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The novelist and Bismarck
with special reference
to Fontane, Freytag and Spielhagen

volume two .

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Freytag and Bismarck

Freitag and Bismarck

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A. Freytag's life and political development: a brief survey

A. Freytag's life and political development: a brief survey

Gustav Freytag was born on 13th July 1816 in the small provincial town of Kreuzburg - not far from the Polish border - into a solid middle class family: his father was a doctor, for many years the mayor of Kreuzburg, a moderate liberal who favoured the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Prussia.¹ Freytag had private tuition at home from an uncle Pastor Neugebauer up to the age of 13 when he left home and went to live with his father's younger brother, a civil servant, at Oels where he attended the local Gymnasium.

At the age of nineteen Freytag went to study philology at the nearby university of Breslau under Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Here he was introduced to the study of paleography and to early German literature and developed a keen interest in the German past. Politics do not seem to have interested him very much, although he did take part in an illegal student demonstration, the 'Zobtencommerz',³ but the authorities seem to have regarded him as relatively harmless politically.⁴ Indeed, it was in order to escape the political unrest that had invaded university life at Breslau that Freytag moved to Berlin - in the autumn of 1836 - where he continued his studies under the famous philologist Karl Lachmann. Freytag's main interest at this time was in the German middle ages and its literature,⁵ while his study of the writings of Jakob Grimm had a profound influence on his understanding of the 'Volksgeist' and its role in the evolution of a nation.⁶ Although political matters were discussed in his circle of friends, Freytag does not appear to have been particularly interested; he was, however, inspired to write some poems in protest at the dismissal of the seven Göttingen professors in November 1837.⁸ He also tried his hand at writing a tragedy 'Die Sühne der Falkensteiner'⁹ which betray his literary ambitions.

Freytag completed his studies in 1838 and was awarded a doctorate for his dissertation on early German drama. In the Spring of 1839 he was called up to do military service; he was hauled off to the army, although he had been declared unfit to serve.¹⁰ Freytag records his father's bitter comment, no doubt reflecting his own view of the matter as well:

"Wäre es der Sohn eines vornehmen Mannes gewesen, sie hätten ihn nicht so behandelt." (11)

Later that same year Freytag was appointed lecturer(Privatdozent) in German Language and Literature at Breslau university,¹² here he continued his research into early German literature. He wrote a further dissertation on the 10th century poetess Hrotswitha of Gandersheim who had written dramatic versions of German legends in Latin.¹³ He also worked on a history of German drama and gathered material for a study of

"...die historische Entwicklung der deutschen Volkstümlichkeit." (14)

a theme that was to remain a major pre-occupation throughout his life.

In 1843 Freytag - unsuccessfully - applied for the post of Professor from which his former teacher Hoffmann von Fallersleben had been removed a year earlier for his political poems. Freytag met with a further set-back when he was prevented from giving a series of lectures on German cultural history by the historian Stenzel. Freytag decided to abandon his academic career and become a professional writer.¹⁵

The prospects for success were good: he had already written two plays, in 1841 he had written a comedy 'Die Brautfahrt oder Kunz von der Rosen'¹⁶ and a year later the play 'Dornröschen'.¹⁷ Both plays deal with the need for Germany to awake to a true appreciation of her qualities, to be more confident in herself, to be proud and self-assertive, characteristics which Freytag felt were sadly lacking. In the early 1840's he had also penned a number of vaguely political poems, all inspired by the desire to give expression to national pride.¹⁸

Freytag's interest in German history and literature were by this time fairly well established, but he had shown little interest in politics; his friendship with Theodor Molinari, a Breslau merchant, was to introduce him to the world of politics, indeed, their friendship was primarily a political friendship.¹⁹ Molinari was deeply concerned at the apathy and lack of interest in political matters; he believed this stemmed from the remoteness and arbitrariness of government, the citizens had become alienated from the state. As a liberal Molinari saw the solution in education linked with evolution towards self-government by constitutional means.²⁰ He rejected revolution or the more turbulent methods of the democrats.

Through Molinari Freytag came into contact with leading liberal citizens in Breslau,²¹ and thus associated with men who were seriously concerned about the political future of Germany, men who were concerned to find the best means of achieving a united and liberal Germany. The literary distillation of the many discussions they must have had is the fragment 'Der Gelehrte' (1844) in which the relative merits of the two main currents of liberal thinking and action in Germany in the immediate pre-1848 period are discussed: moderate constitutional liberalism on the one hand and radical democratic liberalism on the other.²² Freytag rejected agitation and radicalism in favour of education and evolution.²³

In his drama 'Die Valentine' (1846)²⁴ Freytag turned his attention to the relationship between the aristocracy and the middle classes: a critical picture of life at the court of a petty prince in Germany is drawn with its political and moral corruption. The court is depicted as attempting to further its own narrow interests to the detriment of the principality as a whole. The Baronin von Geldern, however, an aristocratic lady who rejects her own background marries the middle class Georg Saalfeld in order to escape from the corrupting influence of conditions at court. The aristocrat adapts herself to the bourgeois: the moral is clear and was to be repeated in later works.

In the autumn of 1846 Freytag moved from Breslau to Leipzig, and a year later to Dresden where he married Emilie Scholz, a divorcee aristocrat Gräfin Dyhrn. Towards the end of 1847 Freytag completed another play 'Graf Waldemar'²⁵ in which once again the theme is the contrast between the corrupt and parasitic aristocracy and the youthful, energetic and enterprising middle class. Graf Waldemar, a typical product of the aristocracy, undisciplined, idle, debilitated and vacillating, is rescued from this decadent existence by his love for Gertrud, the daughter of a gardener, representing the middle class craftsman, that class of society from which Freytag hoped for the rejuvenation of the German nation. Graf Waldemar recognises too - conveniently - the productive industriousness of the middle classes and sees in this the source of national awakening. Freytag's impulse to write was as much political as literary.²⁶

Freytag was in Dresden when the 1848 Revolution broke out in Berlin;²⁷ he immediately abandoned his literary activities for practical political involvement, only to find that there were no political organisations in Dresden that he felt he could join without compromising his political beliefs. Believing as he did in evolution, he was not drawn to any of the more overtly revolutionary or democratic organisations, while the 'Vaterlandsverein' of which Robert Blum was the leader, was too republican for Freytag's liking. He declined to join the 'Deutscher Verein' which, as an organisation committed to moderate liberal policies, represented most closely Freytag's own position, on the grounds that it was anti-Prussian. Characteristically, Freytag went his own way and started a 'Handwerkerverein' of his own, which, with a programme of lectures and discussions, aimed to improve and educate working men. In his memoirs Freytag noted with evident satisfaction:

"...daß von den 500 Genossen des Vereins sich nicht mehr als fünf an dem Aufstande(Dresden 1849) beteiligten." (28)

His enterprise was motivated by his rejection of revolutionary action and supported by his conviction that education would

bring about more permanent, if more gradual, change in society (as exemplified in the play 'Der Gelehrte').

While visiting Leipzig in the turbulent spring of 1848 Freytag met Julian Schmidt, one of the editors of the periodical 'Die Grenzboten'; both men discovered that there were so many points of agreement between them on political and other matters that, when Schmidt invited Freytag to become joint editor of the periodical, Freytag accepted gladly and without hesitation. The political programme of the 'Grenzboten'²⁹ included as its two main points the unification of Germany under Prussia, excluding Austria (the 'kleindeutsch' solution) and opposition to radical democracy and 'den Schwindel des Jahres', namely, the Revolution. Freytag's main concern was to encourage the moderate liberal middle class who had been considerably disheartened by the suppression that had followed the failure of the 1848 Revolution. The main battle fought in the columns of the 'Grenzboten' was

"...gegen eine öde Reaktion und gegen die Mutlosigkeit und Zerfahrenheit im Volke." (30)

In the comedy 'Die Journalisten' (1852) the role of the liberal press as a positive force in educating the masses is contrasted with the corrupt and politically unscrupulous practices of the radical opposition press.

In addition to his work as co-editor of the 'Grenzboten' Freytag was also active in politics: he was involved in the launching of the 'Nationalliberaler Verein',³¹ the aim of which was to bring together in one national organisation moderate liberals from all over Germany:

"...die ganz zersplitterten und in ihrer Vereinzelung fast wirkungslosen guten Kräfte zu innigerer Verbindung zusammenzufassen und mit ihrer Hilfe dem politischen Geiste eine freiheitliche gemäßigte und praktische Richtung anzuweisen." (32)

As such, it was a forerunner of the more famous 'Nationalverein' established in 1859. Later that same year (16th August 1853) a meeting of the new association was held at Reinhardsbrunn at

which the members decided that in order to influence the press they would start a 'lithographierte Correspondenz'. Freytag, being a journalist, took on responsibility for this and the first edition of the 'Autographierte Correspondenz für deutsche Zeitungen' appeared in January 1854. The aim, according to Freytag was

"...die öffentliche Meinung in Preußen zu revolutionieren." (33) He was convinced of the need for a major liberal daily in Germany and hoped to develop the 'correspondence' into a fully fledged daily newspaper,³⁴ in order to increase the influence of moderate liberalism on the formation of public opinion. Although his plans in this direction came to nothing, he did not easily give up the idea.³⁵

In the 1850's, a period of deep reaction in Prussia under Manteuffel, Freytag saw his task as strengthening the liberal consciousness of the middle classes. The 'Presseverein' set up in Leipzig continued in existence until 1861 when - its usefulness outlived - it had been superceded by the establishment of the 'Nationalverein' (1859). Freytag welcomed this development and was instrumental in persuading Duke Ernst II of Coburg to act as patron of the association.³⁶ He believed that Germany could only be united by voluntary parliamentary means, he thus saw the 'Nationalverein' as a step towards the achievement of a united Germany, as well as a powerful means of educating the German public politically.³⁷

In the Constitutional Conflict in Prussia (1862-1866) Freytag through the columns of the 'Grenzboten' encouraged the liberal party (in Prussia the Progressive Party) to take a firm stand against Bismarck. Freytag was convinced that this was German liberalism's historic hour and that the struggle would end with a victory for liberalism and parliamentary government. He was a radical in the moderate liberal camp. Only the defeat of Austria in 1866 and the subsequent establishment of the North German Confederation reconciled him temporarily with the failure of liberalism to defeat aristocratic absolutism and install parliamentary government.

