CHAPTER VIII

WAR

I — 1914–1918

"THE Emperor, during the War, refused to face facts, and entrenched himself in optimism. . . . The contrast between the masterful personality which he tried to assume (and indeed was obliged to assume), and the absence of any real force of character, grew daily more glaring until the bitter end. It was his and Germany's misfortune that it could not be said of him as of his grandfather that he was no mere War-Lord, but a true soldier" (Freytag-Loringhoven, *Menschen und Bilder*, 276). This verdict from an aristocratic General epitomizes the Emperor's attitude throughout the War.

The selection of his commanders in the field was entirely his own. It was he who then urged on the excellent younger Moltke the command of an army of a million—a task which demanded nerves of iron, and accorded ill with a tendency either to shell-shock or humanitarianism, both of which afflicted Moltke. With the appointment he took over the Emperor's own plan of campaign, which had been unprotestingly acquiesced in by Schlieffen. It led, as we saw in Waldersee's account, to a great diminution of the Eastern Army for the Western—thus contravening old Moltke's scheme. For a moment chance seemed to be going to turn everything topsy-turvy. A misapprehension in London, whereby it was believed that France might remain neutral under an English guarantee, revealed the inflexible nature of warlike organizations even to lay-perceptions. "Then," said the Emperor to Moltke on 1st August, after this fallacious news had reached him, "we will simply advance in the East, with the whole Army!"

Moltke: "That is impossible, Your Majesty. An army of a million cannot be improvised. It would be nothing

but a rabble of undisciplined armed men, without a commissariat."

The Emperor, tartly: "Your uncle would have given me a different answer."

Moltke: "It is utterly impossible to advance except according to plan: strong in the West, weak in the East."

On this the Emperor wired to the King of England: For technical reasons the mobilization on two fronts ordered by me for this afternoon, which entails the advance already arranged for on the Eastern and Western frontiers, cannot now be countermanded. I hope France will not be uneasy." To tone down the inevitably menacing effect of an advance on the frontier, the Emperor then—at Bethmann's desire, and without consulting Moltke, who was present—gave orders to his aide-de-camp: "The Sixteenth Division at Trier will not be transferred to Luxembourg."

Moltke, who describes this scene, confesses: "I felt as if my heart would break. Here was yet another risk of complications in our advance. When I got home, I was like a broken man, and shed tears of despair. . . . I sat in my room, doing nothing, utterly dejected, until at eleven o'clock at night I was again summoned to His Majesty." The mistake had been cleared up; there was to be war with France; the advance was to be as arranged. "I have not been able to get over this experience. It was as though something in me had been irretrievably shaken. My confidence and self-reliance were destroyed."

From this account of a mistake which had no tangible results there is more to be learnt than from the report of a battle. The logic of the machine checkmates its constructor and makes him its slave; the war with France would inexorably have broken out, even if it had been really inhibited by England's guarantee, and despite the will to peace of both combatants (in so far as that existed in Paris)—and that because the artful mechanism of the advance must not be meddled with, and a million soldiers could not possibly confront another million on the frontier without a warlike incident of some sort. And simultane-

ously this narrative reveals the character of a Field-Marshal who, on the decisive day of his life, at the outbreak of the War for which he and his Army have been preparing for decades, sits for hours gloomy and inactive in his room, because international necessities have upset the arrangements for his advance—and yet, when publicly and personally ignored, has not the pluck to resign his office there and then.

Beside him stands an Emperor who indeed had ventured, in his youth, to contravene the fundamental principle of this advance, and therefore is to be regarded as an authority on the art of war—but who, now, when the bomb has exploded, betrays entire ignorance of the laws of his machine, and imagines it can make a sudden revolution which had never been provided for. But when the whole thing reveals itself as a mare's-nest, the Field-Marshal is a broken man—not because the war is after all to be on two fronts, but because for a moment it threatened to be on only one. His tears of despair were for the system overridden; and though we cannot but look upon a weeping Prussian General with some distaste, we can certainly understand his forebodings of the autocracy which the Supreme War-Lord was apparently going to exercise over his Chief of Staff.

It was not so, in the event. This event surprised those who knew the Emperor only from the outside—which means, the entire nation.

For twenty-six years he had accustomed his people to "our royal will and pleasure"; he had meddled in all departments of the national life, had prided himself on a personal authority which over-rode the Constitution. Now, free of the detested Houses, sole arbiter in all decisions of the War, invested with such power as none other in Europe possessed (for Tsar and Hapsburg were too weak or too old), now, when autocracy was the order of the day—*now* the Emperor would have none of it. With our recognition of this, the last link in the chain is forged—in the chain which from his childhood, from his princely youth, to the

days of November and the days of July, it has been the aim of this book to link up with the infirmity which was the source of every action of his life. In the stern hour which called for energy—and all his intimates had foretold it—the mainspring of his nervous temperament snapped, and he stopped dead.

"The Emperor," writes Ludendorff (*Kriegserinnerungen*, 203), "was Supreme War-Lord. Over Army and Navy his was the unquestioned power of command. The Army and Navy Chiefs were his subordinates. The Chief of Staff personally conducted operations in the field, but under His Majesty's orders. Vital decisions had to obtain the imperial sanction; the Chief of Staff did not possess supreme authority." Falkenhayn makes a similar statement; and Schwerdtfeger (S. 12), from whose masterly diagnosis we take the following quotations, repeatedly and emphatically declares that "the responsibility of the Sovereign was supreme, and as a consequence the whole extent of the various failures, or even the final defeat, is primarily attributable to him." And so says Hindenburg (*Aus meinem Leben*, 170): "On vital matters I interviewed the Emperor myself and besought, when necessary, the imperial sanction for our measures."

Thus omnipotent, the Emperor could have created his masterpiece—could have given daily and nightly consideration to the welfare of the Army, which was at once the welfare of the nation and his own interest; at a stroke he could have concentrated his lifelong craving for excitement on the single aim of learning war from war, of being the father of his troops. But scarce six months had passed before he was the prisoner of his own Headquarters; in two years all power of decision had left him.

