CHAPTER XI.

SCHLESWIG AND HOLSTEIN.

EARLY in the spring of 1859, Bismarck was appointed ambassador to Russia. His labors were not arduous. Much of his time was devoted to the education of his three children, — one daughter and two sons. On the 2d of July, before his family had joined him in Petersburg, he wrote to his wife, —

"Half an hour ago, a courier awakened me with tidings of war and peace. Our politics are sliding more and more into the Austrian groove. If we fire one shot on the Rhine, the Italo-Austrian war is over: in place of it, we shall see a Prusso-French war, in which Austria, after we have taken the load from her shoulders, will assist, or assist so far as her own interests are concerned. That we should play a very victorious part, is scarcely to be conceded.

"Be it as God wills! It is, here below, always a question of time. Nations and men, folly and wisdom, war and peace, — they come like waves, and so depart; while the ocean remains. On this earth there is nothing but hypocrisy and jugglery; and whether this mass of flesh is to be torn off by fever, or by a cartridge, it must fall at last. Then the difference between a Prussian and an

Austrian, if of the same stature, will be so small, that it will be difficult to distinguish between them. Fools and wise men, as skeletons, look very much like one another. Specific patriotism we thus lose; but it would be desperate if we carried it into eternity."

That Bismarck possesses some warm human sympathies is evident from the following extracts from a letter of condolence to a friend who had lost a beloved child: —

"A greater sorrow could scarcely have befallen you, — to lose so charming and joyfully-growing a child, and with it to bury all the hopes which were to become the joys of your old age. Mourning cannot depart from you as long as you live in this world. This I feel with you in deeply painful sympathy. We are helpless in the mighty hand of God, and can do nothing but bow in humility under his behest.

"How do all the little cares and troubles which beset our daily lives vanish beside the iron advent of real misfortune! We should not depend on this world, or regard it as our home. Another twenty or thirty years, and we shall both have passed from the sorrows of this world. Our children will have arrived at our present position, and will find with astonishment that the life so freshly begun is going down hill."

On the 22d of May, 1862, Bismarck was appointed ambassador to Paris. Nothing of special interest seems to have occurred during his short mission there. He was now regarded by the liberals as the leader of the aristocratic, or Junker party as it was called. There was no one more bold and able than he in defence of the prerogatives of the nobility and of the crown. Greatly to the indignation of the democracy, the king, in the autumn of 1863, appointed Bismarck prime-minister. The

biographer of his life, who was in entire sympathy with his political views, writes, —

"When Bismarck arrived in Berlin, about the middle of September, 1862, he found opposed to him the party of progress, almost sure of victory, clashing onward like a charger with heavy spurs and sword, trampling upon every thing in its path, setting up new scandals every day, and acting in such a manner that the wiser chiefs of that party shook their very heads. Beside that party of progress, and partially governed and towed along by it, was the liberal party, possessed, with the exception of a minority, of an almost still greater dislike for Bismarck than was entertained by the progressists."

Having declared himself in favor of Italian unity, which would weaken Austria, the hostility of that power was strongly excited against him. He therefore entered into more friendly relations with France. His great object seemed now to be to unite all parties (aristocratic and democratic), to wrest from Austria the leadership of Germany, and to confer that leadership upon Prussia. He was fully aware that this great feat could not be accomplished without war. Repeatedly he said, "The all-important questions of the day are not to be settled by speeches and by votes, but by iron and blood."[1]

Bismarck complained bitterly that most of the German States were in sympathy with Austria, and stood out offensively against Prussia. One of the first acts of his administration was to enter into an alliance with Russia to suppress the Polish insurrection.

Upon the accession of William I. to the throne, Prussia consisted of a territory of 24,464 square miles; being

[1] Life of Bismarck, p. 340.

but about half as large as the State of New York. It contained a population of but little more than eight millions. The kingdom was composed of eight provinces, two of which, Prussia and Posen, did not belong to the German Confederacy.[1]

Adjoining Prussia, on the north-west, there were two small duchies, — Schleswig and Holstein. Bounded on the north-west by the German Ocean, and on the north-east by the Baltic Sea, with the River Elbe at their base, they presented unusual facilities for commerce. Their united population was about a million.

