

## CHAPTER III

### BISMARCK

I

1888-1890

**I**N the tribune of the Reichstag, four weeks before the old Emperor's death, Bismarck is standing to speak. To-day he is not contending with the Left, no one will interrupt him, his opponent is invisible—Europe's greatest statesman is speaking of Europe. We are still in February 1888: the peace of the Continent is endangered, the statesman knows it, the peoples feel it; but Germany is befogged, and in the Council-Chamber everyone's eye is directed, in the land everyone's thoughts are fixed, on the young Prince who now stands in the royal box to hear the master-statesman. What is he going to say?

For the first time he dwells upon the imminent possibility that Germany will have to fight on two fronts; he speaks of the desire for peace, not of the certainty thereof; then he sets forth the Balkan case for war and demonstrates its futility: "Bulgaria, that little country between the Danube and the Balkans, is far from being an object of adequate importance . . . for which to plunge Europe from Moscow to the Pyrenees, and from the North Sea to Palermo, into a war whose issue no man can foresee. At the end of the conflict we should scarcely know why we had fought." After this magniloquent phrase and its corollary, wherein he prophetically summed up the causes and effect of the World-War, the report has the comment: "Laughter."

Suddenly, in the middle of this speech (which lasted two hours) the man of seventy-three says: "Forgive me if I sit down for a moment. I am not now able to stand so long." At this moment, what are the sensations of the heir to the throne in the royal box? Are they not those of his own youth beside the Chancellor's enfeebled age—is it not clear in such a moment that Bismarck belongs to

“ WE GERMANS FEAR GOD ”

the grandfather's generation? But soon he stands up again, carefully balancing his adjectives as he depicts the relation of Germany to the individual powers, always as one who designs to tranquillize public opinion. Then he draws himself up in his old fashion, and the Chamber rings with his cry: “ We Germans fear God, but nothing else in the world! ”

Immense ovation, and the session closes—it was, so they wrote, a moment as great as that of July 1870. Next day, the echo reverberates over Europe: Crispi wires pages of verbosity from Rome, Vienna is overjoyed, the Tsar sends a barrel of caviare as a token of gratitude. Only the orator himself is dissatisfied: “ I am getting old, all the same; my ideas don't combine and kindle as they used.” And of course it vexes him to have had to sit down. His photograph, taken that day in the Lobby, represents no giant now. This was his last European speech.

It was not, in the last analysis, spoken for the young man in the royal box, whose accession was still in the future, whose distrust of the Chancellor had for some time been evident. When the statesman chose that moment for unravelling the mighty skein of international relations, it was because he wished to show the world at large, as well as the Prince, that caught between threatening war and a change of sceptre, only one man could discover the right issue, and that man was he.

For simple objects, but by very complicated methods, Bismarck had in recent years conducted foreign policy, framing a system of treaties and conventions designed above all to restrain Austria no less than Russia from a single-handed attack in the Balkans, “ for the German Empire is not called upon to stake the life and property of its subjects upon the furtherance of its neighbours' ambitions.” To protect himself against Austria's Balkan adventures, he had the year before approached Russia anew: when in 1887 Austria refused to renew the Alliance of the Three Emperors, Bismarck had discovered a new form of insurance. Russia knew that she would

never take the field against Austria only, that she would find Germany in arms if there were any attempt to strike at Austria in the Balkans; but on the other hand, if the Austrians attacked in the Balkans, the Germans would support the aggrieved Russians. In consideration of this, Russia undertook to remain neutral, if France should advance against Germany.

Bismarck called this his counter-insurance against Austria, having insured himself with Austria against Russia by the Triple Alliance. But the first object of the treaty was to obviate the mortal danger to his own country of having to fight simultaneously on the Eastern and Western fronts. At the end of an epoch dominated by the secret agreements of the European Powers, this system was a masterpiece; it might be called the gilt-edged security of divided alliances.

Hence, when in November 1887 the Tsar had come to Berlin to see the old Emperor once more, he had, to Bismarck, disavowed all thought of an alliance with France; but had made a point of his jealousy of Austria. The Austrian frontiers were continually disturbed by Russian troops; at that time the German General Staff held war to be imminent, Waldersee even wished to provoke the conflict with France (W. 308). The military party was discontented because the old men desired peace, conversations were already begun with Vienna about the dispositions of the Austrian forces.

Bismarck's aim was to avoid war, though it were by threats. He made public the alliance with Austria of the year 1879, in order to intimidate Russia. He had to do this, because a nonagenarian war-lord was as impossible as a dying Crown Prince; he wished to do it, because otherwise his life-work was imperilled, "and the issue no man can foresee." His anxiety increased; he could get no rest without the aid of opiates, his brain seemed on fire. He had bound the European Powers by treaties making them neutral or harmless; only one was outside the circle, that power which would never let itself be reckoned with

## BISMARCK'S LEGACY

which had remained an unknown quantity in even Bismarck's calculations. For a whole decade he had caused his emissaries to knock at the door in London, and at last had designated as "the aim and object of German policy for ten years past" the joining of the Triple Alliance by England.

Then he took an entirely unwonted step—he approached England with an official offer of alliance. Now, in his old age, he for the first time deserted those byways of diplomacy trodden by him for five-and-twenty years; he reverted to the procedure of his youth, to frank unconcealed approach, and wrote to the English Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, a long private letter, setting forth the advantages to all three Empires of an alliance of England with Germany, and ultimately with Austria. The alliance with England had at last come to represent in Bismarck's eyes the consummation of the Triple, in the form of a Quadruple Alliance.

Before despatching it, he showed it to Prince William, and in a second document informed Salisbury of the Prince's "complete approval of the entire contents," thus indicating that the future too was addressing him—the ruler-to-be, whose views were spoken of as anti-English. Two months later, in January 1889, he directed his Ambassador (A. 4, f. 400) to say to Salisbury "that peace, which is equally desirable for both England and Germany, or even only delay, during which they would be able to organize their defences in a measure corresponding to the magnitude of the danger, could not be more certainly attained than by the conclusion of a treaty between Germany and England. . . . A secret convention, if anything of the sort were feasible, would give both Powers considerable security in the event of [another] war; but war could, in all probability, be obviated only by the conclusion of an open treaty."

This was Bismarck's legacy to the succeeding generation in Germany. Salisbury at first sent a polite but evasive reply: he feared that he was unlikely to gain the majority



in Parliament, whose approval Bismarck desired; but he would "leave the agreement on the table without saying yes or no" (A. 4, 405)

So grave was Germany's, so precarious Europe's, position when the two Emperors died. The High Command was in bellicose mood, the high officials of State were in perturbation, when they welcomed the new sovereign. He indeed said: "We must be prepared to fight the big war, even if we have to do it alone"; but he promised the Chancellor to give no provocation in any quarter; and, fervently desirous as he was of avoiding war altogether, he now sought to gain friends by personal intercourse. It was then that he began his visits to foreign rulers.

First to the Tsar—not to England; this, simply to defy his mother. But his grandmother wrote to the young Emperor, saying that his first visit should have been to her. When he showed the letter to Bismarck, and the Chancellor offered to draft a reply, William remarked. "I rather think I can manage to find for myself the middle course between sovereign and grandson." The old man stood, dumbfounded.

The first visit to Petersburg seemed a success. Everyone praised his manners; what was actually said of him in private the Emperor was not to know for a long time—and that a critical time. The visits to Vienna, Rome, London, and the East were likewise tranquillizing in effect; public curiosity and interest regarding the impulsive young man were everywhere made manifest; and if heads were occasionally shaken in the Chancelleries, why, there was always Bismarck to rely upon.

## 2

The friendship between Emperor and Chancellor seemed a warm one. The Austrian Ambassador in Berlin speaks of a veritable "honeymoon of reverence and mutual understanding," though it is true that he refrains from drawing the horoscope of this union; even Bismarck

himself, after the first Imperial visit to Friedrichsruh; is eloquent. "So considerate! . . . He was surprised that I had delayed breakfast for him till eleven o'clock . . . and had not got up before nine, because he thought I slept late." And Eulenburg tells how the Emperor once, with a courteous gesture, made Bismarck precede him through a doorway. From abroad he sent cordial despatches; in the New Year of 1889 he was "full of joy and confidence, since you are still at my right hand, beginning the New Year with fresh vigour. . . . May it long be vouchsafed me to work together with you."

But intimates knew better. In that same January his uncle of Baden said: "The Emperor needs the Chancellor for the present, to bring forward Army Bills" (Ho. 450); and on the Prince's birthday the Emperor called for Waldersee, Bismarck's enemy, that they might enter together with their congratulations. That was the first shock for Bismarck. Keen-sighted though he was, had he, like Danton, underestimated his danger? Certain it is that he did not always take the measure of this young man.

When, for instance, there appeared a war-diary of the Emperor Frederick's, the old man was beside himself at the great sensation it caused, scented Liberal intrigues, declared in the *Reichsanzeiger* that the undeniably authentic document was apocryphal, and in the same number published a drastic attack on Frederick and Victoria. It asserted that the then Crown Prince had not been informed on confidential matters, because his father feared indiscretions at the Court of England. "The legend," he said angrily, "that Frederick was a Liberal must be demolished! Otherwise the Democrats may rise and delude the young man into doing as his Martyr-Father did!" His agitation over this affair struck Hohenlohe as that of "a man not wholly sound," and the Grand-Duke of Baden said plainly: "Many people begin to think that Bismarck is no longer quite right in the head" (Ho. 456).

