

CHAPTER XXII

THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY

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SOURCE READINGS: ROBINSON, *Readings*, Vol. II., Chapter XL., Sections 4-5 (Königgrätz, the Spanish episode, etc.); BUSCH, *Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of his History*; WHITMAN, *Personal Reminiscences of Prince Bismarck*; BISMARCK, *Reflections and Reminiscences*.

Prussia under
a cloud.

THE many heartrending failures of the year 1848 in Germany had at least made clear that Prussia was the pivot of German politics. The ensuing reaction spread a darkness over the land, but even in this situation it was felt to be a distinct advantage that Prussia had acquired a constitutional government. The unmanly conduct of the ministry during the crisis injured the reputation of the state and reduced its influence to nothing as long as the discredited Frederick William IV. occupied the throne. But, owing to symptoms of insanity, he retired from power in 1858 in favor of his brother William, who definitely became king on the demise of the sovereign in 1861.

The advent of William I. marks the beginning of a new era in Prussian history. Endowed, in sharp contrast to his romantic brother, with a matter-of-fact mind, he straightway took up an urgent practical reform. Having become convinced that the Prussian army was not what it ought to be, he resolved to make it more effective. He had in this connection no great plans for the future of Germany; he simply undertook the thing which lay immediately at hand. The Prussian army was a creation of the War of Liberation and was based on the principle of a universal three-year service with the colors. It was in the best sense of the word a popular army (*das Volk in Waffen*). In practice, however, many exemptions had been allowed, and the service had been reduced from three to two years. The king, a born soldier, saw that if he applied the system rigorously he would have not only a larger army, but also, owing to the longer drill, a more perfect machine. Plainly, the measure would necessitate a greater expenditure; but as the reform was reasonable and along the line of existing laws, William had no fear of Parliamentary opposition. He was mistaken. The Parliament disliked both the lengthened service and the increased expenditure; and after having voted the reform provisionally, refused definitely, in 1861, to sanction it. As the king, nevertheless, went ahead with the military reorganization, Prussia embarked upon a bitter and prolonged conflict between executive and Parliament, wherein the people for the most part enthusiastically supported their representatives.

Outvoted and discouraged, the king in 1862 called into his cabinet as prime minister the man who was destined not only to break the opposition of the Parliament, but also to bring about the unification of Germany. Otto von Bismarck was a Brandenburg squire of ancient lineage, who in the revolution of 1848 had fearlessly defended the royal pre-

William I.
and the re-
form of the
army.

Bismarck,
prime
minister.

rogative against the democratic innovators. He had since entered upon a diplomatic career, had served at Frankfort with the Bund, at St. Petersburg and Paris, and had acquired the true vision of the statesman. The programme with which he took power was to maintain the reorganized army at all costs, and use it, as soon as practicable, for the purpose of settling old scores with Austria.

Bismarck's
struggle with
the Parliament.

When he announced to the members of Parliament, with his habitual self-assurance, that the government had no idea of changing its army policy, a terrific storm was discharged upon his head. Not only the Parliament but the masses became more and more hostile, till the stubborn minister's name became a byword and a reproach. For a few months things went steadily from bad to worse, and the word revolution was already being whispered through the land, when there occurred a succession of events which gradually drew the public attention elsewhere, and ended by brilliantly justifying the king and his unyielding minister.

Schleswig and
Holstein break
away from
Denmark.

In the year 1863 occurred the long-expected death of Frederick VII. of Denmark, the last male of his line. He was succeeded, by virtue of the European agreement known as the Protocol of London, by his relative Christian IX., but the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, never having ratified the agreement, immediately proclaimed the duke of Augustenburg, who was, according to their view, the rightful heir. They coupled with the proclamation of the duke the announcement of their separation from Denmark, in order to unite with Germany. German public opinion, stirred to its depths, heartily supported the project.

Prussia and
Austria wage
war with
Denmark,
1864.