At first, when he realized that instead of a resolute soldier he had, in Moltke, a tormented intellectual at his side, he did make an effort to assume command. But in Falkenhayn's time he was quick to abjure an active part. Ultimately he was not the commander, but the subordinate, of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, of whom the

first hypnotized him by a national reputation, the second by an iron will.

He was partly responsible for the result of the Battle of the Marne. That decrease in the Eastern Army which was the Emperor's, not Schlieffen's, idea, and which had been described as perilous by Waldersee fifteen years before, was quickly visited upon him by the irruption of the Russians. The President of East Prussia arrived at Headquarters, imploring aid. He demanded from the Emperor in person the despatch of two divisions, by which the Western advance was suddenly depleted, and the fatal gap in the flank of the Second Army created. Even the second and more determining cause of that defeat—the inadequate transmission of orders on the decisive 8th and 9th of September—can be traced to the position of Headquarters, which "by the Emperor's command" were in Luxembourg, and therefore too far behind the lines; this, entirely for the sake of personal safety from air-bombs, for resolute men there were urgently desirous of a more forward position.

Criticism of the Emperor became more rife than ever among his highest officers immediately the War began. So early as that August, Moltke calls it "heart-rending to see how entirely he fails to comprehend the gravity of the situation; already there is a certain 'Hooray!' sort of mood which I hate like hell." And during the Marne days: "The Emperor must go to France and be nearer the troops; he *must* be on enemy soil like his soldiers" (M. 388). Tirpitz writes, in the first winter: "I came home after seeing the Emperor, much depressed. . . . Imagine his grandfather in the same situation! . . . The chief mark of his character is that he will make no decision, take no responsibility. . . . Yesterday evening again, it was very dismal; the conversation dragged on interminably. The Emperor sees colossal victories in every direction, but I think it is only to allay his uneasiness. . . . The Staff-Surgeon says that the Emperor definitely begged to be relieved of his responsibility; but then he was brought up short by the

wall he has built around himself, and ran his head against his sense of personal dignity."

By 15th March it had gone so far that Tirpitz pointed out to a General in the entourage that the Emperor, for the sake of unity of command, would have to delegate his authority for some time—say, to Hindenburg. His anxiety increased: soon the Admiral was writing decidedly: "I see only *one* way out—the Emperor must give out that he is ill for eight weeks or more. He must go to Berlin to begin with. Kessel . . . too was in a fright about the Emperor, and suggested that the King of Bavaria should be persuaded to ask him to let it be supposed for some time that he was ill. If we could contrive it, it ought to come from himself—the Empress might help us there. . . . It seems as if only a still greater disaster would bring about any change in him, but then it would be too late." Had Tirpitz but shown himself so good a prophet about England as he did about this!

So—between fear and over-confidence, passive and yet not single-minded enough to delegate his authority, afraid of responsibility, afraid of that questioning look which more searchingly than in peace-time met him now in every eye—a civilian to the marrow, yet at the head of the strongest of all armies, lacking the soldier's virtues, and for that matter most of his effectual vices as well, oppressed by a tradition which had placed his fathers in the field, though not indeed as commanders—so did he live the life of camps, unsoldierly, aloof, wellnigh inactive, and with nothing in the last resort to stay him but an almost religious conviction of martyrdom, of being misunderstood by the world.

For when presently a chorus of hundreds of millions broke forth from every quarter of the globe, and exalted this unstable, pacifically-minded being into an Attila; when whole continents were snowed-under with caricatures and lampoons, of which even in his sheltered corner he must have had some inkling; when the walls around him crackled with the flaming maledictions of the universe . . . no wonder that so monstrous a misjudgment of his purpose

caused him to forget the errors which had made it what it was; and that, knowing himself no Attila, he never remembered that he had once commanded his troops to emulate the Huns.

Now and not till now, confronted by the terrible results of that eternal boyishness of his, the Emperor begins to show as a tragic figure; for what Nature had done to him in the hour of his birth, and what he was forced by the soldier-king tradition of his House to conceal throughout a lifetime under the uniform-coat, was fatality; it was not guilt.

2

But there was guilt in the self-indulgence which swayed those around him only to flattery and deception. It did not cease with danger, it grew worse. "An unexceptionable witness," writes Tirpitz, "the Staff-Surgeon, said lately that all three Cabinet-Chiefs blindly obeyed the Emperor in everything he said. . . . I have gone through two years of watching this aimless truckling; I have seen how . . . everyone looked only to 'Him,' confirming him in the belief that he alone was master, from whom so many good things were to be had. Byzantinism! And here we are, landed in a desperate war; and . . . yet they all keep a furtive eye on the Emperor, who is surrounded by triflers. . . . The Emperor sat there, filled up with news of victories —nothing else may be conveyed to him; and they talk, among other things, of 'a gigantic upheaval in India,' whereupon everyone sings Hosanna. . . . It may be that he purposely deceives himself."

"To keep up this mood," writes Count Stürgkh, Conrad's liaison-officer at German Head-quarters, and frequently the Emperor's guest, "he was told innumerable stories of the trenches, in which the German soldier always appeared in the best light towards the enemy. . . . When he visited the troops, care was taken that he got only the most favourable impressions." When Erzberger, coming from Rome in March 1915, was about to inform the Emperor

whether Italy would take the field or not, the aide-de-camp said pleadingly: "You won't tell His Majesty anything but good news, will you?" His own librarian's book, *Der Kaiser im Felde*, which told of nothing but motor-drives, luncheon-parties, addresses, decorations, and beaming looks, all in a tone of unpleasing adulation, the Emperor presented to Count Czernin and others, with his own inscription.