But the Emperor, to whom such opinions were retailed,



BISMARCK AND THE EMPEROR



must surely have approved of Bismarck's action? On the contrary, he sprang another surprise. Certainly he too believed the diary to be genuine; indeed he attributed the whole thing to his mother and called it a woman's revenge (E. 238); nevertheless he perceived the growing embitterment in all classes, resulting from Bismarck's attack upon the editor. The Emperor's grudge against his father had, it is true, outlived that father's death; but he was resolved that the people should revere his memory—the monarchical idea demanded that. And, as a general thing, the masses must learn not to grumble. Fear of eruptions had disturbed him as Prince; as Emperor, he proposed to prevent them.

What sort of a deep menacing growl was this, underlying the fanfares? If there existed such lawless impulses, if there were masses of men who would fain overthrow the State, what would his constitutional rights avail the monarch? What antidote against this poison but religion? It was not with fire and sword that conflicts such as this were won; it was with God and good intentions. Obtuseness, and a kind of frigid piety, caused the Court-Chaplain Stöcker and his fervents to believe at this time that not the social system, but the soul of Labour, was decayed and breeding Socialism, and that it must be "healed by spiritual tenderness, added to material succour." To these Christian-Socialist views the earliest converts had been the devout Countess Waldersee and her husband, through the Countess her devout niece, the then Princess William, and finally the Prince himself; in the end of 1887 meetings had been held in Waldersee's house to establish the "Spiritual Mission" in the different cities. The Press sounded an alarm, the Bismarckian organs were admonitory—upon which the Prince wrote to him, saying that he regarded this Mission to the cities "as the most effective deterrent to social democracy and anarchism."

The old man read this with a savage grin—little had he ever cared about the national well-being, piety he could not away with, the Black Coat in politics he had derided or



combated throughout a lifetime. He wrote the Prince pages of admonition against clericalism—in vain.

Though condemned to political silence ever since the summer of 1885, Stöcker had latterly gained ground, and now had the mortification of reading in his enemy's organ a confidential letter written by himself, in his "pastoral" capacity, to one of the Conservative leaders. "The bonfires of revolt must be kindled round the *Kartell*" (Bismarck's instrument of government) "and their blaze be seen of all men. . . . If the [new] Emperor perceives that there is any intention to sow discord between him and Bismarck, he will at once draw back; but if in matters regarding which he is instinctively on our side, we nourish his dissatisfaction, we shall in that way confirm his principles, without personally vexing him." The *Kreuzzeitung* had for some time been seeking to work upon the Emperor after this recipe.

He was soon to have his first opportunity of acting upon his humanitarian principles. Over a hundred thousand miners in the Ruhr came out on strike for higher wages. In the moment when Bismarck was laying before the Cabinet some strong emergency measures, there appeared, suddenly and unannounced, the Emperor in Hussar uniform and blustering mood, proclaiming: "The directors and shareholders must give in; ~~the men~~ are my subjects, for whom I am responsible. Yesterday I warned the Chairmen of Committees in the Rhineland, telling them that if the industry does not at once grant an increase of wages, I shall withdraw my troops. Then, if the owners and directors have their villas burnt down and their gardens trampled on, they will sing a little smaller!"

Bismarck: "The owners are likewise, I think, Your Majesty's subjects?"

The Emperor, stung by this retort, laid bare the real reason for his excitement: "If no coal is being produced, our Navy will be helpless! We could not mobilize if there were a coal shortage. We are in such a precarious situation that if I were the Tsar I should instantly proclaim war against us."

Next day, to a delegation of the miners, in paternal mood: "Every subject has the Emperor's ear, as a matter of course. . . . You have put yourselves in the wrong, for your action is illegal . . . since the notices had not expired. . . . As to your demands, I shall examine them myself and let you know the result. But if . . . any connection with the social-democratic group should make itself apparent, I could not any longer estimate your desires by the light of my royal goodwill, for in my view every Social-Democrat is an enemy to his State and country. In such an event I should intervene with ruthless severity and use the power assigned me to its full extent—which is a considerable one!"

Then to the employers, in courteous mood: "The men have made a good impression on me; they have no social-democratic sympathies. . . . After all, it is only human nature for everyone to try to earn as much as possible. The men read newspapers, they know the relation between their wages and the Company's profits, and claim to share more or less in the latter."

Bismarck, stunned by the Emperor's direct intervention, left him to himself at first; when it should become a question of legislating, *he* would take hold. And were his fundamental ideas so very far removed from the Emperor's? Neither the old man nor the young perceived the spirit of the age. Socialists and anarchists were identical; enemies of the State must be kept down—both were "all out" for that. For Bismarck it was no more than an intensification of his anti-democratic feeling; for William, a sentiment resulting from the attempt on his grandfather's life. But their methods of attack were worlds apart. Bismarck wanted to fight as he had always fought—with emergency measures, the lock-out, disfranchisement, and, if these failed, bullets. The Emperor wanted to attract the adherents of the new doctrines by protecting the status of the working-man; he addressed them as "*Ihr*" and "*Du*," fancied himself in the part of father of his people, was anxious to distribute privileges without himself abjuring any—in short, he wanted

## THE BEST-MATED MAN

“popular absolutism,” after the fashion of Frederick the Great. Only he forgot that a century had gone by since then.

Both methods, resolutely carried out, could only have led to revolution: Bismarck's, through violent revolts which might be shot down once and twice, but not for ever; William's, through swift evolution of a movement which, feeling itself encouraged by the monarch and unopposed by the Law, would gradually encroach upon the Government and at last bring it to the ground.

Thus ensued a conflict between two mistaken methods, wherein only one of the protagonists was thorough. Had this been an instance of a modern, democratically-inspired monarch opposed to a hide-bound Chancellor, it would have symbolized the encounter of youth and age, incarnated in the representatives of the two epochs, and we should have followed the contest with anxious sympathy. But here was a neurotic nature in revolt against obsolete methods, yet lacking the perseverance and courage to follow its own convictions. The Emperor wanted to reassure his conscience by an attempt; when that missed fire, he felt free to revert to his natural protection against danger—his Guards.

### 3

Bismarck was an oppression on the realm.

For a decade no political intelligence had dared to raise its head, unless prepared to defy him; thus the best brains in the Opposition were repressed, instead of ripening to potential authority. No official could develop under his rule, for all feared him who drew all things into his orbit, and decreed. Justly could the young Emperor say: “I have no Ministers; they are all Prince Bismarck's Ministers.” If he interrogated one, or sought to stimulate another, always he was met by the embarrassed answer that the matter must first of all be laid before the Prince.

No longer had the latter any friends, nobody loved the old man. Even Roon and Moltke, with whom he stood

depicted in bronze and on canvas before the nation, had drawn aloof from him. The War-Minister had died estranged from Bismarck; Moltke, egged on by Waldersee, had been furious when in the year 1888 Bismarck had taken on himself to make independent military proposals at Vienna (W. 356). When after this Moltke was invited to the Chancellor's, he found himself so badly placed, and the Princess so barely polite, that he left after dinner without any adieux. Next year, at his jubilee, he was offended by a cold, dictated congratulation from the Chancellor.

"He has intimidated nearly everyone, so that none dares to express an independent opinion. He domineers in the administration, and suffers no opposition. . . . He wants to be master all round, and is no longer fit to be so. He is Foreign Minister and interferes with every one of the Home Ministers, paying no attention to the Chief's views; he is Prussian Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce, and regards the various Heads of Departments as his subjects; added to which he sits tight at Friedrichsruh, and is difficult to get at. . . . All complain of insufficient instructions, of having no real power of decision, and more particularly too of the Chancellor's duplicity" (W. 2, 41).

Even his own family trembled before him—the only beings whom he loved and who loved him. Though everyone flattered him, the Princess's drawing-room grew steadily emptier; at Friedrichsruh especially, where they spent half the year, they led in their tasteless rooms, among gaudy cretonnes and diplomas of honour, the lives of small country gentry, seldom enlivened by company or music. When the old Prince in his obsolete coat, with a white neckcloth twisted round his throat instead of a cravat, lay on his chaise-longue, himself gigantic, his black dog gigantic, the pencil with which he laid about him on the Bills gigantic; when his small spouse, always pale, always coughing, sat by his side, her hair still partially dark ~~above~~ the diamond ear-rings, ever solicitous, as full of

## HERBERT'S LOVE-STORY

hatreds as he was himself—then woe betide the grown-up son if he disturbed them by an unconsidered word!

Terribly had the autocrat threatened his eldest son, when he wanted to marry the beautiful Princess zu Carolath, who from her connections and repute was unwelcome to his father; he was ready, so Herbert reported to a friend, "to start with me for Venice, where the lady was, and so prevent me from entering into an engagement of marriage; for he said that it was more important to him than the whole Empire and all its affairs, and what remained to him of his life!" Inevitably this son, his life overshadowed by his father; his dream of love destroyed, showed an aggravated form of the inherited misanthropy; his native ruggedness not to say rudeness, gained the ascendancy; and as he everywhere represented his father, he took that father's tyranny as his model, without possessing his fascination or the aureole of his legendary fame. And so Herbert too was hated.