The Bund at Frankfort, anxious to curry popular favor, resolved to interfere in behalf of the Schleswig-Holsteiners, but before it could get well under way Bismarck pushed it aside by persuading Austria to settle the issue conjointly with Prussia. He had no faith in the ability of the Bund to

do anything effectively, and hence followed his own line of action. Christian IX. immediately upon his accession had signed a bill, passed by the Danish legislature, incorporating Schleswig, that is, the northernmost of the two provinces, with Denmark. This was contrary to the Protocol of London, which recognized Christian as king of Denmark on the understanding that he would respect the autonomy of the duchies. Prussia and Austria demanded that the new law be annulled, failing which they would declare war. When Christian remained obdurate, Prussian and Austrian troops, in January, 1864, entered the duchies side by side, and in a swift campaign brought Denmark to her knees. In August, Christian IX. ceded Schleswig and Holstein to the victors.

Now that Prussia and Austria possessed the duchies, the question was how to divide the spoils. Of course the division turned out, as Bismarck had foreseen, a difficult matter. And now the Prussian statesman could take a step toward the fulfilment of his most ardent hopes, which had long been aimed at the expulsion of Austria from Germany. While picking a quarrel with his late ally over the Schleswig-Holstein booty, he steadily prepared for war. Finally, in the spring of 1866, Prussia signed a close alliance with Italy, while Austria, for her part, strove to get the support of the smaller German states. And owing to the fact that Bismarck's policy of violence aroused in Germany a general fear of the Prussian plans, almost all the southern and central states now actually placed themselves under the wings of the older and more conservative German power.

Bismarck
quarrels with
Austria over
the division of
Schleswig-
Holstein.

These dispositions made—Prussia having secured the support of Italy, and Austria the alliance of Saxony, Hanover, and all the South German states—in June, 1866, the two apparently well-matched combatants took the field. The contest was the culmination of the rivalry inaugurated over

Meaning of
the war of
1866.

a hundred years ago at the time of Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa; the prize of the winner, the supremacy in Germany.

Although a part of the Prussian army had to be detached against the German allies of Austria, the Austrians, too, were hindered from complete concentration by the obligation of sending an army to Venetia to defend that province against the Italians. Weakened only by these subtractions, the Austrians and Prussians, massed in two great armies, made ready to meet each other in Bohemia. This meeting, it was evident, would decide the war.

