

A Secret Counselor Lifts the Curtain

WILLIAM HARLAN HALE

THE HOLSTEIN PAPERS: THE MEMOIRS, DIARIES AND CORRESPONDENCE OF FRIEDRICH VON HOLSTEIN. VOL. I: MEMOIRS AND POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS. \$5. VOL. II: DIARIES. \$8.50. Edited by Norman Rich and M. H. Fisher. Cambridge.

He was a dour, secretive, solitary figure, moving about the inner corridors of imperial Germany's Foreign Office with cold, prying eyes and a thick black beard—a man so mistrustful and bent on his privacy that he only once let himself be photographed and remained a withdrawn bachelor all his life. Although he enjoyed the special favor of Chancellor Bismarck and the young Kaiser William II, he declined high-ranking ministerial posts and lived out his years as simply the senior Counselor of the Wilhelmstrasse. Yet Friedrich von Holstein's influence and power, exerted silently through inner chambers, became legendary. Stories were spun about the private dossiers with which he was said to have humbled his rivals. Learned historians, never able to get at all the facts behind the mask, labeled him the mysterious Gray Eminence of pre-1914 Germany.

What is clear is that he was one of the last professionals of an age that saw traditional secret diplomacy reach its ultimate involutions on the Continent, with the end result of world war. Today that age is thought of as being utterly remote, and Holstein lingers in memory only as one of its symbolic ghosts.

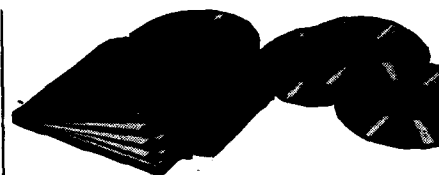
In his time, the man was so effective that some of his contemporaries looked on him as "the Spider," sitting at the center of the webs of foreign policy he had spun. Others called him "the Mole," because he preferred to work in the dark. Bismarck, the ranking practitioner of the secret art, grew so apprehensive of his own pupil's skill at it that he is said to have called Holstein "the man with the hyena eyes." The brassy Emperor William II, who

made many a resounding misstep on the world stage, partly as a result of advice received from Counselor Holstein, referred to him during his twilight years in exile as a "*Höllensohn*"—a "son of hell."

SUCH A REPUTATION as an evil genius requires some foundation either in genius or at least in evil. The Holstein mystery, one of the most absorbing in modern European history, was abetted in the first instance by Holstein himself, with his love of concealment. He wrote no massive memoirs, his hand appears officially in few state papers, and he made no speeches. His patron Bismarck had even advised him not to keep a diary, lest in it he mix private and professional matters. He worked chiefly through conversations and a vast confidential correspondence with Germany's representatives around the globe, his cables being so privileged that they were not even officially logged or filed and were often seen by no one but the recipient. Metternich and Talleyrand operated no more discreetly than did the Wilhelmstrasse's ingrown bachelor.

But one of the advantages of wars is that occasionally they break open the locks of buried archives. The subterranean Holstein, for all his secreting of evidence like a one-man CIA, could not resist the temptation to jot down frank and gossip notes for the eyes of his platonic love, a lady cousin. These, together with masses of letters and fragments of self-justifying memoranda, passed eventually into the hands of another lady friend. In the 1930's, Hitler's Gestapo impounded them on the ground that they might contain matter compromising Germany's imperial past and its exalted figures. This they indeed do, as anyone may see from the installments of the Holstein papers now published.

They also show up the feared *éminence grise* himself, and reveal



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him as a malevolent talebearer and political dunderhead on the back stairs of the Continent's most powerful and least savory court.

The Patterns of Distrust

Two patriarchal figures dominated that court and all Germany with it during the first period of the young empire's meteoric rise, a period that also saw the rise of Holstein. One was the iron-fisted Bismarck, who tyrannized the whole Reich even though (in contrast to Chancellor Adenauer in our own day) he could never muster a safe majority in the national legislature. The other was the bewhiskered and aging Emperor William I, whom Bismarck made his tool. Bismarck's method, very much like Hitler's later, was to maintain himself in power by sowing discord abroad and apprehension at home; he trusted no one, not even his protégé, Holstein—who finally repaid him in kind. The old emperor, for his part, trusted no one less than his own son and heir, soon destined for a brief reign as Frederick III and suspect among the Junker clansmen as being under liberal English influence through his marriage to Queen Victoria's eldest daughter.