The old man brooded with patriarchal intensity over the future of his progeny, and when he encouraged Herbert's friendship with the heir to the throne it was because he wanted to assure the future of his house against all contingencies. This is a cardinal clue to his actions in his last years of office—to bequeath the power which was only lent him, as the Mayors of the Palace had bequeathed it in the Middle Ages; to obtain by strategy the one thing that differentiated him from reigning princes; to leave his first-born the authoritative office to hold as securely as the Crown was held by these kings who, but for him, would scarcely have been kings at all.

Therefore his sons, as Secretary of State or President of Council, had to obey him as if they had been under age. The least thing infuriated the old man; if a servant said Count Bill was not in the house, and the father came across him afterwards, he would foam with rage, and waving his arms about: "Come here at once, I want you!" (E. 66)

So latent revolt was slowly seething among his principal officials; everyone panted for emancipation from



the tyrant. Where would they more surely find it than with the new master? "It *must* improve," thought the Ministers of State, and were ready from the first to encourage every sign of dissatisfaction. And was it not more delightful to frequent a brand-new Court? Shooting-parties and balls, trips abroad, and processional entries—pleasanter to share in these than to tremble incessantly before the nods and frowns of the old misanthrope.

The Palace with its rows of glittering windows, with its Palace-Guard, its lines of sentries, Empress's Bodyguard, standards, weapons, Orders—everything in it was changed or renovated by the new master, everything ministered to the glory of the Highest, even the servants' children. Away with the ugly Old-Prussian dress-coat! How much more imaginative were knee-breeches, silk stockings, buckled shoes, three-cornered hats! Everyone extolled the new dress-regulations. What then can the Emperor have felt at the report of a session in which Bismarck cut down the scheme for the new Court dress, and moved an urgent representation against it? "Untimely, unfitting, politically detrimental, for this remarkable costume draws a distinction between Court-Society and all the rest of mankind. This expensive dress, worn in our country by none but lackeys, deprives its wearers of all dignity" "Easy to see" (thought the Emperor) "that he's nothing but a grumpy old man."

A royal train was needed for the constant journeyings. Twelve carriages, a saloon-carriage in three divisions; a large room in the centre, two smaller ones; blue silk upholstery, divan, chandeliers; a carriage for the Civil and Military Cabinets; royal kitchen, domestics. For the entries—since the great German cities must all see their ruler at least once—body-guard, gold helmet, the Emperor always very serious, the ever-smiling Empress following him in an open carriage. The German people liked all this.

They willingly paid the price. Five months after his accession the monarch demanded an increase of six million

## THE IMPERIAL YACHT

marks a year in his salary. What? Yet another objection from the Chancellor? Yes. He was "very much disturbed; he considered the demand as a whole untimely and exaggerated; he thought that the debate in the Landtag ought to last no more than five minutes, for any discussion would impair the prestige of the Crown, and a rejection would oblige the Cabinet to resign" (W. 2, 24). Had one better wait a while? Had one not great expenses for the two widowed Empresses, for one's children? Unfortunately all the world knew how much the old Emperor had contrived to save.

In the second year, the Imperial yacht—four and a half millions, designated in the State paper as "pattern for the Grand Squadron"; but later, to the consternation of the representatives, described by the Kaiser at the launching as a pleasure-boat for himself and his family, whereof the armament was to serve "more as decoration." On his first trip to Vienna and Rome the Emperor took with him as presents: eighty diamond rings, a hundred and fifty silver orders, fifty breast-pins, three gold photograph-frames, thirty gold watches and chains, a hundred caskets, and twenty diamond-set Orders of the Eagle. That was the way to be popular everywhere.

So early as the second year, his friend and votary Waldersee declared that the zenith had been reached. "Quite gradually there is growing a certain disillusionment; his frequent journeys, his restless activity, his numerous interests have their natural consequence in a lack of thoroughness. The Cabinet Ministers complain that they can only with difficulty obtain an audience, and that then everything has to be settled too cursorily and hastily. The Ministers feel that the Emperor ought to express a considered opinion on their proposals; this however he almost never does" (W. 2, 67). Even Hinzpeter, his prophet, exclaimed at a certain measure: "What do you say to *this* neurotism? He gets more headlong every day!" (W. 2, 88).

As he was away from home more than half the year,

usually for about thirty weeks, the description of his daily round in the shooting-season takes on an enhanced significance, especially as it comes from his friend Eulenburg. According to this he would shoot, in the summer of 1889 at Pröckelwitz, every day till about noon, then sleep till three. "Between three and four the Emperor attended to the private State papers which came to me in sheaves from Berlin. I was always with him at this time, laying the papers before him and discussing the business. Then dinner. Afterwards it would amuse the Emperor to look for thunderbolts in the garden—many were to be found under the gravel, most of which had been scattered there beforehand by Eberhard [Dohna]" (E. 246). Between three and four, then, all business had to be got through. When in the same year Eulenburg invited him to a shoot, he begged him to put crosses beside the names of such suggested guests as he did not approve of, and promised that "of course these crosses shall be concealed in the innermost recesses of my guileless heart." The list set forth the talents of the guests: "Hochberg: sings. Moltke: gambles. Hülsen: does conjuring-tricks. Varnbühler: draws caricatures. Herbert Bismarck: drinks. Dohna: mends shoes (sign of an exceedingly servile nature). . . . Dankelmann: shoots swallows with a bullet" (E. 2, 49).

But the climax of jollity was reached in the evening "when Hülsen acted, in burlesque dumb-show, *The Glove of Schiller*." How astonishing the artlessness of these undergraduate diversions would have been to the subject who weekly perused the dogmatic solemnities and pompous rhetoric of the Imperial orations! Of a truth, these amusements had nothing of his Bavarian kinsman's romanticism, nothing either of a pernicious nature, for that a man should shoot down swallows struck no one in the circle as extraordinary. But the cobbling Count Dohna, who mingled thunderbolts with the gravel so that his Zeus should unearth these curiosities, does seem an omen of perilous things to come.

## THE CROWN-COUNCIL

In such moods, amid dumb-shows, witticisms, and heroic ballads, the young monarch was easily led onward in the path of autocracy by his companions of the gun and glass. In such a mood it was that, over a luncheon-table, Waldersee with bland malignancy said to the Emperor:

Frederick would never have become the Great, if on his accession he had found and retained in power a Minister of Bismarck's authority and prestige" (B. 35).

That was as Iago's poisoned dart within Othello's breast.

### 4

A Crown-Council in the Palace at Berlin, January 1890—the Emperor and Bismarck in uniform, the Ministers in their embroidered coats; on the left, near the Emperor, Bötticher with his pointed features and double eye-glasses, something between a cat and a bureaucrat. No one appears to know the reason for this Council-Extraordinary, such as William's predecessors have never before convened except on occasions of considerable danger, or for decisions of great importance. Bismarck, summoned from Friedrichsruh by wire, has vainly interrogated Bötticher on the agenda. Bötticher has been mute, though he is the only man who knows; even Herbert, Secretary of State, on asking the Emperor, has been left unanswered. A queer sensation for the Chancellor—never yet has his King taken him by surprise; at every session he has himself drawn up the programme, for wellnigh thirty years. What has the incalculable new ruler got up his sleeve? The effect is as if he "were planning an agreeable surprise for us all."

And indeed, for William this is a great moment. "I have chosen the birthday of the Great Frederick, because this Crown-Council is to be, historically, a very significant new departure." Two proposals, of which one is written by the Emperor's own hand, are read aloud by Bötticher. . . . "So *he's* being played off against me," thinks Bismarck of Bötticher, one of his oldest colleagues, a familiar friend, under many an obligation to him.

Protection of the working-man, no work on Sundays, no child labour: mere common-sense. After the reading the Emperor speaks: “ The employers have squeezed the men like lemons, and then let them rot on the dung-heaps. And so the working-man has come to reflect that he is not a mere machine, and claims his share in the profits created by him. But his relation to the employer must be that of a colleague. These strikes are a proof that there is no sympathy whatever between the two parties; hence the increase of Social-Democracy. The modicum of truth which underlies that teaching will be forgotten, and the anarchists will gain the upper hand. Just as a regimental company goes to pieces if the captain takes no interest in it, so it is with industry. In the next strike the men will be better organized and more exacerbated; then there will be risings, which we shall be obliged to shoot down.

“ But it would be terrible if I had to stain the first years of my reign with the blood of my subjects. Everyone who means well by me will do his utmost to avert such a catastrophe. I intend to be *le roi des gueux!* My subjects shall know that their King is concerned for their welfare. . . . We must oppose International Social-Democracy with an international compact. Switzerland did not succeed in that. But if the German Emperor convokes a similar conference it will be quite a different affair. . . . My desires are based upon the information and deliberations of authoritative persons: Privy Councillor Hinzpeter, Count Douglas, von Heyden. . . . And so I have spent two nights in framing these proposals. I desire to have drafts, based upon these, of an edict worded in a spirit of warm goodwill, so that I may promulgate it on the day after to-morrow, which will be my birthday.”

