

# THE GERMAN EMPEROR.

BY POULTNEY BIGELOW.

WILLIAM II OF GERMANY, THE MAN OF THE HOUR IN EUROPE, AND THE MOST REMARKABLE PERSONALITY AMONG THE SOVEREIGNS OF TODAY—A FRANK ESTIMATE OF HIM BY AN AMERICAN WHO KNEW HIM AS A BOY.

WILLIAM II was born in January of 1859, and has therefore years enough behind him to warrant us in dropping the misleading nickname of "the Young Emperor." Coming into the world with a withered arm, he ascended the throne as the successor of a beloved father, whose reign lasted barely one hundred days. Few kings have come to their inheritance under more gloomy circumstances.

His grandfather, William I, had died full of years and national honor. All petty questions were hushed by a mere word from this veteran ruler. Under his long rule Prussia had grown into Germany, and the empire of the Hapsburgs had yielded to that of the Hohenzollerns. The venerable monarch loved peace, as do most men who have passed the age of ninety, and his policy was wisely limited to governing so as to die at peace with his neighbors and his own people.

The great Moltke had done his work; the generals of his army were grown to be old men; yet William I did not like to make changes. He loved to see familiar faces about him, and did not choose to be reminded that old generals do not as a rule make good campaigners. Bismarck, the companion of his declining years, was a man who understood his master well, who relieved him of responsibility, who humored his fancies, and at the same time managed to have his own way.

The people of Germany had very generally come to regard this remarkable trinity—William I, Moltke, and Bismarck—as infallible. They could scarcely imagine the empire moving smoothly in the path of peace under any other rule. Yet even the death of the old emperor did not appear to threaten its safety so long as the beloved Frederick promised to make a worthy successor. But in the early summer of 1888, when the truth dawned that "Unser Fritz" was dying,

the world began to discuss the succession with no little disquietude.

The English and American press led the way in the general abuse of William II. Newspaper correspondents knew all about his father and grandfather, and were very angry that a young man should suddenly jump upon the world's stage and act as if he had a right to be there. The papers unanimously decided that he was a pompous little coxcomb who would hasten to pick a quarrel with some neighbor in the hope of playing the soldier and reaping glory. Every day brought to the English papers accounts—for the most part manufactured in Paris—of alleged eccentricities; and sober journalists were found who pronounced him a fair case for a committee *de lunatico inquirendo*.

The culmination of his madness, as pictured by the press, may be roughly taken as on the day when he accepted the resignation of Bismarck, in March, 1890.

But I am moving too fast. Let us go back and note what sort of a boy he was, and how he was trained for the imperial stage.

## THE KAISER AS A BOY.

When he was thirteen years old, I was living with a German tutor in Potsdam, and so it came about that I was asked to come and romp with William and his brother Henry in the grounds of their summer residence, called the New Palace. I mention this because it might otherwise be supposed that what I am writing has been gathered from hearsay.

William and his brother loved their father and mother as heartily as one could wish. Nearly every day that I remember, the Crown Prince Frederick, with his wife, now the Dowager Empress Frederick, would come arm in arm to stroll among the trees where we youngsters were playing all sorts of rough games. I noted that William was par-

ticularly proud of his mother's accomplishments. One day he told me, as a great secret, that the cake we were eating was of her making. Another day he took me surreptitiously into a room of the palace where his mother had her studio, and there he made me admire her water colors. In 1888, when he became emperor, and the papers accused him of lacking filial piety, my mind went back to our boyish romps in 1871 and 1872, and I felt sure that a young man brought up as he was could not change his nature without cause.

The boy William led a life of the most wholesome simplicity. His food was plain; he was made to work hard at his books; when he did romp, he romped with all his might and main.

Not only did his father and mother bring him up as one who might have to work for his living, but he had a tutor, Dr. Hinzpeter, who went still further in fostering what was wholesome in the boy's nature. Hinzpeter would have made an excellent prior of a monastery where the monks wore hair shirts and lined their slippers with hard peas. He believed in hard fare; he insisted that labor was the condition of happiness, and that if a thing was accomplished without hard work, it could not be worth much. He was a pedagogue of the old school. He would have opposed the use of ruled copy-books because it relieved boys of the drudgery of ruling them.

