CHAPTER VIII

The Decade of the "Foundation" (1862-71)

The telegram from General von Roon with its enigmatic message, "Periculum in mora. Dépêchez-vous" ("Danger in delay. Make haste."), arrived in Paris on September 18, 1862. Its recipient, Otto von Bismarck-Schönhausen, wasted no time but took a train to Berlin on the nineteenth. On the twenty-second he had an interview with King William, which resulted in his appointment as minister-president and foreign minister of the kingdom of Prussia. At this moment there entered upon the large stage of European history the man who was destined to dominate Prussian, German, and even European affairs for almost thirty years and whose statesmanlike stature was to dwarf most of his contemporaries.

Otto von Bismarck was born in 1815 on the estate of Schönhausen not far from Berlin. It seems almost symbolic that while on his father's side he descended from a typical east-Elbian aristocratic family, on his mother's side the blood was not nearly so blue, for her family was a middle-class line which had done well in the administrative service of the Prussian state. These were the two classes which Bismarck was later to weld into the German ruling elite. He received an education typical of a young man of his class and eventually spent time at the University of Göttingen, where he was an indifferent student, although he must have read voraciously and lived a full and bibulous social life. It was probably there that he set forth on his alcoholic career, which can best be described by the word prodigious.

After leaving his formal studies, Bismarck tried his hand at a position in the Prussian civil service, which he did not keep very long because of its boring routine. He then returned to his father's estates and attempted the life of his forefathers as a member of the landed gentry. This too bored him, but he found some relief in continued heavy reading. More relief was undoubtedly afforded by his marriage in 1847 to Johanna
von Puttkamer, an extremely pious young woman of about his own social class. The marriage had the immediate effect of reclaiming the young Bismarck from errant agnosticism to the security of orthodox Lutheranism, a position from which thereafter he never swerved. At about the same time he became interested in politics, and 1847 found him at the United Diet in Berlin as a representative from his district. At this assembly Bismarck took a position of thoroughgoing conservatism and allied himself with those who stood for throne and altar.

When Bismarck heard the news of the uprising in Berlin in March 1848, he went immediately to the capital and informed the king that he would be glad to return home, assemble the faithful peasantry of the neighborhood, and with them disperse the disloyal rabble of the city. Frederick William, understandably alarmed by his turbulent vassal, refused the offer; as a result Bismarck played little part in the events of the revolutionary year, though one can imagine him thundering over his morning newspaper.

Bismarck's first important appointment came in 1851 when Frederick William IV named him Prussian representative at the revived Diet of the German Confederation at Frankfurt, partly because Bismarck had upon occasion been sympathetic to Austria and also because, after Olmütz, the Prussian government wanted to soothe Austrian feelings. It was soon clear, however, that the king had picked the wrong man for the purpose, for Bismarck had now become anti-Austrian and, to bolster Prussian prestige, amused himself by irritating the Austrian representative in every annoying way (e.g., smoking when the Austrian forbade it, or ostentatiously going for an excursion when the Austrian had called a meeting). He adopted a strong attitude during the Crimean War, annoyed by the vacillation of the Prussian king and convinced that Prussia should not work with the western allies. He saw that Austria was losing her credit in Russia and already had a sense of the importance of Russo-Prussian friendship for the future.

After the accession of Prince William of Prussia as regent, Bismarck was withdrawn from Frankfurt and appointed to the important post of Prussian ambassador in St. Petersburg. Here he spent the three years from 1859–62. These were important years for him, for during them he made lasting friendships with leading Russians and learned at first hand to understand the sometimes mercurial and always personal character of Russian rule. At the time of the Franco-Austrian War of 1859 Bismarck once again adopted an anti-Austrian attitude and warned against Prussian aid to her Germanic sister state.

In early 1862 Bismarck's Russian period came to a close and he was named ambassador to Paris. He held this position for only a few months
and spent part of the time on a visit to London. He did manage a love affair with a young Russian lady in Biarritz, and, more important perhaps, got to know Napoleon III, who was to be his principal antagonist in the diplomatic fencing of later years. It was shortly after his return from Biarritz that he received the fateful telegram from Roon.