Is not this a modern monarch? A friend of the people, who inquires not of class or possessions? An enemy of the bureaucrats, with his ear open to every petitioner? The age of force and firearms has gone by. Reason and persuasion are to draw the classes together. In the van of civilization, President of a European Congress, marches



## “ AUTHORITATIVE PERSONS ”

the German Emperor in the twentieth century. What are the earliest effects? Has he carried away the Ministers? “ With increasing bewilderment,” says Lúcius, “ we sat and listened: who could have filled him up with these ideas? ”

Bismarck knows who it is. The “ authoritative persons,” whom the Emperor has extolled as his constitutional advisers, are (he comments) Hinzpeter, “ overbearing and clumsy, with careful avoidance of any responsibility ”. Douglas, “ a rich and fortunate speculator, who . . . by cultivating friendly intercourse with the Imperial children . . . had sought to obtain an influential position with the sovereign,” and had written an enthusiastic article about him which he let him see before it was printed, thus gaining the title of Count. Then Heyden, at one time an official of the mines, now a painter, who “ based his knowledge of the subject on his intercourse with an old miner from the Wedding region, whom he used as a model for beggars and prophets, and from whose conversation he then drew the materials for suggesting legislation in the highest quarters.”

From these reflections he is recalled to his duty by the Emperor’s inquiry as to his opinion. Slowly he rears his giant bulk, as slowly does he speak, with self-restraint, and puts the counter-question. In whose despite is the working-man forbidden to work on Sundays and at night—against whom or what is he verily being protected? Is it not against his own desire—his desire for work? His wage will decrease, his discontent proportionately increase. German industry will be depreciated by the deficit to the extent of four and a half per cent., hence will no longer be able to compete with the foreigner. “ Indulgence will infinitely enhance the rapacity of the masses. Generally speaking, it is impossible to satisfy the working-man. Even the Tsar of Russia, with all his power, could not achieve it. God alone is capable of discharging that task to the working-man’s satisfaction! But first of all we should consider the forthcoming elections: the owners would be irritated, the Socialists encouraged. . . . We

“ WE SHOULD SET FOOT ON A SLIPPERY PATH ”

should perplex the electors, when we ought properly to make them aware of the presence of an enemy in their midst. We should set foot upon a slippery path. I foresee peril to the monarchy.”

Painful silence. Has the voice been heard? Is this only the contest between age and youth, self-preservation and development? Has not the Emperor uttered the slogans of the new epoch, the Chancellor those of the old? Does he know nothing better against the threatening peril than to invoke the Tsar and God? Or is it only that the young ruler likes to intoxicate himself with fine phrases about national well-being, while demanding inspired edicts from his Ministers? Just now he controls himself; very courteously he says: “Of course I am very far from measuring my insignificant experience against Your Serene Highness’s abundant knowledge.” He can even quite see that the edicts had better be discussed by the Ministry of State, not put through in a hurry. But what he does require is mitigation of the anti-Socialistic measures shortly to be renewed in the Reichstag, and above all that the horrible right of the Government to proclaim a lock-out shall be abjured. “Loyal men, devoted to the King and Government, have begged me to make my influence felt in this direction.”

“Loyal men?” thinks Bismarck. “And what am I? The neutrality of the throne will be endangered by such influences as these! If he undermines me like this at the elections, my Kartell will be done for.” And now he becomes ferocious: “I should consider it a grave error to show even the appearance of yielding to the Reichstag. Let us first stand firm; then deliberate on what the Reichstag offers. To give in here and now is to take the first fatal step; is to let the Reichstag lead us by the nose. . . . I cannot demonstrate that such yielding will be fatal to Your Majesty, but from long experience I believe it will. . . . If the bill did not pass, we might have to dissolve, there would be a vacuum, and the tide would rise higher and higher: then there might well be collisions.”

## DILEMMA

“Blood and iron!” thinks the Emperor. “Is not this old man speaking as he has spoken for thirty years? Has he learnt nothing new?” And now he, too, grows excited: “It is precisely such catastrophes that I wish to prevent, instead of having to stain the first years of my reign with the blood of my subjects” The second time—this picture seems to flatter his imagination. But the old man braces himself:

“If there should be uproar and blood-shedding, Your Majesty, it will not be your fault, but that of the revolutionaries. We shall scarcely get through without blood, if we draw back. The later resistance sets in, the more forcible it will necessarily have to be.”

The Emperor: “But anyhow, we must meet the Reichstag half-way!”

Bismarck: “That means capitulation. With my special knowledge, it is my duty to advise against this. Since I entered the Government, the royal authority has steadily increased. But such a retreat would be the first false step, and that in the direction of a temporarily convenient, but perilous parliamentary authority. . . . If Your Majesty attaches no weight to my counsels, I do not think that I can remain in my place.”

So haughtily as this Bismarck had never spoken to his old sovereign. In claiming the enhancement of the royal authority as his achievement, he emphasizes his own authority and refuses to weaken the one by means of the other. Then he tenders his resignation. “Never!” the old Emperor had written on one of these requests, whereby Bismarck had always got his way in the end. Will the grandson answer him with the same word.

The grandson is silent, bites his lips, controls himself anew, only saying half aloud to Bötticher, with whom he has evidently talked it all over beforehand: “That puts me in a dilemma!” Pause “I beg these gentlemen for their opinion.”

Before the whole Cabinet, then, the old man has tendered his resignation; before the whole Cabinet the young

man has left him unanswered and turned to the other Ministers. He could not have acted more adroitly, nor Bismarck more incautiously.

Silently the eight men sit around the oval green table. None sympathizes with the veteran whom all hate, all sympathize with the Emperor, whose good intentions, whose ardent impulses, are to expire under the hiss of that cold shower-bath. Yet not one, sitting here, directly interrogated, dares to speak out in the young ruler's defence. It is he who stands for power in the State, he alone gives and takes the portfolio of office; even the Chancellor he can dismiss, and has not returned a "No!" to the threat but now enunciated. But Bismarck's personality, and the fear of his wrath, are so potent that everyone takes his part—even Bötticher ventures only on a feeble effort at mediation.

The Emperor is furious; in open session he has been put down! Nevertheless he again controls himself, and when going, shakes the Prince by the hand.

Bismarck, as he drives home, is still more agitated. Now at last he realizes his mistake. For more than three months he has left the young ruler to his new friends, who are all the Chancellor's enemies. To Bötticher's cautious feeler in the autumn he had retorted by the haughty answer: "With my post, and in my position, I have no fear of ever having to go against my will." And now, is he to fear this after all? Did not the Emperor keep silence, when he laid down his conditions? To-day, indeed, he gave in, because the Ministers ratted in presence of their master—but to-morrow? Bötticher, who has been proxy for Bismarck in Berlin, has been profiting by these months: he has always wanted to succeed him. "The temptation," wrote Bismarck afterwards in one of his verbose sentences, "to which Bötticher was exposed, of turning to his own advantage the charm of novelty which the monarchical office possessed for the Emperor, together with my confiding indolence in affairs, was, as I now hear, much enhanced by feminine ambitions. His duty as a functionary

“ WELL, YOU MIGHT GIVE ME SOME PRAISE! ”

was not to work for the subjection of an experienced Chancellor to the will of a youthful Emperor, but to support the Chancellor in his responsible position towards the sovereign.”

The old man muses further, as he drives homeward. Only now is he to learn—how bitterly!—of the gossip rife in these three months: how Bötticher has told the Emperor that Bismarck can only keep going by the aid of morphia. Only now is he to measure the significance of all the rubs that have occurred. When Eulenburg in the summer hinted to his friend Herbert that the Emperor thought German policy too Russophile, Herbert said roughly: “ My father has weighed the matter as a whole; amateurs and soldiers don’t understand that sort of thing. If it doesn’t suit him, we can both go.” Whereupon Eulenburg changed the subject, wanted to pretend he had meant nothing, but retailed it all, word for word, to his Imperial friend. Soon this latter was abusive to Herbert about the Russian loan, saying that Bismarck ought to keep the bankers in order, that Bleichröder in particular was a dangerous man. “ I have nothing to do with him,” said Herbert angrily.

“ What does that matter? ” cried the Emperor. “ He’s for ever in and out of your father’s house! ”

Their last meeting had turned out very badly indeed. The Tsar had just left after his visit; on the way back from the railway-station the Emperor told the Chancellor: “ At Hubertusstock I stuck myself on the box of the barouche, and left my guest all the fun of the shoot.” In full complacency over his adroit amiability, he awaited the applause to which he was accustomed. But Bismarck, calculating the effect upon a formal, misanthropic Tsar of these allurements of a German Emperor on the box of a barouche, preserved a studied silence.

The Emperor: “ Well, you might give me some praise! ”

What else could the old man do? Whereupon the Emperor: “ I have told the Tsar that I intend to pay him a long visit at Spala.”



Bismarck: "There might be certain drawbacks to that. The Tsar likes quiet and domestic life; Spala is only a little shooting-box," heaping up superficial objections, because he could not mention the deeper ones: "I was considering that the two exalted gentlemen would be constrained to a very close intercourse with one another . . . and thought it undesirable to bring unnecessarily into such confined and prolonged contact the distrustful defensiveness of the Tsar, and the aggressive blandishments of our own monarch."

