On February 9, 1871, just over three weeks after the new German Empire was declared at Versailles, Benjamin Disraeli rose to address the House of Commons. At the time Disraeli was the Conservative leader of the opposition, and the Liberal Gladstone Ministry had maintained strict neutrality during the Franco-Prussian War. Although Disraeli also opposed British intervention, he recognized in Prussia’s victory far-reaching consequences for the European state system, stating “It is no common war, like the war between Prussia and Austria, or like the Italian war in which France was engaged some years ago; nor is it like the Crimean War.” Disraeli further pronounced:

This war represents the German Revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of last century ... There is not a diplomatic tradition which has not been swept away. You have a new world, new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers with which to cope, at present involved in that obscurity incident to novelty in such affairs...but what has really come to pass in Europe? The balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change most, is England.¹

To the modern reader, Disraeli’s speech seems remarkably prescient. As A.J.P. Taylor could reflect in 1954, “Sedan* marked the end of an epoch in European history; it was the moment when the myth of la grande nation, dominating Europe, was shattered forever. The Balance of Power was startlingly altered.”² And indeed, not only was the myth of French predominance destroyed, but a new era of European history, one in which Germany would be the pivotal power, was born.

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* The Battle of Sedan marked a major turning point in the Franco-Prussian War.
But in acknowledging Disraeli’s foresight we ought not assume that either he or any other British statesman was confident that the newly unified Germany would be a menace to England, much less that British diplomacy should aim to counterbalance the fledgling central European empire. It was only after a long series of disturbing German actions, culminating in the “war-in-sight” crisis of 1875, that the British fully came to view the “German Revolution” as hurtful to their interests. In fact, for decades educated English opinion had favored the emergence of a unified German state, and from the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War British sympathies tended toward the Prussian side. It is not difficult to see why such sentiments prevailed. Reared in the tradition of Britain as a world power, British statesmen of the era were more concerned with Russian advances into Central Asia and French designs in the Mediterranean than alterations in the continental balance of power. Moreover, a strong and united Germany, situated between Russia and France, would distract England’s two great rivals and deter them from extra-European adventures. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Lord Palmerston became the chief British proponent of German unity, believing that Britain and the German states faced common threats in Russia and France. “England and Germany therefore,” Palmerston avowed, “have mutually a direct interest in assisting each other to become rich, united and strong.”

Thus, from a geopolitical standpoint, a long British tradition supported the idea of a strong and unified Germany in the center of Europe. But British sympathy for the cause of German unification was not merely rooted in calculations of geopolitics; rather it extended to the realms of culture, religion, and ideology. The land of Kant, Goethe, and Schiller, Germany was home to an illustrious intellectual tradition very fashionable in nineteenth-century England, and Prussia, the largest German kingdom, was the only European great power that shared Britain’s Protestant religious heritage. Throughout the nineteenth century British intellectuals such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle had propagated the image of Germans as “noble, intelligent, peaceful, civilized, and profoundly
religious people.” Furthermore, by the 1860s, the doctrine of nationalism had become part and parcel of British liberalism, and the British had already enthusiastically advocated Greek and Italian unity. A Germany unified under Prussian auspices, British statesmen believed, would be liberal, peace-loving, and England’s “natural ally” on the continent.

One such statesman was Robert Morier, who became British secretary at Darmstadt just after the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. He followed the war with great interest, but as a liberal and a proud Germanophile, he was disturbed that Bismarck, whom he called “one of the most sinister figures that has ever been painted on the canvas of history,” had co-opted the cause of German unity. Indeed, most British intellectuals and statesmen, despite their positive feelings for the German people, considered Bismarck reactionary and tyrannical. Nevertheless, steeped as they were in the “Whig interpretation” of history, these same Englishmen assumed that Bismarck, like so many other “enemies of progress” before him, would eventually be cast into the dust heap of history. “When any institutions come directly into contact with the spirit of the time,” wrote Liberal politician Mountstuart Grant Duff, “they may resist for five years, or ten, or twenty, but down they must go in the end.” Thus Bismarck did not substantially alter English opinion on German unification.

The British Foreign Office welcomed Prussia’s victory over Austria. Although Morier and other English liberals had hoped that Austria would be expelled from Germany and Italy by “the natural course of events,” they were nonetheless pleased to see “the congenital malformation of Europe” remedied.† Bismarck’s choice of means for effecting unification were reprehensible, but both the

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* See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), p. 5: “[T]he historian tends in the first place to adopt the whig or Protestant view of the subject,” writes Butterfield, “and very quickly busies himself with dividing the world into the friends and enemies of progress.”

† The “natural course of events” refers to “the ripening of political history in Prussia.” Violent war against Austria was considered unnatural—the product of Bismarck’s ideas alone. Robert Morier to M. Grant-Duff (June 9, 1866). Rosslyn Wemyss, ed., *Memoirs and Letters of the Right Hon. Sir Robert Morier*, From 1826 to 1876, Vol. II. (London: Edward Arnold, 1911), p. 66. Italics added.
national principle and the enlightened *Weltanschauung* of the German people ensured that a unified Germany would foster a more peaceful European order. Hence Morier could write to his father, “I entirely concur in your wish to see Bismarck hung,” and nevertheless support the Prussian minister’s war against Austria.*

Despite British inclinations toward Prussia and the cause of German unification in the 1860s, these sentiments never translated into action. British foreign policy toward Europe was decidedly non-interventionist during the decade of Bismarck’s wars. Most historians agree that the first Gladstone Ministry, which came to power in late 1868, was one of the most inward-looking in the annals of Victorian Britain.† And fortunately—at least it seemed—the international situation was calm and clear. A few months after Gladstone entered office, Bismarck wrote him a letter about the European situation. “The political horizon seen from Berlin appears at present so unclouded that there is nothing to report,” professed the Prussian minister. Colonel Walker, the British military attaché at Berlin, reasoned that the “unification of Germany was far distant.” Preoccupied with affairs at home, the Gladstone Ministry readily accepted such reports. When Lord Granville became foreign secretary after Clarendon’s death in June 1870, Edmund Hammond, the under-secretary, told him “he had never during his long experience known so great a lull in foreign affairs, and that he was not aware of any important question that [Granville] should have to deal with.”

Yet, however “unclouded” the horizon appeared, tensions were brewing in Europe. Napoleon III, emperor of France since 1852, had spent his career championing the nationalist cause throughout

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* Morier believed that “A signal victory on the part of Austria in the present struggle would throw Europe back three generations.” Robert Morier to his father (June 20, 1866). Wemyss, *Memoirs and Letters of Morier*, pp. 67–68.

the continent, and the British, in light of their fixation on Belgian neutrality, looked upon him with suspicion. Napoleon welcomed Prussia’s rapid victory over Austria in 1866; a Prussian state organized on a national basis, he assumed, would inevitably be liberal and, consequently, estranged from his enemy, Russia. But many Frenchmen were angry, believing that France must achieve its own coup to offset Prussia’s gains. Napoleon thus instructed one of his top diplomats, Count Benedetti, to negotiate a secret accord with Bismarck. A draft agreement was drawn up in which France would ensure the integrity of Prussia’s territorial acquisitions in exchange for *carte blanche* in Luxembourg and Belgium.* However, the so-called “Benedetti Treaty” was never signed, so Napoleon was forced to look elsewhere to satisfy disgruntled French opinion. His next interlocutor was the king of Holland, with whom he negotiated the annexation of Luxembourg to France. But at the last minute, the Dutch king lost his nerve and refused to sign the treaty without first informing Prussia. The result was predictable: a torrent of nationalist feeling in Germany, followed by a conference of the powers affirming Luxembourg’s neutrality. Although seemingly trifling, the Luxembourg Crisis was a major watershed in the diplomatic history of Europe. Henceforward it seemed no longer possible for France to accept gracefully the emergence of a strong Prussia-Germany on its eastern border.

With Franco-Prussian relations so bitter, French public opinion calling for *revanche* for Sadowa, and constant military preparations in both France and Prussia, it is astonishing that the British Foreign Office thought the international landscape so placid in early summer 1870.† Less than three weeks after Hammond spoke of an unprecedented “lull” in foreign affairs, the issue of the Hohenzollern candidature had exploded into a full-fledged Franco-Prus-

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* Luxembourg and Belgium were considered natural areas in which Napoleon III might seek to augment the French Empire. That such an agreement could even be proposed indicates how far continental perceptions of British power and willfulness had fallen by 1867. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1954), pp. 173-74.

† Sadowa (Königgrätz) was the site of Prussia’s major battlefield victory of the Austro-Prussian War. During Prussia’s next war, against France, Bismarck said to Count Bernstorff: “Even our victory at Sadowa roused bitterness in France; how much more will our victory over themselves.” Quoted in Ibid., p. 217.
sian war. From the outset of the conflict British opinion across all levels of society regarded Napoleon as the aggressor.¹⁹ Queen Victoria, always partial for things German over French, was a committed advocate of the Prussian side. However, despite her sympathies and the pleadings of her daughter, the Crown Princess of Prussia, the Queen recognized the necessity of British neutrality.²⁰ “We must be neutral as long as we can, but no one here conceals their opinion as to the extreme iniquity of the war, and the unjustifiable conduct of the French!” wrote the Queen to her daughter, “… the feeling of the people and country here is all with you … And need I say what I feel?”²¹

British liberals were particularly pro-Prussian in their leanings, as the war seemed to them a selfish and aggressive crusade by Napoleon against popular German national feeling. One such liberal, Gladstone, suspected that the French people might rise up against their emperor: “If ever there was a Government-made War, it is this: & France may call the author to account.”²² Another, Morier, resented the Gladstone Ministry for permitting the continuation of British arms sales to France. “France draws the sword to assert her political preponderance over Europe. Germany draws the sword to assert her national existence. But the result will be that the preponderance of Germany over Europe for centuries to come will take the place of French preponderance,” opined Morier. “We sit by like a bloated Quaker, too holy to fight, but rubbing our hands at the roaring trade we are driving in cartridges and ammunition.”²³ To liberals like Morier and indeed most Englishmen, Germany represented progress, while Napoleon personified reaction; the German people were fighting for liberty, while the French emperor was striving for self-gratification. It is thus understandable that Gladstone thought the French people might topple Napoleon, and that Morier could censure the British government for selling weapons to the French side. Free trade was supposed to be a civilizing principle, not an excuse for profiting off of Napoleon’s unjust war against the German people.