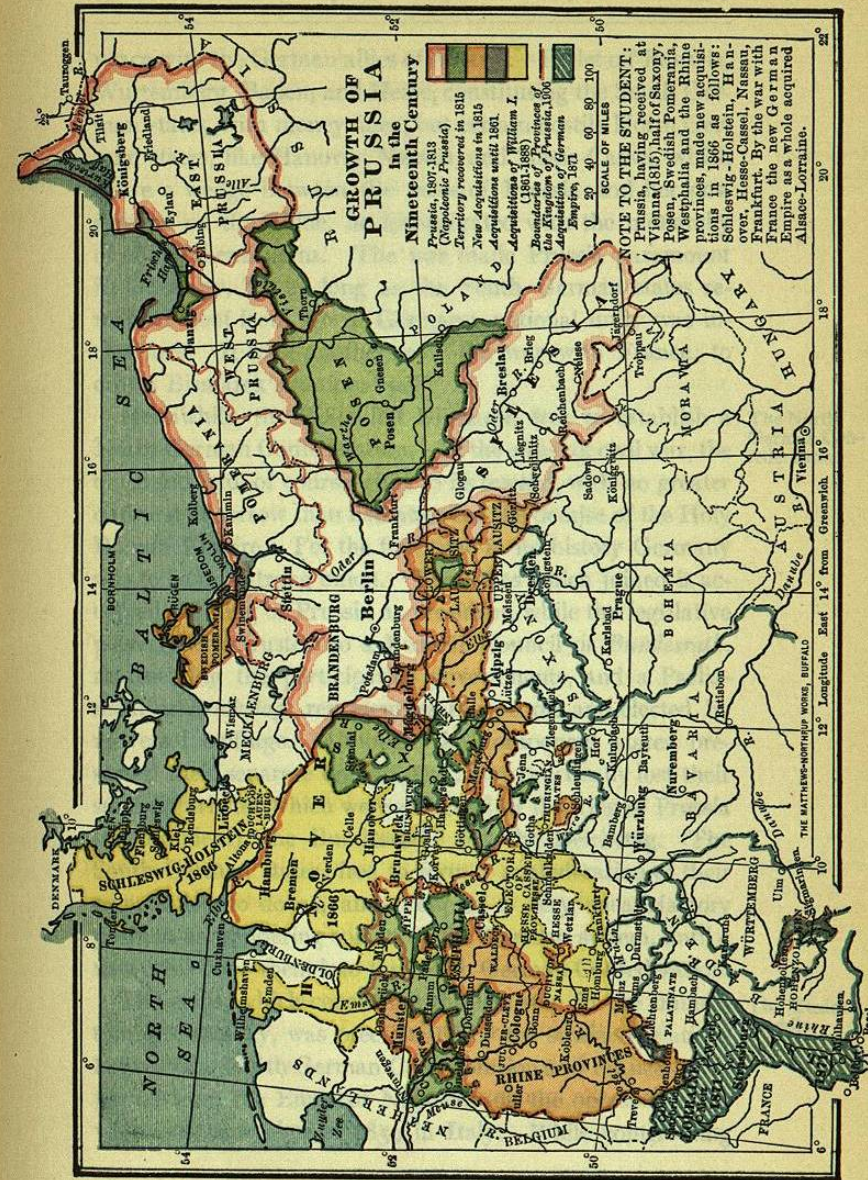
Now it was seen that King William's plan of a strong and modern army had its merits. The Prussians were ready sooner than the Austrians, and showed themselves to be much better armed and disciplined. By the admirable arrangements of the great strategist Moltke, three Prussian columns were made to converge upon the Austrians, and catching them at Sadowa, in Bohemia, on July 3d, as in a vice, crushed them utterly. The war had hardly begun when it was over. It was of little consequence that the Austrians in Italy defeated the Italians at Custozza, or that the Prussians completed their triumph by defeating the South Germans. Austria was humbled by Prussia, and had to make peace. A truce in July was followed in August, 1866, by the definitive Peace of Prague.

