

AN UNUSUAL FRIENDSHIP

Otto von Bismarck and John Lothrop Motley

by Michael Liebig

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Otto von Bismarck (1815-98) is seen today as a “controversial” figure—not just outside, but even within Germany. A typical stereotype of Bismarck presents him as the “Blood and Iron” Chancellor who created a united, but “reactionary-militaristic” Germany. Bismarck’s historical image is often blended with that of the pompous Kaiser Wilhelm II, who, in reality, ousted Bismarck as Chancellor in 1890. Bismarck is a contradictory personality, but he was certainly neither “reactionary,” nor “militaristic.” He was what nowadays is called an “authoritarian personality”—a “natural leader.” His tradition was not democratic-republican, but that of the Prussian constitutional monarchy based on an untainted judicial system and a highly qualified civil service, without corruption. Prussia and, after 1871, Germany had elected Parliaments which Bismarck respected, as documented by his many speeches before the Reichstag.

When Henry Kissinger calls Bismarck one of the most outstanding diplomats of all times, that judgment is correct, despite the qualities of the man who made it. Bismarck united a Germany which until 1870 had been split into 30 kingdoms, principalities, and city-states, and which was surrounded by European powers determined to keep it that way. Between 1864 and 1870, Bismarck had to fight three wars—against the Kingdom of Denmark, the Habsburg Empire, and the French Empire of Louis Bonaparte. None of these three—rather short

and limited—wars were “wars of aggression,” launched by Bismarck for “imperialistic” aims. Executed by the military genius of Helmuth Graf von Moltke, the wars were the precondition for Germany’s unification, forcing the European powers to accept a unified Germany that they had tried to obstruct ever since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Once Germany was unified, Bismarck declared her “saturated,” and focussed exclusively on diplomacy to preserve the peace in Europe. During the 19 years that he was Reichs Chancellor, Germany did not engage in any military conflict, and it took almost another quarter century until Bismarck’s incompetent successors had squandered his heritage, allowing World War I to break out in 1914.

Russia’s Count Sergei Witte once said that Bismarck always had Friedrich List’s¹ *National System of Political Economy* at his bedside. Whether that’s literally true cannot be determined. But, Bismarck was indisputably a committed follower of List’s economic policies. He strongly backed the German Customs Union, he pushed for an integrated, publicly owned German railway network, and the building of key waterways; he promoted advanced industries; and he forced through the “protectionist turn” in Germany in 1878. Bismarck also pushed through truly revolutionary Social Secu-

1. The German-American Friedrich List (1789-1846) was a foremost proponent of the American System of political-economy, in the tradition of Alexander Hamilton and against the British free-trade system of Adam Smith. See *Friedrich List: Outlines of American Political Economy*, German/English edition, with a Commentary by Michael Liebig and an Epilogue by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. (Wiesbaden: Dr. Böttiger Verlags-GmbH, 1996).



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The American diplomat John Lothrop Motley (left) and Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck were life-long friends. Motley described Bismarck as “a man of great talent and iron will,” noting that despite their differing political views, their friendship didn’t suffer, and “probably no man living knows him as intimately as I do.”

rity legislation during the 1880s, providing health insurance and pensions.

Bismarck was no economist, but he had a keen sense for what kind of economic policy led to agro-industrial growth and strength. And he saw that there was no place on Earth where the growth of agriculture, industry, and infrastructure had been more rapid and profound than in the United States. The 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia demonstrated this to the rest of the world, notably to the German representatives there, Emil Rathenau and Franz Reuleaux, the “father of German machine-tool design,” for example. The growing influence of the writings of Henry C. Carey since the 1860s in Germany was another factor. (See accompanying article.)

And, Bismarck saw that the United States had successfully mastered the enormous trial that the Civil War represented. His conversations with former President Ulysses Grant in Berlin in 1878 are testimony to that.

