

CHAPTER VII

GATHERING CLOUDS

I

1908-1914

WILLIAM the Second's heyday was over. He had reigned for twenty years, and was now fifty. His hair was beginning to turn grey; and though his subjects had not yet perceived that change, there was a corresponding greyness in the atmosphere around him. The coruscations which had made him interesting were dying down, yet there was no sign of a calmer, clearer evening-glow. His friends had been banished, and with them went his wisest counsellors—the brilliant Chancellor and the tender intimate, who had been with him in his early conflicts and his later splendours. The Court, with its cold glitter, seemed deserted—more than one of the Federal Princes now kept away from Berlin. Shooting-parties and entries, even journeys, had become monotonous—the same thing over and over again. It was a perpetual fourth act, as it were, for the man who had hitherto been so easily pleased and excited; and while loneliness grew, while a sense of the disillusionments of friendship weighed upon his spirits, he did not indeed cease to be an optimist, but the gestures by which he sought to convince himself and the world how richly God had blessed him did become less frequent.

He had lost the two great encounters in his reign of twenty years. When he looked downward from his heaven-kissing throne, he saw in the far depths the third part of his subjects working and plotting in discontent and hostility. His young ambition, product of fear and impetuosity, had not been fulfilled; for there below, unreconciled, the labouring millions swarmed—an amorphous mass, an insoluble enigma, a subterranean portent luridly revealed in restless flashes. In the

“ HE IS AFRAID ”

twenty-five years of his reign, Social Democracy had gained strength; from three-quarters of a million votes it had increased to four-and-a-quarter million—that is, from nine to thirty-five per cent. of the electors.

Even upon the aristocracy, who had always stood by the monarchy, even upon the Princes of the Empire, he could no longer rely. The former objected to the autocratic methods by which he perverted the doctrine of *primus inter pares*; the latter had repeatedly made an open stand against him and, grouped around the bellicose Crown-Prince, presented a threatening front when the sovereign failed to be sufficiently forcible and Pan-German—for in their view he was poor-spirited. But while the Reds were clamouring for a change from Caesarism to parliamentary government and even the republic, while the Blues wanted an aggressive instead of a pacifist King—while the former demanded a better understanding with their French comrades and ultimately with all Europe, and the latter would be satisfied with nothing less than a Greater Germany, which could not be obtained without a war . . . the *bourgeoisie* stood firmly by their Emperor, under whom they had grown prosperous, and grew more prosperous with every year.

And in truth the Army and the aristocracy had good cause for becoming more and more estranged from their Emperor. As that greatest army in the world's history grew more and more formidable, as the armour of the German paladin grew more and more ponderous, the caution of their Supreme War-Lord correspondingly increased, till everyone was whispering, “He is afraid.” The blustering gestures, the provocative speeches, the whole arsenal of phrases seemed neglected or forgotten; their eternal boy had learnt his lesson, and was circumspect at last.

This was no change of heart, for never did conviction of one single error come to this man. What he beheld around him now, he interpreted as the rancour of an evil world, as the envy of kindred Houses, the rivalry of

caballing dynasties; but that it *was* around him, he no longer denied. Terrified—and assuredly more terrified than even to himself he was fain to admit—he felt that William the Second was encompassed by enmity; and the consciousness could have no other result on him than to strengthen his belief that he had done all a man could, and was but broken on the wheel of the world's callous cruelty. Had he not helped the Tsar in the war with Japan? Had he not shown unfailing courtesy to France? Was it not he who had provided his grandmother and uncle with plans of campaign, when England was in peril? Had he ever flinched from the fatigues of distant journeys, that he might knit up the bonds of political friendship in person at Rome, Damascus, Athens? With furtive thankless glances the false friends had gathered behind his back, had craftily surrounded him, the noblest quarry in all Europe, hoping in the end to bring him crashing to his fall. The father of his people misunderstood by the Socialists, the pacific sovereign misunderstood by his Russian cousin and his English uncle—there he had to stand, the martyr of his own good-will, and watch the circle closing round his realm.

Perhaps he was guiltless before God, though not before men. After all, could he jump over his shadow? Nature, in mutilating him, had driven him to aimless blustering—was that not Destiny? was he to blame? Was it himself who had deranged the nerves which in their febrile restlessness would never let him be? He who was averse from war in every form incessantly gave others reason to prepare for war; and as soon as he eliminated one reason, he gave them another. The instability to which he was victim had flung him from the arms of one national group into another, and then back to the first; and all the time that he was treacherously playing off one enemy against the other, he was but drawing the two together. Since he would always do everything himself, and spoke the decisive word in all great national affairs, he bore and bears the responsibility for Germany's isolation and encirclement

OBJECTIVE GUILT

in the decade immediately before the World-War. Never, but for William's provocations, would Edward VII and his people have joined the enemies of Germany. The security of the German Empire was offered up on the altar of the Emperor's nervous temperament.

In Bismarck's time he had let Russia slip through his fingers, only to try for years to splice the severed bond yet all the while he kept betraying his friend the Tsar to his foe, the English uncle. He had felt that Japan was the enemy of Europe and had dealt with her on that assumption; Islam he began by courting, and then offended by his crusader-poses; France would be placated by courtesies to-day, only to be again exasperated by speeches and jubilees to-morrow. But England—in the vortex of his emotions England was hated, loved, and again hated; and at every moment everything he felt was shown and said. For speech was the bad fairy's gift to this neurotic, with his morbid craving for the deed from which he shrank. Had he been condemned to speechlessness, like his father at the end, the long processes of thought, while the pen hovered above the paper that the eyes of others were to read, would have saved him and his people from the havoc wrought by his irresponsible tongue.

After twenty years of ceaseless carnival the Emperor, almost in an instant, found himself alone. The year 1908 had broken him down. In the summer Nicholas and Edward had concluded another entente; in the autumn his own people had revolted against him. The clash of arms without, the subterranean mutterings within—when he heard these, the Emperor was afraid.

2

In all the European developments between 1908 and 1914 the Emperor was more pacific, was even more far-sighted, than his advisers; genuine alarm was teaching him at last to see things as they were. Such belated insight may truly be described as tragic.

The King of England, now an elderly man, had almost



THE EMPEROR AND EDWARD VII

broken with his nephew. A visit which he had postponed from the autumn of 1907 to the following spring, he then again put off; and went instead to Reval, there to set his hand to what Bismarck had always declared to be possible, and Holstein therefore to be impossible—namely, the co-operation of England and Russia. The Emperor was much more disturbed by this than were his Ministers; and when it was immediately announced from Petersburg that neutrality in the event of war had been promised; he wrote: “That must be established beyond all doubt, and quite irrevocably. That must be unconditionally exacted by our Supreme Command.” Bülow pointed out that this had been a condition of the counter-insurance treaty, but was not now to be obtained. And the spectres rose again; behind the Revel entente, concluded ten years after Bismarck’s death, his spirit hovered ghost-like—the spirit which all those eighteen years ago the Emperor had driven, with the man himself, from the Foreign Office, when he refused to renew the Russian treaty.

That year of 1908 seemed a year of belated punishments. Three months after Reval came the chastisement of a second masterpiece of the Emperor’s policy; and this time it was not his enemy, but his ally, who frightened him.

It was ten years since the Emperor on his second Eastern cruise—dazzled by pictures, cheers, and presents—had turned his attention to the Turk, and envisaged a German Dominion in Asia Minor. The Bagdad Railway, which he soon afterwards embarked upon, calling it “My Railway,” and which was described by his sycophantic Ambassador as “Your Most Exalted Majesty’s own undertaking,” pointed to developments in international politics—the green flag of the Prophet was to be unfurled in the World-War of the future, a Holy War declared, England annihilated by revolts in India and Africa. Hence Germany became involved in the Balkan question, from which Bismarck had always contrived to keep her isolated; and a railway, which but for the Emperor would never have been constructed, drew her into the sphere of

“ NIBELUNGEN-TREUE ”

her two principal European rivals, and that in the most precarious of regions. Marschall was soon maintaining that Bismarck's phrase about the bones of a Pomeranian Grenadier had lost all relevance, that the Emperor's Damascus speech had resounded through the Mussulman world; the Sultan was induced to grant the Austrians a railway through the Sandjak, whereby it was their intention to cut off the Serbians from the sea and from their kindred races. This would drive the Russians, Austria's old rivals in the Balkans, to seek new friends—and suppose that meant England!

