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MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

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attempt to disguise the partisan nature of their writings. When Macaulay chartered for his "vehement, contentious, replying manner," he was not suggesting that history be divorced from party, merely that it be composed as if for delivery from the dispatch box rather than the benches.

Nevertheless, the Whig Parliament was much more receptive than its predecessors to the extension of conscientious objectors, who succeeded in their campaign for a thorough overhaul of the national records. The select committee founded for this purpose produced a report in 1836 which was also opposed by the House of Commons. Rolls and manuscripts were found "in a state of imperishable adhesion to the stone walls...so congealed together that they could not be uncoiled." More shockingly, bundles appeared to have been lost to the British Library. Robert Cottan that formed the basis of the British Library's collection.

Acid — were irresponsible in the extreme. It was only with the emergence of the "professional" historian slightly later in the century that the work was continued in a systematic way. This had the unfortunate effect of making the concept the "historian MP" something of an anachronism. Serious scholars were no longer attracted to, or deemed especially notable for, service in Parliament.

With a few notable exceptions this situation has continued up to our own times. MPs who have seen themselves primarily as historians in the 20th century tended to be rejected of the university establishment, notably Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953), whose embittered scribblings can be read as a long letter of protest to the Fellows of All Souls College who were missed him over for a fellowship. Even the ostensibly scholarly James Wood was denounced by Lewis Namier (1888-1960) as an incompetent amateur, making his History of Parliament project impossible to begin except under what he was safely in his grave.

This divergence between lay and professional historians became more extreme in the latter half of the 20th century. Hugh Trevor-Roper foresaw the dangers of this, prophesying that if lay history would follow Causa into obscurity if its practitioners forgot that their principal function was to enrich society, not to foster in learned isolation.

Only in recent years does this situation appear to be changing. Two decades ago the satirical title of an academic article invented by Kingsley Amis in his 1954 novel, Lucky Jim, — "The Economic Influence of the Developments in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485" — seemed to David Camnright almost recklessly heretical. This is less so today. Gradually the rift between professional historians and public interest appears to be closing, a development highlighted by the influx of historians, MPs, or all of whom could have pursued academic careers had they so wished. It is a good sign, which one hopes will be followed by the appearance of more economists, scientists, and mathematicians in politics, who have traditionally shown a similar tendency to withdraw from public life in favour of specialization.

This trend may have the beneficial effect of helping to smash the virtual monopoly that professional historians seem to have over candidates' shortlists. For, if being a constant reminder becomes the only prerequisite for going into politics, Parliament will fast become as narrow and self-effacing as the kind of scholarship expected. Both professions may be enriched by specialisation, but the danger is always that such activities become too self-sufficient. Whether the new historians, MPs will hold a return to the noble traditions of Spelman and Cotton, or a return to the parliamentary scholarship of the Whigs, remains to be seen. They could do worse than to ensure that Wedgwood's epic project edges closer towards completion despite the cuts to public spending.

Will Robinson is working on a biography of the Victorian investigative journalist WT, Shaw, for which he was recently named a recipient of the Society of Genealogists Newsletter Club Prize. For more articles on this subject visit www.historian.com/political

The creation of the modern unified German state in January 1871 constitutes the greatest diplomatic and political achievement of any leader of the last two centuries; but it was effected at a huge personal and political price, argues Jonathan Steinberg.

How Did Bismarck Do It?

In June 1862 Otto von Bismarck, then 47 years old and not yet minister-president of Prussia, decided to visit London. He had been the Prussian ambassador to St Petersburg since 1859 and for nearly a decade before that served as Prussia's ambassador to the German Confederation. His reputation in diplomatic circles was that of a person capable of eccentric and outrageous statements. He lived up to it as a reception at the Russian ambassador's residence. Bismarck explained his plan to Benjamin Disraeli, the future British prime minister; BaronBrunow, the Russian ambassador; and the Austrian envoy, Friedrich Count Vintur von Tschirschky. He told the astounded guests exactly what he had in mind. Disraeli recorded his words:

I shall soon be compelled to undertake the conduct of the Prussian government. My first care will be to re-organise the army with or without the help of the Landknechts. As a result of the army shall have been brought into such a condition as to inspire respect...I shall seize the first pretext to declare war against Austria, dissolve the German Diet, subdue the minor states and give national unity to Germany under Prussian leadership. I have come here just to say this to the Queen's minister.

