

# The Crown AND The Cabinet:

FIVE LETTERS

ON

The Biography of the Prince Consort.

BY

“VERAX.”

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REPRINTED FROM THE “MANCHESTER WEEKLY TIMES.”

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DECEMBER 22ND, 1877.

MR. THEODORE MARTIN'S third volume of the "Life of the Prince Consort" is as interesting as were the first and second, and it may be even more useful if the English people catch from it the hints which gleam upon almost every page, and venture to infer that the jealousies which once guarded the working of the Constitution from the undue influence of the Crown, though they have grown unfashionable, cannot safely be regarded as obsolete. The publication of the volume at the present time appears to me to be an indiscretion, and an indiscretion of the gravest kind. Upon the grounds which lead me to make this assertion I should also be justified in regarding its publication at the present juncture as suggesting a purpose slightly wanting in good faith. The declared object of the work is to acquaint us with the thoughts and actions of the Prince Consort. On the whole it is a noble theme; and it is so, not because of the elevated position in society which the Prince adorned, nor of the extreme importance and, in that sense, the dignity, of the matters with which he concerned himself, but because the Prince was a



noble character, pure in his life, unselfish in his aims, and of an integrity which I for one believe to have been almost perfect. It is a privilege to be the biographer of such a man, and Mr. Theodore Martin is worthy of the privilege. But it rests with those who have undertaken the task to choose the time for issuing the several instalments of their labours to the world, and, though Mr. Theodore Martin's name is on the title page, I do not know that it would be fair to consider him in relation to this point as holding the position of a responsible minister. Three or six months' delay in issuing the present volume would have been no irreparable misfortune in the history of the work, whereas its appearance just now excites a suspicion that it was intended to bear heavily in the scale of opinion which is most adverse to Russia and most favourable to war. Such an effect is so likely that it cannot have escaped the uncommon sagacity which is engaged in the execution of this literary task, and it is in accordance with a sound legal maxim to hold that a result which must have been foreseen must also have been intended. This, I have ventured to say, is indiscreet, and the indiscretion reveals a purpose which is apart from the main object of the work. We are also allowed to infer that, in order to accomplish this purpose, the original plan of publication has been changed. It was intended to complete the work in three volumes, and if this intention had been adhered to it would have been necessary to pass lightly over the period of the Crimean war. But instead of three volumes we are to have four, and the reason is obvious. This third volume is a diplomatic and



parliamentary history of the war, and it exhibits the Prince in a new light. He is no longer, as we have heretofore known him, the calm and thoughtful observer, penetrated with a sense of the responsibilities of his position, eager to put the best construction upon doubtful appearances of conduct or of policy, and a warm lover of peace. His character seems to be wholly changed. He appears to be borne away on the wings of impetuous passion and of almost personal antipathies. He figures before us as a vehement and bitter opponent of Russia, as an advocate of war at all risks, and to the last extremes. The ruling families of England and Russia are now connected by close bonds of relationship, and I cannot but wonder what the Czar will think of his august connection as he reads this volume. He is not the man whose policy the Prince arraigns; but the man, if not himself, was his own father, and filial feeling is apt to take fire at insults to a father's memory. The extracts which are given from the Prince's letters, pointed as they are by the comments of his biographer, may be held to have a direct application to the policy of Russia as exhibited to-day, and I have no doubt will be so applied. They are of the ordinary Russophobic type, and remind me at least of the writings of the late David Urquhart, or, to take a more recent illustration, of the speech delivered the other day by Lord Stratheden and Campbell to Lord Derby at the Foreign Office. I think we have a right to complain of the firing off of this bouquet of fireworks just now. People are sure to say: These are the Queen's



opinions; this is what the Queen wishes us to understand; this is the side the Queen takes in the controversy which Parliament is being summoned to determine. And in my opinion the people will have reason for so saying. This instalment of the Prince Consort's Life is a Message from the Crown, not conveyed to us through responsible Ministers, who would be able to withhold anything of which they disapproved, or to soften touches which they thought too severe or wanting in prudence, but a Message sent straight to the nation over the heads of Ministers, and only too well adapted to fire the resentments which those who are responsible for the policy of the country might have wished to allay. Russia is not the only Power which this volume holds up in an invidious and even hateful light. Prussia comes in for the severest castigation. It is well known that in 1854 we counted upon the help of Prussia and Austria in resisting Russia. Austria went with us a little way, consenting to occupy the present Roumania till the war was over, but Prussia failed us altogether. "What have we to do with the Turk?" said the King of Prussia in a letter to the Queen. "Whether he stands or falls in no way concerns the industrious Rhinelanders and the husbandmen of the Riesengebirg and Bernstein." Prussia had other ends in view. Statesmen at Berlin had already conceived the national policy which has since been carried out with such consummate success, and they refused to shipwreck their prospects by joining us in a war which did not concern them. It is difficult to give an idea of the polite but boundless vilification which the Prince Consort pours upon



Prussia for this decision. In a letter to Baron Stockmar, the Prince says: "Prussia's conduct is truly revolting, and the King is looked upon by all political men here with profound contempt." The King is elsewhere described as the tool of Russia, as not a King, but a nobody, who does dishonour to a once splendid monarchy, sacrificing his duty to craven fear, and trembling in his shoes lest in some freak of resentment, which, however, he will pawn his soul rather than provoke, the Russians should turn round and make him uncomfortable at Berlin. The question is raised whether Prussia, having insisted upon remaining neutral, shall be allowed to participate in the peace negotiations when the time comes for putting an end to the war, and the Prince replies imperatively "No;" Prussia shall be made to stand outside in the isolation befitting her pusillanimity, and be allowed no voice in the termination of a conflict the cost and the sacrifices of which she has refused to share. Of course this volume will be read at Berlin. What will they think of it? Prince Bismarck has no doubt a copy at Varzin, and in the intervals of dictating despatches he is amusing himself with its perusal. What impression will it produce upon his mind? One impression no German can avoid. If Prussia had gone to war in 1854, if she had aspired to deserve the Prince Consort's eulogies as she saw fit to brave his censures, the future then drawing near to her would have been shipwrecked and utterly lost. She would have squandered her strength in a struggle far away from her frontiers, the bones of her industrious Rhinelanders would have whitened the plains of the Crimea, she would have lighted up irreconcilable



enmities in the breasts of her nearest neighbours, and when the time came for France to bully her—a time which would probably have arrived all the sooner if she had taken part in the war—she would have been unable to cope with her assailant, and to-day, instead of ruling Germany, she would have lost her Rhine provinces, and might even have been reduced to the rank of a third-rate Power, cooped up between the Oder and the Elbe. Such are the blunders which sagacious men may commit when they lay down the law for other countries, and their failure in one direction attaches some suspicion to their infallibility in another. I can fancy a grim smile coming over the face of Prince Bismarck as he reads these diatribes of the Prince Consort. Prussia is again neutral, but this time she is mistress of the situation. France she has disabled, she keeps Austria quiet, and under the protection of her friendly neutrality Russia prosecutes a war which, from what motives soever it was undertaken, will have for its result the reversal of the conditions established by the Crimean war. The question is now raised whether England shall participate in the peace negotiations which are likely soon to begin, and if the Czar wants to know what answer to make to our pretensions Prince Bismarck can help him to it by pointing to the passage in this volume where the Prince Consort protests in vehement terms against the injustice of conceding the similar pretensions which he thought might be urged by Prussia. The Prince Consort was indefatigable with his pen. He was incessantly engaged in writing letters or in drawing up elaborate Memoranda to be submitted to some Minister of