Even in those days the Emperor was nervous about these results of his Turkish policy. He was very far from being a devotee of Austria; he clung to her Emperor only as to the last of his allies, and it was not he who either invented or particularly affected the slogan of “ *Nibelungen-Treue* ”—that was Bülow's inspiration. Bülow had either taken over from Holstein, or really shared with him, the creed of unconditional loyalty to Austria; and never in his whole career did he make a greater mistake than when he handed Germany over, without any sort of limitation, to the most ramshackle of Empires. “ For our attitude in all Balkan questions the requirements, interests, and ambitions of Austria are the ruling factor. ” So he wrote, and impressed it on his Ambassadors as their principle of action, in the summer of 1908. When did the most insignificant of States give Germany such a promise—when had Austria herself made any equivalent advances? Was not the natural relation of the powerful German to the feeble Austrian Empire completely reversed by such a thesis? Here, too, the predominance slipped through Germany's fingers; twenty years after Bismarck she was actually the subordinate partner in the Triple Alliance, and was committed to that very Balkan adventure of Austria's which he had dismissed with the sardonic words: “ The Triple Alliance is not an unlimited liability company. ”

No wonder that Vienna, whose diplomats knew their business better, should take advantage of the German sub-

“ THANKS FROM THE HOUSE OF HAPSBURG ”

ordinate! When Aehrenthal, Franz Ferdinand's creature, seized upon the Turkish Revolution as a pretext for the long-desired annexation of Bosnia, and voluntarily opened up the whole Eastern question by this display of force, he did not take much trouble to ensure Germany's adherence, but was solicitous about Russia's. The Berlin Congress, without the consent of whose signatories no such dismemberment was supposed to take place, was apparently forgotten—it was not until everything was ready that Aehrenthal revealed the morrow's secret to the allies. Indeed, Vienna had evidently reckoned with the modern German fashion of interminable holidays, for so many days intervened between the announcement to Secretary-of-State von Schön at Berchtesgaden and Bülow at Norderney, and *their* communication with the Emperor at Rominten, that this last knew nothing of the arbitrary annexation of two provinces by his allies until the very day of the deed, 5th October. His information synchronized with that of horrified Europe—the French President, however, had been earlier communicated with.

The Emperor was beside himself, not only because of the betrayal of faith. “ A raid on Turkey! ” he wrote, with shrewd premonition, on Bülow's despatch. “ Material for cheap suspicions in England about the Central Powers. . . . Austria won't be able to shake off responsibility for the Bulgarian Declaration of Independence ” (which resulted on the same day). “ Vienna will incur the reproach of double-dealing, and not unjustly. They have duped us abominably! . . . This will probably be the signal for the dismemberment of Turkey. . . . Personally, as an ally, I am most profoundly wounded. . . . Pretty gratitude for our help in the Sandjak affair! . . . So I am the last person in Europe to hear anything whatever about it! Such are my thanks from the House of Hapsburg! ”

This explosion is interesting from three standpoints. It shows a just political judgment in the Emperor when taken by surprise, possibly because he was at a distance from his various mentors; it shows his fear of developments,

BLANK CHEQUE FOR AUSTRIA

and his impotence against the offending Hapsburg. He could not take any practical steps as a result of his anger, for hindered as he was by the isolation he had brought upon himself, he could not well disavow the only allies he now possessed. But his anger lasted, and included Bülow. It is true that he wrote on Bülow's renewed exposition that they would eventually be obliged to recognize the annexation; but "what I deplore is having been put into this awkward fix by Aehrenthal's horrible levity." I fear that I shall not be able to protect my friends, now that my ally has wronged them. . . . Henceforth King Edward will inscribe Protection of Treaties on his banner. . . . A great score over us for Edward VII!" This was the underlying sore. Meanwhile his Chancellor wrote out the following neat blank cheque for the Austrians in the event of war: "I shall regard any decision to which you may ultimately come as influenced by our mutual relations;" and in confidential letters he expressly confirmed this attitude, with Holstein's authority behind him.

When simultaneously the *Daily Telegraph* affair exploded, it was easy for Isvolski to make the Tsar, whose own treachery dated from 1899, believe in another breach of faith by the Emperor in this Bosnian affair. Serbia's acquiescence, on a hint from Isvolski, then—in March 1909—prevented war; for on Germany's decisive declaration that she would stand by Austria, Isvolski held his hand. But from that day forward the Tsar himself reckoned on "an unavoidable collision"; in Paris they talked only of an alliance and retribution; and if Austria had gained nothing but distrust and hostility by the annexation, Germany was regarded, and the Emperor above all was regarded, by Europe as the instigator, the receiver of stolen goods, in an affair which had taken him by horrified surprise.

The Turkish Revolution he accepted wonderfully soon after the first shock. He reconciled himself to it by the reflection that the moving spirits were "German-trained officers," and that after all the Sultan had long been ready

to grant a Constitution. At that time Marschall wrote in a despatch: "Every day makes it clearer that those who had most influence with the Sultan . . . are branded as traitors. A heavy indictment against the monarch who chose such advisers! And of these people, who were indebted to the Sultan alone for their positions and emoluments, not one stood by him in the decisive hour" (A. 15, 622). The Emperor's comment on this was: "Court-parasites are always like that! Not only in Turkey—with us Christians too."

Written in the autumn of 1908, ten years before his own calamity.

3

It was a Judas-kiss—a dual one—that the Emperor and his uncle exchanged on the Anhalt station platform. After years of postponement the English royal couple had at last made up their minds to come to Berlin; but acrimony and frigidity had infected even the weather and the horses. Neither the reception nor the entry was a success; the horses jibbed, the escort—nay, the mere subjects—had more than once to shove the carriage on its way to the Arsenal where the two crowned ladies were to alight. An arctic downpour chilled the mood of family reunion; at the English Embassy the King had an alarming heart-attack. Still, they assured one another of their mutual affection. It was only "at the last moment before their departure," as the Emperor wrote to Bülow, that politics were touched upon; and then the Emperor took his stand upon the approved Naval Estimates, which were, he said, unalterable. "They will be adhered to and exactly carried out, without any restrictions." That was all; and it meant a definite refusal of any sort of understanding.

Bülow worked upon the slightly melancholy mood of the Emperor, when after the November scandal he returned from Corfu in a more subdued frame of mind and ventured on yet another attempt at some fleet-building agreement with England, which was the sole means of ensuring

EDWARD'S DECISION

European peace despite all that had happened. "In the summer of 1908," writes Brandenburg, "it would probably still have been possible, by a concession with regard to fleet-building . . . to persuade England to assume a friendly attitude towards Germany on every question." This was near the time of the Reval meeting, when Edward and the Tsar—three years after Björkö—with no sham treaties, no grandsires looking down from Heaven, but merely a responsible Minister, laid the foundations of an understanding. Thus came to pass at length what Bismarck had feared and avoided, but William had provoked throughout twenty years—England joined hands with the hostile group. At Reval, Germany's doom was sealed.

Now, in April 1909, when Bülow met the Emperor in Venice, and the weather-eye of Tirpitz was not on him, he did at last obtain permission to make a deal with London on the question of building, and at the same time to propose a commercial treaty, even an alliance. The summer before, a fleet-arrangement had been regarded as nationally dishonouring; an alliance had been twice refused by Bülow between 1898 and 1901.

And now it was too late. The curse that lay upon Prussian policy—of nearly always, throughout a century, being too late—fulfilled itself once more. What the Emperor had rejected at Friedrichshof, his diplomatists in London were now unable to retrieve for him—Reval, Bosnia, the *Daily Telegraph* had altered the English mood. "Europe is henceforth divided into two camps," said Grey to Metternich; "it is only from time to time that we shall be able to speak frankly." Tirpitz then became more insistent than ever. While Bülow declared him responsible "to His Majesty, the country, and history," because his deceptive programme had shaken London's faith in Germany's trustworthiness—while at the great Conference of June 1909 not only Metternich, but even Moltke, spoke out for an understanding—Tirpitz only asked for more, and declared that he would go on building from then to 1920.

