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BISMARCK
IN THE
FRANCO-GERMAN WAR
1870-1871.

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN OF

DR. MORITZ BÜSCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE aim in the present translation has been faithfully to reproduce Dr. Busch's remarkable portrait of the eminent statesman who conducted the affairs of Prussia and of Germany during the memorable months of the Franco-German war. A few lines—not more than half-a-dozen—where tedious explanations would have been required, have been omitted.

Measures and money have been generally expressed by their English equivalents.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

It is almost like the recollection of a dream, when I call up before my mind the circumstances under which, more than eight years ago, I made my first and last tour through France, and ponder on all I was permitted to observe and pass through. No other tour I ever made stands out so clearly and livingly in my memory. This will be readily understood, when I say that my route led from Saarbrücken to Versailles, by way of Sedan, and that I had the honour of passing the seven months it took me to traverse it in the immediate society of the Imperial Chancellor—or, as he was then called, the Chancellor of the Confederation. My visit to France was connected with the campaign of 1870 and 1871, during which time I was attached to the mobilised Foreign Office, which accompanied the first section of the main headquarters of the German army.

That I had the opportunity of witnessing from a favourable position some of the decisive actions of the war, and of seeing and hearing in the closest proximity other important events, was a circumstance which might well seem dream-like, both then and afterwards, to a man in a modest position, who eight months previously could not even have imagined his ever coming into personal contact with the Chancellor. Immediately under my eyes, I saw consummated a world-historical evolution which had scarcely any

precedent. Standing in the midst of these events as they developed themselves, we could feel the quick-drawn breath of the spirit of our people; we heard its voice in thunder over the battle-fields; we felt the awful anxieties of the crisis, and trembled with joy at the news of every victory. Not less fruitful and important were the quiet, sober, laborious hours in which we were permitted to glance into the workshop whence issued so important a part of that evolution, where the results of that trial of arms were weighed and measured, and their effects calculated, and where men whose names were on the lips of all—crowned heads, princes, Ministers of State, generals, negotiators of the most various kinds, leaders of parties in the Diet, and other interesting personages—went in and out among us at Ferrières and Versailles. Pleasant, too, was the thought, after the day's work was over, of being one of the small wheels in the machinery with which the Master was working out his mind and will on the world, and shaping it according to his plans. Best of all, however, was the consciousness of being near him, and that continued to be my highest reward.

In these recollections I believe that I possess the greatest treasure of my life, and I trust that I may now be permitted to allow others to participate in some of them. It will be at once understood that a great portion of what I might have given must, for the présent, be suppressed. Much also of what I relate or sketch will appear to many trivial and superficial. To myself nothing is so, for trifles "of which the Prætor takes no notice" not seldom display men's feelings and characters more truly than great or striking deeds; and things and situations, in themselves unimportant, may suggest to the mind flashes of thought, and associations of ideas fraught with consequences for the future. I might instance the origin—often accidental and

insignificant—of epoch-making inventions and discoveries ; the tin can glittering in the sun, which transported Jacob Boehmen into his metaphysical world ; or the spot of grease on the table-cloth at Ferrières, which gave the Chancellor his starting-point for a most remarkable and characteristic dinner discourse. The influences of morning and evening on nervous constitutions are different ; the weather and its changes act upon men and things. Philosophers have laid down theories which, broadly expressed, lead almost to the view that man is what he eats ; and absurd as it may sound, we do not know how far they are wrong. Lastly, it appears to me that everything pertaining to this glorious war is of interest—a war which won for us a German Empire and a strong frontier to the West ; and that things the most apparently trifling have their value, in proportion as they are connected with the part which Count Bismarck played in the events of the war.

Everything, therefore, should be preserved. In a great Time, what is little appears less ; in after centuries, it is the reverse ; the great becomes greater, and that which was without meaning becomes full of significance. People then often deplore that they can form no living image of the events and persons of the past in colours true to nature ; because materials at first regarded as unessential, but then seen to be indispensable, are wanting, because there was no eye to see, and no hand to describe and preserve while there was yet time. Who would not now delight to possess ampler details of Luther in the great days and hours of his life—even very innocent and insignificant traits, circumstances, and situations ? In a hundred years Prince Bismarck will take his place, in the thoughts of our people, by the side of the Wittenberg doctor : the liberator of our political life from the pressure of the foreigner

by the side of the liberator of the conscience from the tyranny of Rome; the creator of the German Empire by the side of the creator of German Christianity. Many have already assigned this place to our Chancellor in their hearts and amongst the portraits that hang on their walls; and I will run the risk of being blamed here and there, because I have spoken of the husk and have scarcely touched the kernel. Perhaps it will hereafter be permitted to me to make the attempt in some modest fashion to portray the latter also with some new features. For the present I merely act on the principle of the text, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

The groundwork of my notices is a journal which recorded with the utmost fulness and fidelity—especially at the time when we were stationary—the events and sayings which I saw and heard when I was in immediate contact with the Chancellor; who is everywhere the central figure round which persons and things are grouped. To note down, for myself only in the first instance, as an observant and conscientious chronicler, how our Chancellor bore himself in the great war, so far as I was an eyewitness, or had trustworthy direct information how he lived and worked during the campaign, how he judged of the present, what he related from the past, at dinner, at tea, or on any other occasion, was the first and immediate task which I proposed to myself. In the execution of that task, and especially in writing down what he said in the outer or inner circles of his friends, I was aided by a habit of attention which had been strengthened both by my reverence for him, and my preceding official intercourse with him; and by a memory, which, though of moderate capacity, had also been cultivated by the severest official exercise in the half-year preceding the outbreak of the war, to such a degree, that it was able

to retain, in all essential points, even the longer discourses of the Chancellor, whether grave or sportive, until I found time to commit them to paper—that is, of course, if nothing intervened, and against such intervention I could in most cases guard myself. My notes of his sayings were written down, almost without exception, before the lapse of an hour, for the most part indeed at once. He who has eyes, ears, and a memory for the style in which our Chancellor generally clothes his thoughts when he expresses himself among his intimate friends, will at once recognise this. When our Chancellor relates anything, he will almost always meet with those sudden and rapid transitions and silent presuppositions which remind one of the style of ballads, and he will find that a vein of humour usually runs through the whole—and both of these are highly characteristic of the way in which the Prince expresses himself.

For the rest, these accounts, and the sayings and remarks in connection with them, are untouched photographs. In other words I will venture to say not only that I observed and attended sharply and well, but that I am conscious that I have omitted nothing that could be communicated, that I have altered nothing, and above all, that I have added nothing. Where gaps were necessary, I have generally marked the fact by . . . Where, on certain occasions, I could not exactly understand the speaker, I have noted it. Many things said about the French may appear severe, some even cruel. Let it be remembered that war hardens and inflames men, and that Gambetta's "war to the knife" urged with all his fiery passionateness, and the treacherous acts of his *Francs-tireurs*, evoked feelings in our camp, in which gentleness and mercy had little place. The expressions of these feelings are not of course published in order to wound and to irritate now, when all this belongs to the past,

Author's Preface.

but merely as contributions to the history of the war, and as characteristics of the Chancellor. I would remark, in conclusion, that the descriptions of places, battle-fields and the like, which I give, as well as much accessory matter, are added for variety's sake, and the articles in newspapers are only inserted to show how certain thoughts shaped themselves at a certain time.

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