the Crown, for his guidance in the transaction of affairs. When the army needs re-organising, a schedule of recommendations is sent to the Duke of Newcastle as embodying in the Prince's opinion the precise steps which ought to be undertaken. When it is decided to invade the Crimea, the Prince is ready with a programme of operations, pointing out even the ground where it behoves the allies to establish their entrenched camp. When the Cabinet are about to consult upon the ultimate objects of the war, the Prince sends to Lord Clarendon a paper containing a *résumé* of the actual relations of Europe, and a demonstration of the ends towards which our energies should be directed. If there is one of the virtues of the Prince which I should feel a difficulty in defending against censorious critics, I am bound to say it would be his modesty. Here in the Cabinet were fifteen of the oldest, sagest, ripest, statesmen and administrators in the empire, yet there was not one among the chief of them whom the Prince did not undertake to advise, and a policy all cut and dried was often sent from his pen for the guidance of their collective wisdom. There were few men in the world of his age who would have felt themselves qualified for such a task. The Prince kept a keen eye upon them, and was ready to note and animadvert upon the smallest shortcomings. I cannot help pitying them. They were obliged to be civil to the Prince, but in their hearts they must often have wished him back at Coburg. Lord Aberdeen was not half warlike enough to please him. "Even yet, Aberdeen," the Prince writes to Baron Stockmar, "cannot rise to the level of the situation." The aged states-



man would persist in being too candid or too humanitarian in his views. On one occasion he committed himself in this way in a speech in the House of Lords. In reply to Lord Lyndhurst, who had been denouncing the encroaching policy of Russia, Lord Aberdeen ventured to point out that in 1829, though the Russians were within twenty miles of Constantinople, not an inch of Turkish territory in Europe was insisted on as the price of the Treaty of Adrianople. He was found fault with for this admission, and among others probably by the Prince Consort—though let it be understood that this is my surmise, and that his biographer does not say so. But what does take place is this: Lord Aberdeen writes a letter to the Queen informing her of his intention to take an early opportunity of correcting the misapprehension produced by his speech; and this, among other things, is what the Queen says in reply: "The Queen hopes that in the vindication of his own conduct to-day, which ought to be triumphant, as it wants, in fact, no vindication, he will not undertake the ungrateful and injurious task of vindicating the Emperor of Russia from any of the exaggerated charges brought against him and his policy, at a time when there is enough in that policy to make us fight with all our might against it." I make no comments upon these remarks. My loyalty forbids. It is a somewhat graver matter when, after Lord Aberdeen's retirement from office, we find the Prince calling him to book for the parliamentary conduct of some of his late colleagues, and striving to influence the course of a debate then about to come off in the House of Commons. In a speech delivered towards



the close of the session of 1855 Mr. Gladstone urged that we should make peace on the terms offered by Russia. Sir Francis Baring was to bring on a motion in the House of Commons in a few days, and the Queen and the Prince Consort were afraid that Mr. Sidney Herbert and Sir James Graham might take the same line as Mr. Gladstone. All three were Peelites, the political friends of Lord Aberdeen, and greatly under his influence; so the Prince sends "Phipps" to request Lord Aberdeen to see him, and as the Earl cannot come he writes him a letter complaining, to quote his own words, of "the line which your former friends and colleagues, with the exception of the Duke of Newcastle, have taken on the war question." The Prince wrote in the Queen's name as well as his own, in the hope, by timely representations, to keep Mr. Sidney Herbert and Sir James Graham from speaking in favour of peace in the debate which was to begin the next day. The remonstrance failed. The two distinguished Peelites did speak in favour of peace along with Cobden and Bright. The Prince, writing to Baron Stockmar, says that they made "Russian speeches;" and Mr. Theodore Martin informs us, as under the circumstances he was almost bound to do, that their eloquence "fell flat" on the ears of the House, though, if I mistake not, it was in the course of this very debate that Mr. Bright delivered the most famous of his many famous orations. I have hitherto laboured under the superstition that it was unconstitutional on the part of the Crown to attempt to influence the proceedings of Parliament or to stifle the freedom of debate, but on Mr. Theodore Martin's testimony I must own myself



in error. I must either do this or accuse the Queen of being wanting in respect to the usages and the rights of the House of Commons, and of tampering with the representatives of the nation in the discharge of their public duties ; and this I will not do. I conclude by again expressing my regret that this volume should have been put forth at this most critical juncture. But it will have its uses, and they may go far towards making amends for the inopportuneness of its publication.





DECEMBER 29TH, 1877.

I SAID last week that in my opinion the publication of the third volume of Mr. Theodore Martin's "Life of the Prince Consort" at the present critical juncture in foreign affairs was a grave indiscretion. Whether or not I succeeded in making good that opinion is a question I must leave, and am content to leave, to the judgment of my readers. In the same spirit I venture now to submit to them the further opinion that the whole book is an indiscretion, and I am so confident of my case that I would pledge myself to abide by their decision on the sole condition that they weighed maturely the considerations I am about to adduce. An account of the private and social life of the Prince Consort, if such a book could have been written, could not have failed to be both interesting and instructive, but it would have been simply interesting and instructive. It would have been free from politics, it would have raised no knotty problems, it would have stirred no controversies, and it would have excited no hostile criticisms. Looking into such a book to see what sort of a man the Prince was as a husband and a father, and to revive our recollections of the important part he played in connection with the literary and philanthropic movements of the age, we should have found there the living records of a high type of human excellence, and a nearer insight into his virtues would have



thrown a fresh charm around the illustrious household which they once adorned. But the book which Mr. Theodore Martin has given to the world under the auspices of the Queen is brimful of politics. For the period which it covers it is the history of England and of the world from a Court point of view. It teems with controversies in which the Prince is the central figure, while around him cower, as detected and discomfited assailants, some of the foremost statesmen of the time, whose memories have a warm place in the hearts of their "deluded" countrymen. The Prince is almost always in hot water, and he has a strange fatality for creating dislikes. He can hardly say a word without being misinterpreted, and his conduct as the Queen's most intimate adviser affords a standing text for all sorts of malevolent insinuations. But, whatever the controversy may be, we are never left in doubt for a moment as to the side to which the moral balance inclines. The conclusion which shines with dazzling brightness on every page of his biography is that the Prince was never in the wrong, while his critics and opponents were never in the right. He stands before us like some immortal hero under the soft effulgence of his native heaven, a Ulysses, an Arthur, a Bayard, and an Admirable Crichton rolled in one, the mixture being so happily compounded that the several failings of the constituent personalities are expelled, and all their perfections made accordant. The world around him is described as all "mad," or "insane," or given over to the most contemptible ambitions. Serpents, dragons, and things of odious name prowl round the sacred enclosure within



