

Poultney Bigelow's Fresh Facts About the Kaiser

IN his early writings, Poultney Bigelow, the accomplished son of a distinguished father, turned to good account, although with perfect propriety, his personal acquaintance with William II. of Germany, by giving to the world some valuable materials for a character portrait of the present exile of Amerongen, before he had revealed the characteristics which have brought down upon him the scorn of the civilized world. Public interest in the personality of the fallen Kaiser is as great to-day as it ever was; and a book that tells us everything really new about him is sure of a warm welcome. For this reason—though not for this reason alone—it is safe to predict an appreciative demand for Poultney Bigelow's *Prussianism and Pacifism*, a study of the two Wilhelms who occupied the throne of the German Empire between the Revolution of 1848 and 1918.

The book is an illuminating essay in comparative biography, in which the portrait of the grandfather commands a degree of respect almost commensurate with the honor in which his memory was held by his people. Far different is the impression left by the author's sketch of the traits of the grandson.

II.

William II., says Mr. Bigelow, became Kaiser in 1888 and thirty years later fled from the midst of his troops on the battle front. This is a short and shameful summary of his reign. Its outset, however, promised anything but such an end. "William II.," says Mr. Bigelow, "showed me a side of himself that was wholly sympathetic; he professed to hate nothing so much as war, and on each occasion that the subject recurred he vehemently professed the one ambition of mounting to heaven on a *band wagon* blazing with the text: 'He kept us out of war.'" During the first eight years of his reign, he cultivated the friendship of the English and visited England every year, seeking always to be regarded as a true British sportsman to whom the rigid Prussian etiquette was onerous. In those days he used to reel off to Mr. Bigelow details concerning the names, tonnage, speed and armament of British men-of-war which would ordinarily only be known to an officer of Queen Victoria's navy. The cloven foot, however, began to show itself toward America during the German naval maneuvers at Kiel, where Admiral Evans represented the United States. "The German Emperor passed a jovial evening on the American flagship; inspected the latest inventions which we had successfully applied; made himself popular by his bluntness and infantile thirst for novelty and carried this beautiful nursery trait so far that he the next day secured through a trusty deputy, and of course with American assistance, all the detailed information he coveted. In return no American was permitted to see anything aboard any of the Kaiser's craft!"

The most startling fact concerning Kaiser William II. contained in Mr. Poultney Bigelow's new book is the assertion that the German Emperor was a kleptomaniac! Mr. Bigelow begins his thirty-first chapter as follows: "If a guest should carry off a pair of my trousers in his baggage the inference would be that it had been done by mistake. If, however, the same sort of absent mindedness should recur at other houses and by the same agency we might be justified in diagnosing the disease either as kleptomania or worse." He then proceeds to tell us that although he has never accepted anything from the Kaiser except innumerable portraits (which his wife carefully conceals behind posters of Gen. Pershing) William II. has taken from him many and valuable objects to which the monarch's title is little better than that of the author's supposititious guest with a

yearning for alien trousers. Mr. Bigelow was the owner of a priceless miniature of the famous Queen Louise, which he valued all the more because it was a gift to him from the venerable Queen of Hanover, whose blind husband had been dethroned by William I. in 1866 although the Hanoverians defeated the Prussians in an important battle in the war of that year. William II. manifested such an intense interest in this miniature that Mr. Bigelow let him have it to look at, mentioning how much he valued it on account of the circumstances under which he had acquired it. "Never was that miniature handed back to me," says Mr. Bigelow, "although I spoke of it earnestly to the Emperor's principal aide-de-camp, the late Gen. von Zitzewitz. Not only did William rob me of that precious portrait, but his courtiers looked at one another with stupefaction when I made so strange a claim upon one who was evidently not accustomed to restoring what had once come under his all coveting hand."

III.

