



Bismarck and the Development of Germany The Period of Unification 1815-1871

Otto Pflanze

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Preface

THE career of a historical personality, observed Wilhelm Dilthey, is marked by reciprocating influences. In his early years such an individual is molded by forces the course of whose development he himself later helps to determine. Because of this interaction the biographer of Schleiermacher was compelled to broaden his subject to include the intellectual history of a whole epoch. What was true of Schleiermacher, the theologian, is also true of Bismarck, the statesman. The customary biographical form cannot capture the significance of a political figure of his stature. As important as the man himself were the many forces—social, political, intellectual, and institutional—which shaped his environment and with which he dealt. This work is concerned with the interaction between these forces and the will of a political genius. It is a study of the effect of one man of extraordinary talent upon the historical process. Hence the more personal and anecdotal aspects of Bismarck's life are included only where they indicate attitudes or affected policy and events. The purpose is to expose the elements of thought and outlook which determined his political aims, the techniques of strategy by which he strove for their achievement, and the ultimate consequences of both for German political development.

Usually the period of German unification has been studied from the standpoint of foreign affairs. Such an orientation gives to the year 1871 the appearance of an end rather than a beginning. This book seeks to relate the story of diplomatic maneuver, war, and victory to the greater problem of Germany's internal political growth. The concentration is upon the internal consequences of both domestic and foreign policy and events. Seen from this viewpoint, the period of unification was one of revolution and reconstruction which established the character of German political attitudes and institutions until recent times. The subsequent period of consolidation, including the domestic history of the North German Confederation, has been reserved for a sequel volume.

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