Bismark and German Unity.

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1901.

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I. Introduction.

The student of history is apt to wonder at the fact that for so many years a people of one race like the German should have remained divided into petty political elements for so many years. The movement toward the union of Germany did not begin till long after most of the European nations were one in fact as in name. The Napoleonic Wars furnished the first impetus toward a national spirit, and from that time till the final accomplishment of the fact of real unity, there was more or less agitation looking toward that end. Particularly was this the case during the periods immediately following the revolutionary movements of 1828 and 1848 in France. It remained for the genius of a single man to bring about by what seemed at the time very irrelevant means the end so long desired.

II. State of Affairs in Germany at the time Bismark was called to the Ministry.

It will be in order first to give a brief statement of the events which had taken place in Germany in the ten years or so prior to the time that Bismark was called to the head of the Ministry, September, 1862.

The revolution of 1848 had come and

gone, the reaction against Liberalism had set in, and even to the most hopeful of the German patriots the unity of the Fatherland seemed as far off as ever. But with the coming of William I. to the Regency the German Liberals became more hopeful for the ultimate union of Germany. King William was supposed to be rather liberal in his views. He had been a soldier for forty years, and was perfectly acquainted with the military affairs of his country. He realized that the disgrace which Prussia was obliged to submit to at Olmütz in 1850 was due very largely to the defective condition of the army, and he was determined that Prussia should not again be brought into such a position. His chief care, therefore, after assuming the Regency, was to reorganize and strengthen the army. This he proposed to accomplish by increasing the term of service from two to three years in the active service, and from two to four years in the reserve and by making more stringent the laws of compulsory military service. The government itself had power to enforce the increased levy and the lengthening of the term of service; but the increased appropriations thus made necessary could be

made only by the consent of Parliament. For our purpose it is sufficient to say that the question of this increased expenditure became the cause of a long contention between King and Parliament, the latter being opposed to such an increase in the army. Time after time did the Upper House pass a bill for military purposes, and time after time did the lower house refuse to pass it. Parliaments were dissolved by the King, only to have a larger majority returned against him at the next election. Two ministers resigned during this peiod, the last one headed by Hohenlohe; whereupon on Sept. 24, 1862 the King placed at the head of the Ministry Herr von Bismark, one of his most resolute friends.

3. Sketch of Bismark's Public Life

Bismark was a royalist of the most pronounced type. He had been one of the two deputies who refused to join in the vote of thanks to Frederick William IV. for the Constitution he promised in 1849, and had, in the earlier part of his official career, been a supporter of Austria. He had been sent as a delegate to the restored Diet of Frankfort, where his eyes had been opened to the fact that Austria was determined that Prussia should

play an unimportant part in the affairs of Germany. He was a diplomatist by nature, and at the time of his appointment to the ministry he was representing Prussia at the court of Napoleon III. He was a man of definite views, keen observation, and great decision of character. He believed that Prussia was destined by her geographical position and the events of her history to take the first place in Germany.

4, Bismark vs. the Parliament.

The appointment of Bismark increased the trouble between the Liberal party in Parliament and the Government. In the minds of the Liberals the fight was no longer for the defeat of the military bill, but for the defense of the Constitution against the attacks of an absolute Royalist. No one knew anything as to his plans, his discontent with Prussian conditions, his hatred of Austria, and his desire for German unity; and his speeches at the Diet of Frankfort had not been made public. His famous answer to a resolution in Parliament, in which he made the statement that "the great problems of the age were not to be solved by speeches and resolutions, but by blood and iron" did not help matters between him and Parliament. The

conflict which had been going on before he came to the Ministry was now resumed. The Lower House passed an appropriation bill without a clause providing for the reorganization of the army; the Upper House amended the bill to include the clause; and the next day the Lower House declared the action of the other null and void. It was through this dispute that the Government saw its way out of the difficulty of strengthening the army without a parliamentary grant. Bismark declared, that, as there was no provision in the constitution relating to disagreements between the two Houses it fell to the Government in such a case to provide for the necessary expenses, and made known his intention of conducting the administration without a grant from Parliament. By this means was forged the weapon, a reorganized Prussian army, which was to be instrumental in the ultimate uniting of Germany.

