

## MEMOIRS OF THE "FATHER OF PRUSSIAN SPIES"

BY MAX J. HERZBERG

## I

A little while ago a Washington dispatch gave a new explanation by the German newspapers of the defeat administered to the Teutons by the Allies. This explanation was to the effect that "Germany had never known how to organize her system of espionage, and that it was to the mistakes made by her secret service that she owed her unpleasant experiences on the western front".

That this admission should have been made by the public organs of what has been called "a nation of spies" is in itself an astounding fact. According to the scathing indictment of one of their own philosophers, Schopenhauer, the Germans are "remarkable for the absolute lack of that feeling which the Latins call 'verecundia'—sense of shame". Herein perhaps lies the explanation of the notorious fact that Germany employed more spies and depended more completely on the information they secured than any other modern nation. In a world more and more anxious to live in peace and harmony, the Teuton systematically planted the seed of suspicion. The secret of German intrigue might have been summed up in a phrase: the fomentation of discontent. The discontent might be political, social, economic—in every instance German agents made it fester, made it malignant. Incidentally, information was conveyed copiously and by innumerable channels to the center of the spider's web—the German military headquarters.

The first German who seems to have conceived the possibilities of espionage on a large scale was Frederick the Great—the tendency among historians lately has been to add "thief" to the latter adjective. He is reported to have said, "I have one cook and a hundred spies". Most of Frederick's spies were employed at the other German courts and in Austria. During the Napoleonic wars Baron von Stein carried out Frederick's ideas in more organized fashion. It is not, however, until we come to the 'forties of the nineteenth century that we reach the true father of the modern German secret service—the person called Wilhelm Johann Carl Eduard Stieber, his monarchical copiousness of cognomens probably being in anticipation of the time when Bismarck was to call him his "king of sleuth-hounds".

Two little-known German works throw considerable light on the character and works of Stieber. The first is called "Die Communisten-Verschwörungen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts", and was written in collaboration with another police official, Wermuth of Hanover. It gives an elaborate description of the socialist and communist agitations of the middle of the last century, together with a very full list of members of radical organizations. The purpose is obvious, and no doubt police officials all over Germany blessed Stieber and his colleague for their thoughtfulness in thus providing an exact catalogue of persons on whom it were well—for the

police of Teuton tyrants—to keep an eye.

The other book, issued in Berlin in 1884, is called “Denkwürdigkeiten des Geheimen Regierungsrathes Dr. Stieber, aus seinen hinterlassenen Papieren bearbeitet”, the compiler being Dr. Leopold Auerbach. According to Auerbach, these memoirs were compiled after absolutely free access to the official and private papers of Stieber, and on the condition that he be allowed complete discretion in handling them. As a matter of fact, Auerbach does not go out of his way to eulogize the subject of his memoirs, and incidents are related scarcely to the credit of his “hero”. Numerous letters of Stieber are included, various speeches that he made in the course of his career are quoted, and much light is cast on the strange career of the man.

An examination of this career is particularly useful today. No institution can be properly understood except in the light of its origin, and the system of German espionage is significantly illuminated as one goes back to its beginnings in Stieber’s day. Here may be found all the elements that dishonored the name of Germany in the lurid illumination of the great war. Stieber first prepared elaborately for the invasion of armies by planting agents years beforehand on the lines of march. He first bought up newspapers in France to sow pacifism, and organized press information in his own land to serve militarism. He first made espionage an integral service, and secured for it in the Reichstag huge budgets. He even had a great part in organizing the Russian secret service, and is hence in a way responsible for the growth of the cancer which the Russian Revolution is today eradicating with such

expense of blood and treasure to all the world.

## II

Stieber was born May 3, 1818, in the town of Merseburg in Prussia. His father was a minor government official, who later removed to Berlin. He intended that his son should follow the ministry, but the latter chose the law. He became interested in police work, proved his capability, and his first important task took him to Silesia. In 1845 that province of Prussia was the scene of terrible conditions as a result of economic changes and political misrule—how bad the conditions were may be gauged from Hauptmann’s oppressive and gloomy drama, “The Weavers”, laid in this period. Socialistic agitators consequently found the province receptive to their fulminations against the ruling classes. Stieber was assigned the task of securing sufficient legal proof to convict these agitators.