Remoteness inspired optimism. After the fall of Antwerp Tirpitz writes: "The Emperor of course in the rosiest of moods. . . . The cardinal point, that the garrison might have moved north, appeared to trouble him very little. . . . He is not a bit changed, and one cannot talk to him seriously at all, though I have tried." In this temper the allies got the same sort of treatment as the courtiers. After only three weeks of war he trod on Count Stürgkh's toes with the remark (*Im Deutschen Quartier*, 31): "Well, we're getting on at last, boys! Fritzie [the Archduke Friedrich] is actually to advance". Later he retailed to the same officer the opinion which his youngest son had brought back from a visit to the Austrian front—it was a biting criticism, after a short inspection, of commanders and officers. Though the Austrian regrettably confined himself to answering that the Prince knew very little about these officers' qualities, the Emperor took even this mild protest in bad part.

All these blunders were, in war as in peace, the outcome of the deceptive selection and presentation of news. "The Hydra"—Plessen, Müller, Treutler, whose portraits reveal their outlook on the universe—guarded the Emperor's pillow. "The orderly from Turkey was anxious to see His Majesty. but Plessen would not let him, saying His Majesty did not wish to hear anything more about Turkey just now." This little incident, recorded by Tirpitz in March 1915, is typical of a hundred more important; for in those very weeks everything depended on Turkey's holding-up Russian corn and powder. An early decision of the World-War might result from the fight in

the Dardanelles; and a conscientious War-Lord should have cross-examined this orderly (who ranked as an officer and had seen many things of import), thereby acquiring some knowledge of how things had stood in the critical quarter less than two days earlier.

What did he do instead of this? "The Emperor traces the progress of the war upon the maps. . . . The whole company around him," writes Tirpitz in July 1915, "gradually falls asleep." His activity lasted one hour daily. The German Army, the German nation, sixty millions, were achieving the impossible; thousands behind the Front were breaking down from overwork, tens of thousands gradually collapsing from exhaustion; what was done and endured at the Front it would be presumptuous to touch upon in these pages. The Emperor alone spent the morning (as all the memoirs testify) "mostly in reading reports and talking" in the garden, "to which he was obliged to confine his walks, by reason of the undeniable danger." Then an interview with the Chiefs of Staff from twelve to one; and of this Hindenburg has to say that, "Much of the time appointed for the submission of papers in the morning would perhaps be devoted as well to consultation with the leaders of the Government"—so that the Generals were in this way cut short for the politicians, all to get sooner rid of the work. At a critical conference with the Emperor at Pless in August 1915, when the question was: "America or no America," Tirpitz relates: "At our preliminary meeting we had all been of different minds, and papers were laid at once before the Emperor, who cut the time short because the waiting luncheon-table could be seen through the open folding-doors."

At table, in a room which seated no more than sixteen or twenty persons, things were extremely simple; in the hunger-years there were "only three courses with white or red wine, and afterwards cigars and beer." As guests who would have had personal experience of the scarcity in the land were ineligible, those who could be invited were

much struck by the simplicity of the imperial table; but as he always lived moderately himself, there was a good deal of pretence about all this self-denial. After lunch he would sleep, then take a walk—"either," reports Stürgkh (74) "in the charming neighbourhood [of Charleville] or to visit an old castle, of which there were many close by, or else to follow the great events of 1870 on the battlefield of Sedan, which was near at hand. It was the business of the entourage to discover a pretext for these excursions—something that would interest him and keep him in good spirits." Then supper, "guests on most evenings"; and conversation until eleven o'clock.

As in that convivial hour the most important news was apt to come in, Hindenburg had once for all excused himself from table; but it was then that the Emperor liked best to read the latest despatches, which he opened himself. "The disability in his left hand, which was to some extent paralysed, and like the left arm withered, made this somewhat difficult for him; so he used to manage by taking the despatch first in his right hand, then thrusting it between the fingers of his left, when he would break the envelope with the right, draw out the despatch, and unfold it."

Into this little scene we may read the entire symbolism of that tragic simulation of a soldier's life. Far off, there is a welter of heroism and horror, of human beings and inhuman things; five million Germans are fighting to save five-and-fifty: Behind the lines their Supreme War-Lord sits at table. After killing time upon a bygone field of battle while his people were being killed upon a new one, he now, after the fatigues of the day, sits with his boon-companions—cheery souls, or pretending to be so—who tell him anecdotes of heroism at the Front; and when the heliograph flashes fresh tidings, the poor disabled man must make shift with the acquired skill of a lifetime to open the reports which are to put new heart in him.

While in Brussels the German Command was requisitioning the brass handles and the weather-cocks and commandeering every scrap of copper—while millions of

German housewives were emptying their kitchens of the glittering utensils handed down to them through generations—the Emperor ordered from Belgian craftsmen a bath for the royal train in pure copper, to be made in the workshops of the Brussels State Railway. This can only have been at his own behest, considering that the bath was for his private use. Yes—they had long gone by, the days of the iron camp-bed wherein the old Emperor had sought repose after long hours of toil, and had found his final rest at last. His grandson, after thirty imperial manœuvres, in the course of which his bath and those of all his Princes had been "carted after" them by pioneers, could inhabit only villas and castles in time of war—and that was why Headquarters were always 200 kilometres behind the lines, and battles lost in consequence.

Sometimes he did go near his struggling people. "The Emperor himself," writes Stürgkh (114), not without admiration, "had been on the spot, following the fight at Soissons through a telescope. He was able to watch the operations of his artillery; he saw the enemy in flight and his own brave soldiers pressing forward; then he could extol them and their leaders, and deck their breasts with the Iron Cross." So the Most High had his compensations, after all; and even this Count, who always seems to see him crowned with stars, calls the pleasure he took in the distribution of decorations, "almost childish."