5. Bismark and the Polish Question

The next step which we must notice in Bismark's career is one which seems at first glance to have a very remote connection with German unity, but which was one of the essential links in the chain of events which ended

in the formation of the German Empire. We refer to Bismark's policy in regard to the Polish uprising of 1863. While all the other great powers were sending protests to the Czar and threatening to unite against him in defense of the Poles, Bismark remained conspicuously friendly, and offered to send Prussian regiments to help put down the uprising. These circumstances while rendering Russia unfriendly to Austria, England, and France, insured her neutrality when Prussia attacked Denmark, and also in the war of 1870-71 with France; but no one, not even the statesmen of Europe, understood this policy of Bismark's, and the people of Prussia were made more violently hostile than ever by this alliance with despotism.

6. Schleswig-Holstein Complications.

(a) Affairs relating to the Duchies.

Schleswig and Holstein were the two Duchies south of Denmark which had been united in a political union with Denmark as a result of the fact that at a time in their past history the duke of Schleswig and Holstein had become king of Denmark. In Denmark proper representatives of the female line could inherit the throne, but this was not

the case in the duchies; and it was because of the prospect that a member of the female line was likely to come to the Danish throne that the trouble arose which finally involved all Germany. The trouble came about in this way; King Frederick VII. of Denmark had made an agreement with the leading powers at the London Conference in 1852 that the Estates of Schleswig and Holstein should not be treated as part of Denmark proper. This applied especially to Holstein, which was a member of the German Confederation. The Duke of Augustenburg, who had claimed the succession in Schleswig-Holstein through the male line renounced his claim in the Treaty of London. This surrender had not, however, received the consent of his son, and the German Confederation as such had not been a party to the Treaty of London. Holstein and much of Schleswig was chiefly German.

In 1855 Frederick VII. had renewed his attempts to assimilate the provinces by a unifying constitution; but in 1858, at the threat of intervention by the Confederation he consented to leave Holstein out of the jurisdiction of the constitution. But this did not help

to its ultimate banishment from the affairs of Germany. The most important perhaps of the diplomatic results of this treaty was, that by thus joining Prussia, Austria came in for her share of the approbium attached to their proposed policy by the rest of Germany, and thus lost influence with the lesser states. In February, 1864, Austria and Prussia jointly demanded the repeal of the November Constitution (which concerned Schleswig only) and on its refusal invaded Schleswig, not at the command of the Diet, but as two independent states.

(d) Results

The Danes probably would not have undertaken to resist such an overwhelming force had they not expected help from other nations; but they were defeated, and in the end King Christian ceded Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia and Austria jointly.

7. Events leading to the expulsion of Austria from the affairs of Germany

(a) Bismark's Policy in the Duchies

On the ground that the sovereignty of the duchies was now vested in Austria and Prussia, Bismark now demanded the withdrawal of the Confederate troops from the Duchies, and

matters with Schleswig, which objected to being separated from Holstein; while in Holstein itself the Danish government broke their agreement by levying the taxes without the consent of the Provincial Estates. All this raised great excitement in Germany, but King Frederick insisted that Schleswig should be included in the Constitution and that Holstein should bear a part of the expense of national government.

Frederick's proclomation to the above effect was the immediate ground for the conflict which was about to break out. The Confederate Diet announced that if the above proclomation was not withdrawn the Diet would proceed to armed intervention. Just at this time Frederick VII. died, and it was thought that perhaps his successor, Christian IX. might avert the conflict, but he did not; the new constitution became a law and received his signature, and at the command of the Diet Hanoverian and Saxon troops entered Holstein.

(b) Bismark's Plans in regard to the Duchies.

From this time on the history of Germany corresponds with the plans of Bismark. He had, before the events just narrated, made a

secret agreement with Austria that the two powers should settle the Schleswig-Holstein dispute by themselves, and here again his plans ran counter with all the rest of Germany. With reference strictly to their relation to the ultimate unification of Germany Bismark's plans were as follows: In the first place, his object in interfering in the duchies was, that thereby an excuse would arise for a war with Austria, whereby she would be shut out of the future German state. All the smaller German states were in favor of the incorporation of Schleswig-Holstein as a separate state under the Duke of Augustenburg, the son of the one who had renounced his title. Bismark's plan was to have the Duchies ultimately connected with Prussia. He recognized the right of Christian IX. to the sovereignty, according to the provisions of the treaty of London; while all the smaller states (who were not bound by that treaty) were declaring in favor of the Duke.

(c) Union of Prussia and Austria.