The Emperor never dreamt of all this. It was his good pleasure to instal himself with the Tsar, whom he could not bear; and again he felt checked in his best impulses, again it was this old man who wanted to spoil everything—and in a sudden rush of defiant feeling he set down the Chancellor at his own house and drove on, instead of going in with him to the conference which they had arranged to hold.

Since that unpropitious parting in October the two had not set eyes on one another until the Crown-Council of to-day.

## 5

After the Crown-Council both champions felt defeated. The Emperor, wounded in his vanity, shook his fist in the War-Minister's face: "Why did you leave me in the lurch? You everyone of you looked just as if you'd been flogged! What had he said to you beforehand?" Bismarck lay ailing on his sofa, complained of the Ministers' alienation from him, talked of these things to everyone who would listen, the manly advice of his second son, to resign without delay, he angrily rejected; then again reviled Bötticher. During these weeks his moods and tempers were no different from those of his opponent, the monarch.

Two days after the Crown-Council, he suddenly made a most loyal declaration in the Cabinet: "The moods of a monarch are like good and bad weather; one takes an

## AN AWFUL MOMENT

umbrella and gets wet all the same. I venerate in the Emperor the son of his forefathers, and my sovereign. . . . We could not possibly suffer a camarilla of irresponsible advisers. . . . So I think we will co-operate."

In the meantime the Ministers had secretly deserted him; and when in the following week, on the 31st, he opened a new session, all of them had made their arrangements. This day saw the beginning of the end of Bismarck. When he proposed a revision of the decrees he met with opposition. Nobody had ventured on this at the Crown-Council, although the Emperor's eyes had sought the oval table round for aid; now, the monarch absent, Bötticher and the War Minister who had been threatened by the Emperor declared: "We must not displease the Emperor. . . . We must produce something that will satisfy His Majesty." This vote, as they knew, would become known to the Emperor, and would assure their careers.

Open opposition? And that upon no practical grounds? The old man flamed forth: "For a Minister to conceal from his sovereign that in his opinion he is entering upon a path which will be perilous to the State, is half-way to high treason! If we are always to do only the Emperor's bidding, eight subalterns would be as much good in our places as the Ministry of State here present!" Silence. A division. Almost universal abstention. An awful moment! Would he not now, in his fury, fling his shattered power at the Imperial feet?

A stir—enter an aide-de-camp. For the second time the monarch, unannounced beforehand, with clinking spurs appeared before the Session, which was quickly closed. Later, Bismarck to the Emperor: "It was only in obedience to your behest that I drafted these edicts, feeling, as a still active functionary, constrained to do so. I decidedly advise against this step, and would request that the papers be here and now consigned to the flames." Never before had he spoken thus—even as an inexperienced novice he had never ventured so far.

"No, no!" cried the Emperor, and signed "with a

certain haste. The Chancellor refused his counter-signature.

The first draft announced a Social Conference of the Powers; the second promised Labour a statute, soundly and unrevolutionally conceived, whereby the workers “ should, through their representatives, have a voice in the regulation of such matters as affected them, thus directly watching over their own interests in negotiations with the employers and the instruments of Government . . . in order to facilitate a free and pacific expression of their views.”

By this proclamation the Emperor, signing alone, could claim the distinction of having been the first monarch to enunciate to all the world, thirty years before its establishment, the idea of the Industrial Council. Here, beyond question, he saw rightly; Bismarck, beyond question, wrongly.

Proudly that evening did he show the edicts to his guests, but laid bare his personal motives in the naïve words: “ The men shall know that I think for them!” Next day, the democratic papers applauded the Emperor for at last lending an ear to new advisers. Nevertheless, the first effect was confusion. In several towns the men, appealing to the imperial words, demanded an immediate increase of wages; in the Rhineland the Miners’ Union claimed instant expropriation of the mines in the workers’ favour.

Despite all this, the Emperor was cock-a-hoop: “ The old man is crawling to the Cross! I’ll leave him a few weeks to recover his breath—then I govern!” Bismarck, who did not hear these words to the group of intimates, divined the mood they expressed; and said at a laying of papers towards the end of February: “ I fear I am in Your Majesty’s way.” The Emperor was silent—that meant he agreed.

Whereupon Bismarck, *a l’aimable*, suggested the possibility of resigning all his Prussian offices, reverting to his old part of Foreign Minister. The Emperor nodded;

then he asked, nowise embarrassed: "But—you would see the Army Bills through the Reichstag for me, anyhow?"

With wounded feelings the Chancellor left the Palace. When, next day, he hinted at his semi-retirement to his colleagues, he beheld them "silent, with varying expressions of countenance." Bötticher only who had the succession to the Prussian offices in his pocket, put the statesmanlike question: "Suppose I were Premier, should I take precedence at Court before or after Major-General von Pape?"

Afterwards the old man said wearily to his son: "The Emperor wants to get rid of me . . . and my colleagues all say 'Ouf!' at the prospect, relieved and well-satisfied."

While the Emperor exulted, the Chancellor grew more and more dejected. The unheard-of was happening: Bismarck paid a visit to several of the officials at the Ministries, sat with the electrified gentlemen, and reviled the Emperor. It was as if he were wandering about in his fortress. Then he visited Moltke and Waldersee, and finally announced himself to the Empress Frederick, when he poured out his heart to his enemy against their common adversary.

Not until election day did he retrieve his old intrepidity. Now it was for the Emperor to tremble. By way of a demonstration, he had the troops on the alert that morning and held a parade in Tempelhof; here only, among his Guards, did he feel safe from the ominous stream of the hurrying masses, objects of his distrust. Result next morning: one and a half million red voting papers—the Socialists trebled.

While the Emperor in his turn grew more and more dejected, the old man was arming himself. The Emperor had lost his first election; this thought rejuvenated the champion hater, while the new situation spurred him to a fresh encounter. Now he could not resign, he told the Emperor; "after this election, the consequence of your edicts, we shall have to strengthen the laws against Social-

ism, bring forward the Big Army Bill—if necessary, alter the suffrage, and disfranchise the Socialists on the ground that they are enemies of the State.”

The Emperor, in the ultimate throes of his conscience: “But I cannot reply to the desires of my subjects with matchlocks! I won't be called the Grape-shot King, like my grandfather!”

Bismarck, excitedly: “Better sooner than later. Social Democracy cannot be reformed out of existence—so some day it will have to be shot out of existence.”

The Emperor, in complete disorder: “I will *not* wade in blood!”

Bismarck, adamant: “Your Majesty will have to go in all the deeper, if you draw back now. At all events, I could not any longer shoulder the responsibility.”

Uttering this third threat, the old man felt conscious of his strength, because he could read the Emperor's heart. He saw before him no philanthropist; only a conscience already appeased by its first futile gesture. Had not the Chancellor mentioned the Army Bill? thought the Emperor, and felt his Guards encircling him again. Eighty thousand men! And he caught Bismarck's hand at parting, reiterating Bismarck's favourite motto: “No surrender!” Now, because he needed the strong hand, the Emperor clung hard to Bismarck. Assuredly he would never love him—on the contrary: because he now believed him necessary, he began to hate him.

“He is almost impossible!” he complained to his friends. “He can't bear me even to express a wish or an intention. I reminded him of all I had sacrificed for him my home-life. . . . I had to go through the most abominable scenes, because I trusted him, and my parents couldn't get on with him!” (E. 229). The Emperor thoroughly believed all this, though for years he had taken Bismarck's side only because his parents opposed him, he did believe in his “sacrifice” for the stranger.

At the same time he was irritated by the Chancellor's vacillation; moods and tempers were not permitted to *him*.



## SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

“ First he wants to go and then . . . takes back his offer; I won't put up with that game. I mean to set a definite term. . . . His monstrous arrogance has been the ruin of him; gradually he has got them all under his thumb, and it has spoilt him. But he'll find out his mistake with me! ” (W. 2, 105).

And Bismarck was no less ready to contend with him—first against the Socialists, then in single combat one against the other. While everyone in office, at Court, on the Staff, was intent on bringing him down at last, Bismarck himself, feeling his indispensability, took up the covert challenge; and that he might the better lay low the Ministers caused every copy of documents to bear an old Cabinet Regulation, whereby in the year 1852 Frederick William IV had forbidden to the Ministers any official intercourse with the monarch unless the Premier was present. It was thus that the two men fought for power.

But Bismarck was fighting, too, for his own life-work. “ On sleepless nights,” he said afterwards, “ I used to debate with myself whether I could endure it any longer, under him. My love for my country said: ‘ You must not go. You are the only man who can keep that wilful nature in equilibrium.’ But I knew too the monarch's mental condition, which seemed to me potentially capable of bringing about the most deplorable developments. The spectacle which had been presented in Bavaria by Ludwig II passed off smoothly enough, but in a military State like Prussia a similar entertainment would have fatal effects.”

Bismarck's diagnosis was at fault; the Emperor was never at any time mentally diseased, as Ludwig of Bavaria had been. He merely suffered, at certain periods, from intermittent nervous irritation, invariably followed by the characteristic depression—alarming enough at times, it is true. Thus he now gave vent to his rage against the Chancellor in a speech on the 5th March: “ Those who desire to be helpful to me are cordially welcomed. But

anyone who opposes me in the execution of my task, him I will shatter!"