Bismarck's personality is not an entirely easy one to understand. He was well-read, cynical, and witty. If he wished to, he could be charming; women were attracted to him in spite of his formidable appearance. Although a heavy drinker and smoker, he had inexhaustible energy when he needed it. Then he would make up for this expenditure by prolonged rests. In his later years he became irascible and grouchy; he was always imperious. The degree of his success has made his many worshipers feel that he had long-range plans which he developed with superhuman astuteness. It seems more true to say that he had a startling ability to analyze a situation as it arose, keep all its threads in his hands, and derive from it the maximum advantage for Prussia, since it was Prussia rather than Germany that he served. He was perhaps the last of the old diplomatists, happiest when dealing with foreign affairs, continental rather than global in outlook, and surely one of the most subtle political minds that the modern west has produced.

King William must not have known that in appointing Bismarck his principal minister he was chaining himself for the rest of his life to what Germans call the demonic force of the new statesman. If he had known it, he would have been well advised to think twice. In any case, he did not have to wait long to see the tack Bismarck would take. After naming a conservative group to form the ministry, Bismarck made one of his first appearances before a legislative body, the Budget Committee of the Prussian lower house. On this occasion he made the statement which contained the words "blood and iron" so often connected with the policy of the "Iron Chancellor." He declared, "The great questions of the time will be decided not by speeches and the resolutions of majorities—that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by blood and iron."

After thus expressing himself, Bismarck proceeded to his solution of the constitutional conflict between the king and parliament. The solution was simplicity itself. The government simply ruled Prussia by executive decree in despite of the parliament. Bismarck sent out collectors to receive taxes and threatened that they would if necessary be accompanied by soldiers whose loyalty was to the king and not to the parliament. Needless to say, the taxes were collected. Bismarck became the target of all kinds of unpopularity and even attack. This did not bother him at all. He developed a specious theory that there were loopholes in the Prussian constitution which permitted him to act as he was doing. No one
was taken in by this, but no serious effort was made to defy the government. Bismarck dissolved the parliament more than once and called new elections. Each time the liberals received greater support from the people. Bismarck’s support lay solely with the king, whose plans for the army reform were now being realized. As a further challenge to constitution and parliament, Bismarck by administrative decree in 1863 established a strong and illegal censorship of the press during the electoral campaign. He went so far indeed that the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Frederick, in a public statement made in Danzig, disavowed the government’s actions and absolved himself of any knowledge of them. This statement led to an angry letter from father to son and to the removal of the crown prince from any important connection with the government. It also led to an angry relationship between Bismarck and Frederick and his wife, Crown Princess Victoria, daughter of Queen Victoria, which was to last for many years until the tragic death of the semiliberal Frederick. Bismarck was the victor. In his position of sole authority he unflinchingly maintained his policy of violence, setting at naught parliament, constitution, and people. He maintained this policy for four years until military success brought him abject surrender from the parliament in the shape of a retroactive amnesty and personal gifts to the victorious statesman. This ignoble action of the deputies is one of the many tragedies of German political history.

After having established his tough position toward domestic problems, Bismarck was ready to embark upon his career as a diplomat, a role much more congenial to him. Two events occurred in 1863 which to a degree set the stage for things to come. One of these was Bismarck’s attitude toward the Austrian-sponsored Congress of Princes at Frankfurt. The Austrian emperor had decided that the German Confederation needed remodeling and reform, but in a conservative spirit without taking account of popular desires. To this end he invited the monarchs of the German states to meet with him in Frankfurt. King William of Prussia was inclined to accept the invitation, flattered by the fact that it was conveyed to him by the king of Saxony in person. Bismarck, seeing in the plan only a thrust for increased Austrian prestige, set himself definitely against it. His interview on the subject with the king was a stormy one. It is said that Bismarck was reduced to tears. This was not to be the last such emotional scene between the two, and this time, as on all future occasions, the minister was the victor. King William refused the invitation; as a result, the meeting, lacking the presence of the second-largest German power, came to nothing.

