

THE REFOUNDING
OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE

1848 - 1871

COLONEL G. B. MALLESON, C.S.I.



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Prince Bismarck

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BY

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* * * *The Portraits of the Emperor William, Prince Bismarck and Count von Moltke are engraved by permission of Messrs Loescher & Petsch; that of the Crown Prince Frederick by permission of Messrs Reichard & Lindner.*

PREFACE

THIS book deals especially with a period of German history of twenty-three years' duration. Beginning with the French Revolution of 1848 it records the rousing in Germany of passions long pent-up, and, for the time, difficult to be controlled or directed; the manner in which these passions were eventually mastered; the great void and the fierce longing they left behind them; the use made by one of the chief Powers of Germany of the feelings and aspirations thus dormant, and, finally, the complete reversal, by the means employed by that Power, of the positions held in Europe till that period by Austria and Prussia on the one side, by France and Germany on the other.

During this period of twenty-three years there occurred in Europe five wars; and although, of those five wars, two, the Crimean war and the Franco-Austrian war, require in this volume but a cursory notice, the other three, viz., the Danish war, the Austro-Prussian war, and the Franco-German war constitute the three steps which made possible the refounding of, the German Empire. The second and third of these wars would

have been impossible without their predecessor. For if the first of the three, the Danish war, may be regarded as a small thing—the whole of Germany being pitted against the smallest country in Europe—it was, nevertheless, the necessary prelude to the wars that followed. That war, and the two greater wars of 1866 and 1870, had been predetermined in the mind of the regenerator of Germany before a shot in the first had been fired. The initial war, in fact, was needed to cause the second; the second to produce the third. The Danish war, then, far from being a war of secondary importance, was the first act of a deliberately planned system; the first consequence of the introduction of that policy of 'Blood and Iron' which, in one of his earliest speeches to the Prussian parliament, Count Bismarck declared to be necessary for the solution of the great questions which were agitating Germany.

The writer of a book professing to deal with these subjects had, therefore, to record (1st) the effect in Germany of that outburst in Paris of February 1848, which acted as a match to the inflamed imaginations of the populations of the great centres of thought in the Fatherland; (2d) the manner in which that outbreak seized hold of the German mind; how it was viewed by princes and peoples; the action it induced; the several movements that followed; the precipitancy of the mob, and the patient waiting of sovereigns; until the fire of the movement had been spent, and the sovereigns were enabled to recover all that they had temporarily lost. It will then be shown how the popular feeling, though crushed for the time, never died out; how it remained, a reminiscence full of hope, to encourage those to whom the

prospect of German Unity had ever been a living ideal; how, again, the feelings and aspirations which had been aroused were, whilst still dormant, utilised by politicians to prepare a machine which, placing the necessary power in the hands of men who knew their own minds, who had a fixed policy, and who were to be deterred by no scruples, would, at the proper time, deal the blows which were to secure for Germany the union which had been her dream; how the policy of 'Blood and Iron' was invented for that end; how other Powers, not in Germany alone, played into the hands of the masters of the machine. Then will follow the story of the wars which had been planned. It will be told finally, how, in 1871, the adventurous but far-sighted policy was crowned with success.

In preparing a continuous account of this policy and of these events the main difficulty of the writer has been to compress in the allotted number of pages events so momentous and so diverging: the diverse actions of Austria, of Prussia, of the German Diet, of France, of Italy. The battles of the three wars above noted—the secret plans and hopes of the several Courts have all demanded the most careful study. How difficult it has been to give a sufficiently clear description of the several battles, many of them of the first importance, may be gathered from the fact that Major Henderson, the most eminent of the younger officers of the British army, has devoted to the consideration of only one battle, that of Spicheren, a number of words at least equal to the whole of those contained in this volume.¹

¹ 'The Battle of Spicheren,' by Brevet-Major Henderson. This volume counts three hundred pages, but, in the type of this volume, the contents would require a few pages more.

I am bound to add that in Major Henderson's volume I do not find a single redundant page. It is throughout admirable; for the military student invaluable. I call attention to the fact simply to illustrate the difficulty of a writer who has to describe, within a given compass equal to that considered by Major Henderson necessary for one battle, not one only, but many battles, some of them of even greater importance than Spicheren, for they were more decisive of the war. The author has been forced then to endeavour to produce, by bold and correct outlines, results which may atone for want of detail. He would fain hope that he has succeeded in producing such sketches of the principal battles as will convey a clear meaning of the movements on both sides to the general reader. With respect to some of them, those of 1866 in particular, he has enjoyed the advantage of a personal acquaintance with many officers who served in the campaign of Bohemia, and he can confidently assert that, although his account of that campaign may differ in some details from the story told by some English writers, it will be accepted in Vienna as the true one. He may add that a distinguished foreign officer, whom he consulted this year, has endorsed every word of it.

Regarding the political events, also, the writer is not without personal experience. He was in Westphalia in the summer and autumn of 1858, and again during 1863-4, and witnessed the growing discontent of large classes of the people, and their distrust of Count Bismarck. There never was a policy so unpopular as that involved by the military system of Von Roon; never a minister so detested as was Bismarck. The war of

1866 was, in its inception, nowhere so unpopular as in Prussia. But success atoned for everything. All the previous high-handed measures of the ministry were forgotten, and the annexations and other advantages which followed it produced the most complete revulsion in the public mind with regard to the minister theretofore so detested.

With respect to events generally, the writer has consulted all the German, and many of the English and French works written on the subject. He has also been allowed to peruse journals of some of the actors, hitherto unpublished. To all he is greatly indebted. But he is bound to admit that he has met with no writer whose knowledge of the incidents which led to the war of 1866 is so ample, or whose conclusions are so just, as those of Sir Alexander Malet, at the time H.M.'s Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at Frankfort. In his book, 'The Overthrow of the Germanic Confederation by Prussia in 1866,' the keys of the Foreign Office at Berlin are placed in the readers' hands, and the mind of the statesman who, after excluding Austria from Germany, completed his policy of 'Thorough' by the humiliation of France, is laid, an open book, before the generation that witnessed 'the refounding of the German Empire.'

G. B. M.

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