On the way home, Disraeli accompanied the Austrian ambassador to his residence. As they parted, Disraeli told Vintur: "Take care of that man; he means what he says." And he did.

Nine years later, almost to the day, the victory parade passed through Berlin after the stupendous Prussian triumph over France in the Franco-Prussian War and the proclamation of a German empire in the euphoria of that success. Bismarck had accomplished much more than he had impulsively promised in London. These nine years and this "revolution" constituted the greatest diplomatic and political achievement of any leader in the last two centuries, for Bismarck accomplished all this without commanding a single soldier, without donning a vast parliamentary majority, without the support of a mass movement, without any previous experience of government, without the charisma of a great orator, and in the face of national revulsion at his name and his reputation. This success, the work of a political genius of a very unusual kind, rested on several sets of conflicting characteristics. He played his parts with
perfect self-confidence, yet mixed them with rage, anxiety, illness, hypochondria and irrationality.

Ever since I first lectured on Bismarck as a junior research fellow at Cambridge 40 years ago this achievement has puzzled me. How did he do it? Of course previous biographers have asked and answered these questions but not as the central issue. They asked what did Bismarck accomplish with what consequences for German and European history. But what fascinates me is how this giant of a man, a rural aristocrat with no military credentials, a reputation for violent statements, reactionary views and irresponsibility, could become the great Bismarck of history?

A few contemporaries saw that Bismarck had no urge, more powerful than any other impulse in his nature, to dominate his fellow human beings. His university roommate, the American John Morley, saw in it the 18-year-old Bismarck and in 1839 published a novel about him, Morton's Hope, or the Memoirs of a Provincial. This is what Otto von Bismarck, the thinly disguised Bismarck, tells the narrator as a new student at the University of Göttingen:

I intend to lead my companions here, as I intend to lead them in after-life. You are all a very national sort of person now and you would hardly take me for the crazy mountebank you met in the street half an hour ago. But then I see that this is the way to obtain superiority. I determined as once on arriving at the university, that the way to obtain mastery over my competitors, who were all, extravagant, savage, eccentric, was to be ten times as extravagant and savage as anyone else...

This will to dominate led behind a deliberate, irresistible sense of humour, a warmth and hospitality that captured even his opponents. They say he was 'bewitching, charming, delighted' and 'fascinated' them. Durrall, no more charmer himself, said 'he talked Montaigne with a child'. As a child Bismarck defended himself against an ambivalent, cold mother with lies. He fed all his life. On other occasions, as in London or in his college rooms, he told the truth about his plans so frankly that listeners could not believe their ears. He could be kind and cruel, emotional and cool, sensitive and heartless, honest and deceiving. His personality had authority and contemporaries used ' demonic', 'diabolical', or ' despotic' to describe it. He had stupendous intellectual powers and a huge capacity to work behind a façade of business. His childhood friend, Moritz von Bismarck, claimed that, when they were both at school, Bismarck never worked but seemed to know everything without trying.

Bismarck achieved his goals because he projected his powerful personality commanded and disarmed his opponents and his opponents alike for nearly four decades, but not even the most sovereign of empires can operate successfully without help. Four factors created the 'Bismarck of history': first, the change in the international balance of power, over which he had no control; second, the institutional structure of the kingdom of Prussia after the revolution of 1848, over which he use had no control; third, the appointment in 1857 of another 'genius', General Helmut von Moltke (1800-91), to be chief of the Prussian general staff and his translation of the Prussian army over which Bismarck as a civilian could by definition have no control; and finally, the support of a small group of influential figures who right-saw in Bismarck a 'genius' that would be the key to the preservation of the Prussian semi-absolutist, military monarchy in the new political world created by the revolutions of 1848. In this one area, he had not only control but mastery.