More important was Bismarck’s attitude and action toward the Polish insurrection which had broken out in 1863 against the Russian govern-
ment. Tsar Alexander II was carrying out a policy of stern and cruel repression in Poland to such a degree that British and French sentiment was wounded. The two western powers proposed a circular letter to the tsar protesting against the severity with which he was treating the Poles. Austria and Prussia were asked to adhere to this letter. Austria regarded it favorably. Bismarck, however, to whom the Poles meant nothing, sent conservative General von Alvensleben to St. Petersburg where he drew up the so-called Alvensleben Convention which provided that Russian and Prussian troops would mutually have the right to cross each other's borders in pursuit of fugitive Poles. This arrangement, of course, was of value only to Russia. The practical result so far as the Poles were concerned was not great, but the implications were considerable. First, Napoleon lost the close relationship with Russia toward which he had been working since the Crimean War. Second, Russia was irritated as in 1854–56 by Austrian ingratitude and double dealing. Finally, Alexander realized that he had a friend in Berlin. In subsequent years this Russo-Prussian amity was to be very useful to Bismarck. In fact, the time was close at hand for its usefulness, for the next major problem facing the diplomats was one that closely concerned the Danish royal family, related to the Romanovs, and over which Russia had historically extended a hand of cousinly protection.

The troublesome problem of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein had lain in abeyance since the Treaty of London of 1852. A new crisis loomed in 1863 when Frederick VII of Denmark proclaimed a new constitution. By this constitution the two areas of Denmark and Schleswig, although technically not merged, were brought closer together politically and the way seemed to be paved toward gradual union. This was a victory for the nationalist Eider Dane party. (The Eider is the little river separating Schleswig from Holstein.) A few days after publishing the constitution but before actually signing it, Frederick VII died; his successor, from the Glücksburg (female) line, was proclaimed as Christian IX. His first problem was whether or not to accept the new constitution. He decided to do so and signed it on November 18, 1863, three days after his accession.

This action caused a furor in Germany. It looked like an affront to the spirit of German nationalism, for it seemed to integrate the German minority in Schleswig into a foreign kingdom, to break up the old unity of the two duchies, and to violate the Treaty of London. More important, it gave Bismarck a choice pool of troubled waters to fish in, and fish in it he did with all the equipment he could bring into action. It seems clear that from the outset Bismarck was determined not to set up the duchies as a new entity within Germany but instead to annex them to the kingdom
of Prussia. He claims in his memoirs that this was the case. However, he had to be very secretive about this aim since the idea would be received with horror in Vienna and also by the Diet at Frankfurt. A further complication was that Frederick, Duke of Augustenburg, now publicly revived his claim to the duchies on the ground that his father had given up his own claim but not his son’s. This young duke was received with enthusiasm throughout Germany and made a trip to Berlin to secure Prussian support for his claims. Bismarck was able to avoid this, in spite of some wavering on the part of the king, by a reminder to William that Prussia had signed the Treaty of London by which Christian was to be recognized.

The next step taken by the Prussian minister was to arrive at an agreement with Austria to bring the two great German powers into harmony. This accomplishment was one of Bismarck’s diplomatic triumphs, since in this way he broke free from the German Confederation. Henceforward Prussia and Austria acted together as signatories of the Treaty of London, which the Confederation as such had not signed. The agreement was rendered easier by the fact that Austria was on fairly bad terms with France and therefore more willing to have a friend in Berlin. Thus Austria and Prussia agreed that action should be taken on the basis of the Treaty of London. The next step was for the two powers to persuade the Frankfurt Diet to carry out Federal Execution against Christian IX, an action which was succeeded by the occupation by German troops of the duchy of Holstein and its small neighbor Lauenburg. This action left the basic question of Schleswig still in abeyance, for Schleswig was not a member of the German Confederation. Austria and Prussia insisted that German troops must advance further and cross the Eider into Schleswig to enforce the Treaty of London. They tried to get the Diet to take this step; the Diet, however, refused. Therefore the two powers decided to act for themselves, which Bismarck wanted in the first place, and presented an ultimatum to Denmark demanding the abrogation of the recent constitution. Denmark refused this ultimatum; as a result, on February 1, 1864, Austrian and Prussian troops crossed into Schleswig. The first of Bismarck’s three wars for the unification of Germany had begun.

