

KAISER WILHELM II

CHAPTER I

A STERN BOYHOOD

I

1859-1887

PANIC swept through the room of travail; women gathered round the new-born child in perturbation and dismay. The first rejoicings in the Crown Prince's Palace at Berlin—rejoicings that it was a boy, and the succession thus assured to the third generation—had died out; for there lay the eighteen-year-old mother, a mere girl, in deathlike unconsciousness, and here lay the child, to all appearance lifeless. Vain were the efforts of doctor, nurse, and waiting-woman to animate it by swinging and slapping; Destiny hesitated for an hour and a half before deciding to turn the motionless substance into a human being.

At last it stirred; but in the confusion and anxiety about mother and child, in the excitement borne on the thunder of salvos into the hushed sick-room, nobody thought to examine closely the person of this royal heir. Not until the third day was it perceived that the left arm was paralysed, the shoulder-socket torn away, and the surrounding muscles so severely injured that in the then state of surgical knowledge no doctor would venture to attempt the re-adjustment of the limb (L. 74). Moreover, it at first appeared to be more than a local disability: the left leg reacted but slightly, and the child suffered pain in the left ear and corresponding side of the head.

For this physically disabled boy, named Friedrich Wilhelm Victor Albrecht, and called Fritz until he was six years old, Nature seemed to have designed a private life; and as a brilliant intelligence was soon made manifest,

THE DISABILITY

that life might well have been an intellectual one in which he would have been distinguished and happy, sheltered from fear of humiliations. But he had been born in the Palace of Potsdam, christened in the historic wooden cradle—a Prussian Prince and more, for as the future ruler of the land he was irrevocably destined to one profession. A soldier he must become—that was demanded of him by the secular tradition of his fathers.

Who can refuse sympathy to the boy, as he duly sought by self-discipline, and under the stern tutelage of his teachers, to do his utmost towards supplying that which Nature had denied him? His crippled arm was subjected to electric treatment which caused him extreme torture, until the attempt to strengthen the paralysed limb was abandoned, and the boy trained to simulate some use of it. Cleverly did he learn to support his left arm in his belt or pocket, to let the reins slip into his left hand from his normal right one, to handle his horse in every sense without the aid of a groom; but in this way the right arm became so over-developed and heavy that frequently, when riding, it caused him to lose his balance, and slide off on that side. “An incurable disability in the left arm,” writes his tutor Hinzpeter, “was a very particular hindrance to his physical and psychical development, and one which the utmost skill and care would have been powerless to remove, had not the child himself co-operated with an unusual energy of resolution. He was confronted with the task of overcoming a natural sense of bodily helplessness, and the timidity inseparably connected with it.”

Thus did a boy grow up who could not but be beset, by reason of an infirmity for which he was in nowise to blame, with a dread of those who were stronger than he, and a corresponding tendency to seclusion; and it was this boy who was obliged to display instead the spirited intrepidity which is the soldier's virtue—who must moreover make a greater show of energy than most officers, since he would have to stand one day before the people, unabashed, unruffled, the chief personage on all occasions,



AS A BOY

"every inch a king" How should a child undergo a training such as this, entirely directed to pretence, without some spiritual risk? The only way of salvation would have been for him to make a drastic separation of the show from the reality, and while cynically flaunting the purple, build himself an inward realm wherein bodily weakness should be no dishonour.

But to such a compromise the boy's character was strongly opposed. "While he was still a remarkably handsome but very girlish-looking lad," continues his tutor, "one was struck by the resistance called forth in him by any sort of pressure, any attempt to form his deeper nature." It was only by the aid of etiquette and an unwearied zeal that something had been achieved in externals, and this contributed to make the direction of the boy's more intimate self supremely difficult. "The gentlest mental discipline was resisted to the utmost by that elusive nature. . . . The strife with this disastrous incapacity for concentration is always one of the most exacting duties of those who are entrusted with a Prince's education. And in this instance, where the nature was so essentially refractory, it was formidable indeed. Only the most extreme severity availed to overcome the resistance until the awakened self-consciousness summoned to its aid the boy's own will, and soon removed all my difficulties. But even from the powerful pressure of the moral forces, now in their normal development, the nature of the adolescent Prince would constantly shake itself free."

When after an Emperor's accession to the throne his tutor, writing as his clear-sighted friend, makes public use of such strong expressions, it is evident that he has had to combat in his pupil an unusual degree of defiance and self-will. Whether these traits of character will be refined into dignity and self-reliance, or debased into arrogance and despotism, is the problem of their possessor's destiny. If he is to hold rule over others, it may become as well, the problem of a nation's destiny; the great

would see depicted, the scene in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles when his father sank on one knee before his grandfather, doing homage to him as the new-made Emperor. True that ever at their side would stand the adamantine figure of the Chancellor; but as nobody told the children what malignities and insults were being perpetrated in those French palaces, their imaginations were inevitably peopled with heroic figures like those in the old sagas and ballads. War and victory, vanquished France and the German Empire, were as a picture-book in this small soldier's eyes, and he called the principal personages in it by the titles of father and grandfather.

Thus, misled by a romantic precedent, he early learnt to regard the history of his land as that of his family alone and even as a boy he could not be insensible to the gulf between ruler and subject when he looked down from the balcony where he stood between mother and grandmother, and saw father and grandfather ride up the Linden in dazzling procession, acclaimed by a people inherently less liberty-loving than submissive, who now could adulate not only their liege lords but the lords of battle. And when soon afterward as a boy of fifteen, he went with his brother to live at Wilhelmshöhe, how could he help ~~decorating~~ the lofty apartments with the figures of Napoleon and his last devoted followers, who had languished here six months in imprisonment, bereft of power through the genius of the King of Prussia? Who was there to point out to the youth that all this had sprung from the brain of a Junker out of Pomerania, and that it was due entirely to the strength and devotion of a courageous people? The grace of God lay visibly upon his grandfather's brow, and in the boy's ears resounded the intoxicating music of "To arms! To arms!"