By representing this movement in favor of the Duke of Augustenburg as a revolutionary one, Bismark had secured the cooperation of Austria in a movement which would lead

the demand was soon complied with. The two powers then assumed full control, and established a joint government for the Duchies, regulated by commissioners from each power.

As before stated, Bismark's ultimate object in acquiring Schleswig-Holstein was that they should become an object of contention whereby Austria might be humiliated and the Confederation overthrown. He did not insist upon the annexation of the provinces, but was willing to accept the sovereignty of Augustenburg, if the latter would accept Prussia's conditions. These conditions were that the Duchies should enter the Zollverein (the German tariff union), place their army and navy and postal system in Prussia's hands, and in short become part of Prussia except in name. These conditions were rejected by Austria and the Duke of Augustenburg, and the entire population of the Duchies declared against them. Both Austria and the Federal Diet now supported the Duchies against what appeared to be Prussian domination; and trouble arose in the Duchies, connected with the joint administration of the government.

(b) The Gastein Treaty.

War could not long be postponed as matters stood, but Bismark was not ready for it, King William was not willing as yet to go to war with his brother monarch, and arrangements must be made with other European powers. So a compromise was arranged known as the Gastein Convention, whereby Austria temporarily undertook to govern Holstein, and Prussia Schleswig, thus tiding over the trouble for the present.

(c) Negotiations with Napoleon.

Bismark's first care was to secure the neutrality of France, and also secure the consent of Napoleon to an alliance with Italy. He met Napoleon at Barriatz and the matter was discussed in secret by them. Just what was said and done is uncertain; but it seems that Napoleon was allowed to get the idea that France was to receive some substantial recompense in return for remaining neutral. Furthermore, Napoleon had a very erroneous opinion as to the respective military strength of Prussia and Austria, and imagined that Austria would be a match for Prussia and Italy combined. It was no part of Bismark's duty to give him any different

opinion, and Bismark left the conference with the promise of French neutrality and the permission to form an alliance with Italy.

(d) Negotiations and Treaty with Italy

Before the Treaty of Gastein Bismark had made overtures to the Italian government looking toward an alliance against Austria; but La Marmora, the Italian minister, was suspicious of Bismark and thought the latter only wanted to use the threat of a union with Italy to frighten Austria. The temporary harmony brought about by the treaty of Gastein seemed to confirm his suspicions. But the disputes in the Duchies broke out again; and once more Bismark made overtures to La Marmora. General Govone was sent to Berlin to discuss the conditions of an alliance. Bismark was not ready to act immediately however, as King William was still reluctant to begin a civil war. He explained to Govone that the Schleswig-Holstein question was not sufficient to justify a war in the eyes of Europe, and proposed to make the resort to arms depend on the question of the revision of the German Constitution. It was finally arranged that Italy would join in any war that should

begin between Austria and Prussia inside of three months.

On the day after the treaty with Italy was signed Bismark introduced in the Diet his famous motion, providing for the establishment of a national assembly chosen by direct and universal suffrage, which was to have a share in all legislation of common interest. However, the proposal to revise the constitution was not the immediate cause of the war. The state of affairs in the Duchies was the immediate cause.

8. War with Austria and its Results.

(a) Preliminaries

Eight months had now passed since the Gastein convention, and affairs in the Duchies began once more to assume a threatening aspect. In Holstein the Austrian authorities allowed demonstrations in favor of Augustenburg to take place, and perhaps encouraged them. This was enough to enable Bismark to denounce the conduct of Austria as an alliance with Revolution. He demanded explanations from the Austrian government and the emperor declined to render an account of his actions. Both governments began to prepare for war, and on

March 16, 1866 the Austrian goveanment announced that it should refer the affairs of Schleswig-Holstein to the Federal Diet. This was a clear violation of the terms of the Gastein treaty.