Under the alias of Wilhelm Schmidt, landscape painter, Stieber went down to Silesia. His investigations led him speedily to one Wurm, a cabinet-maker, and to Schloeffel, a factory owner. Here all accounts grow obscure. Schloeffel was, it seems, his wife’s uncle. According to one version Stieber induced Schloeffel to affiliate himself with the conspirators and then denounced him. It is clear, at any rate, that in some way Stieber obtained access to the immediate family circle of Schloeffel, and then used the information he secured in the most treacherous way. When the conspirators were brought to trial, five persons were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and Wurm to death—the latter sentence, however, was never carried out. Schloeffel was acquitted for lack of evidence. In the later uprisings of 1848 and 1849 he played a

prominent part, and when the revolution in Germany proved a tragic fiasco, he was obliged—like Hecker, Jacobi, Schurz, and Sigel—to flee to the United States, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

On his return to Berlin Stieber resumed his practice in the criminal courts, and this practice became extraordinarily large. In the five years from 1845 to 1850 he delivered no less than 3,000 court addresses. It might seem a little strange, in a country where age and experience count for so much as in Germany, that so young a lawyer should so suddenly have become a favorite among persons seeking relief in criminal cases. The solution of the mystery is simple. As a result of his earlier connection with the police, Stieber had been given the editorship of the police periodical, with consequent access to all records. He was able, therefore, to look over all the evidence and clues which the police had gathered against his savory clients, and the prosecution, it may be suspected, never sprang a surprise on him in the court-room. The affair finally became so scandalous that Stieber's privileges were abruptly withdrawn, and he was asked to resign his editorship.

Meanwhile, he had obtained thoroughly congenial employment of another kind. He became an *agent provocateur* among the revolutionary clubs of the metropolis. Secretly in the pay of the police and well known to King Frederick William himself, he was one of the most zealous leaders of the Berlin mob. Once in a riot he penetrated close to the king, and assured him in a whisper that he and his agents were taking good care of him. To ingratiate himself with the revolutionists and soothe all suspicion, he even employed his talents as an

advocate and defended many of them gratis before the bar of justice. He likewise had the audacity to stand for election to the Prussian Landtag as a liberal candidate, but was defeated.

For some reason Stieber's services to the Prussian government failed of immediate recognition. In 1850, however, as a result of the personal intervention of the king in his behalf, he was appointed *Polizeirath*, with immediate direction of what was called the "Sicherheitspolizei" or "police of safety".

His first important task was a characteristic one. On May 1, 1851, Stieber was made a representative of Prussia at the World's Fair just opened in London. He wasted no time with the wonders of the exposition. His chief concern was with the socialist organization, which at that time made London its center under the leadership of Karl Marx. Stieber complained that the police of London refused to assist him in his "researches", and that such results as he obtained had to be secured through cunning and trickery. He managed, among other things, to get hold of a list of members of the organization, and in this way to discover what Germans at home were affiliated with the movement. With portentous solemnity Stieber records, in his own book on the subject and in the "Memoirs", what the objects of the socialists were. A list is given of places in which organizations had been established, including New York and Philadelphia. After the completion of his investigations in London, Stieber went to Paris for further material. With a large stock of evidence Stieber returned to Germany, and managed to send a considerable number of persons to prison and to cause others to flee the country, many of them to America.

It is curious to note, in this connection, the constant testimony Stieber pays to the part played by the United States in the endeavors being made at this time to free Germany from tyranny. Thus Stieber and his colleague of Hanover record that "for a long time there has existed in North America, and especially in New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities, a so-called League of Freedom, of purely communistic tendency, the purpose of which is to stir up revolution in all European states, but especially in Germany". This league had an organ, "The Republic of Workmen", and printed books for distribution in Germany. The complaint is made by Stieber, that as more and more Germans emigrated to the United States, persons of "the lower classes made the most erroneous comparisons between the United States and Germany, naturally always unfavorable to the latter". He complains particularly of the invidious comparisons as to the ease with which land might be procured in the United States, the higher wages paid workmen there, etc. German-Americans, he says, were always wanting to alter things in Germany so as to make them more like those in the United States. As for political refugees Stieber maintains:

"For these people there can scarcely be a better land than the United States, since not only is there no obstacle to their activity in that country, but they are able easily to deceive other German immigrants as to conditions in Germany and win their interest for those who are still at home. At the same time it is easy for them to collect money, which in North America is an easy sacrifice, but with which much can be done in Germany." He holds these refugees in America

responsible, therefore, for the revolution of March, 1848.

