Trial of William Hohenzollern: A Forecast

SCENE—Westminster Hall, the conclusion of the third day of the trial of the Kaiser.

The curtain rises and discovers the Lord Chancellor and fifteen law Lords and Judges in full robes and full-bottom wigs seated facing the audience on the elevated platform at the south end of the hall. The Lord Chancellor in the centre in a chair of state. An immense crowd fills the hall.

The Attorney General on the left in his black silk gown and full-bottom wig, with a desk in front of him covered with briefs and papers.

On the right the Kaiser on a dais raised about three feet from the ground, in his white uniform and his silver helmet surmounted by the Prussian eagle on his head. His breast is covered with all his German stars and orders. The dais is surrounded by guards.

His counsel, dressed similarly to the Attorney General, is seated at a desk in front of the dais with briefs and papers before him. Four or five other counsel are beside and behind the Attorney General and the Kaiser's counsel; some in King's Counsels' robes and some in the stuff gowns of the junior bar.

(By the Honorable Stephen Coleridge, Great-Grandnephew of the poet and son of Lord Coleridge, late Lord Chief Justice of England.)

The Lord Chancellor—The time has come, Mr. Attorney, for you to continue your address to the Court.

The Attorney General—My Lords, we have now reached the third, and what must be the last, day of this great trial; since the world began never haa there been framed such an indictment as that which you have heard from the clerk of this august court. In the history of this country we have but once arraigned a sovereign at the bar of public justice in this venerable hall.

King Charles levied war upon Parliament, and Parliament proved the stronger, and though he paid the penalty of lifting his hand against his people, yet from the day that he raised his standard at Nottingham to the last solemn hour of his execution he fought with honor, as a soldier should, and died as only a gallant gentleman can. No cruelty stained his banners, no baseness tarnished his sword, and as we look back through the mists of time we can all of us recognize in the figure of that solitary and forlorn champion of a lost cause something that stirs our admiration as well as our compassion and we can salute him as one that was all a soldier should be—brave, courageous and humane.

But he that was once Emperor in Germany and King of Prussia, and who now stands here before you, bears no resemblance to that great gentleman, King Charles, save that he has worn a crown. When we recall the awful and unnumbered horrors with which he has covered this globe we can well doubt whether all history can furnish a parallel to him. Here he stands, a claimant of his Divine Right as a King to be answerable for his actions and his mandates only to God and his conscience.

Well, then, upon him let the judgment fall for those actions and for those mandates. By whose authority but his was helpless Belgium invaded, treaties treacherously broken and her people slaughtered. By whose authority but his were her priests murdered in cold blood and her nuns violated by the vile soldiery? By whose authority but his were helpless prisoners of war clubbed to death by his infamous guards? By whose authority but his were hospitals on land bombarded and hospital ships at sea sent to the bottom? By whose authority but his were armed merchant ships attacked, and all their helpless crews murdered, so as to leave no trace behind?

All these infamies, and others, have been recited here to-day as having been authorized by this man, who thought himself secure behind the serried ranks of his barbaric soldiery. But time and the might of civilization have dissipated those invincible armies, and they have shrivelled before the wrath of mankind. The whole world rose up in its majesty and tore from him that shining armor of which it was his custom to boast, and now here he stands bereft of all the trappings of his sinister power.

He has talked of his conscience, but if he has one he must groan as he looks back along the vista of these years and sees endless columns of the spectres of the slain, sees the piteous outraged women and slaughtered little children, sees homes made desolate in countries far and near, sees the faces of murdered seamen floating in the moonlight among the heaving waves of the sea. He has made the whole world he set out to conquer one vast charnel house.

Well might you, my lords, leave him, had he any heart in his bosom, to the torment of that conscience of his, were it not that it is right and necessary that justice should be vindicated upon the earth. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord, and to God's vengeance it is meet and fitting that his soul should be consigned; but to you, my lords, belongs the verdict and the sentence upon his body, that history may not hereafter record that the wicked flourished and that accumulated infamy went unpunished, and I therefore importune you—nay, I demand—that upon this awful criminal justice forthwith be done.

The Lord Chancellor— Frederick William Victor Albert Hohenzollern, late King of Prussia and Emperor in Germany, have you anything to say before we deliver our judgment on the indictment under which you stand charged?

The Kaiser—I have. The Attorney General has told you that it is to God and my own conscience that I stand answerable for every word and deed, and if that be part of your indictment I accept it and indorse it.

By lawful right of inheritance did I succeed to the throne and sceptre of my fatherland and by the free concurrence of my people have I reigned answerable to none but God even in my glorious empire, and utterly beyond the jurisdiction of this alien tribunal, set up with all the adjuncts of indecent haste and foolish panic by a government that represents nothing but itself.

Whence, my Lord Chancellor, do you claim to derive your authority to sit in judgment upon the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Germany? From your Houses of Parliament? Was there a member of your House of Commons elected in 1910 to whom the electors intrusted this strange and grotesque task? You know well that the electors gave to no one of them such a mandate, and so to your House of Lords, those aristocrats, judiciously leavened with parvenus and grocers, have they any power to erect this court?

