



The Kaiser

Warlord of the Second Reich

ALAN PALMER

**THE KAISER
WARLORD OF THE SECOND REICH**

Alan Palmer

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Author's Note

Any author writing about the German and British Dynasties at the close of the nineteenth century inevitably faced by problems of nomenclature: Augustas, Fredericks, Victorias and Williams abound in royal and princely confusion. For the sake of simplicity I have accordingly, from time to time employed familiar names in the course of my narrative - 'Dona', 'Fritz', 'Vicky' etc. I would like to emphasize that this usage on my part is not intended to imply disrespect, either to their memory or to the institution of monarchy.

It is my pleasure to express gratitude to H.R.H. Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia for allowing me to quote unpublished comments by his grandfather, Kaiser William II. These comments appear in a book which came into my possession through the kindness of Mr A. W. H. Nicolson, whom I would also like to thank. The Marquess of Salisbury generously allowed me to quote from the papers of his great grandfather, which are now housed once more at Hatfield. Elizabeth, Countess of Lindsey and Abingdon, kindly permitted me to use extracts from letters written by her father, Major-General the Hon. Edward Stuart-Wortley, which are preserved in a file on the *Daily Telegraph* Incident of 1908 at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I am also grateful to Lady Lindsey and Abingdon for the interesting information she sent me about Highcliffe Castle.

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A.W.P.

Preface

No ruler has been so lauded and reviled by the British public as Queen Victoria's firstborn grandson Kaiser William II. His birth was welcomed in London as though he were an English rather than a Prussian prince. As he grew older, the Queen granted him a succession of honorific innovations: he became the youngest foreign Knight of the Garter, the first sovereign from overseas created an Admiral of the Fleet, the first given the colonelcy of a British regiment. Although Victoria deplored the wild words and impulsive gestures with which he disturbed Europe, he remained deeply attached to his grandmother, hurrying to her deathbed in 1901, supporting her with his one sound arm through the last hours of her life. Nine years later he offered a hand of friendship to his cousin, George V, and they stood together before the catafalque of his uncle, Edward VII, in Westminster Hall. On such occasions the London crowd, as sentimental as himself, saw in William one of their own royal family while he wrote privately back to Berlin describing his emotional pride in being able to look upon Windsor as 'my second home'. As late as July 1911 he was cheered in the London streets, receiving a standing ovation when he went to the theatre.

By 1915, of course, he had become the most hated man in England. Four years later he experienced the last of his 'firsts': he became the first emperor arraigned in a peace treaty for 'a supreme offence against international morality'; and he was threatened with trial before a commission of judges from the five Great Powers victorious in the war he was alleged to have unleashed. For many people the catastrophe of 1914-18 remains 'the Kaiser's War', just as its successor is 'Hitler's War'. The identification of his person with the great disaster was encouraged by many of the political memoirs of the interwar period. Bülow and others readily blamed William for the bankruptcy of policies which they had imposed upon him. Hostile critics seized on his flight to the Netherlands as proof of his inadequacy as a ruler. It was convenient for writers of the Left and the new Right to have the Hohenzollern scapegoat on whose delight in martial speeches they could pour such withering scorn. He was cast as the fall-guy of imperialism: there are many who still see him in this role. Others, however, regret his downfall and the collapse of the monarchical system in central Europe. For several years - most recently in 1973 - an 'In Memoriam' notice appeared in *The Times* each January on the anniversary of his birth, praising the Kaiser's record as an opponent of both the Nazi and the Bolshevik ways of life. It is not always easy to recognize the All-Highest autocrat of Potsdam in the modern dress bestowed on him by some sympathizers. But was he, for that matter, readily recognizable mourning at Osborne in 1901 or in mufti at Highcliffe in 1907? Throughout his reign and his exile William behaved as though he were dominating the gallery of life immediately around him. This was

an illusion. He thought he stood out as a portrait: in reality, he was a mirror, catching the image of what he himself perceived.

This elusive quality - unexpected in someone whose caricature is so firmly etched on the mind - must intrigue any biographer. 'I am what I am and I cannot change', the Kaiser once told Bülow in a moment of pique. But what was he? And why?

1 - Thus Win all Men's Applause

Thursday, 27 January 1859, was a wintry afternoon in Berlin, light snow falling on a muffled crowd who had gathered expectantly beneath naked limes and chestnuts down Unter den Linden. Throughout the last two days gunners had stood by at the old palace of the Prussian kings, ready to let the world know when a child was born to the 'English Princess' Victoria, eighteen-year-old wife of Prince Frederick William: the battery in the Lustgarten would fire thirty-six rounds for a girl, a hundred and one for a boy. That afternoon, almost on three o'clock, the first of the saluting cannon broke through the midwinter stillness of the city. It rattled the windows in the small palace at the corner of the Oberwaldstrasse, where the doctors were gathered around Princess Victoria's bed, and almost a mile away it shook the rooms in the Wilhelmstrasse where Victoria's father-in-law, Prince-Regent William was in conference. The Regent broke off his conversation, hurried downstairs, hailed a public *Droschke*, and ordered it to take him to his son's palace. The cab was beneath the arch of the Oberwaldstrasse before the thirty-seventh gun let him know he had a grandson, third in line to the Prussian throne. Soon the news was telegraphed to the Princess's mother and father at Windsor; and, as they rested after a late luncheon, Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort learnt that they too had now become grandparents for the first time. The baby was officially styled Prince Frederick William Albert Victor, names which in themselves linked the royal houses of Prussia and Great Britain. He was known in the family as 'Willy'. Eventually, seventeen years after Germany was proclaimed an empire in 1871, he became Kaiser William II. The world remembers him, with little sympathy or understanding, as *the Kaiser*.