From the English quarter came a change of wind. Victoria, the Crown Princess, resolute to bring up her sons after the precepts of her father, broke for the first time in history through the Prussian régime and sent them from their cadet-drill to the Lyceum at Kassel,

“ SATISFACTORY ”

where they would sit in the class-room with civilians' sons and see life out of uniform. The plan proved abortive. Prince William needed only to perceive such an intention, and at once he set himself to disappoint it; the more “ liberal ” his parents would have him, the more unapproachable he became. At Kassel he was soon “ quite the future Emperor. . . . This overbearingness,” said Caprivi later, “ would never have set in if he had been brought up in the good old fashion with a few companions

From Hinzpeter we have only a private observation on those two years at Kassel. He wrote to his patron, who had recommended him to the Court: “ You have no conception of what an abyss I have looked into! ” (Al. 368, from a letter to Sir R. Morier). Later, he said that the Emperor had “ never learnt the first duty of a ruler, hard work ” (E. 231). When the Prince left at eighteen he was awarded, though he was distinctly more gifted than the majority of his companions, only tenth place out of seventeen in the school examination, with the laconic comment “ Satisfactory ”

And yet his master emphatically extols him. For what distinguished the Prince, especially as an officer, was the struggle against his infirmity. Here lay all his ambition, all his achievement. When he for the first time rode at the head of his Hussars before his formidable grandfather and the uncle who was so renowned a horseman both were amazed; and when the old man said: “ Well done! I could never have believed you could do it! ” the Prince was inspired with an instant confidence in his ability to overcome his infirmity, and be as strong and valiant as his forebears and comrades. “ Never,” writes Hinzpeter, “ was a young man enrolled in the Prussian army who seemed so physically unfitted to become a keen and brilliant cavalry-officer. The few who then could estimate the significance of this victory of moral force over bodily infirmity, felt justified in their proudest hopes for this royal personage.”

In reality, the moral victory over his physique was his destruction. If this was the greatest of days for the youthful Prince, riding in glittering uniform upon a galloping horse under the morning sunlight at the head of his regiment before his astonished elders, it was but the prelude to countless parades and processions, resounding orations, and menacing gestures, whereby he endeavoured for a decade to impose upon his inmost consciousness.

2

Before the octogenarian Emperor stands the eighteen-year-old grandson in the mantle of an order of knighthood; to-day, on attaining his majority, admitted into the Most Noble Company of the Black Eagle, he swears before his grandfather "to maintain the honour of the Royal House and guard the Royal privileges" On the same day in January he enters as first lieutenant the First Regiment of Guards, in which at the age of ten he had begun his military career. Opening the newspaper in the evening, he reads: "This figure, in the bloom of its youth, gives promise to our Emperor, the father of his people, for the duration of all that he has undertaken and achieved. With every succeeding year the eyes of the world will dwell on Prince William with keener expectation. It is more than a portent, it is a guarantee for his future career, that to-day, through his strenuous energy, he has attained the goal held forth to the flower of our German youth as the final guerdon of their early training."

When soon afterwards he visited a Saxon mine, Rubezahl stepped forth from between the layers of coal and, illuminated by Bengal lights, declaimed: "Good luck to you! A thousand times good luck—I, Rübzahl Spirit of the Mines, exultingly repeat and will repeat it. Welcome among us, Hohenzollern Prince! Rejoice, ye hills; rejoice, ye vaulted caverns! Noble Prince, the star of Germany! Protect our mines, at home and afar!" How could this fail to go to his head?

As a student at Bonn in February 1878, invited to the

“ NEXT TIME ”

carnival at Cologne, he finds a mummer dressed as a General confronting him in the dizzy circle; the gentleman is presented as the editor, Grieben. The Prince at once clinks glasses, and with a dexterous allusion to “ this fellow-soldier, who daily leads thousands to the strife,” raises a cheer—William the Second’s first public speech, arousing some uneasiness, and cautiously commented on by the Press. People were asking: “ Is this to be another War-Lord? ”

He was not to be that. . . . Yet, going to Paris for Easter, he looked at everything they showed him, but was drawn and held by Versailles as by nothing else. How should he have any foreboding that in that very Hall of Mirrors where, seven years earlier, his fathers had glittered, there would one day be signed and sealed, at a less gorgeous but more terrible table, the ending of his own Imperial reign? The vainglory in these pompous paintings of mighty monarchs struck an answering chord; to strive after their image was a dream of glory and of power more congenial to his soul than such a homely ideal as his grandfather’s, whose Prussian parsimony made him alternately derisive and angry.

Even in later life he never depreciated the French; rather was he drawn to them, through many a year by a sense of inward affinity. It was from his French tutor Ayme that he first learnt the achievements of this nation on that subject they once came into conflict.

