

The Reluctant Imperialists

British Foreign Policy 1878-1902

Part II
The Documents

C. J. Lowe

Foreign Policies of the Great Powers

Volume II



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FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE GREAT POWERS

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II
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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original book may be apparent.

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Introduction

The purpose of these documents is less to define what policy was than to give students some idea of the dialogue that lay behind it. For this purpose most official despatches—not all—are inadequate since, as Renouvin points out, they do not explain the ‘*arrières pensées*’. They did not need to: they were simply instructions to foreign service officials and, since they were liable to be published in a Blue Book, a good deal of caution was necessary. To get at the reasons behind policy it is necessary to read the private correspondence and, where possible, the memoranda prepared for the Cabinet. The latter are particularly useful in that they explain not only the alternative courses from which the choice has to be made but also the strategic factors which influenced the decisions. In a class of their own are the letters of the Prime Minister to the Sovereign. Sometimes, particularly in the case of Disraeli and Rosebery, they are fairly explicit in revealing the differences within the Cabinet or the real consideration behind policy. But it should be borne in mind that Queen Victoria was no disinterested spectator and often held strong views of her own: it is obvious that in many cases the letters were aimed as much at convincing her as at explaining Cabinet decisions. In this respect the view that she held of Gladstone—that he regarded her as another Department of State—seems fully justified by his letters. They say very little beyond the bare bones of Cabinet decisions, though wrapping this up in such an involved style as to make it seem a lot.

It was also decided that the criterion for selection should be significance rather than novelty. Accordingly, although the majority of these documents are published here for the first time, a large number are selected from what is already in print. Since the sources for these are widely scattered and often out of print it was thought that this would perform a useful service. No doubt much of significance has been omitted either through lack of space or through ignorance on the part of the selector.

I am indebted to the Keeper of the Public Records for permission to reproduce the Cabinet Memoranda in the Cabinet 37

Introduction

series. The letters to the Sovereign (Cab/41) are from photographic copies in the Public Record Office of original letters preserved in the Royal Archives and made available by the Gracious Permission of Her Majesty the Queen. Those of Lord Salisbury and Sir Michael Hicks Beach are printed by kind permission of the present Marquess and Earl St. Aldwyn. Acknowledgements are also due to the publishers of the following works from which quotations have been taken at length: Lady Gwendolyn Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, 4 vols. 1921-32 (Hodder and Stoughton); A. G. Gardiner, *Life of Sir William Harcourt*, 2 vols. 1923 (Constable); A. Ramm, *The political correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-86*, 2 vols. 1962 (O.U.P.)

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