In Berlin and in London there was rejoicing that evening and the next. Despite the bitter cold, Prince-Regent William and his consort, Augusta, went on to the palace balcony and waved contentedly to the jubilant crowd below. There were cheers for Prince Frederick William when he emerged from the Oberwaldstrasse to ride the few hundred yards to his parents' residence. At Windsor, toasts were drunk, not only by the family, but by the household and domestic staff as well. In England people still thought of the new mother as the Princess Royal, eldest child of the sovereign and special favourite of her consort. At the princess's marriage, almost exactly a year before, the Poet Laureate had obliged Her Majesty with two extra stanzas for the national anthem: 'God bless our Prince and Bride, God keep their lands allied', the choristers had sung. Now, the birth of a son to the Princess Royal inspired less elegant turners of verse than Tennyson. When the curtain fell at one London music-hall on the first evening of the future Kaiser's life, the audience stood as the principal comedienne sang:

Hail the auspicious morn,

To Prussia's throne is born

A royal heir.

May he defend its laws

Joined with Old England's cause

Thus win all men's applause,

God save the Queen!

Never before in English history had the birth of a foreign prince aroused so much interest and enthusiasm. *The Times*, which had for several years been unsympathetic to Prussia, frowned magisterially at such display of public sentiment. On Friday morning the leading article warned readers not to attach undue significance to dynastic connections in assessing political prospects: but added: 'Our own excellent Sovereign will not have her joy diminished by the reflection that the event which connects her more closely with a great Continental Throne is looked upon by the world as a guarantee of those principles which render her own dynasty secure in the affections of her people. Happily the general mood in London was less portentous. When the House of Commons reassembled in the following week, the member for North Devon, Charles Trefusis, in moving the address on the Queen's Speech, hoped the birth of a royal grandson in Berlin would 'prove a happy augury of peace' and the leader of the Opposition, Lord Palmerston, looked forward to a time when the newly born prince would serve 'as an ornament and 'advantage to the country of his birth and to the lineage from which he has sprung'. (1)

Within a few days of receiving the good news from Berlin, the Queen became aware that 'Vicky' - the princess was known in the family - suffered considerably during a long and tortuous confinement. For several hours the life of mother and child hung in the balance, not least because of the strange prenatal position of the baby. At one moment the doctors seemed in such despair that a private messenger advised the leading Berlin editors to have their presses set up obituary notices for the princess. The battle for her life continued while the cannon were firing their ceremonial salvos, and the infant was left in the care of a German midwife, Fraulein Stahl, who made his lungs function at the last minute by administering a sharp smack. Only after the crisis had eased around the mother's bed was it seen that the baby's left arm was misshapen. At first it was assumed that the dislocation of the elbow joint and the shoulder socket might be healed by orthopaedic treatment. Nothing was said of the child's disabilities in any communication to Windsor, even though Queen Victoria sent an anxious telegram asking, 'Is it a fine boy?' Sir James Clark, the Queen's principal physician, returned from Berlin in the middle of February and told her about the defective arm, while reassuring her over the general state of Vicky's health. There still seemed no reason why the prince's injury should not be cured in the course of time.

More than sixty years later, the Kaiser himself wrote: 'One definite disability I did suffer from. A

birth my left arm had received an injury unnoticed at the time, which proved permanent and impeded its free movement.' (2) The physical and psychological effects of this crippled arm undoubtedly left their mark on his character and therefore, indirectly, on the tragic history of the twentieth century. But it is probable that William himself, and many commentators, exaggerated the significance of the withered arm and neglected its causes. Had the arm itself - and only the arm - been injured by the child's violent birth, there would have been some ground for the medical optimists who recommended gymnastic exercise and electrical treatment. Yet, in reality, the damaged left arm was merely the outward physical form of a deeper disability. When Princess Victoria was five months pregnant she tripped over a chair leg in the old palace at Berlin and (as she wrote later) 'fell with violence on the slippery parquet'. Rightly or wrongly, she believed that this accident - about which she said little at the time - was responsible for 'all my misfortunes and baby's false position'. (3) In the early months of William's life, the doctors discovered that a neck injury had been caused in birth because the head was already tilted abnormally to the left. The damaged neck influenced the functioning of the cervical nerve plexus, thus leading to paralysis of the left arm. At the same time, the hearing labyrinth of the left ear was harmed, so that the young prince suffered, even as a child, from deafness on one side. As he grew older it became clear that his balance was also affected, presumably by damage to that part of the brain which lies closest to the inner ear. Determination and will-power enabled William, in the course of time, to conceal his bodily handicaps from casual eyes; but it is impossible to tell how far he was able to assume co-ordinated self-control of a damaged nervous system.

Ultimately it mattered little, except to the royal physicians, whether these injuries were the consequence of a pre-natal accident or of the difficult delivery. It was, however, especially tragic that the victim of such misfortune should be the offspring of families in which there was already a high incidence of mental instability. The young prince's great-uncle, Frederick William IV (still titular King of Prussia), was recognized as prematurely senile in the autumn of 1858 and was now playing out his last months of life at Potsdam, unaware of anything that happened beyond his palace walls. Moreover Prince William was the firstborn descendant both of Tsar Paul and of King George III, two great-great-grandfathers whose minds frequently wandered into twilight worlds of suspicion and unreality. There were still living in German princely courts those who could remember England in the years when her sovereign was a Lear-like figure, hidden by the windows of Windsor. The possibility of an alleged hereditary madness manifesting itself within the family haunted the Prince Consort and not surprisingly, his daughter in Berlin as well.