which this divinity resides, and strive to annoy him by their malignant cries and noisome odours. But he is always grand and wise and calm; or, if his serenity is ever disturbed, it is simply by reflecting upon the ingratitude of those who have not the sense to comprehend him. Now this representation may be true to the life and to the letter, but we can hardly be expected to take it for granted. The reputations of some great Englishmen depend upon the result, and not reputations only, but some constitutional questions of considerable importance. Historical justice and the dictates of a watchful patriotism require us to dispute some of the conclusions which it is the main object of this book to hold forth as triumphantly established. See to what a dilemma we are driven. To decide against the Prince is to cast censures upon the Queen. These, though twain, are presented to us as politically one, so that the same shaft pierces both. "In attacking the Prince, who is one and the same with the Queen herself, the Throne is assailed." This is what the Queen said in a letter to the Earl of Aberdeen, and if the maxim was true in 1854 it is true now. What is the inference? A book which we are not expected to criticise ought never to have been published. The countless folios of manuscript in which Mr. Theodore Martin revels ought to have been sealed up and left to the literary executors of Her Majesty, to be made use of fifty years hence, when small and great can be judged with some approach to impartiality, and justice can be done to the dead without giving offence to the living. There is one way out of the dilemma. In the Memorandum published near



the end of the second volume, Baron Stockmar says that the desire to keep the name of the Queen out of public discussions is a device of the Whigs for extinguishing Royalty. A page or two later the Prince Consort—that is, the Queen—avows his agreement with the sentiments of Baron Stockmar. Hence, with Her Majesty's permission, I have no hesitation in dealing freely with Her Majesty's name. I cannot help thinking that the immunity from everything but complimentary criticism which it was assumed that our loyalty would secure for this book, has been reckoned upon and taken advantage of for ends which have nothing to do with mere biography. As the volume just issued reads like a Message from the Throne in favour of a spirited foreign policy, so the entire work seems intended to enshrine a courtly theory of the Constitution, to exalt the prerogatives of the Crown, to debase the position of the Cabinet, and to familiarise us with the interference of an autocratic will in the counsels of men who have hitherto been regarded as responsible not to the Queen but to the Nation. It is commonly supposed that while the Queen reigns and all the acts of the Government are done in her name, the responsible business of Government, as regards both foreign and domestic affairs, is done by the dozen or fifteen statesmen whom the Queen selects as her Ministers from out of the ranks of the party which commands a majority in the House of Commons. We are under the impression that these statesmen meet together in perfect freedom, with minds unmolested and undisturbed by any outside influence, and determine to the best of their ability what course shall be adopted in



the management of national affairs. We call them the Advisers of the Queen. We take it for granted that the Queen does not advise herself, that she has no advisers except those supplied to her by Parliament, and that she never hesitates to adopt the conclusions presented to her on their authority as if they were her own. We exult in this arrangement as embodying the perfection of popular government, and we boast of the advantage it gives us of having our national policy decided, not by hereditary brains, which may be wise or foolish, as accident determines, but by the select men of the nation, while it raises the Crown far above the strife of contending parties, exempts it from criticism, and enables us to render to it the homage of an ungrudging, unstinted, and unwavering loyalty. Very different from this is the theory of government presented to us in the biography of the Prince Consort. From the point of view at which it places us, Parliament seems to be lost sight of and as far as possible ignored. Whenever that body forces itself upon the recognition of the superior powers, it appears to be looked upon as an element of disturbance, thrust by some ill-chance into the midst of what would otherwise be a well-ordered mechanism. Compliments are occasionally paid to it when it shows itself tractable, but to the calm eye of courtly reason it appears to be for the most part a miscellaneous assortment of factions and follies, a hindrance rather than a help to good government. This estimate of Parliament seems to determine the relations between the Cabinet and the Crown. The Cabinet are not the Queen's Advisers so much as the Queen's Ministers, whose business



is not to tell her what to do, but to do what they are told. They are her advisers to the extent that, when they have finally and irrevocably made up their minds, the Queen accepts their decision, and it will be admitted at once that she could do no less without determining to rule despotically, an eventuality for which as yet we are not quite prepared. But, short of rejecting the advice of the Cabinet when finally offered, there is no amount of interference with the Cabinet which is not assumed in the theory we are considering to be perfectly constitutional. During the period to which the Prince Consort's biography relates, "the Queen and the Prince" seem to have claimed the foreign department as their own peculiar sphere. So long as Lord Palmerston held the seals they could not obtain that large control over it to which they deemed themselves entitled, and there can be no doubt that, to use a vulgar phrase, they made the place too hot for him. Lord John Russell, who was then at the head of the Cabinet, played an undignified part between an exacting master and mistress on the one hand and a powerful and impetuous colleague on the other, but in the end he conformed to the wishes of the Court. The dispute was raised upon technical grounds. The Queen—that is, the Prince—insisted upon having the foreign despatches sent to her as soon as they arrived, and upon having every return despatch submitted to her perusal in time to allow of its contents being maturely considered. Of course consideration would be useless unless changes were to be made in the words, and sometimes in the principles, of the despatch. As often as this was deemed



necessary there would be a long argumentation between the Queen and the Prince and the Foreign Minister, with Lord John Russell as mediator. Lord Palmerston submitted that he had no leisure for such protracted discussions over every separate despatch, and that if this additional service was to be exacted of him he would have to abandon his parliamentary duties ; but the sting of the dispute was that the Prince claimed to be the censor of his despatches, while Lord Palmerston well knew that the Prince had an adviser in Baron Stockmar, the veteran medico-statesman at Coburg, whom he consulted on all occasions, and to whom he paid infinitely more deference than to the constitutional advisers of the Crown. I was no admirer of Lord Palmerston's, but he was the Foreign Minister of England, he was a man of long experience and of consummate ability, he enjoyed the unbounded confidence of the majority of his countrymen, and much that is said of him in this biography stirs my blood. After the charge brought against him in 1850 of having acted disrespectfully to the Queen, he sought an interview with the Prince Consort and told him that the charge was "an imputation on his honour as a gentleman." The Prince Consort enshrines in one of his Memoranda the precious fact that Lord Palmerston "was very much agitated, shook, and had tears in his eyes," but the Prince was equal to the occasion, and gave him another lecture. "I spoke," so runs the Memorandum, "to Lord John Russell the following day of our interview, and told him how low and agitated I had found Lord Palmerston, almost to make me pity him. Lord John answered"—O



Lord John! Lord John!—"that he thought what had passed had done a great deal of good." In reading the story of the Prince Consort's interference with the machinery of the Government, as told in these volumes, I am amazed at the forbearance of our public men. I wonder that one Cabinet after another did not fling up their places in disgust, and bid "the Queen and the Prince" conduct the affairs of the country themselves. Bothered with long-winded Memoranda, and badgered with letters of expostulation, their lives must at times have been a torment to them. As if the burdensome work of their departments was not enough, with the immense addition of their parliamentary duties, they had day by day to listen, with a deference and a civility which I trust were always sincere, to the encyclopædic dissertations of an irresponsible personage, and thus had their official toils doubled on the side where it was supposed they were entirely free. The indulgence in Cabinet favouritisms and dislikes was carried to a wonderful pitch during the Ministries of Lord John Russell and the Earl of Aberdeen. The Crown did not hesitate to take sides, and to let the weight of its preferences and aversions be fully felt. The personal influence of the Crown in foreign politics is kept incessantly before us as an ordinary and legitimate fact. The quality of a policy is determined by the effect it will have upon the personal relations of the Queen and the other Potentates of Europe. By the Queen we are probably intended to understand the country, with whose honour and renown she regards herself as identified; but, if so, it would have been wiser to make the distinction apparent in the