Even Bethmann-Hollweg tried to slow down fleet-

building. As if to emphasize the loss of his own gifts, Bülow had suggested this functionary as his successor, and Ballin went so far as to say: "Bethmann is Bülow's revenge." Bethmann brought to his high office only what Caprivi had brought—a strong sense of duty and discipline he lacked precisely what Caprivi had lacked—knowledge of affairs and foreign countries, of human nature in general, of those he had to deal with in particular; and besides, had none of the plain common-sense which Caprivi had frequently displayed. He had the advantage of Caprivi in a fairly good education, of which he made but little use; and as a civilian he was necessarily less imposing in the Emperor's and the German people's eyes. Bülow could play the Hussar when he confronted the Generals, but Bethmann always had a touch of Don Quixote about him; nor did his democratic ideals exceed the level of the text-books. The depth and clarity of thought ascribed to him by the intellectuals bore no perceptible fruit; and would, anyhow, only have been acceptable to his sovereign if presented in the artistic shape of which he was incapable.

In point of fact, Bethmann was craftier and more ambitious than he allowed to appear. When in September 1909 Bülow, his advocate for the Chancellorship, besought an official denial of the slanders against him, Bethmann advised the Emperor against that mere obligation of chivalry; and then wrote to Bülow that he was sorry to say the Emperor had "quite spontaneously" refused (A. 24, 210). When the Emperor, during the War, reviled Bernstorff because America had come in, Bethmann offered up his Ambassador, whose policy he had prescribed, as a victim to the Emperor's vexation. He flinched before the cardinal test of his existence when, in the middle period of the War, he continued—against his convictions—to officiate as a dummy Chancellor.

The first thing he did on being called to power, was to provide himself with a right-hand man; for before Kiderlen-Wächter became responsible for foreign policy, Bethmann was advised by him on fundamentals, and in special

RETURN OF KIDERLEN

instances received long letters of dogmatic counsel. Later he would, as Kiderlen states, write despatches at his dictation, so that the handwriting might leave no doubt of their being his own intellectual property—so crafty was Bethmann-Hollweg. The Emperor's tardy appointment of Kiderlen, whom he had banished from his sight for years, was one of the signs of a certain listlessness and secret despondency which had been growing on him since the fall of Bülow and of Eulenburg. "Well then, take Kiderlen," he said to Bethmann. "But you don't know what a house you're taking on you, till you've got him." Kiderlen was, in truth, about the only man whom, before the War, the Emperor suffered to be near him against his own desire.

With more good sense than his predecessor, though often led astray by his native brutality, Kiderlen was hampered throughout his term of office by three particular circumstances. He did not possess the sovereign's confidence; the promotion came, both practically and personally speaking, too late, for meanwhile he had been prematurely worn-out by the endless waiting and a most unprofitable manner of life. Those heavy hands of his had been well able to grip and stun; but now, when the decisive battle was lost, had forgotten how to mould and bend. And above all he lacked, as did Bethmann, Bülow's skill in guiding the Emperor, whose vanity he had severely wounded by the malice of some long-ago intercepted letters. That under Holstein's spell he had of yore been Bismarck's enemy did him no good with the Emperor, who now brooded secretly upon all he might have learnt from the veteran; that he had broken with Eulenburg could only injure him, for the Emperor secretly pined after his friend—he said so to an intimate when they were once driving past Liebenberg. Kiderlen's roughness, his incapacity for honeyed phrases, made him uncongenial company for the sovereign.

This was why these two politicians could not make any headway against the swashbucklers on land and water,



2. Jan. 1877.
Von O. Bismarck

Otto von Bismarck

BETHMANN-HOLLWEG

either with the Emperor or the *bourgeoisie*. True, Kiderlen was less pliable than Moltke, but Bethmann was more pliable than Tirpitz—and if the Emperor did not love the latter, he did fear him; moreover, Tirpitz had a resonant east-iron programme to set against the flabby policy of the Wilhelmstrasse, to which the two Epigoni of a sensational period were condemned.

The Emperor was peacefully inclined. "This wretched Morocco-business must be disposed of, quickly and once for all. There is nothing to be done there—the French *will* have it. So let us get out of the affair with decency!" But Kiderlen was keener than that. Now that the French were tackling Fez, he was meditating on another intervention in Morocco, on obtaining "material guarantees" in the shape of the best harbours, on a threatening gesture which should wipe out the lamentable consequences of the first, and squeeze some new Colonial territory out of the negotiations. For the second time the Emperor was right in Morocco—that is to say towards France—and his advisers were wrong. As in the past he had never for a moment wished to land at Tangier, and only yielded on Bülow's pressure, so in this summer of 1911 he opposed Kiderlen's plan of despatching warships. Now as then, one glance at the abyss was enough to deter him. In the earlier year he had been hypnotized by the ironworks of a German industrial; now he was paralysed by the iron circlet of a European alliance. A fatality which one might almost describe as logical, always tempted his advisers to a *coup de théâtre* when it was the last thing he desired.

Not that Kiderlen, either, wanted a war. He did not conceal from himself that it was impossible to prove any actual French encroachment in Morocco; but he was aping Bismarck's manner when in the July of 1911 he said to his Chancellor, who was almost completely in the dark: "Our prestige has suffered badly; if it comes to the worst, we shall have to fight" (Hammann, *Bilder*, 88). He merely wanted "to remind the French that Germany still exists. . . . Perhaps some German will be patriotic enough to get

THE "PANTHER"

slaughtered in Morocco, so that we can step in to avenge him" (*Deutsche Revue*, 46, 201). His idea was to imitate the Tangier gesture, and he forgot to consider that France would not sacrifice a second Delcassé, that this time she could reckon on new and powerful friends. Kiderlen wanted to extort compensations at the point of the pistol; and at last dragged from the reluctant Emperor at Kiel the command to send the small cruiser "Panther," which carried 150 men, to Morocco, where the French and Spaniards had over 100,000.

When, after this, some laconic negotiations between Kiderlen and Cambon resulted in nothing, the Emperor wrote: "What the devil is supposed to be going on now? It's a pure farce! . . . If we let all this precious time go by, the British and Russians will stiffen the backs of the frightened French, and dictate to them what they are to be most graciously pleased to concede us. This sort of diplomacy is too fine and large for my poor brain!" He was right, and was right again when soon afterwards he forbade Kiderlen to make any threats. For all the consequences, for the suspicion and ridicule poured by Europe on the ill-considered policy of his two statesmen, the Emperor must be absolved of any personal responsibility.

Only when the problem of England raised its head in all its kaleidoscopic immensity, was the Emperor unchanged in this more tranquil period. Throughout these years the documents are crammed with imperial fulminations against England: "Lies! The dog is lying! England! Uncle! A most charming fellow, this King E. VII! Ineffable cheek! Pharisee! Rot! Twaddle! Bunkum! Hurrah, we've caught the British 'scoundrels out this time!"

The question of the fleet, again acute in the years 1911-12, culminated in a duel between Metternich and Tirpitz; the former wanted to stop, the latter to proceed indefinitely with building. Metternich spoke out more plainly than ever: "There is an idea in our naval circles that once we have taken some decided step towards the

further construction of our Fleet, England will submit to the inevitable, and we shall become the best friends in the world. . . . It is a disastrous mistake. . . . Fear will have quite different fruits. It will set England in arms against us. . . . The alternatives are—slow down, or strike the blow. For the latter there is no national objective.” Tirpitz, on the other hand, provided himself with reports from the naval attaché in London which pointed to an attack being imminent, and easily contrived to win the Emperor over.

The Emperor wrote in August 1911: “ A better tone towards Germany will only be obtained by a larger fleet, which will bring the British to their senses through sheer fright.” The better tone, the sheer fright—his old motives! To win the respect of that one eternally unconquerable family—that was it; for when the Emperor wrote “ the British,” he was always thinking of his grandmother, his uncle, and later of his cousin George. While the Navy group were tackling him at Rominten, Kiderlen wrote to one of his jackals there, in a fuming rage: “ The Emperor must not listen only to one-sided advocates of the interests involved, but to all his appointed representatives; for we stand now at the parting of the ways, and the position is too serious for him to decide upon at such a distance from his capital, and without giving any audience to his chosen advisers.” But these forcible words, when he read them over, frightened the new Bismarck. He struck them out of the draft.