And when a few days later he vainly sought to mediate between Bismarck and Bötticher, he chose the same evening for giving to the latter functionary the Black Eagle, a decoration which he had in no way earned, and for which Bismarck had been obliged to wait until after his first victorious peace. The rupture was in being; the crash was only a question of time. "I behave," said the Emperor on the 9th to Waldersee, "as if I didn't notice his grumpiness; I'm even dining with him shortly, so that people may think we're getting on all right." Instead of slaying him with one thrust of the lance, he sought to enfeeble the lion by petty pinpricks. And later, he did the like with lesser adversaries. He was no fighter.

## 6

But Bismarck was.

He was incapable of flight under fire. That he might master his master once more, he assembled all his forces, and ensured to himself a renewed majority in the elections should his Kartell be finally defeated, since in the Palace he no longer commanded any support. To conquer the Reichstag and the Sovereign, to draw the one to himself by means of the other: this was a spur to his fighting instinct. After an estrangement of a decade and longer, the old enemy Windhorst actually now re-entered Bismarck's house. The Catholic enumerated his conditions for procuring Bismarck a majority in the Centre Party.

The Emperor could not bear Windhorst: hence the outcry over this interview suited him well. He ignored the Chancellor's proposed visit for the next day, announced himself (by a messenger who never arrived) at Bismarck's official quarters; appeared after his morning ride, towards nine o'clock, in Herberf's room, and sent for his father. Bismarck, who even at the best of times was a bad sleeper and lay late, could not but regard a visit at this hour in the light of a surprise-attack, and met him with ostentatious

“ NOT EVEN THEN, YOUR MAJESTY! ”

astonishment and his gruffest manner. As the Emperor, in his agitation, remained standing nearly all the time, Bismarck had to stand too; and so, for this half-hour, they looked one another straight in the face.

Bismarck: “ I have to report to Your Majesty that Windhorst has thrown off his reserve, and has been to my house.”

The Emperor: “ And you naturally showed him the door! ” (At these ominous words Herbert left the room.)

Bismarck: “ I naturally received him as I . . . am bound to do with every representative holding his social position.”

The Emperor: “ You ought to have consulted me beforehand! ”

Bismarck: “ In my own house I must be permitted to receive any one I choose, especially official visitors.”

The Emperor: “ You got Bleichröder to send Windhorst. Of course—Jews and Jesuits always stick together.”

Bismarck: “ I am much honoured by Your Majesty’s precise information regarding incidents of my private life. It is quite correct, except that the choice of intermediary was Windhorst’s, not mine—but that does not signify. In the new situation prevailing in the Reichstag, I was obliged to make myself acquainted with the plan of campaign adopted by the leader of the strongest party, and therefore was glad that he consented to parley with me. I know now that his conditions are unacceptable. If you make this a reproach to me, Your Majesty might as well forbid your Chief of Staff in war time to make recognisances of the enemy. I can by no means submit to such control in matters of detail, and my personal intercourse at my own house.”

The Emperor: “ Not even if your Sovereign commands you? ”

Bismarck: “ Not even then, Your Majesty! ”

Up to this the conflict—of a few minutes’ duration—had swelled to its climax with deep-drawn breaths; the old man’s resentment, the young man’s agitation, coming finally to a head when the master and sovereign com-

manded, the functionary and subject declined to obey. This was the point at which the officer, not only on board ship, draws his sword upon the rebellious subordinate and is ready to run him through, no matter whether he is right or wrong in his defiance.

As the Emperor was fully convinced that his functionary was wrong, his military feeling now demanded that after Bismarck's last words, he should leave the house either with or without an adieu. Whether from fear or respect, he did not do so; but changed the subject, and to-day as always uncertain in action, took back the imperious word of command. Not because he was unconstitutionally inclined; only because the blue lightning from those bushy-browed eyes had struck him, did he suddenly add after a pause: "It . . . is not a question of a command, but of a desire. It surely cannot be your intention to stir up the people in the way to-day's newspapers point to!"

Bismarck, conscious of victory: "That is precisely my intention. Such confusion shall prevail in the country, such a hullabaloo, that not a human being shall know what the Emperor is at with his policy!" By this obstreperous piece of nonsense the old man lost his advantage, and gave the Emperor a facile retort:

"On the contrary! My policy shall lie open plain and clear before the eyes of my subjects. I desire no conflict with the Reichstag. The Army Bills must be cut down, so that they are safe to pass. I have asked Falkenstein to make sure of the most we can possibly obtain by negotiations." What a blunder, to blurt out to the Leader of the House how a General was negotiating with the Reichstag! Thus affronted, Bismarck was emboldened again to tender his resignation; but this time, he intended that the Emperor should bear the responsibility:

"I have remained in Your Majesty's service only because I promised my old master to do so. If Your Majesty desires it, I shall willingly go."

For the second time the Emperor flinched. Why did he not grasp the nettle on this morning of agitation?

## THE LOCKED PORTFOLIO

Was he still afraid? As his nature precluded him from venturing an open attack, he tried a side issue: "I—never get any verbal reports now from my Ministers. I have been told that you had forbidden it. Your Serene Highness must have resorted, in that case, to dog-eared old regulations, long since forgotten. I must request you to abrogate them without delay."

Bismarck declared that the regulations of the year 1852 were indispensable, took his stand upon old times, and said: "No Premier can remain responsible if the monarch makes decisions on the advice of all and sundry." Again the Emperor had opposed him; but again without firmly demanding obedience, somewhat embarrassed still—still under the spell. For the second time the question who was to be master lay undecided between them. Bismarck was determined to be dismissed rather than, after all that had passed between them, let his adversary be relieved of him on the plea of tender consideration for his "health." But what was he to do, in that event, to indemnify himself for all this injustice? Was he not perhaps seeing him for the last time to-day? How was this young man to be humiliated? Ingratitude and disloyalty must be avenged!

And suddenly he referred to the Tsar, again advised against the proposed visit, and took, as if to confirm his warning, some papers from a locked portfolio. In these, the Ambassador in London had recently reported some expressions let fall by the Tsar about the Emperor, which had reached the Court of England. The old man had lately perused the pages with satisfaction, showing his son the unpleasing remarks, and assuredly telling his wife of them as well, for she had longer than he been filled with distrust of the Emperor. Now he selected one, probably the worst, of these reports, and held it in his hand, turning over the sheets with slow, tantalizing fingers. The Emperor, always anxious about his personal effect, and especially when English opinion was involved, felt that there were things rustling in the Chancellor's hands which he was not acquainted with, and was not to be allowed to



learn. He said impatiently: “ Well, can't you read it out? ”

Bismarck feigned consternation: “ I could not possibly bring myself to do that. To hear such words could not but wound Your Majesty.”

Then the Emperor grabbed at the papers: in silent ecstasy Bismarck saw them wrested from him. The Emperor read. For the first time—perhaps for the last—he read some truths about himself. He read that the Tsar had said of him, among other things: “ *N'est fou. C'est un garçon mal élevé et de mauvaise foi.* ”

Yet again, he did not fly into a rage; he seemed disconcerted. Before his eyes, as he read, he had seen the Tsar and his Court, his English grandmother and her son; his own mother, all his adversaries, knew of these insulting words about him; and there stood the man who had tempted him with the mysterious documents—Bismarck had dared to let his sovereign read such abominations! The Emperor's vanity had never been before, and was never to be again, so severely wounded. He quivered. Silently the adversary observed him.

He turned to go. Could he still give his hand to the old man? Again a half-measure: he took his helmet in his right hand, so that only two fingers were left free; these he offered to Bismarck. Bismarck escorted him to the hall-door steps. Then the Emperor bethought him of his usual tactics—just as under the eyes of the servants he was stepping into his carriage, he leaped from the step again, and before these witnesses shook the Chancellor cordially by the hand.

At the Palace he told Waldersee the story, and Waldersee left nothing unsaid that could fill the measure of his wrath. The Emperor was glad to be egged on; summed up, as if to justify himself, the troubles in the realm, and concluded: “ How's that for a ‘ Great Chancellor ’? What *are* his merits? ” Now Waldersee dared all, and advised instant action; as he was leaving, the Emperor said reflectively, somewhat cast down: “ I think it will

“GOOD SPORT!”

soon be in train.” Then he pulled himself together and cried, as he was fond of doing: “Good sport!” He might have been shouting to his beaters: “Get him! I’ll bring down the octogenarian!”

7

As if for yet another warning, a railway train next night deposited in Berlin Count Schuvalov, arriving from Petersburg. The Ambassador was charged with the renewal of the Russian agreements with Germany. The fate of the realm hung on this understanding. Within the next three days it would be decided.

The Emperor, doubly enraged by the recently perused iniquities of the Tsar, would have done anything to revenge himself on him as well as on the ruthless intermediary. Were there no intriguers at hand to provide him with a pretext? Waldersee, ever resourceful, pulled one out of his pocket at the psychological moment: reports from the German Consul at Kiev, in a state of alarm over movements of Russian troops—a hundred sheets all fastened together, the oldest several months old. Of these reports, Bismarck had shortly before sent some to the Staff, others to the Emperor. Waldersee, who had been on friendly terms with the powerful and dangerous Privy Councillor von Holstein ever since the latter had been working against Bismarck, procured the whole series from him, showed them to the Emperor, exaggerated the affront, saying that this was a deliberate withholding of important information—then added: “There has been repeated offence in this direction; it is one of the reasons why the Chancellor cannot leave his post. He has too often . . .” the pause to be filled in with “deceived.”

