

IN THE SERVICE OF FRANCE¹

BY CAMILLE VERGNIOL

[THE following article is a review with quotations of the first two volumes of ex-President and ex-Premier Raymond Poincaré's memoirs, entitled *Au Service de la France*, Chez Plon, Paris.]

It is not necessary to dwell upon the importance of the period with which these volumes deal — those pre-war years of traps and snares, of rivalries and conflicts, that put the vigilance, courage, and prudence of statesmen to the severest test. Who is better fitted to recite their story than the man who played the most brilliant, and unquestionably the most difficult, rôle in those events? A work dealing in detail with affairs so supremely important and so complex cannot be adequately summarized in a review. I shall examine only one of the episodes of which it treats, the topic around which the most controversy has raged — the Franco-Russian Alliance.

When M. Poincaré became Premier and Foreign Minister on January 14, 1912, he knew no more of this 'Alliance' than any other member of the preceding cabinets, and that was, to tell the truth, very little. His first act was to open the safe that contained the document of 1892, which was still in an envelope bearing this annotation in the handwriting of Félix Faure: 'The military convention is accepted by the letter of M. de Giers to M. de Montebello, giving this convention the force of a treaty.'

¹ From *L'Illustration* (Paris illustrated literary weekly), February 6

The document was subsequently published. It began with this preamble: 'France and Russia, animated by an equal desire to preserve peace, and having in view no other purpose than to provide for the eventuality of a defensive war, have agreed upon the following arrangements.' The treaty went on to provide that if France were attacked by Germany or Italy, singly or together, or if Russia were attacked by Germany or Austria, singly or together, the other signatory Power would join in its defense; that, if the Triple Alliance or any of its members mobilized against either France or Russia, the other signatory Power would immediately mobilize its forces. Other provisions defined the number of troops each party was to maintain in the field, and stipulated that neither France nor Russia should sign a separate peace with the enemy.

Passing over the multitude of incidents that intervened, — Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Morocco crisis, the intrigues and counter-intrigues spun between European capitals, — we come down to the twenty-fifth of September, 1911, when Italy's *chargé d'affaires* at Constantinople handed the Porte a threatening note. A few days afterward an expeditionary corps seized Tripoli under the protection of the guns of the Italian fleet, and the Turkish garrison withdrew into the desert. In November Giolitti's Cabinet proclaimed the annexation of Tripoli and the Cyrenaica to Italy. Naturally Turkey declared

war. Italy seized Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands and bombarded the Dardanelles. Turkey closed the Straits and the neutrals protested. But all these things were of minor importance compared with what they foreboded. Baron Marshall, the German Ambassador at Constantinople, asserted with a clear vision of the situation: 'A war in the Balkans is inevitable if the war between Italy and Turkey lasts a few months longer.'

Now a Balkan war meant the intervention of Russia, which would involve the intervention of Austria, which would bring Germany into the conflict. Imagine what this meant for France! M. Poincaré had scarcely succeeded in calming Italy when thunder clouds thickened in the Balkans. Bulgaria was conversing with Serbia, who was conversing in turn with Montenegro, and all three were whispering excitedly into the ears of Greece. Nobody knew just what all this talk portended. To complicate matters, Austria in her panic declared in favor of an 'autonomous Albania' — that is to say, an Albania under her own protection. France vainly importuned Russia to be on her guard. M. Sazanov, the Tsar's Foreign Minister, with imperturbable optimism, refused to see anything more than a Platonic accord growing up in the Balkans, 'or at most a defensive alliance to protect the mutual interests of the Balkan States in case of a modification of the status quo.' Was this a dangerously elastic formula? No, because nothing could be done without Russia's knowledge and consent. So France must be patient and confident.