Metternich alone kept his head, and reiterated his warnings. The Fleet-party attacked him; he was soon to pay the penalty. “ If I had followed his advice at that time,” wrote the Emperor on one of his despatches, “ we should now have no fleet at all! His argument implied the arbitration of a foreign nation in our naval policy, which I, as Supreme War-Lord and Emperor, could not now or at any time consider for a moment—and which, moreover, would be humiliating to our people! We stick to the Estimates.” Metternich read the comment, but on 11th December repeated his warnings. Then the Emperor

METTERNICH PERSISTS

openly derided him: "The poor man is past praying for! His parrot-cry is 'Don't arm at home, and then England will go on being in a good temper.'" But with admirable resolution Metternich still pressed on, and soon wrote: "I am very conscious that my attitude . . . does not meet with support from Your Majesty. . . . But I should depart from the truth if I reported otherwise, and I cannot barter my conviction even for my sovereign's favour. Moreover, I doubt if Your Majesty would be better served by smooth and optimistic communications persisted in until we suddenly found ourselves facing a war with England."

If only half a dozen Excellencies had thus manfully opposed the Emperor, he would be the Emperor still.

Neither Bethmann nor Kiderlen ever dreamed of resigning unless an Estimate which they regarded as pernicious was postponed; all they did was to send Ballin to London, where he talked with Churchill and Cassel. Churchill said: "This persistent competition in armaments must lead to war within the next two years." But when Metternich verbally reiterated his arguments, Ballin replied: "It's no good; the Emperor's nerves won't stand the strain much longer."

Metternich's answer was: "I had thought we were speaking of the Empire, not of the Emperor." Here we perceive once more that even Ballin, pacifist by conviction and interest, was at the service of the Emperor's personal feelings, which he deplored.

In February 1912 Lord Haldane, the War-Minister, came to Berlin to make a last attempt. Haldane spoke for the Cabinet, and with his King's approval, to the Emperor and Tirpitz—dangled before their eyes an African colony, suggested elimination of one ship each, but obtained no more than postponement of the German Estimate for one year. There followed written negotiations about crews and guns. But when Grey said to Metternich that he had no fears while Bethmann was Chancellor, but would have to reckon with other persons in the future, the Emperor, mortally offended, broke off the negotiations on various

pretexts, and wrote furiously on the despatch: “ It is the first I have heard of people making arrangements with one particular statesman, independently of the reigning sovereign. From the above it is evident that Grey has no notion who is really master, and that *I* govern! ” This, and an affected speech of Churchill’s in which he talked about the German “ Luxury-fleet,” were sufficient to produce a decided rupture. Even the Empress was drawn in by Tirpitz “ Your Majesty, the throne of your children is at stake! ”—whereupon she drove straight to see Bethmann, and urge a decision upon him.

Metternich fell, because “ he had failed in his duty.” Tirpitz stood triumphant

“ And that *I* govern! ” In those words William the Second once more asserted his innate consciousness of autocracy. This was not the mere cant-phrase of a Roi Soleil, of a Most High behind whose back his Ministers smiled; but the expression of a definite purpose. The Emperor, urged by three political advisers to an understanding, was perfectly free to fix, with Haldane or through Ballin, that “ Fleet-Holiday ” of which England was desirous; Lloyd George, Grey, Haldane, even Churchill, were once more striving to get rid of the monstrous expense of naval competition. No majority in the Reichstag, no overwhelming expression of public opinion, demanded an accelerated programme from the Government; nobody was putting pressure on the Emperor beyond a dozen naval men, supported by a few hundred thousand whooping civilians. Tirpitz once dismissed, the Emperor could have appointed any of his moderate men from one day to another—and a sigh of relief would have gone up from his people, more audible far than the trumpeting of the Pan-Germans. The English would not have decided against Germany in July 1914, and the War would have been avoided.

But the Emperor could not do these things; his nature forced him to the other course. Too deeply it was felt—the bitter, ever-renewed jealousy, the old unsilenced outcry of his wounded, susceptible spirit: Never to yield an inch

DAYS OF CHILDHOOD

to this one power, never to strike sail before England; or rather never to strike cannons, bristling as they were from out the neatly drawn-up lists, from out the pale-blue plans of the armoured turrets! That they might never go off was his hope; but that they should enforce respect from that haughty dynasty was his determination.

All his secret love of England, for ever thwarted by hate and spite and jealousy, was made manifest when his uncle died. He was immeasurably relieved by the death of his mortal enemy; a few hours after the tidings came he wrote beside the Chancellor's condolences: "The . . . system of intrigue which kept Europe on tenterhooks, will come to an end. . . . I believe that European policy as a whole will be more quiescent; even if that were all, it would be something. Edward VII's chief mourners, besides his own people, will be the Gauls and the Jews." But immediately afterwards, at the funeral, all sorts of old memories were revived—a human heart was filled with reminiscences of young untroubled days; and between Court-gossip, naïve delight in the approbation of the populace, and the weary round of politics, we find this, in the many-paged descriptive telegram to the Chancellor (A. 28, 327):

"I found that my parents' old apartments in Windsor Castle, where I often played as a little boy, had been assigned to me. . . . Manifold were the memories that filled my heart. . . . They awakened the old sense of being at home here, which attaches me so strongly to this place, and which has made the political aspect of things so personally painful to me, especially in recent years. I am proud to call this place my second home, and to be a member of this royal family. . . . And they had kept my memory green, as a child who was so much addicted to pudding that he once was violently sick! Kindest regards."

When he concludes his long account of the obsequies with this smiling reminiscence, reaching back into the very mists of childhood, we cannot but be struck by the extraordinary destiny of a man who was driven by his daemon to hate what he wanted to love.

Throughout the whole summer of 1912 the menace of a world-war hung over Europe. For the first time, the Balkans confronted Austria as an entity—that great antagonism which for thirty years had been far more unsettling for the Continent than the Alsace-Lorraine question. The conflict between Russia and Austria seemed once more acute, but no one dared to draw the sword.

Least of all the Emperor. Even in the year of Bosnia, when his Ambassador reported a renewed Pan Slavist agitation in the interests of military prestige, he wrote on the margin of the despatch: “ Haven’t they had misery enough? Incredible folly—to sacrifice hundreds of thousands just to save their face! ” If this had represented his earnest conviction, it would be his redemption in the eyes of history; but it was like the rest, it was as deeply, or as superficially, felt as any of his hundred threatening speeches—it represented the mood of a moment, vanished with that moment, and in the decisive hour was lost in uttermost abysses of the heart.

The Balkan War of October 1912 convulsed the European Powers. They all lied freely, differing only in the manner of it—which in Petersburg was brazen, in London cautious, in Vienna frivolous, in Berlin stupid. When the war ended in the speedy defeat of the Turks, and they besought Germany’s mediation, the Emperor forbade any joint action which could be construed as inimical by the Quadruple Alliance, “ even at the risk of giving umbrage to some of the Powers in the Concert ” (4, 11, 12). It was not until all were inclined for mediation that he acquiesced.

At the Conference he was more reasonable than his own Ministers, and told the Viennese Count Berchtold, who again wanted war with Serbia, that he had no right to cut the Serbians off from the sea. “ I am still less inclined to embark on war for this question than I was for the Sandjak.

GOLDEN WORDS

The Triple Alliance covers only the actual possessions of the Powers concerned, not subsequent claims. I could not answer either to my people or my conscience for anything more." And when Bethmann warned him of a possible rupture of the Alliance, he earnestly reiterated his pacific admonition to the truculent Austria, rejecting all idea of a war, "in which everything would have to be risked, and which might mean the downfall of Germany—and all this for Albania and Durazzo! There is nothing whatever in the Treaty of Alliance to say that the German Army and the German people are to be pressed into the service of another State's political caprices, and be, so to speak, at her disposal for any and every purpose."

