Roumania, along the Volga in Soviet Russia, in the United States. Enough "last obstacles" to enliven history for many years to come, if only Mr. Chamberlain and his likes can remain in power, ready to turn the helpless over to a ruthless and pirate Ship of State that has hoisted the Jolly Roger, made its pacifists, democrats, Jews and sincere Christians walk the plank, and is prepared to sail on until it is sunk.

With apologies to poor Mr. Chamberlain, there was no "Sudeten problem", thanks to which the Sudetens, even supposing they had all so desired, had a right simply to walk out of the Czechoslovak State and go over to Germany. If they had this

right, then Abraham Lincoln was a tyrant, who prevented the Southern States from leaving the Union at the cost of more than four years bloody war. If they had, then Wales, Scotland and Cornwall can secede from Chamberlain's Britain to-morrow without England having a word to say against it. The French Canadians have, if they choose, a right to join a Fascist France to-morrow, and the unending wrong of a subject Indian people must be righted at once. Does Mr. Chamberlain believe this? Only if he does, can he uphold the right of secession for the Sudetens. Or have his German friends " rights " he would deny to " inferior " peoples who have not yet risen to the level of a Nazi régime?

I say that Messrs. Chamberlain and Daladier handed over the Sudetens to Hitler, not because the Sudetens were " oppressed " (none but an amateur could believe that), but because Hitler shouted and banged on the table and threatened war, because his army is strong, and because he must be maintained in power, since " after all, he is the only remaining obstacle to the bolshevisation of Europe ", etc., etc.

Here we reach the real crux of the betrayal.

But wait. The writer of these lines is neither Communist nor Socialist, but a Liberal, a follower of Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill. He comes of what Ku Kluxers call a " one hundred per cent. American, white, Protestant family ", with no known trace of Jewish blood. Among his Celto-Nordic ancestors were even some Germans. Pitiful epoch when pedigree alone bestows the right to state the facts.

I repeat, Neville Chamberlain and Georges Bonnet (let us try to forget Daladier, who surrendered from weakness, not from bad will) betrayed Czechoslovakia, just as Sir John Simon betrayed China in 1931; Pierre Laval betrayed Ethiopia in 1935; Sir Samuel Hoare betrayed the League of Nations and Pierre-Etienne Flandin betrayed France, in 1936; Leon Blum and Anthony Eden betrayed Republican Spain the same year and China was deserted for the second time in 1937.

But neither Chamberlain, who believes he has "saved peace for a generation" (his generation?), nor Edouard Daladier, who thought the crowd gathered at Le Bourget airport to welcome him back from Munich had come to jeer, nor Georges Bonnet and his confederates dare say so.

They say, there was no use in fighting; Czechoslovakia could not have been defended anyway.

This is probably untrue. It is far more likely that had France and Britain taken their places beside Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia, the Germans would have been unable to storm that fortress, Bohemia. But suppose Bohemia had been overrun, was Belgium defended in Belgium or in American munitions factories, at Verdun and the Dardanelles? Yet Belgium is still there, happy and prosperous.

They say, even in case of victory, the Czechs would have been compelled by their allies to yield the Sudetens to Germany.

I doubt it. The Sudetens had never been part of Germany. There is no evidence that a majority of them wanted to be. To most of us, the spectacle

of nine and a half million Czechoslovaks outvoting three and a quarter million free Sudetens is less offensive than that of Germany bullying nine and a half million Czechoslovaks. A war would have driven the Hitlerophiles from power in London and Paris, and Hitler himself from power in Berlin.

They say, by yielding the Czechs saved their country from utter devastation.

It is possible. So could Belgium and France have escaped the horror of their devastated regions by submitting in 1914. And if the Czechoslovaks, like the brave Belgians and Frenchmen of a generation ago, preferred total destruction to capitulation, this was, after all, their affair, not that of Neville Chamberlain.

They say, the Czechs surrendered to save world peace.

The facts belie it. The surrender occurred only when the French Minister told President Beneš in the Hradschin at Prague at two in the morning of 21st September, 1938, that unless Czechoslovakia immediately and unconditionally accepted the German Dictator's terms, shamefully transformed into an "Anglo-British Plan", France would break its pledge and desert the little country in the ensuing war!

They say, they could not count on adequate Russian aid. Lord Winterton chose to repeat this charge several times.

Is it not a fact that the Russians told the French Ambassador M. Coulondre in Moscow on 2nd September, that Russia would support Czechoslovakia, France's and Russia's common Ally, by

all means in its power, and that he would welcome staff talks between the two countries? Does this sound like desertion?

"But the Russian aeroplanes are no good, the Russian Army is completely demoralised."

Strange that such inferior planes have managed to hold their own against the latest German and Italian models in Spain, against French and American machines flown by Japanese in China. Even a demoralised army is, after all, worth more than the finest force that will not fight. And none can deny that the vast majority of military experts the world over, including the French Chief of Staff, General Gamelin, had little doubt but that the war could be won by the democracies with Russia, against the dictatorships.

"But Lord Runciman reported that, under the circumstances, the further peaceful cohabitation in one State between Sudeten Germans provoked by Hitler and Czechoslovaks had been impossible."

Sagacious Lord Runciman, welcomed by the Sudetens as "Father Christmas," who, curiously enough, managed to reach the same opinion as was publicly expressed a month or two before by Germanophiles like Lord Rothermere and Lord Allen of Hurtwood! If this opinion were correct, Hitler needed only to be told to cease provoking the Sudetens or he would be slapped on the wrist. But it is not correct: for a thousand years Sudeten Germans and Czechs have lived in close association. And to this day there is no evidence that a majority of the Sudetens desired to be transferred to Nazi Germany. This transfer was decided without con-

sulting them or the Government in Prague. And after Chamberlain and Daladier had gone through the tragi-farce of mobilisation to oppose Hitler's Godesberg plans for the amputation of three million Germans and about a million Czechs, the Berlin Committee set up to make effective the Munich surrender solemnly allowed him more territory than he had claimed at Godesberg, simply because neither Chamberlain nor Daladier was prepared to stand up against a blustering dictator, who, by keeping his army under arms while the others demobilised, was able to realise not one but a whole series of " ultimatums ".

" But the surviving Czechoslovakia will, because homogeneous, be stronger than before."

If so, if a country that has been deprived of its all but impregnable fortifications, of one-third of its population, of nearly three-fourths of its industry, is stronger than before, then why this hurry to give the rump a " Franco-British guarantee " that will never be honoured (are there any pledges that France and Great Britain still honour?), why this loan and alms-giving to the Czechs? It looks rather like a form of hush-money dictated by uneasy conscience.

" But Chamberlain has nothing to reproach himself with. Why should he? Great Britain had no engagements towards the Czechs, a people none of us knows anything about."

No? Is the League of Nations Covenant no engagement? Or does the learned Sir John Simon maintain that a multilateral contract of this type can be annulled simply by one-sided repudiation? Less subtle jurists are likely to maintain that so

long as Britain remained a member and the Covenant was not amended, Britain remained honourably bound to guarantee both the independence and the territorial integrity of member States. But having betrayed Ethiopia, why should Britain and France bother about another victim, or handing over a few hundred thousand Sudeten democrats and Socialists to Adolf Hitler for torture?

One thing only is true. The Government of Great Britain never wanted to defend Czechoslovakia, and could only have been forced to if France had kept its promise to the Czechs. And the French failed. Foreign Minister Bonnet intrigued against his Ally, Premier Daladier wilted in face of opposition, French pacifist and pro-Fascist currents combined to insist on peace even at the price of betrayal. What else could one expect when even prosperous citizens in Paris were openly proclaiming their preference for Adolf Hitler as against Leon Blum? But since this was the fact, let it be publicly proclaimed and recognised as the fact. To have demonstrated this is the merit of Mr. George's book, *They Betrayed Czechoslovakia.*

Most of " them ", to be sure, have still only the vaguest conception of what they have done. " They " cannot hear the chuckles of Hermann Goering each time a French or British statesman expresses his belief that one " can trust the Führer ". For trust him one can, to make no peace but a *Pax Germanica* with the Duce tagging along behind. " They " do not yet know that Fascism is not a philosophy, not a political doctrine, but simply the national will to aggression brought to its highest point of efficiency

and readiness. " They " have not yet been tortured in concentration camps or seen men herded into jails because they sincerely believed in Jesus Christ. " They " cannot imagine that a Fascist State cannot cease from aggression without ceasing to be. And so " they " think that dishonour is adequately repaid if it bring peace. But a Winston Churchill knows the choice is not between war and a single betrayal of a helpless people, but between war and complete despoliation, between living free or slave.

The abandonment of the Czechs has made the further defence of European democracy extremely difficult. It has given Germany almost complete dominion in Central Europe and the Balkans. It has accomplished Chamberlain's apparent aim of breaking the " French system " and confining France's political activity to Western Europe and Africa. It has almost isolated Soviet Russia (which alone among European States can stand isolation). It has paved the way for a further series of German outrages. But it has not yet made the defence of world democracy impossible. Britain and France can still maintain themselves—if they fight Fascism at home; if they quickly save Spain from Italian and German clutches; if they preserve the friendship, or even the academic interest, of the American people. But it is doubtful if they will do any of these things. Was it not to encourage " co-operation " with Fascism that the Czechs were " sold down the river "?

Do London and Paris realise that, faced with the choice of overcoming stubborn Russian resistance or peacefully blackmailing the over-ripe

Western countries, the Führer and the Duce may well prefer the latter, and that only the Spanish Republican army stands between them and the ability to do it? Or that when the day of trial comes and " S O S Empire calling " is heard along the ether, one hundred and thirty million Americans, taking their cue from Neville Chamberlain, may decide that what is left of European democracy is just not worth having a war to save?

EDGAR ANSEL MOWRER.

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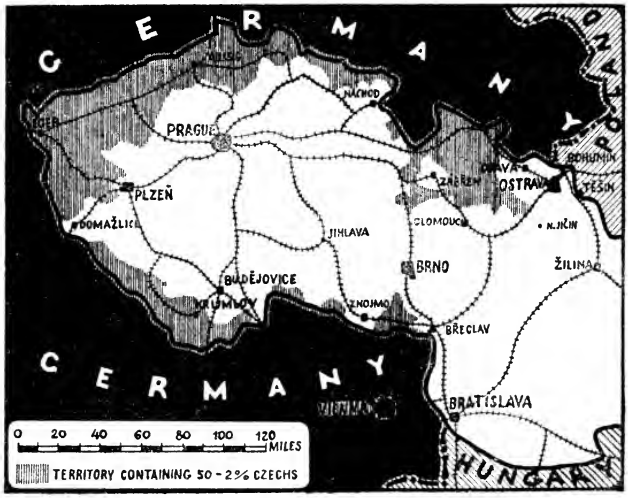

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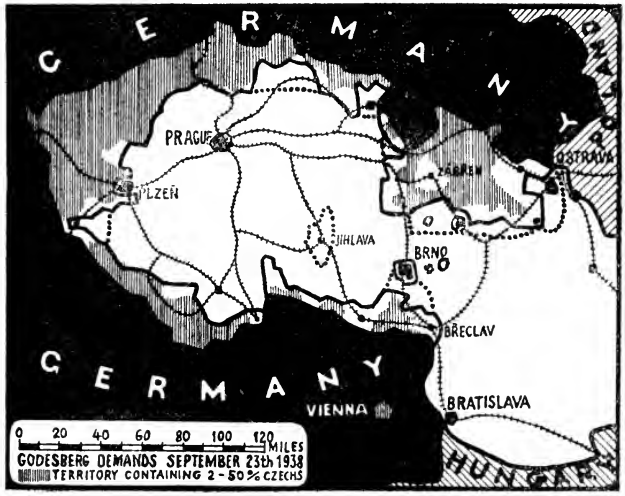

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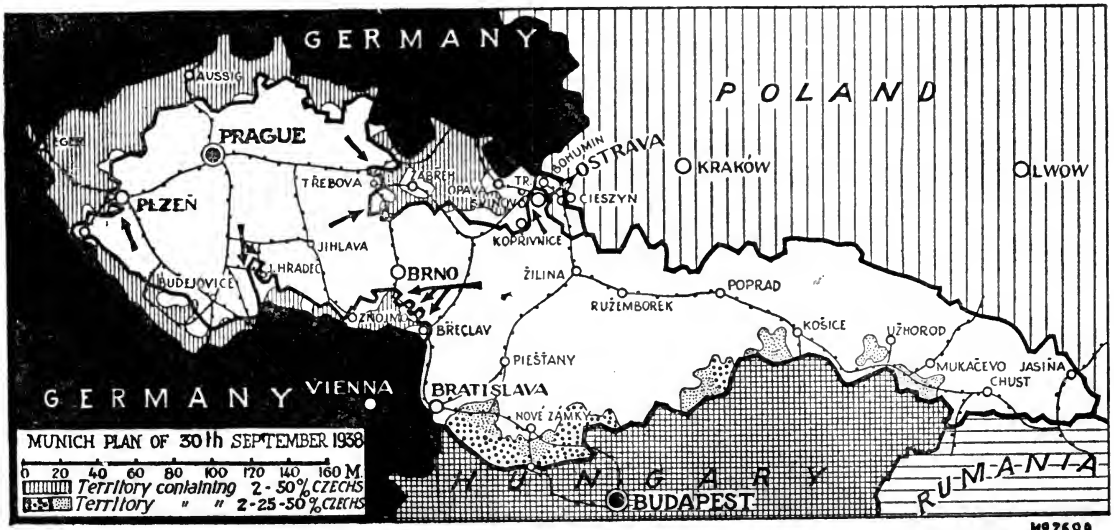
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THEY BETRAYED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

CHAPTER I

THE BIG FOUR

MIDNIGHT had come and gone. Four men sat round a big table in the Führer's house in Munich. At that momentous hour it was for them to decide upon the fate of Europe. One after another they took up the pen to sign a document which inflicted irreparable injuries upon a country not even represented among them—Czechoslovakia.

At the same hour a ray of light which showed through a curtained window in the ancient castle of Prague told of the man who, in his study there, was awaiting the decision: Dr. Edvard Beneš, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, and joint-founder of this State with his predecessor, the great President and thinker, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk.

Far below him the city lay in darkness. Prague had for several days been expecting the German aeroplanes to raid it. But the planes did not come: the Czechoslovak army, counted among the best in Europe, had been mobilised to no purpose. To no purpose also had the impregnable concrete fortifications been constructed on the frontier, at the cost of some 500 million dollars.

The telephone bell rang. President Beneš took up the receiver and listened. The Czech Minister, Dr. Mastny, was speaking from Munich.

Czechoslovakia's fate had been sealed; the democratic little country in the middle of Europe had lost a war without having waged it. Not only was it abandoned by its allies, but it was compelled by them to cede to Germany great and rich territory.

The President was at that hour reminded of the saying of Bismarck, the great German statesman: "He who possesses Bohemia holds the key to Europe."

Too late to think of that now. The men in whose hands lay the fate of Europe did not know, or perhaps did not care to know, that the fate of Czechoslovakia was at the same time Europe's fate, and that the democracies of Europe, in the clutch of a collective fear, and capitulating before Hitler, were surrendering themselves while surrendering Czechoslovakia. Once Hitler has subdued Czechoslovakia, he will soon be master of the Balkans. The rich cornfields of Hungary, Rumania's petroleum wealth, the countless raw materials of Central Europe will fall to him, and he needs them badly if he is to make Germany an invincible Power in Europe.

Europe has given way before Hitler again and again: it permitted him to occupy the Rhineland, which, according to the Treaty of Versailles, was to be closed to German troops for a term of years; it has tolerated Germany's gigantic rearmament schemes; it made no active objections to the invasion of Austria, and it has now practically handed Czechoslovakia over to Germany. Who will be the next to be sacrificed?

In Paris and London the signing of the Munich pact was the signal for tremendous jubilation. The

bulk of the people did not realise that it was not for Czechoslovakia they were supposed to fight, but for a free Europe. Nor do they realise even now that the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia is but one more step along the road of Europe's decline and Germany's domination of the Continent.

The people of France and England did not understand that defeat without war is every bit as terrible as a lost war. In these days they have been celebrating their own discomfiture as if it were a victory.

And yet Europe might have been saved from the domination of Pan-Germanism even without a war. How it was that this did not happen, and how it was that the three most powerful nations in Europe —Great Britain, France and Soviet Russia—yielded to the tremendous bluff of Adolf Hitler, and surrendered both themselves and Europe, will be told in the following pages of this book.

This is the story of a betrayal prompted by fear; of the great game of poker which was not won by the holder of the best cards, but by the player who was able to put up the biggest bluff. The stake of this game of poker, however, was not merely Czechoslovakia—it was Europe.

Stage and Actors

The chief rôle in the most exciting drama in modern world-history, which had Europe for its stage, and for two months kept a whole world in a state of tension, was played by Adolf Hitler, the forty-nine-year-old Führer of the German Reich, an abstainer, a vegetarian, and a man who believes himself to be a prophet sent by God, and receives

his inspirations direct from the 'Germanic God'. But a man, too, who knows how to safeguard his chances, and to turn every one of them to the utmost account; a player playing on the fears of the European democracies as a great musician plays on a violin.

His fellow-player, and Europe's second Dictator, the fifty-year-old Duce of Italy, Benito Mussolini, remained in the background. Not until the great final scene did he come forward, rushing into the breach as saviour of the trembling European democracies.

The two players opposite, Neville Chamberlain, the sixty-nine-year-old Prime Minister of Britain, and Edouard Daladier, the fifty-nine-year-old Prime Minister of France, and former schoolmaster, were no match for the two Dictators. Winston Churchill, the English statesman, said of them: "The Governments of England and France had the choice of dishonour or war. They chose dishonour, but they will have war". In the course of the nerve-racking negotiations there were moments when France and England seemed minded to choose war rather than dishonour. On Monday the 5th September France began her mobilisation. By the end of the month she had a million and a half men under arms. On Wednesday forenoon, the 28th September, the King of England ordered the mobilisation of the Home Fleet. On the evening before, Tuesday, 27th September, Neville Chamberlain, in his broadcast speech, had said: "However much we may sympathise with a small nation confronted by a powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to

involve the whole British Empire in a war simply on her account. If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than that. . . . If I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel it should be resisted. Under such domination the life of people who believe in liberty would not be worth living." Therefore on Tuesday evening Mr. Chamberlain realised that the actual aims of Germany were the domination of Europe. Then on Wednesday afternoon came Hitler's invitation to Munich, and Thursday and Friday the acceptance of the terms laid down by Hitler. On Tuesday evening Mr. Chamberlain expressed the opinion that Germany wanted to dominate Europe. Did he forget this in forty-eight hours when, on the night of Friday, he put his signature to the fatal document?

The fifth leading rôle, and the truly tragic one in this drama, was played by Edvard Beneš, the fifty-four-year-old President of the Czechoslovak Republic. This man, of small stature but abounding energy, had been the most intimate collaborator of Masaryk, the founder of the Republic. For fifteen years he was the soul of the League of Nations. Under the compulsion of those whom he had regarded as his allies, he had had to stand idly by and watch the mutilation and all but annihilation of his life's work. He had had to disregard the most outrageous insults heaped upon him by Chancellor Hitler in his Nuremberg speech on 12th September, and again in the speech at the Berlin Sport Palace on 26th September. Never before had a responsible statesman been known thus publicly to revile the

head of another country. Dr. Beneš could do nothing about it: his friends in the West had tied his hands.

Then there were the numerous subsidiary parts. There was Konrad Henlein, aged thirty-three, the one-time gymnastic instructor from the small town of Asch in Bohemia, who had made a name for himself as leader of the Sudeten German Party, founded by him, and directed by Germany. In the last five years alone over three million dollars were expended on the various activities of this Party. This money, paid by Germany, has been a most fruitful investment. The spa of Karlsbad, the coal-mines of North Bohemia and its whole industrial plant are worth many times the cost of the Sudeten German Party. As for the outlay on Germany's mobilisation, the whole of the Balkans will settle that score. Konrad Henlein was only a small pawn in Hitler's great game, as Seyss-Inquart was in the case of Austria.

Lord Runciman, sixty-five years of age, the personal friend of Chamberlain, and himself a former Liberal Minister, played another secondary part. When he came to Prague on the 3rd of August, on the instructions of the British Government, but " as a private individual ", to mediate between the Sudeten Germans and the Prague Government, students of European politics in Paris and London noted with dismay that Great Britain had that day decided to drop Czechoslovakia. Lord Runciman left Prague on the 16th of September, after a six weeks' stay. His week-ends in Czechoslovakia had been spent mostly at the castles of the pro-German nobility who had never been able

to live on a friendly footing with the Czech democracy, and backed Henlein's Party in the belief that once the autonomy of the Sudeten territory was an accomplished fact, they would again play a leading part. The owners of those castles in Bohemia had never considered the possibility of annexation by Germany, for members of the nobility have very little say in Germany. What they will miss now will be the free atmosphere of a democratic country. When Lord Runciman returned to London he stated that Germans and Czechs would never agree, and that radical measures were necessary. He had not studied history, and therefore could not know that Germans and Czechs had been living together in Bohemia for a thousand years—until such time, indeed, as Hitler and his two great helpers in the West arrived upon the scene.

The European drama of September 1938 was crowded with actors, all of whom will duly appear in their special rôles. It was given to a newspaper, however, to play one of the most fateful parts in this story, and that newspaper was *The Times*, with its leading article of 7th September.

Berchtesgaden

Adolf Hitler's house stands like a fortress high above the little Bavarian hamlet of Berchtesgaden. It is only a few miles from the former Austrian border and about seventy-eight miles from that of Czechoslovakia. It was in this house that Austria's fate was sealed when, on the 12th February, 1938, her ill-fated Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, heard Hitler's ultimatum. On the 1st September of

this same year, not six months after the annexation of Austria, the fate of Czechoslovakia was being decided in the same place.

Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten Germans, had been ordered to come to Adolf Hitler. Officially it was stated that the meeting was taking place at the instigation of Lord Runciman; but actually it was Hitler himself who demanded Henlein's presence. Thus, what Henlein and his Party had hitherto denied now became quite clear to the whole world: that they were nothing but a branch of the National Socialist Party, and received their orders direct from Germany.

Henlein arrived at Berchtesgaden in the forenoon, but was not immediately received by Hitler. He had to wait several hours before being admitted into the presence of his Führer. Henlein's task was difficult. The Prague Government had already made so many concessions under pressure from France and England that the Sudeten German Party might have come to terms with it. It was now possible for the Party to administer the German territory of Czechoslovakia and to receive substantial financial assistance from Prague for that purpose, almost, indeed, to form a State of their own within the confines of the Czechoslovak Republic. Henlein came to Hitler with the task of winning the Führer over to acceptance of the Prague proposals. The Sudeten German population—peasants, workers and trades-people—were tired of a tension which made work impossible for them. Karlsbad and Marienbad were empty, the factories in the Sudeten German area had to close down, because

their products were boycotted by the big American department stores. In this part of the country the tension was at its highest. The Czechs were buying nothing from the German dealers, and the German workmen were no longer able to earn a living. Throughout the German camp there was a general appeal for a cessation of the struggle and an agreement with Prague.

But Adolf Hitler was inflexible. He had learned from radical leaders of the Sudeten Germans that Henlein wanted to give in and was showing himself too weak. The Führer was in a rage, and he did not conceal it from his underling.

For more than an hour he talked to Henlein, who stood there before him. His words became more and more furious and insulting. He banged with his right hand on the top of the table to give further emphasis to his utterances. Henlein was barely able to get out a word or two of the speech which he had prepared beforehand. Hitler, well aware of all that his henchman wanted to say, would not allow him to say it. What he himself wanted was to pursue the struggle to a definite decision, no matter at what cost—even at the cost of war. But it would never come to that, he was convinced of it. What nation in Europe would let loose a war for the sake of Czechoslovakia? So if Henlein would not carry out his instructions, there were others who were quite ready to do so. As for himself, he had no time for weaklings and boobies.

On that same day some leading members of the Sudeten German Party met at the Party headquarters in Prague to await the Berchtesgaden decision.

They were Frank, Kundt, Sebekowsky and Ullrich. Would Henlein's telephone message bid them prepare for a settlement on peaceful lines, or must there be bloodshed? They waited in vain. Henlein had been bidden to spend the night at Berchtesgaden, and to fetch the Führer's orders next morning.

Next forenoon, the 2nd September, and a cold, wet day, Henlein was again shown into the presence of Hitler to receive his instructions. This time the Führer was not alone: Marshal Goering; Hess, the Führer's representative; and Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, were all with him. Some time afterwards the Minister for Foreign Affairs, von Ribbentrop, arrived also. It was the latter who had given Hitler the most valuable advice in the whole campaign: He was not to bother about England, for England would never fight.

"Keep on fighting, come what may," were Hitler's orders, and he then proceeded to give Henlein—by this time so overwrought that he had difficulty in grasping them—his future plans of campaign. These were: to stiffen the demands of the Sudeten Germans sufficiently to make them inacceptable to the Prague Government; provocation of incidents in the Sudeten area, which might possibly be worked up into an armed revolt, in which Germany would have an excuse for intervening if need be.

As the wretched Henlein was leaving Hitler's study, Goering gave him one small word of cheer:

"Don't be alarmed, Henlein, there won't be any war. The Führer always knows what he is up to."

The Sudeten Germans

Towards evening of that same day Henlein motored back to Czechoslovakia. He was received in his native town with great rejoicings, pelted with flowers and everywhere acclaimed. But he did not look particularly happy. He was afraid of what lay ahead, afraid that his own rôle would presently be played out; for Hitler had the whole affair in his own firm grasp.

The Party leaders held a conference as soon as Henlein arrived. Two of the members had that same day been received by President Beneš, who had spoken to them in the clear, persuasive manner so characteristic of him: coolly, calmly and dispassionately. He had pointed out all the advantages which the Sudeten Germans would reap from an acceptance of the Czechoslovak offer. The two deputies listened politely. They could not negotiate until Henlein returned from Berchtesgaden.

But now that they sat together with Henlein in the room where he worked, the two radical deputy-leaders recovered their enthusiasm. Late in the night a message was dispatched to Prague, that the Sudeten German Party were unable to accept the offer of the Prague Government, though they were willing to continue the discussions.

. . . . .

After Henlein's interview at Berchtesgaden, the Sudeten German question assumed dramatic forms: negotiations were shortly to give place to deeds.

The great majority of the Sudeten German population were not aware of what was actually going on.

Up to the last few years they had lived more or less contentedly, more or less peaceably with their Czech neighbours, as they had done during the thousand years which preceded. Only when the National Socialists seized power in Germany was there evidence of some internal disquiet among the Germans in Czechoslovakia. They had always been very nationalistic, and it was really from the German areas in Bohemia that National Socialism had sprung long before the War. Now it held the reins of government in Germany. When, as a measure of public security, the Czech Government was obliged to put down the National Socialist Party, the Sudeten German Party had come into existence, and adherents were soon flocking to it. The Party reached the summit of its power with the annexation of Austria by Germany. It became the strongest single Party in the Czechoslovak Parliament. Still the wave of German nationalistic fervour continued to grow in the Sudeten areas. Even so, however, it did not occur to any of the 3,230,000 Sudeten Germans who made up 22½ per cent. of the total Czechoslovak population that their country would be annexed by Germany. Economically and geographically they belonged to Bohemia, as they had done for the last thousand years, ever since the Bohemian kings had called them in to till the land and build the towns.