“ You could,” said the Prince one day when they were talking of the recent war. “ you could have paid from ten to fifteen milliards! ” Then after a pause, smiling, “ Well, next time! ”

“ Next time,” answered the Frenchman gravely “ it will not be we who shall have to pay ”

“ So much the worse for you, for you ll never squeeze such a sum out of us! ”

Ayme replied, and this time very sharply, that it would be abominable if the Germans, after their good haul, were to declare in defeat that they could pay nothing. “ That

reminds one of the adventurer who, after winning in the card-room, hurries away as soon as he begins to lose ”

“ On this the Prince’s face grew dark, he looked at me with angry eyes for quite a while; then he said coldly

You have put a detestable interpretation on my little joke I never thought your nation capable of plundering Germany in war Such a war would be nothing but a colossal robbery The whole thing is entirely contrary to my ideas Of course these conflicts are really brought about by the intrigues of ambitious ministers, who will do anything to stay in power They ought to be obliged to fight it out personally; that would keep them off adventures, and save much innocent blood. For the rest, I shall take care never again to jest with you on this subject.’ ”

Afterwards the Prince tried to bury the hatchet by great amiability

This is the first significant dialogue of the young William which has come down to us; all the elements are there He starts by being tactless; next, driven into a corner, gives an unworthy retort; and when sharply taken to task, becomes unapproachable all of a sudden Then however, he makes a well-considered pronouncement on the danger and criminality of wars to which, in principle he held all his life; finally he seeks, by personal charm, to atone for his princely arrogance The ideas are good, the behaviour uncertain: vacillating between intimacy and class-consciousness he repels and invites—a youth who is perpetually at odds with his own duality

In his father the Prince could have studied, though in a very modified degree, some kindred characteristics; and that the two had a suspicion of this affinity in their weaknesses was from the first a reason for mutual distrust. When the young man of twenty-one returned to his parental home from his Potsdam garrison, the antagonisms in the family became sharply apparent. The Prince now looked with clearer vision on his parents—what did he perceive in them?

Nobody ever sustained the tragi-comic part of all

UNFAIR OF PROVIDENCE

Crown Princes for a longer time and in a more powerless position than did this Frederick William who now at fifty, still without serious occupation, languished in semi-thralldom, with no control over his time or finances, and even in his ideas continually checked by the octogenarian father and his oldest minister. And were even these ideas truly his own? This not wholly Prussian Hohenzollern, fond of display, despotic of temperament, his Caesarist tendencies aggravated by long inactivity, this Prince who held the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, felt obliged to entertain Liberal opinions because they were urged on him by a passionate and vehement consort, as the higher conception of a man's, a prince's, duty. He was proud to have for wife the interesting daughter of a powerful Queen, but mortified because she was unpopular; and though his victorious father might extol him in public as a "great general" he knew well enough that he had never been anything of the sort. He tried to forget his position in long and frequent journeys.

"The Crown Prince, one of the keenest observers at Court," remarks Waldersee at this time, "is naturally disappointed at having to wait so long for the throne. Ten years—nay, fifteen years ago, he thought it unfair of Providence to let his father live so long. Influenced by his ambitious consort, he made many plans for the future, which were much inspired by Liberal ideas. The Chancellor, whom the Crown Princess cannot, and the Crown Prince therefore must not, endure, gains in prestige daily. In this way the Crown Prince's position is made very difficult. The intellectual superiority of the Princess has proved a great misfortune. She has turned a simple-minded, gallant, honourable Prince into a weak-minded man devoid of self-reliance; no longer open-hearted, no longer Prussian in his ideas. Even of his steadfast faith she has robbed him. . . . His grown-up children have no illusions about the true state of affairs. . . . The father's weakness will be the measure of the son's self-will. . . . If the Emperor lives much longer, the Crown Prince will

go to pieces altogether. Even as it is, he has attacks of profound depression, and no confidence in the future."

The military relations between father and son (who in the meantime, at twenty-five, had been promoted major) sharpened the conflict between them. "Often," writes Waldersee of the manœuvres in 1884, "[the Crown Prince] displayed great vehemence, for the most part over unimportant matters, things which were chiefly personal; unfortunately he imagines that due deference is purposely withheld from him. . . . The fact that Prince William has been summoned to head-quarters, which means to join his father, was completely ignored. The Crown Prince never once asked me, 'Where is my son?' or 'What is he doing?' When the latter, as constantly happened in the course of the manœuvres, returned to my head-quarters, his father behaved as if he scarcely knew he was there, but took much notice of Prince Henry, who was on his staff. Prince William, however, allowed no one to see how much he felt this unfriendliness from his father."

Is it surprising? This forcible-feeble man was possessed with the foreboding, frequently expressed, that he had not long to live; it was intensified by the more than patriarchal longevity of a still vigorous father, who might well see a hundred; how could he escape the thought that his might be the generation to be skipped? Must not the time-honoured grudge against an heir have been sharpened by the sense that *his* would in all human probability have a much shorter probation? For these last twenty years what had been given him to do? Manœuvres, openings of exhibitions, and the like. At the inauguration of a Council of State in the year 1884, he advanced to the great chair which looked so like a throne, and read an address. "On this occasion he showed so little tact and dignity as somewhat plainly to underline his distaste. He spoke in an expressionless voice, constantly drawing a deep breath, as if it were extremely uncongenial to him" (W. 245).

When his father's long life exacerbated him beyond endurance, he revenged himself on his son. At a Guards'

THE CROWN PRINCESS

dinner in the beginning of 1885 he took occasion—“rather, he let himself go, and represented his son to all the officers and guests as an immature and injudicious person. The Prince controlled himself, but was infuriated. The universal opinion is that he behaved very well, and the Crown Prince incredibly badly. . . . The parents are now intent on getting up a scandal, and provoking an open rupture” (W. 255)

Yet for the humiliated Prince it was a matter for rejoicing when he had only his father to contend with. “When my father is alone, all goes well enough. But now for the change of wind!” he said to Waldersee, when his mother was expected home after a visit to England.