The Emperor’s face lit up. He could feel the old man with this document—here was his revenge for the London despatch. He seized a sheet of paper, and without any superscription indited an open letter, to go with the documents to the Foreign Office, be seen in all the bureaux—such papers being there opened in the ordinary course

of business. "These reports leave no doubt whatever that the Russians are in full strategic disposition for war—and I must very much deplore that I have received so few of the papers. You could have long since made me aware of the terrible impending danger! It is high time to warn the Austrians, and take counter-precautions. . . . W."

It is clear that excitement over his imminent emancipation was working up his fears and his aggressiveness to its measure. His hate for Bismarck sought imposing historic justification, his revenge was to be dramatic—war was to be at the door, and the old man was never to have noticed it. The realm in danger? Old consular reports, the particulars of which had long been made known to the Staff by its spies, were to represent a disclosure of impending war! To impart this in an open letter to the Chancellor, so that his officials should read it before he did, grin, and learn to venerate the youthful monarch—what a momentous day for William the Second!

For to-day—he knows it, he alone of all the millions—to-day Bismarck shall fall. Vainly had he yesterday sent General Hahnke to demand withdrawal of the ill-omened old regulations. "That is impossible," Bismarck had said. "If the Emperor wishes to quash the orders, he will have also to terminate the existing Presidency of the State-Ministry. I have no objection to that."

"Surely some middle course can be found?" Hahnke had gently answered. But when that ironic refusal was reported to the Emperor, his patience (so he afterwards averred) gave way altogether: "My old Hohenzollern family pride was in arms. Now it was a question of compelling the old hothead's obedience, or parting once for all. Now it was simply 'Emperor or Chancellor on top?'"

In reality it was the "Russian war threat" which had thus inflamed him. . . . Now he took heart of grace; that very day he sent the General for the second time—it was the 17th March, in the morning. The General entered the Chancellor's room, summoned up all his martial intrepidity and spoke by the book:

“ I WILL WRITE ”

“ His Majesty insists on the withdrawal of the order in question. Following the report given by me of our yesterday’s interview, His Majesty can now only await Your Serene Highness’s immediate resignation. Your Serene Highness will be good enough to be at the Palace at two o’clock, to hand over your office.”

How long a pause was then made by Bismarck has not been recorded. . . . Very quietly he said at last: “ I am not well enough to go to the Palace. I will write.”

When, an hour later, the Emperor drove past the Grand Staff, he said to Waldersee on getting out of the carriage: “ The business is in train. Hahnke has been to the Chancellor; his answer is not the order, but his resignation.” Then he entered the room in which the Staff was to-day to consider the setting of tactical problems. He was quit of his old man of the sea, the King’s uniform was everywhere around him, only leal and obedient men were to be seen. Here he would shine!

And in fact he rose after the Chief of Staff had laid the papers, and imparted his own solution of the principal problem, which differed from the official one. “ Unfortunately,” reports Waldersee, “ his performance made a very poor impression. Every one of the numerous audience felt the erroneousness and crudity of his opinions; ~~so~~ it was very regrettable that the Emperor, over-estimating his knowledge as he did, should have so exposed himself. . . . I answered not a word ” (W. 2, 119).

As no one answered, he could return to the Palace in high good humour. Still nothing from the Chancellor? And on the pretext that he feared Bismarck “ might take steps which would disturb our Foreign policy,” he sent to him that evening for the third time—this time Lucanus, the dry, cool Chief of his Civil Cabinet.

Bismarck had just risen from table. Since the morning, much had happened to him and through him. While the Emperor, as a theorist, was imparting to his Staff his remarkable solutions of military problems, Bismarck, as a practical man, had been trying to get the said problems

out of the way. He had received Count Schuvalov, who had declared himself fully empowered to renew the Russian counter-insurance, and whose discomposure was marked on learning that by next day his old friend would no longer be Chancellor. Then Bismarck had expounded the situation to his Ministers, and he records with sardonic appreciation their chill passivity—not one of them had suggested a general resignation of the Cabinet, though that was the obvious course.

And now the slender Lucanus stood before the giant. Much more hesitant than the General had been in the morning, he blurted it out at last, without preamble: "His Majesty sends me to inquire why the farewell visit requested by him this morning has not yet been paid?"

Bismarck, as quietly as before: "The Emperor, as you know, can dismiss me at any moment; it could not be my intention to remain against his desire. I stand ready to append my counter-signature without delay to a straightforward dismissal. But on the other hand, I do not propose to absolve the Emperor from the responsibility for my retirement—but rather to give full publicity to its true source. After twenty-eight years in office, which have not been without their influence in Prussia and the Empire, I require time to justify myself in the eyes of posterity, as well as at a farewell visit."

Lucanus had the civilian's courage; he dared all, and disputed the Chancellor's right to give publicity to such matters. What reply Bismarck may then have given him the Chancellor does not record and Lucanus had every reason to bury it in oblivion; his coolness, writes Bismarck, gave way to a sense of mortification in the course of this interview.

While Bismarck, that evening, was drafting his document, Eulenburg, for years an intimate of Bismarck's household, was sitting with the Emperor: "They were hours of acute suspense." Dinner with a Duke. Then the Emperor: "Well, that's enough. Now we'll have some music—you shall sing. . . . We'll clear our heads,



“ ACCEPTED ”

and think of other things.” Whereupon Eulenburg sang some of his ballads, chosen by the Emperor, the pages turned by him. “ He was wholly absorbed, thoroughly enjoying himself. His remarkably adaptable temperament did not desert him in these anxious hours. Only for a few minutes was the music interrupted by the burning political question—the Emperor, called out to hear Hahnke’s answer, sat down again at once by the piano, and said softly: “ The resignation is all right.” Upon this, we went on singing ” (E. 238).

What dominated him that day was the mortal fear of the old man’s compelling him to a high-handed dismissal before the nation; no wonder he drowned his perturbation in music. But the veteran made him wait half a day longer before, “ pale and agitated,” he had the paper in his hands at last. Six sheets, attributing to the Emperor alone the entire responsibility for his retirement: not till long afterwards made known to the nation. Instantly the Emperor wrote, as though it might still fall through, the word “ Accepted ” on the document.

Thereupon he forbade publication of this statement, and promulgated his own, which (in two handwritings) spoke of Bismarck’s precious health, of the hope that his wisdom and energy might still be available in the future, and of the conviction “ that further attempts to induce you to rescind your offer of retirement would have no prospect of success.” Thus did he falsify to the world the actual causes, ascribed all the desire, and all the responsibility, for this final step to the mighty man dismissed, and sought by the title of Duke, by appointment to be Major-General, even by the offer of a donation (that is to say, hush-money) to soften the effect of a decision which he had not the courage to take upon himself. Strange figures! as Bismarck’s drawing-room door opened, and to him and his old friend Kardorff there entered, with bland expressions and courteous bows, Hahnke again and Lucanus again—yesterday grave-diggers, to-day bearers of condolences, for each had in his hand a biggish blue envelope. But

Bismarck suppressed both wrath and ribaldry, and received the Imperial script with due reverence.

When, next day, the Emperor announced the Chancellor's retirement to his Generals, and made no concealment of his satisfaction, not one of them was shocked except the old fellow combatant. On the steps, at his departure, Moltke stood still a moment; the nonagenarian lips, usually compressed, were opened now to say: "This is a bad business. The young monarch is going to set us a good many problems."

Meanwhile the Emperor held forth to the people, and that in the manner of a patriotic ballad, ever welcome to their ears. Despatch to a Grand Duke: "I feel as sad at heart as if I had lost my grandfather over again. But we must submit to God's will, even though it destroy us. The duty of officer of the watch upon the ship of State has now fallen to me. Our course is the old course. Full steam ahead!" The German soul was very cleverly appealed to here. It learnt that all this was Destiny; and with its weakness for tragedy, and at the same time for the strong man in command, it obediently perceived the youthful ruler at the wheel, and there by God's decree; nor was anyone startled to find the Emperor declaring himself openly to be his own Chancellor.

And indeed the general effect was much slighter than the Emperor had had reason to fear. The Prussian House of Representatives received the announcement of its Premier's retirement, after twenty-eight years of office, in unbroken silence. The Liberal sheets welcomed the removal of an "insurmountable obstacle. . . . The nation will soon reckon the 18th of March 1890 among the days to be thankfully remembered." Among the high officials reigned a sense of emancipation; of one, Hohenlohe records that he was cock-a-hoop (*froh wie ein Schneekönig*), to be able to speak out at last. This agreeable sensation is predominant here."

Even in diplomatic circles, it was only abroad, not in Berlin, that they grasped what had happened to Europe.