* Morier was concerned that the arms sales were giving Britain a bad name in Germany. Robert Morier to his father (July 31, 1870). Wemyss, Memoirs and Letters of Morier, p. 157.
The only continental issue that really concerned the Gladstone Ministry was Belgian neutrality. When *The Times* published a leaked copy of the “Benedetti Treaty” on July 25, in which Napoleon’s Belgian ambitions were laid bare, British opinion, both popular and official, moved decisively against France.\(^24\) Meanwhile, defying a great portion of British expectations, the Prussian army won victory after victory over the French in August. Disraeli relished in the irony of Napoleon’s fortune: “This collapse of France has all come from the Emperor’s policy of nationality...The Emperor started this hare in order that he might ultimately get Belgium. Belgium is safe and France is smashed!”\(^25\) On September 1, Prussia’s victory became total on the battlefield of Sedan, where Napoleon surrendered himself and his entire army the next day. The Second French Empire had been driven out of existence in just over a month, and the question of a unified and powerful German state in the center of Europe, for all intents and purposes, ceased to be one. At least in form, the hopes of Palmerston, Morier, and the British liberals had come to fruition.

But less than four years after Sedan, when it seemed that Germany and France were again plunging headlong toward war, Britain’s response was strikingly different. During the “war-in-sight” crisis of 1875, it was not only British public opinion that was against Germany; the Foreign Office went so far as to intervene to stay Bismarck’s hand. How could the British position have changed so drastically in such a short period of time? After Sedan the birth of a German empire was all but an accomplished fact; the character of that new empire, however, remained an open question.

**THE BIRTH OF DOUBT: ALSACE-LORRAINE AND THE END OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR**

Robert Morier, perhaps as accurately as any other Englishman, predicted the course of the Franco-Prussian War. When news reached England that the two sides were mobilizing, Morier was at a dinner party. The guests knew Morier to be an expert on German issues, so they solicited his opinion on the coming conflict. After
denouncing Britain’s failure to prevent the outbreak of war, Morier proclaimed: “France and Germany will have to fight it out alone, it will be the most horrible war the world has ever seen, and it will end by France being thoroughly and completely beaten.” The prediction was unorthodox, but subsequent events soon proved its wisdom. Morier was also prescient when it came to the subtler aspects of the war. As he wrote to his father after the early Prussian victories, “[W]ith one voice the whole [German] nation is demanding vengeance, and this demand will, I fear, take the form of a demand for French territory, for Alsace–Lorraine, the very worst fault the victorious Germany could commit.”

The issue of Franco-Prussian peace terms—and particularly the subject of Alsace-Lorraine—would be the hinge on which British opinion would turn over the next several months. After Napoleon’s surrender at Sedan, the French formed the Government of National Defense, which was determined to continue the war, and whose foreign minister, Jules Favre, declared proudly that France would not cede “an inch of her territory or a stone of her fortresses.” At this point the war ceased to be, as Gladstone had described, “Government-made”; it was a war of nations, and the conventions of warfare gave way to brutality and carnage.

Most Englishmen, who supported Germany’s claim to national existence and considered the war a Napoleonic invention, naturally assumed the fighting would stop after the French emperor was removed. Considering Napoleon a threat to the peace of Europe, and thinking that French mores had become indulgent and base, the British hoped Sedan would be an edifying moment for France. On the other hand, the “noble” German victors were expected to reach equitable peace terms and begin their reign as a rock of stability in Europe. “Such a downfall is a melancholy thing, but it is meant to teach deep lessons; may we all learn what frivolity, conceit and immorality lead to!” wrote the Crown Princess a few days after Sedan. “It would be grievous for Art’s sake for that beautiful capital [Paris] to suffer. I trust it will not come to that.”

But the war went on, and Paris was laid under siege on September 19, 1870. Three days later, Bismarck announced in a cir-
cular telegram Prussia’s intentions to annex territory in Alsace-Lorraine. While he may have been more concerned with home affairs than foreign, Gladstone, like other British liberals, regarded the principle of nationality and the sanctity of international treaties and norms as matters of paramount importance; indeed his commitment to these issues was as strong as any of his contemporaries. The Prussian circular assailed Gladstone’s dearest creeds. Recent European practice had established the principle that territorial transfers were not to take place without the consent of the inhabitants. Before Savoy and Nice were officially incorporated into France in 1860, plebiscites were held so that the populations themselves could determine their national destinies. After receiving the Prussian circular, Gladstone voiced concern to Granville: “[It] appears to me that Count Bismarck’s paper raises questions of public right, in which all Europe has a common interest, and it is impossible for us to receive in silence.”

Gladstone was stoked into action. He wrote a series of memoranda to his cabinet urging British diplomatic intervention to prevent the annexations, which he surmised would affect 1.25 million people. “The transfer of the allegiance and citizenship ... of human beings from one sovereignty to another, without any reference to their own consent,” ruminated the prime minister in the first memo, “has been a great reproach to some former transactions in Europe; has led to many wars and disturbances; is hard to reconcile with considerations of equity; and is repulsive to the sense of modern civilization.” Meanwhile, against Granville’s advice, Gladstone wrote a lengthy treatise on the subject for the Edinburgh Review. In the article, he proclaimed “a new law of nations [that] is gradually taking hold of the mind.” This “law” recognized the right of national self-determination, commanded the peaceful and permanent resolution of conflicts, and declared “the general judgment of civilised mankind” as the “tribunal of paramount authority.” Napoleon’s aggression had violated the law, and for this he was justly censured. If Germany proceeded to transgress by annexing Alsace-Lorraine against the will of the inhabitants, it too should expect reproach.*

* As Gladstone wrote of his “law” of nations: “It has censured the aggression of France; it will
Although the article was published anonymously, the identity of its author was never a mystery to the British public. Within the cabinet Granville led opposition against Gladstone’s plan for intervention, asserting that it would only damage British prestige to stand up for general principles with neither the will nor the power to give them force. Yet Gladstone, repulsed by the idea of transferring “human beings like chattels,” refused to concede defeat.

In Prussia there were also voices opposing the annexations, but they were few and severely outmatched. One such dissenter was Johann Jacoby, a Prussian-Jewish politician, who organized a public outcry. Jacoby and his counterparts were hastily imprisoned in September, shocking British liberals who tended to idealize their German “cousins.” Queen Victoria was forced to reexamine her own views when her friend, Queen Augusta of Prussia, wrote her a letter voicing misgivings about the prospective peace terms. “The boundary line of language should in particular be maintained, and no really French territory be claimed,” expressed Augusta, “... we must ever pray for an honourable and blessed peace!” Such sentiments, however, were drowned out by the mass of German opinion across the political spectrum demanding reward for the heroism of the fallen. Even the Crown Prince Frederick, whose liberal credentials were well established in England, could write in his personal diary, “The annexation of Alsace and perhaps of a part of Lorraine, is surely well earned by the sacrifices Germany has made.”

Disturbed by the volume of German opinion favoring annexation, and defeated in his hopes of intervention by his own cabinet, Gladstone sought to inject his voice into the discussion through private channels. The renowned German liberal intellectual Friedrich Max Müller, then professor of philology at Oxford, was both a correspondent of Gladstone’s and a friend of Bismarck’s personal secretary, Heinrich Abeken. Assuming that Müller was of the same mind, Gladstone sent him a letter: “I want to ask you what we are to think of the Alsace and Lorraine question,” wrote the prime minister. “It would surprise me to find that you thought these people [could] properly be annexed to Germany, if their heart is in censure, if need arise, the greed of Germany.” Ibid.
France.” But Gladstone was surprised when Müller responded with an ardent defense of the case for annexation: “The thousands and thousands of German hearts that lie buried in Alsace-Lorraine have made that soil German once more.” Müller’s letter revealed that German liberals could not see eye-to-eye with those of Britain on the Alsace–Lorraine question, and it perhaps reflected deeper differences in the characteristics of liberalism in the two countries. “Max Müller’s letter … shows the hardness of the rock we have to melt or break,” wrote Granville to his disappointed chief.

As the French maintained their resistance and the Prussians were determined to march on Paris, many Englishmen began to have doubts about the forces that the Prussian victory had unleashed. “[O]ur sympathies were entirely with the Germans in the beginning of the war,” wrote George Eliot on September 26, “but I cannot help admitting to myself now, that if they had been in a higher moral condition—I mean the whole [German] nation and its government—the war might not have reached this hideous stage.” Thomas Carlyle was so frustrated by the haste with which British sympathies were turning against Prussia that he published a letter in The Times on November 18, defending the German cause. More representative of popular opinion, however, was the editor’s note printed alongside the letter, denouncing Carlyle for “treating provinces as chattels, and their inhabitants as vermin that may incidentally swarm about them.”

By the time of Carlyle’s letter, it had become evident that Prussia’s victory would have far-reaching consequences—and not all of them for the better. As France lay prostrate, the other European powers gathered like vultures, seeking to profit from the vacuum. On September 20, Italian forces occupied Rome, eviscerating the temporal power of the pope while his protector, France, was immobilized. More troubling to England was the Russian circular of October 31, declaring the czar’s intention to renounce unilaterally the Black Sea clauses of the 1856 Treaty of Paris. Consummated after the Crimean War, the clauses prohibited Russia from commanding a fleet in the Black Sea. Gladstone and other British liberals had opposed the clauses from the first, but the idea that a European
power could unilaterally free itself from treaty obligations flew in the face of the prime minister’s core principles. “It is quite evident that the effect of such doctrine ... is to bring the entire authority and efficacy of all Treaties under the discretionary control of each one of the Powers who may have signed them,” wrote Gladstone following the Russian announcement, “That is to say the result obtained is the entire denunciation of Treaties in their essence.”

