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Memoirs of the Crown Prince

Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$5.00.

THIS is a remarkable book in at least three respects: its literary cleverness, its revelation of a new Crown Prince chastened by adversity, and its vivid pictures of men and events.

March, 1919. It is evening. I have been wandering once more along the deserted and silent ways between the wind-swept and sodden meadows, through grayness and shadow. Not a sound disturbs the silence, save this ceaseless blowing of the wind across the lonesome and slumbering island. Four months! In this seemingly endless time—which I have spent in one unbroken waiting-for-something, listening-for-something—the thought has recurred again and again to me: “Perhaps, if you were to write it out of your heart?”

With these words, the Crown Prince begins his memoirs. He continued to work at intervals, nearly three long years, until he completed them in December, 1921. They cover the whole period from the distant days of his happy childhood at Potsdam to the bitter loneliness of Wieringen. Every now and then the narrative suddenly breaks off into meditations of the moment—his loneliness, his solicitude for his gloomy father, his dying mother, his distant wife and children, and his comrades and soldiers, so many of whom lie beneath the sod. One seems to see the lonely exile sitting by the flickering paraffine lamp, to feel the dank wind-driven fog, and to hear the endless waves breaking on Wieringen. It is very cleverly done. It is bound to create sympathy for him, in Germany at any rate. In fact, it is so cleverly done that for a moment one wonders whether the Crown Prince really did it himself—whether it is not an impudent imposture, like the writings of that precious rogue Karl Aringard Graves; but internal evidence seems to leave no doubt that these are bona fide memoirs. The name of the translator is not revealed, but, whoever he is, he has done the Crown Prince good service in the skill and sprightliness of his English rendering.

An interesting problem of personality and psychology is raised by the Crown Prince's present attitude toward pre-war personalities and events. For his mother he has nothing but reverent love and praise: “All that was best in our childhood we owe to her.” But of his father, he says, “In reviewing our early childhood I can discover

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scarcely a scene in which he joined our childish games with unconstrained mirth or happy abandon. It may have been that we felt him so often to be absent from us in his thoughts when present with us in the body that rendered him almost impersonal, absent-minded, and often alien to our young hearts." Even in later years he complains that he was never able to get close to his father, for the Kaiser was always surrounded by officials. This is his son's great criticism of the Emperor: he did not sufficiently come in contact with people who could and would tell him the real truth about things. Hence the Kaiser's mistaken optimism and continual misunderstanding of one situation after another. It will be interesting to see what the father has to say of the son in the imperial memoirs which are announced for early publication. The Crown Prince does, however, give his father credit for developing the army and creating the navy and merchant marine, and for much well-meant social legislation. He, of course, denies, and correctly we believe, that the Kaiser plotted or willed the war. With the exception of some passages on Bethmann-Holweg, whom the Crown Prince always disliked, and on Gröner, who advised the Kaiser to abdicate after the great German defeat, the Crown Prince shows no rancor either toward old opponents at home or enemies abroad. In fact, he more than once recurs to his admiration for the English and their democratic political system. He remembers with gratitude instructive conversations with Edward VII who seemed to recognize "that the ideas which had governed the first two decades of my father's reign had been leading farther and farther from the lines along which the monarchy of Germany ought to develop, if that monarchy were to remain the firmly established and organic consummation of the state's structure; it was as though he clearly and consciously meant to call my attention to this danger point, in order to warn me and to win me to better ways even at the threshold of my political career." There are many similar passages in which he assumes a wise, philosophic attitude which one would hardly have looked for in the pre-war Crown Prince. Was he really made of much better stuff than the world has suspected? Is this a genuine metamorphosis? Or are these merely hypocritical sentiments by which he hopes to gain favor in a new

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era? Is it another case of an imperial exile, like Napoleon at St. Helena, creating a legend about his family by which some member of it may later ride into political power again? We are inclined to the first and kinder view. Adversity has made a man out of better material than one suspected was there. He would not be the first Hohenzollern prince who has astonished the world by displaying a latent ability after a time of trial; there was the youthful Frederick William, dallying in Holland, until, tried in the fire of the Thirty Years' War, he became the "Great Elector" and created the Prussian state. There was also the milk-sop prince who tried to desert to England, but who, after being court-martialed and imprisoned, astonished the world with literary and military vigor as Frederick the Great. Though much of the wisdom of the Crown Prince may be of the kind which comes after events, and though he has incorporated into his book much that has been written by others—for he has evidently beguiled his lonely evenings by much reading—nevertheless, he has made the material his own. He has done what he set out to do:

"I will depict all events honestly and impartially, just as I see them. I will not conceal my own errors nor inveigh against the mistakes of others."

As to the origins and responsibility for the war, the *Memoirs* have little of importance, except to corroborate what we already know—that the Crown Prince had nothing directly to do with it; during the critical days of July, 1914, he was ignorant of events, being far away from Berlin with his regiment near Dantzig. But of events during the war, there are many vivid glimpses of important and little known scenes—the meeting with Count Czernin to discuss peace proposals, the Crown Prince's own efforts for a timely peace, the demonstrations of loyalty on the part of his troops, and, most notable of all, the last act at Spa where Hindenburg and Gröner forced abdication upon the Kaiser (pp. 280-327).

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