### III

At this point occurs a hiatus in Stieber's career. As a result of his efficiency in protecting Frederick William during the riots of 1848, Stieber had acquired a great ascendancy over the emperor. When this obstinate and reactionary monarch began to sink into imbecility and insanity, Stieber began to lose his influence. The regent, later William I, apparently did not relish the Stieberian personality, and it would seem that the spy was never very popular with his immediate superiors in the Prussian bureaus. With the loss of his influence at court, many whose goings to and fro had been reported in minute detail to Frederick, seized the opportunity for revenge. A long series of charges was brought against Stieber, he was attacked bitterly in newspaper articles. The chief defense which Stieber offers for his admitted wrong-doing as a police official is this: "There have been instances where the Minister of Justice himself has caused persons suspected of political offenses to be kept for weeks, even months in jail, without any attempt at obtaining the proper papers and orders from the courts. These persons have thereafter been freed, without any endeavor to institute a complaint or an investigation against them. If the Ministry of Justice has shown that it is not especially strict in observing the laws, can one expect anything more strict from the police?" Stieber was acquitted, but deprived—at least temporarily or so far as the public was aware—of all office.

For five years he lived in obscurity. But he employed this obscurity fittingly enough in deeds of darkness,

which took the form of the organization of the Russian secret service—in some respects an even more iniquitous institution than the German branch. It should come as no surprise, however, that the same brain conceived both. Stieber first came in contact with the Russian officials in Berlin when they employed him to suppress a scandal that had arisen in connection with the wife of one of the Slav attachés. He proved so useful that his services were further requisitioned. He had a sweeping letter of commission, it would seem. He was not only to search out Russian counterfeits and law-breakers of the usual sort who had taken refuge in Germany, but he was directed to seek out all "demagogues" and political offenders. For this purpose he organized a large number of agents in Berlin and other cities, and police officials everywhere in Germany were ordered to place themselves at the disposition of Stieber in all that concerned Russian affairs. At least as early as this time, then, must have begun that intimate connection between the Russian secret service and the Prussian government. One can well imagine that little of interest which Stieber discovered as a Russian agent failed to reach the ears of that other person—Stieber, the Prussian agent. In the 'sixties of the last century the Hohenzollerns were already laying the foundations of that system by which Soukhomlinoff and Lenine have betrayed civilization to their German masters in our days.

#### IV

In 1863 came the turning point in Stieber's career and a new phase in his activities. Hitherto he had been engaged in the first of the two great tasks of the Prussian regime—the

suppression of democratic tendencies. Hereafter he was to be chiefly occupied with the other task—the further extension of Prussian territory. In the autumn of 1863 a friend of Stieber's who was the founder of the "Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung"—appropriately named Brass—introduced him to Bismarck. The latter gave him no open official position for a while, but occupied him in various ways. As 1866 approached and brought nearer the war with Austria, Stieber was assigned the duty of preparing for the invasion of Bohemia by supplying Bismarck with complete topographical information. Accordingly, Stieber himself made a tour of the country, disguised as a pedler, his wares, it is said, being cheap religious statuary and indecent pictures. It is said further that the data he collected were so accurate as to have astounded Moltke himself. During the war itself Stieber accompanied the Prussian armies as head of a new type of police. Stieber called his force "political police", and distinguished them carefully from the ordinary military guards.

At first the object of this special police was merely to guard the person of the king and the higher state officials, against whom attempts at assassination were constantly being made. But with the approval of Bismarck, Stieber widely extended his field of operations. He undertook to thwart enemy spies in the neighborhood of the Great Headquarters—what is today called counter-espionage. He established, furthermore, control over letters and telegrams. He deemed it his function, moreover, to control the printing-press and newspaper correspondence from the front. Finally, one of his duties was to support the morale of the fighting forces by pro-



viding information concerning the enemy and conditions in Austria. In these functions of Stieber during 1866 one has a picture in little of what the German government has undertaken since his time.

It is a sign of the diabolic intelligence of Stieber that he was among the earliest to recognize the immense importance of the periodical press. He had himself in his youth contributed to newspapers, and he seems in general to have been rather friendly with the publishers and editors of what Bismarck called "the reptile press". While the peace negotiations with Austria were still proceeding in the late summer of 1866, Stieber laid before Bismarck a plan for the further extension of police functions. This plan involved the foundation of a Central Information Bureau, and when created it was placed under the direction of Stieber—now, incidentally, a Privy Councilor. As the "Memoirs" state, "Under this unobtrusive title worked for many years an institute which undertook innumerable political tasks, the effect of which extended far beyond the bounds of a mere press bureau". Stieber watched carefully newspapers in all lands, with the object of discovering those that were hostile to Prussia. Such newspapers were minutely investigated, and the endeavor was made to find the "motives" that animated the writers of anti-Prussian articles. For the latter purpose Stieber placed a great number of agents in foreign countries, especially France and England.