use of suitable phraseology. Mr. Theodore Martin puts a serious strain upon our patriotic sensibilities. It is not his fault. He deals with documents in the Prince's handwriting, and his discretion is not unlimited. It jars upon a pardonable self-respect to find some depreciatory estimate attached to almost every English statesman whose name figures in the narrative, and to listen to those outpourings of heart to the unapproachable Stockmar in which all our national foibles and constitutional delinquencies are set off with ironical epithets. With Stockmar the Queen is simply "Victoria," the dread attributes of "the Sovereign"—a title which is constitutionally inaccurate, and which Mr. Theodore Martin overdoes—are reserved for us. Baron Stockmar is their unfailing Mentor, telling them how to think and what to say and how to act on all occasions, from the most august to the most trivial. So far as he is known to us he reaches his climax in a paper described by Mr. Theodore Martin in terms of reverent eulogy, but which it is fearful and wonderful to read. Its object is to point out and accurately define the constitutional position and prerogatives of a Queen of England and a Prince Consort. As a measure of his sagacity it is sufficient to say that he lays it down as axiomatic that the Queen is the Permanent Premier, taking rank above the "Temporary Head of the Cabinet;" that she has a right to be the Permanent President of Her Ministerial Council, entitled as such to take part in the initiation and maturing of Government measures. He also thinks that the Whigs—men of the stamp of Lord Aberdeen—are consciously or unconsciously preparing the way for a



Republic, and that the personal popularity of the Queen should be developed as a counterpoise to the Democratic development of the House of Commons. From such hints my readers may frame their own idea of this most kind, eccentric, infallible, and unfathomable German, who for twenty years had no small share in governing us. Such is the Constitution, according to the enormous Court Circular of which three volumes are already issued. The mischief is that the Prince Consort's creation survives him, that we are living under it to-day, and that, unless corrected and re-adjusted by an outburst of public spirit and the self-assertion of our public men, it may be passed on to our children, surrounded by a halo of biographical authority, till a day may come when the most momentous questions, affecting the honour and the destinies of the nation, may be settled at a morning call between some future Emperor and his Grand Vizier.





JANUARY 5TH, 1873.

IN the remarkable book to which I have called attention in two previous letters special prominence is given to the part which the Head of the State is presumed to be entitled to play in the guidance of foreign affairs. We are told, for example, in reference to the quarrel with Lord Palmerston in 1850, that "there was no part of her duties as a Sovereign which the Queen, in common with the Prince, considered more to demand her constant supervision than the communications with Foreign Powers through our representatives abroad." Again, further on, we read that, "involving as they do vital questions of peace and war, our foreign relations have always been regarded as demanding in an especial degree the attention of the Sovereign." A number of considerations are adduced to show why this should be so, the final one being that while the Queen's "first thought is to keep her Empire safe, honoured, and respected," she "is bound to maintain at all times a frank and dignified courtesy towards other Sovereigns and their Governments." "For this reason it is," so ends the argument, "that it has always been a prominent function of the Crown to watch closely and continuously the state of our foreign relations, and to keep itself fully advised of the policy of the Government as bearing upon them in every essential detail." Apart from these formal statements, there are numberless remarks



scattered through the book which enforce and amplify the same conclusions. I do not think it is too much to say that we are left, and probably meant, to gather from them that, in regard to foreign affairs, the Queen is more competent to give than to receive advice, and that, though the usages of the Constitution must of course be adhered to, the First Minister will almost always act wisely in allowing his foreign policy to be largely influenced by the suggestions of the Crown. Of course, there can never be too much of good counsel, from what quarter soever it may come, and it is possible to imagine that a Prime Minister might derive considerable advantage from being obliged to listen to the arguments of any impartial and competently instructed person before making a new move, whether in home or in foreign politics. At the same time the subject provokes comment, and I wish, therefore, to make it the foundation of a few questions, as, for example, how is it that the functions of the Crown are supposed to stand in some special relation to foreign affairs; is the intervention of the Crown in such affairs likely on the whole to be useful or pernicious; and what are the safeguards we possess against the allowing of unwise counsels to prevail. As to the first of these questions there will not, I suppose, be much difference of opinion. The special functions claimed for the Crown in relation to foreign politics are a survival of a former age, when the monarch had a far larger share of direct power in most things than he has now. The Plantagenets, the Tudors, and the Stuarts asserted their right to an effective control over domestic legislation, and they generally had their way,



though with many fluctuations of fortune, which cost some of them their thrones, and brought one to the block. In domestic matters the people knew their own interests and their own minds, and they finally made good their determination to be governed as the majority of the nation thought best. But the people knew less of foreign affairs, and for a good reason. They were carried on behind a screen, they were conducted by despatches, which in those days seldom saw the light, and they had their incidence on the governments of foreign countries who observed the same silence as our own, and probably gave no answer at all till it was given in the thunder-claps of war. Hence in this department the Sovereign continued to exercise as much power as his Ministers would let him have, and they often let him have a great deal—a great deal too much for the good of the country. This continuing claim was strengthened by historical accidents. The first king who ascended the throne on the basis of a parliamentary settlement was already committed to a struggle against the power of France, wielded by Louis XIV. He had all the threads of policy at his fingers' ends, and was allowed to be his own Foreign Minister. The struggle in which he involved us—glorious in some respects, and still glowing with the disastrous effulgence of Blenheim and Ramillies—lasted till the accession of the House of Hanover, when a new tie was established with the Continent, which continued unbroken till Queen Victoria ascended the throne. Our monarchs were not only Kings of England, but Electors, and, since 1815, Kings of Hanover. It was a personal tie, attached to the



monarch alone; it was one in which he was supremely interested, and it would have been hardly in keeping with human nature if he had not done his utmost to make his power and influence as King of England conducive to his continental interests. Thus, from the Revolution down to 1837, there was a constant reason why "our foreign relations have always been regarded as demanding, in an especial degree, the attention of the Sovereign;" but happily that reason has ceased to exist, thanks first to the descent of the Hanoverian Crown in the male line, and next to the absorption of Hanover itself in the territories of the King of Prussia. Hence there seems now to be less justification than ever for the theory which would make of foreign affairs an exception to all the other affairs of the nation, and withdraw them to any extent whatever from the sole control of the Ministers to whom Parliament entrusts the duties of government. There are no doubt occasions on which it is easy to suppose that the suggestions of the Crown, or, indeed, the suggestions of any impartial and competent adviser, might be eminently useful, but all would depend upon whether the adviser were impartial and competent. He might be neither, and in that case his advice would be none the better, though it might well be more dangerous, for being backed up by authority and by an untold power of making things unpleasant for the Minister who dared to set it at nought. The advice of the Crown might be usefully permitted if we could feel sure that it would never be taken for more than it deserved, but suggestions on Royal lips have a singular capacity for being listened to as commands. The