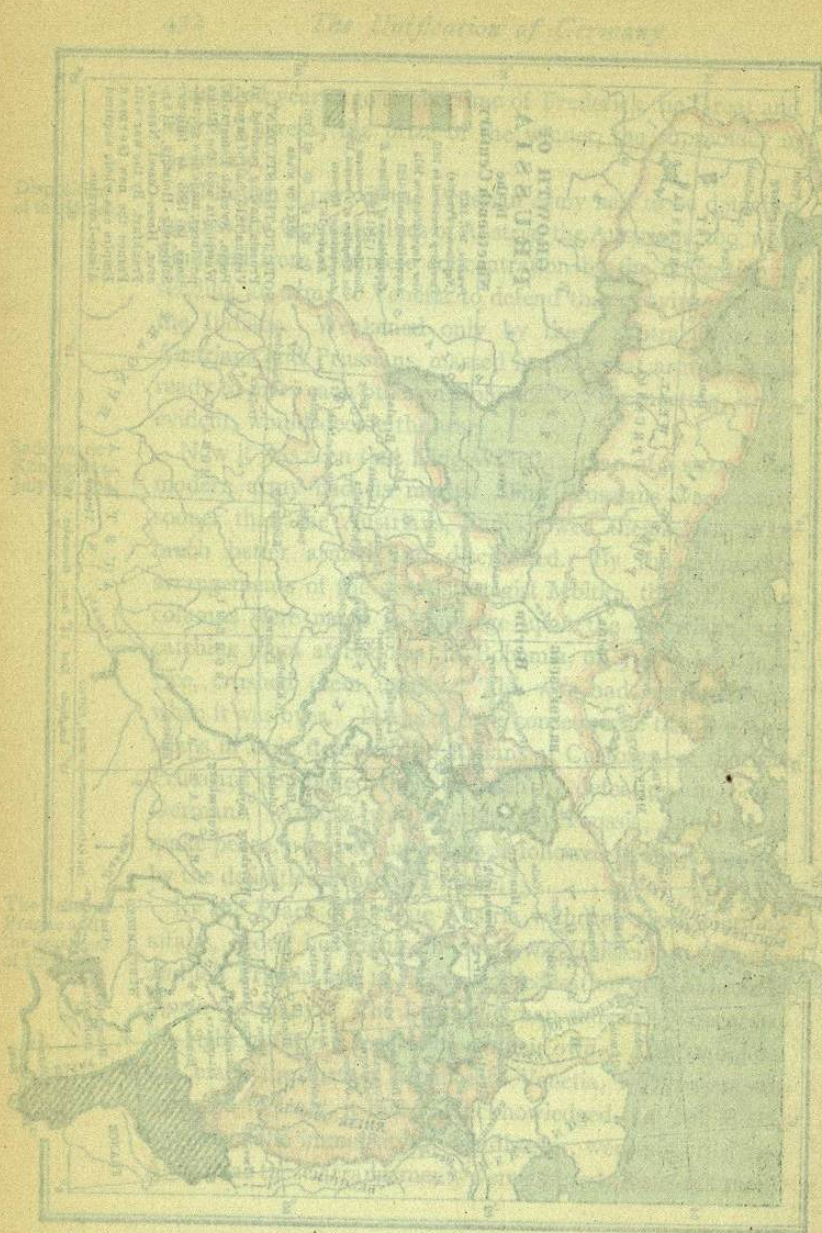
By the Peace of Prague Austria withdrew from German affairs, ceded her rights in Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia, and left Prussia free to form a confederation of the states of North Germany. The South German states were accorded the right to form a federation of their own. Although Austria made the further sacrifice of Venetia, which was surrendered to Italy, it must be acknowledged that her losses, in view of the immensity of her disaster, were not crushing. As soon as these arrangements were assured, Bismarck made

Disposition
of the forces.

Sadowa or
Königgrätz,
July 3, 1866.

The Peace of
Prague and
the greatness
of Prussia.





peace with the German allies of Austria. He let off Bavaria, Wurtemberg, Baden, and Hesse, constituting the South German states, with money fines; but certain hostile North German states, like Hanover, Nassau, and Hesse-Cassel, which drove a wedge between the mass of Prussia and her possessions on the Rhine, he incorporated with the monarchy of the Hohenzollerns. The war made Prussia paramount in Germany, but as long as the South German states remained aloof from North Germany, national unity was incomplete. It took another war, the war with France, to crown Bismarck's national policy.

Meanwhile, the Peace left Bismarck free to establish a North German Confederation. In the stress of civil war, the old Bund had, of course, gone to its reward, with no greater outburst of sorrow than had attended the demise of the Holy Roman Empire. For the first time in its history Germany was to have a strong union. The states which joined it accepted the king of Prussia as president, while the legislative power was intrusted to a Federal Council or *Bundesrath*, representing the participating governments, and a Parliament or *Reichstag*, representing the people and elected by universal suffrage. Although the component states preserved their separate organization, they practically lost their sovereign rights, which were exercised by the king of Prussia (as president), the Bundesrath, and the Reichstag. The South German states, free to form a confederation of their own, failed to do so, and occupied a very unsatisfactory position as wandering comets of the German system, until a new crisis drew them into the North German Confederation.

The crisis, which constitutes the last step in the unification of Germany, was precipitated by the strained relations between the North German Confederation and France. We parted from the Emperor Napoleon on the occasion of his victorious campaign of 1859 in Italy. While contributing

The North German Confederation.