Golden words! Repeated two years later, they might have prevented the World-War.

But only two weeks later, a "shooting-visit" from the Austrian heir-apparent, Franz Ferdinand, produced a change of mood. Suddenly the Emperor declared the moment to be "too serious for us any longer to take the responsibility of hindering Austria from striking her blow." Such a revulsion, due to the suggestions of the allied Prince during a shoot or an evening-talk, is yet another testimony to the womanish instability of the Emperor's temperament. The political results were not long in following—a Conference of the allied Generals at Berlin, simultaneous advance guaranteed, a speech from the Chancellor about loyalty to the Alliance, great risk of war. Nor until this was over was it perceived that Vienna had duped them all, had never wanted the contest, but only a personal diplomatic success. Count Berchtold was merely toying with the idea of a world-war.

But the Emperor had been tuned up, and now demanded that his people should be enlightened by the Press "upon the vital needs of Austria; for otherwise, when the war comes, no one will know in whose interests Germany is to take up arms." But Russia once more drew back decisively; and Poincaré, "in great consternation," racked his brains to discover the "secret grounds" for this *volte-face*.

Again the Emperor turned a deaf ear to England. Great inducements were held out by Grey on the Eastern question, but were brought to naught by exaggerated claims and suspicions, precisely as in Holstein's year of opposition to Chamberlain; and immediately after the German refusal an agreement with France—this time, that known as the Cambon Correspondence—was concluded by England.

Now,” wrote the Emperor, “ we know what we have to expect. . . . Any Power we can get to help us is good enough now. It is life or death for Germany ” (8, 12). So low had his pretensions fallen. The Empire was isolated, and now its Emperor had at last realized that, he would go in with any Power that offered itself. They must beware all round! And the Emperor wrote in March 1913: “ Vienna's Serbian policy was a failure. Let her be advised . . . to retreat. Austria must share the Slavonic waters, else all the Slavs will be driven into Russia's arms.”

With such pacifist reflections the Emperor sought to overthrow Berchtold; but he did not succeed. Nevertheless he had not failed to perceive, even then, the dangers attendant on the levity and ambition of a few aristocrats in Vienna. And when Serbia came out of the Peace of Bucharest with enhanced authority, and the policy of Vienna grew more aimless even than before, with internal affairs revolving in an endless chain of ineptitudes, it became clear to everyone, including the Emperor, that alliance with a tottering Empire meant that he was irrevocably and disastrously bound up with her fortunes. He felt “ the battle between the Slav and the German ” (as he always called it) drawing nearer and nearer, and could not but own to himself that the “ Germans ” were fettered in that conflict by a national covenant with a semi-Slavonic State.

Holstein's thesis of the inviolability of that covenant, so utterly and so swiftly refuted by history (like his other one of the eternal enmity between England and Russia), together with the Emperor's unstable policy—symbolized in the zigzag of his journeys—had ended by so isolating

FRANZ FERDINAND

the Empire that it was too late for recognition to be of any service. Even Tschirschky, for many years Ambassador in Vienna, wrote so late as May 1914, in doubt whether it was "really worth our while to have identified ourselves so closely with a structure which is giving way at every point, or to persist in the heavy task of trying to drag it in our wake." Yet for all that, they did not even feel sure of Austria at Berlin, and in the last war with Serbia had been relieved to know that at least Vienna must be the first to show fight!

The Emperor was entirely conscious of the situation which in point of fact his own decisions had imposed upon the Empire, and was not urged by any sentimental motives to over-prize the Alliance. He had no very excessive respect even for the old Emperor—he only affected that cult because it seemed to him becoming; and as to the Archduke, *he* was as wholly alien as the difference in the shape of their heads would indicate. Hard, savage, entirely without charm, he was a morose and scornful misanthrope, sullen and dare-devil, brutal and rapacious, neither an orator nor a linguist, but an impassioned sportsman and gardener, tender only as husband and father, and unacquainted with pretence in any form. Franz Ferdinand's and William's characters were poles apart. The only trait they had in common was an autocratic temper; their only bond of union was a pact to which they stuck as to a tedious half-hearted marriage.

The more the Emperor distrusted Austria, the more he sought, especially at the last, to make sure of the Balkans. He had supported Serbia against Vienna at the Conference; the Bulgarians he pronounced to be "the nation of the future, and as little to be checked in their development as of old the Prussians." To the Greeks, whose Queen was now his sister, he handed over Kavalla in time of peace against strong opposition, and concluded that Greece was a rich country, because he had seen for himself how prosperous was Corfu. As to the Turks, suspended between life and death, he insured himself for either event. He

wrote: "Preparations for the partition of Turkey, which apparently is more imminent than is generally thought. . . . N.B.:—No partition without us!" and mentally reserved Mesopotamia for Germany. But at the same time, in the November of 1913, he sent General Liman von Sanders there as Commander of the First Army Corps, with almost unlimited powers of control and punishment. This enraged the Russians and perturbed the English, who were by way of assuming the command in that quarter, though it were but from on board their ships. Ultimately the Emperor had once more to yield the cardinal point in this rash undertaking.

Only about the Fleet was he unchangingly intransigent. The roots of this had been planted in his youth. And yet he had known now for the last five years that, encircled as he was, only the greatest prudence would avail to preserve him and his Empire.

5

The Kiel Week was at its height. The Emperor as Admiral, under the ensign of the "Hohenzollern," was conducting the Regatta. The date was 28th June 1914, and it was three o'clock. If he looked eastward, he could see a couple of swart ships silhouetted against the sunlet sky; these flew the Union Jack. Churchill had wished to be present, but there had been difficulties about the form of the invitation; and so this last opportunity for a quiet discussion had been let slip on the characteristic ground that the Englishman must give official expression to his privately conveyed desire for an invitation. But Briand too was absent, though he had been bidden by the Prince of Monaco. Why was that?

And now, while the Emperor is heart and soul in the Regatta, a motor-boat is seen approaching. Those on board convey their desire to lie-to; the Emperor signals

No, he will not be disturbed"; but the officer in the boat persists; he flourishes a despatch—then puts it in his cigarette-case and hurls it on board, so that the sailor

GABRIEL PRINCIP

standing nearest has to pick it up and present it to his sovereign. Woe betide someone, if the tidings are not worth such powder and shot as this!

Three hours ago—the Emperor reads—the Archduke and his wife had been assassinated at Serajevo. “Now I’ve got to begin all over again!” Those were his first words. Then flags half-masted, Regatta and Kiel Week broken off; and he returns to Berlin.

The Serbian marksman, who under the doubly symbolic name of Gabriel Princip let loose the world-cataclysm, shot the Emperor straight through the heart. Not because of the chief victim, who had never been his friend, and for whose memory no word of grief escaped him even in the earliest moment of the tidings. Much more than friendship had been pierced in him; the Serb had blown out the very nucleus of his outlook on the world, of his most cherished faith. “By the Grace of God”—that was the profoundest consciousness in William the Second’s soul, sincerely, guilelessly alive in him, both source and vindication of his self-esteem. By that consciousness alone he felt himself enjoined to dominate his fellow-men, to cling no less than religiously to the ancient conceptions of King and Subject.

Princes are hallowed, because God holds direct communion with them—that, in its antiquated fullness, was his article of faith; and even the most antagonistic of princes, even King Edward, was in personal intercourse at any rate more congenial to him than Roosevelt, whom he courted for the sake of his powerful country. Though he despised the Tsar as a weakling and a dreamer, that monarch’s life was of much more importance in his eyes than the life of the “woodcutter Fallières.” When Carnot was assassinated, his heart was entirely unmoved; when King Humbert fell, all the Emperor’s spectres rose and gibbered round his head. Not only was his whole foreign policy one of alliance with dynasties, so that he lamented over the blood-sprent ruins of the French monarchy a hundred-and-twenty years after Louis XVI had been beheaded, and

thought of Jaures as enthroned where Kings had sat; not only did he feel that semi-republican England with her changing majorities was no stable partner in a covenant; but in Germany, that faith in kings determined his Thirty Years' War against the Socialists, whom he lumped in with anarchists, and thought of as mere regicides.

