## CHAPTER V.

### *PRINCE BISMARCK'S CHARACTER.*

PRINCE BISMARCK'S character presents the most striking contrasts: he is at once abrupt, haughty, and familiar.

Whenever he is resisted he is stubborn, and almost always insulting. There are plenty of examples in proof of this. If the reader is desirous of satisfying himself on this score, all that he need do is to read one of his speeches in the Reichstag in reply to Richter or Windhorst, or indeed to any of the Socialist Deputies. In these speeches the reader will find such expressions as "You are a liar" by the dozen, and a host of other amiable compliments of the same nature

King Frederick William IV., however,



knew the man well. In the month of November 1849, the overthrow of the Radowitz Ministry was on the cards; everything was prepared for it, and a list of the new Cabinet was even drawn up, and on this list the name of Herr von Bismarck-Schönhausen appeared. It was presented to the King, but his Majesty refused to accept it; he drew a very thick mark through Bismarck's name, and wrote opposite it in the margin: "Red-hot reactionary; likes the smell of blood; may be employed later on."

It is noted in the foregoing lines that Bismarck is insulting towards those who resist him. This is true not only in regard to his inferiors, but also to his superiors. Here is an incident narrated of him *à propos* of the battle of Königgrätz.

When the Austrian troops began to give way, the Germans rushed impetuously forward, their leaders at their head, King William being in the very front rank, and his Prime Minister by his side. The

Austrian artillery, to cover the retreat of their troops, then began to shower upon the Prussians a perfect storm of bomb-shells, and at one moment the King was on the point of being carried away by the retreating Austrians; it was observed, too, that his Majesty was in the thickest of the mêlée, and that he ran great risk of being knocked over by a bullet.

At this juncture Bismarck approached him, and respectfully intimated that his Majesty was uselessly exposing himself. The King is said to have replied: "When my army is under fire it is my duty to be in the midst of it, for I am its Commander-in-Chief."

Bismarck bowed, without saying another word; but a moment or two later, on some shells bursting under the horses of the King's escort, he went up again to his Majesty and said:—

"As a Major, of course I have no military advice to offer your Majesty; but as President of the Ministerial Council, responsible



to the Prussian people for your Majesty's safety, I must beg—*earnestly* beg your Majesty not to risk your life in that way."

The King thought proper to follow this advice, and, nodding his head in token of acquiescence, faced about in order to reach a less exposed position in the rear. Bismarck, of course, kept near his Majesty, and deeming that the King's horse was not going fast enough, he took his foot from the stirrup and struck his spur into the King's horse's flank, and the animal at once bounded off at a gallop.

The whole character of the man is manifest in this stroke of the spur.

Dr. Schweninger (as will be seen further on) is one of the few persons who ever dared to resist the Iron Chancellor. It was to the great man's profit though, for after a year of the doctor's treatment his weight was reduced to two hundred and thirty-seven pounds, and it became further reduced as the years went on.

As regards the doctor himself, he remained attached to the person of his illustrious patient, who got him appointed Professor at the Berlin University, and caused him to be decorated a little time ago.

Another indication of the character of the man is to be found in the judgments he has formed of the leaders of the different groups in the German Parliament. The following are some of them:—

EUGÈNE RICHTER.

"As soon as Richter gets up to speak I leave the Chamber; not because I don't think myself capable of replying to his speeches, but because the odour of opposition which exhales from his whole person has a peculiar effect upon my nerves, and also because he has a way of answering a rude remark by the grossest insults. As for what he has to say, I treat it with the greatest contempt; I shall not convert him, and he will not crush me. It is better, then, that we should admire each other at a distance."



VIRCHOW.

"If this man does not take better care of Statesmen than he does of the State itself, it would be very imprudent to trust oneself in his hands."

BAMBERGER.

"In his house it is as is written in the Epistle to the Romans—there is 'one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour.' I have never made a mistake in using his vessels, although a *maitrank* bowl of his is often as much like a soup-tureen or any other utensil. What is the use of getting into a passion if the bottle breaks as soon as it is empty?"

The ex-Chancellor has always had, or at any rate has always pretended that he had, a deep-seated aversion for the Latin characters, either printed or written. When, therefore, he has happened to receive a telegram printed by the Hughes apparatus,

one of his clerks has had to re-copy it in Gothic characters before he would look at it—but, be it observed, without translating it. This, of course, produces a strange effect—a French or English message written in German characters!

At all periods of his life Bismarck has been noted for his haughty bearing, not only to his subordinates, but also towards his chiefs. This will already have been seen from what is written in the foregoing pages. But in order that these assertions may not be doubted, several corroborative examples are recorded in the following lines.

He has never tolerated that anyone should be wanting in the respect which he considered due to him. When he was a mere supernumerary, he was one day treated in a somewhat off-handed manner by the president of some association or other who met him in society. Bismarck told him to his face, firmly but politely :—

WILLIAM I.,
LATE EMPEROR OF GERMANY.