To make matters around the summit even more unpleasant, Frederick and his consort were barely on speaking terms with *their* son, the future William II, a haughty young militarist throwback who delighted in saber rattling despite his crippled arm and who detested his parents. "A cozy family life," remarked Holstein to his Cousin Ize.

In this human morass, where imperial figures watched each other's health chiefly with the hope that they would drop dead, Bismarck and his circle intrigued against Frederick, while Frederick's English wife tried to influence her husband against Bismarck, and young William and his coterie (to which Holstein at the right moment attached himself) turned against all of them.

The general shape of this has long been known. Holstein's salvaged papers illuminate it with sardonic glimpses into the conduct of affairs when the Hohenzollerns were in flower. One day, for instance, old Emperor William was informed that his dangerously ailing heir must be operated on for cancer. "Would

Your Majesty care to see the doctors tomorrow, beforehand?" According to Holstein, this model of Prussian parenthood declined with the excuse that "Tomorrow is most inconvenient for me, because I'm inspecting the troops at Potsdam." Then Holstein records with evident pleasure William II's dislike of his own mother, "who has never become a Prussian, but has always remained an Englishwoman," and adds for Cousin Ize's benefit that there are rumors that she has been having an affair with her court chamberlain. Another entry describes how the young prince, while his dying father was still receiving the homage of his people at a palace window, ordered the commander of the palace guard to seal all exits of the building the



moment news came of Frederick's death, thereby virtually making his mother a prisoner.

"I think I have a mission to destroy Gaul, like Julius Caesar," the bumptious young William confided one day—an observation which Holstein also passed on to Ize. William, he said, was "obstinate and heartless." But, he added, "he may be a good ruler some day."

THE DUMPY MAN behind the black beard heard or rather overheard everything and hoped to use it to his advantage. He tells Ize that Bismarck's son Herbert (whom the Chancellor had made head of the Foreign Office, since the Bismarcks also were founding a dynasty) drinks too much and is vulnerable on that account. He sets down with a gossip's relish his knowledge that the wife-to-be of Count Bernhard von Bülow (later to become German Chancellor) has had an affair with so-and-so, and that Ambassador Hatzfeldt's wife has also been carrying on with so-and-so, while Ambassador Hohenlohe's dispatches from Paris have become "rather thin" since "he is pur-

suing pleasures unsuitable for his age."

And what of the great Bismarck himself, the architect of imperial Germany? Holstein destroys the patriotic image of the Spartan Chancellor by reporting, for instance, on the way he lined his own pockets through manipulating German tariff policy from backstage and accepting huge gifts from bankers. "It is a pity," Holstein remarks of his patron's greed with a smirk, "but that is Bismarck's weakest point." This was set down at a time when Holstein was an intimate at the Bismarck family table, supplying the Bismarck clan with information from his extensive network and not letting on that he was picking up some information at the table, too.

Furthermore, Holstein found the Iron Chancellor as unprincipled in public matters as he was in private. Speaking of Germany's claims to overseas colonies, the old man remarked one day, "All this colonial business is a fraud, but we need it for the elections." The elder Bismarck, like his son Herbert, often drank rather heavily. This was not their only common failing. "Both," Holstein wrote to Ize and thus for posterity, "are liars."

The Old Master's Game

This diarist was the man, then, who through his unique store of inside information and intelligence rose to help shape the policies of the Continent's greatest empire at its zenith. What, actually, did he achieve? Informers and double-dealers often claim that they are motivated by some higher purpose. In Holstein's case this appears to have been an impulse to save old Bismarck from himself, which gradually became transmuted into a desire to save young William II's boisterous empire from the Bismarck clan. "Dear Ize," he confided in 1886, "I have lost my former confidence in the supreme direction of our policy. Father and son [meaning the two Bismarcks] are not at one. The father said six weeks ago, 'If Russia and Austria come to blows, we shall have to support Austria; we can't let her be crushed.' The son, on the other hand, said to me three weeks ago, 'We can do business with Russia, but not Austria. We will help

Russia smash Austria.' " Next year the elder Bismarck, having built a coalition with Austria against Russia, turned around and "reinsured" himself in St. Petersburg by a secret treaty with Austria's old enemy, Russia. "He is now suffering from a positive mania for secret treaties," Holstein told Ize.