With Prussia’s resolve to annex Alsace-Lorraine, Italy’s forceful takeover of Rome, and Russia’s intention to shred the Black Sea clauses, it seemed Prussia’s victory at Sedan had rendered fragile the whole system of international law. But Gladstone was determined not to let it be torn asunder. The prime minister dispatched Odo Russell, England’s former representative at the Vatican, to the German headquarters in France to discuss the Black Sea issue. Meeting with Bismarck, Russell exceeded his instructions and proclaimed that Britain would go to war, “with or without allies,” if the Russians refused to disavow their unilateral renunciation. Bismarck had no time to contemplate a potential conflict in the east while war against France still raged; he thus consented to call a conference of the powers, which was held in London in early 1871. At the end of negotiations the Black Sea clauses were revoked, but the parties declared it an “essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a treaty, nor modify stipulations thereof, unless with the consent of the contracting Powers by means of an amicable agreement.” Gladstone had triumphed and the sanctity of international treaties was saved.

But in Gladstone’s other great cause — applying the principle of national self-determination in Alsace-Lorraine — success was beyond his reach. In the beginning of January 1871 the German forces prepared to bombard Paris. By this point the British public had swung decisively in favor of France, and the Germans were taking notice. “That we Germans are losing hold of sympathy in England I have observed for a long time with grief,” wrote the Crown

*It was clear from the outset that Bismarck had agreed to support Russia’s claim in exchange for the czar’s good will toward Prussian aggrandizement. Eyck Erich, Bismarck and the German Empire (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), p. 190; Langer, European Alliances, p. 11.
Prince Frederick to Queen Victoria, “and this will go on increasing-ingly till Paris falls.”51 Even Morier had doubts. “Germany is to be held accursed. 1. Because she has not yet made peace. 2. Because she insists on a territorial concession. 3. Because her manner of conducting the war is unworthy of a civilised nation,” wrote Morier, describing the current feeling of the British public. And Morier, perhaps in spite of himself, found reasons to agree with these sentiments. On one occasion his disappointment reached such levels that he fumed to his close friend, Ernst von Stockmar, that “the lust for gloire, kindled as it is within her [Germany], will burn with a much more terrible fierceness than it ever did in the grande na-
tion.”52 Stockmar was shocked by his friend’s words and asked for an explanation.53 A few weeks later, after the German Empire was declared at Versailles, Morier responded in a more equable frame of mind:

What I meant to imply was that such unparalleled successes as those which have attended the German arms, and the consequent absolute power which the German nation has acquired over Europe, will tend especially to modify the German national character, and that not only necessarily for the better … Is it love of exaggeration to fear that under such circumstances the German Empire based on universal suffrage, i.e., on the suffrages of the 800,000 men who have been fighting in France … may have some of the faults of militarism attaching to it?54

Morier had advocated for the form of German unity for decades, but at the moment of creation he was worried about the substance of the Germany that had come into existence. Would a united Germany, drunk on the triumphs of blood and iron, bear the emblem of Bismarck, its illiberal architect? Could Morier really feel confident that Bismarck’s influence would be fleeting, and that after his inevitable downfall Germany would blossom into a paragon of liberalism?

Morier was not alone in his concerns. The British public was rife with fears that England would be Germany’s next victim. George Tomkyns Chesney’s novella, The Battle of Dorking, published in serialized form beginning in early 1871, did much to fuel
dread. Quickly an international sensation, *The Battle of Dorking* is told from the perspective of an old Englishman, who narrates the story of his past to his grandchildren. “The danger did not come on us unawares,” the old man reflects, “... We English have only ourselves to blame for the humiliation which has been brought on the land.” He then proceeds to recount how a few years after the Franco-Prussian War, Germany conquered England and destroyed the British Empire. Similarly popular was Henry Pullen’s *The Fight at Dame Europa’s School*, which tells the story of three young students—Johnnie, Louis, and William—who symbolize England, France, and Germany, respectively. Though William was “the biggest and strongest” and coveted Louis’ flowerbeds, he was a “very studious and peaceable boy, and made the rest of the school believe he had never provoked a quarrel in his life.” When the rest of the school least expects it, William tramples over Louis’ flowerbeds and annexes them. Dame Europa soon learns of the story and excoriates Johnnie for his spineless neutrality, advising him to “Take care that William, the peaceable, unaggressive Boy, does not contrive (as I fully believe he will contrive) to get a footing on the river, where he can keep a boat, and then one fine morning take your pretty island by surprise.” By the end of February 1871, *The Fight at Dame Europa’s School* had sold two hundred thousand copies.

Among British intellectuals and statesmen, concerns were concentrated on what the birth of Bismarckian Germany meant for the European state system, rather than expectations of future Anglo-German conflict. Far from the old idea that a united Germany would foster continental peace, Gladstone worried that German unification might signal “the beginning of a new series of European complications.” The jurist-historian Frederic Harrison, who had initially supported Germany against Napoleon, wrote in *The Fortnightly Review* that Europe faced “essentially a moral struggle; one of principles.” Despite hopes for a liberal Germany, “Bismarckism,” as Harrison called it, would provide an ideological challenge to British ideas of international morality. “Europe is thrown into the cauldron to be re-cast, and a new Holy Alliance is forming on the principle of ‘Blood and Iron’ which England must meet abso-
lutely alone,” Harrison cautioned. Prussia was the most militaristic state in the world, and the German people had so thoroughly surrendered their will to Bismarck that there was now more civic participation in czarist Russia. As Harrison asked, “We are told to trust to Germany at the close of her victory assuming a liberal form. What are the grounds for such hope?”

Harrison found such hopes groundless, but other educated Englishmen remained guardedly optimistic. Certainly when Bismarck presented his peace terms to France in February 1871—which included the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine—the British Foreign Office had no thoughts of counterbalancing nascent German power.* Britain needed a larger body of evidence before it could conclude that Germany must be bridled.

THE PERIOD OF DISILLUSIONMENT, 1871–1874

Bismarck’s boundless imagination was both his blessing and his curse. On the one hand, it provided him with broad freedom to seek diplomatic combinations, and enabled him to prepare for contingencies that other statesmen could not foresee. But on the other hand, it filled him with constant anxiety; he was keenly aware of the fragility of his position, of how a rapid twist of fate could give rise to his cauchemar des coalitions. In his memoirs Bismarck reveals that fears of potential neutral-power intervention in the Franco-Prussian War “troubled me night and day,” and doubtless his diplomatic counterparts were unsettled by his excitability.63 When Odo Russell visited German headquarters in France in late 1870, Bismarck received the British emissary warmly, assuring him that “After the present war Germany would care for nothing but peace.”†

* The French signed a preliminary peace on February 26, and the formal Treaty of Frankfurt was signed on May 10. The terms included the annexation of Alsace and a portion of Lorraine to the German Empire; a French indemnity of five-milliard francs; and German occupation of parts of France until the reparations were paid in full. Taylor, Struggle, p. 217; A. A. W. Ramsay, Idealism and Foreign Policy: A Study of the Relations of Great Britain with Germany and France, 1860-1878 (London: John Murray, 1925), p. 347; Paul Knaplund, Gladstone’s Foreign Policy (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1970), p. 62.

† Bismarck also told Russell that “England and Austria are the natural Allies of Germany,” Odo Russell to Granville (December 18, 1870). Paul Knaplund, ed., Letters from the Berlin Embassy,
Despite the Prussian minister's good graces, Russell found reasons to be suspicious. "Now that I know him," reported Russell, "I shall no longer be surprised to see him change the Map of Europe far more than the Emperor Napoleon was expected to do and we must be prepared for many disagreeable surprises."  

In the wake of the war, Bismarck's anxieties were focused on two closely related issues: one external, the other internal. First and foremost, the new German chancellor feared that the French and the Austrians, who had both succumbed to the Prussian sword, would recover their strength and join forces against Germany in a war of revenge. Second, Bismarck worried about the unity of the fledgling German Empire. A number of constituencies within the empire—notably the Bavarians, the Alsatians, the Lorrainers, and the Poles—were thought to be of questionable loyalty, and owing to their Catholic faith, they represented a potential fifth column in the event of a Franco-Austrian war against Germany. As a result, Bismarck initially pursued a two-fold policy: the prevention of a clericalist party, most likely in the form of a restored monarchy, from taking power in France; and conciliation with the Vatican, in an effort to win Pope Pius IX's support and moderate the separatist tendencies within the Catholic Center Party, which had formed in Germany in December 1870.

The second prong of Bismarck's policy failed immediately. When the chancellor reached out his hand, the Vatican not only spurned his overtures, but the papal secretary of state, Cardinal Antonelli, proclaimed the Roman Curia's solidarity with the Center Party. Bismarck's imagination was unleashed. He sensed a Franco-clericalist conspiracy against German unity. The Franco-Prussian War itself, he reckoned, had sprouted from an agreement between the Vatican and France, whose Empress Eugénie was under Jesuitical control. Was it mere coincidence that France declared war on Prussia the day after the Vatican decreed papal infallibility? Bismarck's anxious tendencies could not help but catch the attention of the British. "It is one of the peculiarities of that
great man that he is farsighted to a fault,” averred The Times. “There is something nervous and fidgety in his otherwise dauntless disposition, which renders him unable to find rest in the present, and sets him scheming and striving about an indefinite future.”71 With such an unpredictable helmsman, the German ship of state might sail a disruptive course in international affairs.