"In society, sir, Herr von Bismarck is just as good as the President von X——."

It is said that the president did not relish the remark.

Bismarck being one day in the office of a higher Minister, the latter went to the window and imitated piano-playing with his fingers on the glass—his intention, no doubt, was to make it appear that he was oblivious of the other's presence.

Bismarck immediately went to another window, and played with his fingers on the panes, and when the chief heard the tapping he appears to have become more polite.

In the month of May 1851, he had been appointed First Secretary of the Prussian Embassy accredited to the Federal Diet. His first care on arriving at his post was to go and pay his respects to the Austrian Ambassador, Count von Thun-Hohenstein. This nobleman received Bismarck with that easy nonchalance which the Austrians always

affected at that time when they came in contact with Prussians. Keeping his cigar in his mouth, he did not so much as offer his visitor a chair. Although Bismarck was wounded to the quick by this, as it seemed, studied want of politeness, nevertheless he kept his countenance. He drew a cigar from his case, and, walking up to the Count, asked him in the most amiable of accents: "Would your Excellency have the kindness to give me a light?" Although taken aback at his visitor's assurance, he gave him a light, and then Bismarck, without the slightest ceremony, helped himself to a chair and sat down and chatted as if nothing unusual had happened.

But this was not the only incident which occurred in connection with this noble Austrian. Some years later, in fact, Bismarck replaced General von Rochow as Ambassador at the same capital where he formerly served as Secretary. The Count von Thun-Hohenstein was still there,



and he had become such an inveterate smoker that he always had a lighted cigar in his mouth, even at the sittings of the Diet. The Prussian General von Rochow did not attempt to imitate him, considering it much too unceremonious. But as soon as Bismarck arrived on the scene matters took a different turn.

At the very first sitting he attended, he was seen to take a cigar from his case, and light it with great coolness. But the strange spectacle of *two only* of the Ambassadors of the Great Powers smoking in the midst of this venerable assembly was not destined to last long. Only a few days passed, after Bismarck had set this example, when first the Bavarian Ambassador, and then the Hanoverian, were seen to strike a light in the course of the sitting. Eventually, and it was not long afterwards, all present at these meetings lit up their cigars.

From that time till now the smoking of cigars has been allowed in all the deliberative assemblies in Germany.

Patience is very far from being one of the principal traits of Bismarck's character. What happened at his first interview with Dr. Schweninger, of Munich, is a sufficient proof of this. The Prince was at that time so excessively stout that his life was thought to be seriously endangered on this account. Having heard of the marvellous cures which Dr. Schweninger had effected, he sent for the famous practitioner. This stirred up a great hubbub in Prussia, where this Bavarian doctor was regarded with a jealous eye. But this will be referred to further on. At all events, Schweninger waited upon Prince Bismarck, and he listened to the account which the patient had to give of his malady. The doctor, however, was not sufficiently enlightened by the sick man's account of himself, and he plied him with question after question. At first Bismarck answered with the best grace possible, but as the doctor's interrogations were multiplied he lost his patience entirely and broke out with,—



"Come now! haven't you nearly done cross-examining me? You are beginning to irritate me with all these questions, which appear to me to have no end."

"Just as your Highness pleases," replied the doctor. "But I must inform you that if you want to be cured without having to answer questions you would do better to go to a horse doctor. Those people are accustomed to treat their patients without putting any questions to them."

At these words the Chancellor jumped up from his chair in a rage, and almost annihilated his interrogator with his furious glances. Schweninger remarked afterwards that "if his eyes had been pistols I should have been shot dead upon the spot." But the doctor knew his man, and did not flinch; he met the savage glances of his patient with a steady eye, until the Prince grew gradually calmer, and presently the latter re-seated himself, and said, in the quietest tone imaginable,—

"Very well, question me then if you

must, but get it over as soon as you can. I may venture, however, to hope that your talent as a physician will be at least as remarkable as the rudeness which you have just shown me."

Schweninger then continued his examination, and the treatment he prescribed for his patient was a complete success.

One consequence of this wonderful cure was that the Bavarian physician was called to Berlin and made a Professor in the University at that city. This gave great offence to the Prussian faculty, and no stone was left unturned by Schweninger's rivals to induce Prince Bismarck to reconsider his decision. But those who raised this stir could scarcely have known the kind of man they had to deal with. Bismarck met their efforts with the most determined resistance, and what is more, he appointed Schweninger to be his private physician. Another attempt was made, however, some time afterwards, on the part of a number of Professors of Medicine,



to deprive Schweninger of the Chancellor's favour, but the only result was that a few days later the great man's protégé was named Knight of the Order of the Red Eagle of the Third Class.

The Berlin Professors now began to see the futility of their unfriendly endeavours, and from that day Dr. Schweninger has lived an honoured and tranquil life in the capital of the new German Empire.