His detestation was England. His purely dynastic view of the War and its origins was very early, and very angrily, expressed; for when the Western advance began he was so furious at having fruitlessly wired in a pacific sense to his cousins, that he "frequently banged his fist on the dinner-table" (Stürgkh, 20). For him, writes Ballin (Huldermann, 297), the case stood thus: "He had been betrayed by his English relatives, and therefore had to fight with England to the bitter end." Even the extremely pacifist Empress was seen by Ballin later on "to cry with both hands clenched and lifted: 'Make peace with England? Never!'" The dynastic idea went so far as

solicitude for his enemy's person. To the Emperor it was an unwritten law that Kings by the Grace of God do not shoot at one another. And when the first air-bombs fell at Charleville, Tirpitz declares that the Emperor was furious. "Because now Buckingham Palace is not immune. He really believes in a tacit understanding between the monarchs to spare one another—a quaint sort of notion!"

This feeling about England led to decisions of vast import. Though some might have failed to perceive it in the earlier course of his reign, there could now be no mistake—the treatment of the Fleet by its Supreme War-Lord was the outcome of that old jealous, wounded sense of repulsed affection. A burning hatred, fomented by the idea of having been attacked and betrayed, would now have found its satisfaction in a swift assault; but the Emperor's jealousy flinched before the "emergency," his secret admiration of the greatest Sea Power made him regard a naval victory as impossible; from abysmal depths there rose a desire for that understanding after the fight, which before it he had perpetually obstructed; and in war he never played the card for whose sake he had in peace drawn down the enmity of England—the Fleet remained in harbour.

There stood Tirpitz, its creator, and had to see that verified which he had put forth as the pretext for his Fleet. It was not to be used for fighting, but as a material guarantee for negotiation—the World-War was to be an intermezzo for the Fleet. This was the punishment of Tirpitz the Story-Teller; for that he should now have desired to let loose at last his crews and his torpedoes, his cannons and his iron-plated vessels, and show what *his* armaments could do, is what no one can blame in a fighting-man. There he stood, and tried to persuade the Emperor; found that he could not, gave it up—and went.

"As a result of the war-news . . . I have for the present ordered a defensive attitude on the part of the High Sea Fleet," was the Emperor's command to Admiral von Pohl on the fifth day of mobilization. Pohl, Tirpitz, Ingenohl, made horrified protests against this order; but beside the

Emperor as Chief of the Cabinet sat Admiral von Müller, a smooth-tongued courtier, who was a total abstainer, a valetudinarian, artistic, effeminate, in that respect another Eulenburg—and who talked only of prudence, even of forbearance. " As against the English, the Commanders must await 'the Day' in patience. No forward action until I give orders for it. W." This, on the 30th day of August, was promulgated as Emperor's orders by Pohl; and Moltke " could not believe it possible." On the 4th of September: " Admiral Tirpitz informs me that he has not been able to persuade the Emperor to rescind his order, and that the Navy-Chief is not to take any decisive action without his instructions." At the same period Tirpitz writes: " It is the Emperor who has put the brake on Ingenohl. He won't take any risks with the Fleet. He wants to hold back until the winter, if not altogether. . . . All would be well if we only had an Iron Chancellor, and an 'Old Emperor.' " It was thus that the paladins expressed themselves.

For his passivity in the command of the war on land, whose leaders, plans, and camps he daily saw, he made up to himself by his determination to be Chief in the war on sea, from whose basis he was distant, whose daily fluctuating fortunes were made known to him by no submission of papers, but only very incompletely by telegrams. Thus from his remoteness he paralysed the action at sea, while in his proximity to the action on land he was far from an inspiring influence. For both these things the reasons were profoundly psychological; their results were the appointed fate of Germany.

" I will not have anyone between me and my Navy," said the Emperor; and to Müller: " I need no Chief; I can do this myself." In these reiterated refusals he betrayed, by the very words he used, how he regarded the Fleet as his creation, his own special sphere. That the clique of flatterers confirmed him in this view, poor Tirpitz could but lament. " Of course there were plenty of people on the spot to confirm the Supreme War-Lord in the illusion that

he was himself operating with the Fleet, by consulting him in the lesser actions even to the smallest details." By this insistent show of authority he soon prejudiced vital strategical and national questions. The suggestion made by Tirpitz in November 1914, to blockade England by U-boat warfare, was rejected by the Emperor; but possibly, after the War, he may have read the British Admiral Scott's report that at that time the blockade "would have meant an immediate collapse for England. In Scapa Flow we never knew, on any day, whether we should be alive next morning."

How it must have told upon the *morale* of the Navy when Ingenohl in December 1914 was obliged, despite the most favourable conditions for an engagement, to turn tail before an enemy squadron, and return to Wilhelmshafen! "The feeling," writes Admiral Scheer, "of having let slip an unusually good opportunity was not to be effaced; the likelihood of another such was scarcely on the cards." And Tirpitz says straight out: "On 16th December Ingenohl had the fate of Germany in his hands."

When later, in the Skager-Rack, Admiral Scheer wanted to sail out on the second day of battle, and everything was in his favour, the Emperor forbade a fresh advance. If the inclinations of Emperor and Admiral had been reversed, this would have meant a Court-martial for the latter. And even when Falkenhayn, pressed upon by English artillery at Verdun about this time, asked for the U-boat warfare as a method of defence, the Emperor refused his request. It was then that Tirpitz resigned. A few months later the U-boat warfare was decided on after all; Bethmann remained in office instead of going, but Tirpitz, instead of seizing the opportunity to return, stayed out.

With this *chassez-croisez* of his advisers the Emperor's first war-phase came to an end. In the second he completely abjured his authority.

3

The advent of Hindenburg and Ludendorff in the middle period of the War put an end to the political control of the Empire. If the Emperor had made a constitutional arrangement co-ordinating the civil and military authorities, the balance of power would have been preserved; but as he—a talker, not a doer—failed at every point, these two departments, everywhere and always antagonistic in time of war, were perpetually at odds, and there was no single over-ruling will to bring them to their bearings. From the throne, before which Chancellor and Generals bowed as before a deity whose word was law, the watchword "Silence!" fell with discouraging persistency.