Following Antonelli’s rebuff, Bismarck decided to tamp down the Catholic Center Party by using more direct methods. When the Reichstag first convened in March 1871, the National Liberal Party possessed a commanding position.72 As the most enthusiastic supporters of German unity, the National Liberals viewed Bismarck as a hero and willingly followed his lead. A few months after the inaugural meeting, Bismarck commenced what would become known as the Kulturkampf by dissolving the Catholic Department of the Prussian Ministry of Worship. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Adolphe Thiers, the French were already showing signs of rejuvenation. By cleverly forging a handshake agreement in the National Assembly—the so-called Pact of Bordeaux—Thiers was able to revitalize French military and economic strength with impressive celerity. Alarmed by France’s recovery, Bismarck moved to further defend the German Empire from the potential fifth column.* While the full extent of Bismarck’s intended war against the Catholic Church was not yet known, the British Foreign Office already noticed signs of renewed Franco-German discord. “The New Year will open gloomily for France. The Germans appear to be alarmed, or at all events irritated, by Thiers’s military boasts and military preparations,” wrote Lord Lyons, the British ambassador to France, in late 1871. “The Germans mean to have their money and keep the territory they have taken, and they say that they had better have it out with France now that she is weak, than wait till she has got strong again.”73

* In December 1871, Bismarck inserted the Kanzelparagraf (“Pulpit Law”) into the German Criminal Code, which made public clerical criticism of the state punishable by imprisonment, Francis A. Arlinghaus, “The Kulturkampf and European Diplomacy, 1871-1875,” The Catholic History Review, Vol. 28, No. 3 (October 1942), p. 347; The Pact of Bordeaux tabled discussions of the eventual form of the French government until essential works of national reconstruction were complete. Langer, European Alliances, p. 15.
In January 1872, Bismarck selected Adalbert Falk as the new minister of public worship, anointing him the juridical mastermind of the Kulturkampf. Falk’s first action at his post was to draft the School Inspection Law. Inspiring fierce debate throughout Germany and excited interest in Britain, the law secularized German schools, removing Catholic and Protestant influence from public education, and thus angering members of the Center Party as well as the Junker Conservatives. British liberals, who tended to view Church control over schools as regressive, received the law with great enthusiasm and were pleased to see Bismarck break with the Conservatives in favor of the National Liberals. British liberals began to hope that Bismarck was shunning his reactionary ways, but British conservatives—still far to the left of the German chancellor—remained skeptical.† Odo Russell was well informed on Church matters, and he followed Bismarck’s anti-clerical campaign with acute interest. “[A]t this moment they can think and talk of nothing but the coming war with the Church,” reported Russell from Berlin. “Old Thile confided to me that he feared Bismarck was overdoing it and exciting popular animosity against the Clergy through the press to such a pitch that he would find it difficult to manage the anticlerical masses he was now arming and urging on.”‡ But at that point, in late winter 1872, the infant Kulturkampf seemed very enlightened indeed to the British political classes. Conservatives like Disraeli and Liberals like Gladstone§ could agree that the Vatican, which had recently propagated the Syllabus of Errors and decreed papal infallibility, represented an impediment to progress.

As Bismarck’s anti-clerical campaign gained momentum,

*Bismarck gave Falk straightforward instructions: “To re-establish the rights of the State in relation to the Church, and with as little fuss as possible.” Quoted in Eyck, Bismarck, pp. 206–07.
† The Pall Mall Gazette (London)—one of the more conservative papers in Britain at the time—surmised that the Liberals were getting ahead of themselves in their hopes. See “Occasional Notes,” The Pall Mall Gazette (London), February 29, 1872.
§ Gladstone actively opposed the decree of papal infallibility on both religious and political grounds. See Josef L. Altholz, “Gladstone and the Vatican Decrees,” The Historian, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May 1963), pp. 312–24.
the French resurgence persisted at a fast pace, and Thiers boasted of the renewed strength of the French army. Although such incendiary language deeply upset German opinion and certainly spread fears throughout Europe of another Franco-German conflict, Russell was convinced that Bismarck’s next war would be an unconventional one. “The Generals tell the Emperor it would be better to fight France before she is ready than after,” wrote Russell, “but Bismarck, who scorns the Generals, advises the Emperor to fight France morally through Rome and the Catholic alliances against United Germany.” This was exactly Bismarck’s intention. On May 14, 1872, the chancellor declared war against the Catholic Church in the Reichstag.

The *Kulturkampf*, as the historian Erich Eyck explains, “was looked on by a great part of Europe as one of the most exciting events of the age ... there can be no doubt that in those years many of the most enlightened and highly educated men believed that the future of mankind was at stake.” The veracity of Eyck’s statement is confirmed by the spectacular pronouncements of the British press. To illustrate, *The Standard* saw in Germany and the Vatican the respective embodiments of “Positivism and Ideality, the conflicting doctrines which have, for years past ... been gradually drawing the populations of Europe into two hostile camps; and we are thus unable to divest ourselves of the belief that on the issue of the struggle now imminent hangs the future mastery over Europe of the principles involved in one or the other of these doctrines.”

It was the age of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species*, and the *Kulturkampf* seemed the physical manifestation of the battle of science and progress versus superstition. In this conflict, the British political classes firmly supported science and progress; they were therefore ecstatic to see Bismarck, the proud *Junker*, split with the Conservatives, side with the National Liberals, and pioneer a crusade against clerical obscurantism. Nowhere outside of Germany was the *Kulturkampf* viewed more favorably than in Protestant England. In March 1872, *The Times* judged Bismarck’s

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* Bismarck famously declared: “Have no fear—to Canossa we shall not go, either in body or in spirit.” Quoted in Arlinghaus, “Kulturkampf,” p. 348.
efforts against the Catholic Church a “splendid success” and criticized France for lagging behind Germany on this enlightened path: “[France] ought at last to feel how little it becomes her to be outdone by Germany in a just and liberal course.”

Brimming with confidence, Bismarck unveiled his next major initiative in June 1872: a law that dissolved the Society of Jesuits in Germany and gave the government the right to banish any Jesuit from the empire. This policy was clearly shaded in a darker hue than those hitherto enacted, and Eduard Lasker—leader of the National Liberal Party’s left wing—protested the law, proclaiming that it violated his liberal conscience. The British public seized upon the Jesuit law even more feverishly than it had the School Inspection Law, but this time responses were mostly negative. When one British newspaper commended the Jesuit law, The Standard lashed back fiercely. “Surely no more fitting motto for the Liberals of the present day could be found than these words of Tacitus, written nearly two thousand years ago—*Omnia liberaliter pro dominatione*,” harangued The Standard:

> From the representative German Liberal, a petty tyrant in heavy chains, one can hardly expect very broad views on the subject of personal freedom; but when a London paper … openly justifies religious persecution, we may well ask ourselves if all the progress, all the civilisation of which we boast, is not a dream from which we are gradually awakening.

The *Lancaster Gazette* echoed such sentiments, calling the Jesuit law “an antiquated policy” and criticizing Bismarck for imagining a Jesuit-led conspiracy of Austria, France, and the Vatican against Germany. The British Catholic Union organized a mass meeting, presided over by the Duke of Norfolk, to protest the German legislation. The Earl of Denbigh’s resolution condemning the law as “a wrong done to all natural right” passed comfortably. Denbigh had expected the result: “The meeting … was bound to carry this motion, not only as Catholics, but as Englishmen and as the champions of liberty and of rights of the subject.” It was well for the British to find clerical obscurantism distasteful, but they must utterly object to policies granting the state such broad capabilities to
oppress civilians.

While the anti-Jesuit law tempered British hopes for an enlightened renaissance in Germany—and called into question the liberalism of the National Liberal Party—the Foreign Office was more concerned about Germany's diplomatic endeavors of September 1872. For in that month Emperor Wilhelm of Germany, Czar Alexander II of Russia, and Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria convened in Berlin for a meeting of indeterminate purpose. The British government could not help but observe the imperial gathering with suspicion. On the most basic level it evoked distasteful memories of the Holy Alliance, whose reactionary politics and hard-line methods had been viewed with disgust in England. More immediately, a restored alliance of the three emperors, anchored by an all-powerful Germany, would secure Russia's western flank and free the czar to pursue a more vigorous policy in Central Asia—the most important theater of Anglo-Russian competition. Rumors abounded in Britain that great decisions were being made at the meeting; there were speculations about the rebirth of the Holy Alliance, and Conservative-leaning newspapers blamed Gladstone and the Liberals for letting British influence diminish on the continent.† The British government was so disturbed that it sent an imperial squadron to greet Thiers at Le Havre on September 18.‡ Odo Russell had the opportunity to meet with the foreign ministers of each of the parties at the conference, and they all took pains to assure him that no major political issues had been discussed. What was notable, however, was the statement of the Russian chancellor, Gorchakov, that he “had no interest in the weakness of France; on the contrary, he wished for a strong and

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* The British public was also concerned. In the lead-up to the meeting, The Morning Post (London) speculated that a new Holy Alliance might be proposed, and that an agreement over the Eastern Question might be reached. See “France,” The Morning Post (London), August 9, 1872, pg. 5. The Pall Mall Gazette wondered if the meeting might spell doom for France. See The Pall Mall Gazette (London), August 5, 1872.

† “[W]e confess ourselves shocked at this clear evidence of the tendency in Europe to a new Holy Alliance…and we shall regret as we have never done before the wane of British influence on the Continent.” Occasional Notes, The Pall Mall Gazette (London), October 12, 1872.

‡ The gesture surprised the French president, but he gladly accepted it. Langer, European Alliances, p. 23.
prudent France,” and Russell’s own shrewd impression that Czar Alexander’s participation had been “unexpected and self-invited.”

The mysterious meeting of the three emperors further subdued British hopes that Bismarckian Germany was taking a liberal turn. To make matters worse, the expansion of the Kulturkampf was apparently backfiring. Traditionally the German Catholics had been the most liberal and independent-minded of Europe. Most German bishops had opposed the dogma of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council, and the British press could praise the German Catholics for being less rigid than “the stolid devotees of Italy or Spain.”* But the sinister spirit of the Kulturkampf, revealed most blatantly in the anti-Jesuit law, pushed them into solidarity with the Vatican. Odo Russell, who normally trusted the chancellor’s wisdom, was disappointed. “I fancy that Bismarck utterly misunderstands and underrates the power of the Church. Thinking himself far more infallible than the Pope he cannot tolerate two Infallibles in Europe,” declared Russell:

The German Bishops who were politically powerless in Germany and theologically in opposition to the Pope in Rome—have now become powerful political party Leaders in Germany and enthusiastic defenders of the new infallible Faith in Rome, united, disciplined and thirsting for martyrdom, thanks to Bismarck’s uncalled for and illiberal declaration of War on the freedom they had hitherto so peacefully enjoyed.86

Yet while the British were questioning the prudence of Germany’s anti-clericalist measures, Bismarck was preparing to intensify them.