Freytag joined the National Liberal Party under Bunnigsen whom he greatly admired and was elected member of parliament for the constituency of Erfurt in the 1866 elections.³⁸ He always regarded himself as a member of the National Liberal Party, even when he did not agree with its policies, more particularly in relation to Bismarck. Indeed, from 1866 onwards Freytag's political views developed very largely in response to Bismarck's policies. Thus, although he supported the National Liberals in their anti-catholic 'Kulturkampf', he objected strongly to Bismarck's highly personal, vindictive way of conducting the campaign. Freytag supported the anti-socialist legislation, but he ultimately came to the conclusion that social upheaval was inevitable and that socialism could not be suppressed by legal means. He believed equally that any concessions that were made to the socialists would be followed by further more extortionate demands. Freytag consoled himself in his last years that the very disruption of social and political life he was witness to bore within it the seeds of new national life.³⁹

Ever since the middle 1850's Freytag had placed much hope on the liberal convictions of the Prussian Crown Prince; he became a close political associate of the Crown Prince and worked to influence the Crown Prince in favour of liberal ideas.⁴⁰ However, the 1870's and 80's saw the Crown Prince grow more despondent and weary, a prey to pessimism and moods of depression, as it began to seem that he would never have the opportunity to implement his liberal ideas as Kaiser. He also grew more interested in the revitalisation of the glories of medieval Germany than with the struggle for liberal principles, a struggle that carried little prospect of success under Bismarck. Freytag turned away from the Crown Prince, in later years a bitter man, a man whose hopes of a liberal Germany had been dashed by events and whose whole philosophy had been badly shaken. He gave vent to his bitterness in his critical pamphlet 'Der Kronprinz und die deutsche Kaiserkrone'. (1889)

Freytag spent the last years of his life in secluded retirement at Wiesbaden, maintaining contact with only a few close friends. He died on 30th April 1895.

B. Freytag and Bismarck

1. The Constitutional Conflict

a. Events leading to the appointment of Bismarck as Prime Minister of Prussia

When Crown Prince William of Prussia became Regent in 1858, an era of reaction was brought to a close and a 'new era' begun, at least, this was how contemporary liberals interpreted events. The Crown Prince was known to be on bad terms with the influential court circles, the so-called 'Hofkamarilla', so that his dismissal of Manteuffel and Westfalen, the symbols of reactionary suppressive government, appeared to confirm the liberal leanings of the Crown Prince. This raised the hopes of many liberals that the long period of ultra-conservative policies in Prussia was at an end. William reinforced these hopes when, in 1860 - as King William of Prussia now - he appointed a cabinet composed predominantly of liberal conservative ministers.

On the issue that was to precipitate the conflict between Crown and parliament, however, William very definitely shared the concern of conservatives about the role of the army, whatever differences may have existed between him and the conservative circles in other fields. As Regent, William had been keenly interested in army reform, especially as the mobilisation of the Prussian army at the time of the Austro-Italian War (1859) had revealed serious deficiencies in military organisation. Roon, an ultra-conservative Junker, was a vigorous - and as War Minister, an authoritative - advocate of army reform, and he was supported in this by William. Both men agreed that the army was not only a guarantee of Prussia's international influence and prestige, but also a bulwark at home against the gathering forces of liberalism and democracy.

In due course, therefore, a reform bill was placed before the Prussian parliament (April 1860), which envisaged a reduction in the strength of the 'Landwehr', while increasing the numbers

of troops on active service and in the reserve. By expanding the regular army, dominated by the Junker officer corps, and therefore, politically reliable, the conservatives were seeking to consolidate their power within the state at the expense of the 'Landwehr', regarded by liberals as the 'army of the people'. The King and those in the conservative camp feared a 'parliamentary army',² while parliament was opposed to the idea of an army that was exempt from parliamentary control. The conservative Prussian aristocracy feared that control of the army by parliament - a parliament dominated by the liberal middle class - would rob them of the basis of their power within the state, while the liberals, for their part, feared that an army controlled very largely by the conservative Junker could be used against them. This is what the liberals suspected and feared;³ the liberal-dominated parliament accordingly rejected the bill.

The liberal conservatives in the Lower House had pursued a policy of moderation, they had supported the government where possible, hoping to gain concessions in the army bill, but the government refused to modify its proposals. Many liberals concluded that 'moderation' as a policy had failed and that outright opposition and massive pressure on the government was now the only alternative if the principle of parliamentary control of the army was to be conceded. The German Progressive Party (Deutsche Fortschrittspartei) was set up (June 1861) with the express purpose of pursuing such a policy of confrontation. In the elections the following December the Progressive Party was returned as the strongest party in the Lower House, forming a majority with the left-centre. Unable to gain a majority for the reform bill as it stood, the conservative liberal cabinet was dismissed in March 1862 and new elections were held. The result was a further increase in the strength of the Progressive Party. But conservative circles were in no mood to yield to parliamentary pressure, indeed, a compromise proposal put forward by the Progressive Party was rejected by the King on the advice of the ultra-conservative Manteuffel. The conflict

seemed insoluble. So desperate did the situation appear, that William considered abdicating in favour of his son. It was, as it were, when parliament was on the verge of victory, that Roon telegraphed to Bismarck in Paris: 'Periculum in mora. Dépêchez vous!'. Bismarck returned to Prussia immediately and, after an interview with the King at Babelsberg, was appointed Prime Minister on 23rd September with the task of defeating parliament in its bid for control of the army.

b. Freytag's view of the events leading to the appointment of Bismarck

The dismissal of the liberals from the Auerswald cabinet in March 1862 signalled for Freytag the outbreak of a conflict between, as Freytag put it,

"...den Neigungen der höchsten Staatsgewalt und allen liberalen Fraktionen des Volkes..." (5)

The Prussian government had, he wrote in the 'Grenzboten', virtually declared war on its own people:

"Sie (die preußische Regierung) ist in den Kampf getreten mit dem Kern des eigenen Volkes." (6)

The struggle that had broken out between the Crown and Parliament in Prussia was but the forum for a much broader political and ideological struggle, namely, the struggle between the landed and military aristocracy and the middle classes. Ideologically the struggle was between absolutism and liberalism, the rule of the monarch and the rule of parliament. The current view among liberals at this time was that absolutism and the prerogatives of the monarch were no more than a facade which concealed the realities of Junker power and influence at court and in the administration. The establishment of parliamentary government in Prussia in which the power of the monarch would be reduced to that of a representative head of state bound by the constitution to carry out the wishes of the elected majority party would effectively transfer political power from the Junker to the liberal middle class; the political power of the Junker, who operated very largely through their control of the administration, through their personal access to, and influence on, the monarch, would then be broken. Thus, although the immediate cause of the conflict was the refusal of the King and his appointed Ministers to countenance modifications in the 'army reform bill to satisfy the Lower House of the Prussian parliament, the deeper cause, as recognised by most contemporaries, was the refusal of the King, the Court and the Junker class, that is to say, the conservative establishment, to accept the liberal middle class as equals in the exercise of political power.

The outbreak of the conflict was for Freytag the beginning of a new era, a period of momentous historical transition:

"...Übergang aus einem persönlichen Regiment in ein konstitutionelles, welcher sich jetzt in Preußen zu vollziehen beginnt..." (7)

which would end with the victory of constitutional liberalism over absolutism, of this he was sure.⁸ Freytag's confidence was grounded on his belief that progress towards liberal institutions, as expressions of the political power of the middle class, was inevitable; his studies of German history had convinced him that the middle class was destined to assume the mantle of political power and thus fulfil its historic mission. As a class it had established itself at the turn of the century (1800) when it had given supreme expression to the ideals of liberalism in the literature of German classicism. The middle decades of the nineteenth century had, in the meantime, seen the capitalist middle class increase its economic power, while the landed aristocracy went into rapid economic decline, unable to adapt to new circumstances. Freytag believed that with the constitutional conflict that historic moment had come when the middle class would wrest power from a declining aristocracy.