M. Poincaré did not lose patience, but his confidence wavered. He repelled Bulgaria's advances, and refused to let the Bulgarian loan be quoted on the Bourse. He stood firm on that point despite the protests of the Bul-

garian and Serb ambassadors and premiers, even Pašič. He smelled a rat. He knew that Russia was not fully informed, that she did not try to be so, and that, while she did not know all that was going on, she did not tell even all she knew. 'We felt that there was possibly a rift in the alliance, or else that, if actions did not always agree with our point of view, these were the inevitable discomforts attending such understandings. We had to put up with them. They were the modest compensation that we paid for the advantages we had enjoyed for the past twenty-five years from Russia's friendship — advantages that M. Sazanov would have been the last person in the world to take away from us.'

In order to dissipate these doubts and misunderstandings, there was nothing to do but to go straight to headquarters. So M. Poincaré decided to visit Russia. He embarked on the 'Condé' at Dunkirk on August 5, 1912. He reached Kronstadt on the ninth, and was at St. Petersburg the following day. Naturally he was given a cordial, indeed a warm, reception, but only by the 'authorities.'

'I was greeted respectfully by the people on the street, who had been told that a French cabinet minister was visiting the country. But I could easily see that this courtesy was not spontaneous. It added nothing to the official reception. I went about almost unnoticed. The residents of St. Petersburg seemed to care less about the alliance than those of the coldest provincial town in France.'

Poincaré had long conversations with Sazanov, 'pop-eyed, long-nosed, thin-featured, smiling-lipped,' and with Kokovtsov, 'a kind-faced, simple, loyal fellow.' And as the conversations continued and were repeated, the mists vanished, the misunderstandings were

removed, confidence was reëstablished, and an agreement was reached on every point. 'At my request M. Sazanov has taken cognizance of the minutes of the meeting of the Chiefs-of-Staff of the armies, and of the wishes that General Joffre has expressed to General Gilinski. I explain to him how imperative it is to double and quadruple the strategic railroads we ask for, and to change to the Russian gauge the lines from Warsaw to the German and to the Austrian frontiers respectively, which are now of a different gauge. He thinks arrangements have already been made to change the gauge to Austria. He has promised me to use his influence for the other things. Sukhomlinov, the Minister of War, assures me that he, for his part, will favor what I recommended as far as his appropriations allow.' Then Sazanov read and made comments upon the official text of the convention between Serbia and Bulgaria. Although it was provided in every clause that Russia was to have the decision, Poincaré was not quite reassured. 'The treaty contains the seeds not only of a war against Turkey but also of a war against Austria. More than that, it establishes the hegemony of Russia over the two kingdoms, since Russia is made arbiter of every question. I said to Sazanov that this convention was not what it had been described to me to be; that it was, to tell the truth, a war agreement. He admitted this; but since Serbia and Bulgaria have bound themselves not to declare war, and not even to mobilize without Russia's approval, Russia's veto power ensures peace. I said to Sazanov: "Don't count on us for military aid in the Balkans even if you are attacked by Austria. We shall fulfill our obligations under our Treaty of Alliance, but we shall not exceed them. We are bound to give you armed assistance if you are attacked by Ger-

many, or by Austria with the assistance of Germany, as you are bound to give us your assistance if we are attacked by Germany, or by Italy aided by Germany. In that contingency we shall do our duty. We ask no more than that from you." That is what I said to M. Sazanov and what he has truthfully reported. I did not say anything different later to Izvolskii.'

After all pending questions, both general and personal, had been settled to the complete satisfaction of France with the two Russian ministers, Poincaré reported on August 11 for the audience that the Tsar had accorded him at Peterhof.