These duchies were a part of the dominion of the King of Denmark, though under a different law of succession from that of the crown. For some time, both of the duchies had been under one ruler, — Duke Frederick. The title was hereditary. Upon the death of Frederick VII. of Denmark, his successor on the throne, Christian IX., claimed the dukedom of the two duchies. On the other hand, the reigning duke, Frederick, claimed it. Though the two duchies were inseparably connected, one of them, Schleswig, belonged to the Germanic Confederation; and the other, Holstein, did not: but, as one belonged to the confederation, the contested claim to the dukedom became a German question. The inhabitants of the duchies were, with great apparent unanimity, in favor of Duke Frederick, and opposed to the claims of Denmark. In view of this difficulty, the Danish government had secured a treaty, on the 2d of May, 1862, to which Austria, Prussia, France, Russia, and England were parties, guaranteeing the integrity of the Danish monarchy. Thus all Europe became involved in the controversy.

[1] American Annual Cyclopædia, 1867.

England was somewhat embarrassed in her action. Victoria's daughter had married the Crown Prince of Prussia, and thus was destined to be the queen of that kingdom. The eldest son of Victoria, the Prince of Wales, had married a daughter of the King of Denmark: thus this Danish princess was prospective Queen of England. This intimate family relationship between the British court and both Prussia and Denmark greatly embarrassed the court of St. James in its action.

Prussia and Austria, as members of the Germanic Confederation, espoused the claims of Frederick to the duchies. Notwithstanding their treaty obligations, they furnished military aid to wrest the duchies from the King of Denmark. England, embarrassed by her matrimonial connections, stood aloof. None of the other minor powers ventured to intervene. Thus, after a brief struggle, Schleswig and Holstein were wrested from Denmark, and were declared to be independent of the Danish crown.

This was Bismarck's first step in his very shrewd and successful intrigue. Immediately three new claimants appeared, demanding the duchies by the right of inheritance: these were the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, the Prince of Hesse, and, to the surprise of all Europe, William I., King of Prussia. Thus, including Duke Frederick and the King of Denmark, there were five claimants.

All Europe was at this time in a state of great agitation. Poland was in insurrection. There was, manifestly, a conflict arising between Prussia and Austria in reference to supremacy in Germany. Italy, triumphant (with the aid of France) at Solferino, and having thus attained almost entire unity, was gathering its forces for the conquest of the Papal States and for the liberation

of Venetia; and France was clamorous for the possession of her ancient boundary of the Rhine.

Under these circumstances, the Emperor of the French adopted the extraordinary measure of addressing the following circular to all the crowned heads in Europe. It was dated

"PALACE OF THE TUILERIES, Nov. 4, 1863

"In presence of events which every day arise, and become urgent, I deem it indispensable to express myself, without reserve, to the sovereigns to whom the destinies of peoples are confided.

"Whenever severe shocks have shaken the bases and displaced the limits of States, solemn transactions have taken place to arrange new elements, and to consecrate, by revision, the accomplished transformations. Such was the object of the Treaty of Westphalia in the seventeenth century, and of the negotiations of Vienna in 1815. It is on this latter foundation that now reposes the political edifice of Europe; and yet, you are aware, it is crumbling away on all sides.

"If the situation of the different countries be attentively considered, it is impossible not to admit that the treaties of Vienna, upon almost all points, are destroyed, modified, misunderstood, or menaced: hence duties without rule, rights without title, and pretensions without restraint. The danger is so much the more formidable, because the improvements brought about by civilization, which have bound nations together by the identity of material interests, would render war more destructive.

"This is a subject for serious reflection. Let us not wait, before deciding on our course, for sudden and irresistible events to disturb our judgment, and carry us away, despite ourselves, in opposite directions.

"I therefore propose to you to regulate the present, and secure the future, in a congress.

"Called to the throne by Providence and the will of the French people, but trained in the school of adversity, it is, perhaps, less permitted to me than to any other to ignore the rights of sovereigns and the legitimate aspirations of the people.

"Therefore I am ready, without any preconceived system, to bring to an international council the spirit of moderation and justice, — the usual portion of those who have endured so many various trials.

"If I take the initiative in such an overture, I do not yield to an impulse of vanity; but, as I am the sovereign to whom ambitious projects are most attributed, I have it at heart to prove by this frank and loyal step that my sole object is to arrive, without a shock, at the pacification of Europe. If this proposition be favorably received, I pray you to accept Paris as the place of meeting.

"In case the princes, allies, and friends of France, should think proper to heighten by their presence the authority of the deliberations, I shall be proud to offer them my cordial hospitality. Europe would see, perhaps, some advantage in the capital, from which the signal for subversion has so often been given, becoming the seat of the conferences destined to lay the basis of a general pacification.

"I seize this occasion, &c.,

"NAPOLEON."

In the speech which the emperor made the next day at the opening of the Legislative Corps, he said, —

"The treaties of 1815 have ceased to exist. The force of events has overthrown them, or tends to overthrow them, almost everywhere. They have been broken in Greece, in Belgium, in France, in Italy, and upon the Danube. Germany is in agitation to change them; England has generally modified them by the cession of the Ionian Islands; and Russia tramples them under foot at Warsaw.