The Kulturkampf reached its highest stage with the infamous Falk Laws, first introduced in November 1872 and signed into law in May 1873.† The British press criticized the legislation from the first. Morier, then British chargé d’affaires at Munich, knew that his

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* Owing to the liberalism of both Catholicism and Protestantism in Germany, The Lancaster Gazette voiced surprise that such a vicious religious conflict could take place in the country. See “The Jesuits,” The Lancaster Gazette, and General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmorland, Yorkshire, etc. (Lancaster, England), July 20, 1872, pg. 2.

† By transferring the education, training, and administration of the German Catholic clergy into the hands of the state, the Falk Laws effectively granted the German government limitless intervention in all aspects of Catholic life. German Catholics, of course, could never accept such measures; the bishops staged protests, urged passive resistance, and formally declared their resolve to disobey the Falk Laws. Arlinghaus, “Kulturkampf,” p. 350.
liberal-minded countrymen would resent the legislation, regardless of their opinions on the Vatican. “[T]his programme must appear monstrous to English eyes as an infringement of the plainest principles of individual liberty,” wrote Morier in January 1873.87 Odo Russell’s frustrations multiplied, and he decried the German government’s “ignorance.”88 Meanwhile, with the signing of a new Anglo–French commercial treaty, and Germany moving closer to Russia in consequence, British worries about Bismarck’s intentions swelled.

In March 1873, Odo Russell deduced that the chancellor had two prime objectives: “The supremacy of Germany in Europe and of the German race in the world,” and “The neutralization of the influence and power of the Latin race in France and elsewhere.”89 Bismarck’s resolve in this mission, Russell concluded, was unbreakable: “To obtain these objects he will go to any lengths while he lives, so that we must be prepared for surprises in the future.”90 And perhaps most disturbing, Europe’s day of reckoning might not be far distant. “The Germans … look upon the war of revenge as unavoidable and are making immense preparations for it,” Russell continued. “Germany is in reality a great camp ready to break up for any war at a week’s notice with a million of men.”91 A year after the British political classes loudly cheered Bismarck and the School Inspection Law, the Foreign Office deemed the chancellor illiberal, untrustworthy, and possibly even dangerous.

Despite fears of increasing Anglo-French amity, the German government was remarkably out of touch with the apprehension its policies had elicited in England. Emperor Wilhelm even thanked the British government for being “an ally in the war he was unhappily obliged to carry on against the Roman Catholic Bishops.”92 Odo Russell, who had received this message at Wilhelm’s seventieth birthday party, felt obligated to rectify the emperor’s misconception: “I explained the difference of the standpoint of Church and state in England and Germany to His Majesty and said that

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87“‘We are out of favour with the Germans for preferring the old French alliance to a new German one, as our commercial policy is said to prove,’ wrote Odo Russell on March 14, 1873. Odo Russell to Lyons (March 14, 1873). Thomas W. Newton, Lord Lyons: A Record of British Diplomacy, Vol. II (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), pp. 41–42.
the love of freedom and toleration were so great with us now that we were not likely to imitate the policy so popular with the liberals of Germany at the present moment of placing the clergy and all denominations under military discipline.” 93 Bismarck, however, recognized that the Kulturkampf was faltering, and when Marshal MacMahon, an ultramontane monarchist, replaced Thiers as French president on May 24, he was hurled into a tailspin. Amplifying the chancellor’s alarm was the fact that, miraculously, France was merely months away from having repaid the full five-milliard war indemnity, which would necessitate German evacuation of French soil. With the onset of summer, Bismarck acutely felt the fragility of his position and was determined to repair it.

Lacking faith in Gladstonian England, the chancellor turned once again to Prussia’s erstwhile conservative partners, Russia and Austria. He realized ready success. Before the end of June, Germany had consummated a military partnership with Russia * and entered a loose political alliance with Austria and Russia, bringing the Three Emperors’ League into existence. 94 As Bismarck labored to shore up Germany’s position vis-à-vis France, the chancellor’s worst fears of a Franco-clericalist conspiracy seemed to be coming to fruition. Later that summer, the rival royal factions of France agreed to a restoration of the monarchy under the Bourbon Count de Chambord, whose ultramontane sympathies were well known even in England. 95 MacMahon was complicit in the arrangement, and Pope Pius IX himself had helped negotiate the compromise. But much to Bismarck’s relief, Chambord nixed the plan at the last moment by refusing to accept the French tricolore over the Bourbon white flag. Around the same time, the Bishop of Nancy issued a letter to his clergy instructing them to pray for the restitution of Alsace-Lorraine to France.† These blatant demonstrations of Catholic influence in French politics haunted Bismarck; and when

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† The Bishop of Nancy’s diocese still included part of German Lorraine. The affair caught the attention of the British press. The Graphic (London) reported that a German tribunal at Saverne had sentenced the Bishop of Nancy in absentia to three months in prison. “Foreign—France,” The Graphic (London), May 2, 1874.
France’s final indemnity payment forced Germany to evacuate French territory in September, the chancellor was spurred into action. Bismarck wrote a letter to the French foreign minister insisting that his government denounce the Bishop of Nancy’s instructions and assure that similar episodes would not happen in the future. Despite half-hearted conciliatory gestures on the part of France, the Bishop of Nancy remained steadfast, and the German press churned out belligerent pieces against France and the Catholic Church.

By fall 1873, even so consistent a Germanophile as Queen Victoria began suspecting that the means Bismarck had used to effect unification had poisoned Germany in its nursery. The Crown Prince Frederick himself had concerns, though he did not want his mother-in-law to feel overly discouraged. “The Entwickelung of Germany has not taken place in the way I fondly hoped it would, and there are many measures which I cannot admire or approve of,” wrote the Crown Prince to Queen Victoria, “but I firmly believe that what has been done, has been done for the good of Germany, and of Europe.” In the Reichstag elections of January 1874, the Center Party made substantial gains, becoming the second largest party in parliament. Not one to concede defeat, Bismarck amplified his rhetoric. In a conversation with Gontaut-Biron, French ambassador to Germany, the chancellor assumed a fearsome tone. “In the conflict in which I’m engaged with the Catholic Church,” said Bismarck, “I am energetically determined to conquer … Take care lest the [French] masses become fanaticized in the name of the persecuted Catholic religion, for then the clerical party will seize control and will espouse all the quarrels of the Roman Curia, and you will inevitably be drawn into war against us.”

Bismarck’s threatening language was taken seriously in France, and the new French foreign minister, the Duc de Decazes, wasted no time communicating his government’s distress to Britain.*

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* Lord Lyons’ report on the situation vividly illustrates France’s gloom and Britain’s concern: “The fall of France has never, I think, been brought so forcibly home to me, as when I listened yesterday to the humble deprecation which Decazes was obliged to make with regard to Bismarck’s threats, in the same room in which I had so often heard the high language with which the Imperial Minister used to speak of the affairs of Europe. One can only hope that
Doubtless disturbed by Bismarck’s foreboding gestures, the British Foreign Office solicited the help of Queen Victoria, who agreed to appeal to Emperor Wilhelm for Franco-German peace.103 “Notwithstanding an active and restless Catholic minority, the English nation, as a whole, is essentially Protestant,” the Queen wrote to Wilhelm, “and its sympathies would be entirely with Germany in any difference with France, unless there was an appearance of a disposition on the part of Germany to avail herself of her greatly superior force to crush and annihilate a beaten foe, and thus to engender the belief that a strong and united Germany was not, after all, the expected mainstay of European peace.” She concluded with an exhortation: “Being sensible that the fate of Europe rests in your hands, after such unparalleled successes, I venture to express my hope that you have the power—and no doubt—also the will to be magnanimous.”104

Odo Russell found Bismarck’s maneuvers so confounding that he was convinced the chancellor was engaging in deception. “[N]othing can save them [the French] if Bismarck is determined to fight them again; but then, is it France or is it Austria he is preparing to annihilate?” pondered Russell. Believing that Bismarck’s ultimate object was “to mediatize the minor States of Germany and to annex the German Provinces of Austria,” Russell deduced that the Kulturkampf was a tool of the chancellor’s strategy: “His anti-Roman policy will serve him to pick a quarrel with any Power he pleases by declaring that he has discovered an anti-German conspiracy among the clergy of the country he wishes to fight.” This unconventional analysis probably sprouted from the absurdity that Russell saw in Bismarck’s perceptible policy, which held that France was liable to being attacked lest “[she] gag her press, imprison her bishops, quarrel with Rome, refrain from making an army or from seeking alliances with other Powers all out of deference to Germany.”105

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In the opening months of 1874, Bismarck’s bewildering policies left Britain disconcerted. But the British government could not agree on what Bismarck’s aims actually were, and those officials who had theories could hardly feel confident in their correctness. One thing alone seemed clear: the question of European peace rested in the hands of the German chancellor. As Odo Russell mused darkly: “[T]he only course Governments can follow is to let him do as he pleases and submit to the consequences until he dies.”106

THE “WAR-IN-SIGHT” CRISIS AND THE RETURN OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

Bismarck never liked Gladstone. Considering the British prime minister sanctimonious and timid, Bismarck disparagingly referred to him as “Professor Gladstone,”107 and allegedly said that during the Grand Old Man’s ministry, he had “lost five years of his political life by the foolish belief that England was still a great power.”108 It thus seemed propitious that in the current state of tension, Disraeli, who cared deeply for foreign affairs, replaced Gladstone as prime minister in February 1874.* “The very phrase ‘foreign affairs’ makes an Englishman convinced that I am about to treat of subjects with which he has no concern,” said Disraeli on the campaign trail, “Unhappily the relations of England with the rest of the world, which are ‘foreign affairs,’ are the matters which most influence the lot.”109 For Disraeli, foreign policy was the crux of the matter—the foundation on which all domestic issues depended. He affirmed that the perceived diminution of British power was but an illusion produced by the ineffectual Gladstone Ministry: “I express here my confident conviction that there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible.”110 Disraeli was committed to restoring British prestige on the continent, and naturally he first looked to Berlin.