'I had never seen the Emperor but once, when he visited Paris in 1896. At that time I had been presented to him as Vice-President of the Chamber. He had seemed to me simple and timid. I had only exchanged a few unimportant words with him, however, and to tell the truth did not know him at all. I asked M. Georges Louis and M. Doulcet about him and the Empress. Both described him as an intelligent, honest man. The Empress impressed them as more enigmatical. Strange gossip had begun to circulate regarding her and her entourage. In January 1912 M. Menshikov had published in *Novoe Vremia* an article that had raised a great scandal. In commenting upon the deposition and exiling of Bishop Hermogen of Saratov, this publicist had made charges against a person alluded to indirectly as a Siberian peasant, "a peasant fellow forty years old, coarse and ugly, with sharp features, a whiskey-inflamed complexion, shifty eyes, and a low voice — Grishka Rasputin." This had been taken up by several newspapers. The Empire was creaking in every joint, although the edifice still looked as majestic and imposing as ever. What kind of people were its present masters? I asked my-

self that question with curiosity mingled with apprehension.

'A railway journey of forty-five minutes brought me to Peterhof Station, where we found a master of ceremonies who conducted us across a formal park of French design containing a monumental Neptune fountain to a palace evidently designed to imitate that of Versailles, but having something of the ostentation and pretentiousness of a parvenu.

'While waiting for the Emperor to arrive, I stepped up to the windows opening upon the terrace and looked at the waterfalls. Just then a victoria drawn by two spirited horses stopped in front of the main entrance of the palace. The Emperor and Empress got out. Both came from Villa Alexandra, a couple of kilometres away, where they were living very quietly. The Tsar's face was still bronzed from his Finland cruise, during which he had met the Kaiser. He wore the uniform of a colonel of the Preobrazhenskii Regiment. The Empress was dressed in a dark-colored gown. A large hat trimmed with tulle and a black ostrich-plume shaded her slightly faded countenance. The master of ceremonies came for me and conducted me through a long series of rooms to the Emperor's apartments, where I found Nicholas II and the Empress standing side by side awaiting me. The Emperor received me with the greatest civility. Looking me in the eyes, he spoke a few words of greeting in a remarkably soft voice, inquired about M. Fallières, for whom he expressed high regard, and said that he should be very happy to learn directly from me the opinion and wishes of the Government of the Republic on the important questions of the day. While the Tsar was speaking, the Empress stood at his side as impassive as a statue. A few minutes later she echoed the Emperor's sentiments with a nod

and an appropriate remark. Now and then her face would flush suddenly, as if she had heart trouble or experienced difficulty in breathing. . . .

'I jotted down for the benefit of the President of the Republic and the Cabinet the essential points of this conversation. William II has inserted a ridiculous fiction in his historical syllabus: "Poincaré's trip to St. Petersburg. He promises the Tsar to introduce three years' service." It would be just as accurate to say that Nicholas II, when he met him on the Baltic cruise, promised the Kaiser to disarm France. The Tsar never mentioned three years' service, and I for that reason did not make any allusion to the subject.

'The Empress withdrew to join her children at the Villa Alexandra. I proceeded to a neighboring room, where the people invited to dinner were gathered in a circle. The Emperor appeared a few minutes later, and we followed him to a sort of buffet where various hors d'œuvres were served in Russian fashion. He himself offered me caviar and a tiny glass of strong liquor, which the exigencies of our protocol forbade me to refuse. He also presented me with the Grand Cordon of Alexander Nevskii, in a magnificent casket of red copper.

'About half-past five the French guests at the dinner and I took a special train to Krasnoe Selo, where the Emperor had already gone by automobile. The railway station was decorated in grand style with the French and Russian colors. A great military encampment had been pitched near the railway. Accompanied by several officers of high rank, I was conducted to the Imperial tent. A few minutes later the Emperor descended from his automobile at the edge of the camp, mounted a magnificent horse, and began to inspect the troops. Behind him rode Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich,

Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army, thin as a skeleton and tall as an American skyscraper, but sinewy, active, supple, with a strong-featured, masterful face. The Emperor rode slowly along the front of the divisions, who were deployed in two ranks before the long line of gray tents. I must confess it seemed to me a rather tedious ceremony. My strongest impression was of weariness. A chair had been brought for the Empress, but she was not able to come, on account of a sudden indisposition, so it remained empty.