The war is of interest principally because it provided the newly remodeled Prussian army with its first opportunity to display itself in the field. It marks also the first appearance of the triumvirate which was to become invincible during the ensuing decade: Bismarck as head of the government, Roon as minister of war, and Moltke as chief of the General Staff. The actual commander in the field at first was the very old General Wrangel, but most of the strategy was developed by Moltke. The first objective was the allegedly impregnable Danewerk, a line of forts
across the neck of the Jutland Peninsula south of the town of Schleswig. Owing to bad weather, the Danish army retired from this position without a real fight and withdrew to the peninsula of Düppel and the adjacent island of Alsen. Before the end of February German troops had crossed the northern border of Schleswig and were on territory of Denmark proper, a fact which caused some embarrassment in Berlin and Vienna where it was feared that the advance into Denmark might unleash a general European war. By April 18, 1864, Düppel was stormed and taken, but at this point military activity was suspended for a time because the other powers of Europe, notably Great Britain, had called a European conference in London to try to settle the dispute without further bloodshed. It is hardly profitable to say much about this conference since it ended in failure. All sorts of proposals were suggested which might solve the general problem. Denmark was in a weak position both militarily and diplomatically. On the other hand, the German powers, flushed with success, were no longer content to make the treaty of 1852 the basis of the solution. Denmark would go no further in conciliation. Thus the conference came to an end in late June, and hostilities were renewed.

By this time General Wrangel had been replaced by Prince Frederick Charles of Prussia, who undertook successfully on June 29, 1864, Moltke’s audacious plan of landing on and occupying the island of Alsen. This action effectively broke Danish morale because the Danes realized that they were no longer safe on their islands. They therefore proposed an armistice and began peace negotiations. On October 30 a treaty was signed in Vienna, of which the most important provision was that King Christian abandoned jointly to Austria and Prussia his rights over Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg.

It is clear that this arrangement was no permanent one. It dodged the question of the final status of the duchies and in particular evaded the issue concerning the duke of Augustenburg. The Schleswig-Holstein problem becomes now the pivot of the general problem of the future of Germany. All that was gained by the Danish War was the removal of Denmark from the German picture. Bismarck now let his intentions become somewhat clearer. While the war was in progress, he had indicated to Austria that Prussia was interested in annexing the duchies. He had to deal with some opposition from King William, who felt he had no right to the duchies and that Augustenburg had, but in the course of time Bismarck was able, as always, to bring the monarch around to his way of thinking. In February 1865 Prussia informed Austria of the conditions under which she would permit the duchies to be set up as a German state. They involved a permanent alliance with Prussia, naval bases, and the right to build a canal across the peninsula; in general, they were
so severe that they constituted annexation to Prussia in all but name. Relations between the two German powers became more and more strained, and the possibility of war with Austria was discussed in Prussian ruling circles. However, Bismarck was not willing for a breach to occur at this moment. He presumably wanted to sound out opinion in the other capitals of Europe before acting. Accordingly an agreement with Austria was patched up at Gastein in August 1865, by which Lauenburg and the administration of Schleswig were granted to Prussia and that of Holstein to Austria. A glance at the map on page 88 will show that this again was no permanent solution. Austria had few interests that far from home. Further, Prussia could garrison Schleswig only by transporting her troops across Holstein. However, the Gastein convention did grant a breathing spell for almost a year, and Bismarck gained the title of count. (He was made a prince after 1871.)

The next months were spent by Bismarck in an extremely intricate series of diplomatic moves preparatory to war with Austria, which he now felt to be both inevitable and desirable. He studied the general European picture. Russia and Great Britain were no threat. The former was very friendly to Prussia, the latter jealous of France and not averse to a strong counterweight in north Germany. Italy would be a desirable ally against Austria, but so great was the influence of France in Italy that an alliance could hardly be achieved without the consent of Napoleon III. Accordingly Bismarck in October made a trip to France and visited the French emperor at Biarritz. We do not know exactly what they said, but it seems clear that Napoleon expressed a friendly interest in Prussian aspirations—especially if these were coupled with increase of territory to France. Probably Belgium, Luxemburg, the Saar, and the Palatinate were mentioned airily in the discussions. It seems clear that Bismarck made no definite commitments but did not oppose further negotiation after the conclusion of the war.

On his return from France Bismarck spent the winter in moves designed to increase the tension with Austria and to get the king and other leading Prussians in line with his own policy. He started to enlarge the ground of the whole problem by indicating that it transcended the simple addition of the duchies to Prussia, that in fact it involved a whole reorganization of the German Confederation. He dangled before the king the prospect of a remodeled Germany in which Prussia would play the principal role. The big decision was reached by Prussia in February 1866 when at a crown council Bismarck was given permission to seek an alliance with Italy against Austria. This of course was a violation of the constitution of the Confederation.