danger we are most exposed to is not that of having weak Premiers. Men who have fought their way to that high rank through the contentions of English politics are almost sure to be strong men. But, though strong, they may be supple. They may do from calculating baseness, or from a frivolous ambition, or from a servile loyalty, what other men would do from weakness. Strafford was strong enough, but he was the minion of a despot's wishes, and the arts by which he sought to aggrandise the Crown destroyed it. Since the only means we have of calling the Sovereign to account are such as we should most unwillingly employ, and since the Crown is too powerful to be trusted in a private colloquy with statesmen, it is best that it should be silent, except on those occasions when it acts ministerially as the organ of the nation in transferring power from one set of Ministers to another. These we know and can deal with, but the Crown we only know as the ceremonial device on the Great Seal by which the nation's resolves are attested, and the moment we are forced to know it in any other capacity danger commences for one party, though hardly for both. I have said that the only conditions on which counsel in any case should be tendered or accepted are that the counsellor is both competent and impartial. Apply these tests to the Crown. Apart from his constitutional advisers, the Sovereign is but one person. He carries but one head, and that head may be very small and very weak. It is not necessary to flatter the present occupant of the throne. We know her great and sterling qualities. We have unbounded confidence in the sincerity



of her patriotism. We have a real affection for her. But, with all the strength of her endowments and the rectitude of her intentions, she would have a right to despise us if we professed to believe that she was raised above the influences which often darken and distract the judgments of mankind. Even if we could bring ourselves to regard the Queen as approximately infallible, we cannot profess with Bourdaloue that royalty is an exception to the rule that men are mortal. She will not live for ever, and a usage which may be harmless in her hands might be confusion and ruin in the hands of her successors. For this reason among others personal rule is inadmissible in any degree and in any form. We cannot consent to be ruled by any person whom we cannot displace if he rules us badly. To provide against the chance that hereditary descent may occasionally give us a fool for a Sovereign, our forefathers have devised the mechanism of responsible government. It is agreed that the nation shall choose the Parliament, that the Parliament shall choose the Cabinet, and that the Cabinet shall govern the realm, subject to the penalty of dismissal if they do their work inefficiently, or if they adopt a policy of which the nation does not approve. The greater the importance we assign to any branch of the nation's affairs the more imperative is the necessity that it shall be dealt with by Ministers alone, and that no disturbing element shall be thrown into their deliberations from a quarter too high for us to reach. The supreme importance of foreign affairs is only another reason why the Crown should stand aloof from them and leave them in the hands of the men who,



whatever risks they may choose to adventure with the Sovereign, are delegated by the nation to do the work, and are held responsible, even to the length of impeachment, for the manner in which they do it. As between the competence of the Sovereign and the competence of fifteen of the pick of England's statesmen to arrive at sound views on questions of foreign policy, there can be no doubt in the minds of any who do not believe, with the Anglican divines at the Hampton Court Conference, that Kings speak by the impulse of the Holy Ghost. How is it with the test of impartiality? Mr. Theodore Martin says that the Queen personifies the majesty of the country. This personification is a perilous process. It is apt to be misread in the consciousness of the personator. What the Sovereign takes to be the majesty of the nation may be only an amplification of himself, an exaggerated sense of his own pretensions and prerogatives; and history is little more than one long and sad narrative of the evils mankind have suffered from these artificially distended personalities. Louis XIV. did more than pretend to personify the majesty of the nation; he identified himself with the nation. *L'état c'est moi*. This is a more thorough carrying out of the personifying process than any to which an English Sovereign could pretend, and it ought, on Mr. Theodore Martin's argument, to furnish a still stronger guarantee that he could do nothing without the best intentions, and nothing which would not redound to his country's good. Yet Louis XIV. is not reputed to have ruled beneficently. He persisted in knowing more of foreign affairs than his Ministers, and he carried his theory



into practice, but he sacrificed the lives of a million of Frenchmen, he beggared France, he sent his descendant to the scaffold, and he laid the train for a convulsion which shook the world. When foreign affairs are in question the Queen of England is more likely to be influenced by personal prepossessions, by personal likes and dislikes, than any other man or woman in the realm. She may resist them successfully, and I am sure she does her best to achieve the victory, and never decides till she believes she has grasped the palm of conquest over herself; but that her impartiality is exposed to peculiar dangers, and that on this score she is presumably less to be trusted than any single member of her Cabinet, are facts which it would be a denial of human nature to dispute. The reigning dynasties of Europe are so related by intermarriage that they form one large family. The Queen has Royal or Imperial connections at Brussels, Copenhagen, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Lisbon, not to speak of the smaller German potentates, and of an offshoot across the Atlantic. The consequence is that almost every international question which arises is apt to take a personal form, and to ally itself with family susceptibilities. That the personality of the Sovereign endures through all the changes of Parliaments and Cabinets and the greater changes which pass over the world, is a distinct source of danger. Old contests and defeats which the nation has agreed to forget, or which a new generation despises, may live on in their pristine greenness within the Sovereign's breast, and overshadow the interests of to-day. We have an illustration too near at hand. Should it have



happened, as the Prince Consort's Biography renders but too probable, that the Queen has taken up decided ground against Russia on the Eastern Question, we may fairly suspect that we see in such an attitude a mixing up of politics with the touching homage of a lifetime to the man she loved. The sentiment, considered as an attribute of personal affection, is worthy of respect and reverence, but as an element of our foreign policy it cannot be too severely reprehended nor too decisively abjured. What we see going on in the East is undoubtedly a reversal of the policy which the Prince adopted with passionate vehemence, and an overthrowing of the fabric which he helped to build up; but why should we adhere to a blunder merely for the sake of maintaining intact the illusion that he and Baron Stockmar were the wisest as well as the best of men? In conclusion, let me say that these remarks have not been volunteered. They are made in reply to a challenge. For when, in however mild a form, and though in reference only to a part of the national affairs, the heresy of personal rule is proclaimed from the steps of the Throne, it is necessary to speak out, lest silence perchance should be construed into assent.





JANUARY 12TH, 1878.

PERHAPS I ought to crave the indulgence of my readers for asking them to accompany me on a fourth excursion into the singularly picturesque and auriferous region which has been opened up to us by Mr. Theodore Martin. My excuse must be that one does not get hold of such a book every day, and that, like a Pennsylvanian explorer who has "struck ile," I am loath to abandon my "find" till its treasures are exhausted. But I have to allege another reason which, though not more honest than the one just given, will probably be more presentable in those loyal and polished circles to which, as I am assured, my lucubrations find access. The book gives us a great deal of information on various recondite and mysterious matters connected with the actual working of the Constitution, and more especially—for that is the subject I have in view—with the relations between the Cabinet and the Crown. The Cabinet may be said in one respect to resemble the Moon. We have been gazing upon it from childhood, yet we have never seen but one side. Now, that which no earthly power can do for us as regards the Moon, this book of Mr. Theodore Martin's does for us as regards the Cabinet, that is, whereas heretofore we have only seen that side of it which is turned towards Parliament and the nation, in this book we are carried round so as to see the other side of it which is turned towards the Crown. It is a certain inference that every line of the book was perused by the Queen before it



was given to the public. It is, in fact, an inspired book, the inspiration ranging from mere "permission" at one end of the inspirational scale to "suggestion" at the other, but implying all through an authoritative wish to make us acquainted with certain facts which, but for Her Majesty's gracious communicativeness, must have remained as completely hidden from us in the future as they have been in the past. Now, whatever has thus been written for us by Her Majesty's permission or command is doubtless written for our learning, and as my loyalty prompts me to mark, learn, and inwardly digest every bit of it, if my readers are as loyal as myself they will certainly do the same. Now then to our task, which is that of discoverers on the Crown side of the Cabinet, and here are some of the phenomena which meet our view. In the first place the Queen seems to regard the Prime Minister as the titular chief of the Cabinet, but not as the chief of it in such a sense that his responsibility shelters the proceedings of his colleagues. She deems herself entitled to criticise and censure the official conduct of any member of the Cabinet, to lay down rules for his guidance, to insist upon their being observed, and to dismiss him if his insubordination grows incorrigible. The doctrine seems to be, not that his dismissal must necessarily go through the hands of the Premier, but that the Queen can lay her sceptre, like the long osier rod of ancient schoolmistresses, upon the back of the individual offender, and tell him to go. The authority of the House of Commons seems to be as little regarded as the supremacy of the Premier. The offending Minister may discharge his



