

**WILLIAM THE SECOND AS SEEN
IN CONTEMPORARY
DOCUMENTS AND JUDGED ON
EVIDENCE OF HIS OWN SPEECHES**

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William the Second as seen in contemporary documents and judged on evidence of his own speeches by S. C. Hammer

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BY

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CHAPTER I

YOUTH

DURING the last days of 1858 great political unrest, associated in a singular manner with simple-hearted loyalty, was prevalent in Berlin and throughout Prussia.

The rule of the childless Frederick William IV had presented for many years an almost unique picture of incapacity and wilfulness ; during 1857 he had been obliged, on account of failing mental powers, to relinquish all State business, and was at the moment living in Italy, a chronic invalid. His brother, Prince William, who acted as Regent, was still a political novice, in spite of his sixty odd years, and it was Bismarck who was destined to place him amongst the historic figures of the age. For the time being, however, he was pre-eminently the Prince of the *petite bourgeoisie*, the unpretentious ideal of the ordinary public who frequented tea-gardens and beerhouses ; while those in leading positions were obliged to recognize that he had neither much political capacity nor even a strong personality.

With the dawn of the New Year fresh troubles arose. At the New Year's levée in the Tuileries, Napoleon III expressed his regret to the Austrian

Ambassador that friendly relations no longer existed between the French and Austrian Governments, and this ominous observation—made in the hearing of the whole Diplomatic Corps—blazed like a beacon of war from one country to another. Nowhere, with the exception of Vienna, was the news received with more excitement than at Berlin, as indeed was only natural. The Prussian Government was subjected to violent pressure from Austria, both by means of diplomacy and through the Press ; but in spite of every provocation, Berlin maintained an obstinate silence for several months, evidently because the time was not considered opportune for that national war that should end in German unity. A policy of this kind is apt to result in a condition of a public apprehension, and it was therefore a kindly dispensation of Providence that a pleasing diversion from so much anxiety shortly presented itself.

The Prince Regent's only son, Prince Frederick William of Prussia, had married in 1857 the Princess Royal of Great Britain, eldest daughter of Queen Victoria. At first the alliance was not very popular, either in England or in Prussia ; but now, when it had been announced that the Princess was expecting a child, all classes of society united heartily in their good wishes towards her.

The event, which was expected to take place during the latter half of January, aroused extraordinary excitement. It became the central point in Church prayers, and was the main topic of conversation both in family circles and at public gatherings. As an official chronicler tells us :
" All social engagements were postponed in expecta-

tion of the day that should secure a successor to the throne, and the coming event was eagerly awaited by every one." A whole nation, as it were, walked on tiptoe outside the nursery door.

On Tuesday, January 25, 1859, the event was so close at hand that two batteries of artillery were ready in their barracks, prepared to fire the salute the moment the news should be received.

It came at a little after three on the afternoon of the 27th January. But even before the salute was fired the news had spread like wildfire through the capital, "Es ist ein Prinz." Those who were still in ignorance counted the guns up to thirty-six, and thus all doubts were dispelled.

"Es ist ein Prinz!" These words passed throughout the city like a word of command. In a few hours Berlin was transformed. Every house was decorated with flags and streamers—many Union Jacks among them—and at night there was a general illumination that extended to the remotest quarters of the city. Unter den Linden was one great sea of human beings, and in all the places of amusement rejoicings knew no bounds. In the provinces enthusiasm was equally great, and even in London the public caught the fever.* The next day newspapers in

* The following contemporary verse is not without a certain interest at the present time:—

Hail the auspicious morn !
To Prussia's throne is born
A royal heir.

May he defend its laws
Join with old England's cause,
Thus win all men's applause !