

**THE KAISER AS HE IS: OR,
THE REAL WILLIAM II. (LE
VÉRITABLE GUILLAUME II)**

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(Le Véritable Guillaume II)

by

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NOUSSANNE

E. J. D.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IF M. de Noussanne's little volume were simply what it appears to be on the surface—a fascinating collection of intimate and lively sketches—the necessity of introducing author and book to an audience of English readers might be questioned, and the appearance of such an introduction regarded as an obstacle to the fun that is to come and a damper on its exuberance and freedom. Why the Kaiser dismissed Bismarck, coerced the Poles, despised Socialists; how he addresses the members of his family, his soldiers, his subjects; what he thinks and what he does, would require no prefatory note. Cable despatches from Berlin have long given these things the background and atmosphere necessary to fill them with a human interest that has probably never before been bestowed upon the acts and words of any man.

But one does not have to venture far in these pages before realising that the author has undertaken the exposition and solution of a very serious problem. The anecdotes concerning the whims of the monarch, his ideas on social and domestic economy and the army, his criticisms of, and his achievements in, the arts of expressions are all, through the Frenchman's graceful and subtle pen, recorded as formative influences cast upon the King by the man von Hohenzollern, and hence upon the Emperor, and ultimately upon the people of Prussia and the Germans of the Federation.

Before the world to-day, the German Kaiser stands as the type and symbol of all that is German in culture, thought, and industry. But is he the true type and symbol? Do Germans themselves observe in him the same mentality and physique that do foreigners? To the answering of these questions, M. de Noussanne devotes many serious pages.

The line of demarcation which separates genius from something else is finely drawn and often indiscernible. Many there are who, placing themselves on one side of the line, have been remorselessly thrown over upon the other by the judgment of the world. It would perhaps be too much to expect a Frenchman to place Wilhelm II. elsewhere than upon the further side. M. de Noussanne, although polite, gracious, and free from malice, is no exception. Our author believes that his analysis of the Imperial mind will be confirmed by history. He may be right. But it should not be forgotten that the German Empire of the future will possess quite as many opportunities for the genius as for the madman.

In 1840, Louis Napoleon landed at Boulogne and let fly a tame eagle. The world laughed and took him for a fool. Thirty years later, as Emperor of the French, this same Louis Napoleon declared war on Germany. The world became serious and took him for a statesman. In each case the world was mistaken. In regard to Wilhelm von Hohenzollern, König von Preussen and Deutscher Kaiser, the world has been mistaken only once. On his accession, sixteen years ago, it looked upon him as an erratic but quite unimportant individual. Since that time he has made many speeches, indited many letters and telegrams, composed some music, and painted a few pictures. He has variously been the subject of hatred, contumely, and jest; of pauegyric, ironical and otherwise; but of in-

difference, never. Having fooled the world once to his own advantage and possibly to the advantage of his people, will he do it again with similar results? His policy, so far, has been one of energetic preparation and of sudden feverish feints. Germany has seemed to be on the point of accomplishing something. Will the Kaiser fool the world a second time and have her accomplish it?

But whether for Imperial weal or woe, whether permanency as a world Power or wreck and disintegration follow the reign and administration and dominance of Wilhelm II., M. de Noussanne has prepared his readers for even the most surprising eventualities. From the intimate data with which he provides us no one will question the author's deductions that the German Emperor's individuality has stamped its expression upon the face of Germany. But the author does not deny nor does he seek to evade the fact that this face, in the eyes of the world, has become a singularly remarkable visage—a visage, the strongest and most human features of which were not even dreamed of by the Prussians, the Bavarians, and the Saxons who witnessed the Imperial accession of the "never-to-be-forgotten grandfather" at Versailles. Now, have the German peoples wrought this change in spite of the German Kaiser, or has the German Kaiser wrought it in spite of them? Our author has no doubt on the subject, for he looks upon Imperial disaster as inevitable. Other critics of international politics are welcome to differ from him. The material which he furnishes is no less valuable to them than it is to himself.

Mr. St. Loe Strachey, in his introduction to that excellent little handbook on *German Ambitions*, draws a just distinction between the aspirations of Germany considered as a State and the aspirations of the people in-

habiting the various allied countries which go to make up the German Federation. Like M. de Noussanne, he is apprehensive of the former and full of sympathy for the latter. Racial unity brought about through national unity means, of course, progress and enlightenment for the race, provided the means taken to secure national unity be proper and dignified. So far, M. de Noussanne does not think that the aspirations of the German State, as reflecting to the world the character of the Kaiser, have been either. As a student of international politics, he offers an admirable key to Mr. Strachey's statement: "It is only by understanding German aspirations and the foundations of German policy and statecraft that we can tell how to act in particular circumstances."

Granting to our author his premise that the Kaiser is *un malade*, no one will accuse M. de Noussanne of having reached in an illogical fashion his conclusions—that the dismissal of Bismarck has brought about a weak and vacillating policy at home and a changing tentative policy abroad; that Socialism, nurtured and then despised has, under the Kaiser's irrational treatment, become a serious menace to the Imperial *régime*; that the army and navy under the thralldom of archaic discipline are rapidly losing their effectiveness as modern fighting bodies in which individual initiative should have weight; that industrials and agriculturists are making ducks and drakes of Germany's political economy; and that because of these things Germany is not likely to avail herself of any advantage which might otherwise accrue to her on her eastern frontiers at the death of that venerable Kaiser who now rules benignly those never-to-be assimilated heterogeneous masses in Austria-Hungary. It was inevitable that the dismissal of Bismarck should be followed by pliable and impres-

sionable ministers; that the ill-treatment of the Prussian Poles should cause these people to realise in their own way their title of being "without a country"; that attacks upon individual liberty should augment sympathy for the Socialist propaganda; that the Kaiser's futile attempts at Teutonic expansion on the Continent and across the seas should bring his chancellery into mortification at home and contempt abroad; and that his personal interference in matters of education, art, culture, and theology should become obnoxious to German experts and ridiculous in the eyes of the world. The material upon which these conclusions are based we have presented to us in concise, feverish, coherent chapters bristling with data and episode. Their trustworthiness is beyond question. Nowhere in the English language, I believe, are such brief and admirable surveys to be found of the more serious problems which are now agitating German statecraft and interesting German people. The chapters on the Poles, Socialism, the Agrarians, the industrials, and the exact status of the Austro-Hungarian Empire are remarkable for their lucidity and force, and no one who pretends to a knowledge of Continental affairs can afford to ignore them. They carry conviction with them.

But what of M. de Noussanne's premise that the Kaiser is *un malade*? There are many, including myself, who would join issue with him. The anecdotes, episodes, and idiosyncrasies of mind, manner, and action which go to make up the most fascinating pages of his book, while admittedly trustworthy, require no sympathetic charity to interpret them far differently than our author has done. It is so easy to misjudge the interest that a conspicuous man may take in very little things, and the importance which he seems, at the time, to give to trivialities.