Freytag, therefore, welcomed any aggravation of the conflict since he believed that in this way it would be brought to a head; he was positively exhilarated by the struggle:

"Es ist ein frischer tüchtiger Kampf." (9)

He was at pains to impress on the readers of the 'Grenzboten' that the conflict represented a major turning point in history, it was

"...ein Konflikt auf Sein oder Nichtsein zwischen ihnen(i.e. the government) und dem Abgeordnetenhaus." (10)

He was also quick to point to any worsening of the conflict since he believed that the government would only be forced to surrender to the liberal majority in parliament when the liberals, confident of victory, brought the conflict to a head. In Freytag's view such a victory was inevitable: the government was weak and drifting:

"Sie(i.e. the Ministers) sehen keinen anderen Weg vor sich, als im Kampfe mit der großen Majorität des preußischen Volkes das Staatsschiff durch künstliches Lavieren in den höher schwellenden Wellen treiben zu lassen." (11)

Freytag confidently predicted that any attempts by the government to stifle expression of the mounting popular opposition would only serve to exacerbate the situation.¹² The resulting intensification of hostility to the government would make a victory for liberalism even more certain:

"Sie(i.e. the Ministers) sind nach menschlichen Ermessen nur dazu in ihre Ämter getreten, um widerwillig einen großen Erfolg des Liberalismus in Preußen beschleunigen zu helfen." (13)

Freytag saw the struggle between Crown and Parliament as a vast exercise in practical political education, it would serve to

"...edles Metall härten." (14)

and the Prussian people would develop into a politically aware nation as a result of the confrontation:

"Die Existenz des gegenwärtigen Ministeriums demokratisiert das preußische Volk mit großer Schnelligkeit; das Mißtrauen ist so groß geworden, daß jeder Widerstand, welchen sie einem Drängen des Abgeordnetenhauses entgegenzusetzen, daß jede Forderung, welche sie selbst stellen, ihnen auf das Nachteiligste gedeutet wird. Es ist vorauszusehen, daß die Reibung zwischen den beiden Faktoren der Gesetzgebung größer werden wird." (15)

The government would soon realise, Freytag felt, that the people were not to be won over by minor concessions:

"Noch rechnen sie in der Stille auf eine Bekehrung der öffentlichen Meinung in Preußen. ... Wenn sie...für ihre eigene Popularität etwas hoffen, dann ist, so fürchten wir, nie ein Irrtum größer gewesen... ..ein solches Abwenden des Volkes von den entschlossenen Liberalen der gegenwärtigen Kammer ist höchst unwahrscheinlich. Ja, man muß erwarten, daß so lange das gegenwärtige Ministerium besteht, das direkte Gegenteil eintreten wird." (16)

Nor could they be pressurised by repressive legislation into surrendering their position:

"Daß aber auf dem Wege, den man jetzt eingeschlagen, der stille Widerstand des Volkes nicht beseitigt wird, und daß er noch weniger durch kleine Mittel hier, durch Konzessionen dort, durch polizeiliche Restriktionen zu brechen ist, davon werden die Minister sich sehr bald überzeugen, wenn sie das überhaupt je geglaubt haben." (17)

The power of the people would continue to mount, with government resistance only serving to fuel popular anger:

"Denn die Strömung der Volkskraft wird noch längere Zeit nach der linken Seite hin fluten. Und um so heftiger, je länger der Widerstand dauert, welchen dreißig Regierungen, Hofkoterien und romantische Stimmungen einigen höchsten Bedürfnissen der Nation entgegen stellen." (18)

Even concessions by the government would only lead to an increase in popular demands:

"Jede liberale Maßregel wird ihnen(i.e. the electorate) als erzwungene Nachgiebigkeit, jedes Eingehen auf die Wünsche der Kammern als Schwäche ausgelegt werden und jeder Erfolg, welcher die Vertreter des Volkes durchsetzen, wird von dem Volke als ein Sieg des liberalen Prinzips...aufgefaßt werden." (19)

The prospects for a liberal victory appeared good.

So confident was Freytag of victory that he demanded complete surrender from the government. When the government did make some concessions in the speech from the throne on the occasion of the opening of Parliament after the March 1862 elections, Freytag's advice to the liberals was to take this as a sign of weakness, to cast aside ideas of reconciliation with the government and to intensify the conflict:

"Es war ein glänzender Sieg, den das Volk durch seine Wahlen über die Regierung davongetragen hat. Wie sehr er dem Ministerium imponiert hat, beweist die Thronrede... Die Konzessionen sind abgerungen, dahinter steht ein letzter, durchaus nicht gebrochener Wille, welcher über einen gewissen Punkt sich schwerlich wird hinaustreiben lassen, ohne neue starke Konflikte. Es ist anzunehmen, daß die Führer der Fortschrittspartei, die vielleicht von der Größe ihres Erfolges selbst überrascht waren, sich zunächst ernsthaft bemühen werden, einen solchen Konflikt zu vermeiden. Sie können kaum noch gewinnen, wohl aber viel verlieren. Brennt aber ein unvermeidlicher Zwist mit der Regierung auf, so werden sie sorglich darauf sehen, daß er in einer Frage entstehe, wo sie des Volkes, welches hinter ihnen steht, ganz sicher sind." (20)

Effective government, he pointed out, was only possible with the consent of the people:

"Es ist schon jetzt in Preußen nicht mehr möglich zu regieren im Widerspruch gegen die Majorität der Volksvertreter." (21)

Freytag reminded his readers that the government, dominated by conservatives, was defending the monarchy as a means of

defending the interests of the Junkers, a small, but influential class, whose interests were not those of the nation or the state, but their own selfish class interests:

"Ihre Bildung, ihre Interessen, ihre Gesichtskreise sind eng begrenzt, ihr Verständnis für die höchsten Aufgaben des Staates ist geringer. ... Die Konservativen in Preußen sind gegenwärtig unfähig, irgend eine Regierung zu stützen, weil es ihnen überhaupt an politischen Ideen fehlt und weil sie zur Zeit noch nichts sind als eine große und einflußreiche Coterie, deren letztes Bestreben ist, gegen einige notwendige Bedürfnisse der Gegenwart zu reagieren und zwar nur, seit diese neuen Bedingungen ihnen ungemütlich sind und alte Gewöhnungen stören." (22)

Freytag depicts the aristocratic conservatives as thoughtless and indolent, irritated by the demands of modern society and reacting with sullen arrogance. Any government that chose to rule with the support of such people alone would soon lose the confidence of the people and thus undermine its own authority:

"So lange die Grundstimmung einer Partei dieser Art von mürrischer Unzufriedenheit ist, leer an Inhalt, bar jeder andern, als einer durchaus egoistischen und kleinlichen Herrschsucht, ruiniert sie rettungslos jede Regierung und Autorität, welcher sie sich zuneigt." (23)

If the government wished to gain the support of the people, it would have to abandon its allegiance to the interests of the Prussian aristocracy:

"Jeder große und dauerhafte Gewinn (wird) nur durch ein aufrichtiges Bündnis des Staates mit den liberalen Volkswünschen möglich." (24)

Freytag warned that if the government failed to disassociate itself from the conservatives, then the monarchy itself was endangered, since if the King bound himself to any one political party, the people would no longer feel able to respect the monarch as the head of state. The King must be above - and apart - from politics on the English model.

"Die Aufgabe eines Königs von Preußen ist von jetzt an gar nicht an eine bestimmte Partei sein Schicksal und die Zukunft seines Hauses zu ketten, oder gar sein treues Heer als die letzte Hilfe gegen untreue Bürger zu hegen, das wäre ein furchtbares und verhängnisvolles Verkennen seiner erhabenen Stellung. Sein hohes Amt ist vielmehr:

"prüfend in das Volk zu schauen und zu beobachten, welche der Parteien gerade die größte Frische, Wärme, Energie und Tatkraft entwickelt und am meisten befähigt ist, die Gedanken und Herzen des Volkes zu leiten. Aus dieser Partei, welcher zeitweilig die Majorität der Kammern versichert ist, wird er seine ersten verantwortlichen Beamten wählen. Das ist nicht englische Theorie, es ist nichts als die einfache deutsche Klugheit." (25)

Meanwhile, the monarchy as an institution of state was threatened by its close links with the conservatives, just as the close alliance between the army and the conservatives was the cause of widespread distrust of the army.

In the early months of the constitutional conflict Freytag was supremely confident that the liberals would succeed in establishing in Prussia a government responsible to parliament with a strictly constitutional monarch and an army subject to control by parliament; he believed that the conservative anti-parliamentarian Junkers were a class doomed to extinction. The irresistible advance of modern ideas would force them either to adapt or perish:

"Das Junkertum, wie es von 1848 bis jetzt sich in oft grotesken Formen gebreitet hat, ist für jeden, der näher zusieht, bereits in einer innern Auflösung begriffen, es wird unter dieser und in den ersten Jahren einer nächsten Regierung sich allmählich ruhmlos ausleben." (26)

Freytag expressed the same view privately in a letter to his close friend Karl Mathy:

"Ich halte meine Ansicht fest, daß diese Wirtschaft in Preußen nicht lange dauern werde." (27)

In his novel 'Soll und Haben' (1854) he gave literary expression to the same idea;²⁸ as he reported in a letter to Duke Ernst from a journey through Silesia:

"In drei bis vier Jahren ist das Kapital, welches durch die jetzt ausgestellten Rentenbriefe sehr zu rechter Zeit in die Hände unserer kleinen Aristokraten kam, vertan, dann noch einige Jahre des Schwindels und Schwebens, in fünf bis sechs Jahren also muß mit innerer Notwendigkeit ein großer Sturz der Güter, ein Offenbarwerden der Schwäche unseres Landadels erfolgen. Diese Krisis, welche durch politische Ereignisse allerdings beschleunigt werden dürfte, wird die Herrschaft der bornierten Kreuzzeitungspartei in der Provinz sehr sicher stürzen, wie ich hoffe für immer." (29)

while his play 'Die Fabier'(1859) demonstrated the futile resistance of the aristocratic Fabians of Rome to the demands of the populace.

