

CHAPTER VI

WANGENHEIM TELLS THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR HOW THE KAISER STARTED THE WAR

But there was one quarter in which this transaction produced no appreciable gloom. That was the German Embassy. This great "success" fairly intoxicated the impressionable Wangenheim, and other happenings now aroused *his furor Teutonicus* to a fever heat. The *Goeben* and the *Breslau* arrived almost at the same time that the Germans captured Liége, Namur, and other Belgian towns. And now followed the German sweep into France and the apparently triumphant rush for Paris. In all these happenings Wangenheim, like the militant Prussian that he was, saw the fulfilment of a forty-years' dream. We were all still living in the summer embassies along the Bosphorus. Germany had a beautiful park, which the Sultan had personally presented to the Kaiser's government; yet for some reason Wangenheim did not seem to enjoy his headquarters during these summer days. A little guard house stood directly in front of his embassy, on the street, within twenty feet of the rushing Bosphorus, and in front of this was a stone bench. This bench was properly a resting place for the guard, but Wangenheim seemed to have a strong liking for it. I shall always keep in my mind the figure of this German diplomat, in those exciting days before the Marne, sitting out on this little bench, now and then jumping up for a stroll back and forth in front of his house. Everybody passing from Constantinople to the northern suburbs had to pass along this road, and even the Russian and French diplomats frequently went by, stiffly ignoring, of course, the triumphant ambassadorial figure on his stone bench. I sometimes think that Wangenheim sat there for the express purpose of puffing his cigar smoke in their direction. It all reminded me of the scene in Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, where Tell sits in the mountain pass, with his bow and arrow at his side, waiting for his intended victim, Gessler, to go by:

"Here through this deep defile he needs must pass;
There leads no other road to Küssnacht."

Wangenheim would also buttonhole his friends, or those whom he regarded as his friends, and have his little jollifications over German victories. I noticed that he stationed himself there only when the German armies were winning; if news came of a reverse, Wangenheim was utterly invisible. This led me to remark that he reminded me of a toy weather prophet, which is always outside the box when the weather is fine but which retires within when storms are gathering. Wangenheim appreciated my little joke as keenly as the rest of the diplomatic set.

In those early days, however, the weather for the German Ambassador was distinctly favourable. The good fortune of the German armies so excited him that he was sometimes led into indiscretions, and his exuberance one day caused him to tell me certain facts which, I think will always have great historical value. He disclosed precisely how and when Germany had precipitated this war. To-day his revelation of this secret looks like a most monstrous indiscretion, but we must remember Wangenheim's state of mind at the time. The whole world then believed that Paris was doomed and Wangenheim reflected this attitude in his frequent declarations that the war would be over in two or three months. The whole German enterprise was evidently progressing according to programme.

I have already mentioned that the German Ambassador had left for Berlin soon after the assassination of the Grand Duke, and he now revealed the cause of his sudden disappearance. The Kaiser, he told me, had summoned him to Berlin for an imperial conference. This meeting took place at Potsdam on July 5th. The Kaiser presided and nearly all the important ambassadors attended. Wangenheim himself was summoned to give assurance about Turkey and enlighten his associates generally on the situation in Constantinople, which was then regarded as almost the pivotal point in the impending war. In telling me who attended this conference Wangenheim used no names, though he specifically said that among them were---the facts are so important that I quote his exact words in the German which he *used*---"*die Häupter des Generalstabs und der Marine*"---(The heads of the general staff and of the navy) by which I have assumed that he meant Von Moltke and Von Tirpitz. The great bankers, railroad directors, and the captains of German industry, all of whom were as necessary to German war preparations as the army itself, also attended.

Wangenheim now told me that the Kaiser solemnly put the question to each man in turn: "Are you ready for war?" All replied "yes" except the financiers.

They said that they must have two weeks to sell their foreign securities and to make loans. At that time few people had looked upon the Sarajevo tragedy as something that would inevitably lead to war. This conference, Wangenheim. told me, took all precautions that no such suspicion should be aroused. It decided to give the bankers time to readjust their finances for the coming war, and then the several members went quietly back to their work or started on vacations. The Kaiser went to Norway on his yacht, Von Bethmann-Hollweg left for a rest, and Wangenheim returned to Constantinople.