Victoria, acclaimed in Berlin when she arrived as a bride of eighteen, in twelve years saw nothing but mistrust all round her. Now, after the war of 1870, Court and Society, imbued with exaggerated patriotism, complained that she spoke English in her household, called herself Vicky, her son William, associated with English scientists; that her cookery, her servants, her table appointments were English. As though averse from everything Old-Prussian, North-German, she encouraged those democrats—like Virchow and Helmholtz—whose views assorted with her English outlook; this was looked upon as anti-military, as calculated intrigue against the Court of the hide-bound old monarch. A dilettante, with her finger in everyone’s pie, telling the artists how they were to paint, scenting from afar the New Century, but never going deeply into any social or even feminist questions—she was all for show, just as her son was, and for that very reason was his enemy.

“A combination of remarkable intelligence and Coburg cunning, with a fine education and iron will, together with covetousness and a lack of Christian faith: this judgment of Eulenburg’s is too severe, for it ignores the energy and pride which were her best qualities; also the difficulty of a position between two countries which was afterwards to embarrass her son himself. The long exclusion from the

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TERRIBLE WORDS

side A violent scene between mother and son ensued at the beginning of 1885; it was thought desirable to remove him from Potsdam. "If the Crown Prince were suddenly to become Emperor, there would be nothing for it but to transfer the Prince to a distant garrison" (W. 258)

Meanwhile the Prince honestly tried to win his parents over by various achievements. He was now in the middle twenties, he was even himself a father, for at two-and-twenty he had taken to wife the Holstein Princess who had been assigned him. After this he was twice sent to Russia, and on his return "most warmly received in all quarters, even by his parents. They have been obliged to hear too much approval of him, to be able any longer to treat him as a spoilt, ungrateful son. They are jealous of him" (W. 242)

About this time there fell some terrible words from Victoria's lips. "You can scarcely imagine," she said to an Austrian nobleman, "how I admire your handsome, intelligent, and graceful Crown Prince when I see him beside my uncouth, lumpish son William" (Corti, *Alexander von Battenberg*, p. 328). Spoken by a woman brought up as a Princess, spoken to a foreigner, in full consciousness that her words would be repeated in Vienna, and from Vienna would penetrate into all the Courts of Europe. So deep in the mother's heart lay the unnatural antipathy for her partly deformed son.

3

Far from Potsdam, in quite another continent, stands on the Linden at Berlin the palace of the old Emperor Augusta, in the 'eighties, instituted little intimate evenings at the so-called Bonbonniere. Here would gather a few old ministers and other nobles; professors too were invited—Curtius, who excavated Olympia; Hofmann, the authority on aniline dyes—and there would be no suite at all, for in its absence consisted the hostess's holiday. On these evenings she was quit for once of the painted, padded Count Perponcher, of the parchment visage of old

Albedyll; Plessen distributed elsewhere the amiabilities proper to an aide-de-camp, and Goltz, the Adjutant-General, now quite in his dotage, was free to slumber. The Empress would be rolled in, sitting in her invalid-chair, and established at a little table round which she would invite the guests to take their places: on her left would be a vacant chair for the Emperor. Tea, mandarines, ices, an exiguous glass of wine. It was the general amazement that she, with her feeble voice and hands in which the teacups rattled, should still care to appear in the world. After a while the Emperor would enter. He was near ninety by that time. His overcoat thrown open, for he usually came from the theatre, he would welcome every guest individually and cordially; then take a chair, unceremonious, cheerful, as always. Except for the hardness of hearing, which had begun to make conversation difficult to him, one might have taken him for a vigorous septuagenarian. A nonagenarian, he had brought down his twenty-six head of deer at his last shoot.

His favourite stories were of his youthful days. Once at the Bonbonnière he told of his being, as a lieutenant, at the Tsar's banquet after the victory of Leipzig, and there having been asked why he took no lobster. "I said I didn't know how one ate it, for in my parents' house I had never looked a lobster in the face" (Al. 348)

The guests sit attentive; we too listen with amazement. Here is a King who has sat at table with Alexander the First, who knew Talleyrand, and entered Paris with him after Waterloo; and beside him is a Queen who had talked with Goethe, known Charles Augustus, and in the March days of 1848 had fought her House's battle in this very palace—and yet neither has ever changed. She still tries to rule him, he still courteously refuses to be ruled; and if he does know a lobster now when he sees one, he still inquires every other day for the remains of yesterday's bottle of champagne. . . . It was upon this simplicity that his innate dignity was most surely based; for "he stands in the centre like a rock, the roaring billows

BISMARCK

round him, exalted high above the pitiful strife beneath. His prestige increases daily, nowadays, because he is a man who knows no guile, who cannot be approached by intriguers " (W. 285)

And in the closing years of his life, when war again seemed imminent, he said to old Albedyll: " I will take the command again, myself; my son will be with me. How far I shall get God only knows; it won't be far, but I shall go with the others " (W. 315)

Not a thousand yards away lies the domain of him who weighs in the balance these questions of war and peace—Bismarck, the grim central figure of all three Courts; but he too, as it were, creates for himself quite another world. True, he is sure of his old master; but even for *him* the dictator is occasionally too much, and when the head of the Cabinet one day perceives the Emperor to be enraged after the Chancellor's speech, and impulsively counsels him to let the man go if he will not yield to His Majesty's will, the Emperor replies: " In spite of all my gratitude, I *have* thought of it before now. His arrogance is often almost beyond bearing. But the Fatherland needs him too badly "