*It was only the second time since 1832 that the Conservative Party won a general election. Jonathan Parry argues (pp. 276–332) that public perceptions of the Gladstone Ministry’s weakness, born during the Franco–Prussian War, played a significant part in bringing about the electoral results. See: Jonathan Parry, The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 276-77.
Shortly after assuming office, Disraeli’s foreign secretary, Lord Derby, reached out to the German ambassador, Count Münster, and voiced high hopes for Anglo-German partnership.*

Bismarck’s policy, however, manifested no discernible changes. In May 1874 the National Liberals extended the *Kulturkampf* even further.† On July 13, 1874, Bismarck’s campaign against the Vatican nearly cost him his life when a Catholic copper’s apprentice, Eduard Kullman, fired a bullet into his hand. Unsurprisingly, Bismarck used the incident to support his accusation that the Center Party was an enemy of the German Empire, saying to a Center Party deputy in the Reichstag: “You may thrust Kullman aside, but he nevertheless belongs to you.” †† The British press widely condemned Bismarck’s cynical use of the incident. “In this speech of Prince Bismarck’s,” declared the *Pall Mall Gazette*, “there is a degree of recklessness, an ostentatious refusal or an inability to be bound by any of the ordinary rules of human prudence.” †‡ Just when there seemed to be an opening for Anglo-German partnership, Bismarck alienated the British with his fitful outbursts.

As Bismarck’s policy seemed as aggressive as ever, the French vigorously lobbied the Disraeli Ministry to see the danger Germany posed to European security. Gavard, the French chargé d’affaires in London, implored Derby to consider the growing power of the German navy, which had added three ironclads since 1871. ‡ While this information caught Derby’s attention, it was not enough to convince the British Foreign Office to adopt the French perspective.

In December 1874, a Belgian boilermaker named Duchesne

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* On February 28, 1874, Disraeli told Münster that he “had never believed even in Napoleon III’s lifetime that France was, or ever could be, a sincere ally of England. The only people who could go hand in hand, as must ever appear more plainly, were Germany and England.” Quoted in Winifred Taffs, “The War Scare of 1875 (I),” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 9, no. 26 (December 1930), p. 341.

† The Reichstag passed a law that permitted the German government to arrest, banish, or deprive citizenship from any priest who had been removed under the 1873 Falk Laws. Shortly thereafter, all Prussian sees were vacant, and 1,400 parishes were without vicars. Arlinghaus, “Kulturkampf,” p. 366; Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 63.

‡ These ironclads were much too heavy to use for just the protection of commercial vessels. Langer, *European Alliances*, p. 42.
sent a letter to the Archbishop of Paris offering to assassinate Bismarck for sixty thousand francs. Obtained and published by the German press, the letter caused a stir in both Berlin and London, and Bismarck responded by dispatching a note to Belgium urging the revision of Belgian law to prevent such violent threats in the future.* At about the same time Bismarck sent Joseph von Radowitz, chief of Germany’s department for Eastern affairs, on a special mission to St. Petersburg.† The assignment of such a high-ranking German diplomat to the Russian capital for no perceptible reason elicited gloomy speculations throughout Europe; and one of the most popular was that Radowitz had been sent to offer the czar support for his eastern ambitions in exchange for a free hand against France.‡ Less than a year after Disraeli entered office, Britain’s estrangement from Bismarckian Germany was nearly complete. The chancellor now worried the British not only with his words, but also with his actions; Bismarck’s note to Belgium and Radowitz’s mysterious mission to St. Petersburg seemed to threaten Britain’s vital interests in Belgian neutrality and the preservation of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, recognizing Britain’s misgivings and fearing Bismarck’s ominous designs on his own country, Decazes resolved to rally London against German aggression.‡

Franco-German tensions evolved into a full-blown crisis on March 13, when the French passed the Cadre Law, adding a fourth battalion to each regiment of the French army.‡¶ Both the German military establishment and the press were thrown into

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* The British public followed the Duchesne affair closely. Belgium, of course, remained the central zone of British interests on the continent. See “Plot Against Bismarck’s Life,” The Star (Saint Peter Fort, England), December 29, 1874, and “Prince Bismarck,” The Times, December 23, 1874, pg. 5, col. A. Fearful rumors about the contents of Bismarck’s note to Belgium also circulated the British press. See “Germany and Belgium,” The Times, April 22, 1875, pg. 5, col. G.

† In his memoirs, Bismarck states that he sent Radowitz to St. Petersburg because Gorchakov, the Russian chancellor, refused to allow his diplomats to communicate with Bismarck in Berlin, and instead managed Russo-German relations solely through the German diplomatic corps in St. Petersburg. Bismarck, Bismarck, vol. 2, p. 190.

‡ Decazes and the French government found the German government’s embargo on the exportation of horses (March 2, 1875) particularly troubling. Apparently, the German government enacted the embargo after receiving reports that the France government had placed orders for 10,000 horses from Germany. E.T.S. Dugdale, ed., German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914, Vol. 1: Bismarck’s Relations with England, 1871-1890 (London: Methuen & Co., 1928), p. 2.
frenzy. Moltke calculated that the law would add 144,000 men to the French forces, and the newspaper Nationalzeitung described it as an “ad hoc” measure that could only have an immediate, aggressive purpose.\(^1\)\(^1\)\(^5\) Although German scaremongering strengthened Decazes’ case, the British government was not convinced that a Franco-German war was imminent. “I do not know and cannot conjecture the cause of Decazes’ anxiety,” wrote Derby, “Nothing has passed or is passing in any part of Europe to justify alarm as to an early disturbance of the peace.”\(^1\)\(^1\)\(^6\)

At this stage of the crisis, Britain was only concerned about Bismarck’s intentions vis-à-vis Belgium and the Eastern question; the idea that Germany might invade France was considered too outlandish to take seriously.\(^1\)\(^1\)\(^7\)

Then, in early April 1875, a series of incendiary German newspaper articles finally prickled British nerves. Reaching its climax with the infamous Berlin Post article of April 8—provocatively titled “Is war in sight?”—the press campaign was universally believed to be Bismarck’s doing.\(^1\)\(^1\)\(^8\) That the German chancellor was commissioning articles affirming the imminence of war could not but stir Britain and indeed all of Europe. With the exception of Odo Russell, even the foreign diplomats in Berlin were convinced that war was looming.\(^1\)\(^1\)\(^9\) And despite Russell’s assurances that “Bismarck is at his old tricks again” and “this crisis will blow over like so many others,” Derby, unaccustomed to the chancellor’s methods, seems to have lost faith in Bismarck’s intentions.\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^0\) “The disturbing leading article in the Post had become known here that morning,” reported Count Münster to Bismarck from London, “and I found the Minister [Derby], usually so calm, in a somewhat excited state of mind. He said that it almost seemed as though the fears in Paris of an attack by Germany were not altogether unfounded.”\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^1\)

After dinner at the British embassy in Berlin on April 21, Radowitz—back from his mission to Russia—engaged in spirited conversation with the French ambassador, Gontaut-Biron. Though at present, Radowitz said, Germans were confident that war was not imminent, there was certainly cause for anxiety.\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^2\) Had Radowitz ended the discussion then, nothing would have come of it, but he proceeded. “[I]f revenge is the inmost thought of France—
and it cannot be otherwise—,” said Radowitz, “why wait to attack her until she has recovered her strength and contracted her alliances? You must agree that from a political, from a philosophical, even from a Christian point of view, these deductions are well grounded and these preoccupations are fitted to guide the policy of Germany.”123 What Radowitz was espousing was the theory of preventive war, which had been discussed in military circles and received with trepidation in France, but never thought to be the accepted doctrine of the German government. Yet now a high-level German diplomat had mentioned it, and Gontaut believed it was uttered as official policy. He quickly transcribed the conversation and sent it to Decazes.

Now possessing what he considered definitive evidence that Germany was eyeing war, Decazes commissioned M. de Blowitz, Paris correspondent for The Times, to “expose the entire situation.”124 He also forwarded Gontaut’s report to all the other European capitals.125 Perhaps it was upon learning of Radowitz’s statements that Odo Russell also began doubting Bismarck’s intentions. “The prospect of another war fills me with horror and disgust, and if Bismarck lives a few years longer I do not see how it can be prevented,” wrote Russell in late April.126 His concerns were further heightened on May 1 when Baron Nothomb, the Belgian ambassador to Germany, informed him of recent conversations with Moltke and Bismarck. Moltke had said that war was inevitable within one year unless France revoked the Cadre Law, and Bismarck had spoken even more disturbingly: “Tell your King to get his army ready for defence, because Belgium may be invaded by France sooner than we expect.” As for Nothomb, his personal fear was that the German army might occupy Belgium.127 Russell had been slow to believe that Germany might actually be planning for war, but by May 1875 the preponderance of evidence was impossible to ignore.

With apprehensions mounting, the British government moved to weigh options for curbing Germany’s schemes. The first inclination was to hope that another European power would intervene. “Is there no hope of Russian interference to maintain peace?” asked Derby, “It cannot be the interest of Russia to have France
destroyed and Germany omnipotent.” Interestingly, it seems to have been Queen Victoria who first seriously suggested taking direct action to ensure peace. On May 5 she told Disraeli that “every means should be used to prevent such a monstrous iniquity as a war,” and proposed that Britain “ought, in concert with the other Powers, to hold the strongest language to both Powers, declaring they must not fight, for that Europe would not stand another war!” The next day Odo Russell happily reported that Count Shuvalov, Russian ambassador to Britain, had spent the night in Berlin and had informed him that the czar planned to visit the German capital on May 10, upon which he would “insist on the maintenance of peace in Europe, even at the cost of rupture with Germany.” Disraeli recognized an opportunity to reassert Britain’s influence in European affairs and expunge the Gladstone Ministry’s legacy of diffidence. He communicated his thoughts to Derby on May 6: “My own impression is that we [should] construct some concerted movement to preserve the peace of Europe, like Pam did when he baffled France and expelled the Egyptians from Syria.” That same day Blowitz’s article appeared in The Times under the title “A French Scare.” The stage for intervention was set.