"In the midst of these successive violations of the fundamental European pact, ardent passions are excited. In the south, as in the north, powerful interests demand a solution. What, then, can be more legitimate or more useful than to invite the powers of Europe to a congress, in which self-interest and resistance would disappear before a supreme arbitration? What can be more conformed to the ideas of the time, to the wishes of the greater number, than to speak to the conscience and the reason of the statesmen of every country, and say to them, —

"'Have not the prejudices and the rancor which divide us lasted long enough? Shall the jealous rivalry of the great powers unceasingly impede the progress of civilization? Are we still to maintain mutual distrust by exaggerated armaments? Must our most precious resources be indefinitely exhausted by a vain display of our forces? Must we eternally maintain a state of things which is neither peace with its security, nor war with its fortunate chances?

"'Let us no longer attach a fictitious importance to the subversive spirit of extreme parties, by opposing ourselves, on narrow calculations, to the legitimate aspirations of peoples. Let us have the courage to substitute for a state of things sickly and precarious a situation solid and regular, should it even cost us sacrifices. Let us meet without preconceived opinions, without exclu-

sive ambition, animated by the single thought of establishing an order of things founded, for the future, on the well-understood interests of sovereigns and peoples.'

"This appeal, I am happy to believe, will be listened to by all. A refusal would suggest secret projects, which shun the light. But, even should the proposal not be unanimously agreed to, it would secure the immense advantage of having pointed out to Europe where the danger lies, and where is safety. Two paths are open: the one conducts to progress by conciliation and peace; the other, sooner or later, leads fatally to war, from obstinacy in maintaining a course which sinks beneath us.

"Such is the language, gentlemen, which I propose to address to Europe. Approved by you, sanctioned by public assent, it cannot fail to be listened to, since I speak in the name of France."

The address of the Emperor of the French was sent to all the crowned heads in Europe, — fifteen in number. England declined the proposal. In a letter from Earl Russell, dated Nov. 28, 1863, it was stated, —

"Not being able to discern the likelihood of those beneficial consequences which the Emperor of the French promised himself when proposing a congress, her Majesty's government, following their own strong convictions, after mature deliberation, feel themselves unable to accept his imperial Majesty's invitation." [1]

Austria, following the lead of England, without positively declining, did not accept, the proposal. The emperor stated that the treaties of 1815 were still regarded by Austria as the public law of Europe, and asked several questions, strangely assuming that it depended upon France, and not upon the congress, to decide what measures should be discussed.

[1] "The reception of the proposal of the emperor, in England, was generally unfavorable. England could not expect any territorial aggrandizement from the congress, but only the loss of her European dependencies, and, in particular, Gibraltar. The press, almost unanimously, discouraged a participation in the congress." — *American Annual Cyclopædia*, 1863, p. 390.

Alexander of Russia cordially acceded to the proposal. In his reply, he said, "My most ardent desire is to spare my people sacrifices which their patriotism accepts, but from which their prosperity suffers. Nothing could better hasten this moment than a general settlement of the questions which agitate Europe. A loyal understanding between the sovereigns has always appeared desirable to me. I should be happy if the proposition emitted by your Majesty were to lead to it."

All the other crowned heads accepted the proposal with much cordiality. Victor Emanuel of Italy wrote, "I adhere with pleasure to the proposal of your Majesty. My concurrence, and that of my people, are assured to the realization of this project, which will mark a great progress in the history of mankind." Louis I., King of Portugal, who had married one of the daughters of Victor Emanuel, wrote, "A congress before war, with the view of averting war, is, in my opinion, a noble thought of progress. Whatever may be the issue, to France will always belong the glory of having laid the foundation of this new and highly philosophical principle."

The youthful King of Greece, George I., who was the second son of the King of Denmark, and consequently brother to the wife of the Prince of Wales, wrote, "This appeal to conciliation, which your Majesty has just made in the interests of European order, has been inspired by views too generous and too elevated not to find in me the most sympathetic reception. The noble

thought which predominates therein could not be better enhanced than by the frank language and the judicious considerations with which your Majesty has accompanied your proposition."

In a similar strain, the kings of Belgium, of the Netherlands, of Denmark, of Bavaria, Saxony, Wurtemberg, and Hanover, expressed their approval of the congress. The Pope was prompt in his acceptance. Even the Sultan of Turkey gave in his adhesion to the plan, saying that he should be glad to attend the congress in person, if the other sovereigns would do the same. The Swiss Confederation replied, "We can only, therefore, accept with eagerness the overture your Majesty has deigned to make."