That the middle class was morally and intellectually superior to the aristocracy was axiomatic for Freytag: he saw his own class as eminently productive(economically) and creative, both in material and cultural terms, while the aristocracy was parasitical, intellectually sterile, immoral and debilitated. Such views were not uncommon among members of the middle class in Germany in the period from 1850 to 1870,³⁰ it was the climax of that tide of middle^{-class} resentment of the aristocracy and its privileges that found expression in German literature from the dramas of Lessing and Schiller to the novels of Spielhagen und Freytag. Equally self-evident for Freytag was the assumption that the middle class would ultimately, in fulfilment of its historic destiny, take over the dominant positions in society and the state.

This was the historical perspective within which Freytag viewed contemporary political events. Against such a background it is not surprising that Freytag was quick to dismiss the idea that the appointment of Herr von Bismarck, which had been rumoured, would alter the situation; he was, after all, just another Junker whose efforts would meet with the same singular lack of success that had distinguished previous cabinets:

"Auch eine Ergänzung durch neue Kraft würde ihm(i.e. the state) wenig helfen, denn Herrn von Bismarck würde dasselbe Mißtrauen verfolgen, welches die Tätigkeit der Minister so sehr erschwert." (31)

Rumours - also in connection with the appointment of Bismarck - that the Prussian government was considering embarking on some bold new policy in Germany so as to distract the population from the constitutional conflict by an appeal to their Prussian patriotism, had also been circulating. Such a course of action, Freytag felt, would spell disaster for

Prussia, unless the government first ensured the support of parliament and people by yielding to their demands:

"Die Ungunst seiner innern Unpopularität erschwert ihm (i.e. das preußische Ministerium) höchlich ein kräftiges Auftreten gegen fremde Kabinette, und eine kräftige äußere Politik, welche den Staat in ernsthafte Konflikte bringt, droht ihm wieder mit schnellem Ende. ... Davor aber mögen den preußischen Staat seine guten Sterne bewahren, daß das gegenwärtige Ministerium ohne aufrichtige Versöhnung mit dem Volke, ohne Modifikation in seiner Zusammensetzung, in der bisherigen Weise des auswärtigen Amtes, eine kühne Politik beginne. Neue größere Niederlagen würden die unvermeidliche Folge sein." (32)

Only a few days before Bismarck was actually appointed, Freytag wrote an article on the immediate cause of the conflict, the army reform bill in which he reviewed

"...die Krisis, in welcher das Verfassungsleben des preußischen Staates schwebt." (33)

It was not to be expected, he wrote:

"...daß der Konflikt zwischen Regierung und Volksvertretung auch durch eine jetzt bevorstehende Umgestaltung des Ministeriums beendet wird." (34)

He encouraged parliament to oppose the government even more vigorously; he called for

"...eine rücksichtslosere Opposition...zum Heil des Staates..." (35)

He warned against compromise which could only result in a weakening of liberalism and ultimately the defeat and abolition of parliament; members of parliament

"...müssen den Kampf durchführen, wenn sie nicht sich selbst vernichten, und was wichtiger ist, das Vertrauen des Volkes zu seiner guten Sache vernichten wollen." (36)

The aim of the struggle, he reminded his readers, was not some compromise on the question of army reform, but nothing less than the removal of the government:

"Aber das Hauptziel des Kampfes war durchaus nicht ein momentaner Vergleich, der mit dem gegenwärtigen Ministerium geschlossen wurde, sondern die Beseitigung des nach jeder Richtung unzeitgemäßen Ministeriums selbst, ein Ziel, welches zu erreichen im wahren Interesse des Staates lag." (37)

As long as the government resisted the basic demands of parliament, parliament would be obliged to reject any detailed proposals the government might put forward on the question of army reform, since that was not the main issue. Once the principle of parliamentary government had been conceded, Freytag argued, and a new government had been formed on the basis of the majority party in parliament, then, but only then, could the question of army reform be dealt with on its merits - even suggesting that liberals should be prepared to spend more on the army than the government had originally proposed.³⁸

For Freytag the conflict was not about the re-organisation of the army, it was about the right of parliament to determine government policy; it was about whether the King should rule in Prussia

"...mit dem Volk oder ohne Volk..." (39)

Once this central issue had been settled, then, as far as Freytag was concerned, as much money as was available could be spent on the army. He concluded:

"Ein Eingehen der Regierung auf die Wünsche des Volkes ist zur Zeit noch höchst unwahrscheinlich. Mit kleinen Konzessionen aber ist gegenwärtig eine Versöhnung nicht möglich." (40)

c. The first three months of Bismarck's premiership

Bismarck was appointed Prime Minister (Ministerpräsident) by King William I on 24th September 1862, a move that was generally taken by public opinion ⁴¹ as a sign that the King did not intend to yield to the pressure of parliamentary opposition; the conflict was to continue. Although it was assumed that Bismarck would pursue predictably conservative policies, commentators were not blind to his considerable personal qualities, as the liberal 'Kölnische Zeitung' pointed out, Bismarck may be a Junker, but he was also

"...ein Mann von Geist und Bildung, dem es weder an persönlicher Liebenswürdigkeit fehlt noch an Beredsamkeit und Unternehmungsggeist, kein unfähiger, aber noch weniger ein ungefährlicher Mann." (42)

Bismarck was soon to prove that he was, indeed, a dangerous man: his notorious 'Eisen und Blut' speech ⁴³ scandalised public opinion but was just a portent of things to come. When the Lower House rejected the budget Bismarck had prepared, he declared that he would be obliged to carry on the financial business of the state, whether or not the Lower House gave its approval. A resolution passed by the Lower House that such expenditure was unconstitutional, achieved little. Shortly after Bismarck prorogued parliament indefinitely.

The first article in which Freytag expressed any reaction to Bismarck's controversial measures appeared on 17th October, ⁴⁴ almost a month after Bismarck had been appointed; it was an account of Bismarck's first three weeks in office. Freytag was plainly taken aback, not to say, filled with horror at the way Bismarck had chosen to conduct government policy. The last parliamentary session had been

"...eine verhängnisvolle Session für den Staat." (45)

Bismarck's tactics were

"...etwas Neues und Gewaltiges." (46)

The King had appointed a 'feudal' cabinet

"...gerade in dem Augenblick, wo das Volk am einmütigsten dagegen protestiert hat. Und die feudale Partei in Preußen ist keine Partei, welche auf dem Boden des Verfassungslebens steht." (47)

This was a new phase in the historical conflict between the middle class and the Prussian aristocracy:

"Denn von ihr(i.e. der Session) wird man einst einen Abschnitt in der Geschichte des preußischen Verfassungslebens datieren." (48)

Freytag angrily rejected Bismarck's theory that there was a gap in the constitution ('Verfassungslücke'), Bismarck's action was plainly a breach of the constitution.⁴⁹ Yet, confident as ever, Freytag predicted that Bismarck's policies - which had demonstrated

"...ein großes Ungeschick...in der Behandlung des eigenen Volkes, Nichtachtung seiner Wünsche und Bedürfnisse, veraltete und gefährliche Sympathien für die privilegierten Klassen..." (50)

- would fan the conflict into greater intensity.⁵¹ Indeed, he doubted whether Bismarck would survive one year in office.⁵² Any attempt he might make to win over public opinion and the less militant members of the Lower House by minor concessions, proffered with an air of conciliation, would fail:

"Er wird bald erkennen, daß in der gegenwärtigen Lage des Staates diese Mittel ihre helfende Kraft verloren haben." (53)

In short, Bismarck's task was a hopeless one:

"Es ist ein hoffnungsloses Unternehmen, welches Herr von Bismarck auf sich geladen hat, eine Versöhnung des Gegensatzes, und wenn dies nicht glückt, eine Beseitigung desselben herbeizuführen." (54)

Freytag looked forward to the collapse of the Bismarck administration which, he believed, would at the same time usher in the era of parliamentary government in Prussia,⁵⁵ the ultimate goal, as he never tired of reminding his readers:

"Es handelt sich in Preußen jetzt durchaus nicht um die Militärorganisation und zweijährige Dienstzeit, sondern darum, ob das Regiment nach dem zufälligen Willen der Majestät und nach den Einwirkungen der königlichen Umgebung oder ob dasselbe in gesetzlicher Form durch die Übereinstimmung der Volksmajorität mit den höchsten Beamten des Königs geleitet werden soll." (56)