While Bismarck was the dominant political figure in Prussia and then in Germany as whole, relations with United States were excellent. Opposite to most other European powers, except Russia, Bismarck recognized the Monroe Doctrine and

unconditionally backed the Union in the Civil War. And the United States had outstanding diplomats in Berlin, notably George Bancroft (1868-74). Bismarck’s friendly position toward the United States did not only come from his world-political perspective through which he understood the growing weight of the U.S.A. in international affairs. Bismarck also had a very close American friend: John Lothrop Motley.

The private letters of the American historian and diplomat Motley not only afford the reader a fascinating insight into 19th-Century world politics, but also into Motley’s life-long friendship with Bismarck, which began when both were students at Göttingen University.

Bismarck’s ‘American Friends’

On page two of his memoirs, *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* (*Reflections and Recollections*), Bismarck refers to an “American friend” thusly:

“And nevertheless my German patriotism was so fervent, that when I entered the University [at Göttingen] I joined the fraternity whose declared purpose was to foster the national sentiment. . . [I] kept that patriotic drive, and the belief that developments would shortly lead to German unity; and I even



George Bancroft,
the U.S.
Ambassador to
Berlin (1868-74),
was hailed by
Bismarck as “far
better than most of
the Europeans who
ply the trade.”

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struck a bet with my American friend Coffin that, within twenty years, that objective would be attained.”

Later Bismarck refers to “my late friend J.L. Motley,” and quotes from a letter Motley had written to his wife. In *Reflections and Recollections* there is scant reference to “friends.” Bismarck’s memoirs tend to be a quite ruthless settling of accounts with opponents, and in the most unguarded way, describing as he does his opponents variously as “dishonest thrusters,” “out-and-out oddballs,” “courtesans,” or “political intriguants,” “flatterers,” “gossips,” and “whispering insinulators.” The list of those he calls French, British, Austrian, or “ultramontane” agents of influence, acting against Prusso-German state interest, is very long, and includes members of Royal Houses, ministers, and high officials. And so for Bismarck to mention two “American friends” is a singularity.

With respect to Amory Coffin, we know that, like Motley, he was a student alongside Bismarck at Göttingen University, and that the three were very close friends. Hailing from South Carolina, he wrote a number of novels. A great deal more is known of Motley and of the latter’s ties to Bismarck, which ended only with Motley’s death in 1877.

Motley’s Correspondence

A wonderful source for Motley’s life, his relations with Bismarck, and for an understanding of 19th-Century grand strategy, and in particular, its transatlantic dimension, is the two-volume *Correspondence of John Lothrop Motley* (New York, 1899). The *Correspondence* includes not only many letters to family members and friends, where Motley relates his many visits to Bismarck, but several letters from Bismarck to Motley. However, since letters published in the *Correspon-*

dence are private, they do not include the diplomatic reports Motley filed while U.S. Ambassador to Vienna and London.

In conversation, Motley and Bismarck used the German familiar pronoun “*du*” (thou) rather than the formal “*Sie*”—bearing in mind that Motley spoke German fluently. Their letters are perfectly direct, and even in old age, full of youthful high spirits, even where the issue was grave and political, and despite the fact that Motley was a dyed-in-the-wool republican—hardly Bismarck’s case!

It is not possible, in this short essay, to give even an approximation of a description of Motley’s very full life, just as we cannot walk the reader through the meanders and contradictions of Bismarck’s personality and policies. But the *Correspondence* does give a remarkable perspective on Bismarck’s actions, and goes a long way to sweep away the usual, banal—whether hostile or favorable—generalizations. And how curious that, among the many scholars who have written on Bismarck, so few have studied Motley’s views, although there was no one who was better acquainted with the German statesman.

Who Was John Lothrop Motley?

Motley was born on April 15, April 1814, into a wealthy and notable Boston family. His grandfather had been amongst the founders of the United States, and had corresponded with Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. During the 19th Century, amongst Boston’s political and intellectual milieu, the tone was set by the circles around John Adams, who had been U.S. President from 1797 to 1801, and his son, John Quincy Adams, President from 1825 to 1829. After attending Harvard College, Motley studied at Göttingen University in 1832, and then at Berlin in 1833. On returning to the United States, Motley was first active as both a lawyer and a writer. In 1841, he entered the diplomatic service, but resigned after a few months’ posting at the U.S. Embassy in St. Petersburg.