But Germany had her plans all ready. "There are still ten million Germans on our borders who do not belong to the Reich", had been a favourite public utterance of Hitler's. After the Austrian 'anschluss' only three millions of these were left,

the majority of them being the Germans in the mountainous frontier territories known as the Sudeten regions.

The Sudeten Germans listened when their case came up for discussion in the Reich. They responded eagerly and enthusiastically to the calls which came to them from across the German frontier. But they did not know that they were simply mere pawns on Hitler's chessboard. They were to be the infernal machine which was to blow sky-high the fastnesses of Czechoslovakia. The firm democratic stand of the Republic, its loyalty to the Western democracies, its fortresses, and its good army were the greatest obstacles along Germany's route to South-eastern Europe. Without Czechoslovakia Germany could not dominate that part of the Continent. Therefore Czechoslovak resistance would have to be broken, and what device lent itself so well to this purpose as that of exploiting the German minority? Of course when Hitler had started doing this, he did not immediately conceive the idea of annexing the Sudeten territory. All he wanted was the widest possibly autonomy for the Germans in Czechoslovakia, with a consequent undermining and weakening of the Republic from within. It was not until he had noticed the undecided attitude of the Western Great Powers that he carried his game a little farther, and increased his demands until they reached their limits—the claim for an annexation of the Sudeten Germans. In this game the Western Powers lent him their support.

Germany Plays at War

Three weeks before the occurrences which have just been described, Germany had suddenly announced great army manœuvres. Europe took notice as more and more men in Germany were called to the colours and when it was learned that Germany was beginning in great haste to erect gigantic fortifications on her western frontier in the direction of France and Belgium. Hundreds of thousands of men were mobilised for labour on these fortifications. Motor-cars and motor-lorries were seized for military purposes, and after a few weeks Germany resembled one huge military camp. No less than 750,000 reservists had been called to the colours, so that by the end of September there were close on two million men under arms in Germany.

The arms and munitions factories were working day and night in unbroken shifts. Bombing-planes were made ready for service every day, so that finally Germany had more war-planes than England and France put together. German chemists were preparing vast quantities of the most frightful poison gases that the world had ever seen. With this tremendous power of hers, Germany was getting ready to strike terror into the hearts of all Europe.

The plan was quite clear. Europe was to be given a fright, the German fortifications were to prevent the French army from rendering any real assistance to France's Czech allies.

What were the Western Powers doing in the meantime? They were negotiating, jointly exerting

pressure upon Prague to agree to more and more concessions, and, this agreement extorted, it was each time refused again by the Sudeten Germans, all according to plan.

Germany was playing at war, and the Western Powers trembled. In the diplomatic and political salons of Paris and London a scheme was being got ready whereby peace might be bargained for at the expense of Czechoslovakia.

Externally there were no signs of wavering as yet. On the very Sunday which preceded the National Socialist Congress at Nuremberg, M. Bonnet, Foreign Minister of France, unveiling near Bordeaux a memorial to La Fayette, the hero of Franco-American liberty, took occasion to address a word of warning to Adolf Hitler. He said: " France, at all events, will remain true to any agreements she may have entered into ". He was referring to the Pact of Assistance concluded with Czechoslovakia in 1925, by which France had promised to hasten to the aid of Czechoslovakia if the latter were attacked.

On Monday, the 5th September, the eagerly awaited Congress of the National Socialists opened in Nuremberg. Amid the ringing of bells, Hitler drove in triumph through the streets of the ancient city. In his eyes was no look of triumph, however: they looked tired and strained, and his whole face was lined with anxiety. The German Dictator realised that he was playing a life-or-death game. He knew that he could scarcely begin a war in which England, France, Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia would all be against him. Germany was short of

reserves; he might risk a war lasting for six months, but that was the limit. Shortly after the Congress opened he had heard the news that France was beginning to mobilise: numerous reservists and technicians had been called up the night before. The famous Maginot Line was to be ready in a few days. In Nuremberg, Paris, London and Prague the tension was becoming unbearable, and it was in the midst of this tension that an article in England's venerable newspaper *The Times* burst like a bomb upon the world.

The Times Causes a Sensation

On Wednesday, the 7th of September, *The Times* had a leading article which made a tremendous stir throughout the world. This article dealt with the difficulties of a solution of the Sudeten question within the confines of the Czechoslovak State, and went on to say: "It would be better if Czechoslovakia could simply cede the Sudeten German area to Germany."

In Nuremberg, Paris, London and Prague the article had an overwhelming effect. M. Corbin, the French ambassador in London, at once called on Lord Halifax, in order to protest against it in the name of the French Government. The Prime Minister interrupted his holiday and came back to London with all possible speed. The Prague Government protested in London and Paris. The Foreign Minister of the Reich, on the other hand, went into the Führer's study in Nuremberg with a smile on his face to tell Hitler all about it. Hitler listened unmoved, and although knowing at once

what immense perspectives opened before him, he never smiled. He smiles very seldom in any case —only when there are photographers about does he occasionally summon up a smile.

In London the Foreign Office twice denied that the view contained in *The Times* articles coincided with those of the Government, and no doubt there was ample justification for this statement.

Meanwhile the engagement, voluntarily entered into by France to assist Czechoslovakia, was still in force; England was still aware that she would be bound to hasten to the aid of France if the latter were involved in a war with Germany. So something would have to be done at once. England did not want a war at all just then, least of all a war against Germany and for Czechoslovakia, even if the future of Europe were at stake. Therefore France must be persuaded that it would be advisable for her to drop Czechoslovakia.

Obviously, this would not be altogether easy. Of course, the French Government contained a strong group, headed by M. Bonnet, who were absolutely opposed to war and would have been prepared to drop Czechoslovakia; but French public opinion was at first all in favour of the Czechs; so, too, was the French General Staff, while Daladier, the Prime Minister, held a position midway between these two groups.

French public opinion, however, had undergone a complete change during the course of events. Not all that was written in Paris during the month of September against Czechoslovakia, either directly or indirectly can be attributed to skilful German

propaganda. A great deal of it was quite honest in intention. There were reminders of the enormous losses suffered by France in the World War; there was a genuine desire for peace. The Press which supported this section was jubilant when the outcome of the Munich discussions became known. Peace had been saved. But what kind of peace, and for how long?

Herr Hitler Storms

The prelude to the great speech which Hitler was to deliver at Nuremberg was extremely ominous.

In Czechoslovakia negotiations with the Sudeten German Party had finally collapsed. Urged by France and England, the Czech Government had gone so far as to agree to divide the country into cantons on the Swiss model, and to allow the Sudeten Germans complete autonomy inside their own cantons. The offer was really magnanimous, and the Sudeten German negotiators could find no motive for refusal. Then, as if by chance, in the large Czechoslovak manufacturing town of Moravská Ostrava, there were violent demonstrations among the Sudeten Germans, who now for the first time protested against the imprisonment of some of their number who had been arrested a week previously for disorderly behaviour. The trick proved useful; there were clashes with the police; the Sudeten German leaders protested to Lord Runciman and to the Czech Prime Minister, and in token of their attitude broke off negotiations. Herr Frank, a Sudeten Member of Parliament, went to Nuremberg to report to Hitler.

In Nuremberg the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, sought vainly for an interview with Hitler, to utter a word of warning. He did not get past Ribbentrop. "Your Excellency", said the British diplomat, "I have been instructed to warn Germany. If France is involved in a war with Germany, England could not stand aside."

But the Reich's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the man who once greeted the King of England with the Nazi salute, merely laughed: "Surely you are joking, your Excellency", he replied in an easy, conversational tone. "I know England, and I know that she will not wage a war on Czechoslovakia's account. Just leave us to settle our accounts in the East. We have nothing more to seek in the West."

Sir Nevile reported this conversation over the telephone to his chief, Lord Halifax, and on its way to London the news reached Paris. Other news came along at the same time. The Sudeten Germans declared that they would take the law into their own hands. This was the signal for open revolt. And in a speech at Nuremberg Adolf Hitler said threateningly: "Those who count on our weakness will find themselves mistaken".

France's retort to this was the calling up of her naval reservists. Gamelin, the French Chief of Staff, sent for the German military attaché in Paris, and gave him a detailed report of all the military measures already taken by France—this by way of warning to Germany.

The French soldiers did their duty, while the politicians endeavoured to safeguard what they called peace. There would have been time to bring

Germany to her senses if the soldiers had been allowed to act, and not the politicians. Germany would have drawn back if confronted by the clear determination of France, England and Soviet Russia. The German General Staff had repeatedly warned Hitler against a war in which half Europe would be his foes. But Hitler was not to be scared. He counted on the Great Powers' fear of war, and went on playing his game.

On Saturday, the 10th September, two days before Hitler's Nuremberg speech, Dr. Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia, broadcast a speech in his own country. He expressed his belief in peace and justice, calling upon the populace to keep calm: " Citizens, keep calm ", he said, " the democratic structure of the Republic will remain intact ".

A few hours earlier Goering had made a speech in Nuremberg—a violent, venomous address—to the soldiers, in which he described the Czechs as a " nation of pigmies of whom nobody knows whence they came ".

In Paris M. Daladier conferred with his Chief of General Staff as to further military measures. General Gamelin exerted all his powers of persuasion to convince M. Daladier and the French Government of the importance of Czechoslovakia in the European balance of power. In the afternoon English Ministers in London also conferred with the military men on the General Staff, and here, too, Czechoslovakia's importance was acknowledged; but, at the same time, so was England's unpreparedness for war.

Twenty-four hours before Hitler's speech, all

Europe was engaged in a collective effort to scare the German Dictator. Edouard Herriot, President of the French Chamber, and possibly future President of the French Republic, was using all his influence to induce M. Daladier to stand firm. Further contingents of men were dispatched to the Maginot Line. Journalists in London were authoritatively informed: " In the event of Czechoslovakia being attacked, and the French joining forces with her, England could not stand aside ". In Paris on the day of Hitler's speech on the 12th September a meeting of the Cabinet Council took place, and there was another conference between General Gamelin and the Supreme Council of Defence. Switzerland, Holland and Belgium adopted measures of precaution.

Apparently all these measures were not without some effect. The speech which Hitler made to the whole world on Monday evening was outrageous in tone, but in reality much more moderate in content than had been feared. The German Dictator contented himself with a peremptory challenge to the Prague Government to get on with its task of coming to agreement with the Sudeten Germans " one way or the other " (" So oder so ").

Only a few persons realised that Hitler was biding his time before boldly demanding the surrender of the Sudeten area. On Monday the 12th September Europe was not yet prepared to grant Hitler what he wanted. In England and France some show of resistance was still being put up, and order still prevailed in the Sudeten territory.

The Sudeten Germans go Crazy

Hitler's speech marked the close of a period of comparative calm in Europe. It was the signal for occurrences which in seventeen days were to bring Europe to the brink of war—war which then, certainly, could not have been stopped once Germany had let it loose. Nobody in Europe realised that that day was one of the last on which war could have been prevented and European order safeguarded, if the Western Powers had shown themselves strong enough. All that then ensued were merely measures of desperation taken by the statesmen at the prompting of fear. Hitler had a firm grip of all the strings.

Encouraged by Paris, and strengthened by the decision of the French War Council to proceed to further military measures, the Prague Government on 12th September proclaimed martial law in those Sudeten districts in which there had been disturbances just after Hitler's speech. Eight Czechs and four Germans had been killed in that outbreak.

In Prague, Paris and London important ministerial deliberations took place. The Prague Government asked the French Government through its Minister in Paris: "Will France support Czechoslovakia if she is attacked by Germany?" and an affirmative reply was given by Paris.

On Tuesday afternoon at 5.30 the Sudeten German Party handed an ultimatum to the Prague Government, demanding an immediate suspension of martial law in the Sudeten areas. The ultimatum was to expire in six hours.

Prague and Paris were in communication again, and again the French Government fortified Czechoslovakia in her resistance. "Maintain order and calm at any price", was the advice given to Prague by Paris.

The Czechoslovak Government stated that it was prepared in principle to negotiate with the Sudeten Germans regarding the ultimatum; but no reply to this offer came from Henlein's headquarters in Asch. The time-limit fixed by the Sudeten German Party was approaching, and nothing happened. The Prague Government extended the martial law to more districts in which there had been disorders.

Some days later Henlein and other representatives of the Sudeten German Party fled from Czechoslovakia to Germany. For a day or two the German broadcasting stations maintained that Henlein was still in Czechoslovakia, but such was not the case.

Berchtesgaden—Behind the Scenes

It was the British Intelligence Service that was immediately instrumental in bringing about the first meeting between Hitler and Chamberlain.

In much the same way as the European democracies have shown themselves to be no match for the Dictators, so, too, the famous British Secret Service fell a victim to German bluff. It must be admitted, of course, that this bluff was of such an outrageous nature that it was an easy matter to fall victim to it.

Late in the night of Tuesday, 13th September, No. X, an official of the Intelligence Service in

Germany, obtained possession of a piece of information which was apparently absolutely trustworthy. The German General Staff—according to this—had met in the evening in Munich, and resolved, on Hitler's orders, to march into Czechoslovakia on Wednesday at 6 p.m. To this end the German troops were already massing along the Czech frontier. No. X collected some more information which confirmed that the German troops were indeed on the move. And now this sensational item of news was sent to London in the usual way.

Late on Tuesday night the British General Staff had been advised by a Czech source of the German troop concentrations. Similar information was sent by Prague to Paris also, and via Paris to London. Taken in conjunction with the report of the Intelligence Service, this was all highly disturbing.

Very early next morning all these reports were submitted to Mr. Chamberlain. Coming as they did from three sources, it would naturally not occur to him to doubt their accuracy. One fact stood out: unless someone intervened now, Europe would be plunged into war within twelve hours. Sir John Simon and Lord Halifax were called into consultation with the Prime Minister.

At the same time M. Daladier and M. Bonnet were closeted together in the former's study in the Rue St. Dominique in Paris, and anxiously going through the reports: Sudeten German ultimatum; concentration of troops on the German–Czechoslovak frontier; a situation charged with menace. Would it come to war that very day?

It may very well have been that, just at this

juncture, when the two French statesmen were anxiously conferring together, they were interrupted by a telephone call from No. 10 Downing Street, and heard Mr. Chamberlain himself acquainting them with his decision to send a telegram to Hitler asking for an interview. That this meant a breathing-space, and was therefore warmly welcomed, cannot be doubted.

At noon on Wednesday, after a meeting of the English Cabinet, the telegram drawn up by Mr. Chamberlain himself was sent to the British Embassy in Berlin. Towards evening Mr. Chamberlain procured the assent of the Leader of the Opposition, Major Attlee. But by that time he was already in possession of Hitler's favourable reply. The interview was to take place on Thursday at Berchtesgaden.

French Government and General Staff circles received the report of the interview between Hitler and Mr. Chamberlain with a good deal of uneasiness; M. Daladier was besieged with warnings, and in the afternoon he communicated with the British Prime Minister, and asked him to accede to nothing in Berchtesgaden which might be in the nature of a dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Mr. Chamberlain's reply was reassuring.

. . . . .

Once more German bluff had been successful. The information which No. X had received in Berlin 'from a trustworthy source' was false. The only point of truth in it was that concerning a movement of troops on the Czech border. It would never have occurred to Hitler to march into Czecho-

slovakia in this fashion. His method, as revealed in his book ' Mein Kampf ', is first of all to isolate his victim diplomatically. He had not as yet succeeded in doing so in the case of Czechoslovakia. The small Republic was by no means isolated, seeing that France was still firm and Britain still resolved to stand by France if she went to the aid of the Czechs. No, he would have to wait for a better opportunity.

It is not known who conceived the idea of giving the British Intelligence Service false information of such far-reaching effect. But whoever he may be, he merits the highest distinction that present-day Germany has to bestow—the golden swastika.

Two Men at a Table

On the Thursday morning when Mr. Chamberlain, in his seventieth year, set out on his first trip by air, the European sky was far from peaceful. Martial law had been extended to eighteen districts in Czechoslovakia; frontier affrays and shootings were becoming a regular occurrence; in Eger, the border town between Germany and Czechoslovakia, two hotels, in which adherents of the Sudeten German Party had barricaded themselves, were fired upon; in the Czech frontier village of Schwaderbach forty Czech police and six customs officials were dragged on to German soil by an armed band; at Weipert, another village on the frontier, some German S.A. men crossed the frontier and carried a man and woman off to Germany.

And late at night the leader of the Sudeten German Party—Henlein—had issued a proclamation stating

in the name of the Sudeten Germans that the German population in Czechoslovakia demanded incorporation with Germany.

Mr. Chamberlain knew nothing of this proclamation as he alighted from his aeroplane at the Munich flying-ground.

At Berchtesgaden, as he was slowly ascending the steep steps leading to Hitler's famous terrace, Hitler came a few paces to meet him. The Führer was wearing the uniform of the Germany army, with the iron cross, his only war-decoration, pinned on his breast. His face looked tired and his eyes were red-rimmed. It was easy to see that he had been suffering from lack of sleep. Report has it that Hitler gets scarcely an hour's sleep at night.

He now led his guest into the study. There the two men were alone, except for the interpreter, an official of the German Foreign Office, and one who was well able to cope with his difficult task; for Hitler's words, as ever, flowed from his lips in a torrent. The talk lasted altogether two hours, half of which time was devoted to the general situation, and the other half to particular instances. Hitler did far and away most of the talking, Mr. Chamberlain contenting himself with scribbling down a few notes for future reference.

When the two hours were over, came the climax of the interview. With a " Please read this ", Hitler handed to Mr. Chamberlain a carefully prepared English translation of the Sudeten German proclamation. The British Prime Minister read it with some uneasiness ; simple, short and clear, the document required no second reading.

Then Mr. Chamberlain said that he had come to save the peace, and that this proclamation could not have been drawn up without the knowledge of the Reich Government. He pointed out that this was not a good beginning to their talks, and he asked why Hitler had allowed him to take this trip if the Reich Government had already come to its decision.

Hitler replied that he had decided to free the Sudeten Germans only when he saw the impossibility of an agreement between them and the Prague Government, and when he came into possession of the Sudeten German proclamation.

At this stage Mr. Chamberlain might have remembered that the Sudeten Germans had wilfully repudiated all Prague's concessions; he might have thought of *The Times* article, which had doubtless inspired Hitler's decision. Did he think of it?

Mr. Chamberlain's answer was that it appeared that he was wasting his time, but that he did wish to put one question. This was: did he want peace or war in Europe?

In affirming that he had never wanted anything but peace, Hitler replied that until the Sudeten Germans were satisfied, there could be no peace, but that it was in Mr. Chamberlain's hands to bring the Czechs to reason, and that the Prague Government would do what it was advised to do by the Führer and the Prime Minister. Hitler asked for a guarantee that the British Government would acknowledge the right of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans, saying that he was prepared to consider with Mr. Chamberlain some method of

accomplishing this without a war. If this guarantee was not forthcoming, he would have to agree with Mr. Chamberlain in thinking that to continue the negotiations would be futile.

It was not in Mr. Chamberlain's power to give such an assurance. But he was prepared to discuss the matter with the members of the British Government if Hitler would promise that nothing in the meantime would be done to the prejudice of Czechoslovakia.

To this Hitler gave his consent, but on one condition. That was, that in the meantime nothing should occur in Czechoslovakia which would compel him to hasten to the aid of the Sudeten Germans.

With that the talk came to an end between the two men. Later they met at the tea-table, where the other members of the party were already sitting: von Ribbentrop, the Foreign Minister; Sir Nevile Henderson; Sir Horace Wilson, the economic adviser of Mr. Chamberlain; and the German General Keitel. Hitler's demand was then discussed in detail.

CHAPTER II

NO. 10 DOWNING STREET

WE must now give a short account of events between Mr. Chamberlain's departure from Berchtesgaden on Thursday, 15th September, and the decisive Conference between the British and French Ministers in London on the Sunday.

In Czechoslovakia the Sudeten German Party was

dissolved and warrants were issued against the fugitive leader, Henlein, and his colleagues. Arms were discovered hidden in coffins at the clinic of the German University of Prague and were confiscated. Martial law was extended and order thus maintained throughout the country. Nervousness was increasing among the Sudeten inhabitants. The agitators had fled to Germany, where they were said to have been formed into a Sudeten German Corps. Peace now reigned in the Sudeten regions and a short respite was granted. A strong movement was afoot in favour of an understanding with Prague, and certain moderate leaders among the Sudeten Germans, particularly the leaders of the Catholic section, were negotiating with the Government. They did not wish to be transferred to Germany, still less did they want to become the cause of war. They had long criticised the intransigence of Henlein and his supporters, and wanted to settle matters with the Prague Government on the basis of the substantial concessions already promised.

This news caused alarm in Germany. Such a course had at all costs to be prevented. Czechoslovakia must not be allowed a moment's peace, or she might come to terms with the Sudeten Germans and it would be seen where the truth really lay.

During the night of Saturday and Sunday, on which day MM. Daladier and Bonnet were to fly to London at the invitation of the British Government, an armed attack was made from Germany against the customs house at Eger. Innocent members of the Czech minority in Germany were imprisoned.

At this point Mussolini, from whom nothing up

to then had been heard, thought it time to take a hand. For the moment, however, he was too late. Speaking at Trieste, he urged a plebiscite in the Sudeten areas, obviously unaware that Hitler was merely laughing at his ally's zeal—if he was still in the mood for laughter. Hitler's demands went much further than that: he wanted the Sudeten areas without a plebiscite.

When the negotiations between the British and French statesmen began at No. 10 Downing Street early on Sunday morning, Czechoslovakia had not yet abandoned hope. The people still did not know, though President Beneš and the Government had already been told by Paris and London, that Hitler was demanding from the Czechs all districts in which there were more than 50 per cent. Sudeten Germans. This without a plebiscite and as soon as possible.

During the days between Thursday and Sunday President Beneš had exerted with the Western Powers the whole of his not inconsiderable influence. The Czechoslovak Ministers in London and Paris had done the same. On Sunday morning, when the discussions in London began, it was still believed in Prague that France would not give way.

M. Daladier himself, when he entered the aeroplane at Le Bourget, did not know whether he would yield. During the previous two days he had been swayed by the influence of various personal and political friends. There was no lack of powerful opinion in favour of supporting Czechoslovakia firmly against Germany. At the same time there was much influence in the opposite direction. Above all, the Foreign Minister, M. Bonnet, was

in favour of giving way, if Germany offered certain guarantees. And he had the majority of the French Cabinet behind him. The Prime Minister alone was still undecided.

The discussions between the French and British Ministers in London lasted the whole of Sunday and, after a long debate, ended in an undertaking by MM. Daladier and Bonnet to recommend the French Cabinet to accept a decision by which Czechoslovakia should hand over to Germany all districts where there were more than 50 per cent. Sudeten Germans. Those areas with a smaller percentage of Germans should receive extensive rights of self-government. The territory to be handed over would be fixed by an international commission, and only then be occupied by the German Army. The population of the ceded areas would of course be granted all rights, including that of emigrating and carrying its personal property with it. Moreover, before Czechoslovakia ceded the areas in question, Great Britain, France and Germany would provide a joint guarantee. M. Daladier had had to fight hard for the British guarantee, which Great Britain was unwilling to give. She agreed, however, at last, and, after mutual congratulations, the French Ministers left London in the morning of Monday, 19th September.

Prague Receives an Ultimatum—from her Allies

For seventy-two hours the President of Czechoslovakia and the members of his Government had had scarcely any sleep. The terms communicated by the two Western democracies to the small democratic

State in Central Europe were harder than those imposed upon a defeated foe after a war.

Within the shortest possible time the Czechoslovak Government was to make up its mind to cede large, wealthy and important territories, to surrender factories, coal-mines, power-stations, iron, porcelain and radium, and to deliver over the natural mountain frontiers of the State because its friends in the West desired it.

When, towards evening, the first reports reached Prague from London concerning the progress of the British and French discussions, a Cabinet meeting was summoned, over which President Beneš presided. Discussion turned upon what was to be done if France left Czechoslovakia in the lurch. Deepest pessimism prevailed, but no one believed that France, in whom so much faith had been placed, could sacrifice her friend and ally to the enemy at this most critical hour.

Further reports arriving from London during the meeting foreshadowed the worst.

Towards three in the morning the French Minister in Prague asked for an audience with the President. Their conversation lasted a full forty minutes, and when Dr. Beneš returned to the waiting members of the Cabinet, they read their fate in his look of distress.

The Prime Minister asked if the reports were true. Beneš nodded. The Ministers then departed.

At 10 a.m. on Monday the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Dr. Krofta, invited the French Minister in Prague to visit him at the Foreign Office. Dr. Krofta, like other members of the Czech Government, had had very little sleep of late. He was

tired, but pulled himself together when the French Minister arrived. The latter told him that he had nothing favourable to report, and that the Ministers in London had agreed on matters of principle. The Foreign Minister nodded and said nothing. The French Minister added that the Cabinet was meeting in Paris at that moment, and from what he had heard, he did not doubt that they would accept the arrangement proposed. M. de la Croix then took his leave.

The Foreign Minister seized the telephone and asked for Paris. There was still some faint hope of a Cabinet crisis in France. Surely France could not betray her ally and abandon her at the critical moment? The call came through. No, there was no likelihood of a Cabinet crisis; individual Ministers might resign, but not the whole Cabinet. Moreover, the whole of public opinion was against a strong line, fearing that Hitler might carry out his threat of war. Public opinion was bewildered. All talk was of the necessity of peace at any price. The Czechoslovak Legation in Paris could report nothing which would justify optimism.

The meeting of the Paris Cabinet, presided over by M. Lebrun, ended at midday. M. Daladier reported on the London discussion. This was followed by a debate, in which a number of Ministers at first refused to join. When M. Paul Reynaud, Minister of Justice, pointed out that France would be breaking her treaty obligations, the Prime Minister denied that this was the case, and said that they were merely recommending to Prague the resolutions adopted in London. When asked whether, if Prague refused, France would insist

upon Czech acceptance, M. Daladier replied that in that case the Cabinet would meet again to decide on its further course. At the end of the meeting the Foreign Minister was instructed to transmit the results to the French Minister at Prague.

The scene now changed to the Castle at Prague at 5 p.m. The British and French Ministers called upon President Beneš. What they had to tell him was no news, for he had known for hours that he had nothing better to expect. When the Ministers handed him the British and French Note, he thanked them, saying that he would submit the matter to the Czechoslovak Government. The British Minister reminded the President that time was short, and Dr. Beneš, as he shook hands with them, promised to bear that fact in mind.

In Paris, at 6 p.m., the French Foreign Minister telephoned to Dr. Osuský, the Czechoslovak Minister, saying that he would like to communicate to him the London decisions. These Dr. Osuský already knew. When told that there was not much chance of any negotiations, he asked whether there was any purpose in his visiting M. Bonnet, but, as the French Foreign Minister was insistent, Dr. Osuský left on what must have been the bitterest mission in his life.