Augusta can never entirely forgive this man the splendour of her two crowns, because it is he to whom, in fact, she owes them both. It vexes the imperious old woman to realize that her masterfulness must yield the palm to this stranger's. Even in these years of the 'eighties, she has had to suffer Bismarck's admonition against agitating the Emperor by seeking to influence him. " I never," writes Bismarck " had seen the Empress look so handsome in the last decade of her life as at that moment. She drew herself up, her eyes blazed with such fire as I never encountered before or since. She broke off our interview, left me standing, and said afterwards: Our most gracious Chancellor of the Empire is very ungracious to-day ' "

Such inside information was eagerly retailed by the Berlin Court-foll from the Chamberlain down to the humblest lackey; no frown or grumble of the old master

but the grandson heard of it, and he might well have joined, out of his marked fear and respect for his grandparents, in the general hostility against the omnipotent Chancellor, to whom he was in no way personally attracted. But hatred for his parents drew the Prince to Bismarck's side.

It had already become history, but had been kept from the youth as from all subjects—how in the conflict of 1863 his father had publicly dissociated himself from his grandfather's, the King's, *coup d'état*. Now, however, grown-up, and lavishly supplied by his contemporaries with any sort of material against his father, Prince William heard not only of such revolts, but in the more fearless historical publications could even read besides that it was his mother who at that time had, under English pressure, urged his father to this step, "so as to safeguard her children's future." With the eagerness of aspiring youth, the son now read and heard of the whilom aspirations of his own father.

Yet in his heart of hearts he was not for his father, but against him. His father's advanced opinions were not to his taste, the anti-democracy of Bismarck's sphere was congenial; in a book about him, the Prince at that time underlined all Bismarck's most royalist pronouncements, and everything against England. To the passage in Bismarck's speech of that same year, 1863, in which he alluded to the birthday of "our youngest Prince," and emphatically told the Landtag that the Prussian monarchy was not yet ripe to form a mere decoration in the constitutional structure, the Prince appended, "and it never will be if that 'youngest Prince' can prevent it" (L. 292).

Thus his earliest political ideas were biased by his hostility towards his parents, that was why he made himself the mirror of Bismarck. And had not "blood and iron" prevailed against England's Liberal dogmas? The Prince delighted in hearing from eye-witnesses how his proud father had to bend his will to that of his grandfather, or of how Bismarck had asked the sullen Crown

BISMARCK AND FREDERICK

Prince why he held aloof from the sessions of a Government which after all would "in a few years" be his own? Whereupon the Crown Prince, even then embittered, drew himself up most haughtily, suspicious that the evil genius of Prussia was intent on paving his way to serve the new King also. "Even to-day," wrote Bismarck thirty years afterwards, "I seem to see the head flung back, the cheek reddening, the look at me over the left shoulder. I controlled my own wrath, thought of Carlos and Alba, and answered that I had spoken in an access of dynastic emotion. . . . I knew I should never be [his servant]."

One seems to see the pair. At the end of a coldly glittering palatial room; or perhaps right at the door, this minister, now approaching fifty, colossal, already nearly bald, scarce two years at the helm of affairs, as yet unrenowned, the best-hated man in Prussia and proud to be so, and nevertheless in full assertion of genius, upborne by the arrogance which attributed the salvation of this dynasty to himself. Near by, no less gigantic, a man in the early thirties, blonde as can be, and very dandified—the heir to the throne, his opponent, and yet possessed by the same thought: "When will the sceptre change hands?" The minister, a stranger, wishes the King who trusts him a long life; the son and heir, like other Crown Princes before him, is torn by conflicting emotions—indeed for him there is no longer any conflict.

"Is it possible!" reflects Son William, when he hears such stories. To-day, after more than twenty years, can these be the same three men who, in the self-same places, actuated by the same suspicions and predilections, watch one another unceasingly, trustful and malevolent, recalcitrant and submissive? The old master still obeys the same counsellor, the master's son still hates him; but in the interval the power of that stranger, who rules the destinies of royal houses and divides them against themselves, has secretly and uncannily waxed to an autocracy; in his brain is shaped the fate of Europe, his renown has

reached from pole to pole, and he, whose might no law pronounces to be permanent, is fixed more firmly on his throne than are the members of a family protected by the Law of Succession!

Obscure emotions, compounded of pride and fear, contend in the young Prince's heart when he is in the presence of the Chancellor. Amid the conflicting currents which distract the royal house, this stranger is the only man whom none dares to assail.

4

"In view of the immaturity as well as the inexperience of my eldest son, together with his tendency towards overbearingness and self-conceit, I cannot but frankly regard it as dangerous to allow him at present to take any part in foreign affairs."

With these words the Crown Prince sought, in the autumn of 1886, to veto the employment of his son in the Foreign Office, which Bismarck had caused the old Emperor to ordain. But what had he to take as the Chancellor's reply? That in the royal family the paternal authority must yield to the monarchical. Once again he knew himself defeated—he who might succeed to the throne to-morrow, and the day after dismiss this paid official!

For he knew well that Bismarck's will alone had inspired the order which would reveal State-secrets to the Prince, and prepare him for every contingency of the future. Was the old man trying to put the Prince under an obligation, to turn the unfavourable situation between father and son into one favourable to himself? Did it not look as if the aim was to supersede him, the Crown Prince? And here he was on the Riviera, in perfect health, a man approaching sixty, hailed as a Prince by all the world, the heir to one of the most powerful of kingdoms; yet, for all that, prevented by this eternal minister from forbidding to his own unripened son the thing that seemed to him a danger!