Once more the cause lies evidently in the peculiar psychology of the man. The fear of his overwhelming adversary which had possessed him since the encirclement (that is, since 1909 or thereabouts), and simultaneously a shrinking from critical decisions, a vague premonition of the internal revolts which would follow on external defeats, fostered his tendency towards the defensive. But as for a lifetime he had confused activity with an offensive bearing, thereby keeping the civilized world on tenterhooks, he had no other conception of the defensive than a passive attitude, and was incapable of action when it included forbearance and patience. Hence a just political point of view led to the complete extinction of his influence, and the strong men did as they pleased.

Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, Bethmann and Helfferich, who at once foresaw from Bernstorff's agitated despatches on the unrestricted U-boat warfare that America would come in and ensure the defeat of Germany, nevertheless consented to the course urged on them by the despairing Generals. They did this on the contemptible pretext, pleaded by all unscrupulous and ambitious placemen, that the country stood in need of their services. As nobody besought them to remain, not even the monarch, they had themselves to vouch for their indispensability.

HINDENBURG, THE EMPEROR, AND LUDENDORFF

At Pless, on 10th January 1917, the Chancellor handed over the whole political authority of the Empire to a couple of Generals, who bore no responsibility for their actions.

The Emperor was all for the supremacy of the soldier in war-time. Bismarck (vol ii, chap. 23) had written: "The establishment and limitation of the ends to be obtained by war, and the advice thereon to be given to the sovereign, are and remain in war as before it, a political function; and the tenour of these decisions cannot be without its influence upon the conduct of the war." The Emperor wrote angrily upon a similar representation by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "Let this fallacy be instantly and publicly stamped out by the Wilhelmstrasse. . . . Politicians hold their tongues in war-time, until strategists permit them to speak!"

But now that Ludendorff was master of the Army and the Empire, the Emperor began to chafe under the fetters he had riveted on himself. The man whose "sergeant's face" he reviled among his intimates, he now felt to be more and more his despot, and so he was. The Emperor fled from him to the milder atmosphere of the Field-Marshal, though he was aware of the latter's subjection to the General. Under such a tyranny the last vestiges of his authority disappeared. "His Majesty," writes Hindenburg cautiously, "was usually content, at a submission of papers, to acquiesce in my arguments. I do not remember any difference of opinion with my War-Lord which was not removed during these interviews"; and the Crown Prince (*Erinnerungen*, 94) says still more emphatically: "During the War his self-suppression went so far as to be an almost complete abnegation of his personality with regard to the . . . measures taken by the Chief of Staff."

Along with this went a growing dread of hearing any bad news. Hence he opposed a passive resistance to Count Czernin (*Im Weltkriege*, 75) whose duty it was to lay some important matters before him, in the royal train. "He invited me into the dining-car for the first breakfast, and there we sat surrounded by about ten gentlemen, so

that there was no possibility of entering on a serious conversation. The meal had long been over, but the Emperor did not rise from table. I had several times—and the last time very explicitly—to beg him to let me speak to him in private, before he got up at last,—and then he brought in a gentleman from the Foreign Office, as if for protection against anticipated exigencies." This scene, which belongs to the January of 1917, bears witness to the collapse of his nervous system, which preceded the political breakdown.

When there was no longer any escape from seeing the representatives of his struggling people face-to-face, he was requested to meet them together with the party-leaders. On that evening William the Second saw a Social-Democratic member for the first time in his life. No one, least of all Ebert, could have imagined on this occasion that he was so soon to be the Emperor's successor. Bethmann had been relegated at last. The Supreme Command, in the person of Colonel Bauer (as he himself relates), had brought down the Chancellor directly the Government was threatened with democratization. Erzberger, at the same time, had obtained a majority for a peace by mutual agreement, but had firmly refused to consider a "guaranteed peace," as Ludendorff wished the offer to be phrased. It was in this temper that the people and the Crown were to meet. But what came of it?

"It is very satisfactory," said the Emperor to the assembled representatives, "that the Reichstag should desire a guaranteed peace! The word guarantee is excellent. . . . Guarantees mean this, that we are to deprive the enemy-forces of money, raw materials, gun-cotton, and oil, and transfer them from their pockets into our own. That is a really admirable word." "The listeners," writes Erzberger (*Erinnerungen*, 52), "were shocked to perceive that not only was the Emperor misinformed as to what they wanted, but that he was actually deriding them by these remarks."

Then the Emperor proceeded to unfold his own war-aims. "England will be disposed of in two or three months.

. . . My officers inform me that they never by any chance encounter an enemy-ship on the high seas nowadays. . . The Lower Danube will in time have to be diverted to the Black Sea—then the Danube-Commissioners will be high and dry. . . . At the end of the War we shall enter into a far-reaching agreement with France; and ultimately all Europe, under my leadership, will begin the real war with England—the Second Punic War." He added a pleasantry about the Balkan peoples, and uttered an aphorism on a victory of the Guards: "Where the Guards are, Democracy is not."

With this he laughingly closed the session, which he had entirely monopolized. "The consternation among us members," writes Erzberger, "got greater and greater. . . . Grey-haired deputies, who hitherto would have nothing to do with the parliamentary system, discussed it openly that evening."

Incapable in every sense of being the people's representative, he yet felt quite as alien to his powerful opponents in the Reichstag as to the two Generals; and now, secretly pining for Bethmann, in whose fall he had been forced to acquiesce, he stood completely alone between the two opposing forces. His intimates advised him against the appointment of Count Bernstorff, to which he was inclined; but Bülow, whom the Generals wanted. was even still, eight years after his departure the man guilty of high treason." So the Emperor, having obtained the Supreme Command's express permission, made some insignificant official his Imperial Chancellor; and after the swift downfall of that personage, forced the appointment on the aged Count Hertling. "The only solution," writes Schwerdtfeger (88), "would then have been for the Emperor to come into the foreground and undertake the Supreme Command himself, and that with a firm hand. The development of events positively called for some such authoritative concentration of the Supreme Command. . . . He remained in the background, gave the Command the utmost liberty of action, and himself relied increasingly on

his personal influence. . . . It was not the fault of the German people, but their disaster, that in the severest armed encounter in their history they had not a man at their head possessed of the qualities of Frederick the Great."