Yet, in those opening months of 1859, this particular fear lay dormant. Vicky, as she told her mother in a shade tactlessly, was pleased and proud her first child should have been a son. The baby's baptism was arranged for the eve of Lent, 7 March, which was far sooner than Queen Victoria wished. She was angry because domestic political difficulties prevented her going to Berlin: 'Oh! dearest Uncle, almost breaks my heart not to witness our first grandchild christened!', she wrote to King Leopold

the Belgians. 'It is a stupid law in Prussia, I must say, to be so particular about having the child christened so soon.' She was represented at the ceremonies in Berlin by Lord Raglan, son of the much criticized commander in the Crimea. As Vicky recalled later, he was one of the few guests who did not comment on how small and delicate the child appeared to be. The princess remained extremely sensitive despite her hopes of a successful cure: 'It went to my heart to see him half covered up to his arm which dangled without use or power by his side', she wrote. (4)

Victoria and Albert were both godparents, but the Queen was disconcerted to find they shared the honour with no less than forty other royal and princely sponsors. Although she consoled herself with the thought that godparents who were also grandparents must be reckoned in a special category of divine guardianship, she remained vexed by what she considered the strange behaviour of the Prussian court; and until Vicky crossed to England in May - her first visit home since her marriage - letters from Windsor to Berlin showed affection, solicitude and asperity in almost equal parts. The Prince Consort, on the other hand, was positively light-hearted in his comments, notably on the decision that the baby should be known as William: 'What epitaph history will attach to his name is in the lap of the Gods', he wrote to his son-in-law two days after the christening, 'not Rufus ... not the "Silent", not "the Conqueror", perhaps "the Great". There is none with this designation.' (5)

When Vicky returned to England in May she could not bring the delicate baby with her, and Victoria and Albert had to wait until September 1860 to see their grandson. By then William was twenty months old and had a sister of seven weeks, Charlotte, a healthy child born after an easy labour. The Queen and the Prince Consort, who were staying at Coburg, were delighted by William: 'He is a fine fat child, with a beautiful soft skin, very fine shoulders and limbs, and a very dear face', Victoria wrote, as though defying the comments of the Prussian doctors; and Albert is alleged to have perceived, even at this early stage, a high degree of intelligence in his grandson. Next August, Vicky and her husband - the royal families called him 'Fritz' - brought William and Charlotte to England and they were able to spend some gloriously hot days on the Isle of Wight. 'Osborne', wrote William sixty-five years later, 'is the scene of my earliest recollections', and he always claimed he could remember Grandpapa Albert, who 'used to like dandling me in a table napkin', a reminiscence which may have become embellished by family tales lovingly and frequently repeated. Vicky, Fritz and the children left Osborne on Friday, 16 August, just seventeen weeks before the Prince Consort died. William therefore possessed an advantage over Victoria's seventeen other grandsons: he alone among them had been seen by Albert, and praised by Albert, and petted by Albert. To Victoria he remained, as she told uncle Leopold, 'a clever, dear, good little child, the great favourite of my beloved Angel'. (6)

By the time of his visit to Osborne the 'great favourite' had already advanced one stage nearer the Prussian throne. Frederick William IV died at Potsdam on 3 January 1861 and was succeeded by his brother, the former Prince-Regent, who was crowned King William I of Prussia at an impressive ceremony in Königsberg the following October. The new king had taken an affectionate interest in his

grandson ever since those first salutes in the Lustgarten brought him hurrying back to the Oberwaldstrasse. At times King William was intensely irritated by the good advice which he used to receive from London, especially while the Prince Consort was alive, and he occasionally snubbed his daughter-in-law whose English ways alienated so many figures at his Court. But the King, if vexed, was at least straightforwardly hostile: his consort, Queen Augusta, was devious, mischievous and totally unsympathetic to Vicky or to anything which seemed to emanate from Coburg or Windsor. King William told his grandson tales of the war against the great Napoleon, of the battle of Leipzig and of how at seventeen he had entered Paris beside Tsar Alexander I in 1814; Queen Augusta, on the other hand, fed the child's growing mind with hints of neglect and of affronts to Prussian tradition on the part of his mother. If William came to believe his mother preferred her other children, the blame rests almost entirely with Augusta and her bitterly jealous tongue. On one occasion the Crown Princess - as Vicky had now become - complained to Queen Victoria that William was encouraging his grandson to have ideas which 'were neither wholesome nor good'; but psychologically they were far less damaging than the muddled resentments stirred up by Grandmama Augusta and her ladies at Court.