Journalists waited impatiently for him in the lobbies of the Foreign Ministry at the Quai d'Orsay. The conversation lasted only about twenty minutes. Dr. Osuský observed diplomatic correctness as long as he was with the Minister, but, on leaving the room, dropped further pretence.

"A country has been condemned without being heard", he said to the surrounding journalists.

And it was true; his country was condemned. Its friends and allies had delivered an ultimatum to it.

Hitler Ponders

Meanwhile Adolf Hitler was locked in his study at Berchtesgaden and refused to see anyone. His henchmen knew what this meant, for this was Hitler's way when he had to make an important decision. What would it be this time?

The world would soon know, for on Thursday there was to be a second meeting between Hitler and Mr. Chamberlain at Godesberg, an attractive little town on the Rhine.

Hitler interrupted his meditations for one short space on the Tuesday morning, when he received the Hungarian Foreign Minister, de Kánya, and the Polish Minister in Berlin, M. Lipski, who at his request had hastened to Berchtesgaden.

Hungary and Poland, both Germany's friends, felt that their moment had arrived, for they guessed that Hitler was about to enforce territorial cessions by Czechoslovakia. Both countries would be glad to share in these. Poland laid claim to a small area, known as the Teschen district, inhabited by 100,000 Poles, which had been allotted to Czechoslovakia in 1920 after a local plebiscite. Hungary wanted part of Slovakia, where lived some 700,000 Hungarians. The district had been allotted to Czechoslovakia by the Treaty of Versailles, in order that the new State might have access to the Danube, the most important river in Central Europe.

The representatives of the two States now gave respectful ear to Hitler's word.

Hitler was calculating that, since the Great

Powers had accepted his first plan so easily, he would now make much more sweeping demands, which they would also have to accept.

The details of the plan were discussed shortly, and on the same day the diplomatic representatives of Poland and Hungary notified to all the capitals of Europe their claims to parts of Czechoslovakia.

This was another master-stroke by Hitler. For years Hungarian claims to territorial revision had been sponsored by Signor Mussolini, but now Hitler secured the friendship of Hungary, which he urgently needed for the pursuit of his aims in Central Europe.

With the Abyssinian adventure and the increase in Germany's strength, Mussolini's star in Central Europe was on the wane. In spite of her friendship with Italy, Germany had already seized Austria, Mussolini's second protégé in Europe. And now she was performing immensely valuable service for Hungary. She could thus feel sure of Hungarian loyalty, and Hungary would no longer be an obstacle to Germany's progress towards the oil-fields of Rumania and the wheat-fields of the Ukraine.

Mussolini watched these developments with suspicion. He travelled from one North Italian town to another, from Trieste to Udine, from Udine to Verona, from Verona to Vicenza, everywhere making speeches to which nobody in Europe paid any attention. He was furious, but there was nothing he could do. For the moment he had to look on helpless, while Hitler arranged things in Central Europe. Mussolini was fettered to the Rome–Berlin axis.

M. Bonnet Takes the Law into his own Hands

The Czechoslovak Government was maintaining order in the Sudeten districts and was continuing to negotiate. It negotiated throughout Tuesday, until six in the afternoon. The decision was difficult, but it had to be taken, and time pressed. The Ministers of Great Britain and France had already made two *démarches* to the President. London and Paris were impatient. Czechoslovakia must not be too long committing suicide, for the sake of European peace.

In London and Paris demonstrations were being held in favour of Czechoslovakia. In London crowds paraded the streets, in Paris delegations waited upon the Czech Minister.

And in Prague discussion still went on. It was not until evening that they concluded and an official note was sent to London and Paris. It accepted the arrangement in principle, but asked that an international conference, attended by Czechoslovakia, should decide in the matter, and that the existence of the Republic should be duly safeguarded.

Within an hour Paris and London replied that this was not enough, and asked for a further decision.

Late that night the Czechoslovak Cabinet met once more. This time the proposal by the Czech Minister in Paris was accepted, and Paris and London were told that Czechoslovakia was willing to submit the case to a court of arbitration. This court had been agreed upon between Germany and Czechoslovakia in a Treaty concluded in 1925.

Obviously, the main concern of the Czechoslovak

Government was to gain time. If only there were a respite for a few days, all German democrats and all Sudeten Germans who did not wish to join the Reich could be mobilised and show the world that, if not a majority, at any rate a very large number of Sudeten Germans did not want to be united with Germany. If only there were a respite for a few days, things might change in Paris. If only there were more time!

At 11.30 p.m. the French Minister in Prague learnt from his British colleague that London had sent him instructions to make a fresh démarche to the Prague Government, at once and in strong terms.

At 11.40 the telephone rang in the office of the French Minister. M. Bonnet himself was on the line. He had just been talking with London and had heard of this new démarche. He now instructed his Minister in Prague to act jointly with his British colleague, and he pointed out that France, too, insisted upon acceptance of the ultimatum.

The French Foreign Minister had apparently forgotten that the Paris Cabinet had decided on the previous day to meet again, should Czechoslovakia refuse the London proposals. It had never been said that Paris would compel the Prague Government to accept. If the Prague Government had refused, and had thereupon been attacked by Germany, France would have had to come to her assistance.

But M. Bonnet had already once declared that, as long as he was in the Government, there should be no war. Even without a Cabinet decision, the Prague Government should still be forced, by Paris also, to accept the conditions. Thus French foreign

policy was directed from London, and what London decided, Paris approved. The Prague Government would now accept and the French Foreign Minister would be justified by success.

At midnight the French and British Ministers asked President Beneš for an audience. The President could not receive them at once, for the Cabinet was still sitting. Even now it was believed that France would support Czechoslovakia if things came to the worst.

A Terrible Night and a Sombre Day

Through the silent streets of the old city of Prague two cars dashed up to the Castle, the residence of the President of Czechoslovakia. It was 2 a.m. on Wednesday, 21st September.

A few minutes before, the French and British Ministers had been informed by telephone that President Beneš would receive them in a few moments.

At exactly 2.15 a.m. the two Ministers were shown into the President's study. Dr. Beneš rose from his desk and, advancing to meet the men who had brought him so much bad news in the past two days, shook them by the hand.

M. de la Croix, the French Minister, was a friend of the Czechs and hated his duty, but he had to obey orders. Mr. Newton, the British Minister, was showing a more detached attitude towards the struggle of a small people for its very existence. He was not very fond of the Czechs.

Mr. Newton spoke first. He said that he had been instructed by his Government to say that the Czech counter-proposals were unsatisfactory. His Majesty's Government insisted upon the immediate

acceptance of the proposals made jointly with the French Government. Otherwise the Czechoslovak Government must take all the consequences.

M. de la Croix then said that the French Government was of one mind with the Government of Great Britain and recommended the Czechoslovak Government to accept the London proposals, and declared that Czechoslovakia, should she decide otherwise, could not rely upon French help.

There was a silence. The clock of St. Vitus' Church near by struck half-past two.

President Beneš then spoke. He seemed to have thrown off his fatigue, and with his right hand, in which he held his glasses, he emphasised his words.

The result of the interview at Berchtesgaden between the German Chancellor and the Hungarian Foreign Minister and Polish Ambassador had been made known to him, he said, a few hours earlier. It had there been decided that these three countries should co-operate in dividing up Czechoslovakia between themselves or in making her existence impossible. Here was further proof that Germany's main concern was not to bring the Sudeten Germans within the Reich. Germany wanted to destroy Czechoslovakia, because it was an obstacle in her eastward path. Once Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, or if her resistance was crippled, there would be nobody to oppose Germany. In a short time she would be on the shores of the Black Sea and threatening British influence in Asia Minor. It had to be borne in mind that the question of Czechoslovakia was a European question, a world question even. If the Western Powers now yielded to Germany and allowed her to destroy Czechoslovakia, it

would be the first step towards German domination over Europe. Surely it could not be Great Britain's purpose to allow this?

President Beneš had finished. He is not a good speaker. His words are dry, and he lacks fire; he aims at convincing by force of argument rather than by persuasive tones. On this occasion, however, all his arguments were in vain.

The British Minister replied courteously, but drily, that the British Government had taken note of the conversations between Hitler, de Kánya and Lipski, and he felt justified in assuming that his Government were aware of President Beneš's views.

It was a diplomatic refusal.

President Beneš then asked how long Czechoslovakia would be given to answer the Note. Until that same afternoon, he was told. The President rose, and the two Ministers followed suit. The French Minister expressed the hope that the Czechoslovak Government would accept the terms. If they did not, he said, it would be simply suicide.

The President replied: "We shall do what the Western Powers believe to be in the interests of European peace".

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Europe slept. Only on the borders between Czechoslovakia and Germany small detachments of Czechoslovak police still kept watch. There were not many soldiers in the frontier districts, for Czechoslovakia was afraid that this would be regarded by Germany as provocation. In consequence, isolated Czechoslovak sentry-posts were continually exposed to attack by armed Sudeten

Germans, who came over from Germany and escaped back again.

Europe slept. Only at the Castle in Prague the responsible leaders of Czechoslovakia still conferred on the fate of their country. Some were in favour of a flat refusal by Czechoslovakia and a fight to the last man. But reason finally prevailed. A resolution was adopted in the early hours of the morning, and was communicated to the representatives of the political parties, who proceeded to negotiate with the Government throughout the morning.

Quite early, however, the Ministers of the two Western democracies were informed that the answer was an acceptance.

The Foreign Minister, Dr. Krofta, handed the Czechoslovak reply to the British and French Ministers at five in the afternoon: Czechoslovakia, under pressure from her friends, accepted Hitler's terms and was ready to surrender large territories to Germany.

The news of the Czech acceptance and of the dramatic events of the night of Tuesday–Wednesday was received in Western Europe with relief, but with no enthusiasm.

France felt ashamed. It was the first time in her history that she had failed to observe a treaty and left a friend in the lurch. It was an open confession of weakness and a bad omen for the future.

Between M. Daladier and his Foreign Minister there was a stormy scene. The Prime Minister now learnt for the first time what had happened during the preceding night, and he blamed the Foreign Minister for taking matters into his own hands and

compelling the Prague Government to accept the terms. Several members of the French Government clamoured for M. Bonnet's resignation, and threatened to resign if he did not. But no resignations followed; the headlong course of events had dazed everyone.

At Geneva M. Litvinoff, the Soviet Foreign Minister, declared that Russia would come to the help of Czechoslovakia under her treaty, provided France did the same.

France felt ashamed, but she had no intention of coming to Czechoslovakia's help. Even had she wished to, it was now too late. The public had been told of Prague's acceptance.

In London Winston Churchill said: "This is the bankruptcy of the Western Powers. Such a settlement cannot bring peace. Not Czechoslovakia alone is threatened, but the liberties of all peoples."

At Stratford-on-Avon the former Foreign Minister, Mr. Anthony Eden, uttered words of warning and urged the Government to stand fast.

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Already by Wednesday morning dark rumours were circulating in Prague, but nothing definite was known. It was not till late in the day that the Minister of Propaganda announced on the wireless: "We have accepted in order to avoid bloodshed. The case is unique in history; our friends and allies have imposed upon us terms which are usually dictated to a defeated enemy."

From the loud-speakers in the streets the crowd heard the message telling them that their country had been deserted by all its friends and allies and forced to accept hard terms. A cry of despair broke

from all lips. Cars and trams came to a standstill and the streets filled with people wishing to give voice to their feelings.

Exactly a year before, the streets of Prague had been filled with the lamentations of the crowd which attended the burial of Czechoslovakia's greatest citizen, Thomas Garrigue Marasyk, president and philosopher.

Now, a year later, the people of Prague were again plunged in grief and despair. It was not so much that Czechoslovakia was compelled to hand over rich districts to Germany, her oppressor. It was rather grief at being deserted by those whom she had looked upon as her friends and allies—the thought that the small Czechoslovak Republic was being sacrificed by the two great Western democracies.

War Knocks at the Door

" The Hitler–Chamberlain conversations at Godesberg have broken down! Czechoslovakia is mobilising! In one night France has called up 340,000 more men! "

Such were the sensational reports which set Europe quaking on Friday, 23rd September. In the course of twice twenty-four hours this unhappy Continent had been plunged from expectation of peace to the verge of war.

Tanks, mechanised artillery and infantry were marching through Prague towards the German frontier. Trains crowded with reservists were leaving the Paris Gare de l'Est for the Maginot Line.

Throughout the night of Friday–Saturday Prague and Paris awaited the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the German army and the outbreak of a European war.

The German wireless stations had told their listeners to keep their sets turned on, as an important announcement would be made. Meanwhile the 'Deutschlandsender' played gramophone records. At first, ominous military marches. Then light music by Schubert, selections from Weber and Lortzing, with nothing martial about them.

Was it possible that music of this sort could be the prelude to universal slaughter?

It was not. No declaration of war followed. At 3.10 a.m. the following official communiqué was read over the German wireless:—

> "The three-hour conversation between Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Chancellor Adolf Hitler ended at half-past one this morning. When the friendly conversation ended Chancellor Hitler handed the British Prime Minister a memorandum stating Germany's final proposals, which Mr. Chamberlain will transmit to Prague."

GODESBERG

The Grand Hotel Dreesen, at Godesberg-on-the-Rhine, where Mr. Chamberlain and Hitler were to have their second conversation, has historical associations for Adolf Hitler. It belongs to an old fellow-combatant and friend of his. Here it was that Hitler, before he became Chancellor, built up his Party and made propaganda for it; here, too, he often came for relaxation. It was there that, on 30th June 1934, he learnt of the revolt plotted against him by his friend and fellow-combatant, August Roehm, and other members of the Party. On that occasion he had flown at once to Munich and shot Roehm with his own hand. During the days that followed, the General in command of the German

army, his wife and many hundreds of others met a violent death in the ensuing purge.

It was certainly not by accident that Hitler had arranged this second conversation at the Hotel Dreesen at Godesberg. Like many Germans, he is fond of symbols.

When the British Prime Minister landed at Cologne on this Thursday, 22nd September, the scenes that had attended his departure from London were still fresh in his mind.

"Stand by Czechoslovakia", the crowd had shouted as he left No. 10 Downing Street for the aerodrome. At Heston airport many people had waved Czech flags to show the sympathy of the people of Great Britain for a small country.

Mr. Chamberlain had come to Godesberg armed with the assent of the Czechoslovak Government and with a French power of attorney. It was his intention to conclude with Hitler all reasonable arrangements arising out of this Czechoslovak acceptance.

And yet he did not feel too hopeful. During Wednesday he had received news that Germany was going to demand a great deal more, and intended to espouse the claims of Poland and Hungary against Czechoslovakia. That had not been foreseen. France and England had certainly no wish to destroy the whole Czechoslovak State.

Towards midday, when Mr. Chamberlain was still on his way from Cologne to Godesberg, Chancellor Hitler sent for his generals at the Hotel Dreesen and gave them a lecture.

On the table lay a large map of Czechoslovakia. It was a map prepared by the German General Staff, and all the fortifications of Czechoslovakia were

shown in black. Hitler's generals had already given several warnings of these fortresses, saying that they were strategically well placed and that, if it came to war, their capture would cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Czechoslovakia was a fortress and, before it could be taken, effective help would arrive from the Western Powers and Soviet Russia. The generals repeated these warnings, but Hitler cut them short. These were his orders:

> "I want all measures taken for an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia. We shall march in even if it means a world war. I have pledged my word to the whole German people. I am not going to be intimidated by Czech fortresses or by anybody."

The meeting continued some twenty minutes longer, Hitler issuing further instructions and receiving information from his generals on technical questions.

The Generals left in silence. Even the most loyal of them were filled with apprehension. They knew better than anyone how long Germany could wage a war and who would have to bear the whole blame if the war were lost.

Was there perhaps some truth in the rumours current in Paris and London that the Generals would arrest Hitler if he ventured on war ?

But Hitler knew exactly what he was doing. He knew, of course, that his bluff had already been so successful that he could no longer withdraw, even if he wished to. That, however, did not worry him. During these past years Hitler had banked upon his luck—and upon a sound calculation of the weaknesses of others.

A few minutes after the Generals had gone he told

his Foreign Minister that he would not sign anything with Chamberlain until he held the Czech fortifications. What he might sign then, he would decide for himself.

At the Hotel Petersberg, high up in the hills across the Rhine, where Mr. Chamberlain and his suite were to stay, rumours were rife: at Prague popular indignation had overthrown the Hodza Government and replaced it by a Cabinet with General Syrový at its head. Only Syrový and one other general represented the army in the new government; all the rest were civilians. But it augured ill for the beginning of the talks. Around Downing Street there had been clashes between the crowds and the police. Demonstrators were carrying posters "Chamberlain must go! Stand by Czechoslovakia." The leaders of the Sudeten Germans were beginning to occupy villages in the Sudeten regions. On orders from Prague the Czechoslovak gendarmerie were not resisting. The German morning and afternoon papers demanded the removal of Czechoslovakia from the map of Europe.

Mr. Chamberlain, as he looked from the windows at the lovely valley of the Rhine below, felt pessimistic about the probable outcome of the conversations. Across the river stood the Hotel Dreesen, draped in flags. There Adolf Hitler awaited his British guest.

At 4.35 p.m. a car drove up to the Hotel Dreesen and, as Mr. Chamberlain alighted, Adolf Hitler appeared in the hotel doorway.

This time Neville Chamberlain had no steep steps to climb, as at Berchtesgaden a week earlier. Only five steps led from the drive to the lounge of the hotel, where the talk was to begin.

Hitler welcomed his guest and, after inquiries about his journey, led him in. It was tea-time, and von Ribbentrop, formerly German Ambassador in London, was well versed in British customs. Mr. Chamberlain sipped his tea with relish. Hitler drank with him, for, though he touches no alcohol, he likes a good cup of tea.

The conversation turned upon indifferent matters. Hitler drew his guest's attention to the up-to-date furnishing of the hotel and, as proudly as if he were himself the owner, pointed out that the whole grounds could in the twinkling of an eye be converted into a covered winter-garden. He even offered to perform this miracle for Mr. Chamberlain, who, however, smilingly waved the suggestion aside.

Then, a few minutes before five, the two men withdrew. Once again they were alone together. The interpreter was the only other person present.

This time Mr. Chamberlain spoke first. He said that he had brought with him the reply of the British and French Governments to Hitler's proposal of the previous Thursday. They had, he said, asked the Prague Government to hand over to Germany areas where there were more than 50 per cent. Germans. The Prague Government had agreed. He had come to Godesberg to report this fact and to communicate at the same time the British and French proposals as to how the plan should be executed.

" I did not expect ", Hitler answered, " that Great Britain and France would recognise the right of the Sudeten Germans to self-determination ", and there was something like a smile on his jaded face.

Mr. Chamberlain was taken aback. The Chan-

cellor's words rankled, but he kept his feelings to himself.

He then outlined the plan which London and Paris had prepared and which had been communicated to Czechoslovakia before she accepted the terms dictated by London.

It was, in the circumstances, a fair settlement, the aim of which was to allow unfortunate Czechoslovakia to make the transfer of the Sudeten German territories with the maximum of honour and the minimum of unnecessary sacrifice. An international commission was to fix the areas to be ceded to Germany. Until then those areas were to remain under Czechoslovak control, and only be handed over when the frontiers were settled. Order might in the meantime be maintained by members of the British Legion. The new frontiers would naturally be drawn in such a way as to take into account the most essential economic requirements of the country. If necessary, there should be an exchange of populations. The inhabitants would, of course, be allowed to take with them all their movable property. Finally, France and Great Britain offered to guarantee the new Czechoslovak frontiers. They expected, of course, Mr. Chamberlain concluded, that Germany would participate in this joint guarantee.

For a few moments there was silence. Then Hitler jumped up. Resting his right hand on the edge of the table, and gesticulating freely with his left, he spoke, as if addressing a big meeting.

"Shortly before we began our conversation, I received news from Prague that a military dictatorship has been proclaimed. They want to threaten

me, you see, to force my hand. This Bolshevist crowd in Prague wants nothing less than war and to bring Soviet Russia into Central Europe. At the very moment when you propose that I should guarantee the Czech frontier, a military dictatorship is proclaimed in Prague."

Hitler had begun his remarks in comparatively moderate tones, but the more he said, the quicker his words became, the louder his voice. Hitler was never a diplomat. Before becoming Chancellor, he had been a party leader, a popular orator. He does not therefore choose his words like a diplomat. It is his habit to say exactly what he thinks.

Fortunately, Mr. Chamberlain understood no German. The tone of Hitler's voice betrayed his excitement, but the interpreter was tactful enough to reproduce the Führer's words in more moderate phraseology.

Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the new Government in Prague was not a dictatorship, still less a military dictatorship. There were only two generals in the Cabinet. To this the reply was that Hitler refused to put up with such impudence on the part of the Czechs. They had taken advantage of his leniency. He had wanted to march into Czechoslovakia a week ago, and only desisted to please Mr. Chamberlain. Now his patience was exhausted, and he would give the order that day. Everything was ready.

Mr. Chamberlain, not used to this form of conversation, began to feel uncomfortable. A British Prime Minister is not accustomed to discussions conducted on such lines as these. Still, an Englishman stands his ground, and Mr. Chamberlain in his

turn raised his voice. Such orders were quite unnecessary, he said, for the Czechs had voluntarily abandoned the Sudeten areas.

The Czechs were a pack of liars, said Hitler, and he didn't believe them.

Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the British and French Governments should surely be good enough guarantors to assure him that Czechoslovakia would fulfil the obligations she had accepted.

Hitler agreed, but only on other conditions. Mr. Chamberlain felt dismayed, realising that the reports were true which said that Germany would demand much more, and expressed surprise that the conditions were to be altered.

Hitler refused, above all, to allow any international commission to decide what belonged to him, saying that such a commission would just suit the Czechs, who would in the meantime continue to terrorise the Sudeten Germans, carry off everything movable and leave the whole country in ruins.

Hitler was thinking no doubt of the Czech fortresses, but he did not say so.

Such a commission would take far too long. He did not want to waste time. He wanted the Sudeten districts united to Germany with the least possible delay. If this was not done voluntarily, Germany was strong enough to enforce her rights by arms.

Mr. Chamberlain suggested that the question of an international commission might be settled by negotiation. He inquired whether Hitler was willing to guarantee the new Czech frontiers jointly with England and France.

What did England want in Central Europe? asked Hitler. Why should they want to guarantee the

Czech frontier? Mr. Chamberlain replied with some warmth that it was for England to decide whose frontiers she desired to guarantee.

Hitler modified his tone a little. He saw that he had offended Mr. Chamberlain, and that was not his intention.

He explained that Germany would guarantee the Czechoslovak frontiers provided that other neighbouring states and Italy did the same. He would like to point out that Poland and Hungary had submitted just claims to Czechoslovak territory.

Mr. Chamberlain knew it. The Polish and Hungarian Ministers in London had officially informed him of this on the previous day. His fears that Hitler would make himself the spokesman of these States were now confirmed.

"But you," he said, now tired and discouraged, "are only concerned with the cause of the Sudeten Germans. Once the Sudeten Germans are satisfied, surely Germany could be asked to guarantee the new frontier."

Hitler answered that he stood by what he had just said.

Despite his disappointment, Mr. Chamberlain persisted. He asked whether Hitler would be willing to conclude a pact of non-aggression with Czechoslovakia, supposing his claims were met.

Hitler's answer was that he would conclude no such pact unless the Polish and Hungarian claims were satisfied.

The *tête-à-tête* was at an end. It had lasted an hour and twenty minutes.

CHAPTER III

HERR HITLER DRAWS A MAP

THE surprises which the day held for Neville Chamberlain were not yet over.

The two men withdrew to an ante-room where several people were already assembled, amongst them von Ribbentrop and Sir Nevile Henderson.

A large map was spread out on the table. It was a map of Czechoslovakia, on which curious lines had been drawn by hand in red and green pencil.

Hitler's intimates have an anecdote to tell about this map. Hitler had drawn it himself in Berchtesgaden and shown it to his collaborator, von Ribbentrop. The Foreign Minister had ventured to say that it might be a good idea to get a similar map printed, but Hitler is reported to have said that as long as it was only drawn in pencil, it could be modified with an indiarubber.

I cannot say whether this anecdote is true or not. This much we do know, however: Hitler had done a thorough piece of work. The map he displayed to the British Prime Minister showed nothing remaining to Czechoslovakia but the caricature of a State. Bohemia and Moravia were completely surrounded on all sides by Germany. At one point the scrap of country remaining in Czech hands was only twenty miles across. The most vital railway lines of the country, the two connecting Prague with Brno, the Moravian capital and Bratislava, the Slovak capital, respectively were each twice cut across by German territory.

Mr. Chamberlain had never himself seen the country; the map did not mean a great deal to him, but the red and green lines caught his eye.

The German Chancellor explained that the red lines denoted the districts which must at once be handed over to the Germans; the green ones showed the districts where a plebiscite must be held. There was no objection to the plebiscite taking place under international supervision.

The idea of a plebiscite surprised Mr. Chamberlain, who thought that it was quite unnecessary, and that Germany would be getting, without a plebiscite, all the territories in which there were more than 50 per cent. of Germans.

Hitler then pointed out that there were several other districts in Czechoslovakia containing Germans. All German groups living in Czechoslovakia should be given the opportunity of expressing themselves in favour of a return to Germany. Who cared for percentages, when the rights of the German People were at stake?

By this time Mr. Chamberlain was thoroughly bewildered. It is true that he did not then know that compact Czech majorities existed in the districts which Hitler had outlined in green; nor did he know that these were districts containing the headquarters of the Czech heavy industries. He was quite clear, however, about one point. Here was something quite different from what had been discussed in Berchtesgaden.

Stiffly he inquired whether there were any further communications to make.

Certainly there were. The solution proposed by London and Paris was by no means acceptable to

the Führer. He wished the territories which he had indicated to be occupied by the German Army within the shortest possible space of time, so that the Sudeten German population might be protected from further territorism by the Czechs.

That being the case, Mr. Chamberlain considered that further negotiations were superfluous, and decided to return to London to take counsel with his Cabinet colleagues and with Paris.

The two men looked at each other.

Hitler had arranged a private telephone connection for Mr. Chamberlain between London and his hotel on the Petersberg, having already explained that time was pressing, and that if Mr. Chamberlain flew to London for a consultation much valuable time would be lost. Hitler added that his patience with the Czechs was exhausted, and he could give no guarantee that he might not immediately intervene if there were any unrest in the Sudeten districts.

The interpreter rendered Hitler's statement into English, word for word.

Finally Mr. Chamberlain yielded.

He said he would stay and continue the discussion on the next day. Meantime he would get into touch with the Cabinet in London and, through London, with Paris.

Hitler could scarcely conceal his pleasure. A few minutes later, when they began to draw up a joint communiqué, he grew obstinate again, and would accept nothing which might serve to encourage Czechoslovakia. Discussion over the text of the joint communiqué lasted for some time; several drafts were drawn up and again rejected. Finally

Mr. Chamberlain alone handed to the waiting journalists a statement which constituted an appeal to both the interested parties—Germany and Czechoslovakia—to take no steps which might add to the difficulty of the negotiations.

As he took leave of his English visitor Hitler said: " I expect a clear and unambiguous decision at our session to-morrow ".