International affairs played into his hands. In 1846 he saw that the French revolution of that year offered no threat, as he wrote to his brother Bernhard: 'The motives of 1792, the guillotine and the republican fanaticism, which might take the place of money, are not present. He saw in the 1890s that the empire of Napoleon III would do for him as he wrote to his horrified patron, General Leopold von Gerlach, who regarded Napoleon III as the embodiment of 'red revolution'.

The present form of government in France is not arbitrary, a thing that Louis Napoleon can correct or alter. It was something that he found as a given and it is probably the only method by which France can be ruled for a long time to come. For everything else the basis is missing either in national character or in being shattered and lost. If Henry V [of France] were to come to the throne he would be unable, if at all, to rule differently. Louis Napoleon did not create the revolutionary conditions; he did not rebel against an established order, but instead fueled power out of the whirlpool of anarchy as nobody's property. If he were now to lay it down, he would greatly embarrass Europe, which would more or less unanimously beg him to take it up again.

Napoleon III, imprisoned by the myth of his uncle, Napoleon I, had to liberate Italy. He provoked an unnecessary war with Austria in 1859 and helped to weaken the most important element in the balance of power, the Habsburg monarchy. The incompetence of the Austrian monarch and his advisers did the rest. Then sworn to Nicholas I a great debt for his intervention in 1848, which saved the monarchy and crushed the Hungarian revolution of 1849. When the last asked for Austrian help against the western powers during the Crimean War in 1854, Franz Josef refused it. Austria, caught between Napoleonic France and a disgruntled Russia, had no ally against Prussia. The next time, Alexander II, came to the throne in 1855 convinced that Russia's defeat in the Crimean War showed that self-determination and backwaterism threatened the very existence of the tsarist state. The great 'reform era' took Russia out of active diplomacy for just long enough, for Bismarck to deal with a weakened, isolated and indecisive Habsburg monarchy. He did not create these realities but he exploited them with consummate mastery.

The Prussian state that Bismarck served depended on its army and the compact between the crown and its nobility. When Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the Great Elector, decided in 1653 to have his 'own forces' rather than to rely on mercenaries, he began a process which turned Prussia into a military monarchy, 'not a state with an army, but an army with a state in which it happens to be stationed'. Frederick the Great fashioned it into the armament into the essential element in the social structure. The landed gentry and aristocracy all 'served'; they went first to the Kadettentrainingen, the military schools, and then to a regiment. As Frederick explained in his Testament of 1752:

The Prussian nobility has sacrificed its life and goods for the service of the state; its loyalty and merit have earned it the protection of all its rulers... it is one goal of the policy of this state to preserve the nobility.

Bismarck's king, Wilhelm I (r. 1861-88), followed the mood of Frederick: the Great. He worked hard, avoided display and saw himself first and foremost as a soldier. In one respect he differed from his predecessors. He had the self-certitude to delegate, entrusting his civilian affairs to Bismarck and in 1866 surrendering command of his army to Moltke. From 1866 to 1870 Prussia had a unified military command structure under the greatest military strategist of the modern era. Moltke had developed a range of sophisticated war
General Helmuth von Moltke at the Palace of Versailles, painted by Anton Alexander von Werner, 1872.
career would have ended. I see lies part of the answer to the question: how did Bismarck do it? His power rested entirely on the good will, patience and, yes, love that Wilhelm I brought to his relations with his first servant. Bismarck used his gifts to manipulate and control a rigid, stubborn, reactionary old man. If the king had had the decency to die at the biblical three-score years and ten in 1867, Bismarck’s creation, the North German Federation, might have eventually absorbed the south German kingdoms without a devastating war. But Wilhelm did not die until 1888 when he was 91 and that longevity gave Bismarck 36 years in office. During these years he repeatedly forced the king to do his bidding by means of temper tantrums, hysterics, tears and threats.

Had the king been strong, Bismarck could not have used the remnants of royal absolutism to make his will felt through the entire political system. Bismarck depended on the old man’s health (excellent), his willingness to be bossed by him (liminal) and the tensions of the king’s marriage (weak husband — strong wife) to rule Germany. Yet in his relationship with the king and queen (whom he loathed) Bismarck re-enacted the patterns of his childhood with his cold, ambitious, frightening mother and his forbidding, old father who exercised power over him. There is in this triangle of husband, wife and adopted son a key to the power that Bismarck deployed and also an explanation for the terrible toll that this power dynamic took on his physical and mental health.