More seasoned opponents of Bismarck believed him capable of a coup d'état,⁵⁷ but Freytag did not agree: he felt rather that Bismarck would try to carry on without parliament until such time as he had the opportunity to embark on some foreign policy

adventure which,⁵⁸ if successful, would not only divert public attention from the internal conflict⁵⁹ but would also reconcile some liberals to Bismarck, especially if he were to make progress towards some kind of German parliament.⁶⁰ Although Freytag was, thus, aware of the possibilities, associated with Bismarck, that were later to be translated into political realities, he discounted them for a number of reasons: firstly, he was confident that no such opportunity would present itself:

"Wir fürchten, die Ärzte des Staates werden vergebens auf ein äußeres Ereignis warten, welches wohltätig den kranken Körper des Staates mit neuer Lebenskraft erfüllt." (61)

since Prussia was internally weak,

"Das gegenwärtige Preußen ist zur Unbedeutendheit nach außen verurteilt, so lange seine Krankheit, das Übergewicht des Junkertums, besteht." (62)

a situation that could only be remedied by the removal of the Bismarck administration:

"Es ist vergebliche Hoffnung, eine neue Kraftentwicklung, Wärme, Hingabe, Begeisterung von einem Volke zu erhoffen, welches so lebhaft fühlt, daß die Erkrankung eines kräftigen Staates nicht besser behoben werden kann, als durch Entfernung des gegenwärtigen Ministeriums." (63)

Secondly, Freytag did not credit Bismarck with the ruthlessness to involve Prussia in war,⁶⁴ although he recognised that there were many who did.

"Man traut ihm jetzt die Keckheit, das Äußerste zu wagen, man hält es nicht ganz für unmöglich, daß er festen Entschluß in der Durchführung bewahren könne." (65)

Freytag's tone was one of scepticism, he was inclined to doubt whether Bismarck had staying power necessary to see a decision through:

"Wenn Preußen den Entschluß fassen wollte, sich von dem Bunde zu lösen, und mit den Waffen in der Hand einem unerträglichen Zustand ein Ende zu machen, so wäre doch die nächste Voraussetzung ein einmütiger Entschluß das Äußerste zu wagen, junge Kraft, ein Diktatorwille und eine rücksichtslose Kühnheit in der obersten Staatsleitung, welche die ganze Umgebung der Krone fortreibt. Ist so etwas in dem gegenwärtigen Preußen möglich?" (66)

Freytag thought not. Bismarck lacked resolve and decisiveness, his policy was characterised by - an interesting phrase -

"leichtherzige Betriebsamkeit." (67)

Thirdly, even assuming that Bismarck was able to mobilise the army - if not the people - in support of his foreign policy, Freytag doubted whether success that enhanced Prussia's position in Germany would really change the internal situation:

"Nun, wenn es ihm (Bismarck) gelänge, alles Widerstrebende zu überwinden und einige Armeekorps in Bewegung zu setzen, die tiefe, gewaltige Abneigung, welche die große Majorität der Preußen gegen die gegenwärtige Regierungskunst empfindet, wird er dadurch nicht aufheben. Er würde selbst durch Erfolge mit dem System, dem er zu dienen bestimmt ist, nicht versöhnen." (68)

He looked with optimism to the new year:

"Das neue Jahr wird die Männer der Opposition aufs Neue in der Hauptstadt versammeln. Was seit dem Ende der vorigen Session geschehen ist, kann sie nicht nachgiebiger machen, sie sind durch kleine Konzessionen nicht zu gewinnen, durch halbe Maßregeln nicht zu versöhnen. Der Kampf, welchen sie führen, das Gesetz in der Hand, ein maßvolles Rechtsgefühl im Herzen, mag kürzere oder längere Zeit dauern, aber er wird enden mit dem Siege der nationalen Partei und damit, daß Preußen zum Glück und Segen für sein Königshaus, zum Glück und Segen für das Volk eine durchaus parlamentarische Regierung erhält." (69)

Overall Freytag tended to overestimate the power of Parliament and the people - as exemplified in the frequent use of the vague, but evocative term 'Volkskraft' - and consistently underestimate the power of the aristocracy and the army.⁷⁰

Freytag also seriously misjudged Bismarck's abilities and skill as a politician, regarding him as some sort of latter-day, but fairly light-weight, Pückler-Muskau: the conservative Junker, affecting liberal airs, elegant, eloquent and witty, and not without a certain streak of decadent audacity, who would try to win over Parliament with his urbane ways:

"Allerdings ist er klüger als seine Vorgänger, er hat in Frankfurt und Paris nicht wenig gelernt. Er wird vorläufig versuchen, die öffentliche Meinung ein wenig zu redigieren, durch Beeinflussung der Presse, durch die Urbanität gegen Oppositionsmitglieder, welche dem Minister eines großen Staates so wohl ansteht, und durch ähnliche

"Hilfsmittel einer chevalresken Natur. Aber er wird sehr bald erkennen, daß in der gegenwärtigen Lage des Staates diese Mittel ihre helfende Kraft verloren haben. Gegen die geschlossene Masse einer festen, zähen, erbitterten Opposition, welche ihrer eigenen Größe und Kraft sich noch kaum ganz bewußt ist, wird der heitere Schimmer eines weltmännischen Liberalismus, der ihn vor den übrigen Mitgliedern des Ministeriums auszeichnet, wirkungslos glänzen." (71)

While Freytag was prepared to concede that Bismarck was capable of provocative action, threats and other chicanery, he did not believe that Bismarck was possessed of those qualities that would be required to carry his policies through to a successful conclusion.

"Er (Bismarck) mag im Stande sein, einige herausfordernde Schritte durchzusetzen, drohende Worte, verletzende Maßregeln, aber gerade in den Momenten, wo konsequentes rücksichtsloses Vorgehen die einzige Rettung werden kann, wird seinem Entschluß durch irgend eine Gegenströmung, ein Bedenken, einen Einfall die Energie genommen werden, und was rücksichtslos und hochfahrend begonnen wurde, wird bedenklich geendigt. Ihn selbst aber wird der Haß für eine halbe Maßregel und die Blame treffen, welche Jeden vernichtet, der zu keck wagt, was er nicht durchzuführen vermag." (72)

It was Freytag's preconceptions as to the character of the Junker as a class

"in einer innern Auflösung begriffen" (73)

that coloured his whole interpretation of Bismarck's conduct. Even years later, when the full force of Bismarck's personality, his skill as a politician and statesman had been sufficiently demonstrated, Freytag persisted in his 'Pückler-Muskau' view of Bismarck: he wrote to his close friend Stosch:

"Das Junge Deutschland, das Junkertum in seinen eleganten Typen: Freiligrath, Lenau, Fürst Pückler, Lichnowsky, frech, mit Freude am Gewagten, ohne feste Grundsätze, ohne Schule, abhängig vorzugsweise von französischer Bildung. Der größte Spätling dieser Vegetationsperiode, die in der Literatur von 1830 bis 1848 reicht, scheint mir Bismarck. Das Charakteristische ist Mangel an Ehrfurcht, alles launisch und persönlich fassend, dabei die ersten Anfänge frischer und kecker Lebenskraft. Deshalb wird auch dieser Mann keine Schule haben, seine Fehler sind nicht vorzugsweise die unserer Zeit." (74)

Bismarck was thus for Freytag a specimen of that more elegant breed of Junker that emerged at the time of 'Junges Deutschland', but whose policies were, nevertheless, the product of

"...persönliche Stimmung, Willkür, Vorurteil, persönlicher Egoismus..." (75)

representing the antithesis of middle class attitudes. He failed to detect in Bismarck's conduct any of those qualities, his power of endurance, his determination and ruthlessness, that were to be so decisive later on.⁷⁶ He described Bismarck's conduct of government policy in the first three months of office as 'dilettantenhaft'.⁷⁷

d. The events of 1863 and Freytag's assessment of them

The next year (1863) continued to be dominated by the constitutional conflict between - in the political arena - Bismarck and the liberal majority in the Lower House of the Prussian Parliament. Towards the end of the year the attention of the public was usefully diverted by developments in Denmark where the Danish parliament had passed legislation incorporating the province of Schleswig into the Kingdom of Denmark, a move that provoked passionate reaction throughout Germany where the two provinces Schleswig and Holstein were regarded as indivisible, and, therefore, essentially German.⁷⁸

In his efforts, as a journalist, to broaden and intensify the liberal opposition to the Bismarck administration Freytag turned his attention in his regular articles in the 'Grenzboten'⁷⁹ to the so-called Old Liberals (Altliberalen),⁸⁰ who, while they were generally opposed to 'die Herrschaft des Junkertums'⁸¹, nevertheless, regretted the present confrontation between monarch and parliament and sought to bring the conflict to an end by some sort of compromise.⁸² Freytag sensing the danger of their approach, sought to convince them of the urgent need to overcome their scruples and support the main body of liberal in outright opposition. He rejected the 'old-liberal' argument that all that was required, was to remove Bismarck and then the system would become more flexible and the way open for reforms.⁸³ It was not, Freytag countered, the conflict that threatened Prussia's future, but the continued existence of the Junker establishment:

"Nicht in dem gegenwärtigen Streite liegt das Unerträgliche für Preußen und die größte Gefahr für sein Fürstenhaus, sondern in der Art, wie dieser Streit beendet wird. Der Staat der Hohenzollern ist gerettet und gesichert, wenn der Staat mit einer gründlichen Niederlage der alten Velleitäten und mit einem glorreichen Sieg des Liberalismus endigt." (84)

Freytag emphasised the need for all liberal forces, whatever other differences might separate them, to unite on this issue in determined opposition to the government:

"...nur ein einmütiges und festes Zusammenhalten in der Opposition gegen die bestehende Regierung (kann) ihren Staat und die Deutschen aus der gegenwärtigen Katastrophe herausheben..." (85)

while a divided liberal camp would only

"...den Gegnern eine innere Schwäche des Liberalismus verraten, die Reaktion vorläufig befestigen, eine große Zahl der Wähler tiefer in den Radikalismus hineintreiben." (86)

Freytag warned insistently against compromise; radical change was what was required, by which Freytag meant the removal of Bismarck and the conservative government to be replaced by a liberal government:

"Ein fauler Friede, eine halbe Versöhnung werden das akute Fieber in eine chronische, schleichende Krankheit verwandeln. Und offen muß ausgesprochen werden, die Zukunft Preußens und seiner Dynastie hängen davon ab, daß der nächste Umschlag in der Umgebung der Krone, die Ursachen des alten Leidens gründlich beseitige. ... Es sind scharfe Schnitte, gründliche Reformen notwendig geworden." (87)

The exacerbation of the conflict that Bismarck's measures had produced was welcomed by Freytag as clear evidence of the deep gulf between government and people, the guarantee of a liberal victory:

"Wir meinen, daß die Verschärfung des Konflikts, das heißt, ein offenkundiges, Jedermann verständliches Darlegen des tiefen Gegensatzes, welcher zwischen dem preußischen Volke und Regierung besteht, die erste Grundbedingung für eine endliche und vollständige Heilung des Gegensatzes selbst ist... Durch zwei Jahre war die altliberale Partei bemüht, das bereits bestehende Leiden durch Palliativmaßregeln zu verdecken... Es blieb nichts übrig, als eine gründliche Kur durchzumachen." (88)

In this situation the task of the Lower House was quite clear, it was, Freytag urged, to bring the government down:

"...durch gesetzliche Mittel die Kampfstimmung zu steigern bis das gegenwärtige System zusammenbricht." (89)

The collapse of the Bismarck administration would in turn, he felt, lead to the break-down of the system of monarchical government, that whole complex of power comprising the monarchy and the court, the Upper House, the diplomatic service, the army and the civil service, all branches of the apparatus of state that were dominated by the Junker. In such a crisis as Freytag envisaged the conservative establishment

would be obliged to make the concessions necessary to establish a government that enjoyed the confidence of the Lower House. Just to replace Bismarck ('dem alten privilegierten Junkertum in seinem modernen Kostüm')⁹⁰ or be content with minor concessions was clearly irrelevant. The struggle had to be fought through until the present system had been abolished.

Freytag was a constitutional liberal of a decidedly radical bent,⁹¹ whose determination in the struggle was inspired in no small measure by his belief in the ultimate victory of liberalism. Although he was prepared to go to any 'legal' and 'constitutional' extreme in the struggle, he remained implacably hostile to the radicals of the Left⁹² and to the 'democrats' within his own Progressive Party.⁹³ He had no patience with compromise or reconciliation; he believed that the conflict must be fought out to its bitter but glorious conclusion if Prussia was to be freed from

"...seine Krankheit, das Übergewicht des Junkertums..." (94)
 Nothing less than the abolition of monarchical government, nothing less than the complete victory of liberalism and the establishment of parliamentary government in Prussia would satisfy him. Since he never doubted that the aristocracy would ultimately be forced by economic developments to surrender their position of privilege and power - he believed in a sort of economic determinism - he welcomed any exacerbation as a sure sign that the confrontation was coming to a head.

Sensing that some liberals were tiring of unconditional opposition to the government, Freytag felt compelled to repeat his warnings⁹⁵ about agreeing to concessions which, although they might end the constitutional conflict, would not lead to any radical change in the 'system'; he reminded his readers that liberal opposition to the re-organisation of the army proposed by the government was not opposition to the proposals themselves, but to the principle the reform bill represented, namely, that of monarchical control of the army, exempt from parliamentary scrutiny. He urged the Lower House to

"...allein auf dem Grundsatz stehen, daß sie nur solchen

"Ministern den Militäretat bewilligen, welche ihr Vertrauen besitzen." (96)

Nothing was to be gained from a compromise which only disguised the true nature of the conflict:

"Aber wer den gegenwärtigen Konflikt zweier Staatsgewalten zum Frieden führen will, vermag das allerdings nicht dadurch, daß er die Tiefe des Rißes, der jetzt durch den ganzen Bau geht, mit gemüthlicher Tünche verdeckt." (97)

The issue was not the army reform bill:

"In Wirklichkeit steht die Frage in Preußen nur so, ob persönlicher Wille, ob parlamentarische Regierung die Geschicke des Landes bestimmen soll." (98)

He went on to castigate the liberals for their lack of opposition in parliament, in particular for what he saw as their failure to make more clear to the public

"...die gegenwärtige hilflose Lage des Staatsregiments." (99)

The main body of liberals were apparently less convinced than Freytag of the imminent and inevitable collapse of the system. His advice continued to be confrontation, to break down

"...die Hindernisse, welche dem parlamentarischen Leben in Preußen entgegengestellt werden, durch alle gesetzlichen Mittel." (100)

to refuse to co-operate with the Bismarck administration, to be ruthless in their attacks ('durch fortgesetzte Schläge bis zur Ermattung des Gegners')¹⁰¹ to employ

"...die stärksten Maßnahmen, welche dem Hause jetzt irgend möglich sind." (102)

Only the most unrelenting opposition would assure a peaceful future for Prussia. The dismissal of the Lower House on 27th May Freytag took as a sign that Bismarck had had enough, that his administration was 'auf dem abschüssigen Wege'.¹⁰³

Freytag was all the more surprised when Bismarck, not less than three days later, introduced a series of repressive measures designed to curb the press, the 'Presseverordnung' of June 1st 1863.¹⁰⁴ Freytag was evidently taken aback by the measures:

"Alles was man von einer frischen und fröhlichen Reaktion erwarten konnte, wurde durch die neue Maßregel übertroffen."
(105)

Freytag had always regarded Bismarck as something of a liberal conservative and as not capable of being so thoroughly reactionary, although he had fully realised that Bismarck might

be forced to take reactionary measures by more powerful elements in the conservative camp;¹⁰⁶ now there could be no doubt:

"Schneller als zu erwarten war, hat das Ministerium Bismarck begonnen, das Programm der Oktroyierungen in Ausführung zu bringen, welches durch die feudale Partei seit Monaten angeregt war. Mit der Presse wurde, wie billig, der Anfang gemacht." (107)

Bismarck had revealed the iron fist: he was attempting to do no less than completely silence the opposition press, he had banned public meetings and officials who showed liberal sympathies were to be disciplined. Bismarck was bent on depriving the opposition of all legal means of conducting that opposition in public, opposition was being made practically illegal:

"So wird ein gesetzliches Mittel des Widerstandes nach dem andern der Opposition entzogen, und dieselbe wird bald in der Lage sein, Verfassung und Recht nicht mehr mit den gesetzlichen Mitteln verteidigen zu können." (108)

Although deeply disturbed by a development that had turned a constitutional conflict into a state of undeclared war

"Der preußische Verfassungstreit ist nicht mehr eine Rechtsfrage, sondern er ist eine Machtfrage geworden." (109)

Freytag hoped that this would make less militant liberals realise that there could be no compromise with such a government.

"Es ist bitter, daß so etwas möglich ist, aber es ist gut, daß die Krankheit des Staats so schnell und so auffällig sichtbar wird. Es ist jetzt Sache des preußischen Volkes die Heilung herbeizuführen." (110)

But Freytag was now less optimistic about the prospects of success:

"So stehen die Parteien einander gegenüber. Die feudale Partei angreifend, mit überlegtem Plan, zur letzten Appellation an die Kraft wohl entschlossen. Die Majorität des Volkes auf der Defensive, überrascht, aufgeregt, erbittert, nicht ohne Leitung, aber noch ohne Führung nach einheitlichem Plane." (111)

Bismarck's measures had so curtailed legal means of opposition that opposition was hardly possible without infringing the law. Appeals to the people to refuse to pay the taxes that had been declared unconstitutional by the Lower House, were of little effect.¹¹² Freytag began to see that parliament's power to force a change of system was more limited than he had imagined.

