II Nazi Regime and Second World War

(i) Adolf Hitler

The news of Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 came as a great blow to Gooch. His life was deeply affected by the establishment of the Nazi regime and he returned once more to active political life. Helping the victims became one of his foremost tasks. Though Gooch in the 1920s could hardly have foreseen the satanic nature of the new order more than most observers, he showed general prescience in his worry about the effect Germany’s treatment at the hands of the victors might have on her. Without being uncritical of German policy during the Weimar Republic, he emphasised constantly during the 1920s and early 1930s the urgency of a return to normal conditions and the necessity of alleviating the disadvantages under which Germany laboured. He was a strong critic of French harshness not only at Versailles, but also in the Ruhr invasion of 1923. He welcomed the more conciliatory spirit shown by the French in the Locarno treaties and in Germany’s belated admission to the League. Among French statesmen, he singled out for praise Briand, whom he called a sincere friend of peace in May 1930,1 and Herriot, whom he described as ‘a real leader’ at the beginning of January 1933.2 But throughout this period he was worried about the pace of concessions and fully aware that time might run out. He certainly appreciated the appalling effects the world economic crisis was having on the stability of the democratic regime in Germany. He wrote to Dorothy Henkel, who was doing charitable work under the auspices of the Quakers in Germany, in October 1930:

I can imagine how difficult it is to keep up the spirits of the people
among whom you work in these times of unemployment and distress. A young student from Nuremberg has just this moment left me, and he says almost all the students there voted for Hitler — who could only make things worse. I hear he is an eloquent gas-bag, nothing more. I explain his success mainly by the distress, and if the world-slump diminishes in intensity I hope his power will wane.³

Gooch regretted that the French authorities failed to make timely concessions in trade and disarmament to bolster the prestige of the weakening democratic regime in Germany. He was gloomy at the end of 1931, at least for the foreseeable future, as he told Dorothy Henkel:

What a dark prospect for us all in 1932! France and America can ruin Europe if they wish, and we are powerless to stop them. You and I and other people must just go on doing our best to be helpful and keeping up our faith in the ultimate victory of reason and right.⁴

One of his strongest objections to the Conservatives in the period around 1930 was their comparative indifference to Europe: 'I detest the Conservatives' idea that England is not part of Europe but only part of the British Empire'.⁵ He favoured British participation in any viable inter-European organisation that might be created.⁶ In spite of all the problems he never despaired. He believed that the suffering of mankind was gradually teaching the lesson of the insufficiency of self-seeking nationalism.⁷

Altogether, a strong case can be made out that Gooch ever since the First World War advocated a policy towards Germany which would have had a good chance of keeping a reasonable regime there in existence. Gooch emphasised mainly the mistakes of the early period after the war, when analysing the causes of Hitler's rise to power in March 1933: 'if we had made a moderate peace in 1919 and Germany had been properly treated in 1919–24, things would have never developed like this'.⁸ In a considered statement in July 1933, Gooch described the three main causes of the Nazi revolution as the short­sighted severity of the Versailles Treaty, the fact that the world economic blizzard struck Germany just at the moment when she was beginning to recover after years of suffering, and the emergence of Hitler himself.⁹