The Great German Ring-master Bismarck presenting a Bill of Divorce to his trained dog in the German parliament, from the US magazine Puck, c.1879.

The tension between Bismarck and the queen — empres produced absurd reactions. Describing how Bismarck, claiming a last minute attack of hysteca, had dashed out of a dinner invitation from the British ambassador at which etiquette would demand he sit next to the Empress Augusta, Lady Emily Russell, wife of the British ambassador, wrote to Queen Victoria:

Your Majesty is aware of the political jealousy of Prince Bismarck about the Empress Augusta’s influence over the Emperor, which he thinks stands in the way of his anti-clerical and National policy, and prevents the formation of responsible ministries as in England. The Empress told her husband [Bismarck] has only twice spoken to Her Majesty since the war.

Bismarck’s rage and irritability got worse as he got older. Robert Lucas von Ballhausen became a member of his inner circle in 1870 and after 1873 was a cabinet minister in the Prussian state ministry. He saw Bismarck frequently and recorded the deterioration. From 1875 he wrote increasingly anxious entries in his diary:

February 22nd: It is a remarkable feature of Bismarck’s character, how intensively he multiplies thoughts of revenge and retaliation for real or imagined slights that he has suffered. In his morbid irritability he feels as a wrong what from the other person was never intended to be that...

March 4th: the domestic situation changes kaleidoscopically quickly... Bismarck handles all questions from his own personal point of view, is clearly not about to give up much of his personal influence and changes his mind from day to day. Where he himself does not want to do something, he blames himself behind the Kaiser’s back, and everybody believes that he gets his way on anything if he really wants it.

When he fell from power in 1890 Bismarck reprieved began to realise itself. The institutions ceased to work. The new, young Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted to enjoy ‘personal rule’ and round a group of dedicated courtiers who encour-
aged his militarism. The lovers that Bismarck had left failed and the Kaiser took the blame. By that stage, though embittered in his retirement, Bismarck had become an icon, the all-wise, all-knowing statesman, a view of himself he did not challenge.

The Iron Chancellor emboldened and manifested the greatness of Germany. His image hung in every schoolroom and over many a hearth. Yet this image became a burden to his successors. Germany had to have a genia-
manschaft as its ruler. Kaiser Wilhelm II outdid the Iron Chancellor in showboating but failed the test. He could not control himself, still less the remiscible structure that Bismarck had left him. The First World War destroyed much of Bismarck’s Germany and defeated the monarchies in all the many German states.

Bismarck paid a terrible personal price for the power he wielded, suffering hypochondria, hysteria, illness, sleeplessness, rage and over-eating. He destroyed much of his social life, the happiness of his children, the friendships of his youth and his peace of mind, but he dominated his society so utterly that contemporaries called him a dictator. He destroyed more from his health. He had a
disastrous effect on Germany. Under his rule political opponents became enemies and had to be crushed. He destroyed German liberalism and tried to stamp out the Catholic center party. He outlawed social democracy and wanted to deprive academies and reside unions of their votes. He helped the worst elements of the old ruling class to survive, so that in 1933 they could give the office that the Iron Chancellor had created to a ‘Bohemian corporal who destroyed what remnant of Bismarck’s Germany.

In the words of the great sociologist Max Weber, writing in 1918, Bismarck...

...left a nation totally without political education... totally bereft of political will accustomed to expect that the great man at the top would provide their politics for them. And further as a result of his improper exploita-
tion of monarchal sentiment to conceal his own power politics in party battles, it had grown accustomed to submit patiently and fatalistically to whatever was decided for it in the name of ‘monarchical government’.

Jonathan Steinberg is the author of Bismarck: A Life, published this month by Oxford University Press.


For further articles on this subject, visit: www.historytoday.com/bismarck

THE ADMISSION: LA PETIT JOURNAL FROM DECEMBER 1893 POINTS TO BISMARCK’S RESPONSIBILITY FOR GERMAN WARTIME GRIEVANCE OF HIS YEARS.