Ultimately it was the grandmother at Windsor and Osborne who made the greatest impression on young William, even though he saw her so rarely. By the 1860s Queen Victoria's ascendancy was complete in Europe, despite her prostration after Albert's death. Although only forty-two when she was widowed, the Queen had already reigned longer than any of her contemporaries; she was not inclined to conceal feelings or change an opinion over questions of principle, for it did not occur to her that she could be wrong. Often she looked on lesser mortals with amiable condescension: 'Poor dear soul', she wrote of Augusta, after Vicky reported one particularly mischievous outburst, 'her worries and annoyances make her quite cross.' (7) But the Queen herself was both obstinate and proud. Nothing could convince her that Prussian physicians equalled in skill of diagnosis or treatment the talents of her royal doctors, Sir James Clark and Sir William Jenner. Fortunately she had taken a liking to Fritz when he first visited London in 1851, a few months short of his twentieth birthday, and she continued to look for his qualities as well as those of Vicky in their eldest son. So long as William was a child she treated him indulgently, smiling happily at his naughtiness, commending his courage when he had a tooth out, allowing him to play at Osborne with the miniature cannons on the fort in the grounds which Albert had designed for his own sons. In March 1863 the four-year-old prince was brought from Berlin to Windsor for the wedding of his uncle Bertie, the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. William amused himself by throwing an aunt's muff out of a carriage window and by kicking a decorative stone from his dirk across the floor of St George's Chapel. When Prince Leopold - not yet ten, and also dressed in a kilt for the occasion - tried to restrain him, William caused a minor commotion by seeking to bite his uncle's leg. Yet whatever the younger generation may have felt about his behaviour, 'precious little William' was a delight to his grandmother, brightening

momentarily the widow's gloom in which she enveloped herself. It is not until after William had twice stayed at Osborne without his parents that a warning note appears in the royal correspondence: on his sixth birthday the Queen told her daughter she hoped that 'our darling William', who 'is so dear and so good', would be brought up 'simply, plainly, not with that terrible Prussian pride and ambition, which grieved dear Papa so much'. (8)

There was, of course, also a specifically British pride, and it was around the young prince every time he went to Osborne. He found it exciting to look out from the windows of the house across the parkland to Spithead, where he could watch the warships sailing in and out of Portsmouth. But in Berlin, farther from the sea than anywhere in England, a different tradition predominated: the Prussian capital could not shake off the legacy of Frederick the Great. William I himself always behaved as though soldiering was the true vocation of the House of Hohenzollern and, though Frederick had died in 1786 disillusioned and far from popular, dynastic sentiment perpetuated his achievements and he was remembered as the victor of Rossbach and Leuthen. When Treitschke began his history of nineteenth-century Germany, he declared, 'The twelve campaigns of the Frederician Era have left their mark for ever on the martial spirit of the Prussian people and the Prussian army'; and William insisted that the first presentation of colours to new regiments after his accession should take place at a ceremony beside Frederick's tomb in Potsdam. Nor was this romanticized past so very remote. 'Those that knew him are still alive', the Crown Princess reminded her mother early in 1863; and she added that she herself was acquainted with two of them.' (9)

An Englishman visiting Berlin in the 1860s declared that nowhere in Europe were so many uniforms to be seen in a street. Prussia was the supremely militaristic society of the post-Napoleonic era, and from earliest days the young prince was accustomed to the trappings of soldiery - dark blue service dress, white ceremonial tunics, epaulettes, long leather boots, flat caps, spiked helmets, feathers, hats bearing the death's head emblem, iron crosses, the stars and pendants of military distinction, the ribbons and sashes of the great orders. He grew up to the sounds of an army at the ready: the rattle of scabbards and cavalry spurs down palace corridors; the sharp clicking of heels; hoof beats of carriage escorts; saluting cannon; fifes and drums; staccato commands on open squares; bugle calls and regimental bands. Each day at noon the prince could see from the palace windows an elaborate ceremony of changing the guard, sometimes with his grandfather taking the salute. There were garrison parades, church parades, and special parades for royal birthdays and national festivals. But it was not always mere masquerade. The impressionable years of William's boyhood coincided with the wars which enabled Bismarck to create his united Germany. He watched a regiment of Hungarian infantry march down the Linden in 1864 on its way to fight alongside the Prussians against the Danish army in Schleswig-Holstein and Jutland. Soon afterwards William saw his first victory parade, with captured flags borne in triumph past the Brandenburg Gate. Two years later there were even great celebrations for the victory of his grandfather's armies over the Austrians and their allies among the

smaller German states. It seemed in that autumn of 1866 as if Frederick the Great's mission was at last completed, with Habsburg Austria out of the reckoning as a Germanic power.

In these campaigns the Crown Prince won a reputation as the most successful general in the Hohenzollern family for four generations. Without his arrival on the battlefield the decisive encounter at Königgrätz on 3 July 1866 would have been unresolved, or perhaps even a defeat for Prussia. William joyfully welcomed his father back from the war and on 20 September saw the King on horseback lead his armies through the centre of Berlin. The details of this occasion William remembered vividly throughout his life. (10) Princely cousins rode at the head of regiments they had taken into battle. Not all the relatives in the parade were Hohenzollerns: great-uncle Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg, brother of the Prince Consort, was there, commanding a battalion in the procession as he had done in the campaign itself. For William, however, there could be no question that the hero was Papa, the Crown Prince, gaunt and bearded at the head of the Second Army. Yet if the enthusiastic applause of the Berliners filled William's heart with pride, it also emphasized the bitterness of what his mother was already calling 'the cross' he bore. In the previous year he had for the first time become acutely conscious of his afflictions: he could not keep his balance so as to run like other boys of seven, nor could he hope to climb, let alone mount a saddle. How, then, was he ever to ride beside his father and grandfather at the head of Prussia's victorious troops? To a royal child in Berlin in the autumn of military triumph it seemed as though sitting a horse was the first essential of popularity.