The alliance with Italy was not very difficult to achieve. Bismarck
managed to make it favorable for Prussia. Italy obligated herself to follow Prussia into war, but there was no promise on Prussia's part that the war would have to occur. In return for her participation in a war Italy was to receive the province of Venetia, which was still under Austrian rule. One important proviso made by Italy was that for the treaty to go into effect the war would have to start within three months after its signature (April 8, 1866).

Bismarck now turned to immediate preparation for war, trying to maneuver Austria into the position of aggressor. Much of the activity occurred in the Diet at Frankfurt. For example, the Prussian delegate suggested that a general German parliament elected by universal suffrage be called. Bismarck now was posing as a liberal and a good German nationalist. His attitude, however, was really determined by the fact that he believed universal suffrage to be more conservative than a suffrage based upon taxes or land. He knew the conservative character of the peasantry, who would dominate. Bismarck's letters to the Austrian government became ever sharper. In the duchies everything was done to annoy the Austrian authorities in Holstein and to damage the position of Augustenburg, who was favored by the Austrians. Bismarck even made gestures in the direction of peace with the Prussian parliament.

The crisis occurred in June 1866. Austria, goaded beyond endurance by what she considered Prussian breaches of the Gastein arrangement, brought the whole matter before the Federal Diet. Prussia retaliated by occupying Holstein and dislodging the Austrian troops from the duchy. Austria then presented a motion to the Diet calling for the mobilization of all the member states except Prussia. Bavaria modified this to exclude Austria too from mobilization. Bismarck instructed his delegate that if either of these motions were passed, he was to announce that the vote constituted a breach of the constitution of the Confederation, which Prussia therefore considered no longer to exist. He was to propose further that a new constitution be adopted, unbelievably enough, on the lines of that of the Frankfurt Parliament of 1849, with Austria excluded. The vote was taken on June 14, the Bavarian motion was passed, the Prussian delegate carried out his instructions, and war broke out. Most of the southern and western states sided with Austria, so that Prussia was opposed by the majority of the Confederation.

The story of the war is a simple one and upset the calculations of those (notably Napoleon III) who thought that it would be a long and exhausting struggle. In fact it is sometimes called the Seven Weeks' War. There was fighting in three areas. In western Germany a Prussian army defeated Hanover at the battle of Langensalza. In Italy an Austrian archduke defeated the Italians at the second battle at Custozza, and Austria
was also the victor on the Adriatic Sea. The main center of conflict, however, was Bohemia. Here Moltke directed the operations. The Austrian commander was General Benedek, who was given the command there largely because of his intimate knowledge of the terrain in north Italy. There was only one battle, the battle of Königgrätz (also known as Sadowa since the battlefield lies between the two villages), fought on July 3, 1866, a brilliant victory for Prussia and a catastrophic defeat for Austria. This battle is one of the decisive turning points of modern history. It established Prussian hegemony in Germany and shifted the European balance of power well to the east. Thus it was a crushing defeat for Napoleon, as well as for Francis Joseph. More than dimly aware of this, the French emperor debated coming to Austria’s aid even after the battle and sent his ambassador in Berlin, M. Benedetti, to the front to offer mediation, but the gesture was treated with scorn by Bismarck.

Bismarck had a difficult time now with King William, who, flushed with victory, wanted territory from Bavaria and Austria and also a triumphal entry with his army into Vienna. Bismarck, however, displaying his greatest diplomatic skill, wanted a peace with Austria which would indeed get her out of Germany but also avoid humiliating her as much as possible. Stormy scenes including tears ensued between king and minister. Finally Bismarck won his point. By the preliminary Peace of Nikolsburg, which became definitive at Prague on August 23, Austria was excluded from Germany and gave her consent to any arrangement that Prussia desired in north Germany (north of the Main River). She lost no German lands. Her only territorial loss was the province of Venetia to Italy. Bismarck went even so far as to humor the Austrian emperor’s request that no territorial demands be made on Saxony. Far different was Bismarck’s attitude in northwest Germany. In that area four historic entities disappeared from the map and were simply annexed to Prussia. They were the kingdom of Hanover, the grand duchy of Hesse-Kassel, the duchy of Nassau, and the free city of Frankfurt, which latter was treated with surprising brutality. It looked almost like an afterthought that the old bone of contention, Schleswig-Holstein, was also annexed to Prussia, although the Prussians promised that a plebiscite would be held in north Schleswig.