In 1851, Motley moved to Europe to devote himself entirely to a close study of the history of the Netherlands, which led to his published *Rise of the Dutch Republic* and *History of the United Netherlands*. While his family lived first in Dresden and then in Vevey in Switzerland, Motley pored over the Archives in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Venice, Paris, and London. From 1861-67, Motley was U.S. Ambassador to Vienna, and from 1869 to 1870 Ambassador to London. He spent his declining years in England, where he died in 1877.

From the mid-1850s on, Motley enjoyed an international reputation as an historian and also, both before and after serving as Ambassador to Vienna and London, as one of the United States’ leading unofficial representatives in Europe, in touch with monarchs, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and financiers. On April 29, 1860, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote to Motley, “we now regard you as the plenipotentiary of the true Republic accredited to every Court in Europe.” An American patriot and staunch republican, Motley was at special pains to maintain close contact with England’s ruling

class, and undoubtedly played a major role in preventing London from openly backing the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Relations in Göttingen, Berlin, Frankfurt

When Motley reached Göttingen University in 1832, he undertook to study law, but also attended lectures by the Grand Old Man of German ancient history, Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, who kindled an interest in historiography that would remain with him throughout his life.

Professor Heeren was to have a great influence on another U.S. statesman and historian, George Bancroft, who became U.S. Ambassador to Berlin from 1867 to 1874. Edward Everett, U.S. Secretary of State from 1852 to 1853, later president of Harvard University, studied at Göttingen, and also fell under Heeren's sway. George Ticknor, a fatherly friend of Motley's, was so impressed by Göttingen University, that he was to reorganize Harvard on the Göttingen model.

Shortly after reaching Göttingen, Motley wrote to his parents (July 1, 1832): "I have found a few friends here whom I admire very much, and with whom I have already drunken *Brüderschaft*"—and Bismarck amongst them. The following year, Bismarck and Motley pursued their studies at Berlin, and lived in the same building at number 161, Friedrichstrasse. In June 1834, Motley left Berlin, and although the two were not to see each other for another 21 years, their friendship never faltered.

Before leaving Germany, Motley visited Weimar and met there with Goethe's daughter-in-law at the late poet's home. In 1842, returning from St. Petersburg, Motley called on her again, and wrote of Weimar: "Of that splendid army of genius, the coffins of Goethe and Schiller are all that remain."

Of Weimar, Bismarck was, for his part, to write in *Reflections and Recollections*: "Despite Goethe, Schiller and the other great men in the Elysian Fields of Weimar, this spiritually extraordinary town was nonetheless infected with the foolish conceit that has ever plagued our patriotic sentiment: namely that a Frenchman and above all an Englishman, through his nationality and birth, were somehow more of a proper man than a German, and that the acclaim of public opinion in Paris and London were better proof of one's worth than one's own conscience." That very attitude was embodied in Bismarck's arch-enemy Princess Augusta of Weimar, wife to the Prussian King (later German Kaiser) Wilhelm I; their son Frederick was to marry Queen Victoria's eldest daughter.

On leaving university, Bismarck entered the civil service, but threw himself into wild escapades most unsuited to the life of a Prussian official, and quit the service. He thereupon whiled away a few years on Kniphof, his Pomeranian estate, where he attempted to lead the life of a gentleman farmer, without, however, attaining any notable success. At the time, Motley was practicing as a lawyer, a profession with which he felt little affinity; he was elected for one term to the Massachusetts State Legislature, and wrote two novels.

Both for Bismarck and for Motley, the year 1851 was to be decisive: Motley moved permanently to Europe, and undertook his studies of Dutch history, while Bismarck became the Prussian delegate to the Federal Diet (Deutschen Bund) at Frankfurt-on-Main.

In July 1855, Bismarck and Motley met again at Frankfurt, for the first time in 21 years. Motley wrote to his wife: "I was received with open arms. I can't express to you how cordially he received me. If I had been his brother, instead of an old friend, he could not have shown more warmth and affectionate delight in seeing me. I find I like him even better than I thought I did, and you know how high an opinion I always expressed of his talents and disposition. He is a man of very noble character, and of very great powers of mind. The prominent place which he now occupies as a statesman sought him. He did not seek it, or any other office. . . . Of course my politics are very different from him, although not so antipodal as you might suppose, but I can talk with him as frankly as I could with you."