Mr. Chamberlain thereupon returned to his hotel on the Petersberg. He was tired and dispirited. The negotiations had reached a deadlock. No further concessions could be forced from Czechoslovakia, and England's prestige was at stake. If Great Britain now gave way to Hitler, what would the prospects be for the future of Europe?

While Europe waited in feverish tension for the result of the Godesberg conversations, Mr. Chamberlain made use of the telephone connection with London which Hitler had installed for him.

Paris Interlude

The Daladier Government in Paris was in a bad way on that momentous Thursday when Mr. Chamberlain was interviewing Hitler in Godesberg. Several members of the French Cabinet were in open revolt against the policy which led to Prague's acceptance of the ultimatum. It was common knowledge that Prime Minister Daladier was easily susceptible to influence from any quarter. His intentions were excellent, but what use was that when he could not take a simple, clear line and stick to it, when he would let himself be influenced by M. Bonnet, by his entourage and by all his political friends who wanted peace at any price provided

only that France could, for the moment, be saved from war?

The dissatisfaction of certain members of the Cabinet was therefore primarily directed against M. Bonnet. The most radical of the dissidents was Paul Reynaud, Minister of Justice.

The two other rebellious members of the Cabinet, MM. Mandel, Minister for Colonies, and Champetier de Ribes, Minister of Pensions, met on that Thursday morning at M. Reynaud's. They discussed the critical situation and condemned the arbitrary action of M. Bonnet, who, on his own sole initiative, had forced Prague to accept the ultimatum. They decided to resign that very day.

An atmosphere of crisis prevailed in the lobbies of the French Chamber. Even in the forenoon little hope was felt that the Godesberg negotiations could be successful. Even if they were, the Socialists were dissatisfied and the Communists were raging. Both groups had decided to demand the immediate summoning of Parliament, to impeach the Government and to bring about M. Daladier's fall.

For the first time in history, France had betrayed an Ally; she had failed to honour the signature she had placed to a treaty eight years ago. She had done worse: she had compelled her Ally to accept the humiliating demands of the enemy. France's position as a Great Power was shattered. Who would in future want to conclude a treaty with a country which did not respect its treaties? France's allies and friends in the Balkans, Rumania and Yugoslavia, would turn their backs on France. Germany, France's immemorial enemy in Europe, would be the strongest Power on the Continent.

Members of Parliament excitedly discussed the situation in the lobbies of the House.

" France has handed in her resignation ", declared Henri de Kerrilis of the Right; " the people of France have been smitten with blindness. They do not see that later on we shall have to fight the war which we could now risk with relative assurance. Later we shall fight under far less favourable conditions. I shall tell my constituents so, even if they repudiate me."

M. Jacquinot, another member, cried in excitement: " To-day we refuse to fight for Czechoslovakia. If this goes on we shall to-morrow refuse to defend Alsace Lorraine against Germany."

With bitter irony he continued: " If Czechoslovakia takes Germany on single-handed, I shall fight as a volunteer in the Czech army. I shall make one stipulation only. If I fall, they must write over my grave: ' Died for France '."

Exciting news was received in Parliament at noon. General François Faucher, Chief of the French Military Mission in Czechoslovakia, had returned all his French decorations, renounced his rank of general in the French Army and placed himself at the disposal of the Czech Army as military adviser.

This news was little calculated to allay the crisis atmosphere that reigned in Paris. It was already common knowledge that the Ministers Reynaud, Mandel and de Ribes were intending to resign.

The Delegation of the Parties of the Left, a parliamentary committee of the parties of the Popular Front, was clamouring for the Chamber to be summoned. The atmosphere was sultry, negotiations stormy. The Radical Socialists, the Party to

which M. Daladier belonged, could not decide to join in this demand, for they knew that it was contrary to the wishes of their Party chief.

. . . . .

M. Jeanneney, President of the Senate, and M. Edouard Herriot, President of the Chamber, called on M. Daladier. Both were seriously alarmed at the course things were taking, and sought to prevent whatever yet might be prevented. The President of the Senate, a former colleague of the great statesman Georges Clémenceau, spoke with heat, saying that they were perhaps sparing war to one generation and condemning untold future generations to misery. Clémenceau would never have consented. France had surrendered—out of fear. Who could imagine that the period upon which they were entering could be called peace?

Edouard Herriot rose to his feet, his massive form towering high above M. Daladier, seated at his desk.

He would offer him no advice, but if he had been in M. Daladier's place he would have acted differently. If they did not make a stand against Germany now, they would never be able to do it with success. Think! France, Soviet Russia, Great Britain. The three mightiest Powers in Europe. If they made a firm stand against Germany that would be enough. There would be no war. It might already be too late; that he did not know. In any case the consequences of this lost peace be on M. Daladier's head.

The two took their leave. M. Daladier rang up his Foreign Minister.

The news was not cheering. Pessimism in London. Tension in Prague. The Czechoslovak

Government had had to yield to pressure and had resigned. The Czech nation wanted to fight, they did not want to give in without a struggle. However that might be, hope need not be given up. It would somehow still be possible to save peace for France and for Europe.

" Yes, yes," interposed M. Daladier, " but at what price? "

" We have the Maginot Line," M. Bonnet answered, " no one can take us by surprise."

This answer was not calculated to cheer M. Daladier, who had himself been Minister for War for years. He sent for General Gamelin, Chief of the General Staff, to discuss once again with him the strategic position of France. For if the Godesberg negotiations were to break down, would France give way to Hitler once again? No. This time France would stand fast and defy Hitler, even if such an attitude led to war.

General Gamelin came in. He had already taken all possible steps to prepare France for the worst. He could not act alone. He had to get the permission of the Head of the Government. For more extensive preparations he required the permission of the Cabinet, and if war were declared, the permission of Parliament.

Up to this moment 110,000 reservists had been called to the colours. This was obviously not enough, for Germany had already nearly two million men under arms. But, if necessary, France could also mobilise two million men at short notice; for that, however, the consent of the Council of Ministers was essential. General Gamelin knew only too well that M. Bonnet had said that as long

as he was in the Cabinet there would be no war. And on that fateful Thursday, the 22nd of September, M. Bonnet still held a seat in the Cabinet. He will be there for a long time yet.

As soon as his guest had sat down, the Prime Minister asked if there was anything new to report. The forceful face of the French Commander-in-Chief remained grave.

He had further news from the second Bureau of the French Secret Intelligence in Germany. The general mood was one of despair. The whole population was dead against war, and it might be expected that the first military reverse would destroy the National Socialist régime. Disaffection reigned in military circles. They were dissatisfied with Hitler's policy and said that it was heading for war. They knew that Germany could not sustain a lengthy war. The economic position was bad, the supplies inadequate. There were even serious deficiencies in the army itself. There was a grave shortage of officers; a large proportion of the rank and file were insufficiently trained. The fortresses that were being built along the Rhine were inadequate. Hitler was bluffing when he had said at Nuremberg that they would be ready in three months. It would be at least five months before they were completed. Concrete, moreover, takes a considerable time to dry properly. The French were in a position to cope with the Siegfried Line.

M. Daladier remained thoughtful, but felt that his country was not sufficiently prepared either. France's war output had suffered severely from the strikes of the last few months. They had got into arrears.

General Gamelin waved this argument aside, saying that they were admirably prepared for a start. The moment war broke out, their factories would all be placed on a war footing. They would amply suffice the country's needs. There was no need to worry about that. France was militarily prepared. As soon as the mobilisation order was issued they would have sixty divisions promptly ready for action. Did not France possess a first-rate Colonial army of five million men?

M. Daladier urged that France's air force was weak and that Germany's was excellent.

This fact was admitted by General Gamelin, but he thought it no cause for alarm. The French, British and Russian air forces together were more than a match for Germany. Moreover the United States would supply France and England with planes. Further, the war was not going to be decided in the air. It would be decided solely by the infantry and artillery. And the country could fully rely on them.

M. Daladier dismissed his Chief of the General Staff, saying that he would inform him of his decision later.

. . . . . .

The three malcontent Ministers, Reynaud, Mandel and Champetier de Ribes, were already waiting in the Prime Minister's antechamber. They told him their intention of resigning immediately.

M. Daladier had expected this, and was prepared for it. He succeeded in convincing his colleagues that nothing would be more dangerous for France at the moment than a Cabinet crisis. He reminded them that last spring, when France was in the middle of a Cabinet crisis of several days, Hitler had marched into Austria.

Moreover there was a hitch in the Godesberg negotiations. Things looked black. If the negotiations broke down, they would need a united Cabinet more than ever.

On being asked what would happen then, M. Daladier replied that they would have to take energetic action. This would be decided upon in the Council of Ministers.

After a short discussion the three Ministers decided not to withdraw their threat of resignation, but for the moment not to press the point. They left the threat hanging over M. Daladier's head like the sword of Damocles.

Letters Across the Rhine

Mr. Chamberlain worked late on the night of Thursday, 22nd September, conferring with London and Paris, and what he had heard was not calculated to reassure him.

On the Friday morning the situation was extremely complicated: Hitler had made new proposals which London and Paris could hardly accept, and which they assuredly could not force on Prague. If he insisted that the Sudeten German areas must immediately be occupied by the German military forces, the Czech army would unquestionably offer resistance. France would certainly not leave her Ally in the lurch this time, for the temper of Paris had changed on Thursday. If France were at war with Germany, England must hasten to her assistance, for a military victory of Germany over France would be a direct threat to Great Britain. The Soviets, too, were not to be forgotten. Prague and Paris had concluded pacts of mutual assistance with

Moscow, and the Russians had declared that they would honour their word and hasten to the assistance of Czechoslovakia. Mr. Chamberlain knew perfectly well that these three Allies could smash Germany. But apart from the horrors of such a war, what was to follow it? Once the Soviets had got a footing in Central Europe, would they voluntarily withdraw? Would not the defeat of Germany mean the outbreak of Communism in Central Europe?

There is nothing the English Lords and Conservatives dread more than the bogey of Communism. They prefer National Socialist Germany, even if in her new strength she were to threaten England and the British Empire.

War must therefore at all costs be averted. Negotiations must somehow be continued. But how? Would it be possible to induce Hitler to show some degree of moderation? Mr. Chamberlain had his doubts. But he decided to " try again ", and this time to vary his tactics.

A terrace of the Hotel Dreesen had been set aside for journalists; they were waiting there in acute suspense. They all knew that yesterday's conference between the two statesmen had been in some degree unsatisfactory. They had been despatching their cables and telephoning their messages till late into the night, and had begun again at dawn. Now they were waiting, gazing down into the Rhine, watching the spot where Mr. Chamberlain must come ashore after crossing the river from his headquarters on the other bank. His steamer was sighted. He would be over in a few minutes.

" But that's not Chamberlain! " ejaculated one of the journalists who was watching through a field-glass.

Everyone pricked up his ears. They all felt that they were witnessing a dramatic event. Mr. Chamberlain had not come. It was one of his secretaries who had stepped out of the car and disappeared into the Hotel Dreesen.

Straightway there was a general rush for the telephone-boxes. Mr. Chamberlain had not come; he had sent instead a secretary with a letter. This letter is No. 3 in the English White Paper. It runs:

> " I am ready to put to the Czech Government your proposal as to the areas, so that they may examine the suggested provisional boundary. So far as I can see, there is no need to hold a plebiscite for the bulk of the areas, *i.e.* for those areas which, according to statistics upon which both sides seem to agree, are predominantly Sudeten German areas.
>
> " I have no doubt, however, that the Czech Government would be willing to accept your proposals for a plebiscite to determine how far, if at all, the proposed new frontier need be adjusted.
>
> " The difficulty I see about the proposal you put to me yesterday afternoon arises from the suggestion that the areas should in the immediate future be occupied by German troops. I recognise the difficulty of conducting a lengthy investigation under existing conditions, and doubtless the plan you propose would, if it were acceptable, provide an immediate ceasing of the tension.
>
> " But I do not think you have realised the impossibility of my agreeing to put forward any plan, unless I have reason to suppose that it will be considered by public opinion in my country, in France, and indeed in the world generally, as carrying out the principles already agreed upon in an orderly fashion and free from the threat of force.
>
> " I am sure that an attempt to occupy forthwith by German troops areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle, and very shortly afterwards by formal delimitation, would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force.

"Even if I felt it right to put this proposal to the Czech Government, I am convinced that they would not regard it as being in the spirit of the arrangement which we and the French Government urged them to accept, and which they have accepted.

"In the event of German troops moving into the areas, as you propose, there is no doubt that the Czech Government would have no option but to order the forces to resist, and this would mean the destruction of the basis upon which you and I a week ago agreed to work together—namely, an orderly settlement of this question rather than a settlement by the use of force.

"It being agreed in principle that the Sudeten German areas are to join the Reich, the immediate question before us is how to maintain law and order pending the final settlement of the arrangements for the transfer."

Early that morning Adolf Hitler had summoned Generals Keitel, Brauchitsch and Reichenau to discuss the situation with them once again. He pointed out that negotiations might very probably break down. If so, the march across the Czechoslovak frontier must begin at midnight.

Hitler was painfully taken aback when Mr. Chamberlain did not come. He was in a worse temper than ever before, and let his entourage feel it. When the German translation of Mr. Chamberlain's letter was laid before him, however, the Chancellor breathed again. Beneath the firmness of the phrasing he detected an undercurrent of readiness to give in. Mr. Chamberlain had already given in over the plebiscite question when Hitler had insisted. He was still holding out against the immediate occupation of the Sudeten areas by German troops. This is a point on which Hitler would not give way. He had not mobilised his forces for nothing; he would not rob them of their triumph. More-

over, he wanted to give such a display of force as would make an impression on the peoples of Eastern Europe. Above all, he was determined to get the Czech frontier fortresses into his hands; otherwise the whole business was futile. He was not greatly concerned about freeing his German brothers from the yoke of a free and democratic Czechoslovakia; his primary ambition was to remove from his path the great obstacle to his progress eastwards: Czechoslovakia. This point he could not yield.

He went cautiously to work, however. He sent a brief answer to Mr. Chamberlain acknowledging the receipt of the British Prime Minister's letter and stating that he hoped to reply more fully in the course of the day. The secretary brought this letter back to Mr. Chamberlain at Petersberg.

Feeling a shade more hopeful, Mr. Chamberlain rang up London. He told Lord Halifax that it looked as if there were still some chance of an agreement. Hitler had not sent an immediate reply to Mr. Chamberlain's firm and decisive letter. Possibly this was a sign that he was willing to make concessions.

The Prime Minister then had a chat with Mrs. Chamberlain and conversations with some political and personal friends. He looked out over the lovely landscape of the Rhine the while—and waited for Hitler's answer.

Meanwhile, M. Bonnet learnt via London, that in spite of everything there was still a gleam of hope. He hastened to communicate this to the French Prime Minister and his other colleagues. M. Daladier received a deputation from his Party. The Socialists and the Communists had demanded the immediate

summoning of the Chamber; the Radical Socialists had opposed it. M. Daladier approved the refusal, but would not commit himself to stating definitely what France would do if the Godesberg negotiations broke down. "That depends on circumstances . . ." he said, and with that dismissed his Party friends.

At half-past three in the afternoon a special messenger from Hitler was announced. He handed over a sealed letter. The translator set feverishly to work, as if the peace of the world hung on his speed.

Mr. Chamberlain could hardly control his impatience. He snatched up the translation, then despondently let fall the hand that held the German Chancellor's reply. Hitler's answer scattered all his hopes to the winds. The German Dictator and Imperial Chancellor wrote as follows: (Document No. 4 of the English White Paper):

"For nearly two decades the Germans, as well as the various other nationalities in Czechoslovakia, have been maltreated in the most unworthy manner, tortured, economically destroyed, and above all prevented from realising for themselves the right of nations to self-determination.

"All attempts of the oppressed to change their lot failed in the face of the brutal will to destruction of the Czechs. The latter were in possession of the power of the State, and did not hesitate to employ it ruthlessly and barbarically. England and France have never made an endeavour to alter this situation.

"If formerly the behaviour of the Czechoslovak Government was brutal, it can only be described during recent weeks and days as madness. The victims of this madness are innumerable Germans.

"In a few weeks the number of refugees who have been driven out has risen to over 120,000. This situation as stated above is unbearable, and will now be terminated by me.

"What interests me, Your Excellency, is not the recognition of the principle that this territory is to go to Germany, but solely the realisation which both puts an end in the shortest time to the sufferings of the unhappy victims of Czech tyranny, and at the same time corresponds to the dignity of a great power.

"For England it is a question at most of political imponderables, whereas for Germany it is a question of primitive right, of the security of more than three million human beings and the national honour of a great people."

The telephone rang. In a roundabout manner, via London, Mr. Chamberlain learned approximately what Hitler had said to his generals yesterday and that morning. He learned of fresh concentrations of German troops on the frontiers of Czechoslovakia.

He talked at great length with London—and told of the day's happenings to date. Everyone who spoke to him agreed that they were in the highest degree discouraging. Mr. Chamberlain requested that these facts should be communicated to Paris and also the contents of the cypher telephone despatch which he sent to London shortly after.

A few hours later the whole world was stirred to intense excitement by the consequences of this despatch.

The Czechs Ready to Fight

About seven o'clock that Friday evening M. Daladier again received the members of the parliamentary committee of his Party. He said to them: "France will aid Czechoslovakia if she is attacked by Germany".

The Paris correspondents of the Czechoslovak newspapers at once communicated this news to

their editors. It was their last telephone conversation with home for a long time. Two hours later all telephonic communication had been cut between Czechoslovakia and the outer world. Czechoslovakia was on a war footing.

. . . . .

The new Czechoslovak Government, which had been formed on Thursday, took office in a brief moment of relative calm. There had been huge demonstrations in Prague on the Wednesday and Thursday, but now there was a lull. The people, however, felt stunned by the treachery of their Western friends. Yet none believed that this state of affairs was final, especially as rumours had reached the public ear that there was a hitch in the Godesberg negotiations.

" Hitler is our last hope ", said a highly-placed Czech official to a friend. " He has at last overstepped the utmost limit of the attainable, he will ask impossibilities of Chamberlain." He was right in his estimate of the German Chancellor. A few days, however, sufficed to convince him that he had over-rated the firmness and determination of the Western Powers.

President Beneš felt a tiny stirring of hope again that Friday. He knew that the French party which was in favour of making a firm stand against Hitler was gaining the upper hand. On the Thursday afternoon—only the day before—the Polish Minister in Prague had handed in Poland's repudiation of the Minority Pact between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Polish military forces were mustering on the Polish–Czech border. Simultaneously, however, there came good news from Moscow. At four

o'clock on the morning of Thursday, Potemkin, the acting Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, had sent for the Polish Chargé d'Affaires, and informed him that if Poland attacked Czechoslovakia, Soviet Russia would immediately and without further warning break the Polish pact. At the same time, Prague received an official answer from the Soviet Government to her inquiries.

Through their Minister in Moscow the Czechoslovak Government had asked: "Does Soviet Russia consider that recent events have cancelled the Russo–Czechoslovak pact of mutual assistance, or is the Soviet Government still prepared to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance if she is attacked by Germany?"

The answer of the Soviet Government ran: "If Czechoslovakia is attacked, Soviet Russia will fulfil the obligations arising from the French–Czechoslovak–Soviet pact of mutual assistance".

This meant that Soviet Russia was ready to help Czechoslovakia if France also fulfilled her obligations. But would France fulfil them when she had already left Czechoslovakia once in the lurch?

President Beneš rang up the Czechoslovak Legation in Paris. His Minister's report was hopeful.

President Beneš stepped to the window of his study, from which he had a glorious view over the city of a hundred towers lying in the valley far below. A slight haze lay over the spires and roofs. The glorious view that met his eye had in it, as always, a touch of melancholy.

Was this lovely town to be reduced in a few days to a heap of ruins? The German bombers would

not spare the glorious monuments of architecture, once they had their orders to begin. But the President was optimistic. He still hoped that even now, at the eleventh hour, the appalling catastrophe might be averted. He firmly believed that if the Powers stood firm, Hitler would abandon his bluff. Dr. Beneš is a disciple of the French philosophers, he clung to the philosophy of clear logic and its unbending laws. He was therefore convinced that Germany would not risk a war against overwhelming odds. He forgot that in the Europe of to-day the laws of logic appear to have lost their validity. Feelings and emotions have routed logic.

The President lingered long at his window. He thought on the past and on the future. The Czechs had been only a mere twenty years in control. Before that, for three hundred years, they had been ruled by the Germans of the Habsburg Empire. It was no cause for wonder that here and there old resentments had asserted themselves, and found vent in petty intrigues against which the President could do little, even if he came to know of them. The State was a democratic Republic, and the democratic–bureaucratic machine works slowly. Besides, what are twenty years in the life of a State? If Czechoslovakia were given time, Germans and Czechs could contrive to live and work together in friendship, to the advantage of both nations. It was no accident that in this Bohemian land Czechs and Germans had lived together for ten centuries. The existence of Bohemia was economically and politically necessary to Europe.

And now—it seemed too late. The Czechs had denied autonomy to the Germans because they

feared that they would use it to create a totalitarian State within the democratic framework of the Republic. Would a wise compromise still be possible even now, if Germany should give way? President Beneš optimistically believed that even yet a peaceful settlement might be found for the Sudeten Germans within the Czechoslovak Republic.

At this point in his reflections—6.45 p.m.—his secretary entered. The French and British Ministers requested an audience.

The President granted it.

This time the French Minister spoke first. He spoke solemnly and with profound emotion: "The French Government", he said, "have commissioned me to inform Your Excellency that they no longer regard as binding on Czechoslovakia the promise she made not to take extraordinary measures in the present crisis. She is again free to take any steps she thinks imperative for her own safety."

"His Majesty's Government associates itself unreservedly with this declaration", added the British Minister.

The President replied as calmly as he could:

"Thank you, gentlemen. We shall promptly inform you of whatever measures we take."

The President knew at once what the Franco-British message implied. The Western Powers considered that the Godesberg negotiations had broken down, and were preparing for the worst. They were now giving Czechoslovakia a free hand.

A council of Cabinet Ministers was summoned at once, and attended also by the Members of the Ministry of Defence and the Generals of the General Staff.

At twenty minutes past 10 that same Friday evening the Czech wireless broadcast the order for mobilisation.

By eleven o'clock Prague lay in complete darkness. The first attack of the German air force was expected.

But at Godesberg at that moment two men sat together in animated conversation.

The "Supreme Effort"

Storm-clouds had gathered on the European horizon while Chamberlain and Hitler on opposite banks of the Rhine had been exchanging letters.

About four o'clock that afternoon the British Prime Minister had sent the following answer to Adolf Hitler's letter:

"My Dear Reichskanzler,

"I have received your Excellency's communication in reply to my letter of this morning and have taken note of its contents.

"In my capacity as intermediary, it is evidently now my duty—since your Excellency maintains entirely the position you took last night—to put your proposals before the Czechoslovak Government.

"Accordingly, I request your Excellency to be good enough to let me have a memorandum which sets out these proposals, together with a map showing the area proposed to be transferred, subject to the result of the proposed plebiscite.

"On receiving this memorandum, I will at once forward it to Prague and request the reply of the Czechoslovak Government at the earliest possible moment.

"In the meantime, until I can receive their reply, I should be glad to have your Excellency's assurance that you will continue to abide by the understanding, which we reached at our meeting on the 14th September and again last night, that no action should be taken, particularly in the Sudeten territory, by the forces of

the Reich to prejudice any further mediation which may be found possible.

" Since the acceptance or refusal of your Excellency's proposal is now a matter for the Czechoslovak Government to decide, I do not see that I can perform any further service here, whilst, on the other hand, it has become necessary that I should at once report the present situation to my colleagues and to the French Government. I propose, therefore, to return to England.

" Yours faithfully,
" NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN."

Meanwhile Hitler had shut himself up in his room in the Hotel Dreesen. He paced up and down muttering half-inaudibly to himself.

The unprecedented tension that held the whole place under a spell communicated itself to everyone. Even the most hard-boiled journalists spoke in whispers.

In a corner of the hotel hall two men carried on a discreet conversation; they were von Ribbentrop and Sir Nevile Henderson.

Ribbentrop suggested that if war were to break out now, it would be over a mere question of procedure, as the whole question had already been decided upon in principle.

Sir Nevile agreed, but called attention to the serious differences on the main question, to which Ribbentrop replied that it made no real difference whether the German forces occupied the Sudeten areas then or later.

The immediate occupation of the areas was vital to Germany's prestige, according to Ribbentrop, but Sir Nevile felt that it was no less vital to England's prestige that the whole problem should be settled justly.

Finally the two diplomats agreed that a further meeting between Mr. Chamberlain and Hitler was absolutely essential, and each undertook to ensure that it should be arranged.

Before this last interview took place, Europe had anticipated its result. Prague, as we know, had ordered mobilisation as a direct consequence of the cypher telephone despatch which Mr. Chamberlain had sent to London a few hours before, and which had brought about the joint communication made by the French and British Ministers to President Beneš. There had been a Cabinet meeting in Paris, which General Gamelin had attended, and which had authorised further mobilisation measures. Moscow was transporting more and more troops to her western frontiers. There was talk of an army of two million men. Finally, the English Minister for War, Mr. Hore-Belisha, cut short his tour of inspection in the provinces and flew with all haste to London.

Just before 10.30 p.m. Mr. Chamberlain alighted from his car to bid Hitler farewell.

The journalists eagerly awaited his reappearance to be able to transmit the sensational news to the world. But Mr. Chamberlain did not reappear. The journalists had to wait three hours that chilly evening in the night air before he at last emerged.

Midnight Talks

If Mr. Chamberlain had expected to find a stern and angry man, he had miscalculated. Hitler was transformed as he resumed conversations in the hall of the hotel shortly after 10.30.

Stiffly Mr. Chamberlain announced that he had

come to say good-bye, much regretting that he had to return to London with such a result. The consequences would be incalculable.

But Hitler had prepared the Memorandum for which Mr. Chamberlain had asked and had it with him.

Mr. Chamberlain took the Memorandum and began to study it. It was written in German, but there was an English translation alongside. Germany demanded the immediate cession of the areas marked on the accompanying map and their occupation by German troops before the 1st of October. Plebiscites must be held in the other areas, marked green on the map, before the end of November, and the new boundaries of Czechoslovakia laid down in accordance with the results of these plebiscites either by a German-Czech or by an International Commission. Germany demanded that all movable and immovable property should be left behind in the areas which were to be occupied by the German forces. No one, not even private persons, could be permitted to carry anything away if they wished to move into Czech territory. The Memorandum was couched in language not usually employed in diplomatic documents.

Chamberlain read the Memorandum through, then turned his gaze on Hitler, who sat motionless.

The German Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, Sir Nevile Henderson, and Mr. Chamberlain's adviser, Sir Horace Wilson, sat in another corner of the room and followed the historic conversation with strained attention.

Mr. Chamberlain said firmly that he thought that the document was not a memorandum, but an

ultimatum; but Hitler answered that such was the will of the German people. There had been no previous talk, objected Mr. Chamberlain, of fixing a given date for the occupation of the Sudeten areas. And now the 1st of October was given. The shortness of the time left little prospect open for useful discussion.