On May 8, Derby telegraphed Odo Russell instructing him to act alongside Alexander II for the preservation of peace in Berlin. Meanwhile Count Shuvalov returned to London, where he promised British diplomats that Russian expansion into Central Asia would cease. While this guarantee did not materially affect the course of events, it was remarkable in and of itself: the present threat of Germany was considered so severe that Russia and Britain were willing to shelve their Great Game competition in Asia to check it. May 10 was the day of decision. Odo Russell and Bismarck ate dinner together, and the British ambassador politely delivered his government’s démarche. Bismarck, who was very fond of Russell, responded gracefully and even expressed appreciation for Britain’s concern for peace. But toward the end of the evening, Gorchakov, the Russian chancellor, barged into the dining room and expressed his own government’s policy with distinctly less tact. To make matters worse, he revealed that Britain and Russia had
coordinated the intercession. Bismarck was infuriated by Gorchakov, whose pretensions of playing the peacemaker he called a “circus performance.” Nevertheless, peace was secured, and Bismarck’s animosity fell upon Gorchakov alone.

The British government was pleased with its performance. Disraeli fancied that the intervention was the most vigorous act of British foreign policy since Palmerston’s time, and he congratulated Derby for his work: “Your policy seems to be very popular, and very successful ... We must not be afraid of saying ‘Bo to a goose.’” Derby agreed that the policy was wise, not least because it “involved no risk and cost no trouble, while it has given us the appearance of having helped, more than we really did, to bring about the result.” Meanwhile in Germany, the Crown Prince and his wife—who had both been so hopeful for a great liberal partnership between Britain and Germany—were left searching for answers. The Crown Prince speculated that tensions might have been overblown by Bismarck’s indiscrete utterances, and the Crown Princess complained that the chancellor “remains the sole and omnipotent ruler of our destinies.” Queen Victoria, whose letters to her daughter were typically so gentle, proudly wrote the Crown Princess taking credit for Britain’s policy, and providing a harsh analysis of Anglo-German relations: “No one wishes more, as you know, than I do for England and Germany to go well together; but Bismarck is so overbearing, violent, grasping and unprincipled that no one can stand it, and all agreed that he was becoming like the first Napoleon whom Europe had to join in PUTTING down.”

The British had always harbored misgivings about Bismarck. Except for a short period in the early stages of the Kulturkampf, most Englishmen could probably agree with the German Crown Princess’ estimation that Bismarck was “mediaeval” and that “the true theories of liberty and of modern government are Hebrew to him.” Yet despite Bismarck’s obvious power, the British had largely refused to let the chancellor color their hopes for an ultimately liberal and peace-loving Germany. As an “enemy of progress,” Bismarck and his influence would only be temporary. He would eventually be swept away by the tide of history, and the Ger-
man state would then finally reflect the liberal wishes of its people. By May 1875, however, Disraeli and his colleagues had recognized this reasoning as illusory. Four years to the day from the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt, Britain joined with czarist Russia to counter an increasingly illiberal Germany. Far from the vision of Morier’s dreams, “in which free and united Germany, in alliance with England, should impose peace on Europe, and inaugurate a golden age of international security,” by 1875 Bismarck resembled Napoleon in the eyes of British statesmen, and Germany seemed more likely to disturb the peace than impose it. The balance of power had been restored, but not in the way the British had expected four years prior.

FORM AND SUBSTANCE: BRITAIN, BISMARCK, AND THE IDEA OF GERMAN UNIFICATION

Not for nothing is history associated with the figure of Nemesis, which defeats man by fulfilling his wishes in a different form or by answering his prayers too completely. – Henry Kissinger

“By defeating Austria and France while unifying Germany under Prussia, Bismarck could not help but profoundly challenge the European balance of power,” writes David Calleo in The German Problem Reconsidered. “A coalition of hostile powers was nearly inevitable, and indeed appeared as early as 1875, when Britain and Russia both made clear they would not tolerate another German victory over France.” The Anglo-Russian intercession of 1875 was no small event in the diplomatic history of Europe; after a long period of aloofness from European affairs, Britain set aside its Central Asian rivalry to counterbalance German power on the continent. But to describe the Anglo-Russian action as the work of a “coalition of hostile powers” whose emergence was “nearly inevitable” after German unification is to overlook the utterances of British statesmen made all the way up to 1875.

Far from viewing German unity as an eventuality to be prevented, the British political classes tended to believe that a unified Germany would promote European peace and stability. The British
ambassador to Prussia summarized this outlook during the Aus-
tro-Prussian War in 1866:

I could not view with any dissatisfaction or fear of danger to
England an increase of power to Prussia. She was the great Prot-
estant state of continental Europe. She represented the intelli-
gence, the progress and wealth of Germany. We have ... nothing
to fear from her. She will become a Power of great importance
in maintaining the peace of Central Europe. She will gradually
advance in a constitutional system of government, and she will
play the part of a moderator in Europe. We have much in com-
mon with her—our race, our religion, our mutual interests are
all interwoven with Prussia, and our political interests should be
identical.\textsuperscript{146}

British support for German unification rested on two pillars: the
geopolitical premise that a robust Germany at the center of Eu-
rope would restrain France and Russia from challenging Britain's
extra-continental dominance, and the sociocultural premise that a
unified Germany must be liberal and, in turn, Britain’s “natural ally.”
British statesmen wanted not only the \textit{form} of united Germany but
also a certain \textit{substance}; their mistake was to assume that the for-
mer would inexorably produce the latter.

Hence it is unsurprising that England received news of Prus-
sia’s victory at Sedan with loud cheers. France, which had caused
tremendous upheaval on the continent for over two centuries, had
fallen to Prussia, which was a symbol of restraint and shared im-
portant religious, cultural, and ideological ties with Britain. More-
over, Queen Victoria’s daughter was married to the Crown Prince
of Prussia, who socialized in liberal circles and wrote passionately
of “a free German Imperial State, that in the true sense of the word
should march at the forefront of civilisation and be in a position to
develop and bring to bear all noble ideals of the modern world.”\textsuperscript{147}
But Prussia’s behavior in the aftermath of Sedan, including the
bombardment of Paris and especially the annexation of Alsace-
Lorraine, chafed at British ideas of morality and justice, which were
particularly important to Prime Minister Gladstone.

Most educated Englishmen of the era—who were all \textit{liberal}
by continental standards—were steeped in the “Whig interpretation” of history. For these men, history was teleological, unfolding ever-higher levels of progress and more perfect forms of liberal government. All people were essentially the same; the only difference between nations was their relative positions on the same path to enlightenment. There was no room in this paradigm for great men. Individuals could either swim with the tide of history or be washed away; they certainly could not alter its flow. In his quest for German unification, Bismarck swam with the tide, and thus should be supported; in his reactionary and aggressive policies, Bismarck swam against it, and thus could be ignored. Germany’s troublesome behavior between the Battle of Sedan and the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt could be written off to Bismarck, whose influence would be ephemeral. By 1871, therefore, Britain’s highest hopes were shaken, but its ultimate faith in united Germany remained.

British doubts, however, were amplified in the years 1871–1874. In its early stages, the Kulturkampf enjoyed popularity in England. Secularizing German public schools was considered the epitome of progress, and Bismarck’s breaking with the Junker Conservatives to combat clerical obscurantism alongside the National Liberals seemed cause for celebration. The confidence of British statesmen and intellectuals was momentarily restored. But British enthusiasm for the Kulturkampf faded when it lost all semblance of proportion; indeed it was impossible for the British liberal mind to support policies that enabled the state to imprison Jesuits and priests at will. Compounded with Bismarck’s revival of the triple alliance of Germany, Russia, and Austria, the increasingly repressive nature of the Kulturkampf called into question the very liberalism of the National Liberal Party, and the English were forced to reevaluate their conviction that a unified Germany would be Britain’s ideological ally.

When the Kulturkampf entered the realm of foreign policy, and German officials began making threats to both France and Belgium, the fears of British statesmen came fully alive. Perhaps Germany would not only be illiberal at home, but also a menace to continental stability and possibly even Britain’s vital interests.
This was the worst of both worlds—both geopolitical and socio-cultural premises were failing; Germany’s disappointing *substance* seemed to reverse all expected benefits of the *form* of unification. In 1874 Prime Minister Disraeli entered office preaching the return of Britain as a force in international politics, and in May 1875 he got his chance. By the time of the Anglo-Russian intercession at Berlin on May 10, Bismarck’s tactless press campaign and the bellicerent statements of a variety of German officials had convinced virtually the entire British Foreign Office that Germany must be restrained. Even Odo Russell, whom Bismarck was sure harbored no suspicions of Germany’s intentions vis-à-vis France, applauded the decision to intervene. 

Thomas Carlyle, one of Britain’s most ardent Germanophiles, rejected the “Whig interpretation” of history. “[A]ll things that we see standing accomplished in the world,” wrote Carlyle, “are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world.”

By 1875, it was clear that the mere *form* of German unity would not produce the *substance* so desired by British intellectuals; Bismarck was one of Carlyle’s “Great Men,” and the Germany born in 1871 was unmistakably his offspring. Perhaps the most ironic element of the situation is that as far back as 1854 British statesmen had identified Bismarck with ideas antithetical to English liberalism, and some had even speculated that his future rise to power could only signify that reactionary forces had triumphed in Prussia. Yet these same statesmen believed nationalism and liberalism were inextricably tethered, and thus they stomached Bismarck’s aggressive means in the belief that not even three wars could thwart Germany from liberal development. But, as it happened, in uniting Germany with “blood and iron,” Bismarck successfully severed nationalism

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*Bismarck was shocked by the British intercession. As he wrote to Münster a few days afterward: “This phenomenon to me is all the more astonishing since Lord Odo Russell has always reported from here in a contrary sense. I consider him much too good and truthful an observer, considering how long he has had before him evidence of our friendly policy, to have written any differently.” Bismarck to Münster (May 14, 1875). Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, vol. 1, p. 9; Odo Russell wrote to Derby five days after the intervention: “I was delighted at the course pursued by Her Majesty’s Government and at the instructions you sent to me, which I feel sure will do good, both at home and abroad.” Odo Russell to Derby (May 15, 1875). Newton, *Lord Lyons*, vol. 2, p. 80.*
from liberalism; and it was not until 1875 that the British finally acknowledged his protean influence.