'Twenty-five military bands, including two thousand musicians, played a series of selections until sunset. Suddenly a moment of profound silence followed. Then all the music struck up together the vesper hymn. At the first measures the sixty thousand soldiers uncovered in perfect unison, and the last rays of the setting sun fell upon a motionless army of sixty thousand men. The Emperor departed in an automobile for his chalet at Krasnoe Selo, which is a modest residence, like all the others that the Imperial family maintains for its use out in the country. It is surrounded by verdure, and has not been changed for a century or more.'

After a visit to Moscow and more conversations with the Russian ministers, Poincaré reëmbarked on the 'Condé' on August 19 and returned to Dunkirk. How many times he must have recalled this voyage, and com-

pared it with that subsequent trip on 'La France,' in company with M. Viviani, the latter part of July 1914. In August 1912 he brought back to France a revived and reinvigorated alliance. As he says: 'The Russian ministers had formally acknowledged again that the Entente between our friendly and allied countries, founded upon their permanent interests and consecrated by their unchanging sentiments, had been and was still a precious guaranty of the peace and equilibrium of Europe.'

Equilibrium and peace! These were the steadfast objects of the French Government.

When Poincaré returned for a second time from Russia, in July 1914, he brought back the same alliance enlarged and reënforced. But could he, as he stood upon the deck of 'La France,' flatter himself that this was still 'a precious guaranty of peace'? We shall have to wait for the coming volumes to learn what he thought during those tragic moments, to know the fears and the hopes that stirred his heart, the cruel combat that was fought within his breast. Did he not say, as M. Steeg has testified, 'Even were I sure of victory, I would not assume the responsibility for such a catastrophe?' Yet catastrophe was sure, and victory was uncertain. A Russian alliance, after all, must have seemed to him to afford at least the best chance of victory.

HOW TO MAKE THE YANKEE HARMLESS¹

BY RAMIRO DE MAEZTU

IN view of the existing social structure of the United States, how can the nations threatened by American imperialism best defend themselves? Were it possible to acclimate in Iberian America one of the most characteristic institutions of the Anglo-Saxon world, the debating society, I am sure that this would be the question most often discussed.

Happily for Latin America, the United States is not an imperialist country in the usual sense of the word. That nation's growth results from a rapidly expanding population pushing into thinly settled regions, rather than from the deliberate action of its Government. It is not organized for military conquest. The Federal authority is limited by the powers of the States. Its army, including the garrisons of far outposts like the Philippines, Hawaii, Porto Rico, and the Canal Zone, does not exceed one hundred and fifty thousand men. But the United States has great industries with whose exuberant growth even its domestic market cannot keep pace, so that its producers must find foreign outlets for their wares. Furthermore, it possesses a superabundance of investment capital, which makes it the banker of less favored lands.

If the United States had a bureaucratic organization serving imperialist ambitions, as did pre-war Germany, the best defense against its expansion would doubtless be for the Latin-

American republics to become highly centralized like France and to cultivate a nationalist spirit. The German danger forced France to centralize her military organization at all costs, and therefore made it imperative to centralize also her civil administration, for unless this were done the army would soon be master of the country. That would have defeated the very purpose for which an army exists, by dividing the nation into two antagonistic classes, the soldiers and the peasants.

Latin America's system of government has been determined by her effort to protect herself against dictatorships, and not by the danger of a foreign foe. This struggle to subordinate the cacique, or party boss, to the constitution, which characterizes the political evolution of both Spain and her former colonies, is little by little improving their bureaucratic machinery, which has grown better ever since these nations attained self-government; so that all Spanish-speaking countries are evolving gradually into bureaucratic States, in which most men of university training, except those who enter law or medicine, look forward to a government career.

This leads us to ask if a bureaucratic constitution can defend the Spanish-speaking republics against North America's economic imperialism? This is not a simple question to answer. The United States is not only a great nation industrially and financially, but it is perhaps the greatest Power politically in the world, albeit its diplomacy is

¹ From the *Prensa* (Buenos Aires Liberal daily), January 24