Three years later, in May 1858, Motley visited Bismarck again at Frankfurt. "I went to the Bismarcks' and received as affectionate a welcome from them both as I knew I should, and like them if possible better than ever. . . . I have dined there every day, and spent most of my time with them."

Motley then travelled on to London, writing to his wife on May 28, 1858: "In the evening I dined at Thackeray's. . . . One of the company I discovered to be . . . the Secretary of the English Legation at Frankfurt. He knew Bismarck, of course, and said there was no doubt he was the cleverest man in Germany, and that everybody hated him in consequence, and was afraid of him."

Motley on Bismarck's 'Great Plan'

In October 1858, Motley left England to return to his family in Switzerland, stopping to spend, as he put it in a letter to his mother, "a couple of very agreeable days at Frankfurt with one of the most intimate friends I have in the world, Mr. de Bismarck, now Prussian Ambassador at the Diet, and formerly a companion of my youth."

Some idea of what he discussed with Bismarck can be gathered from another letter from Motley to his mother, penned on June 5, 1859:

"If there were a young, vigorous, intellectual sovereign in Prussia at this moment, a man like Frederic the Great or Peter the Great, he would see that the time has arrived for Prussia to secure at last the object of its ambition, the imperial crown of Germany. If the House of Brandenburg which governs the powerful, wholly German, and progressive Prussia, could become Emperors of Germany, to the utter annihilation of a fictitious, artificial sham, which [was] got up at the Congress of Vienna fifty years ago, and baptized the Empire of Austria, in which there are only about seven million Germans, shaken up pell-mell in a great bag with 30 millions of Slavonians, Magyars, Italians, Croats, and Greeks, and the Lord knows

The North German Federation and the German Empire, 1866-71



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Bismarck finally succeeded in unifying Germany in 1871.

what hodge podge, which has never had any vitality except in defiance of all laws, divine or human—if such a result could take place, then there might be a real Germany, and a handsome solution to the present European question.”

What Motley relates here is Bismarck’s plan for “Prussia’s German future”: German unity under Prussian leadership. As Bismarck wrote in *Reflections and Recollections*, while Bismarck was at Frankfurt, he pondered a strategy that would enable the German people “to realize its claim to an existence under international law, as one of the great European nations.” During the forthcoming decade, that plan was to be implemented, but as Motley wrote the lines above, Bismarck was simply a Prussian diplomat, being appointed Minister President of Prussia only in 1862.

There were three major stages along the way to the realization of Bismarck’s “Great Plan” for German unity under Prussian leadership, and three wars: the Prusso-Danish War of 1864, the Austro-Prussian *Blitzkrieg* of Summer 1866, and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Does that make of Bismarck a “war-monger” who forced through a united, but reactionary-militaristic Germany? Hardly—these were *not* “wars of aggression” provoked and launched by Bismarck, and they were, in all cases, contained. The same can be said of the Franco-Prussian War, as the U.S. Civil War general Philip Henry Sheridan remarked to Prussian Chief of Staff von Moltke. But, in truth, all three wars were “willed” by Bismarck: He saw them not only as inevitable, but necessary.

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, German unity had been deliberately thwarted. The Diet, or Deutsche Bund of 30 allegedly “sovereign” states, was an impotent construct, in which the two main powers, Prussia and Austria, succeeded only in stifling one another—precisely what the other European powers wanted. In the aftermath of the 1848 Revolution, German unity slipped through the net yet again, owing to the lack of any great leader, whether on the “reactionary,” or the “revolutionary” side, a leader able and willing to seize the great historical opportunity. Bismarck was well aware that German unity would not be attained “through speeches, associations, majority vote,” nor through “parliamentary votes, newspapers or rifle-club get-togethers,” just as he knew that

Germany was ringed about by foreign powers which intended to keep her split into as many tiny “sovereign” statelets as possible, forever.