Almost as bitterly does Mr. Bigelow bemoan the Kaiser's appropriation of his American cruising canoe, the *Caribee*, in which he made a 1,500 mile voyage down the Danube and was the first voyager to pass through the Iron Gates in so fragile a craft. William II. borrowed this costly canoe from its owner on the pretence that he wanted it for the use of his six sons in learning to be expert canoeists. "While I have lost my matchless *Caribee*," says Mr. Bigelow, "the Kaiser has broken his word, for when I visited her in 1913, she was hidden away amid other dust covered nautical curios in an obscure corner of his boathouse at Potsdam. The old guardian did not know who I was and I stayed but long enough to learn that my canoe had never been used and that I had been the victim of a Prussian promise." The Kaiser's foreign acquaintances were constrained at considerable expense to become members of a yacht club which was a German imitation of the Royal Yacht Squadron of England. It was a sham, except for officers of the Germany navy. At the festival of the opening of the Kiel Canal in 1895, Mr. Bigelow was harshly challenged by a sentry for attempting to go ashore at the landing stage of this yacht club—in which he enjoyed membership, but nothing else, for a period of twenty-five years. The sentry had been ordered to shoot any person attempting to land there unless he was in uniform! In 1914, the German members began to fill the visitors' book with cartoons depicting imaginary victories of the German fleet over the navies of France, Italy and England. Mr. Bigelow remonstrated at this unsportsmanlike performance and was thereupon promptly expelled from the club, which, however, retained his money. It is to this incident that he refers when he says, "Wilhelm also owes me money." He does not expect to get any money back; but now that there is a republic on the banks of the Havel, he lives in the hope that he may some day recover his miniature of Queen Louise and his Rob Roy canoe, the *Caribee*.

The Kaiser continually sought to emulate the spirit of the English and Americans in international yachting; yet here also he failed. In 1912, Lieut. Robert E. Tod of the United States Navy did much to revive deep sea yachting by arranging an international yacht race from Sandy Hook to the Lizard. "The yachts were all either English or American and there was originally not the slightest idea or desire that Germany should be in any way mixed up in the matter." The German Emperor, however, projected his personality into the contest by announcing that he would assume the patronage thereof and would bestow a costly prize upon the winner and autographed photographs of himself upon the unsuccessful contestants if they would continue their voyage as far as the headquarters of the Kiel Yacht Club. "The Kaiser again broke his word," says Mr. Bigelow, "for I was a guest on Capt. Tod's schooner, and when we reached the Lizard no imperial stake boat or timekeeper was there as had been promised nor did my gallant host receive a copy of the coveted photograph, although he claimed it through the Kaiser's naval attache in Washington. The whole episode would be insignificant save for illuminating a dark corner in the Kaiser—a corner whence have crawled far too many unsportsmanlike reptiles." The importance of this and of Mr. Bigelow's personal disclosures concerning the Kaiser generally is the utter inconsistency of such conduct with the pretentious atti-

tude of chivalric nobility which William II. assumed toward the world. It is impossible to imagine how a monarch who stooped to do such things could preserve his own self-respect or expect others to honor him in their hearts. Many of Mr. Bigelow's previous writings have been translated into German and published in Germany. The circulation of this book likewise might serve to convince the late subjects of the Kaiser that they had worshipped a false god.

IV.

There is much dramatic force in Mr. Bigelow's comparison and contrast of the careers of the two German Kaisers, Wilhelm I. and Wilhelm II. Many of his readers, we think, will have forgotten that the first William was twice a fugitive from his own Prussia: first when he fled with his mother beyond the Russian border on the Baltic and sought refuge with the Czar Alexander I. when Napoleon entered Berlin after the Battle of Jena; and the second time in the Revolution of 1848, when he was accused of having ordered the troops to fire upon the people, and fled from their fury to a place of concealment on an island in the Havel and thence found his way, under an assumed name, to London and the protection which England has so often afforded to political refugees. In two months, the Prussians who had then clamored for his destruction clamored for his recall; and he returned to Berlin to become successively Regent, King and German Emperor. He first met Bismarck in September, 1862, when Wilhelm was sixty-five and Bismarck was forty-seven years of

age, and when Wilhelm was resolved to abdicate rather than yield to the claim of the Prussian Parliament to control his expenditures for the army. Bismarck dissuaded him from his purpose by showing him how he could get along without the cooperation of Parliament and "thus was the compact sealed between master and man—a compact that was loyally held for more than a quarter of a century—and which forms one of the most remarkable friendships in kingly chronicle." The grandson, when he became Emperor, apparently succeeded to the friendship; and only broke it, as he assured Mr. Bigelow, because Bismarck had become simply impossible and discredited Hohenzollern rule among the Danes, the Poles and the French, besides sanctioning attacks upon the reputation of the Empress Frederick, the Kaiser's mother! In view of the Kaiser's own treatment of his mother, upon his accession to the throne, this last pretence may be regarded as too good to be true.

Here it should be said that Mr. Bigelow's chapter on Frederick the Noble and his wife should be read by all who would appreciate what Germany lost by his untimely death, after a reign of only ninety-nine days. Had he lived a few years longer Germany would have become a constitutional monarchy in fact and the military autocracy which his father inaugurated would have been abandoned beyond the power of his son to revive.

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