Nevertheless it was precisely then that Bismarck and

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the Crown Prince seemed to make some *rapprochement*. Since with every added year, every indisposition of the aged ruler, the sceptre seemed more likely to change hands, these two men had to consider coming events which were already the topic of Court gossip. When at this time the Crown Prince asked the Chancellor if in the event of a change he would remain, he was answered by the condition: No parliamentary government, and no foreign influence in policy. Despite the unmistakable allusion to England, the Crown Prince answered, with a gesture corresponding to his words: "Of course not."

Prince William saw all this at close quarters; we know what he thought of it, for Waldersee, his personal friend, records the deliberations of this group with constant reference to the young Prince's rôle. "I consider the Chancellor and the Crown Princess together simply an impossibility, so long as we are not openly allied with England. How is the Chancellor to conduct foreign policy when the future Empress, initiated in all these matters by the weakness of her husband, is English at heart? But on the other hand, whom can the Crown Prince take for Chancellor? There is no one available! . . . It could not last a month; then would come collapse and chaos. . . . I am convinced that his fall would mean complications at home and abroad, probably war. The great game of intrigue grows more transparent every day. It is a question of who is to be master in the Imperial Court of the future. The Bismarcks, father and son, propose to rule alone, and flatter themselves they can manage the Crown Princess. . . . If the Crown Prince comes to the throne [Bismarck] will easily make a pretext of, or actually force on, such differences of opinion as will enable him to resign. His son will go with him—to resume office under Prince William, on whom everyone is calculating" (W. 251 *seq.*)

Uncanny—this conviction in those around him of the early death or abjuration of a man who has been waiting thirty years, who is in perfect health, and not yet sixty!

All these calculations and desires found their way to the ears, to the heart of the Prince; and sooner than with other heirs to a crown his fancy began to hover round the thought of his father's death. This drew him into yet closer relation with the powerful Chancellor, who played with him in masterly fashion. The old minister knew how the jealous father watched every visit paid him by the son. He personally initiated him into foreign affairs, called him his most important coadjutor, for the whole Foreign Office was in fact no more than Bismarck's workshop; and only at one name did the Chancellor hesitate. "When the name of Privy Councillor Holstein was mentioned," the Prince wrote afterwards, "I seemed to hear in his tone a sort of warning against that man. He called him later on the man with the hyena-eyes, from whom I should do well to hold aloof."

But the Prince's zeal quickly faded; he visited but fitfully the Ministry now open to him, "ready for anything exciting, but with no liking for continuous work, for real knowledge." And besides this: "It was thought unfitting for the Prince, now in command of a regiment, to be so often and so long absent from Potsdam" (W. 267); of this the old Emperor, too, disapproved. For the most part he was shooting or abroad, in Vienna, in Scotland, and again in Vienna.

Soon his adherence to the House of Bismarck began to waver, at first not of his own accord. In the beginning of 1886 the Chancellor had certain reasons for approaching the Crown Prince, and consequently Victoria, whom at heart he despised. "She is no Catherine," he said; "put to the test, she shows cowardice. She wants to be popular . . . to seem Liberal, to perplex people with paradoxes—no more. About twenty years ago she told me that the Prussian nobility were servile because they were poor, that in Birmingham alone there was more silver plate than in all Germany . . . and that she believed I should love to be a King or the President of a Republic. I answered: 'Doubtless England is much richer; but Prussia, in compensa-

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tion, has many valuable qualities. And as to the danger of a Republic, that is still far from Germany. Possibly our children and grandchildren may see it—but only if the Monarchy abandons its own cause' ” (L. 396).

Prophetic, stinging words! When he spoke of abandoning its own cause, he was alluding to the Crown Princess's Liberalism, for he could not then have dreamed by what strange ways, a generation later, his prophecy would reach its fulfilment. At the moment his aim was, for international purposes, to win over the ruling spirit of Potsdam. Now that his policy was inclining towards England, his distrust of the Englishwoman necessarily decreased, since he could make direct use of her correspondence with London for the furtherance of his aims.

Every means to that end he pressed into his service. “The Chancellor is now on the best of terms with the Crown Prince and Princess. . . . The consequence is that she, bent as she is on attacking and humiliating her son, claims the Chancellor's co-operation to this end. It will be a bitter disillusionment for him, but perhaps a useful experience ” (W. 288).

The Prince's disillusionment was severe. In the vortex of intrigue, standing between the hostile Courts, and dependent on the moods of the enigmatic, and even more inflexible than enigmatic, Chancellor to whom he had hitherto reverentially adhered, and whom he had sought to please above all others, he now saw once for all that he too was no more than a pawn in the master's game, and felt himself pushed aside in favour of his detested mother. This young man would have had to be an expert in the art of diplomacy, an initiate in the shifting sphere of high politics, the confidant of Bismarck's soaring schemes, if he were not to be confounded by such an experience. But as he was, young and inexperienced, no less sensitive than unstable, he could see in this *chassez-croisez* nothing but a revulsion of the Chancellor's, and on Herbert's side especially a kind of betrayal. Bismarck's enemies did their part in confirming these views. For in truth everyone

suffered and groaned under the yoke of the omnipotent man; and with smiles of glee they wrote and whispered to each other that at last Prince William was getting over his craze for Bismarck. When at that time it was one day rumoured that Bismarck was dead, and the Prince, hastening to Berlin, heard from the Minister von Scholz the joyous *démenti*: "No; he is still with us," very coldly did the Prince rejoin: "No one is irreplaceable. Of course he will be needed for some years. After that, his functions will be divided; the monarch must himself take a larger part in them."