France and England, Hitler then argued, had recognised Germany's just right to the Sudeten areas. Czechoslovakia had accepted Germany's demands. But he did not trust the good faith of the Czechs. They wanted to gain time to mobilise the war-mongers in France, England and Russia for their cause, and he had no great opinion of international negotiations and commissions, but intended to secure his right and his people with arms.

Would not England and France be a sufficient guarantee? asked Mr. Chamberlain, but Hitler's simple and unambiguous reply was that Germany's arms were the best guarantee of Germany's rights.

Mr. Chamberlain now urged Hitler to consider what it would mean if he took the steps proposed. France would hasten to the assistance of Czechoslovakia. He reminded him that the French Army was still considered the best in Europe.

Hitler remained unmoved.

He knew that the French Army was good. But Germany had completed a line of fortifications along their western frontier. These fortifications would hold up a French advance, and by that time they would have finished their job in the east. Besides, the French Air Force was poor. The Chief of the French Air Force, General Vuillemin, had

been in Germany a month before. He had been able to convince himself of the quality of Germany's Air Force. If Germany's bombers laid a few French towns in ruins there would be a revolution in France.

Chamberlain wondered what would happen if the French, Russian and Czech bombers attacked German towns, to which Hitler replied that there would be no German revolution. The Red bandits in Prague and Moscow would like to think it. And that was why he must have the business with Prague ended by the 1st of October. Czechoslovakia was nothing but a Red arrow in Germany's side. Until Czechoslovakia was overthrown and Soviet Russia driven from Europe, there would be no peace in that Continent.

Hitler repeated all the old arguments which have filled the German Press for years. This time, however, they made no impression, for Mr. Chamberlain was putting all the bulldog tenacity of an obstinate Englishman into his task of saving the peace of Europe.

England, he said, had repeatedly declared that she would not stand aside if France became involved in a war with Germany. The sympathy of the United States was with the European democracies, and they could count from the first on America's economic help and on her supplying them with munitions. Once war had started, who could tell how things would develop? He asked Hitler to remember the World War.

This time Chamberlain seemed to have hit the mark. He was not himself aware of it, but Hitler, and with him many of the National Socialist leaders,

have an almost superstitious terror of the power of the mighty democracy over the sea. All Hitler's attempts to win for himself the friendship of the United States had failed. Germany has few friends in America. This fact emerges unmistakably on every occasion of crisis. And Hitler is anything but happy about it.

Making an effort to conceal his uneasiness, Hitler said that no one would really believe that the United States would go to war with Germany. They had had enough unpleasant experiences in the last war and would turn their backs on Europe.

Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that he had good reason to be convinced of what he had said. Not only public opinion in England, but public opinion in many other democratic countries would be outraged by the Memorandum which Hitler had just handed him. France and Czechoslovakia would reject it, and on the 1st of October we should have a war in Europe of which no man could foresee when or how it would end.

There would be no war, unless France and England wished, replied Hitler. Czechoslovakia had been forced to accept the main thing, and the British and French Governments would be able to compel her to acquiesce also in the method of procedure.

Mr. Chamberlain refused to discuss the matter further. If the question found no peaceful settlement, he said, the whole responsibility would rest on Hitler's shoulders in the eyes of the entire world.

Hitler swung round. In that soft, wooing voice with which when he was still only a speaker at mass meetings, he had enlisted hundreds of thousands for his cause (especially women), he expressed his

heartfelt admiration for Mr. Chamberlain's efforts. Europe should be grateful to him, for once already had Hitler abstained from violent action for Mr. Chamberlain's sake, but he would not do it a second time. If the Czechs did not voluntarily withdraw by the 1st of October, he would give the order to march. It was not only a question of prestige or of the security of the German people which compelled him. Once before, on the 21st of last May, the Czechs had been able to flatter themselves that they had frightened him. This belief of theirs had been false, but dangerous. If Hitler did not act this time, how many helpless Sudeten Germans would pay the penalty?

Mr. Chamberlain ventured to suggest, seeking an acceptable formula for agreement, a force of international police to maintain order in the Sudeten country, but Hitler would not hear of such an arrangement. The Sudeten areas would be occupied by German troops. If the Czechs would not peacefully permit the occupation, Germany would occupy the territories by force. Sufficient proof had been given of his good will, in cancelling, for Mr. Chamberlain's sake, the military measures which had already been taken. Had Mr. Chamberlain not come to Berchtesgaden the week before, the whole business would have been already settled.

Mr. Chamberlain retorted that Europe would then have been plunged in war, but Hitler emphatically denied this. He did not believe that France would have stirred a finger. Germany would have entered Prague within a few days, and they would have dictated to the Czechs boundaries very different from those which he now conceded to Mr. Chamberlain.

Mr. Chamberlain was profoundly shaken. Anything he might attempt to do seemed hopeless. He was about to get up to say good-bye; instead he asked if he might have a few words with Hitler alone before he went.

Hitler agreed. For the third time within a week the two men were alone together.

Once more Hitler turned his soft side to Mr. Chamberlain. There is no doubt that he set himself to win the Englishman over.

Germany was asking nothing but her rights, he pleaded. It would have been a simple thing for her to have attacked Czechoslovakia by force. Their detailed plans were ready. The Siegfried Line protected their western frontier. The Russians would have had to march through Rumania to help the Czechs, for the Poles would not have let them cross Poland. That would have brought the Rumanians in on Germany's side. Long before western help could have begun to operate, Germany would have seized Czechoslovakia and allied themselves with Rumania. They would then have had supplies enough from Rumania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to fight and win a long war. Meantime Italy would have held France in check. Britain's job would not have been nearly so easy as many of their Western newspaper scribblers imagined. They had no true conception of the strength and determination of the German people. In spite of everything, Germany nevertheless wanted peace. Hitler's policy had always been clear. He had always said that there were still ten million Germans in Europe who must be reunited to their Mother-country. He had also always spoken of his peaceful

intentions, and he had so far kept his promise. The *anschluss* with Austria had been accomplished without his firing a shot. The *anschluss* of the Sudeten country should be equally peaceful. Only if the Czechs and their Red allies offered resistance, fear would not deter them from using their tanks and aircraft. They would only be performing a service to Europe.

Mr. Chamberlain could find no suitable reply to this vehement outburst. He could only repeat what he had already said several times before, and said without success. He could only point out the dangers which would arise from this procedure: the danger that European civilisation would be laid in ruins for a long time to come. Hitler paid no attention to all this, nor to anything else which Mr. Chamberlain brought forward. When once he had incorporated in the Reich all the Germans who were living on the outskirts of Germany, he would have no further territorial ambitions in Europe, he said.

Chamberlain remained silent.

Germany, continued Hitler, had always been deeply anxious not only to come to terms with England, but to live in genuine friendship with her. After all, they were two peoples of the same Germanic race. Why should there be discord between them? Hitler also reminded Mr. Chamberlain that he had already demonstrated his readiness to be friends by concluding the Naval Agreement with England. He was ready to sign an Air Agreement, a Non-Aggression Pact and a Pact of Friendship. England and Germany were racially predestined to rule Europe and the World.

Mr. Chamberlain was not anxious to enter into a discussion of race. An Englishman practises race discrimination, but he never speaks of it. On the other hand, Hitler's declaration of friendship was something which the British Premier could seize upon.

Great Britain was equally anxious to live at peace with Germany, he said eagerly. Friendship was tested only when the moment came to prove it. Hitler had now the opportunity of proving it. If he would waive his demands in this matter—since the question had already been decided in principle in Germany's favour—he would prove that he really desired England's friendship.

Hitler hesitated. But he did not hesitate long enough to let Mr. Chamberlain hope afresh.

He said that he could not and would not give way, but could once more assure Mr. Chamberlain that he was ready to open every kind of negotiation with England when once the Sudeten problem had been solved. Nothing would then stand between them.

After a moment's reflection Hitler added that there was of course still the question of Colonies which must be settled. A powerful Empire like Germany could not be forcibly prevented from continuing its colonising mission. But he added in a conciliatory tone that Germany would have no mobilisations on that subject. With a little goodwill on both sides that little problem could easily be settled in a friendly way.

Mr. Chamberlain answered that he was assuming a good will in that matter, which he gave no sign of showing himself in the question of Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak question, Hitler pointed out,

touched the German people very closely. He could not allow foreigners to interfere when they were about to settle matters their own way.

Mr. Chamberlain saw that they were talking at cross purposes. This man would not be convinced by argument. It was late, and he thought resignedly that they had better end their conference.

The two men returned to the hall. Ribbentrop and Sir Nevile Henderson saw at a glance that no agreement had been reached between the two statesmen.

The four continued the conversation for a little while, but it now turned on irrelevant or unimportant matters. Once more in the course of conversation Mr. Chamberlain made an attempt to induce Hitler to alter his point of view, but he knew beforehand that the attempt was useless. Finally they drew up a brief communiqué, and Mr. Chamberlain said that he would forward Hitler's Memorandum to the Government in Prague, but he scarcely thought that the French and British Governments would be able to recommend Prague to accept it.

Had he been hoping that Hitler would turn right-about, now, at the last moment? If so, he was mistaken.

Courteous phrases and handshakes were exchanged, and Mr. Chamberlain stepped out into the night air.

He was surrounded by journalists. Wearily he told them that negotiations had not completely broken down.

CHAPTER IV

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY HOURS SHAKE EUROPE

FIVE days had elapsed between the Saturday morning on which Mr. Chamberlain entered the aeroplane at Cologne to return to London and the following Thursday, the 29th September, when, at 8.30 in the morning, he once more entered the aeroplane which was to take him to Munich, where he was to attend the Conference of Four.

One hundred and twenty hours had shaken Europe —the worst hours which it had to pass through in this crisis.

War seemed inevitable. The negotiations had broken down, and further talks were useless. With whom and on what subject was it still possible to negotiate? People had to familiarise themselves with the idea that on the 1st of October the guns would begin to speak, since the speech of European statesmen was not loud enough to bring Germany to her senses.

When night fell, the people of Europe had every reason to suppose that they would find their Continent in a state of war on awaking next morning. Yet there was no panic: people seemed hypnotised by fear of the inevitable, and prepared to meet their destiny.

Spain and China had taught every European the horrors of warfare. All had seen pictures of the smoking ruins which once had been cities, of dead children and women slaughtered by enemy aircraft.

The fate of Guernica and the bombardment of Shanghai, Taerchewang and other Chinese cities had not been forgotten. And it was certain that if war broke out in Europe on the 1st of October, it would be a hundred times more hideous than the events taking place in China and Spain.

Europe's resources were at an end. It had added fuel to the flames until it was threatened itself. The heads of the European democracies had proved incapable of countering Germany's bluff by bluff, of thus preventing war, and of confining Germany within due limits. And now the peoples seemed doomed to pay with their blood for this ineptitude of European statesmanship.

The two protagonists of the drama, Germany and Czechoslovakia, were ready. The latter had mobilised, and the former did not require mobilisation, since she had been armed to the teeth for weeks. France, the third chief Power concerned, was preparing at accelerated speed. Russia observed a threatening silence. In London gas-masks were distributed to the population. Italy had completed a secret mobilisation and had taken certain economic measures. Belgium, which had suffered ruin during the Great War, was anxiously waiting to see whether the Germans would once again violate her neutrality. Even the minor States, which normally stand aside from Europe's major politics, were taking steps. Switzerland had mined every road and railway leading across her frontiers, and issued public notices that they would be blown up on the outbreak of war. In Denmark coastguards and sailors whose period of service was due to expire were retained. The Netherlands Govern-

ment had determined to increase the effective number of the army.

By order of the Pope masses of intercession for peace were celebrated in 423 churches.

The peoples of Europe saw the end of their civilisation approaching, and prepared for death.

President Beneš sees Hitler's Work

Czechoslovakia, too, prepared for death. The trainloads of men who were being carried to their threatened frontiers knew that in all probability they would not return home again. And if they did return, what would they find? Prague was a bare hour's flight from the nearest German aerodrome. All possible measures of safety had been taken, and Prague was surrounded by anti-aircraft guns; but these would be of little avail against the vast superiority of German aircraft. All Czechoslovakia knew that at best it could resist Hitler's forces for six weeks, and that within these six weeks the entire country would be turned into a desolate heap of ruins. There was, further, the Polish threat. Poland, itself possessing a Ukrainian minority of six millions, thought the moment opportune to raise a claim upon the 100,000 Poles living in Czechoslovakia.

But the Czechs are a sturdy nation: their thousand years of national life has not been easy. There had been times before when the Czech nation had seemed no longer to exist, and yet on each occasion they had held their own.

In Prague the man in the street knew well enough what was at stake. He knew what the Western statesmen did not quite realise, that now

was the time to stop Germany's *Drang nach Osten*, and thus to prevent her from achieving the hegemony of Europe. The Czechs knew this, and were ready to do their duty by their country and Europe.

On the Saturday evening the British Minister in Prague had handed Hitler's memorandum and map to President Beneš.

The President had asked whether the British Government made any recommendations to Czechoslovakia with regard to the memorandum, and had been answered in the negative. A similar reply had been received from Paris.

And now the entire Czechoslovak Government was assembled around the big table in the President's conference-room, before them the map of the new Czechoslovakia—the Czechoslovakia *à la* Hitler. Apart from members of the Government, there were members of the General Staff and of the body of political advisers whose function it is to assist the Government.

Before them was the map with the districts marked in red and the green lines surrounding plebiscite areas. What they saw was grave enough. The new State would lose all its raw materials—lignite, timber, china-clay, iron and radium. It would be deprived of hops for Pilsen beer, and Prague would be without electric current, as the Prague electricity works were in the mixed-language district near Most.

Pilsen, with the vast Skoda works, would become a frontier town, and almost the entire textile industry, together with the glass, china, paper, chemical and dye industries, would pass into German hands. Further, the two most important railway lines of the country—that from Prague to Brno, and that

from Prague to Moravská Ostrava—would have to cross German territory in two places.

While other Ministers were sceptical, President Beneš remained optimistic. Neither Paris nor London insisted on the acceptance of the terms, and he still thought that Germany would be frightened if she saw that the Western Powers meant business. In that case reasonable negotiations might be possible. At the same time one consideration remained. Czechoslovakia had agreed in principle to cede purely German districts to Germany, and if there were to be further negotiations, Czechoslovakia would have to honour this pledge.

War or Peace?

The breakdown of the Godesberg negotiations had roused the Western statesmen from their lethargy for a few days, and had inspired more energetic action. Now that war seemed inevitable, the necessary preparations were made with varying degrees of intensity.

In Paris, as we know, there had been a meeting of Ministers on the night preceding Saturday the 24th September. General Gamelin had been present at these consultations, at which it was decided to take all measures not requiring a resolution of the Council of Ministers, meeting under the chairmanship of the President of the Republic. In the process, certain laws and regulations admittedly received rather cavalier treatment: but there was no need to worry about such matters now. It was necessary to prepare France at any rate for the first assault: long before this was

achieved, the necessary resolutions of the Cabinet and Chamber would be forthcoming.

On this Saturday morning France had nearly a million and a quarter men under arms, and the Paris Gare de l'Est was still thronged with reservists. M. Daladier said to his friends, "I have done everything permitted by my powers. Further measures will require fresh resolutions."

The attitude of the population towards these events was followed with anxious interest; but the population remained remarkably passive, and no definite attitude was observable. This was natural: for the French were not only badly informed, but had been deliberately misled by the Press. Whether from conviction or design, the major papers had for weeks been stressing the need of preserving peace at all costs: the majority of the French Press was serving the cause of defeatism. The people had not been told that the present need was to show firmness in order to preserve peace and, should that be impossible, to anticipate the more disastrous war which an immediate future would certainly bring. The heads of the French Government now saw, to their dismay, the effects of such tendentious information.

Behind the scenes Georges Bonnet, the indefatigable "Angel of Peace-at-all-costs", was active, influencing the Press, sowing dissension within the Government, and striving against France's Eastern ally.

On the same Saturday, Signor Mussolini, whose chance was soon to come although he did not know it, appeared to have lost his nerve. He had delivered a militant speech at Belluno: "Our enemies beyond

the Alps ", he said, " are far too stupid to become dangerous to us ". In commenting on this speech the French Press did not hesitate to say that Mussolini had not meant France, but only the enemies of Fascism in general beyond the Alps.

On the same Saturday big posters were shown in German cities like Frankfurt-on-Main, Lörrach and Baden, bearing the inscription: " Two and a half millions of Swiss Germans await their liberation ".

On the same Saturday Herr Hitler returned to Berlin and Mr. Chamberlain to London. The latter conferred with his friend Lord Halifax. Later, before the meeting of the Cabinet, he spoke with Mr. Hore-Belisha, the War Minister.

At five o'clock the Cabinet met at No. 10. The Prime Minister reported on the breakdown at Godesberg and read out the Memorandum. The map attached to it was also submitted.

No resolutions were reached by the Cabinet on this day. The general impression prevailed that the Memorandum could hardly serve as a basis for further negotiation, and the matter was postponed until the following day. MM. Daladier and Bonnet had already been asked to come to London, and the problem would be discussed jointly with them. It is possible also that many circles in London and Paris still believed that the Prague Government would, after all, accept the Memorandum, and that an easy way out of the difficulty would thus be found.

But no recommendation in this sense was made to Prague by either capital. The necessary energy was lacking. Instead it was preferred to prepare for the inevitable, in the hope that Germany might still be deterred at the last moment.

But already it was too late. Herr Hitler felt that he had succeeded in "neutralising" Britain in a sense, and, seeing how slight were the preparations made by Britain for a possible war, he was firmly convinced that France would not move without Britain.

A witty British diplomat once said: "If France makes war without asking us, we naturally join in. If France asks us whether she should make war, of course we say no."

A Rainy Sunday

Sunday the 25th of September was an unpleasant day. Autumn had come early, with cold and wet weather. A chilly wind blew through the streets of Paris, which were almost entirely empty. Nature seemed to have adapted herself to events.

But though the Paris streets were empty, it did not follow that political activity had come to a standstill. Early in the forenoon M. Bonnet had received Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador. The British Government was anxious to know what attitude France would take up at the present juncture. The Foreign Minister, however, was unable to give a satisfactory answer, because at the moment he did not know whether he would be Foreign Minister at the end of the day.

The ministerial crisis had indeed again become acute, and those members of the Cabinet who were dissatisfied with the attitude hitherto taken up by the Government, were insisting on a firm line by France, coupled with a plain intimation to London that France would abide by her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. Their wish was to enforce their

own policy, which was that Paris should advise Prague summarily to reject all concessions to Germany, and thus to create a definite *fait accompli.* Advice in this sense was actually reaching Prague from many sources: so far, however, the desired answer had not been given.

M. Bonnet naturally opposed such a course, which, he thought, would involve France in war: his attitude being that war must be avoided at all costs. He knew that this attitude met with the approval of many members of the British Government. The latter, indeed, was completely in accord with his initiative in compelling Prague to accept the first ultimatum.

The mid-day papers had announced that the two Ministers would leave for London early in the afternoon, and the aeroplane to take them there was waiting at the Le Bourget aerodrome. First, however, a Cabinet had to be held. The outlook was uncertain.

The Cabinet met at two o'clock: and the crisis failed to materialise. M. Daladier, reporting on the Godesberg negotiations in accordance with London advices, informed his colleagues regarding the contents of Hitler's memorandum, and submitted Hitler's map of the new Czechoslovakia.

A heated debate ensued. The three malcontents, MM. Reynaud, Mandel and Champetier de Ribes, laid down their point of view, and were joined by three further Ministers, MM. Jean Zay, Campinchi and Queille. Tension was growing, and an open breach within the Cabinet began to threaten. Yet a Government crisis was highly to be deprecated. The French Ministers were expected in London, and

it had already been found necessary to telephone to London to say that they would be coming later because the morning negotiations and the protracted meeting of the Cabinet Council had detained them in Paris.

And indeed a Cabinet crisis would be extremely awkward at the moment, for, though it would certainly be possible to fill vacancies left by resignations, Sunday was not the day for such measures.

The upshot of a lengthy debate eventually was that France would report in London that it would no longer recommend the Prague Government to accept the Memorandum, and that it would recommend the British Government to take up a firm attitude with regard to Germany. Further decisions were to be taken when the Ministers returned from London. After all, it was essential first to know the British Government's views.

A car rushed through the empty streets of Paris, and thirty-five minutes later an aeroplane rose into the air to fly to London in the wind and rain.

. . . . .

At half-past six M. Jan Masaryk, the Czech Minister, in London, called on Lord Halifax. The son of the founder of Czechoslovakia, Jan Masaryk had been serving as Minister in London for a number of years. In society he was known as a man of wit and imperturbable good temper. He had never lost his humour during the strenuous times through which he had lived. It was only during the last week, when he had been forced to report to Prague that the British and French Governments were asking his country to cede large regions to Germany, that he had ceased to smile. He had

lived through hours of despair: but this was no time to give way to his nerves: he had to act and to carry on important negotiations on behalf of his country.

He had been instructed by his Government, he told Lord Halifax, to inform His Majesty's Government that the acceptance of the German Government's conditions in their present form was considered impossible. At the same time the Czech Government was ready to continue negotiations on the basis of the concessions already made.

This ended the formal part of the interview. M. Masaryk handed the Note to the Foreign Minister, and a brief but grave conversation ensued.

When the Czechoslovak Minister left, Lord Halifax began to study the Czech Government's Note. It was a lengthy document, and enumerated the reasons why Czechoslovakia could not accept the demands made by Hitler at Godesberg. It pointed out that Hitler's Memorandum was in fact an ultimatum, and consisted of terms such as are dictated to a conquered people. It was not a plan addressed to a sovereign State which had already declared its readiness to make great sacrifices in the cause of European peace. The Note declared that Herr Hitler's Government had not shown the slightest readiness to make concessions, and demonstrated the grievous consequences for the national existence of Czechoslovakia if it yielded to the Hitler demands. The national and economic independence of Czechoslovakia would disappear automatically if Hitler's plan had to be accepted.

Lord Halifax now reached the end of this momentous document:

"My Government wish me to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler's demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government. Against these new and cruel demands my Government feel bound to make their utmost resistance, and we shall do so, God helping. The nation of St. Wenceslas, John Hus and Thomas Masaryk will not be a nation of slaves.

"We rely upon the two great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial."

. . . . .

Since the previous day the British Cabinet had met three times. It was now late in the afternoon of Sunday, and Mr. Chamberlain was preparing to meet his French guests.

At the moment when he drove through pouring rain to the aerodrome, the Prime Minister was completely informed about the British Cabinet's views. Since his return from Godesberg on the previous afternoon there had been no less than three meetings of Ministers. At this moment no doubt Mr. Chamberlain felt his sixty-nine years: but despite his weariness he knew that he must not give in to it. A decision had to be reached, and peace to be saved. Time was pressing; only a few days remained before the 1st of October, the time-limit of Hitler's ultimatum.

A four-fold cordon of police was necessary to keep back the crowd assembled in Downing Street and Whitehall to greet the French guests. Cheers were heard as the car turned into Downing Street and stopped at No. 10—cheers for France, and also for Czechoslovakia. Many shouted "Stand by Czechoslovakia". In many ways it was an altogether unusual Sunday for London: most of the British

public had by now realised what was at stake; they knew that Britain's prestige was in the balance, and were convinced that there would be no surrender to Germany.

A large number of measures had already been taken in preparation for an emergency.

The Home Fleet was standing by. Measures to ensure the safety of the population in case of air-raids had been taken and hastily completed. Unknown to the public, all preparations had been made for introducing conscription. Hundreds of volunteers were enrolling for services of every kind. If rumours current in London were to be believed, numbers of British citizens ready to fight in the Czech Army had given in their names to the Czechoslovak Legation. But now things had changed. Now, unless the unexpected happened, Englishmen would have to fight for the greatness and preservation of their country. The British people had seen through Germany's intentions, and felt that Hitler was not so much concerned with the Sudeten Germans as with much more ambitious aims ultimately affecting the interests of the British Empire. Further, people were infuriated by Hitler's lack of fairness in dealing with Czechoslovakia. All the best British qualities were revealed in these hours of crisis. The population knew no fear. They were ready to fight, and knew that they would win.

The French Ministers were negotiating with the Inner Cabinet. They had left Paris with the knowledge that they were backed by a resolute Cabinet, and the negotiations showed that this firmness was shared by the British Ministers. So

far, however, none believed in the inevitability of war. The feeling was that Hitler would give in at the last moment, and the possibilities of meeting him were discussed.

But the negotiations were lengthy. Various plans were considered and rejected, and late that night the feeling which prevailed at No. 10 was not very hopeful. Differences of opinion among various members of the Cabinet emerged. M. Bonnet maintained his thesis that the questions at issue were only matters of procedure about which no war could break out. M. Daladier, who now displayed a firmer attitude, objected. Among the British Ministers, too, there were divergences of opinion. Some wished Germany to be shown the full powers of the two great democracies, because that was the only way to negotiate with her; others were convinced that it was essential to reach agreement with Hitler even at the expense of Czechoslovakia.

The French Ministers were hampered by the resolution of their own Cabinet, which was not to go beyond the Anglo-French proposals of the 19th September. They were not at liberty to go further and to agree to Hitler's Godesberg demands.

Some time before midnight Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier withdrew to an adjacent room for a prolonged conversation in private. At midnight the conference was interrupted to give the British Cabinet an opportunity of arriving at further resolutions. These resolutions were of far-reaching significance. Mr. Chamberlain conveyed to his colleagues France's firm attitude, as well as the readiness of MM. Daladier and Bonnet to agree to further negotiations with Germany and

possibly to make certain minor concessions to Hitler. At the same time the main outlines of the agreement of 19th September were to be maintained.

When the British Ministers concluded their consultation, a brief summary of the day's deliberations was made.

Hitler's Godesberg demands were unacceptable. At the same time everything humanly possible would be done to bring Hitler to his senses before the 1st October. Simultaneously preparations would be made for the worst. During the same night General Gamelin was requested to come to London immediately to discuss all necessary measures.

"*Ça va pas mal*", M. Daladier later told the French journalists in reply to their questions.

Uncertainty in Berlin

The crisis had reached its climax. Hitler had made his demands, and refused to budge an inch. Prague had rejected the demands. In London the consultations with the French Ministers ended with an invitation to General Gamelin to come to London on Monday. Everything seemed to indicate that the Western democracies had grasped the position and were ready to meet Hitler's exaggerated demands with a firm refusal. Hitler had been carried away by the dynamics of his policy, and now could not have stopped, even if he had so desired.

At midnight on Sunday the 25th of September the Berlin War Minister gave orders to the troops stationed along the Bohemian and Moravian borders to prepare to march into Czechoslovakia. Whether the operations were to begin on the morrow or within the next few days was not stated.

At the Chancellor's office work went on until late at night. Herr von Ribbentrop had received Sir Nevile Henderson on Sunday afternoon, and had been told the result of the London discussions so far as they were known. The Prague rejection was also conveyed. The Ambassador expressed grave apprehensions about the future, and told the German Foreign Minister that not only public opinion but also the British Cabinet favoured a firm stand and declined to give way to Germany.