With his intense class-consciousness, the news from Serajevo could not but assail him in his dignity, his sense of a divine mission, and likewise in his ever-wakeful fear of a kindred fate; so that his markedly pacific attitude in the recent emergencies altered in the twinkling of an eye to a burning desire for atonement and intimidation. In the last five years the Emperor's veto had been chiefly instrumental in averting three Serbian conflagrations; but now at last the fire-eating Viennese Counts and the Berlin Pan-Germans, the Parisian *revanchistes* and the Petersburg war-lords, with their respective militarists, had their long hoped-for, glorious Day. The World-War which had been smouldering for thirty years, and even in Bismarck's time had threatened to break out over the Russo-Austrian quarrel—that is to say, over the paradox of the Hapsburg Monarchy—could not have exploded more logically than upon the pretext of this Serbian affair.

Neither Poincaré's pretensions nor William's provocations, neither the whooping of a few thousand Lorrainers on the boulevards, nor the arrogance of as many Pan-Germans, will avail, in the eyes of history, to fix the crime of this war upon the respective nations. The situation had existed for decades, the danger had been increasing for years, and with it the caution of all concerned; but there was not one ruler who dreaded, and therefore avoided, war so much as the Emperor did. Had he kept quiet, as in the three recent emergencies, Europe might have been saved once more by state-craft, even though he had incurred the enmity of England, the deciding factor in this crisis. Only the most profound emotional disturbance could divert his essentially timorous nature from the chosen course; and even so only for a brief period.

THE JULY OF 1914

In the beginning of the July of 1914—the history of which is no more to be recounted here, than that of the War—an adept in human nature could have foreseen the Emperor's attitude, and that in both of its phases. First, punishment for regicide, swift, violent; but then, with growing sense of his encompassment, cessation of any sabre-rattling. All his affectation of domineering masterfulness revived at the sound of the fanatic's pistol-shot, but only for a moment; and just as on that January morning of 1896 his megalomania had been diverted from letting loose a war with England in the Transvaal to sending a congratulatory telegram to Kruger, so, these eighteen years later, the bleeding head of that one Serbian would have availed to stay his wrath.

Three students of human nature, with a sense of their responsibility upon them, at the head of the Petersburg, Vienna, and Berlin Cabinets, could, on that First of July, 1914—despite all the bellicose militarists of Europe—once more have conjured the tempest, precisely as had been done thirty, and then five, years before. Witte, Tisza, and Bülow could have achieved it. But Isvolski and Berchtold toyed criminally with the idea of war—the former to avenge himself for his failure at Buchlau, when he abandoned Bosnia to the Austrians; the latter to wipe out the Serbian checkmate of the preceding years, which he sullenly ascribed to the Emperor William's desire for peace.

Three Emperors, avowedly opposed to war, were driven by the ambition, vindictiveness, and incompetence of their Ministers into a conflict whose danger for their thrones they all three recognized from the first, and if only for that reason tried to avoid. Their three peoples were, like all the others eventually to be involved, pacifically inclined; and only by the universal propaganda of lies were they ever goaded into hate—for not trade-rivalry nor race-antagonism, not material nor moral causes, made this Cabinet-War a necessity in any one of the European States. The life-blood of ten millions of her sons was shed by Europe, not under any "tragic necessity," not through any "fatal

concatenation” of circumstances; the sacrifice was extorted from her only by her wrangling statesmen.

The first of the many words written by the Emperor on the margin of the 879 German documents of the days preceding the War were these, two days after the assassination: “ Now or never! ” (D. 7). When it came to the settling of accounts with Serbia, and his Ambassador in Vienna wisely wrote: “ I seize every similar opportunity of advising, very quietly but very decidedly and earnestly, against any rash steps,” the Emperor broke out furiously in the course of perusal: “ Who gave him any such instructions? It’s idiotic! *he* has nothing to do with it. . . . Later on, if it comes to blows, they’ll be saying that Germany wasn’t inclined! Tschirschky, if you please, is to have done with that nonsense! The Serbs must be wiped out, and at once!” In the days immediately following he insisted, in all despatches, that Vienna’s demands on Serbia should be made without delay.

On 5th July he received an autograph letter from his ally, which informed him that Count Hoyos had declared for the dismemberment of Serbia. On this, without consulting his Chancellor, he gave the Austrian Ambassador, after lunch at Potsdam, the *carte blanche* which he had refused him before they sat down to the meal. Without this promise Austria could not have stirred a step; with it, Vienna could carry out her plans. On the 5th and 6th, as all the chiefs were on leave, the Emperor consulted with their delegates over military and naval preparedness for war. This was inevitable at a crisis; but he summoned no Crown-Council. Then he started—fatally—on a Scandinavian cruise, in some sort urged by those who hoped for war and dreaded his timidity.

Three years ago, in July 1911, the mere intimation that Kiderlen was desirous to take strong measures against France had so disturbed him on the Scandinavian cruise that he had written, quite rightly: “ Then I must come home at once. For I cannot allow my Government to take such a step without being on the spot myself, so as to have a clear

BLIND FURY

idea of the consequences, and some control over them. It would be unpardonable to do anything else. . . . *Le Roi s'amuse!* And meanwhile we're heading towards mobilization! That sort of thing shan't go on in my absence."

Now, for three weeks, he sprinkled the telegraphed reports with comments which reveal his moods as clearly as a journal could have done. Everything that was more than an emotional outburst, everything that represented purpose and conviction, was wired to the ambassadors, in order that "their tone" should be in accordance with the imperial will. By these orders, dashed on to the paper by an excited man on board ship, to whom neither individual nor national counsel or admonition could be directly conveyed, the decisions of the Allies were, in those three weeks of July, shaped, authorized, or at the very least unhindered.

In the Viennese despatch of the 10th the Emperor read the intolerable demands which it was proposed to make upon Serbia, together with the following comment on them: "Should the Serbians accept all the conditions, it would be a solution very unwelcome to Count Berchtold; and he is still considering whether further demands cannot be made, which would render it quite impossible for Serbia to acquiesce." Beside this diabolical suggestion the Emperor wrote: "Clear out of the Sandjak! So then the fat is really in the fire! Austria must have that back at once, so as to prevent the union of Serbia and Montenegro, and Serbia's access to the sea!"

A year and a half ago he had said: "I am still less inclined to embark upon war for this question than I was for the Sandjak. The Triple Alliance covers only the actual possessions of the Powers concerned, not subsequent claims. I could not answer either to my people or my conscience for anything more. . . . A war in which everything would have to be risked, and which might mean the downfall of Germany,—and all this for Albania and Durazzo!"

So blind had fury made him now. At the same period he wrote beside the remark that Count Tisza was for

prudence and moderation: “ Towards murderers, after what has come to pass? Imbecility! ” And underneath: “ As in the time of the Silesian War: ‘ I am opposed to councils of war and deliberations, since in these the chicken-hearted party always has the upper hand ’ [Frederick the Great] ” (D: 29)

Suffering from his sense that the sanctuary had been violated, impelled by the desire to stand forth before his people in this swiftly sharpening crisis as the guardian of the royal idea, surrounded only by the sea and his gasconading fellow-voyagers, represented at home by two incompetent statesmen—he forgot all the prudent arguments which had hitherto made him so sceptical about the Viennese War-Counts’ adventure, and insisted on avenging the assassination. Indeed, it seemed that he was the one who could not wait; for on two Viennese despatches of the 14th, intimating a desire to postpone the ultimatum until Poincaré’s departure, he twice wrote: “ What a pity! ”

A decisive factor in this vehemence was his fixed belief that the Tsar could never take the part of regicides.” That old delusion of his—that nations were still, as of yore, ruled by their sovereigns, the exaggerated regard for dynastic influence which he derived from the fact that his own was far too preponderant in Germany—affected his calculations throughout these weeks. For him, the Tsar “ by the Grace of God ” represented the Government of Russia; and though he knew by experience that Nicholas was a weakling, he continued to repeat in writing that never could the Tsar take the Serbians’ part—those “ active and vicarious regicides.” Hence it was, once more, the royal idea which caused him to believe that Russia would tacitly suffer the humiliation of Serbia, instead of reckoning on her intervention, and its consequence—the World-War.