He was a conscientious, highly cultivated man, and eminently suited to the prince, so long as the prince remained young. But when William came of age, and went about in the world, he left Hinzpeter far behind. For the prince absorbed the life and thought about him with amazing facility, whereas the tutor remained where he was, seeing life only in books.

It is difficult to say a good thing of an emperor without incurring the charge of flattery. At this risk, however, I venture to say that I never met a youngster in Europe or America whose manner was so happy a blend of courtesy and good fellowship. In his wildest romps—and he was a very devil at sport—he never for a moment took advantage of his rank, or allowed any one to suppose that he was better than his playfellows. If he saw a shy or awkward youngster he took partic-

ular pains to place him at his ease. He did this, not as a lad who is being coached into good manners, but obviously in response to his own feelings as a little gentleman. His tutor was, of course, enormously in fear lest the pupil should come to grief, and often warned me not to be rough, but with the prince that did not seem to make any difference.

#### THE KAISER'S SCHOOL DAYS.

William II is the first German emperor who attended a public school, and did his work from day to day like every other German boy. Whether in all cases this would be a good rule is doubtful. In his it produced good, however, for it opened his eyes to the brutal manner in which the growth of school children can be stunted by narrow minded pedagogues. With the exception of the Chinese custom of binding up women's feet, I know of no more barbarous perversion of nature than what formerly passed in Germany under the name of classical education.

At the age of six the young Teuton was handed over to the pedagogue. For ten or twelve years he was stuffed with Latin, Greek, theology, mathematics, and other things, until he grew pale, short sighted, narrow chested, and almost as emasculated as his teachers. In all these years of classical training he had to work indoors, and bent over his books, not merely all day, but usually at night as well. The pedagogue held that his duty ended when he had crammed a lad's brain to bursting; he regarded it as heresy to say that a man's body and general health were more important than his head alone.

The emperor, young as he was, recognized, as every healthy mind must, that there is something wrong in an education which turns out only classical scholars and pedagogues. The world has need of other men—men of judgment; men of healthy brains; of action; of good stomachs; men fit to lead, to plan campaigns, to conquer new worlds.

He himself is fairly clever at books, but his school life was anything but joyous. It was grind, grind, grind, all the way through—and he must often have envied the English public school lads across the Channel, who play cricket and football every afternoon, and look in fighting trim year in, year out. From what I have seen of German public schools,

I am inclined to think that an excellent law would be one committing to prison every school teacher who did not insist upon his pupils playing out of doors at least three hours a day. This would be revolutionary in the eyes of the pedagogues, who think three hours a week enough, but a few exemplary arrests would do much good.

#### THE KAISER AT COLLEGE.

From the classical school at Cassel, William went to the university of Bonn, where his father had studied before him. Here he had more liberty; was much courted by the worldly minded students, and passed a couple of pleasant years. He married, shortly after graduating, the handsome and motherly Augusta Victoria, daughter of Duke Frederick of Schleswig Holstein. The princess, who was three months older than her husband, has presented him with six boys and one daughter, and has been an excellent wife.

Professor Geffcken, who knew William's father well, told me that the late Emperor Frederick had never committed an act which he need have concealed from his wife on their wedding day. This I believe to be equally true of the present emperor, much as sensational journalists have done to spread rumors to the contrary.

The son of an American President, who enters one of our universities as a freshman, has before him a career peculiarly trying, even to a strong character. He has to meet temptations which less conspicuous students can easily avoid. He is courted by fellow students, made much of by leaders of society, and looked upon with indulgence even by the faculty. •Most of my contemporaries can recall half a dozen sons of conspicuous fathers, whose college life has been anything but creditable. That the heir to an imperial throne passed his years at school and at the university not only without scandal, but without even the cause for scandal, is worthy of note.

Men of the world shrug their shoulders when they hear that a man can be a prince and also virtuous. This is because in certain courts of Europe it is still customary to provide an honored guest, not merely with board and lodging, but with questionable female companionship as well. Any one familiar with the court of St.

Petersburg, or with that of Napoleon III, will have no difficulty in understanding what I allude to.