But the Foreign Minister remained calm and optimistic. He had frequently voiced the opinion that Britain would not fight on behalf of Czechoslovakia—least of all on a question of procedure. This was the opinion he had expressed to Hitler, and he now repeated it to the British Ambassador. The latter stressed the gravity of the position, and suggested that British resolution was being underestimated. Ribbentrop insisted that agreement would still be reached.

Until late at night the windows of the Ministry of Propaganda were brightly lit. Reports on public opinion had been received from all parts of the country, and were now being studied.

The news was not particularly satisfactory. The furious attacks on Czechoslovakia made by the German Press had gone too far; readers were tired of big headlines and strong language. The mass of the German people felt completely indifferent about the fate of the Sudeten Germans: they admitted that they ought to be helped, but they failed to see why there should be war on their behalf. So far, the German Press had been careful not to explain that opinion in the West was beginning

to change: only optimistic reports had been placed before readers.

But the vast military preparations in progress for weeks had begun to alarm the populace. War was not wanted, not even with a small country like Czechoslovakia, still less with the Western Powers and Russia. And now the opposition did not come from the communists, but from the classes who formerly had helped Hitler to power—the petty bourgeoisie. This opposition could everywhere be felt—in Württemberg and Baden, in Bavaria and in Austria. The reports of Nazi secret agents left no doubt as to this feeling. Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, gave the necessary instructions for the next few days. Unless the situation changed, the German population would have to be prepared for war with France and Britain, to say nothing of Russia.

The U.S.A. Steps In

For some time the United States had followed developments in Europe with grave misgivings. People had more and more begun to ask what the U.S.A. intended to do in the case of a European conflict. Nobody supposed that the United States would again send troops to Europe to take part in a European war; this was a blunder which would not be repeated. At the same time, it was felt that there would be ample opportunity for helping the democratic Powers in other ways than by sending troops in case of war. The Neutrality Pact might be altered, and the European democracies might be supplied with arms and aircraft, while

Germany could be threatened with economic measures.

Yet though there was not the slightest intention to send troops or to take a direct part in a war, the American population did not feel indifferent with regard to European events; on the contrary, its reactions to them were far more open and vigorous than those of the European peoples. Through the President and all other responsible statesmen, and through the predominant part of the Press, it expressed its wholehearted sympathy with the countries which were regarded as the champions of democracy.

When Paris and London resolved to compel Czechoslovakia to cede some of her territory, public opinion turned against these two Powers. When a firm attitude became apparent after the Godesberg conversation, feelings of sympathy became stronger again.

At the same time, the inevitability of a European war was not regarded as absolute in the United States. It was felt that all problems could be settled in a friendly manner, as was fitting between civilised countries.

For some days Europe had been full of rumours that President Roosevelt would take the initiative in calling a world conference for the settlement of all economic and political problems. Democratic Europe eagerly awaited the American President's step; but it waited in vain. For reasons best known to himself, President Roosevelt had omitted to take this initiative: but he did adopt another measure. With the authority of a man behind whom stood the greatest democratic community

in the world, he sent an eloquent appeal to all the statesmen concerned. This was on the Monday—before the German Chancellor had spoken in the Sportpalast. Pleading for a peaceful solution, and drawing attention to the obligations arising from the Briand–Kellogg Pact, he said: " On behalf of the 130 million people of the United States, and for the sake of humanity everywhere, I most earnestly appeal to you not to break off negotiations looking to a peaceful, fair and constructive settlement of the questions at issue. Opposing standpoints can be harmonised by negotiations. Once they are broken off reason is banished and force produces no solution for the future good of humanity." The voice from overseas, warning Europe of the impending conflict at the eleventh hour, was heard in Paris and London, Berlin and Prague, Budapest and Warsaw. Within an hour the news agencies had spread it to the four quarters of the globe, and soon the whole world knew of the President's appeal.

The first reply reaching Washington did not, however, come from Europe, but from South America. The President of Argentina, Roberto Ortiz, sent a telegram to thank Mr. Roosevelt for his initiative, and to declare that Argentina was at one with the peaceful endeavours of the United States. At the same time President Ortiz informed Mr. Roosevelt that Hitler and Dr. Beneš had been advised of the position taken up by Argentina.

Later the replies from Europe came in. They were, of course, in a positive sense, and the heads of the British and French Governments expressed their gratitude to the American President. In 168 words Mr. Chamberlain told Mr. Roosevelt that

France and Britain would do everything to save the peace and to settle the whole matter by negotiation.

M. Daladier's reply, which was sent from London, where he was staying on Monday morning, was twenty words shorter. " We are," the telegram concluded, " confident of serving to the very end the ideal of justice and peace which has always united our two peoples."

The reply sent on Monday evening by President Beneš contained 277 words. The President declared that Czechoslovakia had ever been faithful to the principle of solving questions under dispute by way of negotiation. He recalled that Czechoslovakia had signed a treaty of arbitration with Germany, and expressed his readiness to settle the present conflict by this method. He expressed the Czechoslovak people's gratitude to President Roosevelt, and declared that Czechoslovakia would defend herself if attacked. Finally, he shared President Roosevelt's view that war was not the method by which problems were solved.

Hitler's reply was the longest of all. True, it was not despatched from Berlin until twenty-four hours later, on Tuesday. It contained no less than 1075 words, and was not so much a reply as a note.

Hitler, too, did justice to President Roosevelt's efforts. Further, he gave a lengthy exposition of the entire problem as seen from the German angle. He spoke of the dictated peace of Versailles, of the sufferings of the Sudeten Germans, and of the calm attitude of the German Government. He expressed the conviction that President Roosevelt would recognise that the German Government had not been lacking in moderation from beginning to end,

and had not been deficient in the desire to reach a peaceful understanding. The responsibility did not rest with Germany, but with the Czech Government, and the decision between war and peace was with the latter alone.

Hitler's telegram was simply a repetition in more moderate terms of the speech delivered on Monday evening in the Berlin Sportpalast, a speech which caused disgust and anger throughout Europe.

The German people was aware of Hitler's angry speech, but it had heard nothing of President Roosevelt's appeal nor of the Führer's reply. The organs of Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, had kept them in ignorance.

The Soldiers' Hour

On the morning of Monday, the 26th of September, it was the soldiers' hour in London rather than that of the diplomats and politicians.

The politicians had reached agreement in principle on the previous evening, and were due to finish their consultations in the course of the morning. Meanwhile the soldiers had the floor. Or rather, in the first instance, the soldier, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, General Gamelin, who had come from Paris in the morning. General Gamelin had a lengthy consultation with Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. The details of the impending warlike operations which actually had been settled long ago were discussed; the armies were to be under French, and the navies under British command. The air forces, whose weakness was realised, were also to operate jointly.

Later, conversations took place between Mr. Chamberlain, M. Daladier and General Gamelin. The latter announced that the French Army was ready.

The French General's conversations in London were a complete success. With a full sense of responsibility, the Generals were now preparing the great war destined to free Europe from the German menace. At last it was seen that the question at issue did not concern Czechoslovakia, but Europe itself.

And while the soldiers were preparing for war, the politicians were still trying to save the peace. Not perhaps at all costs, but still . . .

During the night preceding Monday, London had telephoned to Moscow, and the British Ambassador had paid an urgent call at the Kremlin. M. Litvinoff, the Russian Foreign Minister, who at the time was away from Moscow, had certainly declared on numerous occasions that Russia's attitude in the present conflict was firm, and it was also known that similar information had been conveyed to Prague. But now that the decisive moment was approaching, it was found desirable to be quite certain.

In the course of the morning a reassuring reply was received from Moscow, stating that Russia was ready.

The British and French statesmen took note of this information. The affirmative answer given by Russia was destined to play an important part in the evening's official statement.

On Sunday night and Monday morning the question had been how far it was possible to meet Germany. It was accordingly resolved to accept Hitler's time-limit for the settlement of the point at issue—

the 1st of October—and to offer him a token occupation of a small district beyond the Czech fortifications. Again, it might be possible to meet him in subsidiary matters, provided he did not insist on his main claim—viz., the immediate occupation of all the Sudeten German regions. In any case, the point was maintained that an international commission must settle the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia, and not the German militarists.

On the other hand, if the German Army were to attack Czechoslovakia before a peaceful settlement of the question was reached, then, it was resolved in London, France would help Czechoslovakia, and Great Britain would be on the side of France. The question of guaranteeing the frontiers which, on Hitler's refusal to undertake a guarantee, remained with Britain and France alone, caused a long and extremely difficult debate. Mr. Chamberlain was faced by the difficulty that the guarantee of Belgian neutrality and of the Rhine frontier, imposed as they were by military considerations, were quite enough without having to guarantee the frontiers of a small State in Central Europe which in the near future would be exposed to heavy economic and political pressure from Germany.

But the French Prime Minister remained firm, and succeeded eventually in inducing the British Cabinet to state its readiness to guarantee the new Czechoslovak frontier. The British statesmen did not like to give this promise; but they gave it.

Meanwhile Hitler's speech in the Sportpalast on Monday evening was anxiously awaited. Confidential reports had been received from Berlin stating that it would be extremely violent.

The French and British statesmen little understood the German Dictator's psychology. Before the French Ministers left London it was decided to send Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin with a fresh personal message from Mr. Chamberlain. They little suspected that they were only adding fuel to the Chancellor's flame.

Herr Hitler Listens and . . . Speaks

Although he was drafting the speech to be delivered that evening in the Sportpalast Herr Hitler had found time to receive numerous personal and military advisers and to hear their views.

Early in the morning the news of the day had been submitted to the Führer. First came President Roosevelt's moving appeal, which he read attentively but without comment.

Other news came later: the dissatisfaction among the populace, the previous day's consultations in London, General Gamelin's journey, and the apparently growing resolve in the West not to give in to Germany.

Herr von Ribbentrop had expressed his conviction that Britain would not intervene, a view which Hitler seemed to share. Complete certainty did not exist about France's attitude, but it was felt that Germany could settle France alone: the essential point was to enforce a halt on France at the German frontiers until the occupation of Czechoslovakia was a *fait accompli*, when it would be possible to conclude peace with France, provided that the old methods were followed of assuring the French people that no harm was intended to them. Once Germany had struck a blow at Czechoslovakia with all the power

at her command, no doubt was felt that France would cease hostilities and leave Czechoslovakia to her fate.

This view was shared by Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, and Herr Rudolf Hess, the Führer's deputy, who visited the Chancellor's office in the course of the morning. Field Marshal Goering, who had recovered from his illness, was more cautious. Despite his bellicose speech at Nuremberg, he disliked a warlike adventure, the result of which was dubious.

Towards noon General Keitel called on the Führer. The Commander-in-Chief reported that all preparations had been made. The decisive attack would be launched from the former Austrian frontier in the direction of Moravia, so as to cut off Bohemia and to prevent the Czech armies from retreating. From Moravia it would be easier to enter Bohemia than by forcing the strongly fortified mountain frontiers. Certain difficulties were inherent in the operation, but their final success was assured by the German numerical superiority. The General was aware that the position would become more difficult if France were to intervene, since that country possessed far more trained reservists than Germany. Further, French intervention would also automatically involve Russia.

Early in the course of the afternoon three Major-Generals—Loeb, Bodenschatz and Hanneken—called at the Chancellor's office and asked for an audience, which was not granted. They left a letter which Hitler read and put aside; the warnings not to enter a war which might involve the entire world did not count at this moment. What mattered was

that the Chancellor had already learnt, to his intense satisfaction, that Mr. Chamberlain had sent Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin with a personal letter. Later in the afternoon, when the hall of the Sportpalast where he was to make his speech had already begun to fill, the Chancellor received Mr. Chamberlain's emissary and the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson.

Herr Hitler, as he listened to Sir Horace's introductory words, seemed somewhat absent-minded. This is what Mr. Chamberlain wrote:

"The Czechoslovak Government now inform me that, while they adhere to their acceptance of the proposals to the transfer of the Sudeten German areas on the lines discussed by my Government and the French Government, and explained by me to you on Thursday last, they regard as wholly unacceptable the proposal in your Memorandum for the immediate evacuation of the areas and their immediate occupation by German troops, these processes to take place before the terms of cession have been negotiated or even discussed.

"Your Excellency will remember that in my letter to you of Friday last I said that an attempt to occupy forthwith by German troops areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle, and very shortly afterwards by formal delimitation, would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force, and that, in my opinion, if German troops moved into the areas that you had proposed, I felt sure that the Czechoslovak Government would resist, and that this would mean the destruction of the basis upon which you and I agreed a week ago to work together—namely, an orderly settlement of this question rather than a settlement by the use of force.

"I referred also to the effect likely to be produced upon public opinion in my country, in France, and indeed in the world generally. The development of opinion since my return confirms me in the views I

expressed to you in my letter and in our subsequent conversation . . .

"I learn that the German Ambassador in Paris has issued a communiqué which begins with stating that, as a result of our conversations at Godesberg, Your Excellency and I are in complete agreement as to the imperative necessity to maintain the peace of Europe. In this spirit I address my present communication to you.

"A settlement by negotiation remains possible and, with a clear recollection of the conversations which you and I have had, and with an equally clear appreciation of the consequences which must follow the abandonment of negotiations and the substitution of force, I ask Your Excellency to agree that representatives of Germany shall meet representatives of the Czechoslovakian Government to discuss immediately the situation by which we are confronted with a view to settling by agreement the way in which the territory is to be handed over.

"I am convinced that these discussions can be completed in a very short time, and, if you and the Czechoslovakian Government desire it, I am willing to arrange for the representation of the British Government at the discussions.

"In our conversation, as in the official communiqué issued in Germany, you said that the only differences between us lay in the method of carrying out an agreed principle. If this is so, then surely the tragic consequences of a conflict ought not to be incurred over a difference in method."

The tone of the letter was fairly unequivocal. Had it been accompanied by a general mobilisation in Britain, it is possible that Hitler would still have altered his speech, and would not have told the German people about the ultimatum, of which it knew nothing so far. We say that it is possible, for we are not entirely convinced. We still consider that the only thing to cause Germany to stop would have been the timely adoption of a firm attitude by

the Powers. In the letter he had just read, Hitler had perceived the hidden threat, but also the eagerness to continue negotiations. The letter may have confirmed him in his conviction that Great Britain would not make war, despite the fact that it now seemed to be preparing for it.

"I desire," Hitler replied, "to express to the Prime Minister my profound gratitude for his endeavours in the cause of peace: but I must abide by what I have already said. I do not trust the Prague Government, and I do not trust Dr. Beneš. He must give way, or else we will compel him to. I do not like the idea of further conferences: they would only delay a settlement of this question."

Sir Horace withdrew to convey Hitler's statement to London; but he did not leave Berlin. He was to call for the Führer's written reply on the following day.

A few minutes after 8 p.m. the Führer entered the crowded hall of the Sportpalast. As usual, he was welcomed with the enthusiastic cheers of the frenzied multitude. "German men and women . . ." he began.

Millions listened to him: millions all over the world, full of hopes and fears.

One sentence which many expected to hear was not pronounced in the course of the speech: the proclamation of general mobilisation, the sole reply to the Prague refusal which it might have been thought that Germany could give. The cause of such moderation lay in Mr. Chamberlain's letter and in an official communiqué issued in London shortly before the speech.

CHAPTER V

THE BALKANS LOOK WEST

THE firmer and more confident attitude that the Western Powers took up towards Germany during the next few days rapidly bore fruit. This applied above all to Rumania, which had been following events with grave anxiety. For a short period at the beginning of the year Rumania seemed to have thrown herself into Germany's arms, but the diplomatic representations of the Western Powers, perhaps accompanied by economic pressure or promises, brought about a rapid change of front. Rumanian foreign policy was once more definitely directed towards the West. Rumania has big German and Hungarian minorities, and it was inevitable that she should feel that she might well be Germany's next victim. An enormous burden of anxiety seemed to have been lifted from her shoulders, and she looked to the West with renewed confidence. In case of war she was ready to allow Soviet aircraft to fly over her territory, and was perhaps willing to intervene herself, naturally on the side of the Western Powers.

Dr. Stoyadinovich, the Prime Minister of Jugoslavia, whose policy had been very friendly towards Germany for many years, hesitated. If Italy joined in the contest, Jugoslavia's position would be critical. Dr. Stoyadinovich had hitherto refused to believe that the Western Powers would fight, and had acted accordingly. In spite of widespread pro-Czech demonstrations throughout the country, the Government did nothing that could be interpreted

as an unfriendly act towards Germany. But the firm attitude of the Great Powers alarmed him somewhat, and there was talk of a radical alteration of Jugoslav foreign policy. Jugoslavia looked to the West with greater respect than had been the case before.

Moreover, Germany's allies, Poland and Hungary, hesitated too. Hungary hastily declared that she would remain neutral, and the gravest alarm was felt in Poland, which had heard many unpleasant things from the West during the last few days. They now became more unpleasant than ever.

Even General Franco, the would-be Dictator of Spain, made a declaration of neutrality during these few days, and this action on his part was taken very much amiss in Germany.

There could have been no clearer demonstration that, in spite of everything, the force of attraction that the Western Powers exercised over the countries of South-Eastern Europe had remained unbroken. These countries naturally look to the West for the protection of their economic and political independence. Moreover, they are better acquainted with Germany than the West is. They know both the advantages and the disadvantages of Germany as a political and economic associate. They know Germany can consume all their raw materials and agricultural products, but they also know that Germany has no foreign exchange and insists on making payment in machinery and other industrial products. And the Balkan States, which do not need so very much machinery, will take a long time to absorb them. They would far rather have the United States and the capitalist countries of the West as

their customers. But in this respect the countries of the West, particularly France, have been very remiss. Though the French language is popular in Eastern Europe, and French civilisation is greatly admired, it is not Frenchmen but Germans who are to be found there, offering good prices and making widespread business connections.

Moreover, the Balkan countries know the Germans not only in the economic, but also in the political field, and in the political field Germany is feared. German political agents are scattered throughout the whole of South-Eastern Europe, buying up newspapers and influencing important people. German colonies, established throughout the Balkans, actively promote Nazi policy in the countries whose hospitality they enjoy.

The Balkans admire Germany, but they also fear her; and they look longingly to the West, hoping for a word of guidance. But that word has not come.

Shadows over Europe

Europe is like a stage, revolving at such dizzy speed that it is difficult to keep pace with the lightning changes of scene. Now it is London, now Paris, now Berlin. Then it shifts to Berchtesgaden or Godesberg, to Prague, Warsaw or Moscow. For a full and exhaustive picture of the whole a view of the chief scenes is not sufficient. We must also have a look at the sideshows.

On Monday, 26th September, the chief scenes of action were London and Berlin; and Paris, Prague and Warsaw were the sideshows. Let us now pay some attention to the latter.

Paris

In the course of the afternoon the two Ministers, MM. Daladier and Bonnet, returned to Paris. M. Bonnet was upset. He had not been invited to take part in the most important conversations. Now that soldiers were preparing to take a hand, he had seemed to be mistrusted, although his sole aim was at all costs to spare France a war. M. Bonnet was profoundly convinced of the correctness of this policy, and he was not alone. He had widespread support, not only in his own Party and in the Cabinet, but among the Opposition as well; and, what was more, every important newspaper was on his side. The French people were never really informed of what was at stake. They never knew that this was not just a matter of the defence of Czechoslovakia, but of France's age-long enemy securing the hegemony of Europe. The French Press spoke of matters of procedure, put blinkers over the eyes of the average French citizen and made it impossible for him to sum up the situation with his usual clarity. Only two Paris newspapers told the truth. But their circulation was relatively small, and they received little attention. If the people of France had known the truth, things would have been very different. This offered the Government very little scope if it were to make a firm stand against Germany, for such a course meant accepting the risk of war. The French people had no objection to making a firm stand, but they objected strongly to a war on account of a little-known and distant country, even though that country lay only four-and-a-half flying hours from

Le Bourget. However, that was the feeling of the country, and the Government had to take it into account.

After M. Daladier had reported to M. Lebrun, the President of the Republic, he received Mr. Bullitt, the American Ambassador. After the interview Mr. Bullitt said to the journalists: "I am always an optimist, because I am always on the side of truth".

Mr. Bullitt did not, however, seem so absolutely positive that truth would easily prevail on this occasion, for his Embassy advised American tourists in France to return to the United States by the first available liner, unless they were detained in France by urgent business.

General Gamelin returned to Paris in the evening. He found the city preparing for war. The street-lamps were dimmed, and all the hundred and fifty sirens that were to warn the population of air raids were ready. A force of five thousand men had been specially appointed to warn the people of Paris of the peril that hung over them. Experts were busily engaged transforming forty-three thousand Paris basements into bomb-proof shelters. Even the traffic in the streets bore witness to the preparations that were taking place for war. There were noticeably fewer buses, because many had been requisitioned to take reservists to the front. Hundreds of Paris taxis had been commandeered for service with the army transport, just as in 1914. The opening of the school term was postponed, and innumerable mothers and children were leaving the capital for the greater security of the provinces.

Meanwhile train after train steamed out of the

Gare de l'Est, taking reservists to the Eastern frontier of France.

PRAGUE

President Beneš, speaking to the people of Czechoslovakia over the wireless a few days earlier, had said: "I have a plan". What could this plan be? Was he hastily making agreements with his neighbours to improve his prospects of resisting Germany?

Poland, Czechoslovakia's Eastern neighbour, had no intention of letting such a splendid opportunity slip by without claiming her share of the spoils.

As we know, Poland had already claimed the Teschen area, which contains important heavy industries and coal-mines in addition to a population of several thousand Poles. We also know that Poland had given notice to terminate the minorities treaty with Czechoslovakia and was concentrating military forces on the frontier. Would Poland invade Czechoslovakia in spite of the warning she had received from Russia?

Czechoslovakia was prepared. A state of national emergency had been proclaimed, and the services of all civilians between the ages of seventeen and sixty were declared to be at the disposal of the State. But Prague itself remained calm. There was no panic, in spite of the threatening danger.

President Beneš had a plan. He wished to come to an understanding with Poland. PAT, the official Polish news agency, had already announced that Czechoslovakia was ready to come to a territorial understanding with Poland. This piece of information was denied by the Czechoslovak Press Bureau, but it was nevertheless true. For during the after-

noon an aeroplane set off from Prague in the direction of Warsaw, bearing a personal letter from the President of the Czechoslovakian Republic addressed to M. Ignacy Moscicki, President of the Polish Republic.

WARSAW

Colonel Beck had been responsible for Polish foreign policy for many years, and now it looked as though he was coming into his own. The new orientation he had given to Polish policy, directed to coming to an understanding with Germany, had succeeded in its aim, but at the cost of a long struggle, at home and abroad. Colonel Beck's policy had resulted in an estrangement from France, Poland's traditional friend since the time of her greatest national humiliation.

Since the end of May 1938, French diplomacy had sought with all the means in its power to convince Poland that this policy was incompatible with the promise that Marshal Rydz-Smigly, the Dictator of Poland, had given a few years earlier when the Polish Government had sought and been granted an armament loan of two thousand millions in Paris. Marshal Rydz-Smigly had promised not only that Poland would not attack Czechoslovakia in the case of war, but that she would remain neutral and permit Soviet aeroplanes to fly over Polish territory. But now it did not look as if Poland would remain neutral. That Poland would allow Russian aeroplanes to fly to the rescue of Czechoslovakia if she were attacked was out of the question. Colonel Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, had actually attempted to persuade the Rumanian Government

to refuse permission for five Russian aeroplanes which Prague had bought in Russia to fly over Rumania.

All the efforts of M. Noel, the French Ambassador in Warsaw, to persuade Poland to change her attitude had been unavailing. If a conflict broke out, Poland would certainly remain neutral, but Colonel Beck was just as convinced as his friends in Berlin that a conflict would not break out, and that the Western Powers would give in to Germany. In that case Poland could not remain disinterested. She would claim her reward for her pact with Germany, and Czechoslovakia would have to cede Teschen to her.

President Moscicki read President Beneš's letter, and sent for his Foreign Minister. A conference took place, in which Marshal Rydz-Smigly also took part. Colonel Beck held firm to his position. Did Czechoslovakia voluntarily offer the Teschen district to Poland? Well and good. But as for coming to a friendly understanding with her and signing a non-aggression pact, that was out of the question. In the first place, it would amount to a vote of no confidence towards Germany, and in the second place Colonel Beck was nursing far more ambitious plans for his country. Why should not Slovakia be incorporated into Poland, and why should not Poland have a common frontier with Hungary?

Of course there was nothing of all this in the reply which President Moscicki sent to President Beneš next day. This reply was in very general terms, acknowledging the promises made by President Beneš on behalf of Czechoslovakia, but promising nothing whatever in return.

Two Communiqués and a Cabinet Meeting

While Hitler was speaking in the Sportpalast on Monday evening, the British Foreign Office issued a communiqué couched in unusually firm language. It was as follows:

> " During the last week Mr. Chamberlain has tried with the German Chancellor to find the way of settling peacefully the Czechoslovak question. It is still possible to do so by negotiations.
>
> " The German claim to the transfer of the Sudeten areas has already been conceded by the French, British and Czechoslovak Governments, but if, in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister, a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France.
>
> " It is still not too late to stop this great tragedy, and for the people of all nations to insist on settlement by free negotiation."

This communiqué aroused universal interest, partly because of its firm tone, but mostly because it actually mentioned Russia. It was very rare for Russia to be mentioned in an official statement issued by the British Foreign Office.

A strange thing happened to this official statement. The news agencies were at first authorised to announce that it had been issued by the Foreign Office, but the authorisation was later withdrawn, and next day the London and Paris morning papers described it as merely a statement " from an authoritative source ". This soft-pedalling was doubtless due to the fact that it was still desired to treat Germany with kid gloves. One had the impression that those in authority were terrified by their own boldness in mentioning Russia in the same breath

as France and England, and that they felt that above all Germany must not be offended.

. . . . .

Late that night, after Hitler had finished his speech, the British Cabinet met to study its contents.

At first sight the speech was terrible. In the first place, Hitler now publicly proclaimed his ultimatum date—1st of October—and thus committed himself before his own people. In the second place, Hitler repeatedly insulted the President of Czechoslovakia, an independent State, in a fashion unprecedented in international relations.

But on second thoughts the speech was not so bad as it looked. After all, it was felt in London that it contained no reference to the mobilisation of the German army. A general mobilisation in Germany would have meant that Hitler had decided to resort to force. But he had not done so, and that meant that he had kept the next few days open for possible negotiations. Nor had he repeated his Godesberg demands in their entirety. It could therefore be concluded that the door was still open, though the answer he had sent to Mr. Chamberlain's letter that night was not very encouraging. In any case, hope must not be abandoned. The firmness which the Western Powers had been showing since Saturday had already borne some fruit. If things went on in the same way, there was still hope.

At two o'clock in the morning, when the Cabinet dispersed, Mr. Chamberlain issued the following statement to the Press:

> " I have read the speech of the German Chancellor, and I appreciate his references to the efforts I have made to save the peace.

"I cannot abandon those efforts, since it seems to me incredible that the peoples of Europe who do not want war with one another should be plunged into a bloody struggle over a question on which agreement has already been largely obtained.

"It is evident that the Chancellor has no faith that the promises made will be carried out. These promises were made, not to the German Government direct, but to the British and French Governments in the first instance.