On the 28th of May France, England and Russia called a conference of the powers to settle the differences between the belligerents. The invitation was accepted by Prussia and Italy, but was accepted by Austria only under conditions which the others would not accept, and practically, therefore amounted to a refusal. At the same time, Austria called on the Federal Diet to take the affairs of the Duchies into its own hands, and convoked the Holstein Estates. Thereupon Bismark declared the convention of Gastein at an end, and ordered Manteuffel, the Prussian commander in Schleswig to lead his troops into Holstein. Austria now called on the Diet to mobilize the whole of the Federal armies; but before the vote was taken on the proposition Bismark gave notice that Prussia would consider as a declaration of war every vote in favor of Austria's motion. The represenative of Prussia handed in the plan of his government for the reorganization of Germany and left the Diet. Only a few of the smaller states in the north took part with

Prussia; all the rest joined Austria. Diplomatic relations between Prussia and Austria were broken off on the 12th of June, 1866, and war began.

b) War - Beginning of Hostilities

The first act of the war was the invasion of Saxony, Hanover and Hesse, which were immediately conquered. Following this the main Prussian army invaded Bohemia. The Austrians were met and utterly defeated at Königgrätz. This practically ended the war, so far as Austria was concerned. In Italy the Austrians were victorious, but their successes were not sufficient to counterbalance the effect of the disaster at Königgrätz.

c) The North-German Confederation.

Immediately after the battle of Königgrätz the Austrian Empero asked for the mediation of Napoleon III. and ceded Venice to him on behalf of Italy. His mediation was accepted by the Prussian king, and the principal stipulations of the treaty of peace were as follows; that Austria should completely withdraw from German affairs; that Germany north of the Main should be included in a federation under Prussian leadership; that for the states south of the Main there

should be reserved the right of entering into some kind of bond with the northern league; and that Prussia's sovereignty in Schleswig-Holstein be confirmed.

(d) Treaties with the South-German States.

The south-western allies of Austria, including Bavaria, did not make peace with Prussia till some time after the suspension of hostilities with Austria, but when peace was declared Bismark made the conditions as light as possible so that the future union would not be difficult. Nearly all the South German states appealed to Napoleon to mediate between them and Prussia in arranging the terms of peace. But at this very time Napoleon was negotiating with Bismark for part of the territory of the states along the Rhine, and when Bismark allowed this fact to become known to these governments they were much more willing to enter into friendly arrangements with Prussia. Not only were the terms of peace arranged satisfactorily, but all the South German states made secret treaties with Bismark by which they entered into alliances for offense and defense.

9. Demands for Territory by Napoleon and Bismark's Refusal.

We have already mentioned the negotiations between Napoleon and Bismark as to the acquisition of German Rhenish territory by France. There is much dispute by different historians as to just how much Bismark did or did not promise in the secret interviews. The last negotiations relating to the transfer of German territory took place between Bismark and Benedetti between July 25 and August 7, 1866. Benedetti demanded certain Rhenish provinces, but was met with a direct refusal. The last negotiations related to the acquisition of Luxemburg by Napoleon, but nothing came of it, so far as the French were concerned, except to increase their feeling against Germany, which was already quite intense.

10. War with France

(a) Dispute over the Spanish Succession.

In 1868 the throne of Spain became vacant, and the party in power Prince Leopold of the house of Hohenzollern, a relative of the king of Prussia to take the throne. It is barely possible that Bismark encouraged this candidacy as a means of bringing on a

war with France, which he saw was inevitable sooner or later.

When Leopold finally accepted the crown there was raised a storm of protest in France, and Benedetti was given instructions to see the king of Prussia and require him to order the withdrawal of Leopold. While the king did not promise to do this nevertheless in a short time Leopold withdrew. This should have ended the matter; But now the leaders in the French government were intensely eager for war, and King William was asked to give a guarantee that none of his family should ever be a candidate for the Spanish throne. He refused, and the story of the circumstances of the refusal which he made to the French ambassador were magnified slightly with Bismark's aid and published. This hastened the beginning of hostilities, and France decided on war July 14, 1870.

b) War

The war was a one-sided contest from the start. France was not ready. Her army administration was rotten, and there was no effective system of mobilization or plan for the war. On the other hand, the North Ger-

man Confederation and its allies, the South-German states, were perfectly prepared. The Germans were universally victorious, and in seven months the war was ended by the capture of Paris.

II. Result of the War – German Unity

France had begun the war in order to undo the work of partial union effected by the war of '66; but the result was just the opposite. In September, 1870, negotiations were opened with the South German states for their entry into the northern Confederation, and at the end of November the union of all the states was accomplished. A letter was sent by the King of Bavaria to all the other sovereigns proposing that ~~the~~ the King of Prussia should assume the title of German Emperor; and at the palace of Versailles the empire was proclaimed and King William was crowned Emperor of United Germany. Thus in ten short years was accomplished a task which is doubtful whether it would yet be completed had it not been for one man – Otto von Bismark-Schönhausen.