#### HIS SCHOOLING IN STATECRAFT.

Between William II's school days and his accession to the throne lies the period of his life which has done most to make him what he is. He was quietly set to work in the government bureaus learning the routine of official business. Bismarck took charge of this part of his education, and no doubt flattered himself that he would some day influence William II as completely as he had William I. Bismarck initiated the young man into the arts by which treaties are made; the traps that must be laid for suspected officials; the diplomatic steps necessary to make a war or conclude a peace. He unfolded the glories of state socialism, the arguments in favor of protection; in short, he sought to inoculate a singularly clever pupil with most of the economic ideas associated with Chinese statesmanship and Pennsylvania protectionism.

In this interesting school William learned many things not included in the Bismarckian curriculum. He learned to know the machinery that kept the German empire in motion; he learned how business of state is despatched; he had an excellent opportunity of making the acquaintance of the officials about Bismarck, and of noting their relative capacities. He could not have done this as well had he been crown prince. At that time, however, not only was he not crown prince, but it was not supposed that he would reach the throne until far on in years; for the Emperor Frederick gave the impression of one likely to live as long a life as that of his father, William I.

#### THE YOUNG EMPEROR.

In 1888 the plans of all German politicians, courtiers, and prophets were violently upset. The grandfather William died; three months afterwards his son, Frederick III, followed him to the grave, and the imperial throne devolved upon William II, then twenty nine years old.

He commenced his task like a prudent skipper in strange waters. He felt his way cautiously. He paid visits to his neighbors; made the personal acquaintance of the principal statesmen in the countries about him; and it is safe to say

that these visits cleared away many false impressions which the press had created in regard to him. He visited St. Petersburg, and did his best to discover there the warm sympathy for Germany which Bismarck had taught him to expect. On the contrary, he found that in Russia there existed an anti German feeling as strong as that of the French. He visited Austria, and found that Bismarck again had been mistaken. Instead of the jealousy he had been led to expect, he found himself as among members of his own family. He visited England, where Bismarck had taught him to look for nothing but insult. Among Englishmen he found a cordial welcome, so much so that he returned to Germany enthusiastic in the cause of outdoor sport, and promptly put his name down in the lists of British yachtsmen. Wherever he went, whether to Norway or Sweden, to Greece or Turkey, he brought back a valuable picture of the actual state of things in those countries, so that when his foreign minister placed before him reports upon matters outside of Germany, he was able to follow them intelligently.

His rapid movements about Europe gave rise to much talk, for to people unacquainted with such railway comfort as Americans possess there appeared to be something inordinately restless in an emperor's living on a train, and actually signing state papers while flying from one court to another. His grandfather had not done so, and with many that was argument enough.

William II, however, at once resolved to use the resources of modern civilization to their uttermost. He built for himself a train of cars on the plan of the Chicago Limited, so thoroughly comfortable that he could spend his night in travel and arrive fresh and ready for work early next morning, at almost any point of his empire. He had a first class steam yacht built with the same idea in view. In neither expense was he extravagant, for yachts and cars, used as he uses them, make him capable of double work with no increase of nervous waste.

William II no sooner discovered that Bismarck had been mistaken in regard to one or two important foreign questions, than he began to examine things more closely for himself at home. The old chancellor had made the first emperor

give the police extraordinary powers against socialists, and had promised to exterminate political heresy by stern repression. The law that enabled him to war upon the hated doctrines expired soon after William II came to the throne, and Bismarck asked to have it renewed. The emperor declined to assist him. He saw that socialism had not decreased under Bismarck's rule of brute force; on the contrary, it had increased enormously. It was rare in Germany, when the empire was formed; in 1891 there were more than a million votes cast for socialist candidates for the Reichstag. The emperor was shrewd enough to recognize the fact that a large share of these votes were cast, not as an approval of any abstract socialistic program, but merely as a protest against Bismarck.

The chancellor had made himself so thoroughly disliked by his persecutions of those who did not agree with him, that he no longer represented a working majority of the legislature. His omnipotence had made little impression for good after 1871. He had not reconciled the conquered French provinces. He had made enemies of the Polish districts on the eastern frontier by repressive measures clumsily carried out. He had antagonized all Catholic Germany. He had made the work of government difficult, yet persisted that only in his way could government be carried on.

William II loved Bismarck and treated him with every mark of affection and respect. He fully recognized the veteran statesman's services in helping to form the empire. But he could not stand by with folded arms and quietly see this same Bismarck day after day making the government more and more unpopular, and his people more and more discontented. If a man does me a great service, and I ask him to live with me at my expense, I expect to treat him with every token of hospitality which gratitude can suggest. But if that man insults my wife, teaches my children bad language, debauches my servants, and habitually falls asleep with a lighted pipe in his mouth, I feel justified in asking him to go to a hotel, where I may show my gratitude by paying his bills.