duties to the entire satisfaction of that assembly, and may enjoy the plenary confidence of his countrymen, but if he does not comply with certain disciplinary rules the Queen can dismiss him whenever she chooses. This is the doctrine laid down in the classical case of Lord Palmerston, and the attempt to apply it led to some results which may be called grotesque. Lord John Russell was the Premier. He did not like to do what the Queen evidently desired and expected, but he sympathised with her complaints, deplored his colleague's wilfulness, and gushed over occasionally in regretful tears. This state of things lasted for several years. Lord John went on whining, and Palmerston went on sinning, till at last the "Queen and Prince" were furious, and Palmerston was kicked out, a compliment which he repaid within a couple of months by kicking out Lord John on the Militia Bill. Thus it seems Sovereign and Premier can take sides against one or more of the Premier's colleagues. In this way the Cabinet may be split into opposite factions, one enjoying the Sovereign's favour and the other not, while all confidence is lost. Clearly we have here an instance of the assumption by the Sovereign of pretensions which she has not the power to make good, for though it is easy to say in theory that she has the right to dismiss this or the other Minister, the Minister or Ministers in question may be so powerful that they cannot be dismissed without upsetting the Cabinet, and bringing the Crown into collision with the House of Commons. But nothing is more mischievous than pretension without power. It can do no good, while it may do a world of harm, leading



to jealousies, inconsistencies, and Ministerial disorganisation, the results of which will be simply bewildering to outside observers who know nothing of the cause. It appears also that the Queen expects all important matters to be submitted to her while they are still "intact;" that is, before the Cabinet have arrived at any decision upon them, if not before they are seriously discussed, so that she may have an opportunity of making known her views respecting them. This claim leads to practical consequences of considerable importance. There is first of all the necessity for discussing questions with a personage outside the Cabinet, who has no responsibility whatever, and is not supposed to interfere at all. There is next the consequent necessity of arguing all questions down to the capacity of a single intellect, which, however large and vivacious, cannot be regarded as commensurate with the combined capacity of fifteen picked men. Moreover, the whole of the Cabinet cannot engage in a discussion with the Crown. This must be done by one or two, and this obviously favours the innovation of a Cabinet within the Cabinet, of a few prominent members undertaking to settle everything of importance after a conference with the Crown, while their colleagues—comprising by far the larger number—have either to submit or make a fight of it. But it is not so easy to fight against an august and possibly obstinate influence which has already mastered the two or three leading spirits who are admitted to interviews with Egeria. The dissidents may become, or may fear that they will become, marked men, and so be deterred from acting according to their real convictions. In this way the



responsibility of the Cabinet may be frittered to nothing, and the imposing machinery of Constitutional Government become a mere modification of personal rule. Another fact which appears to be put forward with studied prominence in Mr. Theodore Martin's pages is that, when important questions were coming on for discussion in the Cabinet, the Queen and Prince took the earliest opportunity of communicating to the Premier their own views. The effect of doing so, whether intentional or not, was in some sense to preoccupy the ground by presenting a particular line of policy as a candidate for adoption backed with the approval and the moral influence of the Court. We have just seen the Queen complaining that questions were not submitted to her "intact;" but if, as was often the case after this complaint was made, they were submitted to her "intact," they did not come back to the Cabinet "intact;" on the contrary, they came back well handled, and often saddled with an opinion which, as the Queen's opinion, must necessarily have run the risk of being taken for more than its real worth. We may venture to imagine what would take place at a Cabinet Council on such occasions. The Minister, generally the Premier, who was charged with the Queen's letter or memorandum, would of course read it, setting forth the view she took of the emergency, and what in her opinion ought to be done. Without supposing that the Ministers were consciously willing to sacrifice their own judgment, I think it may be taken for granted that there would be a general desire to gratify the Queen as far as possible, and that this desire might occasionally be strong enough to



warp their decision in a wrong direction. If opposition became necessary, it must sometimes have been a question, Who shall bell the cat? Who shall speak first? Who shall give the first signal for a rebuff which may not be taken graciously? Men are weak, and in councils carried on under the shadow of a superior power the weakest among them, by a servile use of reason, by special pleading of which the motive is not avowed, though it is easily conjecturable in the right quarter, may sometimes cower and silence the rest. Those who remember the Crimean War may also perhaps remember that the immediate cause of it, so far as we are concerned, was the interpretation attached by Russia to the Vienna Note, after it had been accepted by all parties except Turkey. A despatch from Count Nesselrode made it clear that Russia understood the Note in the sense which the Turkish Government alleged that it was capable of bearing—a sense different from that in which it had been accepted by the other Powers. This difficulty might have been overcome by further negotiation, but the cry went forth that Russia had tried to deceive us, and the indignation roused by Russia's supposed treachery made war inevitable. We learn now that this was the Court view. As soon as Count Nesselrode's despatch was made known we are told that "not an hour was lost" by the Queen and Prince "in making Lord Aberdeen aware of their views as to the course now to be adopted." It is no surprise to be told that their views prevailed, and that the arguments which dropped from the Royal pen were "adopted and carried out in detail by Lord Clarendon in a despatch to Sir



George Hamilton Seymour, at St. Petersburg, on the 30th of September." In a letter to Baron Stockmar, two days after this communication of the Queen's views to the Cabinet, the Prince, referring to Russia, speaks of "the cloven foot," of the "cat let out of the bag," of the Vienna Note as "a trap" set for us, with the connivance of Austria, and of the folly of acting as if our antagonists were "honourable men." This was the cue given at once to the Cabinet, to the nation, and to as many as Baron Stockmar chose to acquaint with the "views" of the British Court. The change in the temper of the nation was as sudden as a transformation scene, and we were irrevocably committed to war. All through the war, both in diplomacy and in matters of administration, the initiative seems generally to have been seized by the Queen and Prince. Their advice was communicated sometimes by memorandums and sometimes in private conferences; sometimes through the Premier, and sometimes to the Minister to whose Department the advice referred. The scheme for enlisting foreigners, which got us into such a scrape with the United States, was of the Prince's suggesting. The Cabinet eyed it with suspicion at first, but ended by adopting it, as is duly noted to the Prince's glorification. In sending his recommendations to the Secretary at War the Prince uses language very much like that which an official would use in writing to his subordinate. The order is conveyed, and no doubt seems to be entertained that it will not be promptly executed. I say nothing of the letters, full of politics, which the Queen, often in drafts drawn up by the Prince, was in the habit of