The Mexican muddle.

immensely to the liberation of Italy, he had not failed to collect a small fee for services in the form of Nice and Savoy. The Italian campaign marks the last occasion on which his ventures prospered. Owing to his persistent occupation of Rome with French troops for the purpose of protecting the Pope, he sacrificed the good-will of the Italian nation, won upon the battlefield, and made himself almost as detested as the Austrians. Then in an evil hour he turned his desires upon the New World. He was induced to interfere in the internal affairs of Mexico, and proceeding from one measure to another ended by overturning the republic and setting up an empire under the Archduke Maximilian, brother of the emperor of Austria. His candidate landed in Mexico in 1864. The great American Civil War was just at its height, and the United States was too embarrassed to do more than register a weak protest against this violation of the Monroe Doctrine; but as soon as the Civil War was over the government at Washington gave Napoleon to understand that he must withdraw immediately. Napoleon shuffled awhile, but did not have the courage to face the consequences. The French sailed for Europe, and Maximilian, deserted by his allies, was captured and shot (1867). Thereupon the Mexicans reestablished their republic.

France grows
jealous of
Prussia.

The shame of this disgraceful ending was not the only hapless feature about the Mexican adventure, for, owing to the absence of the best French troops in the New World, Napoleon could exercise no influence on the issue of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Prussia won, established her supremacy in Germany, and refused France any sort of territorial equivalent. Napoleon's position was profoundly shaken. The French people were angry that the opportunity of the embarrassment of the German powers had not been used to realize that cherished dream, the Rhine boundary, and were offended because their eastern neighbor had

become strong and united. More and more passionately public opinion began to insist that the audacity of Prussia must be checked. Consequently, the relations of the two neighbors became gradually worse. A little incident sufficed to precipitate war.

In the year 1868 a revolution had occurred in Spain by which the Bourbon sovereign, Queen Isabella, was expelled. Ever since, the Spanish leaders had been looking about Europe for a new king, and finally offered the crown to Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a distant relative of the king of Prussia. The prospect of a German prince upon the Spanish throne greatly excited French opinion, and Napoleon hastened to protest. Prince Leopold's wise refusal of the crown quieted alarm, until, in an evil hour, it occurred to the French Government to insist that King William should promise never to permit his relative to become a candidate in the future. On July 13, 1870, the French ambassador made this unnecessary demand while William was taking the waters at Ems. He indignantly refused, scenting in the proposal an effort to humiliate him before the public opinion of Europe; whereupon Napoleon, aroused by the rebuff and moved by various court influences, persuaded the French legislature to declare war (July 19th).

The Spanish
incident.

The advantages in the struggle which now ensued were, from the beginning, with Prussia. The first success was achieved in connection with the South German states. Napoleon was hoping that they would, out of aversion for Prussia, side with him, but the far-seeing Bismarck had provided for just such an emergency. Immediately after the war of 1866 he had signed offensive and defensive treaties with the South German states, which obliged them to fight shoulder to shoulder with Prussia. Even without these alliances, however, the South German governments would not

The advantages are with
Prussia.

have remained neutral, for the people were aroused to explosive enthusiasm and insisted on regarding the cause of Prussia as that of all Germany. From a purely military point of view, too, the preliminary honors were all with the German side. Prussia and her allies were ready sooner, and mustered a larger and better-organized army. In consequence, the famous Moltke, who had the campaign in charge, could assume the offensive and invade France.

The early
German
victories.

The Germans found the French drawn up in two main bodies, one in Alsace under General MacMahon, the other in Lorraine, under Napoleon himself. A simultaneous attack on August 6th was crowned with a double victory, obliging MacMahon to abandon Alsace, and Napoleon to fall back on the great fortress of Metz. The combined German armies thereupon attacked the French around Metz, and by three bloody battles, culminating in the battle of Gravelotte (August 18th), succeeded in blocking the French retreat and bottling up the best French army in the chief fortress of the eastern frontier. Before the situation around Metz had become acute, Napoleon made his escape to the army of MacMahon, which he now tried to bring up, as fast as possible, to the relief of Metz. But he was ruinously defeated at Sedan and obliged to surrender with his whole army (September 2d). After a moving interview with King William he was sent to Germany as a prisoner of war.

The invest-
ments of Metz
and Paris.