"Speaking for the British Government, we regard ourselves as morally responsible for seeing that the promises are carried out fairly and fully, and we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out with all reasonable promptitude, provided that the German Government will agree to the settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force.

"I trust that the German Chancellor will not reject this proposal, which is made in the same spirit of friendliness as that in which I was received in Germany, and which, if it is accepted, will satisfy the German desire for the union of Sudeten Germans with the Reich without the shedding of blood in any part of Europe."

On that agitated Monday Mr. Chamberlain, and with him Great Britain, had the last word. Nevertheless Hitler, as we shall soon see, remained implacable.

. . . . .

Sir Horace Wilson Goes Home

Hitler appeared to have taken no notice of the diplomatic appeals and letters that had been addressed to him in the last twenty-four hours.

True, his speech of Monday night did not slam and bolt the door. Nevertheless he had not budged one inch from his position. The Sudeten territory must be voluntarily evacuated before the 1st of

October and occupied by the Reichswehr. Otherwise . . .

The alternative filled Europe with foreboding. On Tuesday the situation turned out to be even more critical than it had seemed in the early hours.

At ten minutes past twelve Sir Horace Wilson was received by the Führer in an audience which lasted for half-an-hour, and grave words passed between them.

Following Hitler's speech, fresh instructions had come from London, and Sir Horace accordingly transmitted another British warning to the Chancellor.

The British Government, he explained, had been informed by the French Government that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, France would go to the latter's assistance, and the British Government would then be obliged to intervene. His Majesty's Government therefore requested the Chancellor to weigh carefully all the consequences that would ensue, and to shape his future actions accordingly.

At this Hitler flared up. The British Fleet had already been mobilised, he indignantly declared, and France and Britain were preparing for war. That was proof that they were not acting honourably towards Germany. The Czechs had been mobilised for the past five days. He had already informed Prague that unless the Sudeten territory were evacuated by Czech troops by two o'clock on the following day, Wednesday, the German army would intervene.

Hitler saw that the die was cast, and his bluff now reached its utmost limit. The more rapidly he acted now, the more frantic he made the pace, the

greater was the chance that the Western Powers would give in and grant everything he asked. Hitler may not yet have foreseen exactly in what way this would come about.

That was the situation when Sir Horace Wilson left Berlin at 1.45 p.m., to hand the British Prime Minister a personal letter from Herr Hitler a few hours later.

Mr. Chamberlain had already been informed by telephone of the general purport of Hitler's letter and of the extremely alarming news of the German ultimatum to Prague. But he had a plan. He instructed M. Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Minister in London, to inquire in Prague whether Czechoslovakia was prepared to take part in an international conference. The answer was yes. Naturally Czechoslovakia would require certain assurances, in particular a guarantee that, in the interests of her national security, she would be allowed to maintain her mobilisation during the course of the negotiations. Mr. Chamberlain acknowledged the Czechoslovak reply and considered his plan further. Perhaps Mussolini occurred to him in the course of his meditations. Mussolini had meanwhile been discreetly reminding Paris and London of his existence. Mussolini's hour was approaching, and in less than twenth-four hours it would be at hand.

But things had not got as far as that yet.

In the parks and open spaces of London twenty thousand men were engaged in digging trenches for the protection of the population in case of air raids. There were large numbers of volunteers for the civil air guard. The Air Force and the Navy were ready for action. Parliament had been called for

Wednesday, and there was feverish anxiety about what the next few days might have in store. Was it to be war or peace?

The King cancelled his journey to Glasgow for the launching of the *Queen Elizabeth*, the world's largest passenger ship.

The whole British Empire declared its solidarity with the British Government. Mr. Lyons, the Australian Prime Minister, had had a telephone conversation on Monday with Mr. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London. The Australian Federal Cabinet was in permanent session. If war were to break out in Europe, Australia was ready.

Declarations of loyalty poured in from India, and South Africa had already announced her determination to stand by England's side, because she knew that if Germany came out on top she would be threatened by German colonial ambitions.

Mr. Chamberlain awaited Hitler's letter with anxiety, although, as mentioned above, he already had more than an inkling of its contents.

" The Government in Prague " [Hitler stated], " feel justified in maintaining that the proposals in my Memorandum of 23rd September went far beyond the concessions which it made to the British and French Governments, and that the acceptance of the Memorandum would rob Czechoslovakia of every guarantee of its national existence.

" This statement is based on the argument that Czechoslovakia is to give up a great part of her prepared defensive system before she can take steps elsewhere for her military protection. Thereby the political and economic independence of the country is automatically abolished.

" Moreover, the exchange of population proposed

by me would turn out in practice to be a panic-stricken flight.

"I must openly declare that I cannot bring myself to understand these arguments, or even admit that they can be regarded as seriously put forward.

"The Government in Prague simply passes over the fact that the actual arrangements for the final settlement of the Sudeten German problem in accordance with my proposals will be made dependent, not on a unilateral German petition or on German measures of force, but rather, on the one hand, on a free vote under no outside influence and, on the other, to a very wide degree on German–Czech agreement on matters of detail to be reached subsequently. Not only the exact definition of the territories in which the plebiscite is to take place, but the execution of the plebiscite and the delimitation of the frontier to be made on the basis of its result are, in accordance with my proposals, to be made independently of any unilateral decision by Germany. Moreover, all other details are to be reserved for agreement on the part of a German–Czech Commission. . . .

"It is clear from my Memorandum that the German occupation would only extend to the given line, and that the final delimitation of the frontier would take place in accordance with the procedure which I have already described. The Prague Government has no right to doubt that the German military measures would stop within these limits. If, nevertheless, it desires such a doubt to be taken into account the British and, if necessary, also the French Government can guarantee the quick fulfilment of my proposal. I can, moreover, only refer to my speech yesterday, in which I clearly declared that I regret the idea of any attack on Czechoslovak territory, and that under the condition which I laid down I am even ready to give a formal guarantee for the remainder of Czechoslovakia. . . .

"I must assume that the Government in Prague is only using a proposal for the occupation by German troops in order, by distorting the meaning and object of my proposal, to mobilise those forces in other countries, in particular in England and France, from which they hope to receive unreserved support for

their aim and thus to achieve the possibility of a general warlike conflagration. I must leave it to your judgment whether, in view of these facts, you consider that you should continue your effort, for which I should like to take this opportunity of once more thanking you, to spoil such manœuvres and bring the Government in Prague to reason at the very last hour."

Mr. Chamberlain considered this letter with his friends and several members of the Cabinet. It was clear that it still held the door open for further negotiations. True, the German ultimatum to Prague was very alarming, but perhaps a way out might yet be found. Moreover, in the course of the discussions, the name of Mussolini cropped up.

Europe Awaits Her Destiny

On Tuesday, 27th September, European public opinion regarded war as inevitable. All efforts to find a solution to the crisis had failed. On the one hand the German Chancellor was determined to have his way with Czechoslovakia, on the other Britain and France seemed equally determined to make no more concessions that would hand over Czechoslovakia bound hand and foot to the tender mercies of Germany.

That was how the situation appeared in the eyes of European public opinion. But were Britain and France really so determined to make no more concessions to Germany at Czechoslovakia's expense? The day drew to a close and darkness fell, and as the hours passed by, the leading statesmen of Europe detected a path that might lead them to the resumption of harmonious relations. That path led through Rome.

But before things reached that stage and hope had definitely revived, a number of things happened in other places to which we must now devote a little attention.

Paris

The political and diplomatic activity in the French capital resembled a revolution in a beehive. There was a continual coming and going of diplomats at the Quai d'Orsay, violent discussions took place in the lobbies of the Chamber, and innumerable party groups held long and excited conferences.

The Cabinet met and dispersed after deciding not to recall Parliament for the time being. It would have been dangerous to have displayed the differences of national opinion to all the world.

For the differences of opinion in Paris were very serious. Everybody had divergent views about what ought to be done in this emergency. There was no certainty about the attitude of the various parties as a whole. Members of the Right were in favour of resolute and determined action, come what may, and members of the Left wanted peace at any price.

The Government majority, consisting of the Popular Front, was more disunited than ever, and in fact the end of the Popular Front was already casting its shadow before. Only the Communists were unanimously in favour of making a determined stand, even at the cost of war: and many members of the Right—*i.e.*, of the Opposition—including the extreme Right wing, were in agreement with them. The Socialists were in an acute dilemma, and most of them were opposed to war. The Radical Socialists—*i.e.*, M. Daladier's own Party—were

utterly bewildered, and, not knowing what else to do, decided to ratify whatever M. Daladier might do.

The most determined advocate of peace at any price on the Right was M. Flandin. He called a conference of the Parliamentary minority in order to convince them of the necessity of common action towards this end, but he was not very successful, because, as we have already seen, many members of the Right were in favour of making a determined stand. After a long debate it was determined that the exact differences between Hitler's Godesberg demands and the Anglo-French proposals should be established. A deputation was sent to interview M. Bonnet, the Foreign Minister, who expressed his conviction that the differences were not very great, and that it would be an appalling act of irresponsibility if war were allowed to break out because of what he called " questions of procedure ". He, M. Bonnet, was absolutely opposed to it, but the decision now lay in the hands of M. Daladier, who had conducted all the decisive negotiations in London. M. Bonnet, who could scarcely conceal his nervousness and irritation, sent the deputation to see M. Daladier. But M. Daladier declined to receive it, explaining that he was prevented by pressure of business and had no time.

The rumour had already started going round Paris that M. Daladier was planning a Government of national union, a coalition to include all the Parliamentary Parties, in case of war.

French public opinion was opposed to war. As we have already stated, it was misinformed, and still believed the crisis was only about Czechoslovakia,

or, as M. Bonnet called it, " matters of procedure ". French public opinion was quite unaware that the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia would inevitably have terrible consequences for France, and remained definitely opposed to war. Hence the divergence of opinion within the political Parties in Parliament. The deputies knew the state of public opinion very well. Whether the latter was due to the defective information supplied by the French Press or to something else made no difference now.

The writers of France issued a public proclamation. M. Jules Romains, the president of the P.E.N. Club, issued a manifesto addressed to the writers of Italy and Germany, calling on them to work for peace. Failure to do so, the manifesto declared, would mean working against the spirit of civilisation, betraying the cause of humanity, and undertaking a terrible responsibility. There was no more talk now of France fulfilling her treaty obligations towards Czechoslovakia. Was the treaty to be fulfilled, or was it to be declared a scrap of paper? That was not the question in men's minds. The war threat overshadowed everything else. The future of France as a Great Power hung in the balance. Should she make war on Germany to prevent her from securing the hegemony of Europe, or should she give in to Germany now, spare the present generation the ordeal of another war, and let future generations foot the bill?

Public opinion was opposed to war, and public opinion had to be reckoned with. This fact was naturally as familiar to the Prime Minister as it was to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. M. Daladier therefore listened very carefully to M. Bonnet that

evening when the latter made him a proposal. In this the name of Mussolini again cropped up.

. . . . .

Later that evening—meanwhile, of course, contact had been made with London—M. Daladier made a statement to the Press.

" Complete calm and order prevails in France," he said. " Security measures are being carried out in orderly fashion and according to plan. The international struggle for peace is not yet ended. As an old soldier, I have a right to say that my Government will leave nothing undone to secure an honourable peace."

PRAGUE

The capital of Czechoslovakia was the scene of many conferences during the course of the day. Negotiations took place between the leaders of the political parties, the President of the Republic had long deliberations with various political personalities, as well as with the military leaders. Their task was relatively easy, for they had calculable factors to deal with, such as military units, transport arrangements, defence plans, and the organisation of public safety. The task of the politicians was far more difficult. Moreover, Czechoslovakia, though the cause of the whole crisis, no longer occupied the centre of the stage.

Prague had already spoken. She had agreed to surrender the Sudeten areas to Germany, declined Hitler's more far-reaching Godesberg demands, and declared her willingness to take part in an international conference, subject to certain guarantees. She had noted the German ultimatum calling upon

her to evacuate the Sudeten territories before two o'clock on Wednesday, but she had no intention whatever of doing so. Prague's position was clear, and if war should break out now, the whole world would know with whom the responsibility lay.

As, for the time being, there was nothing to do in Prague but to take note of the diplomatic reports from Paris and London, the contents of which were increasingly bewildering, attention was devoted at the last hour to the task of rallying all Germans who did not wish to live in Hitler's Germany. A pro-Czech proclamation by the Sudeten German Democratic Youth Movement was published, and negotiations were undertaken with those Sudeten German politicians who were still prepared to work for a solution by which the Sudeten Germans should live peaceably within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic. A proclamation was published in the name of a million democratic Germans, declaring that the majority of the Sudeten people had no desire to be absorbed by Germany.

> "The votes that we gave for Henlein [this proclamation declared] gave him no authority whatever to declare an *anschluss*, and still less to secure it by means of a world war. We protest before the whole world against the violence done to democracy by Hitler's new demands. The cession of the Sudeten German territory to Hitler would not prevent a war, but would plunge Europe into catastrophe, since the democratic Powers would henceforward be unable to resist Fascist aggression."

However, all these negotiations and proclamations took place in an atmosphere of bewilderment and uneasiness. Everyone felt that the fate of Czecho-

slovakia no longer depended upon herself, but upon the decisions being made in the Western capitals.

Czech public opinion, which in the past few days had been so grievously disappointed in its trust in the Western democracies, once more became hopeful. But the statesmen in charge of affairs were sceptical and uncertain. The language of the confusing diplomatic reports that poured in from the Western capitals was not reassuring.

At 5.40 p.m. President Moscicki's answer to President Beneš's letter arrived from Warsaw. As we already know, it was written in conciliatory terms, acknowledging the Czechoslovak promises, but promising nothing in return.

At the same time an official Polish statement was published, announcing that Poland accepted the Czech declaration agreeing to the principle of territorial revision as a means of solving the Polish–Czechoslovak problem.

The diplomatic reports that Prague received from Warsaw, direct and through Paris, were by no means reassuring. Poland was of the opinion that the moment had come to press her claims to Teschen, but she had no intention of coming to an understanding with Czechoslovakia, let alone make a treaty with her.

Brussels

Six military classes had been mobilised in Belgium, which had been in a state of emergency for many days. Belgium had never forgotten the terrible years of the German occupation during the Great War. She had declared her neutrality some time ago, but, if a war broke out, who would pay heed to

the neutrality of a small country like Belgium? Besides, Belgium too has a small German minority, in the frontier districts of Eupen and Malmédy.

On Tuesday evening M. Spaak, the Prime Minister, went to the microphone and spoke to the Belgian people.

" Belgium is determined to defend her territory against any attack," he said, " and will not permit any army to march through Belgian territory."

WASHINGTON

The United States Government did not remain inactive. Three American cruisers, *Philadelphia*, *Savannah* and *Texas*, were sent to Europe to evacuate American citizens in case of need.

During the afternoon the Czechoslovak Minister in Washington called upon Mr. Cordell Hull, the United States Secretary of State, and had a long conversation with him. " It is never too late for negotiations," the Minister said as he left the State Department.

At seven o'clock a Cabinet meeting was held in the White House, and soon afterwards a long cable was sent to Europe, consisting of another appeal by the President of the United States, this time directed to Hitler alone. Mr. Roosevelt knew as well as any European statesman where the real centre of the unrest lay.

He therefore appealed to the German Chancellor to continue negotiations for the sake of avoiding a European war. He expressed the opinion that all the differences between Germany and Czechoslovakia should be settled peacefully. He pointed out that the threat of force might easily lead to a general

war, and proposed the immediate summoning, in a neutral European country, of a conference of all the countries concerned in order to settle existing differences. President Roosevelt's moving appeal ended as follows:

> " Allow me to state my unqualified conviction that history and the souls of every man, woman and child whose lives will be lost in the threatened war will hold us, and all of us, accountable should we omit any appeal for its prevention.
>
> " The Government of the United States has no political involvements in Europe and will assume no obligations in the conduct of the present negotiations.
>
> " Yet in our own right we recognise our responsibilities as part of a world of neighbours. Conscience and the impelling desire of the people of my country demand that the voice of their Government be raised again and yet again to avert and avoid war."

President Roosevelt's wishes were to be fulfilled, perhaps sooner than he expected. He certainly did not anticipate that the conference he suggested would take the form that it did take, nor that the ensuing peace would be the peace that was arranged. There were two important respects in which the wishes of the American President were not fulfilled. The conference did not take place in a neutral country, but in Munich, and the country most concerned—Czechoslovakia—was not even admitted to it.

Berlin

Late that night a long coded cable reached Berlin from the German Embassy in Washington. Its contents were far from encouraging. Anti-German feeling in America was very great, it stated. In Roosevelt circles the opinion had been expressed

that a sharp Note ought to be addressed to Germany, though American jurists had expressed themselves against the proposal that Roosevelt should summon a court of arbitration to settle the dispute. Should war break out, the whole of America would be on the side of the European democracies, and there was even a possibility of American intervention.

With regard to the question of American intervention we do not know whether the German Ambassador exaggerated, because the people of the United States had no desire at this moment for armed intervention in European affairs, and they had no ambition to pay with their own blood for the incapacity of Europe's statesmen to maintain a reasonable peace.

When this cable reached Berlin it did not, however, make as great an impression as it would have done if it had arrived half a day earlier.

Germany wished to do nothing to make the path of the Western Powers more difficult. As a proof of this we may mention the following:

As we have stated above, Germany addressed an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia on Tuesday calling upon her to evacuate the Sudeten territory by two o'clock on Wednesday. Mr. Chamberlain himself mentioned this in the course of his speech in Parliament on Wednesday. Foreign correspondents in Berlin learned of this ultimatum in the course of the late afternoon and evening of Tuesday. The correctness of this information was at first orally confirmed, but was denied in a communiqué issued by the German Press Bureau later that night.

The purpose of this *démenti* was obviously not to force matters too far. For by the small hours on

Wednesday morning Berlin felt fairly sure that the Western Powers would give in, that there would be no European war, and that Germany would get what she wanted. Certain information that reached Berlin from London seemed to confirm this. Let us see what this information was.

A Gentleman's Speech and Two Letters

Mr. Chamberlain, sitting in his room at No. 10 Downing Street, broadcast a message to Hitler, the German people, Europe and the whole world. No one who listened to that speech will ever forget it. Mr. Chamberlain's quiet, tired and resigned voice made a far greater impression than the temperamental outbursts of the German Chancellor on the previous day.

"How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is," said Mr. Chamberlain, "that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.

"It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which is already settled in principle should be the subject of war.

"I well understand the reason why the Czech Government felt unable to accept the terms put before them in the German Memorandum. Yet I believed that, after my talks with Herr Hitler, if only time would allow, it ought to be possible for arrangement to transfer the territory that the Czech Government had agreed to give Germany to be settled by agreement under conditions which would ensure fair treatment for the population concerned."

Mr. Chamberlain then gave a short account of his

efforts to save peace, described his talks with Hitler and explained that he found Hitler's altered attitude at Godesberg " unreasonable ". He declared that he would not abandon his efforts to preserve peace, and called upon the people of Great Britain to offer their services for purposes of national defence.

" Don't be alarmed," he continued, " if you hear of men being called up to man the anti-aircraft defences and ships. These are only precautionary measures which the Government must take in times like these. It does not mean that we have determined on war or that war is imminent.

" However much we sympathise with a small country involved in a struggle with a larger neighbour, one could not necessarily involve the whole British Empire on that account. If this country fights, it must be on larger issues than that.

" I am a man of peace. To the depth of my soul, armed warfare is a nightmare to me.

" If I made up my mind that a country had decided to dominate by fear of its force, I would feel that it must be resisted.

" Under such a domination, life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living. But war is a fearful thing, and England must be very clear before it embarks on it that it is real and great issues that are at stake, and then the call to risk everything in their defence is irresistible. . . . I am going to work for peace till the last moment."

Was Germany to regard this as a last warning? Yes and no. Mr. Chamberlain said that England had no desire to be involved in war for the sake of a distant country. He said that if England fought,

it must be for greater issues than that. But he also said that if he were convinced that a country was determined to dominate by fear of its force, he would feel that it would be necessary to oppose it.

A big query remained. Was Mr. Chamberlain convinced that a struggle between England and Germany would be a struggle over " great issues "? Was he convinced that Germany " had decided to dominate by fear of its force "?

We believe that he must have been convinced of it. Otherwise Hitler would have been satisfied with what the democratic Powers had granted him at Berchtesgaden—namely, the cession of the Sudeten German areas. That was a great deal. If Hitler subsequently acted as he did, it could only be because he was pursuing wider aims. In Eastern Europe these aims are common knowledge. Hitler wished to destroy Czechoslovakia to leave the way clear for his drive to the East. He required an open road for the economic expansion of the Reich. Czechoslovakia was the key to Eastern Europe, and that key must be in his hands. He therefore made every effort to secure it by diplomatic means. For four whole months he had manœuvred very cleverly, and his diplomatic *démarches* showed him the many weaknesses of the Western European democracies, which had retreated step by step. At Berchtesgaden Hitler scored his first striking success, and this success had to be exploited. If the Western Powers sacrificed Czechoslovakia, it was obvious that they would sacrifice much more, and if they did so, these additional sacrifices would involve consequences to the structure of Europe far more extensive than the

mere occupation of Czechoslovakia. For the sake of these great aims, it was worth taking the risk of war. During these months, weeks and days Hitler tested not only his and Germany's strength, but the weaknesses of others. The history of these few days, with which we have now nearly finished, shows that for a short space the Western democracies spasmodically pulled themselves together and stood their ground. But after that they gave in. In the European game of poker they held many trump cards, but many of them they threw away.

As for Mr. Chamberlain's speech, it caused part of Europe to feel fairly certain that Great Britain was about to throw her great weight into the scales, while it led the other part, including particularly Berlin, to conclude that Britain would not fight.

. . . . .

At half-past nine, after Mr. Chamberlain's wireless talk, the British Cabinet met. It immediately decided on a Class B naval mobilisation. This mobilisation had to a great extent been carried out already, and the Cabinet decision was intended partly to ratify it, partly to make it known to the whole world, in order to lend emphasis to the words that came from London. We know that Hitler was already aware of this mobilisation, having spoken of it to Sir Horace Wilson during the afternoon

The wishes of London and Paris met half-way. There had been talk of Mussolini in both capitals throughout the day. Nevertheless it seems that this was not entirely a coincidence, and that it was Mussolini himself who had skilfully attracted the attention of both London and Paris and caused

himself to be looked upon as the last hope of both. M. Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, subsequently stated that the idea that the British should approach Mussolini came from him. That is quite possible. Nevertheless the fact remains that the idea was not new in London, and that when a telephone call came through from Paris on Tuesday night it was already in the air.

First of all, the British and French Ambassadors in Berlin were both instructed to approach Hitler and make one more endeavour to persuade him to recall his ultimatum, and then Mr. Chamberlain took another step. He wrote to Hitler as follows:

> " After reading your letter, I feel certain that you can get all essentials without war and without delay. I am ready to come to Berlin myself at once to discuss arrangements for transfers with you and representatives of the Czech Government, together with representatives of France and Italy, if you desire. I feel convinced that we can reach agreement in a week.
>
> " However much you distrust the Prague Government's intentions, you cannot doubt the power of the British and French Governments to see that the promises are carried out fully and carefully and forthwith.
>
> " As you know, I have stated publicly that we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out.
>
> " I cannot believe that you will take the responsibility of starting a world war which may end civilisation for the sake of a few days' delay in settling this long-standing problem."

If this letter convinced Hitler of anything at all, it can only have been that England and France wanted peace at any price.

Mr. Chamberlain addressed the following appeal to Mussolini:

"I have to-day addressed a last appeal to Herr Hitler to abstain from force to settle the Sudeten problem, which I feel sure can be settled by a short discussion, and will give him the essential territory, population and protection for both Sudetens and Czechs during the transfer.

"I have offered myself to go at once to Berlin to discuss arrangements with German and Czech representatives and, if the Chancellor desires, representatives also of Italy and France.

"I trust your Excellency will inform the German Chancellor that you are willing to be represented and urge him to agree to my proposal which will keep all our peoples out of war.

"I have already guaranteed that Czech promises should be carried out and feel confident full agreement could be reached in a week."

As soon as these letters were sent to the Ambassadors concerned, the fate of Czechoslovakia was sealed. They constituted a complete capitulation, and while offering no guarantees to Czechoslovakia against aggression, much as she needed them, they made lavish promises to Germany, armed to the teeth as she was.

CHAPTER VI

MUSSOLINI'S RETURN TO GLORY

At 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 28th September, the British Ambassador in Rome, Lord Perth, called at the Italian Foreign Ministry. This talk was the first item in the series of sensations with which the day was packed.

They were sensations to the general public only, of course, for expert politicians had heard on Tues-

day night—or, if the news had not reached them till very late—in the early hours of Wednesday morning, that the great European crisis was on the point of ending—indeed, that it was practically over.

. . . . .

The head of the Italian Government, Benito Mussolini, had some difficult weeks behind him when he found himself placed suddenly in the forefront of European affairs. The exploits of his partner at the other end of the Berlin–Rome axis pleased him less and less.

Germany had snapped up Austria from under Italy's nose, and was now preparing to go much further. Mussolini saw clearly that if Germany won this game, there were certain advantages which would accrue to Italy. Italy would have, however, to make sure of these advantages for herself. The great disadvantage would be the further weakening of Italy's position on the Axis. This position was not now, by any means, a brilliant one, and Mussolini did not like having to play second fiddle. But, if Germany lost the game, if war should come, what then?

The German Reich was not enjoying any great popularity in Italy, where people were afraid of their neighbour beyond the Alps, and if Italy had to join with Germany against France, she would find herself committed to a very dubious adventure. Hitler could, no doubt, risk his own career, and that of his régime, for he stood to make enormous gains, but Italians did not like the idea of staking the future of Fascism in an affair in which Italy stood to gain but little. It was no wonder, there-

fore, that the Duce was very nervous, and not particularly amiable to his suite.

So Italy's position in the first three weeks of this European drama was left vague. She held back, so that the impression might arise in the West that, under certain conditions, she would remain neutral. That did not suit Germany in the least, for Italy was an important card in the game of poker that was being played for Mid-Eastern Europe. So "strong pressure" soon set in from Germany. Germany had several reasons to be dissatisfied with her southern neighbour. There were differences of opinion on the Spanish question and on the internal weakness of the Fascist régime, to remedy which Germany had, so far, worked in vain. To offset this, the Duce presented the Führer with his surprising solution of the Jewish question. To please Hitler, the fanatical and convinced anti-Semite, Italy launched a cold-blooded campaign against the 44,000 or so Jews within her frontiers. But the uncertain attitude of Italy to the Czechoslovak question was a very serious matter, and Germany, therefore, proceeded to take the necessary measures.

The immediate results of this German pressure were Mussolini's speeches in the Northern provinces of Italy, which were, however, by no means a great success for the Duce. Their effect was much weakened by Mussolini's excursion to Jugoslav territory during his stay in northern Italy. This annoyed Berlin considerably, and Mussolini was subjected to still greater pressure to compel him to take up an unambiguous position.