This note was recurrent as against England also—of whose hostile intervention Prince Lichnowsky urgently warned Germany from the earliest day. He, Bernstorff, and Wangenheim were the only men who, before Germany’s

RAGE AGAINST ENGLAND

enemies declared themselves, saw and said how things would go. And when he read such warnings, the Emperor's sense of the Elect of God assailed took on a dual form. Just as no king could possibly take the part of regicides, so no voice might be raised against the Hapsburg's right to decide as he pleased.

"Why should *I* undertake," wrote the Emperor beside Grey's suggestion, "to smooth down Vienna! Those dogs have added murder to rebellion, and must be made to knuckle under. . . . This is a piece of monstrous insolence on the part of Britain. I am not called upon to write His Majesty the Emperor prescriptions for the preservation of his honour, *à la* Grey! . . . Let this be conveyed to Grey, very seriously and explicitly, so that he may see I am not to be played with. . . . The Serbians are a pack of criminals, and should be treated as such. I will not interfere in matters which are the Emperor's business, and his alone. . . . This is the typical British attitude of condescending authority, and I wish to put it on record that I entirely repudiate it! William I.R."

Even to its pompous signature this outburst resembles the most frantic documents of his middle-period; yet while he thus refused to tranquillize his ally, he ordered that Paris should be requested to smooth down hers. This was written under the heights of Balholm on 24th July, before he had any knowledge of the ultimatum to Serbia. Of its purport the Emperor then had no idea at all, and his Ministers were informed—to their consternation—only twenty-four hours before it was delivered. The excitement which England had always been able to stir in him now awakened all the old impulses and foibles, all the old defiance and uneasiness; and while he played the chivalrous ally who had promised the "venerable sovereign" in Vienna his lance and shield, and scorned to inquire for what sort of an adventure, he was at the same time pitching into the Englishman as if he were a schoolboy.

Higher and higher mounted his martial ardour—nothing that was done in Vienna seemed enough, in his eyes.

GREY'S CONFERENCE "SUPERFLUOUS"

Again on the 26th he wrote (D. 145) on a despatch from Paris: "Ultimata are either carried out or not! But there's an end to discussion! Hence the name!" and on one from Vienna (D. 155) which reported that Borchtold had disclaimed to the Russian Ambassador any idea of acquisitions, and had even spoken in a somewhat conciliatory tone, the Emperor wrote: "Quite superfluous; will give an impression of weakness . . . which is entirely untrue as regards Russia; and must be avoided at all costs. . . . The matter cannot now be referred to discussion behind our backs. . . . The ass! Austria must get back the Sandjak, else the Serbians will come down to the Adriatic!" And: "Serbia is not, in the European sense, a State at all," he continued on the same day (D. 157), "but a community of brigands!" When Grey in the same despatch conveyed his view that a European war was "staring us in the face," the Emperor's only comment was: "That's a certainty"; and when the Englishman for the fourth time suggested a conference for arbitration with a view to avoiding war: "Superfluous. . . . I will not co-operate, unless Austria explicitly asks me to do so, which is improbable. One does not confer with others over vital questions of honour."

These words, which on the night of the 26th were wired to Berlin, and next morning wired on to London, put an extinguisher on the suggestion of Grey, who wanted (precisely as in the preceding year) to patch up the quarrel at a Conference of Ambassadors; but who, it must be said, had delayed to inform Petersburg of neutrality, or Berlin of England's readiness for war—which, officially conveyed, would have acted as a deterrent warning.

On that 26th, while all Europe was in suspense about the reception of the ultimatum, the Emperor's vehemence increased to boiling-point. By this time he had lost all faith even in Russia's attitude to kings, for he wrote: "Since her fraternization with the French Socialist Republic [she has] let that go!" In another place: "This comes of an alliance between an absolute monarchy and an absolute socialistic *sans-culotte* Republic." Finally, on Sasonov's

THE ANSWER FROM SERBIA

threat: that if Austria exterminated Serbia, Russia would fight, he wrote in the Berlin vernacular: "*Na, denn zu!*" ("Well, come on then!"). On the same day, under a monitory despatch from Rome: "This is sheer bunkum, and events will soon prove it to be so"; and on a warning from the Chancellor to stop the homeward-bound Fleet, he wrote furiously: "Incredible suggestion! Not to be thought of! . . . Our civilian Chancellor has not yet grasped the [general situation]" (D. 182).

In those July days all the Emperor's good angels deserted him in mid-ocean.

Even in the days immediately following, when Bethmann warned him against precipitate mobilization, again referred to England's mediation, and asked for a pacific attitude (D. 197), the result was open derision. "To be pacific is the first duty of the citizen! Peace, peace—nothing but peace! A peaceful mobilization, too, strikes one as something new"; and Bethmann in his despatch having inquired where the Emperor meant "to land," the Admiral of the Atlantic made game of the land-lubber in two exclamation-marks, because the Chancellor, in the stress of affairs, had not wired in nautical language: "go ashore."

The Emperor and the Serbian answer reached Berlin almost at the same moment. "The answer was very nearly that unconditional acceptance which Berchtold had so sorely dreaded. The Emperor read it—and in a trice his mood completely changed. Was it the anxious faces of his subjects, which this time he had searched upon his way from the coast to the capital? Was it the change of environment? The too long-delayed contact with his responsible advisers? Or was it perhaps only the recognition that no more *could* be asked? Anyhow, on the 28th he wrote under the Serbian reply: "A brilliant solution—and in barely 48 hours! This is more than could have been expected. A great moral victory for Vienna; but with it every pretext for war falls to the ground, and [the Ambassador] Giesl had better have stayed quietly at Belgrade. On this

document, *I should never have given orders for mobilization!*”

Indeed, he actually spurred himself to write a long autograph letter to his Secretary of State, instead of the usual marginalia or oral behests which had long taken the place of such efforts: It stated: “The most submissive of capitulations is what this signifies, and no possible pretext for war now remains.” In the meantime, though, Belgrade must be held as a material guarantee for the execution of the demands, so that the Army, thrice fruitlessly mobilized, might have its *satisfaction d’honneur* and the consciousness of having at least set foot on alien soil. . . . Otherwise, with the abandonment of the campaign, there might arise considerable discontent against the dynasty, which would be most deplorable. “In case Your Excellency shares this view, I would suggest saying to Austria . . . that we congratulate her. That of course there are no further grounds for war. But that certainly a guarantee is necessary, until the claims are satisfied. . . . On this basis I am ready to negotiate for peace with Austria. . . . This I will do after My own manner, and with all possible consideration for Austria’s national sentiments and the honour of her Army. . . . The Army must have a tangible *satisfaction d’honneur*—that is to be understood as a condition of my mediation. . . . I have ordered Plessen to write to the Chief of Staff in the foregoing sense.”

A return to reason—very slightly masked. Can we not hear his sigh of relief—the civilian eternally condemned to the uniform? The storm has cleared off; there is no more talk of war, the bandits need not be wiped out, the Sandjak need not be invested, Serbia need not be cut off from the Adriatic; conquest and general conflagration have turned into a military parade; the only questions are the honour of the Army, the prestige of the dynasty—and the regicides are extolled for their “brilliant solution.” All that was moderate in him was counting on peace.

Too late. Pandora’s box was opened.

Everything that ensued in the decisive four days was born of his will to peace; and if sometimes the Emperor belied that earlier impulse, it was only the result of a nervous temperament which forgot one mood in the excitement of the next. All the recklessness with which Berlin had sanctioned the proceedings of its ally and subscribed beforehand to what was later exacted, was authorized by the Emperor's marginalia; if the dissuasions, exhortations, and warnings, which poured into Vienna from 28th July onwards, had been despatched in the preceding fortnight (as Grey had urged upon the Emperor), if he had been as collected on board ship as he was now, Vienna would never have rejected the reply to the ultimatum, London would have obtained the Conference, Petersburg could scarcely have drawn the sword.