In 1890 William II chose to have a political talk with a leading German politician. Bismarck said that if the



emperor did so again he would resign. The emperor did so again. Bismarck did not resign. The emperor naturally sent to Bismarck's palace to know why the promised resignation had not been handed in. Bismarck had become so accustomed to gain his point by the mere threat of giving up his post that he could not imagine a case where the old charm would cease to have effect. This time he found himself invited to make his words good.

#### THE RECONCILIATION WITH BISMARCK.

Three years after his departure from the chancellorship, Bismarck fell ill. The emperor had requested the old statesman's physician to let him know from time to time how the illustrious patient was doing; but such was Bismarck's spirit of resentment that he did not allow his doctor to carry out the imperial wishes. During the army operations of that year, about Metz, it was reported in the papers that Bismarck was ill, but not seriously. I can testify that no one about the emperor, and least of all the emperor himself, had any idea that the old chancellor had anything worse than one of his frequent attacks of indigestion. Only after the danger was over did he learn, by accident, that Bismarck had been dangerously ill. At once he reached out the hand of friendship, and offered him one of the royal palaces as a place where he could rest and recuperate. The offer was declined with formal politeness.

In January, 1894, William II celebrated his thirty fifth birthday, and at the same time the twenty fifth anniversary of his admission to the army. He sent a personal aide to Bismarck with a present of very fine old wine, and with an autograph letter inviting the old chancellor to be his guest in Berlin on this interesting occasion.

At last Bismarck yielded, and came to the capital for the purpose of making his peace. The emperor sent his only brother to meet him and escort him to the palace. Every demonstration of respect was offered him: an escort of cavalry; two state carriages, one open, the other closed. It was my good fortune to be in Berlin on that remarkable day. The avenues of the capital were crowded with strangers and idlers eager to see the great man, and they cheered him with general heartiness. It is hard to say what

was the main reason for the cheers. I am inclined to think that hero worship and gratitude for past services united to make the demonstration hearty. In all minds, too, there was a sense of relief that a painful situation had ceased in a manner honorable to both parties. It is probable, though, that very few in the crowd wished to see Bismarck chancellor again.

Loud as the cheers were for Bismarck, they seemed faint in comparison with those which went up a couple of hours later, when the emperor rode out from the Schloss, unescorted, save by two aides who followed some distance behind. He was in an officer's undress uniform, and he jogged along the bridle path, taking his accustomed constitutional.

When the crowd caught sight of him it became at once indifferent to the police. Men and women rushed in a body towards him; crowded about his horse, flung their hats into the air, and shouted themselves hoarse. It was a spontaneous movement, and took the emperor completely by surprise. Germans recognized what he had done; the self control he had exercised for the past four years; the delicacy with which he had brought about a reconciliation; the patriotism that had enabled him to put aside personal feeling for the sake of national interests.

I have seen many historical movements in Germany—for instance, the marching out of the German troops to the war of 1870-1871 and their victorious return; the ceremonies attending the laying of the foundation stone of the new Reichstag building, and many more; but none impressed me more than those attending the reconciliation of Bismarck and the emperor in 1894.

#### THE KAISER AS A GENERAL.

We cannot dismiss this subject without touching upon William II in his relation to the fighting forces of Germany. When he ascended the throne he had to undertake the very ungracious task of retiring dozens of very worthy commanders for the simple reason that they were old. These men had, for the most part, played an honorable rôle in the war against France; they had been brought up with Moltke and the old Emperor William, and they naturally felt that Germany was going to ruin under a young leader, who

proposed to do without them. The public at large was inclined to take the side of the old generals, and to assume that there were no young officers competent to fill their places. The emperor was criticised as being hot headed and ambitious.

Now war usually comes suddenly, at least in Europe. Commanders of army corps cannot sit in their office chairs and command troops by telegraph. They must be in the saddle early and late; and physical toughness is an element which must not be wanting in their composition. The Prussian army was destroyed at Jena, in 1806, because its generals were old men who could not do a day's work. Today the emperor is resolved that if he is attacked his troops will be led by men in the prime of life.