Meanwhile Bismarck sought to provide him with a serious adviser, who should instruct him in the arts of government; but the Prince rejected the gentleman on the ground that "when he was a boy, he had seen Rübezahl wearing just such an unkempt beard." But the adviser chosen by himself withdrew at his own request after a few weeks, because he "could not instil a sense of the importance of earnest application, nor reconcile himself to an idle Court existence."

Nevertheless the Prince had his successes, especially abroad; his two missions to the Tsar went off admirably, he was lauded for tact and geniality, knowledge of the Russian language, and a certain charm. In conversation he was versatile; "he talked with much animation, and was enthusiastic about Wagner's music and military manœuvres" (L. 213). But at the same time Waldersee, who was devoted to him, complains of indignant letters about utterly trivial circumstances, and of great difficulty in persuading him to estimate people reasonably. Moreover, even as a mere Prince, he gave birthday presents of his own bust, wrote under his photograph the untimely words; "*Oderint dum metuant*," and under one sent to England: "I bide my time." Ominous signs of a restive self-confidence.

He was far from well, it is true; frequently prevented by ear-ache from appearing on great occasions; in the spring of 1886 vertigo and sickness led to the grave

diagnosis "that there is some risk of the brain being affected" (W 292). Soon afterwards the sound ear was attacked; the tympanum had to be pierced—all this endangered his mental balance.

From his twenty-third to his twenty-eighth year the Prince's life was divided among three circles. He was a husband, was yearly made a father, and on the birth of his first-born son expressed the hope that he might follow in the footsteps of his great-grandfather. Rumours and reports of conjugal infidelity in those years are contested not only by his friends, but by the psychologists, for to the Prussian virtues of which he was so proud that kind of fidelity peculiarly belongs; and though Bismarck ascribes to him a strong vein of sensuality, this is but scantily attested outside his domestic relations.

One thing only is certain—that even in this youthful period he preferred the society of men to that of women, and liked to amuse himself in the Guards Club with his Potsdam brother-officers. Bismarck looked with disapproving eyes on this way of life and desired other influences for him; for, as he says, an heir to a throne, consorting with young officers of whom the most gifted have probably a keen eye to their official future, is only in very rare instances likely to find such an environment a good preparation for his future career. "I deeply deplored the limitations of this early intercourse" (B. 5). The attempt to transfer him to Berlin proved abortive, despite Bismarck's pressure, by reason of the old monarch's parsimony, which refused to allow him a fitting establishment. So did a Prussian virtue prevent the Prussian heir-apparent from undergoing the discipline appropriate to his situation.

What his brother-officers admired in him was the energy with which he had surmounted his infirmity, and taught himself to be a fine horseman and a fine shot. For he was urgent to outdo them all. When his bride came in procession along the Linden to the Palace on the wedding-day, he was standing in the courtyard in command of the

bodyguard, "and commanding with such enthusiasm that her entry seemed to be a matter of no other interest in his eyes" (L. 203). Again, laying the foundation-stone of the new Reichstag, he "wielded his trowel so vigorously that there was general acclamation" (L. 296). His intimates alone knew the degree of nervous energy demanded of him by this display. "The poor Prince," writes Eulenburg, "is much incommoded by his paralysed left arm. His loader has to lean his right arm on a long pole, thus serving the Prince as a support for the rifle. Not every buck will put up with this!" (E. 137).

Only those who can appreciate this lifelong struggle against the congenital weakness will be fair to him when the future Emperor is seen to strain too far, or lose, his nervous energy. The perpetual struggle with a defect which every newcomer must instantly perceive and he, for that very reason, the more ostentatiously ignore—this hourly, lifelong effort to conceal a congenital, in no way repulsive stigma of Nature, was the decisive factor in the development of his character. The weakling sought to emphasize his strength; but instead of doing so intellectually, as his lively intelligence would have permitted, tradition and vainglory urged him to the exhibition of an heroic, that is to say a soldierly, personality. And everything combined to strengthen the delusion: his forefathers' martial glory, his parents' depreciation, his opposition to their Liberal ideas; and above and before all, the innate vanity inherited from his father, and frequently characteristic of the family—this and these it was which drove him all his life to seem what he was not.

5

The Prince preferred the third group—that of his brother-officers—to the other two. Whom did he choose for friends? Hinzpeter his tutor, was his adviser; but he was too old, and socially too far removed, to be called his friend. Even General Waldersee, in the middle fifties, could not be the bosom friend of a young man in

the middle twenties; but the choice of him as confidant is significant.

Among the Generals of the previous generation, who had held the highest Prussian commands in three victorious campaigns, Count Waldersee was perhaps the only one who was deficient in the virtues of Moltke, Roon, and Blumenthal—straightforwardness, reticence, austerity; and who, because of this, was given over to intrigue, political wire-pulling, and consuming ambition, all of which were in accordance with his crafty nature. His diary, invaluable as an indication of William's opinions, rich in spitefulness and knowledge of the world, yet for all that wearing a sanctimonious mask which is particularly in evidence on birthdays and in illness, is the earliest document of a type of Prussian officer which originated with him, and was in the next thirty years to be summoned to decisive power—that is to say, to the Cabinet of the monarch.

This first Court-General, who was also the originator of "aide-de-camp politics," very swiftly gained a pernicious influence over the Prince. His policy was ruled by Bismarck's—which means that he was always on the other side. Thus when old Moltke wanted to retire, and appointed Waldersee, his protégé, as Quartermaster-General, Bismarck desired someone else for the position. What was the result for Waldersee? A deadly feud with the Bismarcks. When, on the other hand, Bismarck discovered that Waldersee was playing-up to the Prince for the future Chancellorship, what was the result for the Bismarcks? A deadly feud with Waldersee.