In these latter days, when all Europe was laying, and unjustly laying, Vienna's rejection of the ultimatum to Germany's charge, the Emperor was whole-heartedly ready for any retreat from the position. Though so recently as the 26th he had repudiated all reliance on Russia since her fraternization with the Republic, he now declared (D. 288): "This was not known to me [that Russia would support Serbia]. I could not foresee that the Tsar would go in with bandits and regicides, even at the risk of a European war. Such a mentality is inconceivable in a German—it is Slavonic or Latin."

By any means he now sought to put on the brake. His urgent telegram of the 28th to the Tsar crossed a precisely similar one from the Tsar to him—two cries for help, which symbolically passed each other on the singing wires; though the tone in which he dealt with the Russian telegram was collected. But, on the other hand, he fulminated against his own subjects with a terrible energy of hate: "The Socialist crew is making anti-military street-demonstrations—that must not on any account be suffered, especially now. If there is any repetition, I shall pro-

claim martial law and have the leaders, one and all, imprisoned."

Beyond the frontiers an army of a million was assembling; from one day to another the Emperor's functionaries informed him, not only from Petersburg, that Russia was mobilizing. That did not dismay him. But that the people, or some of the people, in Berlin had risen to avert the disaster by their utmost effort could achieve it—this was for him the call to arms. William the Second, throughout his life, was less afraid of the coalition without, than of the revolt within, the realm.

For England alone he was as full of hate as ever; and while the other marginals of the 28th were suddenly invested with a calm common-sense style (only occasionally enlivened by "Swine" and similar zoological amenities) against England there was a hailstorm of invectives and harangues. Indubitably he was right, that Grey "by one stern, energetic expostulation with Petersburg . . . could quiet them both down"; but then he worked himself up into an outburst which, coming from Germany, had the effect of an amazing paradox: "A common scoundrell England alone is responsible for war, or peace—we are so no longer! And that must be publicly proclaimed!"

Then, like a thunderbolt, fell the tidings—dreaded for years, foreboded for days. It had come true. Russia was mobilizing her army of a million along the whole length of the frontier. And now it was as though the Never-Silent stood speechless before the embodied spectre. Seconds passed away; and then with his last hope his nerves, too, broke in pieces. How suddenly they seemed to darken the sun—the awful meshes of that net invisible till now, though so long felt! He was caught in those meshes . . . and now the heaped-up waters of his rage rushed forth in torrents. The insulted, the betrayed, the blameless Prince, whose good intentions he was conscious of, whose errors he ignored, and so could feel subjectively absolved from blame! In a genuinely impressive composition the flood-gates of his forebodings were opened at last:

“My function is at an end. . . . Wantonness and weakness are to engulf the world in the most terrible of wars, the ultimate aim of which is the ruin of Germany. For now I can no longer doubt it—England, France, and Russia have conspired . . . to fight together for our annihilation. . . . That is, in a nutshell, the naked truth of the situation which was slowly and surely created by Edward VII. . . . and is now to be put to use. The folly and incompetence of our ally is the snare in which we have been caught. . . . And so the notorious encirclement of Germany is at last an accomplished fact. . . . England stands derisive, brilliantly successful in her long-meditated, purely anti-German policy—a superb achievement, stirring to admiration even him whom it will utterly destroy! The dead Edward is stronger than the living I! We ran our heads into the noose . . . in the pathetic hope of appeasing England!!! All my warnings, all my prayers, fell on deaf ears. And here are our thanks from England! Through my dilemma of loyalty for the venerable old Emperor a situation was created for us which gave England the desired pretext for annihilating us. . . . Our Consuls in Turkey and India, our agents, and all such, must inflame the whole Mohamedan world to frantic rebellion against this detestable, treacherous, conscienceless nation of shopkeepers; for if *we* are to bleed to death, England shall at all events lose India! W.”

Never in all his myriad utterances did William the Second give forth so elemental an outcry; never in his life did he call down fire and flame upon an enemy with fervour like to this. Only from a genuine passion does such blind wrath blaze forth, and only once in a lifetime. This malediction was written under a threatening despatch from Petersburg which never once mentioned England. With the Russian mobilization, the Emperor saw the War to be inevitable which for five years he had tried to hinder. England's attitude was menacing, but was not yet decisive; the conflict was Russian; the mobilization, the betrayal, were Russian; yet the Emperor's bitterness and fury,

mortification and horror, were directed neither on the trickery of his ally nor the rancours of the Russian Court, nor even on the English Premier. In the hour of this Passion, only the ghost of that loathed enemy whom he had thought to overcome through death, appeared before him, while the images of mother and grandmother hovered vaguely in the dim inane. The rending of a family-tie was, in William the Second's belief, the origin of the World-War. As a despairing man he entered that conflict.

Nevertheless, he assumed in every way the attitude of an absolute monarch. Amid the turmoil he was solicitous for all the knightly procedure which his historical sense of etiquette demanded; and while everywhere the Parliaments of the Twentieth Century were deciding the issues of war or peace, the three last Emperors were flinging down their gauntlets as in the troubadours' tourneys, without in any one instance riding into the lists themselves for life or death. They turned over ancient parchments to find the best-rounded formula for gauntlet flung and challenge issued; and so the Wilhelmstrasse wrote (D. 542): "S.M. l'Empéreur, mon Auguste Souverain, au nom de l'Empire relève le défi et Se considère en état de guerre avec la Russie."

It was thus that the crazy old machine creaked for the last time through the earliest clatter of weapons; and while Emperor and Tsar were exchanging anguished appeals—which were genuine on both their parts, since each was trembling for his throne—they were both caught up against their wills by the vast engine whose mighty arm had such centripetal force as no king had ever so much as imagined until now. Even with England, the family rancour was veiled in cousinly affection. Like antiquated puppets, Prince Henry and King George assured each other of peace and amity; and George and Willy, even on the First of August, were exchanging telegrams which it must be owned were chillier even than the martial farewells of Nicky and Willy.

Though the Tsar's troops were already discharging their

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güns, the Emperor's heart was much more sorely stricken by the King of Italy, who now at last began to chaffer with him. "Scoundrel! Blackguard!" (D. 700) said the marginalia; and the King of Greece, who pleaded his alliance with Serbia as an excuse for neutrality, was hectoring in true Frederician style: "You are ordered to advance against Russia!"

With the beginning of the conflict, a sense of pride in Germany took chief place among the Emperor's emotions; and though all the sovereigns were cousins and in nearly every instance had a common grand- or great-grandmother, he dissociated himself from them, and talked of "Slav treachery, Latin arrogance, native British duplicity." Marginalia to remarks by Tyrrell and Bunsen ran thus: "The son of a German, yet he lies like this!" and "A German, and he puts his hand to such lies!" (D. 764). Yet in particular instances he perceived German errors sooner than anyone else did; and though he cast all blame for the War on Russia and England, never on Paris nor even on Vienna, he wrote on a report of the 4th of August, which confirmed the defection of the Roumanian confederates: "Our allies are falling like rotten apples, even before the War begins! A total defeat for German, and consequently Austrian, foreign diplomacy. This could, and should, have been avoided" (D. 811).

These classically formed phrases, which are the last of any interest among his marginalia, afford us a glimpse into his inmost soul on the afternoon following the speech in the Weisser Saal. It was a brief moment of insight wherein he perceived, not his own errors indeed, but at any rate those of his functionaries. The terrible isolation which his personal policy, his nervous temperament, had brought upon him and his Empire in the space of twenty-five years, grew more and more alarming as ally after ally deserted him. Then he could fully realize what it meant to be burdened with a corpse which stank to heaven, and—a worse lot than Hamlet's with the dead Polonius—to be obliged to drag it on the stage with his own hands. "I

never," said an intimate, "have seen so tragic and ravaged a face as the Emperor's is in these days" (T. 238).

William the Second was confronted by the first and last ordeal of his life. Now, before the nation and history, he was called upon to justify his system of autocracy and the Divine Right of Kings; now, too, within his heart to play the winning hazard of his life—show courage, strength of will, decision, and collectedness; all that through thirty years he never had exacted from himself. For now the measure he had set so arrogantly for the Emperor—the measure of omnipotence—was given him in all its length and breadth, and he must answer to it.

Now or never he must show that he was master.