As to his personal capacity as the commander of a great army it is dangerous to speak, because in war capacity is measured only by success. As I read history, however, I note that the successful generals have been, as a rule, men of practical minds; of strong convictions; of simple habits; of great physical endurance; of endless pluck, and with a capacity to control an infinite number of details. In so far as these qualities can make a general in our day, there is hope for William II.

Beyond these qualities, he has gained a familiarity with the handling of large masses of troops rarely acquired excepting in the great wars of modern times. Each autumn he commands about sixty thousand men who operate for several days as if in the presence of a real enemy. His army has to be provided for as in war; has to be led with as much caution as if a real enemy were before it. There is room for many entanglements and mortifying blunders when men have to be placed on a fighting front extending perhaps ten miles from wing to wing, and when the men have to arrive in position at a given hour from encampments many miles away. It is very easy to get regiments mixed up on the same road; to get them stuck in swamps; to direct them across streams which look small on the map, but prove to be too deep to ford and impassable for artillery. I have seen a whole division of cavalry surrounded and taken prisoner at one of these great war games, to the great mortification of the general commanding.

The practice that an officer gets in these great field exercises, covering hundreds of square miles of unknown country, is of course not equal to the experience gained in actual fighting; but it is the next best thing. And in this kind of warfare the emperor has shown marked ability. He does his work thoroughly; commands in person and in fact, and if no one can yet say that he will be a successful general in war, it is at least equally safe to say that no one is more likely to deserve success. The officers and men who have been under his command have come to see, little by little, that he understands his business. They have confidence in him—and that is half of the battle.

The German emperor knows that the best preparation for war is to have a prosperous, industrious, and united people. At the same time he works early and late, seeking to keep abreast of modern requirements. He visits ship yards, factories, and studios, gathering knowledge, and imparting suggestions.

I once happened to be with him when the postman brought in the fruit of one letter box delivery. It would have filled a wheelbarrow. I asked him why he took so much trouble with his letters—why he did not let his clerks attend to them. He answered characteristically:

"Any one who writes to me must feel sure that the letter reaches me. I have all my letters opened here by a trusted man, who sorts them, and gives me an idea of what is in them."

On another occasion he was walking through the crowded streets of a German town, talking with his companion about dynamiters. The companion remarked that it was rather risky work, going about without protection.

"Oh," said the emperor, "if I had to bother with such considerations, I should never finish my day's work."

Personally brave, and more inclined to court a combat than to shrink from one, that he does not regard military glory as the principal object of life is proved by the profound peace which has lain upon Europe during the first ten years of his reign. At the same time, he is far sighted enough to understand that Germany is safe only through military preparations that will command respect from hostile neighbors. England and the United States can afford to talk about a millennium of

peace, but Germany cannot. Russia, with a population of a hundred millions, is daily persecuting the Germans of the Baltic provinces, who are Protestants. She has an army put down on paper as about eight hundred thousand, and these troops are massed almost exclusively up against the German frontier, as a constant challenge to fight. France not only maintains a standing army greater than that of Germany, but still proclaims to the world that she means to recover Alsace and Lorraine.

Russia has an army recruited largely

from uncivilized tribes, and France has her more or less barbarous African regiments. Germany has none but Germans in her army—educated, humane lads taken from the plow, the counting house, or the university. Is it strange that Germans look with anxiety upon a coming war in which they are to be set upon by savages little better than our Apaches or Sioux?

But William II has said in public, and I know that he has said in private:

"I shall never make war; but if I am attacked——!"

The sentence needed no ending.



#### THE SPELL.

I HUNG a string of verses  
Against my cabin wall.  
What think you was the fortune  
They prayed might me befall?

Not fame nor health nor riches  
To tarry at my door,  
But that my old, old sweetheart  
Might visit me once more.

Out of the moted day dream  
Among the boding firs,  
They prayed she might remember  
The lover that was hers.

They prayed the gates of silence  
A moment might uncloze,  
The hour before the hill crest  
Is flushed with solemn rose.

Oh, prayers of mortal longing,  
What latch can ye undo?  
What comrade once departed  
Ever returned for you?

All day with tranquil spirit  
I kept my cabin door,  
In wonder at the beauties  
I had not seen before.

I slept the dreamless slumber  
Of happiness again;  
And when I woke, the thrushes  
Were singing in the rain.

*Bliss Carman.*