writing to foreign potentates, though they must necessarily have coloured the view which continental Governments took of our national policy, and tended to create a state of things which must have pressed upon the freedom of the Cabinet. I have already said that in dealing with the Cabinet the Queen set up pretensions which she could not always enforce. It is also true that in dealing with public business she identified her prerogative with duties which she could not possibly discharge. In a letter to the Prince in June, 1849, Lord John Russell mentioned on the authority of Lord Palmerston that during the year 1848 no less than 28,000 despatches were received or sent out at the Foreign Office. "These 28,000 despatches," the Prince says in his reply, "Lord Palmerston must recollect came to you and to the Queen as well as to himself." This "Lord Palmerston must recollect" seems to cover some squabble with the Minister, and sounds rather pettish and insolent. But what could the Queen do with these despatches? They amount to seventy-six per day all the year round, Sundays and holidays included. Is it possible that they can be all read and studied? If not, then the pretence that they are does harm, being calculated to embarrass business and divide responsibility. I have now gone through the principal facts disclosed in this book which bear upon the relations between the Crown and the Cabinet, and I think it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that they bring to light a serious and unsuspected evil. It seems to me that the relations shown to have subsisted between them while the Prince Consort lived, and which presumably continue still, are



adapted to break up the solidarity of the Cabinet; to foment division, to enkindle jealousies, to set up a Court policy in rivalry with a Parliamentary policy; to subject the deliberations of Ministers to undue pressure; to warp their views in directions not dictated by their own convictions; to lay the business of the country open to influences which the Constitution ignores, and of which the people know nothing, at the risk of fluctuations and inconsistencies which cannot but be detrimental to the public service; in short, to naturalise amongst us the continental notion of Constitutional Government, according to which the Ministers are the servants of the Crown rather than the servants of the nation, the supple instruments of the Sovereign rather than the responsible executors of the will of Parliament. We have not yet reached the abyss, but, on the testimony of this book, we have been, and perhaps are still, far down on the incline which leads to it. Our recent experience of Cabinet utterances and Cabinet doings is not reassuring, and with the light now afforded they are capable of an explanation which I would rather not give to them. For the last six months the Cabinet has been a puzzle to us. It has seemed to have two voices and two sets of hands. Our diplomacy has appeared to have a will of its own, or be inspired from unknown sources. Our Plenipotentiary at Constantinople said one thing, and our Ambassador another, and, unless appearances wholly deceive us, the Foreign Office has been persistently thwarted by its own servants. The spectacle is not at all surprising if the remarks I have made are true, but I prefer to leave their application with my readers.



JANUARY 19TH, 1878

THIS will be my last letter on the important questions which have been forced upon the attention of the public by the Biography of the Prince Consort, and I purpose devoting it to an examination of the "vigorous Constitutional essay," as Mr. Theodore Martin calls it, which we have from the pen of Baron Stockmar towards the end of the second volume. I have already referred to it once or twice, and I intended to deal with it at greater length before now, but other matters were too absorbing. The result is that I am able to give the Baron a letter all to himself. This is not intended as compliment, though if it were I can honestly say that the object would be worthy of it. Baron Stockmar was in many respects a remarkable man. He was born at Coburg in 1787, a subject of the petty dynasty whose offshoots now fill so many thrones. In 1816 he came to this country in the suite of Prince Leopold, better known to us afterwards as King of the Belgians and the uncle of Queen Victoria, but our grandfathers knew him as the husband of the Princess Charlotte, sole child of George IV. and heiress presumptive to the throne. Baron Stockmar was Prince Leopold's private physician, but he was an accomplished and thoughtful man, well versed in the public affairs of Europe, and he became by degrees his master's political factotum. When



Prince Leopold became King of the Belgians the Baron retired to Coburg. He was probably one of those old servants whose salaries the King of the Belgians paid out of the allowance secured to him on his marriage with the Princess Charlotte, before paying the balance back to the English Exchequer, and in this state of honoured and pensioned dependence he lived to the end of his days. When the King of the Belgians planned a marriage between his niece the Princess Victoria and his nephew the second son of the Duke of Coburg, he took Baron Stockmar into his counsels. When in a few years the Princess had become Queen, and the great affair was ripening, Prince Albert naturally turned for advice to his uncle's confidential friend, who was living under the shadow of his father's castle. After the marriage had taken place the Baron consented to spend a year in this country in order to "coach" the Prince into the duties of his new position, a visit which proved to be the first of a legion. Almost every year the Baron was ensconced at Windsor or Balmoral for months together. He saw but little company, for he had a mission to fulfil. He had his private room, a sort of innermost shrine of the Constitution, a domestic chapel of Edward the Confessor, ready to give forth the oracle as it was wanted, day by day and hour by hour. As often as he went back to Coburg correspondence took the place of oral consultation. The Prince was always writing to him. All the gaiety of heart which the Prince could spare from his domestic circle broke out in his letters to the Baron. I think it likely that if he had treated the English gentlemen whom he met on



business or in society with one-half of the gushing amiability which he lavished on the German recluse he would have been the most popular man in the realm, instead of being, as he was, intensely disliked. I have said enough in my previous letters to show how the Prince Consort, acting in the name of the Queen, sought to influence, and succeeded in influencing, the deliberations of the Cabinet, the administration of affairs, and the foreign policy of the country. Mr. Theodore Martin would have us believe that the statesmen upon whom he thrust his advice desired nothing better than to be guided by his sagacity, and many expressions which in private life would merely be reckoned civil are gravely recorded in these columns as the outpouring of solemn conviction. Flattery, alas, is the bane of princes; for instead of passing it, as other men would do, through a filter of common sense, their inordinate self-esteem induces them to swallow the draught entire, as if every word of it were gospel truth. There can, I think, be no doubt that the Prince's habitual interference in State affairs was the cause of much annoyance, which reacted periodically upon himself. For a time the storm slept, but it broke at last with all the greater violence. If the Prince had acted on his own judgment his incessant meddlesomeness would have been bad enough, but it was known that the position he claimed for himself was precisely that which Baron Stockmar had told him he ought to hold, and that on every important question that arose he was merely the Baron's echo. To a man of Lord Palmerston's high temper it was positively unendurable that a pensioned dependent of the King of



the Belgians should be the ultimate referee on all matters at issue between the Cabinet and the Crown of England, and that the sentence to be passed upon his own despatches would probably be settled after an appeal to Coburg. The Baron set himself up as a high authority on the British Constitution, but he laboured under two disqualifications. In the first place, he knew it only theoretically, and he brought to his theoretic study of it all the prepossessions of his German training. In the next place, the whole of his public life was passed in a sort of domestic servitude. He never rose above the rank of a retainer, and his chief aim in life was to give such advice as would be serviceable to his employers. He attached himself to them no doubt with utter fidelity, and in this sense was probably one of the most disinterested men living. As a natural result of such circumstances and of such a habit of mind, he no doubt sincerely believed that in promoting the personal interests of those he served he was also doing his best to promote the welfare and glory of the lands they ruled; but this is a sequence in which we are not obliged to follow him. Such being his presumable fitness for instructing the Queen and Prince in their constitutional duties, let us look at the advice he gave. This is a very practical matter, for it is probable that his illustrious scholars believed every word he uttered, and that Baron Stockmar's theory of the Constitution inspires and guides, to the utmost possible extent, the conduct of English Royalty to-day. The advice was asked for when the Prince was in a peck of troubles, all of his own brewing. The fact of his interference in public affairs was no secret,