The great man, however, is not only stiff in his demeanour; he can also be extremely savage and unyielding towards those who displease him or who differ from him in opinion. His rejoinders in reply to members of the Opposition in the Reichstag have, as a rule, been exasperating and offensive; and several instances are recorded of his having, in private life, been guilty of actual violence.

One day, when he was very thirsty, he went into a café in Berlin and ordered a bock [glass of beer]. At the tables

adjoining his were seated a number of worthy Berliners drinking white beer and talking politics. The conversation gradually became animated, and presently some remarks were made respecting a prince of the blood royal. It would appear that these remarks were not too flattering to the exalted personage in question, for suddenly Bismarck rose to his feet, and, addressing those who were conversing, said,—

"Get out from here now, all of you. If I find a single one of you still here when I have emptied my glass I'll break it on his head."

The politicians were thunderstruck, and the talk ceased for a moment; but it soon went on again in the same vein as if nothing had happened. Bismarck quietly emptied his glass, and then, rising and walking slowly up to the man who was talking the loudest, struck him on the head with his glass and smashed it. The poor fellow fell off his chair and rolled under the table, but his companions were intimi-



dated by Bismarck's bold assurance, and never said a word, and the future Chancellor, who did not for a moment lose his self-possession, paid his score and left the place without being molested.

This incident occurred, of course, more than fifty years ago.

Bismarck was one of the first to hear of the death of Napoleon III.; he even knew of it before the Emperor William. The following is the conversation he had with his wife on the subject, in the presence of a German merchant who had a house of business at Melbourne, and who was taking breakfast with them at the time.

The meal was nearly over, when a messenger arrived with a dispatch, addressed to the Chancellor by the German Ambassador in London. Bismarck took the message, laid it on the table, put on his eye-glasses, and again took up the telegram and read it attentively. After having got through it, he turned to his wife and said,—

"I told you Napoleon would not get over the operation. He died this morning."

And then addressing the messenger, he asked him whether the telegram had been communicated to his Majesty.

"No, your Highness, it has not."

"Very well, then. You will take it to him at once."

When the man had gone out the Princess said to her husband,—

"I suppose you will wear mourning for Napoleon, Otto?"

Bismarck replied that Napoleon was a worthy man enough, but too weak; that he was incapable of forgetting a service rendered him; and that he had only deceived him (Bismarck) once—that was on a certain day in 1866, after the battle of Königgrätz, when he telegraphed that if the Prussians entered Vienna he would declare war against them.

"*I have never forgiven him for that,*" added Bismarck; "*but, at any rate, he has been cruelly punished in his turn.*"



But the Iron Chancellor could be a jolly fellow enough at times. Many little spicy anecdotes are told of him, in which one is astonished to find, not the tyrant, but a man actuated by benevolence, not, however, without just a seasoning of humour with it.

He had a valet who was very attentive to him, whose name was Friedrich. One day when he entered his study, which he had only quitted for a few moments, he caught Friedrich drinking from his glass of beer. He knew that the man was not fond of drink, and that if he was drinking out of his master's glass it was simply because he might be able to say some day—that he had drunk from Bismarck's glass.

He was struck with pity at the sight of the poor fellow who stood there trembling in every limb and not daring to raise his eyes; and putting as much mildness into his voice as he could, he said,—

"You can take the glass and keep it, Friedrich, if it takes your fancy. It is not

big enough for both of us though. You had better bring me another; and make haste, I am thirsty."

The delight of Friedrich can easily be imagined. He carried off the precious glass, and had engraved upon it the memorable date on which it had been presented to him.

Varzin first came into Bismarck's possession in 1867, and he purchased at the same time the estates of Mussow, Misdow, Puddiger, Chomitz, and Charlottenthal from Adalbert von Blumenthal. There was no railway station at Varzin at that time, the nearest one being that of Schlawe. As soon as he had concluded the purchase of this estate he thought he would like to visit it, and in the course of the journey he had the following amusing adventure.

Everybody knows that in small towns, when the gossips have nothing else to do, they loiter about the station to see the passengers alight from the trains, and stare



those out of countenance who are going on further.

On a certain afternoon, then, in pursuance of this custom, a master shoemaker of Schlawe was at his post closely scrutinizing the strangers arriving by the two o'clock train. Presently he caught sight of a traveller of gigantic proportions stepping out of a first-class carriage. He walked up and down on the platform for a while, then stopped and lit a cigar, and then resumed his walk, and finally seated himself on a bench. The honest cobbler, who had not taken his eyes off this well-grown stranger for a moment, could contain himself no longer; spurred on by curiosity, he went up to him with an air of smirking shyness, and sat down on the bench by his side. Seeing that the stranger made no sign, he asked him with as much politeness as he could muster:

"I suppose you come from Berlin?"

"Quite so. Who are you?"

"Oh! my name is X——, and I am a