2 - Hinzpeter's Pupil

The pattern of William's education was settled soon after his seventh birthday; but not, perhaps wisely. Both parents had convinced themselves of the need for stern discipline. Leisure hours were an exceptional privilege, not a natural condition for a growing child. His father wanted Willy to understand the army and its traditions, and to master several languages: his mother hoped he would acquire intellectual curiosity and aesthetic judgement. The Crown Prince had little difficulty finding a suitable military governor, from whom his son could learn the rudiments of soldiering. Captain von Schotte was a veteran Guards officer, naturally compassionate towards a boy whose disabilities were so grave that they would have ruled out military service for any lesser person in the kingdom. But the dominant figure in the young prince's schoolroom was a civilian, Dr George Hinzpeter, the thirty-nine-year-old classicist who was given charge of William at the Neues Palais in Potsdam shortly before midsummer in 1866.

Hinzpeter's is a strange shadow across the margin of history. Few tutors have been less well-fitted for their task. His social background and manner - even his appearance - were against him. He was born into a Calvinist family who lived in the Westphalian textile centre of Bielefeld and he attended the local high school (*Gymnasium*), where his father taught classics. The austere tenets of Calvinism imposed a moral order on Hinzpeter's life. He was taught to find joy only in the virtuous satisfaction of duties fulfilled. Other students of his age were stirred by the lyricism of Heine and the Romantic poets, but their ecstasies kindled no flame in George Hinzpeter's soul. He gained his doctorate in philological studies and then returned to Westphalia as a schoolmaster, marked out for advancement by his diligence and moral rectitude. These qualities led him to tutorships in a succession of aristocratic families, and the Crown Prince first met him in the household of Count Emil von Görtz. Hinzpeter had no great range of intellectual interests: he would not have impressed Frederick the Great. His artistic sensitivity was undeveloped, partly because his upbringing sternly repudiated even the most harmless pleasures of social convention. Fritz admired his quietly reserved air of dedication but he was prepared to leave the final word on William's schooling to Vicky, and she had three other candidates in mind, apart from the Westphalian.

On first acquaintance, the Crown Princess found Hinzpeter puzzling. She wrote subsequently to Queen Victoria, telling her that 'Willy's tutor' was a trustworthy, good-natured man but 'not very bright', and she complained of his irritating habits of eating with a knife and resting his elbows on the table. (1) He had, however, two strong recommendations in her eyes. Sir Robert Morier, a British diplomat whom she respected, had met Hinzpeter, talked political abstractions with him and thought

him a tutor of probity. And when Vicky herself began to talk to Hinzpeter she found him a man of system and ideals. He assured her that he believed the crowning virtue of an educational method was its simplicity. To a mind moulded by the Prince Consort and still chafing at the ceremonial in an alien court, this vague concept of education was comfortingly reassuring. Hinzpeter was appointed principal civilian tutor to William and to his brother Henry, who was three and a half years his junior. By Christmas in 1866 Vicky was so pleased with her appointment that she was praising Hinzpeter for his 'sense, tact and intelligence' and telling her mother how readily she would follow the advice which he (and the children's French tutor, Mademoiselle d'Harcourt) offered her. (2)

The Crown Prince told Hinzpeter to give his eldest son a mental training fit to match the 'intellectual cream' of the kingdom. This was a formidable assignment, but Hinzpeter did not lack self-confidence and he set about his task without demur. Tuition began at six in the morning, except in the winter months when it was moved back to seven. It continued for twelve hours each day, with two breaks for food and for physical exercise. Official duties were frowned on: they were as wasteful as the extraneous non-academic studies originally prescribed by the princes' military governor. Hinzpeter insisted that a tutor must have prior claim on a pupil's time whatever the obligations of royalty. There was nothing new in such a demand: it was as old as the education of princes, and normally ignored. But there was a rare earnestness in Hinzpeter; the more he fussed, the more Vicky, Fritz and the court authorities respected him. Certainly he was intimidating. 'A dry and pedantic person with a gaunt, slight figure and a face of old parchment', William described him many years later. His classicism was inspired not by the serene grandeur of Athens and Rome, but by the discipline and frugality of Sparta. Praise, the princes learnt, would be given for perfection, never for sustained effort or improvement. William was taught that it was not sufficient to do as well as anyone else: he had to excel.

Hinzpeter found Willy strong-willed and obstinate, 'my much loved problem child', he called him. Nearly thirty years later he wrote, 'What especially impressed one in this good-looking but girlish boy whose delicate softness was turned into almost complete frailty by the embarrassing uselessness of his left arm, was his resistance ... to every attempt which would have forced his inner self in one direction or the other.' (3) If there was an effeminate streak in the unfortunate prince it was soon suppressed. His tutor assumed responsibilities far beyond the narrowly academic. The prince was made to steel his mind in order to overcome physical clumsiness. By his tenth birthday he had acquired poise, self-assurance and independence. It was Hinzpeter, and not the riding master, who taught William the basic skill of horsemanship. At the age of eight William's riding lessons were a pathetic charade: the groom would lift him on to the back of a pony and lead it on the rein. It seemed to Hinzpeter that such an exercise was an abject surrender to his pupil's disability and therefore represented a challenge to his own principles of education. He browbeat a frightened and weeping prince into sitting on the pony without stirrups and taking the reins in his right hand. When the boy fell to the ground - as, at first, invariably happened - Hinzpeter picked him up without sympathy or encouragement and put him back

on the pony 'despite his prayers and tears'. After several weeks William began to acquire a sense of balance. Gradually he learnt, again after weeks of bruises and tumbles, how to trot and canter across the parkland of Potsdam. By the early summer of 1868 he could sit a horse; and in July 1871 he was sufficiently assured horseman to follow his father through the Brandenburg Gate in the procession celebrating victory over France. It was an astonishing personal achievement, though the cost in physical agony and nervous repression was enough to sear a boy's character.