and when the Crimean campaign went wrong, the blame was laid upon his shoulders. If our soldiers were dying of starvation it was because there was a traitor behind the scenes, some dynastic busybody who wanted to make everything miscarry, and there could be no doubt who the traitor was. Writing to Stockmar the Prince says, "My unconstitutional position, correspondence with foreign Courts, dislike to Palmerston, relationship to the Orleans family, interference with the army, &c., are depicted as the cause of the decline of the State, the Constitution, and the nation, and indeed the stupidest trash is babbled to the public, so stupid that, as they say in Coburg, you would not give it to the pigs to litter in." This is no exaggeration of the ferment which prevailed. It was even rumoured that the Prince had been arrested on a charge of high treason and committed to the Tower. What did Baron Stockmar say to him in such circumstances? Did he tell him to mind his own business, and let the nation henceforth govern itself through the Ministers responsible to Parliament? Far otherwise. He begins by disparaging the Premier. Lord Aberdeen, he observes, was a good man; but his friend Nicholas had been his worst enemy. He was placed in a position for which his intellectual resources were insufficient, or, as the Baron puts it, "he had not the productive energy which serves to develop a great luminous thought." Now this is just what the Baron could do, and he hastened to supply the Premier's defect. He tells the Prince that he could not marry the Queen of England "without meaning and without being bound to become a political soldier." This is the



keynote of a disquisition which fills a dozen pages. The Prince, as the Queen's *alter ego*, is bound to become a fighting politician. He has been wounded in the fight, but he must take courage and renew the struggle. The Baron says that England, since 1830 (the eve of the passing of the Reform Bill), has been "constantly in danger of becoming a pure Ministerial Government." "In theory," says he, "one of the first duties of Ministers is to defend the prerogatives of the Crown;" but if they fail herein, "are we," asks the Baron, "to allow crack-brained sciolists in politics to deny to the Crown the right and power to keep Ministers to the fulfilment of their duty, and not to suffer the Crown, and with it the entire commonweal, to come to destruction?" For this purpose the Prince is to be a "political soldier." It is his business to fight for the prerogatives of the Crown with the Queen's Ministers. If he were not there to do the fighting, the Queen herself would have to fight, but he can spare her the trouble. The Ministers cannot be trusted to defend the Royal prerogative. Whenever they essay to do so, they show "nothing but lukewarmness, timidity, and, above all, that maladroitness which comes from want of goodwill." In other words, in the Baron's opinion, the Queen's Ministers were a pack of traitors. The old Tories, says the Baron, who managed the Government from 1780 to 1830, had an interest in doing their duty, and did it pretty successfully; but, as a race, "these Tories have died out, and the race which in the present day (1854) bears the name are simply degenerate bastards." Of the Whigs the Baron thought still worse. He tells the Prince that they "stand in the same



relation to the throne as the wolf does to the lamb." These Whigs, he says, "must have a natural inclination to push to extremes the constitutional fiction—which, although undoubtedly of old standing, is fraught with danger—that it is unconstitutional to introduce and make use of the name and person of the irresponsible Sovereign in the public debates in matters bearing on the Constitution." This, however, the English Crown must not permit; that is, the Sovereign must insist upon being made a party in such matters, or else the nation will come to think "that the King in the view of the law is nothing but a mandarin figure, which has to nod its head in assent or shake it in denial, as the Minister pleases." Now, in order to counteract the influence of "politicians of the Aberdeen school," that is, moderate Tories, "who treat the existing Constitution merely as a bridge to a Republic," Baron Stockmar tells the Prince it is of extreme importance that the above-named "fiction" should be "countenanced only provisionally," and that "no opportunity should be let slip of vindicating the legitimate position of the Crown." Here we see defined the nature of the contest in which the Prince is to be a "political soldier." What is the Baron's idea of the "legitimate position of the Crown?" For one thing he holds that the King of England has a right to be the "permanent President of his Ministerial Council," that is a right to preside at every meeting of the Cabinet; he has a right to take part in the initiation and the making of the Government measures, to form an independent judgment in all matters, and to do his best to make his views prevail.



The Premier, so argues the Baron, is only the head of a party. He represents only half the nation, whereas the Sovereign represents the whole. Which of the two has the greater right to paramount influence in the councils of the State? In fact, the Premier selected in conformity with the opinion of Parliament is only a nominal Premier, and only a Premier *pro tem*. The real and permanent Premier is the Sovereign, king or queen, as the case may be. Lord Palmerston, in the explanation which followed his resignation, had observed that he "conceded to the Minister (the Premier) not only the power to dismiss every member of the Cabinet, but also the right to dismiss them without any explanation of his reasons." The Baron admits this to be constitutional doctrine, but at the same time he cannot admit that this large power belongs to the Parliamentary Premier. At last he sees his way to a conclusion, and with a triumphant chuckle he tells us in what way the doctrine is true. It is not true of the Parliamentary Premier, but it is true of the Permanent Premier. The Sovereign, and the Sovereign alone, has the right to dismiss every member of the Cabinet without any explanation of his reasons. The Baron enlarges upon the constitutional advantages of the "moral purity of the Queen." Faugh! I cannot follow him. If the Queen were not morally pure she would be disgraced as a woman. The Baron's final lesson is that the popularity of the Queen must be thrown into the scale against the democratic element in the House of Commons; and that Ministers must make it the first of their duties to serve the Crown, instead of seeking to be



popular in the House of Commons, which indeed would be "the surest way to lead on monarchy imperceptibly, and this too under the Minister's own guidance, into a Republic." Here ends that part of the Baron's Memorandum which is essential to my purpose, that purpose being to set forth the theory of the Constitution which he sent to Windsor for the use of the Queen, who, by sanctioning its publication in the Prince's Biography, seems to endorse its conclusions, and to present them to us for our information. I trust I know my readers better than to insult their understandings by stooping to criticise this solemn trash. I take my place at once among the Baron's "crack-brained sciolists," and am even proud to identify myself with that "most stupid of Englishmen"—the rest of my countrymen being "stupid" only in the positive and comparative degrees—whom this political von Teufelsdröckh, this purveyor of "luminous thoughts" for the guidance of England's benighted Royalty, assumes to be incapable of denying the shallow proposition that the Premier for the time being, because he is the chief of a party, is not also the Minister of the nation. All I shall say is that if the Baron's teachings are still held orthodox at Windsor, we need not wonder at Cabinet divisions and ministerial helplessness. I desire to close this series of letters with one word of heartfelt warning. The Constitution of England is not, like the Constitutions of the United States, of Prussia, Belgium, Austria, Italy, and France, a thing written out on parchment, and defended by literal propositions that can be construed in a Court of Law. It is largely a growth, a set of ever accumulating usages, the last of which has the effect of



modifying those that have gone before, and of prevailing in their stead. This being the case the first duty of Englishmen is to guard against reactionary innovations, remembering that what they tolerate to-day will to-morrow be used against them with the force of law. The attempt of the Stuarts in the seventeenth century to revive the dormant prerogatives of the Crown provoked the bloodiest of our historic struggles. Ours is the easier task of seeing that the heritage bequeathed by our forefathers, together with the glorious additions that have since been made to it, suffer no detriment in our hands ; but it is a task which demands, among other things, unslumbering suspicion and eternal watchfulness, and, perhaps, with more immediate urgency at the present moment, self-respecting loyalty, patriotic devotion, and, if need be, a touch of rugged independence, on the part of English statesmen.