On 6th June in a speech at Danzig the Crown Prince Frederick publically disassociated himself from the measures Bismarck had taken; while the Crown Prince was known to sympathise with constitutional liberalism, this was the first time that he had spoken out in public and repudiated the government. Freytag was much encouraged:

"...jetzt ist schon deutlich, daß dem beherrschenden System dadurch ein harter Schlag zugefügt worden ist und daß dieser Schritt des Prinzen möglicherweise die Chancen für ein gutes Ende der gegenwärtigen Krisis verspricht." (113)

The speech was taken by Freytag to be the first step in the formation of what his friend K. Mathy referred to hopefully as the 'Gegenhof': pressure would now be brought to bear on the 114 conservatives from both outside and from within the establishment. It was essential, Freytag believed, for the liberals to support the Crown Prince to bring about a change of governmental system:

"Denn der nächste Zweck unsrer Partei muß sein, daß der Eintritt des Kronprinzen in die Regierung unter Bedingungen stattfinde, welche denselben sowohl befähigen als geneigt machen, einen gründlichen Wechsel des Systems zu veranlassen und eine andere Zeit für Preußen heraufzuführen." (115)

The lead given by the Crown Prince restored Freytag's flagging optimism and once more he began to hope that Bismarck's reactionary measures would rouse public opinion and the liberals in Parliament into even more determined opposition:

"Auch sind wir innig überzeugt, daß ein Ministerium Bismarck gegenwärtig viel heilsamer für den Staat ist, als die vorsichtige Verwaltung des Herrn v. Manteuffel oder eine klügere Reaktion des Herrn v. Goltz. ... Wir halten es für zeitgemäß zu erklären, daß die liberale Partei zu viele Anrechte an Herrn v. Bismarck und seine Kollegen gewonnen hat, als daß sie diese Gegner jetzt gern vom Schauplatz würde abtreten sehen. Sie sind uns guten Preußen und warmen Patrioten so wie sie sind, ganz recht. Denn sie geben uns die Bürgschaft eines vollständigen Sieges, eines Sieges der liberalen Partei, wie er notwendig ist, um den preußischen Staat, und wir dürfen jetzt wieder mit einer gewissen Hoffnung sagen, um das Fürstengeschlecht der Hohenzollern für die deutsche Zukunft zu retten." (116)

But Freytag's brimming optimism was not to last for long; by the end of the year - with no real change in the situation - he was markedly less optimistic. Parliamentary opposition, he

felt, had been too weak and too conciliatory:

"Unser armes Preußen! Diese Opposition tut's auch nicht, das ist mir seit wir uns gesehen, deutlich geworden. Unsere Freunde sind zum großen Teil nur Altliberale in der Joppe." (117)

The once hoped-for regeneration of political life by the sheer force of popular discontent had proved to be an illusion:

"Und wir werden uns müssen gefallen lassen, daß die Regeneration des Staates nicht durch eine unwiderstehliche Energie des Volkscharakters, sondern durch langsames Zerarbeiten der Parteien bewirkt wird, zuletzt durch einen Thronwechsel, den das Schicksal oktroyiert. Das ist eine schlechte Aussicht, aber es ist das Wahrscheinliche." (118)

The defeat of absolutism under popular pressure would have indeed been a fitting and glorious climax to the rise of the middle class in Germany, but it was not to be; Freytag now began - rather resignedly and sadly - to look to the Crown Prince to introduce parliamentary government in Prussia, although he reaffirmed his belief that the Prussian people would one day rise. In the meantime his task was

"...Mut machen und dem guten Gemüt des Volkes vertrauen." (119)

Freytag's assessment of Bismarck's handling of foreign policy in the same period could not have been more damning, but then he was hardly a disinterested observer. The Alvensleben Convention (8th February 1863) - an agreement with Russia to aid her in the suppression of the Polish uprising - was, he declared, a total failure: neither the Germans in Poland had been helped nor had Russia been impressed.¹²⁰ Freytag insinuated that Bismarck had allowed Prussia to be used by other European powers for their own ends.¹²¹ The prestige of Prussia under Bismarck was at a low ebb; she was isolated.¹²² On the question of the rumoured project of an all-German parliament in Frankfurt, Freytag did his best to make sure that readers of the 'Grenzboten' detected the ulterior motive: to curry favour with the other governments of the German Federation and to break the liberal majority in Prussia by means of electoral reform.¹²³ But Freytag - in rather routine fashion - foresaw defeat for the plan:

"Die Lage in Preußen ist so geworden, daß es für alle Teile der Opposition nur ein nächstes Ziel gibt, worauf hingearbeitet werden muß, und dies Ziel ist eine neue Regierung." (124)

14. Bismarck's conduct of the Schleswig-Holstein question

a. 1864

The death of Frederick VII of Denmark without issue in November 1863 reopened the question of the claim of the Danish throne to the two provinces of Schleswig and Holstein. The new King, Christian IX - under pressure from public opinion - signed a new constitution which incorporated Schleswig into the Danish kingdom and separated it from the German-speaking province of Holstein. Liberal nationalists in Germany regarded this separation of the two provinces as a breach of the long-standing agreement whereby the provinces were to 'bliven ewich tosamende ungedeelt.'¹ Although the ethnic character of Schleswig was mixed, it was regarded as a German province by virtue of the link with Holstein.²

The German claimant to the two provinces was Prince Ferdinand, Duke of Augustenburg; he was supported by the National Liberals who hoped that if his claim was successful Schleswig-Holstein would join the German Federation as an independent and more important, liberal duchy. Bismarck's position, as foreign minister of Prussia, was one of strict adherence to the so-called London Protocol which meant support for the status quo and determined opposition to the Augustenburg claim.³ Freytag - an ardent supporter of Augustenburg⁴ - was furious at Bismarck's opposition; it was once again evidence - as with the Alvensleben Convention - that Bismarck was the willing champion of foreign interests, in this case, the interests of the Danish crown. Bismarck appeared as the arch-legitimist whose sole concern was the maintenance of the status quo, regardless of the demands of German national feeling and the interests of Germany in the matter:

"Wahrlich, wenn man einst in der Geschichte lesen wird, daß ein preußischer Minister mit dreister Stirn eine Politik verfolgt hat, welche die Erhaltung Dänemarks wichtiger erachtet, als die Vergrößerung des preußischen Einflusses durch ein, zwei stattliche Landschaften,

"wird man ein solches Nichtachten des höchsten Interesses des eigenen Staates, Verachten der leidenschaftlichen Wünsche in Preußen und Deutschland, Verhöhnern der verpfändeten Ehre des preußischen Heeres als eine monströse Verirrung betrachten, deren letzte Ursachen für gemeinen Menschenverstand und ein redliches Gemüt ganz unfassbar sind." (5)

At first at something of a loss to account for Bismarck's motives, Freytag then decided that his failure to embark on an energetic foreign policy - even when the ideal opportunity presented itself ⁶ - was because

"er zu solchem Entschluß nicht geeignet war... Ihm aber haben Gespenster aus vergangener Zeit den Blick abwärts gezogen von der Stelle, an der für ihn Rettung und Erhebung zu finden war." (7)

So pre-occupied by the legitimist claims of a foreign monarch was he, that he failed to see the opportunity. Freytag concluded that Bismarck was being propelled along by events that he was no longer able to control:

"Was jetzt geschehen muß, wird er nicht leiten, sondern erdulden." (8)

The failure to act decisively was for Freytag no momentary lapse, but evidence that Bismarck, the Prussian Junker, was the prisoner of his own narrow interests and had neither the vision nor the ability to embark on a foreign policy in the interests of a strong Prussia. He accordingly interpreted the concerted military action taken by Prussia and Austria as a move to suppress the German national movement in the two provinces:

"Außerdem sind angekündigt und im Anmarsch andere preußische und österreichische Korps, welche die Dänen in Schleswig angreifen sollen, um einige Konzessionen von der dänischen Regierung durchzusetzen und alsdann Schleswig und Holstein an Dänemark zu übergeben und die deutsche Bewegung gründlichst zu unterdrücken." (9)

Events, however, obliged Bismarck to abandon his plan, as Freytag wrote:

"Seine Berechnung erwies sich nur teilweise als richtig. Der Widerstand der Dänen, der ausbrechende Krieg, das vergossene Blut, die Umwandlungen der Stimmung in der Armee und die patriotische Wärme in Preußen selbst gaben dem Kriege während des Kampfes höhere Zielpunkte, auch in den höchsten militärischen Kreisen Preußens brach sich die Überzeugung Bahn, daß die Herzogtümer nicht bei Dänemark bleiben durften." (10)

Bismarck had perhaps recognised, Freytag surmised, that his original policy was going to encounter too much opposition and that perhaps here was the opportunity he had been waiting for to achieve some success that might impress the nationalist liberal opposition and thus make an end to the constitutional conflict on his terms more likely. The annexation of Schleswig-Holstein was, indeed,

"eine gute Gelegenheit durch äußere Erfolge seines Ministeriums die innere Widersetzlichkeit zum Schweigen zu bringen." (11)

When, on 28th May 1864 Prussia and Austria jointly declared Augustenburg the legal heir to the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, Freytag was cock-a-hoop:

"Er war durch die Ereignisse soweit gebracht worden, für das zu arbeiten, was seine Gegner seit vorigem Herbst geräuschvoll gefordert hatten." (12)

Events and the patriotic agitation of German liberals had forced a change of policy on Bismarck.¹³ However, Bismarck was determined that the change of policy should not be seen as a victory for liberalism:

"Was aber auch geschehen mußte, es mußte so geschehen, daß es nicht als Erfolg und Sieg des deutschen Liberalismus erschien." (14)