Hence Waldersee concentrated all his energy on embroiling Herbert Bismarck with Prince William, Herbert being Foreign Secretary and on good terms with the Prince. Again, Waldersee suggested hostility towards Russia, because Bismarck's plans were pro-Russian; at the same time systematically undermining the Prince's confidence in Bismarck's greatness as a statesman. Yet simultaneously he struck up a sudden friendship with

Privy Councillor Holstein, whom shortly before he had designated as "one of Bismarck's sorriest tools"; but this was a critical moment, and he divined that Holstein was beginning to revolt against the Chancellor.

Amid all this, his diary will invoke—on Good Friday or some other day of humiliation, or in the tedium of a watering-place—the faithful love of his devout wife, who was a connection of Princess William's; and from the welter of personalities, Court-gossip, lesser and larger treacheries, there will suddenly shine forth a pious gleam: "how Marie will rejoice in my spiritual transformation," or how from henceforth "he will strive, not after honours and earthly things, but to prepare himself for the next world." Such was the mentor chosen by the Prince.

His bosom friend was entirely different. Prince William had a stern adolescence behind him; native cold-heartedness had been reinforced by his early experience. Neither father nor mother, neither brothers nor sisters, had shown him that warmth of affection which calls forth the best attributes of youth; in his extremely uninspiring marriage he had later found no sedative against the hell of the home-life he knew. It is certain that he never was in love. Whether his nature was inherently incapable of devoted affection for a woman, or whether, fearing out of egotism to abandon himself to feeling, he followed the fashion of his time and group, wherein there was abundance of male friendships, not necessarily perverted—certain it is that at twenty-seven Prince William for the first time lost his heart.

Having from his childhood up obeyed the strictest Prussian ordinances, in his horror of betraying any physical inferiority, and possessed by the constant fear of not truly shining as an officer, the passive side of his nature now demanded its compensation. Suppressed sentimentality needed a field for ardour, fancy yearned for an artistic friendship. Music and song, lyric poetry and mystic speculations, nordic sagas and southern sunlight,

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the lofty presentation of heroic figures, draped in glittering mantles: all, in short, that Richard Wagner gave him, he now sought among his fellow men. And he found it all in Count Philip Eulenburg, to whom he was most fervently attached for thirty years.

This remarkable, many-sided man, whose nature is more plainly revealed to us in his Memoirs than he would have desired, was above all else an actor. His powers of adaptation were so great that he himself records the caustic comment of a friend: "If all his dear pals were to be brought together at one time, there would be a big fight." And speaking of his father and uncle, he adds: "I was like both in the exercise of my social talents, but I was an actor and they were sincere." Even his gifts were those of an effeminate nature, vacillating in half a dozen directions; and having been as a young man uncertain whether to decide for music, painting, architecture, or poetry, he finally realized that all his talents, combined as they were with rank and training, could find no more dazzling field for display than in diplomacy.

"During those agitated years of inward conflict and overflowing productiveness, stimulated by the artistic life of Munich . . . I would flee in desperation to the lake, leap from the boat into the azure flood, or ply my fishing-rod for many a dreamy hour, until, remote from strife, I drew from Nature's greatness, from the blue-green waters, from my poetical and musical projects and fancies, a kind of tranquillity." And it is not only the dilettante, but the actor, who writes as it were with guilelessly uplifted eyes: "Even as a child I was possessed by measureless compassion . . . to help was ever my dearest joy." The man who, with an appearance of complete naïveté, can so depict himself in memoirs written decades later, is looking back upon a life in which the false note was unheard by others. and finally even by himself.

A tall supple figure, indefinite features, eyes which in Bismarck's opinion were enough to spoil the best break



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fast, large soft hands, a Narcissus-like grace of bearing, alike in diplomatic uniform and Guards' full-dress, brilliantly witty, a store-house of anecdotes told in a beautiful, slightly veiled voice, able to improvise gracefully at the piano, to turn a rhyme, mimic a fellow-creature, put style into a letter; above all so pliant that any friction with other natures was precluded . . . a personality imbued with no less sagacity than insincerity, its glitter at the same time oxidized by an unconquerable dread of responsibility—here is the seductive picture of an aristocratic Cagliostro, formed to bewitch the young Prince, twelve years his junior, as the embodiment of all human graces, the epitome of all artistic achievement, set forth before his eyes in the person of a living man.

Such was the first impression. And when we delete the superlatives without which such natures can neither exist nor write, there remains a great deal of truth in Eulenburg's statement: "The Prince's affection for me was an ardent one . . . my musical performances drove him into almost feverish raptures." The nordic ballads and roseate songs of sentiment—twin products of the Eulenburgian Muse—it would delight the Prince to hear "by the hour together . . . always sitting beside me and turning the pages . . . and he loved to greet me, when we met on shooting-mornings in the forest, with turns and phrases from my verses. I have had many a ravished listener to my performances, but hardly ever have I inspired such ravishment as in Prince William. And as at the same time I familiarly frequented Bismarck's house, was an officer in the Prince's adored Guards, and (alas!) was profoundly initiated in the byways of politics, I can understand that the young Prince should have felt as if looking deep into a cup filled with a draught whose ingredients were delightful to his palate."

It is in such an enervating atmosphere that the vanity of an idolized tenor, and the folly of his idolizing devotee, will thrive and grow. And yet we cannot be angry with

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this Count who was the first to open the gates of the garden of Romance to the young man who had been forced into the part of hard-bitten Prussian Prince, and now was taking leave of an adolescence poor alike in love and in the dreams of youth.