This settlement was a great victory for Bismarck’s policy. The force of “blood and iron” had proved decisive. At home the minister received his reward from the parliament which he had been defying for four years. He requested and received an indemnity bill, legalizing all expenditures of the past years in a gesture of forgive and forget. The parliament, in addition, voted him a grant of money for his personal use, with which he bought himself the estate of Varzin in Pomerania. The indemnity did
not pass without opposition. It led to a split in the Progressive party. The group which became the National Liberal party approved the indemnity; others further to the left refused to vote for it and became the core of the later Progressive party. However, for the moment Bismarck was vindicated and now had leisure to reorganize most of Germany under Prussian auspices.

The constitution which Bismarck drew up for the new North German Confederation with slight changes served as the constitution of the German Empire after 1871 and remained in force down to the end of World War I in 1918. It was largely the personal handiwork of Bismarck, who turned his efforts to it after a period of illness and rest in the fall of 1866. It was presented to a Reichstag, elected for the purpose by universal suffrage, which passed it with a few modifications in about two months. This constitution is a masterpiece of a sort. It ensured that Prussia would be in almost complete control of the new entity known as the North German Confederation. The Confederation and the later Empire are sometimes described as Prussia writ large. The king of Prussia by hereditary right held the position of president of the Confederation. In him reposed executive authority, principally concerned with foreign affairs and the military establishment. He was to name a chancellor, the only minister of the Confederation, who was responsible to the president and to him only. The chancellor could name assistants, but Bismarck was careful to avoid anything that smacked of real cabinet government or of any type of responsibility to the parliament. The chancellor was to be chairman of the upper house of the legislature, called the Bundesrat. This house was made up of delegates representing the governments of the various states, really ambassadors. The states received votes in the Bundesrat in proportion to the votes they had had at the Diet at Frankfurt, with the exception that Prussia received in addition to her original ones the votes of the states she had annexed. Thus Prussia had seventeen votes, but only fourteen were needed to veto a constitutional amendment. The votes were cast by the unit rule. The Bundesrat met behind closed doors. It had the sole right of initiating legislation into the lower house of Reichstag, which was elected in proportion to the population by universal male suffrage. This apparently democratic device was really a façade, for the powers of the Reichstag were largely illusory. It could debate proposed legislation referred by the Bundesrat, and more important, in spite of Bismarck's wishes, it had the right to pass the annual budget. In general, however, it became the most distinguished debating society in Europe. The constitution was tailored by Bismarck for Bismarck and worked as he had planned while he was at the helm. During most of his succeeding years he was both chancellor and also minister-
The relationship between the new Confederation and the four south German states which were not members of it (Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, and the southern half of Hesse-Darmstadt) was within a few months assured by military alliances with Prussia, providing that in case of war the south German troops were to be placed under the command of the king of Prussia. These alliances were a result of negotiations for compensation between Bismarck and Napoleon III. North and south were also bound together by the old customs union, which was revived after the war.

The war of 1866 had constitutional repercussions in the Hapsburg lands as well as in north Germany. In 1867 a thoroughgoing overhaul of the Austrian Empire occurred after lengthy discussions between Vienna and the leading Hungarian political figures. The result was the so-called Ausgleich or compromise which set up the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. By this arrangement the kingdom of Hungary was separated from the rest of the empire and given complete independence in internal affairs. The relationship with Austria was solely a personal one, vested in the Austrian emperor who was also king of Hungary. Each half had its own constitution and parliamentary organization. There were three joint ministers, one each for foreign affairs, the armed forces, and finances necessary for the former two. To organize these joint affairs a system was devised whereby members of the two parliaments, known as Delegations, met together but in separate rooms alternately in Vienna and Budapest. It was a cumbersome method of government but persisted down to the extinction of the Hapsburg monarchy in 1918.

The years 1867–70 were largely filled by negotiations between Bismarck and Napoleon III, which led eventually to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in the summer of 1870. It is a sorry story of French ineptitude, gaucherie, and inefficiency, and of Prussian astuteness, efficiency, and unscrupulousness. Much has been written about the relative responsibility of France and Prussia for the war. A moderate approach seems to be that if the whole four-year period is taken into account, France appears more to blame, but if only the crisis of 1870 is to be judged, Prussia is the greater villain.