Thus far the campaign had been admirably managed on the part of General Moltke. The war had hardly lasted a month, and already Napoleon, at the head of one of the French armies, had been captured, while the second French army, commanded by Bazaine, was locked up in Metz. Apparently, it remained only to march upon Paris and dictate terms of peace. Accordingly, a German army of 200,000 men proceeded westward, and toward the end of September undertook the investment of the French capital.

Meanwhile, important things had happened in the capital. The calamity of Sedan was hardly known when the whole city of Paris rose in indignation against the luckless imperial government. The Empress Eugénie fled in dismay amid scenes of wild disorder, and France was declared a republic (September 4th).¹ At the same time a number of men, the most prominent of whom was Gambetta, set up, for the purpose of effectively prosecuting the war, the Government of the National Defence.

The Third
Republic

The siege of Paris marks the last stage of the war. If the Germans entertained the hope of settling things in a few weeks, they were greatly mistaken. Gambetta, supported by the opinion of the country, made a most active and honorable resistance, but his raw levies were no match, in the long run, for the disciplined soldiers of the enemy. The surrender of Bazaine at Metz, on October 27th, withdrew from the war the last veteran army which France boasted, but still the Parisians held out, until forced by hunger they at last, on January 28, 1871, signed a capitulation. The war was over. France had to buy peace from Germany by paying an indemnity of one billion dollars, and by ceding Alsace and a part of Lorraine.² In March the Germans began the evacuation of the French territory.

Capitulation
of Paris fol-
lowed by
peace.

But it was not the old divided fatherland to which the German soldiers returned. The great victories won by the united efforts of north and south had aroused a boundless enthusiasm. In all circles the feeling prevailed that the present happy military union must take a constitutional form; and, yielding to this sentiment, the South German

King William
becomes Ger-
man emperor,
January 18,
1871.

¹ The republic of September 4th is known generally as the Third Republic. The First Republic was proclaimed in 1792 and destroyed by Napoleon in 1799; the Second Republic belongs to the period 1848-51; and the Third Republic, of 1870, the most long-lived of all, exists at this day (1906).

² The preliminary treaty, signed at Versailles, was in May, 1871, converted into the definitive Peace of Frankfort.

governments signed agreements with Prussia by which they entered the North German Confederation. It was further stipulated that the Confederation was to be rebaptized the German Empire, and that its president, the king of Prussia, should take the title German emperor. On January 18, 1871, the edifice of German unity was completed and the fact proclaimed to the world from the Hall of Mirrors in Louis XIV.'s sumptuous palace at Versailles. Bismarck, the architect of Germany, was raised to the rank of prince, and became the head of the national cabinet under the name of chancellor.

The Com-
mune.

France, in the month following the treaty with Germany, went through a terrible crisis. The peace had been authorized by an Assembly freely elected by the people and convened at Bordeaux. This body gave Thiers, a man of sound conservative views, the provisional executive authority, but, being largely composed of monarchists, refused to declare for a republic. In March, as soon as peace was assured, the Assembly removed to Versailles in order to be nearer Paris. Meanwhile, the strong republican element of Paris had become very suspicious of the conservative intentions of the Assembly, and presently a group of revolutionists, rising in insurrection, set up what purported to be a thoroughgoing democratic government, called the Commune. They terrorized the middle classes into submission and prepared to resist Thiers and the National Assembly, if necessary, by arms.

Victory of
the National
Assembly.

The result was a bitter civil war, lasting two months (March-May, 1871). Insurgent Paris was regularly besieged, this time by the national government of France. But the loyalty of the troops decided the issue, and in May the insurgents made their last stand in the heart of the capital. When resistance became useless, a few desperadoes attempted to set fire to Paris and actually succeeded in

destroying the Tuileries, the City Hall, and a few other historical structures. The exasperated victors knew no mercy. Thousands of men, called communists, but really representing every shade of democratic opinion, were shot without trial, thousands were transported or condemned to imprisonment with hard labor. The National Assembly became the unchallenged government of all France. How would it order the future of the country? The year which gave birth to a strong imperial government in Germany brought defeated and discouraged France to a point where her best friends might despair of her destiny.