The Austro-Prussian *Blitzkrieg* in the Summer of 1866 ended with peace terms that were mild for Austria—Bismarck insisted on that. Those terms did, however, revolve about one central aspect: Austria, a multi-national state, was compelled to quit the German Diet. Under Prussian leadership, the North German Confederation (Norddeutscher Bund) was established, and by 1867 Germany was unified within her territories north of the Main River. Then, as an outcome of the War of 1870-71, France, which had systematically obstructed German unity since the Peace of Westphalia, was obliged to acknowledge that unity, and that it included Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden in the south.

The U.S. War of Secession

From his conversations with Motley, who was utterly opposed to slavery and to the Southern states’ “Great Conspiracy,” as he put it, Bismarck knew that the Gordian Knot within the United States would have to be cut, somehow, and that compromise, “peaceful co-existence” within the Union was out of the question. When the Confederacy declared secession from the Union in 1861, the United States could not just walk away and accept it. It was the Civil War that made the South bow to the principles of the *Great Republic*, in Motley’s words.

In the War of Secession, England and France were the “interested third parties.” They encouraged the Confederacy to secede, and pursued plans for it to ally with Mexico, which, thanks to the puppet Emperor Maximilian, had become a de facto Anglo-French colony. Bismarck well knew that the foreign policy concerns of England and France were largely absorbed by the gigantic shake-up on the American continent, so Germany had maneuvering room that it would not have had otherwise.

As the American crisis escalated in 1860, Motley left Europe for the United States, where he remained until he was appointed Ambassador to Austria in late 1861. “As to going abroad and immersing myself again in the 16th century, it is simply an impossibility. I can think of nothing but American affairs, and should be almost ashamed if it were otherwise.” On several occasions, Motley met with the newly elected President Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of State William Seward. “Mr. Lincoln embodies singularly well the healthy American mind,” he wrote. In Massachusetts, Motley was surrounded by his Bostonian circle of friends, which included George Ticknor, Edward Everett, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John Quincy Adams’ son.

On July 22, 1861 Motley wrote to his wife: “The existence of this government consists in its unity. Once admit the principle of secession, and it has ceased to be, there is no authority then left, either to prevent the extension of slavery, or to protect the life or property of a single individual on our share of the continent. Permit the destruction of the great law which has been supreme ever since we were a nation, and any other law may be violated at will. . . . In short, we had our choice to submit at once to the dismemberment and national extinction at the command of the slavery oligarchy which has governed us for forty years, or fight for our life. The war, forced upon us by the slaveholders, has at last been accepted, and it is amazing to me that its inevitable character and the absolute justice of our cause does not carry conviction to every unprejudiced mind.”

In Autumn 1861, Motley took up his ambassadorial post in Vienna, stopping in England, where his letter to the *Times* of London, titled “The Causes of the Civil War” attracted much attention. The semi-official *Times* strongly supported the Confederacy, and indeed in 1861-62, there was a very real possibility of a military intervention by England in support of the Confederacy. Motley met with Lord Grey, Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston, Queen Victoria, and Prince Albert. His essential message—and warning—was clear: “I tell everybody here that the great Republic will rise from the conflict stronger than ever, and will live to plague them many a long year.”

Motley journeyed on to Paris, where he met French Foreign Minister Thouvenel. “Of course, France hates us as much as England does, and Louis Napoleon is capable of playing us a trick at any moment. . . . I say, then, our great danger comes from foreign interference. What will prevent that? Our

utterly defeating the Confederates.”

When Lincoln was re-elected in 1864, and the military tide turned in favor of the Union, Motley wrote to his daughter Lily: “*Oh Grosser Gott, im Staube danke ich Dir* [Oh Great God, I thank thee from the dust]. . . . Throughout the great War of Principle I have been sustained by one great faith, my belief in democracy. The American people have never known a feudal superior, in perfect good faith and simplicity has always felt itself to be sovereign over its whole territory, and because for a long period [it] allowed itself to be led by the nose, without observing it, by a kind of sham aristocracy, which had developed itself out of the slave-trading system of the South, it was thought to have lost all its virtue, all its energy, and all its valour. . . . But when the object of the great conspiracy was finally revealed, I suppose that no despotic monarch that ever lived, not Charles V, nor Louis XIV, nor the Czar Nicholas was ever more thoroughly imbued with the necessity of putting down the insurrection of serfs or subjects than was the American Demos. . . . I don’t say it is pretty or gentle or jolly. But it has a reason for existing, and it is a fact in America, and is founded on the immutable principle of reason and justice.”