Immediately after the news of the battle of Königgrätz, the French emperor tried to cash in on the promises of compensation which he pro-
fessed to believe Bismarck had given him at Biarritz the year before. His first suggestion was that France should annex some of the left bank of the Rhine, including the city of Mainz, and part at least of the Palatinate, which belonged to Bavaria. It was at this time that Bismarck evolved from a purely Prussian statesman to one who concerned himself with all Germany. He stated that it was quite out of the question to cede any German territory to a non-Germanic nation. He also used this thrust of Napoleon as bait to persuade Bavaria to sign the military alliance with the Confederation.

A year later in 1867 a more serious affair arose concerning the little grand duchy of Luxemburg, which belonged to the king of the Netherlands but had been part of the old German Confederation. The Dutch king was willing to sell it to France, and Napoleon, thwarted on so many sides, thought that at least this would be something to show for his efforts. The project raised a storm of nationalistic fury within Germany. Bismarck had the question raised in the Reichstag and used the opportunity to take full advantage of national feeling in a highly theatrical speech. The result was that Napoleon had to retreat. At a meeting in London the independence and neutrality of Luxemburg were guaranteed by the powers.

A last effort of the French emperor concerned Belgium, which he hoped possibly to annex as a result of heavy investment by the French in Belgian railways. Nothing came of this either, largely owing to Bismarck’s awareness of the hostility with which Great Britain would regard such a threat on the sensitive channel coast.

Napoleon seemed to be foiled on all counts. The years 1868 and 1869 were years of tension and of jockeying for position. France made a belated effort to improve the condition of her army. She also engaged in a desperate series of negotiations with Austria-Hungary and Italy to achieve an alliance that might be useful against Prussia. Some progress was made in this direction, but when the war broke out neither of these states did anything to help France. Bismarck seemed to hold all the trump cards. He simply waited for a suitable occasion to settle accounts with France and to draw the south German states into the new German unity. The occasion arose in the summer of 1870 over a problem connected with the naming of a new monarch for distant Spain, which had been without a ruler since the deposition of Queen Isabella II in 1868.

The Spanish revolutionaries, after getting rid of their corrupt and unpopular queen, had drawn up a monarchical constitution but so far had found no one to place on the throne. Among the promising candidates was the young Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a very distant cousin of the king of Prussia, a Catholic, and a brother of
the recently established prince of Romania, Carol. Leopold's father, Karl Anton, was still alive. He and the titular head of the family, King William of Prussia, were responsible for Leopold's decisions rather than the young prince himself. A good deal of secret negotiation went on during 1869 and the early months of 1870 among the Spanish, the Hohenzollern family, and the Prussian court. The most important aspect of this is the attitude taken by Bismarck toward it. This is not absolutely clear. In his memoirs Bismarck throws a certain amount of smoke screen over his role. Modern scholars on the whole agree that Bismarck knew of and approved the plan, and in fact that he did all he could to push it in the face of the king's reluctance. Bismarck must have realized that the French reaction to the plan would be very hostile. Thus one is forced to the conclusion that Bismarck was thinking of the matter not only as it concerned Spain but more as it concerned the final unification of Germany through the adherence of the south German states, and also that he was prepared to face, if necessary, a war with France to achieve his aims.

During the early months of 1870 the affair proceeded secretly. In March Prince Leopold and his father visited Berlin, but still King William demurred. Not until well into June did he give his consent. The plan was to keep the matter secret pending a public announcement by the Spanish parliament. However, owing to a number of accidents, the news reached the French ambassador in Madrid on July 3. The excitement with which it was greeted in Paris was unprecedented. Napoleon was hurt at what seemed to him the duplicity of the king of Prussia. The French foreign minister, the Duc de Gramont, gave an inflammatory speech in parliament declaring that France would not tolerate a resurrection of the empire of Charles V. He also sent the unfortunate French ambassador, M. Benedetti, to the health resort of Ems, where the king of Prussia was vacationing, to take the matter up urgently with the king in person.

King William, alarmed by the storm which had arisen, was trying to maintain peace. In fact, during the whole crisis he behaved with moderation and courtesy. He resumed his former opinion that the prince should not accept the Spanish throne and so advised him and his father. Bismarck, on his Pomeranian estate, was becoming more and more restive as it began to appear that the affair would blow over with nothing gained. He decided to travel to Ems; but when he reached Berlin, he heard the public news that Leopold had withdrawn his candidacy.