In telling me about this conference Wangenheim, of course, admitted that Germany had precipitated the war. I think that he was rather proud of the whole performance, proud that Germany had gone about the matter in so methodical and far-seeing a way, and especially proud that he himself had been invited to participate in so epoch-making a gathering. I have often wondered why he revealed to me so momentous a secret, and I think that perhaps the real reason was his excessive vanity---his desire to show me how close he stood to the inner counsels of his emperor and the part that he had played in bringing on this conflict. Whatever the motive, this indiscretion certainly had the effect of showing me who were really the guilty parties in this monstrous crime. The several blue, red, and yellow books which flooded Europe during the few months following the outbreak, and the hundreds of documents which were issued by German propagandists attempting to establish Germany's innocence, have never made the slightest impression on me. For my conclusions as to the responsibility are not based on suspicions or belief or the study of circumstantial data. I do not have to reason or argue about the matter. I know. The conspiracy that has caused this greatest of human tragedies was hatched by the Kaiser and his imperial crew at this Potsdam conference of July 5, 1914. One of the chief participants, flushed with his triumph at the. apparent success of the plot, told me the details with his own mouth. Whenever I hear people arguing about the responsibility for this war or read the clumsy and lying excuses put forth by Germany, I simply recall the burly figure of Wangenheim as he appeared that August afternoon, puffing away at a huge black cigar, and giving me his account of this historic meeting. Why waste any time discussing the matter after that?

This imperial conference took place July 5th and the Serbian ultimatum was sent on July 22d. That is just about the two weeks' interval which the financiers had demanded to complete their plans. All the great stock exchanges of the world show that the German bankers profitably used this interval. Their records disclose that stocks were being sold in large quantities and that prices declined rapidly. At that time the markets were somewhat puzzled at this movement but Wangenheim's explanation clears up any doubts that may still remain. Germany was changing her securities into cash for war purposes. If any one wishes to verify Wangenheim, I would suggest that he examine the quotations of the New York stock market for these two historic weeks. He will find that there were astonishing slumps in prices, especially on the stocks that had an international market. Between July 5th and July 22d, Union Pacific dropped from 155 1/2 to 127 1/2, Baltimore and Ohio from 91 1/2 to 81, United States Steel from 61 to 50 1/2, Canadian Pacific from 194 to 185 1/2, and Northern Pacific from 111 3/8 to 108. At that time the high protectionists were blaming the Simmons-Underwood tariff act as responsible for this fall in values, while other critics of the Administration attributed it to the Federal Reserve Act-which had not yet been put into effect. How little the Wall Street brokers and the financial experts realized that an imperial conference, which had been held in Potsdam and presided over by the Kaiser, was the real force that was then depressing the market!

Wangenheim not only gave me the details of this Potsdam conference, but he disclosed the same secret to the Marquis Garroni, the Italian Ambassador at Constantinople. Italy was at that time technically Germany's ally.

The Austrian Ambassador, the Marquis Pallavicini, also practically admitted that the Central Powers had anticipated the war. On August 18th, Francis Joseph's birthday, I made the usual ambassadorial visit of congratulation. Quite naturally the conversation turned upon the Emperor, who had that day passed his 84th year. Pallavicini spoke about him with the utmost pride and veneration. He told me how keen-minded and clear-headed the aged emperor was, how he had the most complete understanding of international affairs, and how he gave everything his personal supervision. To illustrate the Austrian Kaiser's grasp of public events, Pallavicini instanced the present war. The previous May, Pallavicini had had an audience with Francis Joseph in Vienna. At that time, Pallavicini now told me, the Emperor had said that a European war was unavoidable. The

Central Powers would not accept the Treaty of Bucharest as a settlement of the Balkan question, and only a general war, the Emperor had told Pallavicini, could ever settle that problem. The Treaty of Bucharest, I may recall, was the settlement that ended the second Balkan war. This divided the European dominions of Turkey, excepting Constantinople and a small piece of adjoining territory, among the Balkan nations, chiefly Serbia and Greece. That treaty strengthened Serbia greatly; so much did it increase Serbia's resources, indeed, that Austria feared that it had laid the beginning of a new European state, which might grow sufficiently strong to resist her own plans of aggrandizement. Austria held a large Serbian population under her yoke in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and these Serbians desired, above everything else, annexation to their own country. Moreover, the Pan-German plans in the East necessitated the destruction of Serbia, the state which, so long as it stood intact, blocked the Germanic road to the Orient. It had been the Austro-German expectation that the Balkan War would destroy Serbia as a nation---that Turkey would simply annihilate King Peter's forces. This was precisely what the Germanic plans demanded, and for this reason Austria and Germany did nothing to prevent the Balkan wars. But the result was exactly the reverse, for out of the conflict arose a stronger Serbia than ever, standing firm like a breakwater against the Germanic flood.

Most historians agree that the Treaty of Bucharest made inevitable this war. I have the Marquis Pallavicini's evidence that this was likewise the opinion of Francis Joseph himself. The audience at which the Emperor made this statement was held in May, more than a month before the assassination of the Grand Duke. Clearly, therefore, we have the Austrian Emperor's assurances that the war would have come irrespective of the assassination at Sarajevo. It is quite apparent that this crime merely served as the convenient pretext for the war upon which the Central Empires had already decided.