

CHAPTER VII

GERMANY'S PLANS FOR NEW TERRITORIES, COALING STATIONS, AND INDEMNITIES

All through that eventful August and September Wangenheim continued his almost irresponsible behaviour---now blandly boastful, now depressed, always nervous and high strung, ingratiating to an American like myself, spiteful and petty toward the representatives of the enemy powers. He was always displaying his anxiety and impatience by sitting on the bench, that he might be within two or three minutes' quicker access to the wireless communications that were sent him from Berlin via the *Corcovado*. He would never miss an opportunity to spread the news of victories; several times he adopted the unusual course of coming to my house unannounced, to tell me of the latest developments, and to read me extracts from messages which he had just received. He was always apparently frank, direct, and even indiscreet. I remember his great distress the day that England declared war. Wangenheim had always professed a great admiration for England and, especially, for America. "There are only three great countries," he would say over and over again, "Germany, England, and the United States. We three should get together; then we could rule the world." This enthusiasm for the British Empire now suddenly cooled when that power decided to defend her treaty pledges and declared war. Wangenheim had said that the conflict would be a short one and that Sedan Day would be celebrated in Paris. But on August 5th, I called at his embassy and found him more than usually agitated and serious. Baroness Wangenheim, a tall, handsome woman, was sitting in the room reading her mother's memoirs of the war of 1870. Both regarded the news from England as almost a personal grievance, and what impressed me most was Wangenheim's utter failure to understand England's motives. "It's mighty poor politics on her part!" he exclaimed over and over again. His attitude was precisely the same as that of Bethmann-Hollweg with the "scrap of paper."

I was out for a stroll on August 26th, and happened to meet the German Ambassador. He began to talk as usual about the German victories in France, repeating, as was now his habit, his prophecy that the German armies would be in Paris within a week. The deciding factor in this war., he added, would be the Krupp artillery. "And remember that this time," he said, "we are making war. And we shall make it *rücksichtslos* (without any consideration), We shall not be hampered as we were in 1870. Then Queen Victoria, the Czar, and Francis Joseph interfered and persuaded us to spare Paris. But there is no one to interfere now. We shall move to Berlin all the Parisian art treasures that belong to the state, just as Napoleon took Italian art works to France."

It is quite evident that the battle of the Marne saved Paris from the fate of Louvain.

So confidently did Wangenheim expect an immediate victory that he began to discuss the terms of peace. Germany would demand of France, he said, after defeating her armies, that she completely demobilize and pay an indemnity. "France now," said Wangenheim, "can settle for \$5,000,000,000; but if she persists in continuing the war, she will have to pay \$20,000,000,000."

He told me that Germany would demand harbours and coaling stations "everywhere." At that time, judging from Wangenheim's statements, Germany was not looking so much for new territory as for great commercial advantages. She was determined to be the great merchant nation, and for this she must have free harbours, the Bagdad railroad, and extensive rights in South America and Africa. Wangenheim said that Germany did not desire any more territory in which the populations did not speak German, for they had had all of that kind of trouble they wanted in Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, and other non-German countries. This statement certainly sounds interesting now in view of recent happenings in Russia. He did not mention England in speaking of Germany's demand for coaling stations and harbours; he must have had England in mind, however, for what other nation could have given them to Germany "everywhere?"

All these conversations were as illuminating to me as Wangenheim's revelation of the conference of July 5th. That episode clearly proved that Germany had consciously started the war, while these grandiose schemes, as outlined by this very able but somewhat talkative ambassador, showed the reasons that had impelled her in this great enterprise. Wangenheim gave me a complete picture of the German Empire embarking on a great buccaneering expedition, in which the spoils of success were to be the accumulated riches of her neighbours and the world position which their skill and industry had built up through the centuries.

If England attempted to starve Germany, said Wangenheim, Germany's response would be a simple one: she would starve France. At that time, we must remember, Germany expected to have Paris within a week, and she believed that this would ultimately give her control of the whole country. It was evidently the German plan, as understood by Wangenheim, to hold this nation as a pawn for England's behaviour, a kind of hostage on a gigantic scale. In that case, should England gain any military advantage, Germany would attempt to counter-attack by torturing the whole French people. At that moment German soldiers were murdering innocent Belgians in return for the alleged misbehaviour of other Belgians, and evidently Germany had planned to apply this principle to whole nations as well as to individuals.

All through this and other talks, Wangenheim showed the greatest animosity to Russia.

"We've got our foot on Russia's corn," he said, "and we propose to keep it there."

By this he must have meant that Germany had sent the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* through the Dardanelles and that by that master-stroke she controlled Constantinople. The old Byzantine capital, said Wangenheim, was the prize which a victorious Russia would demand, and her lack of an all-the-year-round port in warm waters was Russia's tender spot--her "corn." At this time Wangenheim boasted that Germany had 174 German gunners at the Dardanelles, that the strait could be closed in less than thirty minutes, and that Souchon, the German admiral, had informed him that the strait was impregnable. "We shall not close the Dardanelles, however," he said, "unless England attacks them."

At that time England, although she had declared war on Germany, had played no conspicuous part in the military operations; her "contemptible little army" was making its heroic retreat from Mons. Wangenheim entirely discounted England as an enemy. It was the German intention, he said, to place their big guns at Calais, and throw their shells across the English Channel to the English coast towns; that Germany would not have Calais within the next ten days did not occur to him as a possibility. In this and other conversations at about the same time Wangenheim laughed at the idea that England could create a large independent army. "The idea is preposterous," he said. "It takes generations of militarism to produce anything like the German army. We have been building it up for two hundred years. It takes thirty years of constant training to produce such generals as we have. Our army will always maintain its organization. We have 500,000 recruits reaching military age every year and we cannot possibly lose that number annually, so that our army will be kept intact."

A few weeks later civilization was outraged by the German bombardment of English coast towns, such as Scarborough and Hartlepool. This was no sudden German inspiration, but part of their carefully considered plans. Wangenheim told me, on September 6, 1914, that Germany intended to bombard all English harbours, so as to stop the food supply. It is also apparent that German ruthlessness against American sea trade was no sudden decision of Von Tirpitz, for, on this same date, the German Ambassador to Constantinople warned me that it would be very dangerous for the United States to send ships to England!