

PRINCE BISMARCK.

Chief of the Bandits of Europe.

James Darmesteter in *Revue Bleue*, Paris, November 20.

If there were a tribunal to pass upon crimes against Europe, the first criminal who would be put at the bar, in obedience to the outcry of France and Germany, would be the forger of the 18th of July, 1870.

Prince Bismarck is not the only statesman who has lied and used forgery as a weapon of war. He is the first and the only one who has lied to bring on war, to set upon each other two nations who wanted peace, and with the full knowledge that such a war must be horrible at the time and full of disasters for the future. Those few strokes of the pen across the dispatch sent by his King not only meant the death of 800,000 Frenchmen and of 200,000 Germans; they not only meant the misery of 2,000,000 human beings; they meant misery and terror, perhaps for centuries, between the two nations at the head of human progress. They meant the education of new generations to love war and scorn right, the cultivation of hate, and a war of extermination set up as the ideal of wars to come. They meant the recasting of Europe in such shape that hate should prevail and common humanity be ignored. No great work, no pregnant word, not a step in moral advance, has been made during these twenty years—years passed in a nightmare of preparation for a morrow still more terrible, that may leave Europe exhausted and a prey to anarchists and barbarians. This man, by one lie has stained with blood the coming century.

France did not want war, she wanted to suppress the Empire, to reconquer her own liberty, to devote herself to the ideal, always missed but always sought, of democracy and fraternity. France, which had made Italy—and she does not regret it even to-day—was ready, and is still so, to give her hand to a Germany which shall be really German.

Germany did not want war. She had become united. The treaties which gave to King William the command of all the German forces made sure her independence as against outside enemies, and left her independent at home. To arouse her to war, it was necessary that she should be provoked or made to believe that she had been provoked. Two men in Europe wanted war—one vaguely, and as in a dream. One, the dreamer of the Tuileries, exhausted by disease, by disappointments, by the plebiscite, feeling his throne sinking under the tide of revolution, and catching wildly at any straw. The other wanted war, but coldly, with clear sight and a will of iron. He wanted it not for the unity of Germany, which was accomplished, but to transform this defensive union into an offensive and a conquering one, to transform the free union of States into an autocratic empire. He wanted it in order to tear from France those of her provinces the most French at heart, in order to make sure of a dictatorship which should be perpetual, because of the threat of possible vengeance. In a word, he wanted it because he was sure of victory, because he knew the weakness of the Empire, had counted its soldiers and captains, he knew that he could put three men in the field to one on the other side, and had a Moltke against a Leboeuf.

This war, which the two nations did not wish, had to be made inevitable, and had to be declared by the captain of France, so that in the eyes of Europe, formal and indifferent, the legal side should be on the side of Prussia, and that great Germany, heavy and honest, might be stirred to the depths of its conscience, and throw itself into a crusade against the

aggressor, backed with the conviction that God was behind its legions. The occasion came; King William let it slip through his fingers. "The affair was spoiled," Bismarck sent out his falsified dispatch. War followed. It still lasts. When will it end? France does not attempt a justification of her Emperor, nor of the men who acted for him. He knew that the dispatch was falsified, and yet accepted it. He recognized an insult which he had never received, in order to gain the right of revenge. He was able to unmask the Chancellor, and yet he became his accomplice. But he, at least, has paid the debt, in person and in his posterity. Nemesis waits for the other head. The inevitable Nemesis is often late, and is fond of visiting the crimes of the father upon the son. In this instance, however, she came soon; the criminal himself was chosen as the agent of her work, and she did not wait for Bismarck to get to hell.

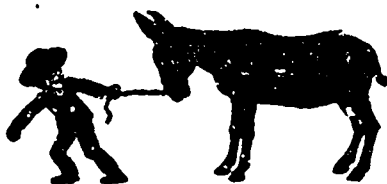
A tremor of indignation and shame has shaken Germany from end to end; and this hardy Bismarck is astonished. Is it possible that all Germany does not roar with laughter between two mugs of beer over the story of the trick he played upon France? Would it not have been madness to have missed so good a chance, when failure was impossible and there were two provinces to be won and so many millions? Could a better and more plausible pretext have been found, or one which was more sure to win the sympathy of Europe? Without it, could "the young flower of the Confederation of the North," as the poetic *Journal de Hambourg* puts it, "have borne imperial union as fruit?" And Germany stands aghast before this hero to whom she owes so much, and whom she sees at last as he was—a robber baron of the Middle Ages. She feels the flush of victory upon her brow, and also her loss of faith in her cause.

Already it had been asked upon many sides, without an answer having been given, whether the conquests of 1871 have not cost too much; whether the pleasure of forcing into the family circle, at the point of the bayonet, children who hate this family, was worth the butchery of the past, the sacrifices of the present, the terrors of the future. Moreover, has not Germany abused her victory? Has she not drunk too deeply of this bad wine of success and glory? Would it not have been better to let the Empire fall of its own weight and allow peace, years, and liberty to cement the German union? What has war brought that peace would not have given her, with the exception of a sort of Franco-German Poland, a war without end, and the new draft of men and blood now asked by Caprivi? Her only consolation was that she did not invite the war, that it had been imposed upon her as a duty, and she found relief from past miseries and future distress in the thought that Divine right was on her side. She repeated the words pronounced by the old Emperor at the inauguration of the Germania of Niederwald: "The German armies, under the lead of their princes, were the instruments of Providence. In the years of 1870-1871 we felt the help of the Divine Will." And now Germany awakes from its dream of saintly glory to discover that instead of having been the soldier of God, she was but the instrument of a brigand, and to find in the place of the finger of God the hand of a forger!

In a moment she sees all her past glory poisoned by this Bismarckian canker; the monument of Ems changed into one of shame; the Germania of Niederwald that has withstood anarchist dynamite, shaken and soiled at its foundations, because the Empire was dishonored at birth, and Europe repeats with Faust "Am

Anfang war die Lüge"—at the beginning was a lie.

In this memorable week something has sunk into the German soul which, notwithstanding the weak denials of Caprivi, works for reconciliation more powerfully than cannons or rifles or treaties—namely, doubt. Can Germany keep with a clear conscience what Bismarck has stolen? As to the uneasy idealist who holds in his hands the destinies of Germany, this irresponsible heir of the victories of his grandfather and of the treachery of the Chancellor, it would be interesting to know what thoughts stir his soul. Yet history knows but one prince who, of his own free will, as a matter of justice, in obedience to right, and for the sake of future peace, gave up an iniquitous conquest. His name is Saint Louis.



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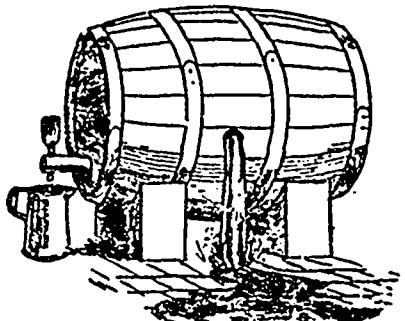
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