“ WHY? ”

“ Yesterday ” (the 18th) “ there were amateur theatricals at the Saxon Envoy’s ” (so the Austrian Ambassador wrote home); “ and I could not get over my amazement at noticing that one scarcely found a single group discussing the great event of the day. People were much more interested in each other’s impressions of the evening’s entertainment.” This Austrian could not foresee that on that evening amateur theatricals were, in sober fact, inaugurated at Berlin; but he had a sufficiently ironical sense of the historic to send to Vienna, some days later, a visiting-card which Bismarck had left at his farewell visit, with the words “ Imperial Chancellor ” crossed out in pencil.

The Emperor exulted; his people had understood him. To ensure their peace of mind still further, he tried to get Herbert to remain in office.

He appealed to their old friendship, which had long decayed; he even sent again to Herbert’s father, asking him to persuade his son. But the intermediary received for answer only Piccolomini’s saying: “ My son is of age.” Woe to Herbert, if he *had* remained! Bismarck had constantly striven to assure the office to his son; but now, with battle joined, honour prevailed over security. However, he permitted his son to remain a week longer so as to save the Russian treaty, against which Bismarck’s enemies had instantly conspired. When Herbert reported to the Emperor that Schvalov declined to renew the agreement with Bismarck’s successor, the Emperor wrote in the margin: “ Why? ” That one word revealed his total failure to realize Bismarck’s authority in Europe, if likewise all the naïveté with which a youthful monarch believed that he could accomplish everything by means of good intentions. “ Why? ” That is the word with which, after thirty years had gone by, he still was to express, in full assurance of his own goodwill, his wonder at a ruthless world.

But, astonished and uneasy, he did not fail to realize the importance of the treaty; he too for that reason wanted

to retain Herbert, in order to guard against any impression of a change in foreign policy. And now he fell into a sudden state of nervous apprehension; he caused the Russian Count to be awakened in the middle of the night, with a request to come to him at eight o'clock next morning. Schuvalov was startled; he thought the Tsar must have been murdered. In the morning the Emperor assured him: "Nothing is changed by the Prince's retirement; I am entirely in favour of the treaty. Please settle it with Herbert, and assure the Tsar of my constant friendship." When the Tsar received these words by wire some hours later, he called a council of the Ministry; inquiries flew to and fro, there was another debate at Petersburg—the treaty seemed a settled thing.

But in the meantime the Epigoni rushed upon the master's abandoned masterpiece, eager to destroy it as quickly as might be.

Caprivi, the new Chancellor, a General unversed in politics, was appealed to by the darkly foreboding old man—their interview took place in Bismarck's garden. "Bismarck," so Caprivi relates, "asked me if I did not propose to renew the secret treaty of 1887. My answer was: 'A man like you can keep five balls in the air at once, but other people do well to restrict themselves to one or two.'" No further confidences took place; for Caprivi, invited to lunch daily with Bismarck until the latter removed from Berlin, went only once; "for I had been witness to censures of the Emperor, and that from feminine lips, which it was entirely unfitting that I should listen to a second time" (*v. Eckardt, Caprivi's Kampf*, 59).

And why always Bismarck? Meanwhile Caprivi had got advice from other authorities; above all from Privy Councillor von Holstein, best judge of all foreign matters, whose opinion was against the renewal. "It offers nothing tangible; but if it comes out, we shall be accounted double-faced fellows." The Tsar was not, by the Treaty, cut off from France; while on the other hand, if the secret were betrayed in London or Vienna, it might break up the

Triple Alliance and throw Germany into the arms of Russia once for all. Neither to Holstein nor to the younger Kiderlen-Wächter, whose conclusions were the same—neither to their recipient Caprivi, nor to *his* recipient the Emperor, instructed by the new Chancellor in these adverse arguments, did it occur that Bismarck had kept the treaty a secret from Vienna, not from a bad conscience (which was not in his line) but by the Tsar's desire; nor did it strike any of them, either, that covenants are based on interests, and will not be broken because one of the parties seeks pacific insurances in other quarters as well.

It was something else which influenced the Baron von Holstein to his decisive vote. "Thus," he wrote to a confidant, "we are dependent on Russia's discretion, and Russia might formulate conditions for our further intercourse. The first would be: 'I will do business with my old friend B. and with no one else.' Do you grasp the situation now? Hence this hectic zeal!"

Hence Holstein's and his creatures' zeal! Now, when the crisis sharply separated friend and foe before Bismarck's eyes, all those who had forsaken him could not but tremble at the thought of his return. The dwarfs, with hasty hands, were already stopping up the cave of their habitation lest the bear should again break in upon them. In these days, when the Foreign Office watched the question: "With or without Russia" trembling in the balance, and every man was straining at the collar, even a Registrar could have his importance. When Herbert, still Secretary of State, wanted to remove the whole of the negotiations to St. Petersburg so as to sequester them from the rancours of Berlin, he ordered the papers for the German Ambassador to be taken out of the secret archives.

"Those papers?" said the old Registrar. "They were taken away by the Baron von Holstein."

Too late. Holstein, going behind his chief, had taken the papers himself, and handed them over to the new Chancellor. And Herbert fell upon the old official with



all his brutality: "How dared you produce secret papers without the permission of the Secretary of State?" Whereupon there ensued "a most violent scene, in which Holstein became involved." To this eldest of his confidants, whose secret defection Herbert had long divined, he cried angrily before witnesses: "You seem to think me dead and done for rather prematurely!" (Eckardt, *Caprivi*, 51)

Next day Herbert too resigned: the conflict was abandoned.

The Emperor alone decided the problem at last, according to his own discretion—and with it, for the first time, a vital question for Germany. The new Chancellor, unversed in politics, would never in his first weeks of office have made a Cabinet question out of a decision in which he himself must have taken practical advice. Why then did the Emperor change his mind?

The Russians were even ready to renew the agreement, hitherto valid for three years, for a period of six; thus preparing the ground, as they made clear, for a permanent alliance. This signified no less than an insurance against the war on two fronts. The Emperor had grasped that, and therefore desired the renewal, despite his private grudge against the Tsar. But now, with the malefic obstruction at last removed from the prospect, the path lay open, new faces encircled the ruler, every one had something to say against Bismarck—now, for the first time counselled by a man who was his own discovery and therefore bound to be of value; stuffed-up with plausible arguments about loyalty to allies, and at the same time assailed at his weakest point, his timidity . . . now he was his own man, and now he followed Caprivi's advice the more willingly, because Caprivi offered such a contrast to the failing attributed to Bismarck.

"Tranquilly, unambiguously, and openly let us proceed, without any diplomatic gambles." This phrase of Caprivi's the Emperor drank in eagerly; yes, they would be plain and German, not like the old fox—that consorted well

with the God-fearing attitude he loved to display, and it was uttered by a simple soldier, who knew nothing of the arts of the pen. The good Caprivi, indeed, had frankly declared his incapacity when he abandoned the idea of diplomatic ball-play; he was but dimly aware that Holstein, the deciding voice, was not concerned for the Empire, but only for himself, when he advised against a policy which might bring Bismarck back. And if the Emperor *had* been informed of this by Caprivi, the same motive might well have operated with the monarch also as an admonition against renewal.

As if to make clear to all the world what course the Emperor had but now been counselled to avoid, he appeared, at a visit of his Uncle Edward's on the 21st, for the first time in his life as an Englishman at the festive board. Appointed Admiral of the British Fleet, he, in his brand-new uniform, raised his glass and drank to the old comradeship-in-arms at Waterloo, hoping that "the English Fleet would co-operate with the German Army in keeping the peace." And once again Moltke's close lips opened for the startled words: "It is to be hoped this speech won't be reported in the Press" (Ho. 463).

Now it was vain for Schuvalov to reveal his consternation, to offer renewed conversations, even to remind the Chancellor of his recently pledged word. Vain for the German Ambassador to warn them that "Russia may seek elsewhere the support she has failed to find with us." Precisely because the Parisian movement towards Russia had been discouraged in Berlin, it must now be the more carefully guarded against. . . . No use! The Emperor had made up his mind.

Three months thereafter, in the June of 1890, the Tsar, isolated by the German withdrawal from the treaty, took the first step towards an alliance with the French Republic, which had hitherto been repugnant to his absolutist ideas; and the Russian Prime Minister soon afterwards said to the German Ambassador: "With our treaty fell the last barrier between Russia and France."

In this fashion, from ignorance of Europe, from the confessed incapacity of his chief official of state, above all from an intrigue against Bismarck—wholly, then, as a result of the premature dismissal of the master-statesman, was demolished the treaty with which his state-craft had bound up the security of the Empire. With prophetic insight Bismarck wrote somewhat later, twenty years before the World-War, of the simultaneous events: "I could not but regard this as a caprice of destiny, and history may have to call it a fatality."

He who decided all was the Emperor. When in those days he received the Chancellor's farewell visit and asked after his health, on which account he was supposed to have let him go, Bismarck said quietly: "That is good, Your Majesty." Whereupon the Empress gave him a bunch of roses. He with his own hand laid three roses on the old Emperor William's grave. When he was leaving Berlin, the crowd broke through the barriers, on to the station-platform. There stood the Ministers and their new Premier. The crowd had expected to see the Emperor. Neither he nor his brother, nor any of the Federal Princes, put in an appearance. The only Royalty present was Prince Max von Baden.

In the waiting-room, among flowers, there had been placed by hands unspecified a globe, wreathed round with crape.