CHAPTER 3

THE LAST THROES OF PEACE

In the course of a talk with Eden in Geneva in May 1936, Titulescu had asked him whether he believed Hitler would shortly realize the Anschluss. This was, of course, the sort of question one asks in view of receiving the hoped-for answer. Titus, naturally, hoped to hear his British colleague reply that the Anschluss would never take place because Britain was resolved to oppose it by arms. But Eden's answer was as simple as it was candid: "Oh, surely not before autumn, because the Olympic Games are to be held in Berlin in August, and Hitler is bound to abstain until then from any gesture that would displease so many of us."

This forecast had been correct. But once the Olympic Games were over, we could not help asking ourselves each instant: "When is the Anschluss coming?"

Yet the year 1937 passed without any new acts of force on Hitler's part. And certain inveterate optimists at home and abroad began to imagine that nothing would ever come to trouble the "phony peace," which we enjoyed so sedulously. In the meantime, however, the Führer was arming the Third Reich to the teeth; he was erecting the Siegfried Line; he was strengthening his ties with the Duce; and he was sending out his fifth columns.
everywhere. Further west, this dim, inglorious interlude was marked by Britain's continuing efforts of appeasement, and by France's inner dissension, government crises, and progressive impotence.

In our parts, the system of alliances, so painstakingly elaborated in the course of the preceding years, could be heard cracking apart with sinister distinctness. Its weakest link was the Yugoslavia of Stoianovich. Hitler and Mussolini worked overtime to widen this breach in the wall that had been erected in the past against the penetration of such forces into the Balkan and Lower Danube regions. Stoianovich had ceased even to conceal that his firm desire was to reach ties of close friendship and trust with the leaders of the Third Reich, of Italy, and of Bulgaria, in order to avoid their assault upon his country in the event of a war which he felt to be drawing nigh.

How often have I heard him repeating, for the various successors of Titulescu, his refrain of warning? "Our two countries," he would say, "were occupied during the last war; but they came out of it with their territories doubled. This was a miracle. Now I do not believe that miracles of this sort can occur twice within twenty-five years. Since we are militarily weak, I am convinced that if we commit the folly of allowing ourselves to be dragged into the next war, we will be occupied again. But this time it would spell the end for our countries. As for myself, I am resolved to do everything humanly possible to keep my own country neutral."

His premises were perhaps correct; but the same thing could hardly have been said of his conclusions. Titulescu had posed the problem in a more exalted manner, when he had written in a report which he submitted to the King on February 10, 1936:

What is important is not to be able to stay neutral in a future war; it is rather that there should be no war at all. And in order to contribute effectively to the maintenance of peace, we must give no one the impression that we fear war.

The passionate desire of Stoianovich to transform overnight into childhood friends all the ancient foes of Yugoslavia led him to treat cavalierly certain of his country's formal undertakings toward her allies of the Little Entente and of the Balkan Entente and to go against the spirit of the treaties that bound her to them. The year 1937 was largely devoted to the lat-