The Prussian Wars of 1864 and 1866

On April 17, 1863 Bismarck wrote to Motley: “I was overjoyed to read your letter of the 9th, and should be most grateful, were you to stick to your word and write oftener and longer. I hate politics, but as you so rightly say, like the grocer hating figs, I must nevertheless ceaselessly bend my thoughts on those figs. At the very moment that I pen these words, my ears ring with politics. I have got to sit through thoroughly vulgar speeches from the lips of thoroughly infantile and excitable politicians. . . . Never for a moment had I expected to spend my adult years plying so undignified a trade as that of Parliamentary Minister. . . . Your battles [in the Civil War] are bloody, ours are babbly; these babblers cannot govern Prussia, I must stand up against them, for they’ve scant wit but much self-satisfaction, bone-stupid and brash as they are. . . . Your faithful old friend V. Bismarck.”²

Bismarck’s letter relates to his own extremely precarious situation as Minister President of Prussia between 1862 and 1866. Conflict had broken out between King Wilhelm I and Bismarck on the one side, and the liberal bourgeoisie on the other. The latter controlled the Prussian Parliament, and rejected the call for increased military expenditure. Matters escalated, and Bismarck had to govern without a budget approved by Parliament. This tense situation ended—to Bismarck’s advantage—thanks to the *Blitzsieg*—quick victory—against Austria in the Summer of 1866. On May 31, 1863, Motley wrote to Lady Russell: “I am just now very interested in watching the set-to between Crown and Parliament in Berlin. By the way, Bismarck-Schönhausen is one of

2. Bismarck’s letter was penned half in German, half in English.

my oldest and most intimate friends.”

The transatlantic factor was critical in the war with Denmark of 1864, where Bismarck moved to prevent Denmark from annexing Schleswig-Holstein. In the end, Schleswig-Holstein was annexed to Prussia. Bismarck took the risk of unleashing that war, because he knew that France and England were tied down in the American Civil War and their adventure with Emperor Maximilian in Mexico.

For his part, Motley considered the Danish War as a useful relief for the United States: “I presume if the Great Powers of Europe are drawn into a war on the Schleswig-Holstein question, we shall not be any longer taunted with urging war. . . . France would like to fight Prussia, and get the Rhine provinces, but England could not stand that, nor Austria either, much as she hates Prussia.”

As the war with Denmark raged, Bismarck wrote on May 23, 1864 to Motley: “Where the devil are you, and what do you do that you never write a line to me? . . . Let politics be hanged and come to see me. I promise that the Union flag shall wave over our house, and conversation and the best old hock shall pour damnation over the rebels. . . . Be so good as either to come, or to write to me. Thy V. Bismarck.”³

During the peace negotiations at Vienna after the war with Denmark, in July-August 1864, Bismarck visited Motley, who was there as Ambassador. Motley wrote to his mother: “He [Bismarck] dined with us yesterday en famille, asking me to have no one else except Werther, the Prussian Minister here. . . . Lily [Motley’s daughter] will tell you all about him politically. He is as sincere and resolute a monarchist and absolutist as I am a Republican. But that doesn’t interfere with our friendship.” Motley and Bismarck met twice more in Vienna, Motley noting that they were downing great quantities of wine. Bismarck presented Motley to the Prussian King Wilhelm I—“a tall, sturdy, goodhumoured-faced elderly man,” observed Motley.