Now the Duce had to act. He announced to

Hitler, through Bernardo Attolico, his Ambassador in Berlin, that Italy was ready to carry out certain military measures and would, of course, be on Germany's side in case of a conflict. At the same time, however, he advised moderation.

So for several days Italy had been preparing. Certain partial mobilisations had been carried out, and Mussolini discussed the military situation with his Staff.

But, at the same time, very delicate and discreet contacts were made with the West. " How would it be if one could persuade the Duce to intervene with the Führer ? " Such was the purport of the suggestions which mysterious emissaries from Rome whispered to the ministers and diplomats in the two Western capitals. They acted with such extreme discretion that they even refrained from dropping inspired hints in the Press.

For the Press was much too coarse an instrument for these approaches. Was it an accident that, at the beginning of this decisive week, rumours were spread in Rome and elsewhere that the King of Italy would abdicate in favour of his son if Italy was involved in a war with France? The King had given formal instructions to Mussolini, so it was said, to intervene energetically with the German Chancellor. Truth or fiction? Had the King of Italy really made this statement, or was the author of this story not unconnected with the Italian Ministry for Press and Propaganda? That is one of the many mysteries of September 1938 which only the future can unveil.

Mussolini's mood, which, as we know, was very bad, showed signs of improvement on the following

Tuesday. He felt that things were shaping well for him, and this soon proved to be true. First came the private message from President Roosevelt to the Duce, requesting his intervention in favour of peace. Mussolini replied politely, but not too clearly, that the suggestion was very nice, but should come from elsewhere—from London.

And it did come, as had been foreseen. Italian diplomacy was exactly informed, late on Tuesday afternoon, of the feeling in Paris; Italy knew how strong were the forces working in Paris for an accommodation and for an intervention by Mussolini. And so they knew in Rome in the late hours of Tuesday night and the early hours of Wednesday what the coming day would bring—a request from England for Mussolini's intervention with Hitler, to which, of course, Mussolini would agree. Moreover, precise information had arrived from Berlin which left no doubt that this intervention would be successful.

Such was the position when, on Wednesday morning, at 10.30 a.m., the British Ambassador, Lord Perth, was announced to Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, and Mussolini's son-in-law.

Speeding Ahead for Peace

The six hours which elapsed on Wednesday between the first interview of Lord Perth with Count Ciano and Mr. Chamberlain's announcement in the British House of Commons that Hitler had accepted the proposal of a Conference of Four, produced merely the endorsement of already definite facts.

When M. Bonnet proposed Mussolini's intervention, he knew that Mussolini would accept. London knew it too. And Mussolini, on his part, was definitely informed that this intervention would not be without success. For Hitler knew that the Western Powers had already decided to give way, and that the only remaining question was that of the method to be adopted. He was ready to offer minor concessions for which he could make up later.

10.30 *a.m. Rome.*

The British Ambassador, Lord Perth, informed Count Ciano that he had an appeal from the British Government to communicate to Signor Mussolini....

The text of Mr. Chamberlain's message had not yet arrived, but he would hand it over later. As time pressed, however. . . . A telephone conversation between Ciano and Mussolini. The arrangement of which they had heard the previous night had now been put into effect. An official British *démarche*. But they took no steps yet; they waited for the letter that was promised for later on.

11 *a.m. London.*

King George signed the order for the mobilisation of the British Fleet. This, however, now seemed almost superfluous.

11.15 *a.m. Berlin.*

The *démarche* of the British and French Ambassadors which had been arranged on Tuesday night was made to Hitler. He was officially informed of the *démarche* requested by Mussolini.

Shortly afterwards, the Italian Ambassador visited the Führer, on Mussolini's instructions. He informed him that Mussolini would like to speak to the Führer by telephone, and meanwhile requested the postponement of the mobilisation arranged for 2 p.m. Hitler agreed, and stated that he was awaiting Mussolini's telephone call.

Meanwhile, the telephone wires were buzzing between Paris and London, London and Rome, Rome and Paris, Paris and Berlin, Berlin and London, Berlin and Rome. No common mortal could carry on a conversation with a foreign country on that Wednesday morning, for every line was blocked with diplomatic talks.

11.30 *a.m. Rome.*

The British Ambassador handed to the Italian Foreign Minister the text of Mr. Chamberlain's letter. Count Ciano hastened from the Palazzo Chigi to the Palazzo Venezia. He was immediately admitted to the Duce. The Duce read "I have, to-day, addressed a last appeal . . ."

Then Count Ciano spoke with the German Foreign Minister in Berlin. It was a long conversation. It lasted a full forty minutes. Germany was prepared to hold a Conference of Four in Munich, but on one condition . . . This condition was at once communicated to London and Paris. In his last letter to Hitler, Mr. Chamberlain had proposed that a representative of the Czechoslovak Government should take part in this conference. Germany rejected this suggestion. Italy supported Germany, and the Duce was prepared to accept the rôle of mediator, only on this condition. Both London and Paris agreed.

12 *mid-day Rome.*

The Duce spoke to the Führer for fifteen minutes. The Duce spoke German, and the Führer had some difficulty in understanding. Consequently, the talk took a quarter of an hour. When it was over, the Führer had given his consent to the Conference of Four, and promised to postpone the mobilisation ordered for 2 p.m. " out of friendship " for Mussolini.

2.30 *p.m. Paris.*

M. Daladier learned from Berlin that the French Ambassador, M. François-Poncet, had received an invitation for the French Premier to attend the Conference of Four at Munich on the following day. The public announcement of this invitation was made officially two hours later.

4.20 *p.m. London. The House of Commons.*

Mr. Chamberlain was speaking. For more than an hour he had been giving a report of his efforts, negotiations and journeys. Sir John Simon passed the Premier a note. This note ran as follows:

> " Herr Hitler accepts your proposals. He will be glad to meet you at Munich to-morrow, together with M. Daladier and Signor Mussolini."

Mr. Chamberlain paused for a moment, then he continued his speech with a voice full of emotion: " This is not all, I have something further to say to the House . . ."

At 7 p.m. M. Daladier was to have broadcast to the French people. Now he could not make the speech he had prepared. He spoke but briefly: " I shall not give up my fight for peace . . ."

In Prague they had been celebrating the Feast of St. Václav, the patron saint of Bohemia. Hundreds of thousands had made pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Saint Vitus to do honour to the skull of the saint, which bears the crown of Bohemia. In the afternoon, news came of the Munich meeting. The effect was staggering.

That evening Czechoslovakia attempted to protest against her fate being decided in the absence of her representatives. But the Führer objected to them, and London and Paris had yielded. The feeble voice of Czechoslovakia was now scarcely audible in the mighty concert of the Great Powers.

The Pax Germanica

Hour after hour the 'Big Four' deliberated in the Führerhaus in Munich. They had come from London and Paris, from Berlin and Rome, by air and by special train, to save peace. Nor was there any doubt that peace would be saved.

The four statesmen understood each other perfectly. Mussolini, who was suffering that day from acute pain in the kidneys, spoke all four languages; Hitler spoke German, M. Daladier French, and Mr. Chamberlain English—and yet they understood each other perfectly.

These four men had one wish in common: peace. But of the four, one had staked all, and would stick at nothing, to shape the peace to his design. He held all the cards; now he was the one to grant concessions, to whom the others had in fact come to beg him to do so. Hitler had now come into his own; he was dictating *his* peace to Europe, a peace

that he had gained without war because the others had first left him a clear path and then run away from the consequences.

Hour after hour the negotiations dragged on; and when at last the four reached agreement, none knew exactly what it was that they had agreed upon. The broad outlines had been settled, but not the details. These were left to be determined by an international commission consisting of the British, French, and Italian Ambassadors, a German Secretary of State, and a representative of Czechoslovakia. And these were details that concerned the fate of hundreds of thousands of human beings, property to the value of millions, and the life of a whole people.

But peace was saved—the peace at any price. And at 1.35 o'clock on the morning of 30th September, 1938, a pact was signed in Munich that put the finishing touch to the disastrous events of the month. People said that it was a peace without victor or vanquished. But in fact there was a victor: Adolf Hitler. Had his concessions really been enough to justify the Munich agreement being called a peace without victor or vanquished? We will see:

The plan accepted by the Czechoslovak Government on 21st September under pressure by London and Paris—*i.e.*, after the Hitler–Chamberlain Berchtesgaden talks—differed essentially from that agreed upon in Munich on 30th September. This latter, as we shall see, is almost identical with Hitler's Godesberg demands, which the British and French Governments regarded as unacceptable. To facilitate examination of the three plans we will set them out

in tabular form, item by item. The first we will call ' Berchtesgaden ', the second ' Godesberg ', and the third ' Munich '.

THE THREE PHASES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE OVER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Berchtesgaden.	*Godesberg.*	*Munich.*
1. Areas containing more than 50 per cent. of Germans to be ceded to the Reich without plebiscite. Where special circumstances required, an international commission, on which Czechoslovakia would be represented would define the frontiers, bearing in mind, however, the economic and strategic requirements of the country.	1. Hitler himself marked on the map the areas demanded by Germany. Among these were areas in which the Czechs were in a majority. Hitler himself decided the areas in which plebiscites were to be held, including important industrial districts with Czech majorities. New frontier lines arising out of the plebiscites were to be determined by a German–Czech or an international commission. The areas on the map drawn by Hitler were to be occupied by German troops, irrespective of whether they would be finally allotted to Germany or Czechoslovakia.	1. Hitler's map, containing certain areas with Czech majorities, was not accepted as a basis, the decision being left to an international commission of the British, French, and Italian Ambassadors in Berlin, a German Secretary of State, and a representative of Czechoslovakia. The activities of this commission will be discussed later; its decision, however, is anticipated in certain important matters.
2. Optional exchange of populations.	2. No mention of exchange of populations, but demand for a plebiscite, not later than 25th November, under international control, in the areas defined by Hitler.	2. Right of option agreed to, to be exercised within six months. All matters concerning this and the exchange of population to be settled by a German–Czech commission. Areas where plebiscites will be held to be decided by an international

Berchtesgaden.	*Godesberg.*	*Munich.*
		commission and occupied by international troops. Plebiscites to be carried out according to the Saar statute, not later than the end of November.
3. The new frontiers of Czechoslovakia to be internationally guaranteed. Britain to take part in this guarantee.	3. No guarantee of the new Czechoslovak frontiers before Czechoslovakia had ceded certain areas to Poland and Hungary. After this the possibility of a guarantee would be considered.	3. Britain and France guarantee the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia against unprovoked attack. When the questions of Polish and Hungarian minorities are settled, Germany and Italy will participate in the guarantee.
4. Czechoslovakia demanded that pending the determination of the new frontiers the areas in question should remain under her authority and that the settlement of practical details should be carried out in agreement with her Government.	4. Czechoslovakia to evacuate and hand over to Germany by 1st October the areas marked on Hitler's map.	4. The areas to be ceded to Germany to be successively occupied by the Reichswehr during period from 1st to 10th October, inclusive. The occupation to take place in five zones, to be determined by the aforesaid international commission.
	5. The territory to be ceded to Germany to be handed over in its existing condition. In particular the following articles to be neither destroyed nor rendered useless : military, industrial, and traffic installations. This includes aerodromes and wireless stations. All industrial and traffic installations, in particular rolling-stock, in these areas,	5. No existing installations (including, therefore, the fortifications) to be destroyed. The Czechoslovak Government to be held responsible for carrying out the evacuation without damage to any of these installations.

Berchtesgaden.	*Godesberg.*	*Munich.*
	to be handed over undamaged. This applied also to all other public installations. Finally, no foodstuffs, goods, cattle, raw materials, etc., to be removed from these areas.	
	6. The Czechoslovak Government to release forthwith all Sudeten Germans in the Czechoslovak Army or Police.	6. Czechoslovakia to release from the Army and Police within four weeks all Sudeten Germans who wish to be released.
	7. The Czechoslovak Government to release all German political prisoners.	7. Czechoslovakia to release all political prisoners of German race.
	8. The German Government agreed to the setting up of a German–Czech commission to settle all other questions of detail.	8. An international commission, consisting of the three Ambassadors in Berlin, a German Secretary of State, and a representative of Czechoslovakia, to settle all questions arising out of the cession of the areas.
		9. The Heads of the Governments of the four Powers declared that the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities should, if not settled within three months by means of direct agreement between the Governments concerned, be the subject of another four-Power conference.

The international commission referred to in the Munich document has since agreed to all the de-

mands of the Germans, so that, apart from a few small details, the frontier as finally determined corresponds almost exactly to that drawn by Hitler.

Such, then, is the aspect of the peace in which there is neither " victor nor vanquished ".

EPILOGUE

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

At two o'clock on the afternoon of 1st October, the first German soldier entered Czech territory. Not a shot was fired.

On the same day, in Paris, M. Daladier, the French Prime Minister, amid resounding cheers, lighted the lamp over the grave of the Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe.

The people of France, and with them the peoples of all Europe, acclaimed the peace. They had not wanted war, and rejoiced that it had been prevented.

Readers of this book may perhaps have received the impression that it is an argument in favour of war. That is not so. The author, like every other European, detests the cruelty and devastation of war.

But this peace that has been saved is not a good peace for Europe. The point is not that a State which, during the last twenty years, has been held up as a model for all the States that were founded after the War, has been deprived of its power of independent existence, and has been delivered up to Germany. The essence of the matter is that the balance of power in Europe has been upset. The

way to the east of Europe has been opened to Germany. Who to-day can predict the limits of that country's expansion?

If from the outset the Western European democracies had shown greater firmness, it would have been possible to come to a reasonable agreement with Germany—an agreement whereby all the just claims of the German minority in Czechoslovakia would have been satisfied without delivering up that country to Germany or giving Germany proof of the weakness of the two great Western European Powers. Germany has taken cognizance of this, and will make further capital out of this weakness. Peace has been concluded—at an exorbitant price; but war in the future, or a further capitulation of the Western Powers, has not been prevented. The events of October 1938 have alarmingly shown that democracy in Europe has chosen the quickest road to abdication.

POSTSCRIPT

WHILE this book was passing through the press, Herr von Ribbentrop and Count Ciano were busy in Vienna arranging the general scheme for the mutilation of Czechoslovakia in the east and south-east. The results of their proceedings have now been announced, and they are, if anything, more outrageous than the Munich decisions. Slovakia loses one-fifth of its area, and more than one-sixth of its population to Hungary. Of the 895,000 persons

who are affected by this territorial operation, only 506,000 are Magyars. Hungary receives also nearly one-eighth of Carpathian Ruthenia, with one-quarter of its population. Here the proportion of Magyars in the ceded territory amounts to scarcely one-half. In both regions Czechoslovakia has to surrender important towns, in particular Košice, hitherto the capital of Eastern Slovakia, as well as Užhorod and Mukačevo, the only towns of any size in Carpathian Ruthenia, and both of them improved beyond recognition by twenty years of Czech labour and financial sacrifice.

The Vienna arrangements, like those of Munich, include, of course, wanton destruction of railway routes. Once again, in fact, bare-faced robbery masquerading as self-determination has done its worst. And the betrayal of Czechoslovakia is now complete.

APPENDIX

Minorities in Central Europe

What would happen if all the problems relating to minorities in Central Europe were solved as radically as that of the Czechoslovak minorities?

Before the War there were nearly 60,000,000 discontented minorities; now, after the settlement of the Czechoslovak question, there still remain some 16,500,000.

In Poland, 30 per cent. of a population of 32,000,000, consist of minorities, including 4,200,000 Ukrainians (7,000,000 according to Ukrainian calculations), 1,059,194 Germans, besides Lithuanians, Russians, and Czechs.

Rumania has a population of 18,000,000, of which 25 per cent., or 4,500,000, consist of minorities, 1,386,717 being Hungarians, 774,645 Germans, besides Ruthenes and Bulgarians.

In Jugoslavia the minorities account for 15 per cent., of which 499,326 are Germans, 468,185 Hungarians, besides 176,482 Czechoslovaks, Italians, Russians, Ruthenes, Poles, and Bulgarians.

In Hungary also there are large minorities: some 500,000 Germans, more than 100,000 Slovaks, besides Serbs, Croats, Rumanians, and Ruthenes.

Italy has 257,000 Germans in South Tyrol, and more than 500,000 Slovenes and Croats. The South Tyrolese have been abandoned to Italianisation in accordance with the policy of the ' Berlin–Rome Axis.'

And Germany herself has also national minorities. German statistics show approximately 2 per cent. of national minorities within her borders, or about 1,500,000. Of these there are about 800,000 Poles (1,200,000 according to Polish calculations), 62,000 Czechs, nearly 80,000 Lusatian Wends (a Slav stock), besides Danes, Frisians, and Lithuanians.

Principal Events of the European Crisis

August–October 1938

3rd Aug. Lord Runciman, the British intermediary, arrived in Prague.

10th Aug. Abortive negotiations between Czechoslovak Government and Henlein Party.

14th Aug. Opening of the grand manœuvres of the German Army, which made Germany the strongest military Power in Europe during the crisis.

19th Aug. Concessions by the Prague Government, described by the Sudeten Germans as insufficient.

25th Aug. New proposals of the Prague Government, which, however, were again refused. Opening of the German Press campaign against Prague.

28th Aug. Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, declared at Lanark that the British attitude in regard to France and Czechoslovakia remained unchanged.

1st Sept. Talks between Hitler and Henlein at Berchtesgaden. New plan of action evolved. Lord Runciman's mission in Prague received gas-masks from England.

3rd Sept. M. Litvinoff, Russian Foreign Minister, had an interview with the German Ambassador in Moscow, and left him in no doubt that Russia would fulfil her obligations towards Czechoslovakia if the latter were attacked by Germany.

4th Sept. M. Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, stated in a speech at Bordeaux that France would fulfil her treaty obligations towards Czechoslovakia.

Demonstrations in Sudeten German districts.

5th Sept. France called up reservists and technical personnel.

Opening of the Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg.

The Czechoslovak Government submitted new concessions, stated to be final.

7th Sept. *The Times* published an article suggesting the cession of the whole Sudeten German district to Germany as the best solution of the problem. The article was repudiated by the British Government, but gave Hitler further reason to hope.

Incidents in Sudeten districts.

8th Sept. Mr. Chamberlain interrupted his holiday and returned to London.

Lord Halifax, M. Bonnet, and M. Spaak postponed their departure for Geneva.

Failure of Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin, to obtain interview with Hitler at Nuremberg. He succeeded only in seeing von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, whom he warned against hasty steps in the Czechoslovak problem.

The British Home Fleet assembled for manœuvres in the North Sea.

9th Sept. The Sudeten Germans proclaim a state of emergency.

10th Sept. Goering in a speech at Nuremberg referred to the Czechs as " a miserable race of pygmies . . . nobody knows from where they came . . ."

Important ministerial consultations in London.

11th Sept. In Geneva M. Bonnet had discussions with M. Litvinoff and with M. Comnen, Rumanian Foreign Minister.

Communiqué issued from Downing Street to the foreign Press stated: " In the event of Czechoslovakia being attacked, Britain could not remain neutral in a war in which France was involved ".

Military preparations in Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland.

12th Sept. Hitler's speech in Nuremberg: a tirade directed against Prague, which, however, failed to make clear his real aims.

Cabinet meeting in Paris attended by General Gamelin, head of the French General Staff.

Cabinet meeting in London.

Czechoslovakia protested against the proposals for a plebiscite and demanded the right to participate in any international negotiations held for the purpose of deciding her fate.

Sanguinary conflicts in Sudeten districts in consequence of Hitler's speech. Czechoslovak Government declared martial law in these districts.

13th Sept. General Staff consultations in Paris and London.

Many sanguinary incidents in Sudetenland. Martial law extended to more districts.

At 5.30 p.m. the Sudeten German Party issued an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak Government demanding revocation of martial law within six hours.

Prague Government invited leaders of Sudeten Germans to Prague to discuss their ultimatum. They did not, however, accept.

14th Sept. Mr. Chamberlain's letter to Hitler. Hitler invited Mr. Chamberlain to come to Berchtesgaden.

Shooting in Sudetenland, with many killed and wounded. Arms from Germany confiscated. Martial law further extended. Abortive discussions between members of the Runciman mission and Henlein.

Hitler consulted his Army leaders at Berchtesgaden.

15th Sept. Interview between Hitler and Mr. Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden. Hitler demanded cession of Sudetenland.

Henlein and other deputies of his Party fled to Germany. Order restored in Sudetenland by Czechoslovak authorities. Result of disturbances: twenty-nine killed, of which majority were Czechs; seventy-five wounded, of which sixty-one were Czechs.

16th Sept. Mr. Chamberlain returned to London with Hitler's proposals.

Sudeten German Party suspended. Criminal proceedings started against Henlein and other members of the Party. Many groups of Sudeten Germans who disagreed with Henlein's method of procedure expressed wish to continue negotiations with Government.

Czechs in Germany arrested and held as hostages.

Lord Runciman left Prague and returned to London.

Private conference of Hungarian Cabinet with the Regent, Admiral Horthy.

17th Sept. Further extension of special measures in Sudetenland. Henlein issued proclamation creating Sudeten German legion.

Ministerial discussions in Paris and London.

Cabinet meeting in Washington.

18th Sept. Dr. Hodza, Czechoslovak Prime Minister, spoke on wireless: " No plebiscite. If we are forced to fight we will fight."

In a speech at Trieste Mussolini declared in favour of a plebiscite.

Consultations in London with MM. Daladier and Bonnet on Hitler's Berchtesgaden demands, at which it was decided to accept them.

19th Sept. MM. Daladier and Bonnet returned to Paris. Cabinet consultation. London decision accepted.

Czechoslovak Government informed in the afternoon that they should cede Sudeten districts to Germany in accordance with Hitler's demands and the decision arrived at in London.

Poland and Hungary, at first unofficially, put forward demands for certain parts of Czechoslovakia.

Feverish political and diplomatic activities in Paris, London, and Prague.

20th Sept. Hungarian Foreign Minister and Polish Ambassador visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Plan of action drawn up for further demands for cession of territory by Czechoslovakia.

Admiral Horthy visited Marshal Goering at Sternberg, East Prussia.

Czechoslovak Government having delayed acceptance, Paris and London urged them to accept. Representations of British and French Ambassadors to President Beneš. Czechoslovak Government proposed submission of dispute to arbitration of German–Czech tribunal.

Differences in French Government.

Polish Ambassadors in London, Paris, Rome, and Berlin announced officially Poland's claims to certain parts of Czechoslovakia.

Attacks on Czech frontier guards, organised by Germany.

Inner Cabinet Committee in London discussed reply from Czechoslovak Government. Cabinet meeting until 10.45 p.m. Telephone conversations between Downing Street and Paris.

21st Sept. Further representations during night by British and French Ministers to Dr. Beneš. Britain and France urged acceptance by Czechoslovakia of the demands. Prague accepted.

Hungary announced through diplomatic channels her claims to certain parts of Czechoslovakia.

Demonstrations in Prague due to popular indignation at the acceptance of Franco-British decision.

Ministerial consultations in London. Mr. Chamberlain had audience with the King.

In Geneva M. Litvinoff stated that if France fulfilled her treaty obligations towards the Czechs, Russia would come to their assistance.

22nd Sept. Mr. Chamberlain flew to Godesberg. Discussions from 4 to 7.15 p.m.

Three French Ministers expressed intention to resign, but subsequently withdrew.

In speech on wireless Dr. Beneš called for maintenance of order and stated that he had a plan. Resignation of the Hodza Government and formation of a new one with General Syrový at its head.

Hungary informed Prague of her claims.

Poland denounced the minority agreement with Czechoslovakia.

23rd Sept. Breakdown of Godesberg discussions.

Correspondence between Mr. Chamberlain and Hitler.

Further discussions from 10.30 p.m. until 1.30 a.m. Hitler put forward new demands.

Paris and London released Czechoslovak Government from undertaking to do nothing that might prejudice negotiations.

Mobilisation of Czechoslovak army proclaimed by wireless at 10.20 p.m.

Concentration of Polish troops on Czechoslovak frontier. Russia warned Poland that she would immediately denounce the Non-Aggression Pact between her and Poland the moment the first Polish soldier entered Czechoslovak territory.

M. Daladier stated that if Czechoslovakia were attacked by Germany, France would fulfil her obligations.

M. Litvinoff stated at Geneva that if France fulfilled her obligations towards Czechoslovakia, Russia would do the same.

24th Sept. Mr. Chamberlain flew back from Godesberg. British Cabinet consultations. French Ministers invited to London.

Measures for mobilisation of French army continued.

Czechoslovakia cut off from the rest of the world. No communication possible by telephone, telegraph, or aeroplane.

M. Daladier stated on wireless that France had given proof of her desire for peace, and that she must now prove that she was strong.

Hitler's memorandum and the map marked by him

handed to Prague. France and Britain did not recommend its acceptance.

25th Sept. Cabinet crisis in France narrowly avoided. French Cabinet decided that firm stand should now be made. Long consultations of French and British Ministers in London.

Note from Czechoslovak Government refusing Hitler's demands.

26th Sept. Consultations of French and British Ministers in London continued. General Gamelin in London. Military consultations.

Further war measures in Paris. Women and children sent away.

Roosevelt's appeal to all concerned. Replies from Dr. Beneš, M. Daladier, and Mr. Chamberlain.

Sir Horace Wilson sent to Berlin with a letter from Mr. Chamberlain.

Further military measures in Belgium.

Hitler's speech in the Sportpalast in Berlin. Attack on Dr. Beneš. Sudeten districts must be evacuated by 1st October.

Private letter from Dr. Beneš to M. Moscicki, Polish President.

Important announcements by Foreign Office and Mr. Chamberlain after Hitler's speech.

British Parliament called together for Wednesday. War preparations in England.

American tourists in Europe advised to return home.

27th Sept. Cancellation of King's visit to Glasgow.

Further interview of Sir Horace Wilson with Hitler. Hitler's reply to Mr. Chamberlain despatched.

New ultimatum to Prague: Sudeten districts to be evacuated by 2 p.m. on Wednesday.

Hitler's reply to President Roosevelt.

Daladier attempted to form a united national Government. Great political activity in Paris.

Visit of three American cruisers to Europe. President Roosevelt appealed personally to Hitler.

Gas masks distributed and trenches dug in London.

President Moscicki's reply to Dr. Beneš. Poland took note of Czechoslovakia's agreement to the cession of certain territory.

Mr. Chamberlain's wireless speech. Night meeting of the British Cabinet. A last letter sent to Hitler. Appeal to Mussolini to intervene with Hitler.

28th Sept. Two interviews between the British Ambassador in Rome and the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano.

Interview between Hitler and the Italian Ambassador.

Interview between Hitler and the British and French Ambassadors.

Telephone conversation between Mussolini and Hitler and between Count Ciano and Ribbentrop.

Denial of German ultimatum to Prague.

Decree mobilising the British Fleet signed by the King.

Mr. Chamberlain's speech in the House of Commons. Hitler's invitation to Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier to a conference at Munich the next day with Mussolini and himself.

Czechoslovak Minister in London requested that Czechoslovakia should be permitted to attend the Munich conference.

29th Sept. Munich conference.

30th Sept. Agreement signed at 1.35 a.m.

1st Oct. First German soldier crossed the Czechoslovak frontier.

5th Oct. Resignation of Dr. Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia.

January 1939

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