These brutal methods of instruction were less effective in the schoolroom. A more imaginative tutor, not circumscribed by an established curriculum, might have given depth to his studies and suggested standards of critical judgement. As it was, William could not concentrate on anything academic. To the disappointment of both parents he became - and remained - an arch-dabbler, a dilettante who showed promise but never fulfilment. There was in him none of the scientific and mathematical curiosity which Vicky had admired in her father. Hinzpeter assigned a disproportionate number of hours to studying the linguistics and grammar of Latin and Greek, but he could not awaken any innate sympathy with the ancient world. At thirteen William considered Ovid a 'very childish' poet: he enjoyed the Gallic Wars - 'Rhine bridges, Germanic arms, crossing to Britain and Siege of Alesia' - but complained that Caesar was unfair to the barbarians. No doubt Hinzpeter's intentions were sound. He insisted on escorting William and Henry to museums and art galleries. Both young princes were bored by these dutiful visits and in their adolescence pained their mother by becoming self-assertive philistines: 'Willy ... does not care to look at anything ... would not look at a Guide Book, or any other book which would give him information about the places to be seen', she wrote to Victoria after a journey through Belgium and Holland. Yet William himself subsequently praised Hinzpeter for taking him to factories and mines where he saw the nation's growing industrial strength. (4) This early acquaintance with industry gave him an insight into the social problem; or so, at least, he claimed in later years.

It was in many ways a lonely childhood, with few companions of his own age. In 1870 Hinzpeter encouraged the Crown Princess to invite Poulteney Bigelow, the fifteen-year-old son of the American minister in Berlin, to visit Willy and Henry at Potsdam so that they might have some youthful company. Bigelow, who in Paris had been an occasional playmate to the Prince Imperial, found the two Prussian princes more fun, although overshadowed by their tutor, whom he later described as 'a dessicated schoolmasterly stripe of Prussian'. At the Neues Palais 'there was an empty attic, running the whole length of the palace roof, and here on rainy days we kicked footballs until the broken panes of glass attracted Dr Hinzpeter's attention', Bigelow wrote in 1915. No game interested William that did not, in some way, suggest war: and the two princes' chief delight was to sail a model frigate, about the size of a launch, which had been presented to their great-uncle by William IV of England. The vessel, so Bigelow suggested, was 'the parent ship' of Willy's later navy. (5) The young prince's friendship with Bigelow continued intermittently into manhood, and they corresponded with each other

other even in William's final years of exile; but William had no close contact with German boys until he was in his sixteenth year. Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, Francis Joseph's only son, was a few months older than William; and when Fritz and Vicky went to Vienna for the 1873 Exhibition they took Willy with them. Unfortunately William's voice had just broken that spring, and to his mother he seemed loud and uncouth, 'a bear or a schoolboy beside Rudolph', she wrote to Queen Victoria. The two princes had little in common. (6)

Theoretically William was prepared for his responsibilities with greater care than any of his Prussian predecessors. In September 1874 he became a pupil at a public high school, the *Gymnasium* at Kassel, remaining there until a few days before his eighteenth birthday. It was an astonishing innovation for a future sovereign in Berlin to spend over two years beside boys whose fathers were not even officers in the reserve. William I thought the *Gymnasium* unsuitable for his grandson: Willy might be exposed to dangerous influences if some of the teachers held new-fangled beliefs. Yet the prince had little contact with the middle-class world of Kassel: Hinzpeter supervised his studies, staying in the town palace during the winter months and riding in with him each day in summer from the royal residence at Wilhelmshöhe, three miles away. William had no opportunity to make friends among the other sixteen boys in his class, nor to follow his own academic tastes (such as they were). He enjoyed recent history, but history teaching at Kassel ceased abruptly in 1648, and the curriculum was overwhelmingly classical in structure. A few years later Willy met a group of Etonians of his own age and decided they 'had learned much less Latin and Greek' at school. (7) He neither especially liked nor disliked the *Gymnasium* experiment, but he did blame his parents for exposing him to the humiliation of lower class marks than mere commoners, and in this grievance he was warmly supported by his grandfather. The prince saw no merit in competition he could not win.

Already his character was beginning to cause anxiety. The Crown Princess regretted that Willy was 'selfish, domineering and proud', but consoled herself by the earnest manner in which he affirmed his faith during the protracted ceremonies of confirmation, in the Friedenskirche at Potsdam on 1 September 1874. The Prince of Wales was impressed by such pious fortitude. Other members of the family were less sure of William's sincerity. Queen Sophie of the Netherlands - a distant cousin whom Willy called 'Aunt' - had inherited the sharp eyes and sharp tongue of her mother, Catherine Pavlovna, favourite sister of Tsar Alexander I. Sophie saw a lot of Vicky and her family during that summer of 1874; and she was puzzled to find William inventing total fantasies. 'His strange propensity for lying alarmed her: 'In every sense', she reflected, 'he will be an odd specimen of a Sovereign, perhaps the more warlike because nature did not fit him for a soldier.' (8)