As for Bismarck the “resolute absolutist,” here is what he wrote in *Reflections and Recollections*:

“Absolutism *would be* the ideal Constitution for European forms of statehood, were it not that the King and his officials belong to the race of men, and accordingly are in no position to rule with superhuman knowledge, discernment and justice. Even the ablest and most benevolent of absolute monarchs cannot but be affected with the foibles and imperfections of his fellow men, and by an inflated idea of his own discernment, as well as by the influence and eloquence of favorites, not to speak of the effeminate, whether legitimate or illegitimate, amongst them. The monarchy and the most ideal monarch, unless he is to become a public nuisance through his own idealism, must be open to criticism, the thorns of which will press him back onto the right path, whenever he is going astray. . . .

“Criticism can be expressed only through a free press

and through Parliament in the modern sense of the term. The usefulness of both those correctives may, however, be eaten away and even lost by misuse. Preventing this, is the task of constructive politics, which does involve fighting Parliament and the press. Gauging the limits within which that struggle must be contained, in order to allow the government to exercise control without, however, this turning to oppression, is a matter for political tact and sense of proportion. If the monarch be possessed of such a sense of proportion, then happy his nation, admittedly a transient happiness like all that pertains to man. . . . To the degree that human shortcomings so allow, that objective was more or less attained under the government of Wilhelm I.”

In 1866, as tension between Prussia and Austria escalated, a war very nearly broke out between the United States and France over Mexico. Shortly before the Austro-Prussian war Broke out, Motley wrote to his daughter Lily:

“But there is a future—a possible future of Prussia. It may one day become liberal as well as powerful. Intellectually and industrially it is by far the leading power in Germany. Constitutionally it may become free. It is now a military despotism. The hard-cutting instrument, which is now personified by my old friend Bismarck, may do its work by cutting away all obstacles and smoothing the path to Prussia’s great fortune. Bismarck is a man of great talent and iron will. Probably no man living knows him as intimately as I do. He too believes in his work as thoroughly as Mahomet or Charlemagne, or those types of tyranny, [as] our Puritan forefathers, ever believed in theirs.

“He represents what is the real tendency and instinct of the whole Prussian people, from King William to the most pacific *Spießbürger* [Philistine] of Potsdam. They all want a great Prussia. They all want to Borussifise [Prussianize] Germany. Only they want to do it pacifically, God save the mark. As if it were possible to make an omelette without breaking the egg. As if the electors and grand dukes and other little fish would put themselves of their own accord into the Prussian frying pan. Well then, suppose Prussia victorious, there is a great intellectual and powerful nation, which may become a free nation, in the heart of Europe able to counterbalance France. . . .”

After Prussia’s victory at Sadova on July 3, 1866, Motley spoke of “the most lightning campaign in all military history”:

“Germany has for centuries been tending towards unification. The people have been getting more and more restive under their three dozen independent sovereigns, great and small. The Congress of Westphalia recognized more than 300 of them. The Congress of Vienna, a century and a half later, stewed them down to 36. Prussia, whatever may nominally become of Saxony, Hanover, Hesse, and the like, is sovereign mistress of all Germany North of the River Main line. And already there are strong indications that the population of South-Western Germany will claim admission to the Northern Union. . . . Prussian military despotism, by the grace of

3. Written partly in German, partly in English.

God, is perhaps opening the way more rapidly for liberty in Europe than all that the Kossuths, Garibaldis and Mazzinis could effect in half a century. . . . The union of Italy and the union of Germany, to prevent which was the steady aim of Louis Napoleon, just as was his steady aim to assist Jeff. Davis in destroying the American Union, are in a fair way accomplishing themselves in spite of him.”

Final Meeting Between Bismarck and Motley

Of his brief stint as U.S. Ambassador to London, Motley wrote:

“I have great doubts whether it would be worthwhile to get myself steeped again in the fascination of Albion. The cultivated luxury of these regions has poison in it, I fear. It is well to enjoy it once—twice—even thrice, as I have done. But, after all, one is an exotic here. . . . I am most sincere when I say that one should never wish America to be Anglicized, in the aristocratic sense. Much as I can appreciate and enjoy, aesthetically, sentimentally, and sensuously the infinite charm, refinement, and grace of English life, especially country life, yet I feel too keenly what a fearful price is paid by the English people. . . .”