As Franco-German tensions heightened in 1874, Robert Morier reflected wistfully on “the irony of fortune which grants to men what they earnestly pray for, but usually in such a way as to render the gift useless or worse than useless.” So eager to see Germany unified, and so confident of the inseparability of nationalism and liberalism, Morier had grudgingly supported Bismarck’s wars. But those wars had consequences beyond German unification: notably an enduring Franco-German antagonism, enshrined in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, and the vindication of military force as the critical instrument of German statecraft. British statesmen ought not have been surprised, therefore, when German officials decided that aggressive threats were the best means to make France accommodate their interests in 1875. The “war-insight” crisis marked the culmination of nineteenth-century Britain’s disillusionment with the idea of German unification, and though it certainly did not make a future Anglo-German conflict inevitable, it revealed for the first time the constellation of powers that would clash in the great wars of the twentieth century.

Notes

3 A number of works providing good narratives of European diplomatic history between 1870 and 1875 have been published. Anglo-German political relations in this period are covered particularly well in William L. Langer, European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); Raymond James Sontag, Germany and England: Background of Conflict, 1848-1894 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969); and Paul Kennedy, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).
5 Quoted in Ibid.
8 Taylor, Struggle, p. 213.
9 Murray, Robert Morier, x, 98. A co-founder of the Cosmopolitan Club with Henry Reeve and A.H. Layard, and an original member of the Cobden Club, Morier was an active participant in English liberal intellectual circles. He was also a renowned expert on German affairs.
11 Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, Studies in European Politics (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1866), p. 234, p. 245. Grant Duff held firm to such views despite his harsh criticisms of Bismarck. As he wrote in 1866: “[I]t is not too much to say that his [Bismarck’s] action upon the affairs of Europe has hitherto been simply evil.”
13 Mosse, European Powers, p. 365.
15 Ramsay, Idealism and Foreign Policy, p. 277.
17 Hans Rothfels, “1848—One Hundred Years After,” The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 20, No. 4 (December 1948), pp. 291-319. Rothfels describes (pp. 300-301) German liberals’ intense and even aggressive antagonism toward Russia during the uprisings of 1848.
18 Ibid., pp. 181–83.
19 Gladstone to Queen Victoria (July 15, 1870). George E. Buckle, ed., The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence and Journals Between the Years 1862 and 1878, Vol. II: 1870-1878 (London: John Murray, 1926), p. 34.
20 The Crown Princess Frederick to Queen Victoria (July 18, 1871). Ibid., p. 43.
21 Queen Victoria to the Crown Princess Frederick (July 20, 1870). Ibid., p. 44.
28 Quoted in Langer, European Alliances, pp. 10–11.
29 Taylor, Struggle, p. 211.
33 Gladstone to Granville (September 24, 1870). Ramm, Gladstone and Granville, vol. 1, p. 131.


Granville to Gladstone (October 7, 1870). Ramm, Gladstone and Granville, vol. 1, p. 139.

Gladstone to Granville (September 30, 1870). Ibid., p. 135.


Queen Augusta of Prussia to Queen Victoria (September 25, 1870). Buckle, Letters of Queen Victoria, vol. 2, p. 73.

The Crown Prince Frederick’s diary (September 12-14, 1870). Ponsonby, Empress Frederick, p. 93.


Quoted in Ibid., p. 124.

Granville to Gladstone (October 9, 1870). Ramm, Gladstone and Granville, vol. 1, p. 141.


Thomas Carlyle, “Mr. Carlyle on the War,” Letter to the Editor, The Times, November 18, 1870, pg. 8, col. D.

“We Publish to-day a letter from Mr. Carlyle,” Editors’ Note, The Times, November 18, 1870, pg. 7, col. B.


Eyck, Bismarck, p. 190.


Robert Morier to Ernst von Stockmar (December 15, 1870). Wemyss, Memoirs and Letters of Morier, p. 239.

Ernst von Stockmar to Robert Morier (December 17, 1870). Ibid.


Italics added.


Ibid., p. 22.

Dora Neill Raymond, British Policy and Opinion During the Franco–Prussian War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), p. 310. The publication of The Fight at Dame


Ibid., p. 643.

Ibid., p. 641.


Ibid., p. 32.


Bismarck was even prepared to offer the pope asylum in Germany. See Bismarck, Bismarck, vol. 2, p. 135.


Langer, European Alliances, p. 36.

Papal infallibility was proclaimed in the constitution Pastor Aeternus on July 18, 1870; France declared war on Prussia on July 19 of that same year. Murray, Robert Morier, p. 213.

“London, Friday, September 6, 1872,” The Times, Editorial, September 6, 1872, pg. 7, col. A.

The National Liberals controlled 155 of the 399 seats. Craig, Germany, p. 64.


The appointment of Falk was deemed important enough in Britain to be announced in The Times. See “Germany,” The Times, January 31, 1872, pg. 5, col. A.

Odo Russell had spent twelve years as British representative at the Vatican before his assignment in Germany.


“Germany,” The Standard (London), June 11, 1872, pg. 5.


“Prince Bismarck,” The Times, March 16, 1872, pg. 9, col. D.

The Jesuit bill's passage in the Reichstag elicited announcements in a variety of British newspapers. See “Closing of the German Parliament,” The Morning Post (London), June 20, 1872, pg. 5.

Eyck, Bismarck, p. 206. Whereas Lasker was one of the only National Liberal officials to denounce the Jesuit bill, the Catholic Center Party considered it an abomination that confirmed the National Liberal Party's maleness. August Reichensperger, a Center Party official, described the anti-Jesuit law as 'a declaration of modern liberalism's bankruptcy in the field of the spirit.' Quoted in Craig, Germany, p. 77.

“Germany,” The Standard (London), July 4, 1872, pg. 5.


“Sympathy with the Jesuits,” The Times, July 17, 1872, pg. 11, col. A.

Odo Russell to Granville (September 12, 1872). Winifred Taffs, ed.,


89 Ibid., p. 41.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.


95 *The Times* claimed that Chambord “cannot speak of the Pope without tears in his eyes.” See “Ultramontane Plots Against Prussia,” *The Times*, March 13, 1872, pg. 12, col. A.

96 The final French payment was made eighteen months ahead of schedule. Craig, p. 106.


100 Crown Princess Frederick to Queen Victoria (October 4, 1873). Ibid., p. 284.

101 “The Elections to the German Parliament,” *The Times*, January 17, 1874, pg. 12, col. A.


104 Queen Victoria to Emperor Wilhelm of Germany (February 10, 1874). Ibid., p. 314.


106 Ibid., p. 53.

107 Ramsay, *Idealism and Foreign Policy*, p. 357.


109 Disraeli’s speech at Free Trade Hall in Manchester (April 3, 1872), Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, vol. 5, p. 191. It is important to note that the key British diplomatic personnel in Germany—including Odo Russell and Robert Morier—maintained their posts despite the change of government.

110 Ibid., p. 192.


112 Ibid.

113 Taaff, “War Scare of 1875 (I),” p. 337.


116 Derby to Lyons (March 16, 1875); Newton, *Lord Lyons*, vol. 2, p. 71.

117 Dr. Geffcken, a liberal German intellectual, informed Morier that “[Bismarck] is resolved to annihilate Belgium, which he declares to be the central Government of the political Catholicism, and the heart of coalitional conspiracies.” Dr. Geffcken to Morier (March 27, 1875). Wemyss, *Memoirs and Letters of Morier*, p. 333.


119 As Russell reported: “Half the Diplomatic Body have been here since yesterday to tell me that war was imminent, and when I seek to calm their nerves and disprove their anticipations, they think that I am thoroughly bamboozled by Bismarck.” Russell to Derby (April 10, 1875), Newton, *Lord Lyons*, vol. 2, p. 72.

120 Russell to Derby (April 10, 1875). Ibid.

121 Münster to Bismarck (April 13, 1875). Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, vol. 1, p. 4.


123 Quoted in Fuller, “War-Scare of 1875,” p. 203.


126 Russell continued: “The Emperor’s powers of resistance are over; he does what Bismarck wishes, and the Crown Prince, peace-loving as he is, has not sufficient independence of character to resist Bismarck’s all-powerful mind and will.” Odo Russell to Lyons (April 24, 1875); Newton, *Lord Lyons*, vol. 2, p. 74.

127 If Germany was resolved to go to war against France, the German army might occupy Belgium as a prelude. Odo Russell to Derby (May 1, 1875). Ibid.

128 Derby to Russell (May 3, 1875). Ibid., p. 75.


131 Odo Russell to Derby (May 6, 1875). Newton, *Lord Lyons*, vol. 2, p. 76.


133 “A French Scare,” From a French Correspondent [M. de Blowitz], *The New York Times*, May 6, 1875, pg. 8, col. A.

134 Derby also informed Russell that the British government had proffered the same suggestion to both the Austrian and Italian governments. Derby to Odo Russell (May 8, 1875). Temperley and Penson, *Foundations*, pp. 352–53.


137 Disraeli to Derby (May 18,1875). Ibid., p. 423.

138 Derby to Disraeli (May 20, 1875). Ibid., p. 424.

139 The Crown Prince wrote a letter to Queen Victoria two weeks after the affair: “I am afraid we shall never accurately find out, who is in reality to be blamed for getting up these alarming rumours. But I could not help observing that perhaps our Chancellor himself, from his state of nervous irritation, might sometimes be induced to utter remarks, which are liable to be misconstrued and are often interpreted as meaning more than they were originally intended to mean.” Crown Prince Frederick of Germany to Queen Victoria (May 24, 1875). Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, vol. 2, p. 401.


141 Queen Victoria to the Crown Princess Frederick (June 8, 1875). Buckle, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, vol. 2, p. 405.
142 Crown Princess Frederick to Queen Victoria (June 5, 1875). Ponsonby, Empress Frederick, p. 139.
147 Crown Prince Frederick’s diary (October 24, 1870). Ponsonby, Empress Frederick, p. 104.
149 Kennedy, Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, p. 9.

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