At the beginning of 1918 there was talk in the operations-section of arresting the Emperor. Even Hindenburg, always technically loyal, presented the following threatening ultimatum in a memorial of the 7th of January: " It is Your Majesty's supreme right to decide; but Your Majesty will not command true-hearted men who have loyally served Your Majesty and the Fatherland to take part, with your authority and in your name, in transactions which their inmost convictions assure them to be injurious to the Empire and the Crown. . . . I beg Your Majesty . . . to reflect before deciding." As this concerned the Peace of Brest-Litovsk, Hindenburg's authority was in no way endangered—he was a Field-Marshal, posing the question in a Cabinet-affair, a political affair, which the Chancellor should properly have been alone in handling. In his answer the Emperor explicitly took the part of an umpire in conflicts between the military and political administrations, and therewith not only constitutionally but personally, the whole responsibility for the events of the closing year of the War.

For all that, the two Generals forced him to dismiss his friend of many years and his Chief of Cabinet, as " preventing the Supreme Command from working with cheerful confidence"; and by his desire for an understanding with the enemy, " most seriously endangering the dignity of the Crown." The Emperor revealed all his impotence in a marginal comment which he wrote in those days on a Berlin article. " In the conditions now prevailing among us " (this ran), " it has come to pass that the equilibrium between political and military authority has been disturbed, and that the predominance—by its very nature the right one—of the Foreign Office in political questions can scarcely be said to exist." Beside this he wrote: " Because on both sides the Emperor is ignored."

For thirty years he had annotated the documents and cuttings with thousands and thousands of behests and menaces, with words of derision, of ill-will, of autocratic wilfulness—by turns clamant, insistent, satirical; and now what a confession of failure in eight words! Was not this the real abdication? He who stood as the cynosure of his people, of Europe, much reviled but more belauded; he who had never wearied of disturbing the face of the earth; who had written *Regis Voluntas*; who had exclaimed, "Here there is only one ruler, and that is Myself!" he without whom no great decision might be taken anywhere in the civilized world, before whom the Russian Minister was to stand with heels together—*he*, William the Second, ignored? Manipulated by his Ministers and his Generals, urged to dismiss his closest intimates, degraded into a decoration, only fit to hand out decorations?

It was even so. While the great Battle of the Marne in the West was still undecided, the sovereign, under the stress of his ennui, bestowed on Hindenburg the Iron Cross with the Crown in gold—only once before bestowed, instituted indeed to be bestowed on Blücher as a thank-offering for the victory at Belle-Alliance, when he assisted in the overthrow of Napoleon after twenty years of despotism. . . . Three days later the German onslaught was repulsed. But not until thousands more had been sacrificed, not until the final repulse on the 8th of August, did the Emperor realize the situation. "I quite see now," he said after Ludendorff's report (Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*, 43), "that we must strike a balance. . . . The War must be brought to an end. . . . I will expect you, gentlemen, at Spa within the next few days."

At the Session of 14th August at Spa, when the Crown Prince, the Chancellor, and the new Secretary-of-State Hintze were present, and when those very steps were declared to be necessary, for advocating which Kühlmann had been turned out of office, the Emperor said (White Book, *Vorgeschichte des Waffenstillstandes*): "There is too much unrest in the interior. . . . Moreover, our home-

reserves are of inferior calibre. . . . We might institute a Commission for Propaganda with the aim of reducing the enemy's confidence and enhancing that of the German people. Influential men, such as Ballin—but there should be some statesmen as well—might make stirring appeals. Adequately gifted men should be appointed to this Commission, not officials."

Now, when it might have been of service for the sovereign to carry his gift of eloquence from one German city to another, breathing that fire and flame with which of yore he had perturbed the halcyon days—now, and withal four years too late, he suddenly held forth about Commissions which like iron cranes were to uplift the sinking spirit of the nation. The "speech of warm good-will," which in 1890 he had demanded for his edicts from Bismarck, was now demanded in the form of "stirring appeals" from men unspecified, till then disdainfully regarded.

This address, however, was the beginning of the "new era." True, this time too the Emperor began with the customary demands for political power over his subjects, for the despatch of better cannon-fodder; but he began too by calling upon private persons instead of officials—for the first time his emphasis was laid upon capacity, not upon titles or blue blood. Is he contemptible or pathetic—this unstable, distracted spirit, hovering on the threshold of a new epoch, hearing the mighty door grind on its hinges, and hoping he may enter unassailed because compliant? At the latter end, this anti-democrat was like a miser who should seek to conciliate Heaven by little offerings before he dies.

What does a Supreme War-Lord do, when he sees the end approaching? Hurriedly he forsakes Head-quarters; goes, while by day and by night the most critical of situations arise, to Wilhelmshöhe—there to receive Ballin. As no one had anything helpful to suggest, they put forward the clever Jew—perhaps *he* would tell the Emperor how to act. The Emperor had long relied on him, and in the past had appeased his own anti-semitism by snubbing (as

he himself relates) a gentleman of his Court who protested, "But Ballin—!" with the retort: "Ballin a Jew? No such thing! Ballin is a Christian!"

But to-day, instead of their talking intimately as on other days, Ballin was unpleasantly surprised to find his visit described as one "for report," so that the new Cabinet-Chief might be present to keep an eye on him. For still these parasites obscured their sovereign's outlook with their chains of paper-roses. "It was infinitely difficult," writes Niemann in the Eulenburgian manner "to give the Emperor a clear idea of the situation without disturbing his mental equilibrium"; and when Ballin advised mediation through Wilson, "Herr von Berg adroitly interposed, and explained to me, when the Emperor had left us, that we must not make him too pessimistic. . . . The Emperor talked about a Second Punic War. . . . I thought he seemed very much misled, and in the arrogant mood which he affects in the presence of a third person. . . . The poor monarch is so humbugged that he has no idea how catastrophic things have become."