In 1867 Stieber likewise interfered with the attempt of the Reuter Press Bureau to found branches in Germany. Even before Stieber's time the Prussian government had recognized the significance of telegraphic news, and in order to be sure that the German

people had the journalistic pabulum that their official guardians deemed suitable for them, the Wolff Bureau had been founded under the direction of Dr. B. Wolff. Consequently, when the Reuter Bureau sought to establish telegraph offices at Berlin and Frankfort, permission was withheld. In the first place, the Reuter Bureau refused to give any guarantee that they would handle news in a way friendly to the Prussian government; and in the second place, fear was entertained that the Wolff Bureau would not be able to sustain a contest with so powerful a competitor.

The Reuters sought to evade the Prussian government by founding an ostensibly independent agency called the "Telegraphic Bureau for North Germany". But Stieber discovered the deceit, and the bureau shortly was obliged to cease its activities.

Among the states that gave Stieber particular trouble at this time was Hanover, recently annexed but not completely digested even at this day. Among documents confiscated by him was an historical sketch of exceedingly great interest just now. This sketch took a survey of the past and present of Germany. Throughout the survey this principle was emphasized: the separation of the German races into numerous political states was the healthiest state for Germany and the most natural. The sketch maintained: "Prussia is the common enemy of all. An alliance of all small nations with France for the common purpose of breaking the power of Prussia, to throw it back over the Elbe as Napoleon did, is an essential duty if we wish to continue to exist. It is still possible to fulfill this duty as long as the newly acquired territories of Prussia are yet unassimilated, as long as there exists in them, especially in

Hanover, an energetic opposition. But when a number of years have passed, this opposition will grow constantly weaker, just as has happened in the other lands that this state of the Hohenzollerns has acquired." The memorial closes with these words: "There is only one cure for this frightful evil. That cure is the restoration of the equilibrium of Europe by the destruction of the Hohenzollern state. That is the task not only of France, but of all the smaller powers that see a protector in France, and that watch with anxiety and fear the increasing might of Prussian militarism. They all have a common interest." Surely these are prophetic words. For the suppression of this and similar literature Stieber received a special reward, he tells us—a gratification from the Foreign Ministry of two hundred thalers.

## V

Germany, too, realized that France was the state toward which many of the smaller nations were looking, even France under the Empire. So preparations for war on France went forward rapidly, and in them Stieber bore an increasing part. At this time Prussia was already spending over a quarter of a million dollars on its secret service. With this sum at his command, Stieber appointed a great number of spies within the proposed invasion zones, using Brussels, Geneva, and Lausanne as directing centers. His spies consisted of several classes. There were, first, German farmers, whose immigration into France was "assisted", and who were made to locate along the probable route of advance of the German armies. Then German women of the lower and not too fastidious classes were placed as barmaids and cashiers in public places, or as servants in soldiers' can-

teens. Many hundreds of domestics were told to find employment in the homes of members of the official and professional classes. Finally, numerous retired non-commissioned officers were found commercial positions at important points in the country. It is said that Stieber boasted that he had placed 40,000 spies in France, and that it was due to him at least as much as to Moltke that the war had been won.

In November, 1869, Stieber went to Paris, to secure details as to the chassepot and the mitrailleuse. His information being "satisfactory", he proceeded to Switzerland, to confer with other agents. Thence he returned to Berlin and assumed his position as director of the field police, which was mobilized at the end of July, 1870. His immediate personnel consisted of thirty-one officials and 157 subordinates.

As the victorious Prussian army moved farther and farther into France, the intimacy between Bismarck and Stieber increased apace. In a letter to his wife, Stieber chronicles an evening they spent together. There were five of them in a miserable peasant's hut, he says; and Bismarck made coffee himself. After a while the others left, and Bismarck and Stieber held confidential chat. "We went over our whole past together", writes the sleuth proudly, "and I was very candid, as he was too. He closed with the words, 'Just see what a country junker can become, who once had all the world as his foe'. I believe we shall never give Alsace and Lorraine back again. I must confess that was the most interesting evening of my whole life. Our conversation is, perhaps, a matter of world history." Truly the spirit of history, hovering over this drama of candor, might well have recorded in greater detail this dialogue between

Bismarck, who boasted that he had once told the truth just because no one had expected it, and Stieber, the spy that skulked before kings.

