



Otto von Bismarck and the Development of Germany The Period of Consolidation 1871-1880

Otto Pflanze

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IN JUNE 16, 1871, the German Kaiser, preceded by Bismarck, Roon, and Moltke, entered the city of Berlin on horseback in triumph at the head of forty thousand troops newly returned from France. George Bancroft, the American minister, described the scene. "The via triumphalis was about three miles long, through streets as wide and in some places thrice as wide as Broadway." Cannon captured from the French were parked in close order on both sides of the route, which was also lined by "flag-staffs garlanded and festooned with oak-leaves and evergreens." At intervals stood three huge statues made of linen covered with gypsum and stuffed with straw: at the start a "gigantic image, representing the city of Berlin"; at midpoint "a colossal victory, having on her right hand and left statues of Strassburg and Metz"; at the end "a Germania receiving back into her arms Alsace and Lorraine." More than one million people crowded the sidewalks under a brilliant sun and, when night came, every house and building in Berlin was illuminated. At the opera a glittering company of royalty, nobility, and generals viewed two pageants specially composed for the occasion. "The first represented Justice as having done its work in the late war, and now introducing Peace attended by all the Seasons and all the Arts. The second showed Barbarossa spellbound in his cave, dreaming on till the empire should be restored, and seeing in his visions what the spectators saw in tableaux vivants, the epoch-making incidents of German history, from the crusades and early humble fortunes of the younger branch of the Hohenzollerns, to the moment when its chief was upborne at Versailles as emperor by the arms of the princes of Germany." Germany, Bancroft concluded, enjoyed a "feeling of security such as it never had before." While Germany reveled in the euphoria of triumph, the rest of Europe shuddered. Three stunning victories within six years had elevated Prussia, whose qualifications for great power status had been questioned before 1866, to a leading position among European nations. Two great powers had been humbled by the superior discipline of its soldiers, the competence of its generals, and brilliance of its political leadership. Geographical size and position, rapidly growing industrial and financial strength, larger population, and the size and capacity of its army made the new German Reich the most formidable power on the continent.

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