So far the crisis had resulted in a major diplomatic triumph for France, which she desperately needed. However, the French government unwise decided to push the matter further. Benedetti was instructed to
demand from King William a statement that no member of the Hohenzollern family would ever again be permitted to aspire to the throne of Spain. Accordingly the next afternoon, July 13, 1870, Benedetti approached the king as they met on the promenade and delivered his foolish message. The king received him politely, declared that he knew no more news of the matter than Benedetti, promised that he would send him a copy of an expected telegram from Leopold, and took his leave. Upon returning home, the king did as he had promised; he wrote Benedetti that he considered the matter closed and did not feel they needed to meet again. He then asked an aide to send a telegraphic account of the day's events to Bismarck in Berlin.

Bismarck in his memoirs gives a detailed story of the following evening. He says that he had invited Moltke and Roon to dinner to drown their sorrows over the mishandled and unproductive crisis. During dinner the telegram from the king arrived. Bismarck read it and, jumping from his chair, made some comment about a red flag to bait the Gallic bull. He then went to his desk and edited the telegram, not changing the facts, but shortening the account and coloring it to suggest both that Benedetti had been rude to the king and also that the king had dismissed Benedetti abruptly. The telegram was made public and published in the French newspapers the next day. The apparent insult to the French ambassador infuriated public opinion in Paris. Crowds gathered and an emotional orgy ensued. There was no further way to restrain events, although Napoleon had a heavy heart. On July 19 the French government in an almost nonchalant way declared war. Almost immediately the four south German states declared their solidarity with Prussia, and France found herself at war with all of Germany.

From the outset it was clear that Prussian efficiency was immeasurably greater than that of the rather shabby French. Moltke devised the strategy, which was carried out by three German armies. During the month of August a number of battles were fought near the Franco-German border, nearly all of them Prussian victories. The decisive battle, however, was fought on September 1, 1870, at Sédan. Here one of the two major French armies, under Marshal MacMahon with the emperor present, found itself on the defensive in an extremely disadvantageous position. The Germans surrounded the French, who were forced to surrender almost a hundred thousand men. The emperor gave himself up as a prisoner to the king of Prussia and was sent to the castle of Wilhelms höhe near Kassel. Two days later in Paris the people arose, drove out the Empress Eugénie, and ended the second French Empire. The following month the other major unit of the French army, under Marshal Bazaine, was trapped in the fortress of Metz, besieged, and forced to
surrender. By this time other German forces had crossed northern France and—in spite of the heroic efforts of the French, led by Léon Gambetta and Adolphe Thiers, to raise new French levies—had encircled Paris, beginning a siege which was to cause the Parisians untold misery and to end in the surrender of the capital in January 1871. However, by that time another event had happened of decisive importance for the future, the proclamation of the German Empire on January 18, 1871.

Very shortly after Sédan, negotiations began between the south German states and Bismarck concerning the creation of a united Germany. These negotiations were difficult and several times were almost discontinued. Both Bavaria and Württemberg demanded special concessions. In particular, the mentally doubtful Louis II of Bavaria was hesitant. Even King William of Prussia was reluctant, feeling that the title king of Prussia was far more dignified than any parvenu imperial title. Finally, however, things were arranged. Bavaria and Württemberg received special privileges in such matters as the army (during peacetime), and postal, railway, and telegraph regulations. Bismarck wrote out a letter for the king of Bavaria to copy requesting William to accept the title of emperor. This Louis did probably in return for a handsome bribe to help him out of his serious financial straits. On January 18 in the Hall of Mirrors in the palace of Versailles a somewhat sulky William assumed the title of German emperor (he would have preferred emperor of Germany), and the united German Empire came into existence.

The war was still going on, although the Germans did not engage in much more fighting. Instead they stood aside while troops of the French republican government put down their own rebellious compatriots of the Commune of Paris. Peace negotiations between France and Germany began in February, and a final treaty was signed at Frankfurt on May 10. France had to pay an indemnity of five billion francs and to endure a German occupation until the amount was paid. Much more important was the cession by France to Germany of the province of Alsace and part of French Lorraine including Metz. Bismarck disapproved of part of this cession but for once was overruled. Thus there was introduced into the European body a cancer which was to prevent a reconciliation between the two antagonists and contribute mightily to the military competition which characterized Europe from 1871 to 1914.