The old master's game of international finesse, always designed to seek out likely partners anywhere, was too complex for the pupil, who preferred the stiletto threat. "Our policy with its criss-cross of commitments resembles the tangle of tracks at a big railroad station. The chief switchman thinks he can click everything into its proper place, and hopes . . . that the greater the confusion, the more indispensable he is." Holstein's orderly Teutonic mind, despite its forays into areas of the boudoir and the back stairs, demanded one firm, categorical line. So with pedantic consistency he promoted precisely the wrong line.

Bismarck had played the field. Holstein's way of improving on this was to advise that Germany play with no one but neighboring Austria-Hungary, since the Czarist East and the liberal West couldn't possibly unite against this combination. All Holstein's efforts were bent on this, and he used the specter of a "Russophile party" to wean German generals away from their age-old flirtations with the East, while on the other hand he spread dire rumors about "British influence" in order to burn bridges between the German commercial class and London. Bismarck, who was cynical but not stupid, was dropped by the young Kaiser in 1890, and his Russian reinsurance deal was canceled in favor of closer ties with Holstein's favorite foreign capital, gilded Vienna.

IN THE END, of course, Russia and the West did pull together, despite all the Counselor's predictions, and the Danubian Dual Monarchy became less an asset to Germany than an unlimited liability. By 1906 Germany was heading in increasing isolation toward war. Belatedly, Holstein set down that he had tried to apply brakes: "Year in and year out, the Foreign Office had to resist the Kaiser's sudden inspirations, and I was chiefly responsible for this cen-

sorship." Such as it was, the censorship was ineffective. There could have been no poorer censor, in fact, than Holstein—who in 1906 was at last fired from the Foreign Office for having advised during the international crisis over Morocco an intransigent position toward France that might have brought on general war before Berlin was ready for it.

Holstein was retired with the Order of the Red Eagle. A short time after, a vengeful blast appeared in the German weekly *Die Zukunft*, charging that William II was surrounded by a coterie of titled homosexuals. The Holstein papers do not reveal that Holstein himself inspired this as his parting shot (as many have suspected), but it seems pretty clear that he had a close connection with the editor of *Die Zukunft*—as indeed he had with anyone with whom it was profitable to share a damaging secret.

THROUGHOUT his career, by remaining the professional with inside knowledge who kept himself out of sight, Holstein remained unaccountable to either legislature or public opinion. Some German commentators, seeking to explain away the phenomenon of Holstein, have argued that democracies, too, have their entrenched palace advisers, no less removed from responsibility than he. They cite President Wilson's Colonel E. M. House. But House was a man of another caliber: He did not use the back stairs. And his master, unlike William II, was at least responsible. A Holstein with his cloaked mischief would probably not last long except in a nation that was undecided on which way to turn—east or west, forward or back—or that had failed to make its diplomacy responsible to its people.

Yet there are serious experts and philosophers in America today who argue that we have made our diplomacy too public, too subject to debate, and that a return to the good old days of secret covenants, secretly arrived at, would avoid many present difficulties. They argue that if our diplomacy could go back to the good old days, international affairs would move smoothly again. For these romantics, there is the image of the baronial old Holstein. No question about it: He *was* smooth.

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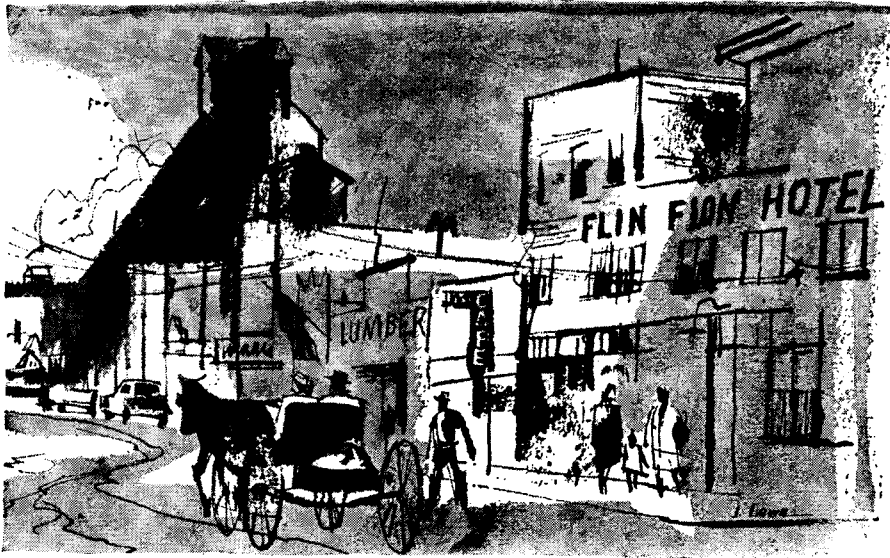
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Introduction