The equilibrium of a nation is disturbed, and it is justly pessimistic; but its Emperor must have sunshine even though the sun has long gone down. He must be sheltered from the thunder of the cannons; his equilibrium must not be disturbed, endangered by harsh truths; and when the independent private person, capable and trusted too, comes to him and would urge him to make a speedy end, the courtier adroitly interposes and lets his sovereign go on talking about the Second Punic War, his favourite theme through these four years. . . . Perhaps he was right; for when on 2nd September the English Tank-attacks resulted in imminent peril for Germany, the Emperor was so shattered by the news that he fell ill "not uncritically," and those around him feared that "his excitement and exhaustion might lead to a mental and physical collapse" Quite as in the Eulenburg year; only of less consequence, for, in the interval, excitement and exhaustion had reduced sixty millions of innocent people to a state of "collapse."

While at the Front a nation was fighting its last battle with traditional devotion, its Emperor sat in the picturesque background, where, according to his aide-de-camp (Niemann, 65), "all concerned did their best to distract the monarch's thoughts from the pressing anxieties of the day, and to start a discussion on some interesting artistic, scientific, or technical question. When the subject attracted the Emperor, and (as not seldom happened) impelled him to bring forth something from the positively inexhaustible store of his own experience, the long hours would go by like winking, and were a real refreshment to him." So at the end it was the same as it had been for thirty years—again he held forth "under the soft light of a standard-lamp." There, at Wilhelmshöhe, it seemed to him the fitting moment to uphold the candidature of a German Prince, his brother-in-law, for the throne of Finland. Three weeks of holiday had gone by, when the Emperor obeyed an urgent recall to Head-quarters.

On the way there, on 9th September, he made a speech at Essen, where he had never before made one—he addressed the men at Krupp's Works. They stood round him in a circle, 1,500 of them in the vestibule, the enemies of his long royal career, whom he hated more fiercely than they hated him, because it was he who must fear, not they. The Emperor, in his field-grey uniform, confronted them; vulnerable, but as yet unwounded, he spoke of the German nation. The atmosphere was stifling; there was no throne —only a tribune as for a demagogue. He spoke for half an hour. Would he, like Coriolanus, gain "their most sweet voices"?

"My dear friends of the Krupp Workshops!" ("Friends?" thought the men. "Since when?") "My friends, which of us has any hate in his heart? The Teuton knows not hatred. Hatred belongs to peoples who have the sense of inferiority. He who knows the temper of the Anglo-Saxons knows how unrelenting they can be." ("'Teutons'? What is all this?" thought the men.) "Last year I said: 'Boys, make no mistake—this war is

like no other; this is a long long fight for life!' " (" 'By *Christmas we'll be home!'* Didn't he say that four years ago?" thought the men. "Now he's going to pretend he foresaw all this.") "You will have read of the recent events in Moscow. The English Parliamentarians have tried to overthrow the ultra-democratic government which the Russian people have now begun to form, because that government, watchful of the national interests, wished to obtain for the nation that peace for which it clamours. But the Anglo-Saxon wants no peace as yet." (" And when did William the Second begin to be enthusiastic about Communists?" thought the men, grinning.)

"That is because he is out to win, and our enemies have the deepest respect for the German Army—so they are trying to foment disturbances in our land, that discouraging rumours may cause us to lose heart." (" Disturbance in the land?" growled the men. "That's a hit at us!") "Everyone who listens to such rumours is a traitor and worthy of condign punishment, whether he be noble or working-man. . To every single one of us his task is given—to you with your hammer, to you at your lathe, to me upon my throne!" (" Ho-ho!" thought the men, and smiled.) "We are at peace to-day with Russia and Roumania; Serbia and Montenegro are disposed of; only in the West are we still fighting, and is the good God going to forsake us at the last moment? . . . God be with us; and now farewell, good fellows!"

A heavy silence. The speech had lasted half an hour, but all it had produced was sullen criticism and furtive laughter. The orator's adjutant and adorer, Niemann, writes as an eye-witness (p. 80): "The intimate contact established at the beginning of the address was gradually lost. The men's faces were expressionless, and the more eloquent the Emperor became, the more apparent was the coolness. . . . We all felt that he had missed fire." For once something depended on his words, and that once the man missed fire. Why? Because William the Second lived aloof from his people. The men divined the coldness of

his heart, and he had scarce an inkling of their resentment.

After only a few days his restlessness drove him once more from Head-quarters—there were inspections, bestowals of decorations at Colmar, Kiel the Baltic Provinces. Suddenly arrived the news of Bulgaria s defection. He then returned to Head-quarters.

Came September 29, at Spa. Fully six weeks had gone by since the last political session in that room; and despite the Emperor's acknowledgment that they were at the end of their resources, those precious weeks had been thrown away, and could not now be retrieved. For four years they had wasted time in every direction; now, when all was over, it had to be hoarded—every day counted, as at the beginning. For as the number and value of the young American troops, who were now hammering at the fortress, increased with every day of those six weeks, so day by day dwindled the hope of deceiving the enemy with the fiction of a still unshaken German Army; and while the onslaught gathered force, the spirit behind the battlements sank lower and lower. The nation was wasted to the bone; it needed no internal shock—of itself it went to pieces.

Too late as always, but with secret tremors, the Emperor now read the earliest reports, couched in courtly euphemisms, of the unrest at the Front. The things said to each other by uselessly sacrificed men, out there—said for a year now in face of the gradually hardening resistance—he knew nothing of; he had heard but little of the mutiny of January 1918. Now all he learnt from his Generals was that here and there exhausted troops had met those returning to the Front with the cry: "Strike-breakers!" But a few such reports were enough to darken his soul with a fear which the world in arms against him had not hitherto instilled.