On August 7, 1869 Bismarck wrote to Motley: “for three weeks, the sheets of writing-paper have lain there, waiting that I write to you in London, and ask whether you cannot spare a week or two for me . . . and pitch your wigwam in the Pomeranian forests [at Bismarck’s estate, Varzin]? I am so bent on that thought, that I shall fall ill if you refuse—think of the dreadful effect on political life that would have!”

Shortly thereafter, Bismarck wrote to Motley: “I’ve heard through sources at Paris that [U.S. Ambassador to Germany George Bancroft] is to be withdrawn, for having allegedly failed to properly represent America. No one here in Berlin shares that view. . . . I can scarcely believe that any friend of America and of Germany, anyone who delights in the brotherly ties between those two civilized nations, might possibly entangle himself in such intrigue. Bancroft is one of the most popular fellows in Berlin. . . . If you can, do act to prevent him from being sacrificed, as he’s far better than most of the Europeans who ply the trade that is his, yours and mine.”

One should note here that it was on account of intrigants, that Motley himself was withdrawn from his post in Vienna and then in London.

In late July 1872, Motley and his daughter Lily visited Bismarck at the Varzin estate. Following Prussia’s victory over France and the proclamation of the German Reich on January 18, 1871, Bismarck had been appointed Chancellor. Motley wrote:

“The manner of living is most unsophisticated, as you will think when I tell that we were marched straight from the carriage into the dining room, and made [to] sit down and go on with the dinner. . . . He [Bismarck] is talking all the time in the simplest, funniest, and most interesting manner about all sorts of things that had happened in these tremendous

years, but talking about them exactly as every-day people talk of every-day matters—without any affectation. . . . It has done me much good to be with Bismarck, so familiarly and pleasantly all the time. We had long, long talks about the great events in which he was the principal actor, and he goes on always so entirely *sans gêne* [unconstrained], and with so much frankness and simplicity. . . .”

Motley and his daughter stayed a week at Varzin, and were among the inner family circle that attended Bismarck’s silver wedding anniversary. On the journey back, Motley called on U.S. Ambassador Bancroft in Berlin. This was Motley’s last meeting with Bismarck. After his wife died in 1875, Motley’s health declined sharply, and he died on May 29, 1877. Bismarck survived Motley by 21 years, to die on July 30, 1898.

Bismarck and the German Reich

In his years at the helm, Bismarck left a deep imprint on the newly established German Reich, in terms of its economy, as well as its labor and domestic policies. In 1879, protectionist tariffs were at long last introduced, “to defend the German labor force and German production,” as Bismarck put it. The railroads were nationalized, and a unified, excellent legal system was introduced.

The term *Kulturkampf* refers to Bismarck’s bitter struggle with the Catholic Church between 1870 and 1878: Shortly after the battle at Sedan on Sept. 1, 1870, Italian troops marched into the Papal States in central Italy. Through the French defeat at Sedan, Pope Pius IX, an ultra-reactionary, had lost both his mightiest protector, Louis Napoleon, and all temporal power in the Papal States, for which the Pope rightly held Bismarck responsible. With boundless energy, Pius IX threw the Catholic Church and her political allies in Germany, essentially the so-called Center Party, against Bismarck. The latter reacted by an out-and-out onslaught on what he called the “ultramontane” forces. On the election of the new Pope, Leo XIII in 1878, the *Kulturkampf* ended.

In that same year, with his “Socialist Laws,” Bismarck launched a confrontation with the Social Democratic workers’ movement. He saw the Social Democracy essentially as a British instrument deployed to destabilize Germany—run from London. “England has been occupied for quite some years now, in threatening foreign states with revolution,” wrote Bismarck in *Reflections and Recollections*. Between 1883 and 1889, it was Bismarck who pushed through his own “social security legislation,” which instituted a public system for health and accident insurance and pensions, jointly financed by workers and employers.

From a foreign policy standpoint, Germany was “saturated” from 1871 on, as Bismarck told Motley during their Varzin visit. His sole aim had been to head off a combination of Great Powers directed against Germany. While Bismarck was in power, it worked—and the same was true of German-American relations.