It was regarded as essential to the plan, that there should be a *general* congress; that *all* the leading powers should unite. If any should refuse to join, they would also refuse to be bound by the decisions of the congress: thus the refusal of two such leading powers as England and Austria thwarted the measure.

After all the replies were received, the French minister, M. Drouyn de Lhuys, in the name of the French Government, issued another circular to the European courts, with a summary of the responses, and giving the following as the result: —

"The refusal of England has, unfortunately, rendered impossible the first result we had hoped for from the appeal of the emperor to Europe. There now remains the second hypothesis, — the *limited* congress. Its realization depends upon the will of the sovereigns. After the refusal of the British cabinet, we might consider our duty accomplished, and henceforth, in the events which may arise, only take into account our own convenience

and our own particular interests; but we prefer to recognize the favorable dispositions which have been displayed toward us, and to remind the sovereigns who have associated themselves with our intentions that we are ready to enter frankly with them upon the path of a common understanding."

The Emperor of the French was much disappointed at this result. In a letter written soon after to the Archbishop of Rouen, dated Jan. 14, 1864, he wrote, —

"You are right in saying that the honors of the world are heavy burdens which Providence imposes upon us. Thus I often ask myself if good fortune has not as many tribulations as adversity. But, in both cases, our guide and support is faith, — religious faith and political faith; that is to say, confidence in God, and the consciousness of a mission to accomplish."

In the mean time, Count Bismarck had submitted to the syndics of the crown of Prussia at Berlin the question of the legal title to the sovereignty of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. After several conferences, these legal gentlemen decided that the King of Denmark *had been* the legitimate heir, but that the duchies *now* belonged, by right of conquest, to Austria and Prussia.

This curious decision, it is said, was brought about by the diplomatic skill of Count Bismarck. Until this time, Austria had never laid any claim whatever to the duchies. Francis Joseph was as much surprised as he was gratified to learn that one-half of the sovereignty of the duchies enured to him. As, however, the duchies were at a great distance from Austria, and consequently of but little value to that kingdom, Count Bismarck supposed that Francis Joseph would sell, for a consideration, his share of the sovereignty. Prussia, accordingly,

offered Austria sixty millions of dollars for the relinquishment of her title.

Austria refused: she would only consent that Prussia should, for the present, hold Schleswig, while Austria should hold Holstein. This agreement was entered into at what was called the Convention of Gastein, which was held in August, 1869. Both France and England announced in diplomatic notes their dissatisfaction with this arrangement. Austria appointed Marshal von Gablenz governor of her newly-acquired province of Holstein. Prussia appointed Gen. von Manteuffel governor of Schleswig. The duchies were quite dissatisfied with this arrangement. A large majority of the people in both duchies sent memorials to the federal diet, protesting against the division of the duchies, and demanding the recognition of Duke Frederick. These remonstrances of the people were of no avail.

Count Bismarck, having thus annexed Schleswig to the Prussian crown, now turned his attention to the acquisition of Holstein. The agitations in other parts of Europe greatly favored his plans. The Prussian army was placed on a war-footing. Negotiations were opened with Victor Emanuel in Italy, stating, that if, while Prussia should attack Austria upon the north, Italy should assail Austria from the south, Venetia could be wrested from her grasp, and re-annexed to Italy. "If you will help us gain Holstein," said Prussia, "we will help you gain Venetia."

Having thus made all his arrangements, Count Bismarck demanded the surrender of Holstein. The reason assigned for this demand was as follows: —

"King William I. is grievously affected to see developed under the ægis of Austria tendencies revolutionary,

and hostile to all the thrones. He therefore declares that friendly relations no longer exist between Prussia and Austria."

This astonishing declaration, that Austria was allowing too much popular freedom in Holstein, was soon followed by another, in which it was declared that the repose of Prussia rendered it necessary that the government should pursue with firmness the annexation of both of the duchies, so desirable in all points of view.

Still this was not a positive declaration of war. Austria inquired of Prussia if she intended to break the treaties of the Convention of Gastein.

"No!" was the characteristic response; "but, if we had that intention, we should tell you we had not."

It seems to have been an avowed principle in European diplomacy, that sincerity was a virtue not to be expected in the intercourse of cabinets. In one of Bismarck's letters, dated Frankfort, May 18, 1851, he writes, —

"I am making enormous progress in the art of saying nothing in a great many words. I write reports of many sheets, which read as tersely and roundly as leading articles; and if Manteuffel can say what there is in them, after he has read them, he can do more than I can." [1]

[1] Life of Bismarck, p. 228.