This need to appear every inch a soldier obsessed William's mind throughout his adolescence. He was nominally commissioned in the first infantry regiment of Guards on his tenth birthday and continued to receive military training, often against Hinzpeter's wishes, while at Kassel. The army, so his tutor wrote later, provided him with many hours of 'dreaming, thinking and acting', but he shared

with his brother Henry an enthusiasm for warships and the sea. Here was an interest which marked the two boys from earlier generations of Prussian princes, soldiers through and through, unable to report from starboard. The German fleet in the 1870s was small: control of the Admiralty in Berlin was entrusted to temporarily desk-bound generals who looked on the navy as an auxiliary arm, staffed by officers of inferior social status. For a future heir to the throne to become a naval cadet was unthinkable. Even in England Queen Victoria criticized the decision to send the two eldest sons of the Prince of Wales to HMS *Britannia*, and however much her German grandson may have envied his English cousins' good fortune he never seriously thought of avoiding his spell of service with a Guard regiment. Yet court conventions were changing in Berlin no less than in London. There seemed no reason why the crown prince's second son should not be trained as a naval officer; and William found it both exciting and frustrating when Henry left the Kassel *Gymnasium* for Kiel and the sailing frigate *Niobe*. (9)

Technically William came of age on his eighteenth birthday, an occasion of great celebration. (10) Emperor William I invested his grandson with the Order of the Black Eagle and Queen Victoria wished the British ambassador to confer the Order of the Bath on him that day. But there was a problem. Discreet messages passed from Potsdam to Windsor: 'Willy would be satisfied with the Order of the Bath, but the nation would not', Vicky told her mother; and the Queen, with an indulgence reserved for this most favoured grandchild, agreed that William should be created a Knight of the Garter. Once again he was receiving special treatment from his English relatives: no foreign prince had ever before been created a Knight of the Garter so young, nor had three generations of the same foreign dynasty ever held the dignity at the same time. He was delighted and for several years signed letters in English, 'William, Pr. v Pr., K. G.', a practice his grandmother considered unnecessarily affected. The honour had long been prized in Berlin. When the German Empire was proclaimed at Versailles in 1871, Fritz had taken care to wear the Garter, 'an omen of intimate union between the Reich and England', as he wrote in his journal; but he regarded conferment of the distinction on his eldest son with mixed feelings. 'That boy will never mature, never come of age', he complained to a distinguished professor who offered congratulations after the eighteenth birthday celebrations were completed.

Both parents were disappointed in William. 'It has been the dream of my life to have a son whose soul and mind would be like beloved Papa', Vicky told her mother (11); and Willy fell short of the ideal. Fritz, while not seeking a reincarnation of Albert the Good, at least hoped for a balance of rational and kindly young man with whom to discuss his hopes and fears for Germany. Instead, he was confronted with an emotional adolescent, starry-eyed with admiration for the creator of the unified German Empire, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. The Crown Prince's sentiments were liberal rather than authoritarian: he had long opposed Bismarck although at times the two men co-operated for a particular objective. But there had never been any lessening of tension between the chancellor and the

Crown Princess: she loathed 'blood and iron'; he distrusted her English loyalties. It was galling to find the emperor and Bismarck encouraging her eldest son in his deplorable attitudes. But Willy had no reservations: Bismarck was for him the genius who raised his grandfather 'to the pinnacle of the German Empire'. If Papa and Mama failed to admire his statesmanship then this was a reflection upon them rather than on the chancellor: William despised those whose natures did not warm to his own intensity of hero worship.

The prince's eighteenth birthday marked the end of Hinzpeter's direct responsibilities. Although only fifty he looked older, and retired to Bielefeld with the former Mademoiselle d'Harcourt, whom he had married two years before. The emperor insisted that William should spend six months in the army. There he acquired the highly affected Potsdam accent (*Potsdamer Ton*), a nasal bark which ruined the civilities of normal conversation by its arrogance and coarseness. It was a style which ill-suited his priggish attitude to moral questions, and it did not make him a more attractive or sympathetic person. The Crown Princess cherished a plan, which she discussed with Sir Robert Morier and with Hinzpeter, for William to spend a few terms at Oxford. She hoped he might sharpen his mind at Balliol, where Jowett was in his prime as Master and would have welcomed the prince as an undergraduate. No one else at the Prussian court favoured the idea, and it is of course probable that William's academic attainments would have fallen short of Balliol's standards. (12) Clearly it was far more convenient for a German prince to spend two and a half years at Bonn, and in the autumn of 1877 he matriculated at the university where his father had been a student in the restless days following the 1848 revolution. Yet William gained less than his father from the university: he picked up a smattering of law, history and science; and he joined one of the student societies, the Borussia Corps, although he never became a full member and frowned on duelling, gambling and excessive drinking. Occasionally he would play croquet with the daughters of a local magistrate; but in general he cut himself off from his fellow students, living in even greater isolation than Hinzpeter permitted at Kassel. Lecturers and tutors came to his residence, the Villa Frank in the Koblenzstrasse, unless they wished him to observe a scientific experiment, when he would honour one of the demonstration theatres with his presence. He was *at* the university but not *of* the university, any more than his uncle, the Prince of Wales, had been as a Cambridge undergraduate in 1861. (13)

During his vacations William travelled. A visit to Paris, where he made a balloon ascent, was not a success: he gave the impression that he was shocked by the lax standards of life in the city, but it is probable he chiefly resented the coolness with which he was received, for it was only seven years since the Franco-Prussian War. 'I never wanted to see the French capital again', he wrote in his memoirs; and he never did. Venice, Monza and Genoa were more to his taste, but much of his time was spent in the British Isles, trying to understand a people towards whom he constantly felt both admiration and resentment. He visited his grandmother again at Osborne, Windsor, and Balmoral; and he met Disraeli, whose 'cleverness and cold calculation' together with 'a submissiveness to his

sovereign' failed to make 'an agreeable impression'. ('How jolly!', Willy had written to his mother on hearing that Disraeli had secured for Britain the largest single holding of Suez Canal shares.) Rather unexpectedly he stayed for some weeks at Ilfracombe in north Devon for the good of his health, and once spent a puzzled day at Lords' seeking to make sense of the Eton and Harrow cricket match. There was, as he noted, nothing in Germany comparable to the enthusiasm with which the English people followed competitive games. (14) Sporting metaphors were duly absorbed into his English vocabulary whence eventually they emerged - heartily inapt - to confound crises in later years.

