

**THE
HOHENZOLLERNS, A
HISTORICAL STUDY**

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The Hohenzollerns, a historical study by A. D. Innes

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A. D. INNES

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**THE
PEOPLE'S
BOOKS**

THE HOHENZOLLERNS

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THE HOHENZOLLERNS

A HISTORICAL STUDY

By A. D. INNES

AUTHOR OF "A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH NATION," "A GENERAL SKETCH OF POLITICAL HISTORY," &c.



*Oh, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.*

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THE HOHENZOLLERNS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

ON April 18th, 1417, Frederick of Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nuremberg, was invested by the Emperor Sigismund with the title and dignities of Elector of Brandenburg. On January 18th, 1701, Frederick III, Elector of Brandenburg, was crowned King of Prussia. On January 18th, 1871, William I, King of Prussia, was proclaimed German Emperor. In 1914, his grandson William II, King of Prussia and German Kaiser, endeavoured to assert a claim, not recognised by other European powers, to a still more extended dominion, attainable only by the total destruction of the power of France, of the British Empire, and of Russia. It appears improbable at the present time that those nations will be reduced to acquiescence. It also appears that an appreciable curtailment of the powers of the house of Hohenzollern will be the inevitable and fortunate alternative.

The Brandenburg Electorate was bestowed upon a capable noble of the Holy Roman Empire whose advancement was thoroughly justified by his many admirable qualities. The crown of Prussia was assumed by or granted to a prince of no great merit who succeeded to the Electorate at the moment when his father had raised Brandenburg from the position of insignificance in which he had found it to that of a Power not indeed of the first class but at least very far from

negligible. Frederick II, the grandson of Frederick I, by his own genius and by the instrumentality of the army which his father had created, established Prussia as a first-class Power and the rival of Austria for the leadership of Germany. A hundred years later, William I, not by his own genius but by that of the mighty minister to whom he gave his confidence, Otto von Bismarck, and by the instrumentality of the army directed by Moltke, disposed of the Habsburg rivalry for the leadership of Germany, and by his victories over Austria and France established Germany as the greatest military power in Europe. His grandson William II discarded Bismarck, and developed the policy aiming at world dominion of which the issue is now being fought out on the battlefields of Europe.

Frederick William, "the Great Elector," who reigned from 1640 to 1687, was the first Hohenzollern who acquired international consequence. His grandson, Frederick William I, the second King of Prussia, was a prince of very remarkable personality who made possible the achievements of his son and successor, Frederick "the Great," achievements which justify that complimentary title. Frederick left no sons to succeed him. Of the three kings who followed him, each one proved quite emphatically that he was by no means a great man. The fourth, William I, was neither a far-seeing statesman nor an incomparable soldier; but greatness was thrust upon him by the statesman and the soldier by whom he was great enough to allow himself to be guided. All men are agreed that the elements of greatness were nobly combined in his son Kaiser Frederick I; but he was suffered to reign only for a few months. To the greatness of Frederick's son, let Belgium be called as witness.

But let this be said of the house of Hohenzollern. In the seventeenth century it raised an insignificant state to a position of consequence. In the eighteenth century it transformed a minor Power—partly, indeed, by sheer aggression, but partly by a quite magnificent resistance to overwhelming odds—into a first-class

Power. In the nineteenth century, a Hohenzollern gave to Germany a unity which a thousand years of the Holy Roman Empire had utterly failed to give her; since, unsupported by the crown, Bismarck and Moltke would have wrought in vain. The three Hohenzollern princes who have been called "Great," succeeded because each pursued a truly national policy, but none attempted to transgress its limits—the limits which were too narrow for German ambitions in the twentieth century. None of them was overburdened with scrupulosity, but each had moral standards to which he adhered. The Great Elector twice refused the crown of Poland, because he regarded it as a political necessity that the king should be a Catholic. Frederick II, with a somewhat cynical frankness professed and practised the principle that treaties should be broken if the security of the State demanded it, but he did not claim that security and convenience were equivalent terms. William allowed Bismarck to be the keeper of his political conscience; and whatever Bismarck did was done with some excuse which carried with it at least a show of moral plausibility sufficient to satisfy if not positively to convince his master. None of them ever found it necessary to resort to pure invention in order to provide something which might pass as a justification for palpably indefensible action.

Professorial Germany appears to labour under the conviction that in Germany and primarily in Prussia is to be found the motive power for the advancement of civilisation. In reviewing the history of the Hohenzollerns, it is curiously difficult to discover any single respect in which European progress is indebted to Prussian sources. Among the other nations, Britain perhaps owed a debt to Frederick the Great because, in the Seven Years' War, France divided her energies and wasted her troops in fighting the King of Prussia instead of confining herself exclusively to the struggle with England. But Frederick was fighting, not for the sake of his Ally, nor even for the European balance of Power, but to save Prussia from annihilation. He was

fighting not for any general cause but exclusively for his own kingdom. Whether anyone outside of Prussia was the better for his success may be questioned. Only at a single epoch in our history—from the moment when Yorck in effect raised the standard of Prussian revolt against the Napoleonic domination at the close of 1812, to the moment when Blücher's arrival on the field of Waterloo sealed the doom of Napoleon—did Prussia play a heroic part in a common cause. And even then, the lead was not given by the Hohenzollern, who was swept somewhat reluctantly along the tide of irresistible popular feeling. There have been fervent and distinguished patriots among the Hohenzollern princes. Hohenzollern princes have even extended their patriotism to Germany at large. They have served Prussia, they have served Germany—not always to Germany's benefit. But not one of them has ever attempted to serve Europe.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDING OF PRUSSIA

§ 1. *The Early Hohenzollerns*

THE Mark or March of Brandenburg was primarily a military colony or outpost planted by the German emperors on the north-east of the Empire to control and hold back the Slavs between the Elbe and the Oder. In course of time, the whole region ruled by the margraves, "marcher earls" as they would have been called in England, became thoroughly Germanised. The margraves were persons of considerable importance. But the old Ascanian line became extinct in the fourteenth century. Anarchy followed; and at the time of the Council of Constance (a year or two after Agincourt), the Emperor Sigismund conferred the Mark of Brandenburg upon his friend and supporter Frederick of Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nuremberg. With the margravate went the electoral dignity; the margrave