Even if you (truly represented the people of England you could by no law of your own land exercises any prerogative, authority or power over the sovereign of another state. Therefore your robes and ermine are your only titles to authority, and though your wigs may impart to you a gravity of appearance they cannot confer upon you even wisdom and understanding, much less the right to judge a King.

I look upon you, therefore, as I am justly entitled to do by your own laws and customs, as a phantom court; you are a travesty of your own ancient traditions, an insult to your own jurisprudence— you are a mockery and a farce! Deliver, then, your lawless judgment against an unarmed King and a swordless Emperor! History will allot to you and indorse the contempt with which I here defy and flout your usurped and baseless authority.

"Man, proud man," says your own Shakespeare, "dress in a little brief authority,

Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such phantastic trick before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

The judges retire to consider their judgment. Silence reigns till they return. As soon as they are seated the Lord Chancellor addresses the Kaiser.

The Lord Chancellor— Frederick William Victor Albert Hohenzollern, it ill becomes you, who have broken every law of man and ordinance of God, to mock at the greatest court of justice ever erected in the civilized world.

Not only is this court constituted and established by a lawful act of Parliament passed by Lords and Commons of this realm unanimously, and signed thereafter by our august Sovereign George, by the grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the seas, King, Defender of the Faith, but that act of Parliament has received the indorgement of our glorious allies, the great French Republic, the illustrious Kingdom of Italy, the vast Republic of the West; Portugal and Japan, the oldest and the youngest friends of this country; the gallant Republic of Brazil, the dim millions of Cathay as the sands of the sea in number; tortured Belgium, ravished Sertia, desolated Roumania, and every other state joined together to vindicate civilization, which you outraged, and freedom, upon which you sought to set your heel.

Therefore never in the chronicles of man has justice been more omnipotently authorized than in this court. Nor can you, descended as you are through your august mother from the royal house of England, pretend to an ignorance of the majesty of English law or the inviolability of English justice. The reverence for justice is a living force in the life of every man born in this favored land, and many generations of men have treasured in their hearts the famous apostrophe to justice that fell from the lips of the great Hooker:

"Her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, the greatest as not exempted from her power."

Such is the justice that all of us in this great commission have long administered publicly before the world in the high courts of this country. Such is the justice that we sit here to-day to administer without fear or favor, untouched by insult, unmoved by emotion, inflexible as fate, and to such justice, sir, your pride must now submit.

Never since civilization was established in Europe has one man committed so dread and awful an accumulation of public iniquities. You have spat upon the ancient chivalries of battle; you have prostituted the decent amenities of diplomacy; you have polluted with murder the splendid comradeship of the sea. Of these horrible deeds the proof stands unchallenged, and for such deeds the world has cast you out and thrown you down from one of the greatest thrones in history and left you here stripped of all your power and splendor, your crowns, your crosses and your diadems.

The English are a generous people and have shown even in the memory of us all that they can extend the hand of friendship freely to an honorable and a gallant foe when the sword is sheathed; and had you fought this people as a gallant and knightly king should, you would not now be their prisoner, but their guest.

In declaring you to be a debased and treacherous enemy, who turned your back on no infamy in the wanton attack you made upon mankind, this high and puissant court delivers upon you the judgment of all the nations gathered together from the ends of the earth to overwhelm you—and unanimously we find all the charges set out against you fully and perfectly established.

The Kaiser (raising his hand aloft) Deutschland uber Alles!

(Angry cries in the crowd)

The Lord Chancellor— Silence! Silence! This is no place for passion or anger against this man who is now our prisoner, and let there be no cries or even murmurs of approval or disapproval as justice advances upon its inexorable path.

The Attorney General— My Lords, the Act of Parliament passed to establish this Court for this state trial provides that upon your lordships should be conferred full plenary and complete power and authority to pronounce any sentence you may determine upon this prisoner. As the designer and authorizer of innumerable murders of non-combatants, men, women and children, and of gallant wounded soldiers lying helpless in hospitals on sea and land, it is my duty to urge upon you that he share the fate of all other convicted murderers under our law.

(The black cap is placed on the head of the Lord Chancellor by the clerk. As he begins to pass sentence, at the word "Frederick" every one in the Court rises.)

The Lord Chancellor— Frederick William Victor Albert Hohenzollern, there is but one sentence known to the law of England for a convicted murderer—and a murderer you have been proved to be. For the instigator of murder, though he be no murderer—and a murderer you have been proved to be. For the instigator of murder, the compasser of murder, the abettor of murder, though he be no murderer, we have no sentence in our law-books. We leave you to the law of God and the law of your own country. You have sown the whirlwind, you shall reap the tempest. Your own people have risen against you, and they have cast you out from your throne and from your country, and you have fled like a coward before the face of your own people. Your own people have risen against you, and they have cast you out from your throne and from your country, and you have fled like a coward before the face of your own people. But there is another and a greater court than this court, and there is another and a greater judgment than the judgment of this court. You have sown the wind, you shall reap the whirlwind. The eyes of all the dead of this war are upon you, and the eyes of all the living are upon you, and the eyes of all the living are upon you, and the eyes of all the living