On most weekends in his first summer at the university William liked to escape from Bonn and travel down through Hesse to Darmstadt, where his mother's sister, Alice, was married to the Grand Duke. The Hessian court was pleasantly unpretentious and the prince enjoyed showing off to his sisters and cousins. In that summer of 1878 the eldest, Victoria, was fifteen, while her constant companion, the second daughter, Elizabeth ('Ella'), would be fourteen in the following November. They were not impressed by Willy's behaviour: it was disconcerting to lob a tennis-ball over the net one moment, and find him wishing to read aloud a favourite passage from the Bible the next. Victoria was too much of a tomboy to win William's admiration, but he was increasingly attracted by Ella. That winter, tragedy hit the Hessian royal family: the youngest child, four-year old May, died from diphtheria, and Prince Louis Alice succumbed to the same virus four weeks later. William was deeply moved by his aunt's death and filled with sentimental compassion for Victoria and Ella. He spent leisure hours writing verses for Ella - though none have survived - and, in the following summer, sought always to be near her when he visited Darmstadt or the wooded Schloss Wolfsgarten, a mere ten miles from the Rhine. By now he was smoking heavily, a habit which his cousin Victoria secretly picked up from him, and he seemed even more erratic and restless. (15) His mother thought it undesirable for her eldest son to marry her niece (although nine years later Henry was allowed to marry Ella's younger sister, Irene) and no one apart from William, took his infatuation with Ella seriously. He was too egocentric for either of his Hessian cousins; Victoria was to marry Prince Louis of Battenberg and settle in England, while Ella married the Grand Duke Serge of Russia. William needed a more placid and less intelligent creature than Ella for his wife.

He had, in fact, already found such a person in Princess Augusta Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg. 'Dona' (as she was called in her family) possessed a pretty face, a dignified manner and an even temper. She was Willy's senior in age by a mere fourteen weeks. Her father, Duke Frederick of Augustenburg, had long been a friend of the Crown Prince, who unsuccessfully championed his claims to Schleswig-Holstein against Bismarck's policy in 1864-5, and William first met Dona on holiday in Thuringia during the spring of 1868, when they were both nine. Ten years later William began to pay her more attention, visiting the family at Gotha and in return escorting her around Potsdam. She did not inspire love poems, but there is no doubt he found her physically attractive and she idolized him, although she had few illusions about his temperamental immaturity.

Unfortunately the Augustenburgs were considered of lowly rank among German princely families and William knew that a projected marriage with Dona would be unpopular at court. His parents, however, agreed with him and by Christmas 1879 he had almost made up his mind.

Early in January 1880 Dona's father died. Once again, as with Ella, bereavement brought out protective instinct in William; and the death of 'that idiot from Holstein' - as Bismarck called the duke - improved the prospect of securing the emperor's consent for the marriage. The young couple became secretly engaged on St Valentine's Day, 1880, for both were romantics at heart. The emperor showed some reluctance to make the betrothal public, no doubt because he would personally have preferred a Russian dynastic connection. But in the end he agreed to 'proclaim the event' at Babelsberg on 2 June. The marriage was arranged for the following February. (16)

Everyone liked Dona personally. 'Her smile and her manners and expression must disarm even the most bristly, thorny people of Berlin with their sharp tongues, their cutting sarcasms about everybody and everything', Vicky wrote to Windsor. And the Queen herself, who welcomed Dona to England for the first time in March 1880, thought her 'gentle and amiable and sweet'. Bismarck, lapsing into a coarse style, remarked that the 'Holstein cow' would introduce a fresh strain to the Hohenzollern breed; but he was thankful Dona was not English, nor endowed with such spirit as Vicky or the Empress Augusta. 'An excellent woman', wrote Waldersee, one of the rising stars on the General Staff, in his journal; and Hinzpeter, who had been with William at that first meeting in 1868, told Dona he was glad that 'my dearly beloved problem child' would be united 'for life with someone who understands him and sympathizes with him in his weaknesses'. (17) There was a general impression that, in some undefined way, Dona would do him good.

The wedding festivities lasted three days. On Saturday, 26 February, the bridegroom - newly promoted to the rank of captain - led a detachment of Guards through the Brandenburg Gate and along the Linden to the royal palace, where they formed a guard of honour to welcome the bride on her formal arrival at the capital. A flock of white doves was released as her carriage reached the Brandenburg Gate and passed, in fine state, between crowds lining the Linden. The inexplicable intrusion into the procession of an advertising float recommending, for all newly-weds, the merits of Singer's sewing machine did not please Dona and, to at least one of her attendants, William seemed more concerned with the appearance of the Guard than of the bride; but the Berliners were delighted and remained in holiday mood the whole weekend. The festivities within the palace that evening lasted for six and a half hours, and the ceremonies on the Sunday (the actual wedding day) were no less protracted. The formal banquet was held on the Monday, followed that night by a grand performance of *Armide* at the Opera House. (18) There was no honeymoon: the couple left for Potsdam, where William was enjoying regimental life with the Foot Guards. It was fortunate that Dona was too docile, dutiful and conventional to resent the 'army mania' hereditary among Prussian royal princes.

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