Perhaps if the story of the Franco-Prussian War had been a little better known, there might have been less surprise at the conduct of the Prussian soldiery in the World War. Writing from Pont-à-Mousson, the scene of the great American offensive of September 12, 1918, Stieber remarks, "I have received orders to act here with the greatest severity and disregard of consequences. Yesterday in the village of Gorze a French peasant fired upon a wagon conveying some wounded Prussian soldiers. As it happened, two of the wounded men were able to walk; they jumped into the house and seized the fellow. He was hanged to the house by a cord around his arm, and then killed slowly with 34 bullets." In other letters from the same town Stieber tells how the land has been desolated, adding as comment, "We Germans are such good-

humored fellows, it is frightfully difficult for us to act severely".

The final act came when Faure arrived to beg peace. Bismarck had Stieber act as his host—Faure, of course, did not know that his every act was under observation, and that his papers were systematically examined. Stieber began to think of home. He was not long delayed, receiving the coveted Iron Cross meanwhile for his services.

After the war Stieber continued to suppress all democratic movements and to guard William I and Bismarck against assassination. He suppressed so many attempts that a suspicion arose that he had stopped with one hand what he had started with the other. He died in 1882 at Berlin of arthritis.

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Leopold Auerbach. *Denkwürdigkeiten des Geheimen Regierungsrathes Dr. Stieber.* Berlin, 1884. Verlag von Julius Engelmann.

Wermuth Und Wilhelm Stieber: *Die Communisten-Verschwörungen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts.* Berlin, 1853. Druck von A. W. Hayn.



## REALISTS AND ORATORS

BY BABETTE DEUTSCH

William Butler Yeats has drawn an interesting distinction between the artist and his fellows. With fine simplicity he declares:

The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors,  
The sentimentalist himself; while art  
Is but a vision of reality.

So when Amy Lowell prefaces her latest volume of polyphonic prose by the statement that she has based her form "upon the long, flowing cadence of oratorical prose", it is no matter for wonder that she achieves the exaltation of oratory rather than the intensity of poetry. For all the enormity of her ambition (she brushes in an epoch on a page, unveils a giant in a phrase), for all the splendor of her imagery and the richness of her tonal color, her work retains this rhetorical quality. Both oratory and music are based on a more exact science than is poetry. And it is the relation of poetry to these arts that engages Miss Lowell. In the sense that all art is experiment, she is supremely an artist. But she seems always the scholar in the laboratory, rather than the poet in the grip of his emotion.

Truly, her experiments in this book are magnificent. "Sea-blue and Blood-red" is almost as brilliant as its title. "Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings" is a fascinating juxtaposition of "the delicacy and artistic clarity of Japan and the artistic ignorance and gallant self-confidence of America". But "The Bronze Horses" is the author's herculean *tour de force*, with its colored chiaroscuro of Cæsarian

Rome, the Venice of Campo Formio, the Italia Irredenta clamor of 1915. "Can Grande's Castle" is a place for communion with historic ghosts; it holds open doors to age-long vistas. But one is often able to step quietly out of the picture, to lose the intimate excitement; in one's pleasure in the orator's gorgeous periods to forego the "vision of reality" which is the essence of poetry.

Distinguished by its utter divorce from academic and foreign influences is the work of Carl Sandburg. "Corn-huskers" is a wonderfully stronger achievement than "Chicago Poems". Here Sandburg says the things he only strove for in his earlier volume. The same emotions stir him, the same brooding vision of the laborious human struggle and of nature's large, silent indifference. The same slow, resurgent rhythms, with their sudden sharp pauses, prevail. Rhyme, and the sense of color which seems to accompany it, are equally absent. But his perceptions are sharper, his expressiveness is at once larger and less verbose. One reiterated note is struck, but how differently, in "Prairie", the fine opening poem, and in "Grass". Sings the Prairie:

I am here when the cities are gone.  
I am here before the cities come.  
I nourished the lonely men on horses.  
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.  
I am dust of men.

Says Grass:

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.  
Shovel them under and let me work—  
I am the grass; I cover all.