Thenceforth, through all the last six weeks, his gaze was exclusively fixed on his land and his subjects—not any more on the Front and the foe. The downfall of the Tsar had given his whole outlook, even his religious faith, a

staggering shock which he could parry only by remembering how his cousin *would* go in with that French Republic, despite his many warnings. All that kind of thing was inconceivable in Germany! Had he not just fraternized with the men at Krupp's? A few hundred misguided individuals could never get the upper-hand of millions of loyal subjects! It was inevitable that the Emperor should feel in this way—he who in these four years had known nothing of the temper either in the Army or at home; who was fed only with the official substitute for the truth, and whose egocentric nature never could submerge itself in the feelings of others.

And yet, from afar he did hear the low mutterings. It was time to yield. The session in the forenoon of that 29th of September began with the demand of both Generals for immediate overtures to the enemy both for an armistice and peace: "every hour of delay is perilous." This resolve, conditioned solely by the situation at the Front, not by Bulgaria's defection nor by unrest at home—this blow which was to fall upon the nation to-morrow or next day, was a "complete surprise" to the Ministers, even to the Emperor, as the Crown Prince testifies. But it did not dismay him. His eye was fixed on the interior only of his realm; and he requested the Foreign Secretary to describe the situation at home (Hintze's report of the Commission of Enquiry, p. 409).

Hintze, who had been only two months in Germany, pointed out that the Chancellor was expected that day with his report. The Emperor insisted, for this alone—this question of revolt—absorbed him. Then Hintze told all he knew, advised that "the threatened Revolution should be canalized," and said that one way to that end was a dictatorship. "Dictatorship—nonsense!" interrupted the Emperor. Thereupon Hintze suggested the alternative—an immediate democratization of the Government; this, in order that the blameless nation might share in the responsibility for a bad peace. "His Majesty listened to the statement with suppressed emotion, with kingly

dignity; and declared himself in favour of the programme suggested.

His attitude was logical. At the end of his career, the defeated sovereign demolishes his most cherished conception of his rank and influence, renounces the dictatorship at which he had incessantly snatched in the moment of its being actually a possibility, and admits into the ranks of Government the very men whose claims he had always laughed to scorn—real, live Socialists: and all this for fear of the masses who, as it now appeared were really venturing to make themselves felt. Half a century ago—and it was his grandfather who had stood as he stood now, and how had *he* argued? "I take my leave, and abdicate," he said to Herr von Bismarck-Schönhausen; it was September then as now, and in the Park at Babelsberg the leaves were yellow as here at Spa. He too had no will to fight, but he had the will to go—yet he had no war behind him, and (after waiting for it thirty years) had enjoyed his crown for barely two. His grandson, who for thirty years had governed with a hundred per cent. of his being and had ended by losing the World-War, was so faint-hearted that he proposed retreating step by step. Surrounded by swords and cannons, he was not tempted to a sally for life or death, such as Bismarck had obtained from his grandfather—but it is true that there was no one at Spa to look lightnings at him from under bushy brows.

To retreat step by step—that was his programme. When Hertling Berg, and Rodern came in the afternoon—the Foreign Secretary being unrepresented at this further conference over the fate of the Empire, "because no one asked me to go in with the rest of them" (Hintze, p. 410)—they calmed him down again; but laid before him a proclamation, dated for next morning, which ran: "It is my wish that the German people should take a more active part than heretofore in deciding the fate of the Fatherland. It is therefore My Pleasure that men who are supported by the confidence of the people should have a larger share in the rights and duties of the Government."

Issued two years earlier, this document might have led to endurable peace-terms, might have saved the dynasty. But even now it seemed premature to the Emperor; for after an hour and a half he sent for the waiting Foreign Secretary, who found him visibly relieved. "This Revolution-business hasn't gone so far, after all, the Chancellor tells me. So we can wait awhile about the new Government and the Peace. We'll stay here quietly in Spa for a fortnight, and think things over.

Hintze, dismayed, reminded him of the two Generals' demand for an immediate armistice, of their fear of a sudden collapse. "His Majesty listened quietly, but did not seem inclined to make up his mind just then, and turned to the door On the table lay the proclamation drawn up by the Imperial Chancery in His Majesty's name, for the 30th. I followed H.M. to the door and again said that the formation of a new Government was a preliminary condition of the armistice and the offer of peace. The Emperor turned, walked to the table, and signed the edict."

Thus cornered, the Emperor established German Democracy. In no scene of his life is his character so transparently revealed. For four years war had raged; on this day his tenacious Generals had for the first time declared it lost, and demanded an armistice from the Reichstag, without a day's delay. For four years his subjects, in Prussia and in Germany, had clamoured for the right to a voice in the decisions. For four years it had been refused them. To-day the people were admitted to a share in the government, not because they were ripe for it, but because the ruling class was bankrupt, and had every reason to believe it would do better with a democratic Germany than with the Generals who till now had dominated policy. A new Cabinet with Socialists was seen to be a condition for successful peace-overtures. A people in arms had been obliged to fight for bare existence, in order that at the appalling end they might snatch at a corner of the purple mantle which symbolized authority in this State. The man

in that purple mantle was obliged to grant what for thirty years he had refused. How did he go about it?

"This Revolution-business hasn't gone so far, after all; and we can wait a while about the new Government. We'll think it over during the next fortnight.' Had he got off? The door was there—who was going to force him to sign the paper? Besides, with that endless session it was nearly seven o'clock, and he had not changed for dinner. The Secretary-of-State barred the way, courteously indeed, but would not let him leave the room. He exhorted him once more—nay, he conjured him by the words of despair which had come from the Generals that day, and which seemed to have escaped the sovereign's memory. What was to be done? It was a dilemma—and perhaps it might exorcise the danger at home if one let the Socialist rascals nibble at the manger, for that was all they wanted.

So he turned, and signed for the new Germany, in a hurry to dress for dinner.