To a Next-Door Neighbor

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

CANADA: TOMORROW'S GIANT, by Bruce Hutchison. Knopf. \$5.

THE PATH OF DESTINY, by Thomas H. Raddall. (Volume Three of "The Canadian History Series," edited by Thomas B. Costain.) Doubleday. \$5.

To explain one country to another must be a trying task. Anyone who reads Alistair Cooke, official interpreter of Americans to Englishmen, is likely after a time to have the feeling that everything is a trifle out of focus. In the course of being explained to Englishmen, the folk rites at a political convention, the affection for the now ex-Brooklyn Dodgers, and other American foibles somehow get to seem more important than they are. The Dodgers' departure will not affect Mayor Wagner's career—like Elvis Presley, they will simply be forgotten. Convention shenanigans cut no particular ice; they are sustained by a conspiracy between the mass-communications industry and the politicians, both of whom must contend with the appalling fact that the real business could be transacted in a few hours but must be made to last a week.

For many years Canada's acknowledged interpreter to the

United States has been Bruce Hutchison, a distinguished newspaperman who lives in British Columbia. For a long time his must have been a rather unrewarding task: It used to be a tenet of the book-publishing business that no one was ever interested enough to buy a book about Canada. Now things are very different. The voice of Canada is being heard with increasing authority on international affairs; Canada has emerged as one of the world's premier trading nations; the Canadian dollar is regularly above par; and any number of people seem to think that Canada is a place where the big money can still be made in the bad old way. Mr. Hutchison's day has come.

THIS VOLUME is a highly civilized account of a journey by the author and his wife from Newfoundland on the far east to British Columbia on the Pacific. Much history, geography, and politics are worked into the account. Moreover, Mr. Hutchison makes a major effort to get under the surface—he is almost painfully concerned to tell why the people of, say, Nova Scotia are as

they are. This, coupled with great language felicity and a figurative skill that at times gets dangerously out of control, makes everything, including the Canadians, almost too complicated. I was born and brought up in Canada, and I finished the book with the feeling that I had had a fairly narrow escape. But one also finishes with a mild sense of regret. Mr. Hutchison is a skillful and perceptive writer. He knows his subject as few men do. If he were to control his gifts and confine himself to description and background history, he might write the best of all books on Canada. He simply puts too much spinach on the giant's brow.

War Whoops and Opportunists

"The Canadian History Series" is an enterprise not of academic historians but of Canadian or ex-Canadian journalists and novelists. Their avowed purpose was to write history less in terms of the great names and the great battles and more in terms of the *habitant* and the backwoods settler. An unavowed purpose was to provide a more readable product. It seems to be one of those enterprises that have worked. The first volume, by the prodigious Thomas B. Costain (*The White and the Gold*, Doubleday, 1954, \$5), dealt with the French régime in Canada. The second, by the late Joseph Lister Rutledge (*Century of Conflict*, Doubleday, 1956, \$5), covered the years of turmoil that ended when Wolfe defeated Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham and finished not only France's hopes of dominating the continent but, in effect, those of England as well.

Mr. Raddall's book now carries the story to 1850. These, too, were years of turmoil—first the perilous eruption over the border, then the War of 1812, and finally a miniature internal revolution that brought home rule and paved the way for full self-government. In contrast with Mr. Hutchison's rich involvement, Mr. Raddall is dry, detached, and on occasion sardonic. He has also learned from Churchill that a historian can obtrude his own preferences without being thrown out of the club.

On the whole he does not find little men rewarding copy. So, the intentions of the series notwithstanding,