While Freytag was well content that Bismarck was now officially in support of the liberal Augustenburg, he felt sure that Bismarck would try to impose such a restrictive constitution on the two provinces that they were independant only in name.¹⁵ The matter was by no means finally settled.

b. 1865

After suffering a military defeat - 'immortalised' in Prussian military mythology as the storming of the 'Düppeler Schanzen' - Denmark ceded the two provinces of Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia and Austria respectively. The year 1865 saw wide-spread public discussion of the future of the two provinces, as to whether they should be incorporated into the German Federation or simply annexed by Prussia. Freytag observed:

"ein großer Teil der liberalen Preußen ist für Annexion"(16) but he was against annexation, he believed that the people of Schleswig-Holstein should decide their own fate on the basis of self-determination:

"Wir haben kein Recht, über die Zukunft eines deutschen Stammes zu beschließen gegen seinen Willen. Daß das Volk selbst die entscheidende Stimme haben müsse ist ein Fundamentalsatz der liberalen Politik... Aber in keinem Falle dürfen wir dem Volke von Schleswig-Holstein Zwang oder Gewalt antun lassen, selbst nicht um das zu fördern, was wir für sein bestes Heil halten. In dem Respekt vor dem Volkswillen liegt das letzte Geheimnis unserer Stärke, diese Rücksicht bestimmt und beschränkt auch gebieterisch die Mittel und Wege unserer Politik." (17)

Bismarck's conduct of Prussian foreign policy had led to the occupation of an additional province, after inflicting defeat on an enemy - and there were rumours that she would also occupy Austrian-held Holstein under terms to be agreed upon with the Austrians - so that many liberals warmly approved of the results of Bismarck's policies, indeed, voices were heard suggesting that the Liberal Party should end its opposition to Bismarck's government where the policies being pursued were in accordance with the aims of the Party.¹⁸ Freytag saw the danger that was threatening liberalism and placed himself firmly on the side of those for whom liberalism as a system of government was more important than the establishment of a German national state by force of arms under the direction of a Junker statesman:

"In Deutschland ist manchen feurigen Geistern die Sehnsucht nach stärkerer Konzentration so hoch gesteigert, daß sie auch eine Tyrannis mit Freuden begrüßen würden, welche ihnen die Grundlagen eines großen Staatslebens zu schaffen vermöchte." (19)

To support a policy of conquest, Freytag averred, was to compromise essential liberal principles:

"Aber die schleswig-holsteinische Frage darf von unserer Partei überhaupt nicht nach Gründen der augenblicklichen Zweckmäßigkeit beurteilt werden. Weshalb sind wir liberal? Weil unserem Herzen Bedürfnis ist, von dem Menschen groß zu denken. Weshalb betonen wir überall das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Völker? Weil wir darin den edelsten Ausdruck der politischen Freiheit finden, welche, wir für uns wie für andere fordern. Ist es redlich und klug hier liberal zu sein, dort oktroyieren zu lassen? Heute einen großen Grundsatz mit Emphase betonen, morgen denselben Satz aus Utilitätsgründen gleichgültig fallen zu lassen... Deshalb dürfen wir als Liberale keineswegs schweigend zusehen, wenn man sie (i.e. the people of Schleswig-Holstein), ohne sie zu fragen oder gar wider ihren Willen zu dem machen wollte, was wir ihnen und uns nützlich halten, zu Preußen." (20)

Against the desire ~~for~~ unification by virtually any means, Freytag reasserted the primacy of the principle of political freedom and self-determination, central tenets of European liberalism.

Reviewing the parliamentary situation against the background of Bismarck's success in Schleswig-Holstein and the reaction of the majority of liberals in Prussia, Freytag concluded sadly:

"Die Opposition vermag nicht mehr, was im Jahre 1863 noch nach möglich war, das herrschende System siegreich zu bekämpfen." (21)

Since the stern measures Bismarck had taken in June 1863, the liberals had been

"in die Defensive herabgedrückt"; (22)

now all they could do, was to obstruct the government.²³

He no longer believed that the liberal opposition had the will to bring down the government, the desire for reconciliation and an end to the constitutional conflict was too widespread.²⁴

Bismarck's success in Schleswig-Holstein had apparently brought about a significant change in public opinion, so much so that Freytag feared that the next elections would see a drop in support for the Liberal Party as the party of opposition.²⁵

Despite this he reaffirmed the view that vigorous opposition was the best course:

"Auch in den innern Kämpfen ist kein Fortschritt noch nahe Beendigung zu hoffen. Wir sind als Liberale verpflichtet zu der Opposition zu halten, welche jetzt allein die großen Grundsätze unserer Partei in den preußischen Kammern vertritt... Aber es ist unmöglich die Betrachtung fernzuhalten, daß auch der Opposition die Aussichten auf einen Sieg verringert sind." (26)

The Party now had to contend with a situation where it was condemned to

"streiten ohne Erfolg". (27)

The liberal opposition had failed to force the issue in June 1863 and had suffered accordingly:

"Bis zu den Juniordonnanzen des Jahres 1863 war die Opposition in der Tat, was sie nach ihrem Ursprung sein mußte, der angreifende Teil; seitdem ist sie in die Defensive herabgedrückt. Damals war der Konflikt zu einer Höhe getrieben, welcher nicht mehr in den Wänden des Abgeordnetenhauses ausgefochten werden konnte und die höchsten Anforderungen an den politischen Charakter der einzelnen Abgeordneten machte. Es war die Zeit gekommen, wie sie bei jedem erbitterten politischen Kampfe eintritt, wo die Mitglieder der Opposition im Notfall sich opfern mußten. Sie haben das nicht getan, das Ministerium hat sich befestigt." (28)

When Freytag resumed his work as a journalist for the 'Grenzboten' in the late summer of 1865, he had regained much of his former optimism; this was because Bismarck's dismissal of Parliament and his imposition of the budget for the following year without the stamp of parliamentary approval had so enraged the liberal opposition that an end to the conflict seemed as remote as ever.²⁹ Bismarck's action had, Freytag felt, served as a useful reminder of the reactionary nature of his government and of his determination to govern in defiance of Parliament, while his erstwhile success in Schleswig-Holstein, with which he had hoped to woo the liberals into cooperating with him, had now receded.

"Die letzten Wochen sind verhängnisvoll für die preußische Politik gewesen. Es ist leider genau so gekommen, wie zu befürchten war: die Spannung im Innern Preußens ist

"zu einer Höhe gesteigert, welche eine Versöhnung zwischen der gegenwärtigen Regierung und der Opposition im Volke nach menschlichem Ermessen unmöglich macht, die Hoffnung des Ministeriums, durch einen großen Erfolg in den Herzogtümern den Widerstand des eigenen Bürgertums zum Schweigen zu bringen, hat sich als irrig erwiesen." (30)

Although Freytag had feared that the liberals would lose public support, the Liberal Party actually increased its share of the votes at the elections in 1865; the more cooperative and malleable Lower House that Bismarck had hoped for - and which Freytag had feared - had not materialised:

"Der alte Krieg gegen die Oppositionspresse, gegen liberale Stadträte, Kreisrichter, Abgeordnete wird heftiger und schonungsloser, täglich größer auch unter loyalen Freunden der Regierung, die Unsicherheit, die Opposition hat an Zahl und auch an Energie der Empfindung zugenommen, und das Ministerium muß gänzlich auf die Aussicht verzichten, welche ihm durch einige Monate gegeben schien, mit Schonung der leidigen Verfassungsparagrafen etwa durch Neuwahlen ein fügsames Haus der Volksvertreter zu gewinnen." (31)

Freytag now felt able to once more emphasise the role of the Liberal Party as the party of total opposition, he returned to the urgent language of 1863:

"Es ist fast nur Zufall, daß diese Frage (Militärfrage) als Erisapfel zwischen Volk und Krone geschleudert ward; würde sie heute erledigt, so würde morgen unter dem gegenwärtigen System eine andere, nicht weniger aufregende, ein neues Schisma hervorrufen, die Frage über Militärgerichtsbarkeit, über Zusammensetzung des Herrnhauses, über die ministerielle Methode, administrative Gesetze in Liebe und Haß zu interpretieren und vieles andere. Der Kampf geht nicht um eine einzelne Organisation, es ist ein tiefer und unsühbarer Gegensatz und dieser heißt: hier persönliches Regiment, dort verfassungsmäßige Regierung. Nur ein gründlicher System- und Personenwechsel vermag dem preußischen Staat den innern Frieden zurückzugeben. Wer noch anderes hofft, verkennt die Größe des Konfliktes und die Erbitterung der Menschen." (32)

Freytag claimed that the gulf between the government and the people had deepened over the last three years:

"Der Streit in Preußen (hat) langsam größere Dimensionen angenommen." (33)

and he hinted darkly that the conflict might this time end in

violence.³⁴ In an attempt to rouse his readers he recalled the great issues that were at stake in the present confrontation:

"Der Kampf in Preußen, der im Jahre 1848 begonnen und seitdem nur in kurzen Zeiträumen geruht hat, ist ein Kampf nicht nur um die Verfassung selbst, sondern um die gesamten sittlichen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Lebens." (35)

The conflict was between two classes, between the rising middle class and the declining aristocracy which Freytag went on to describe as the

"große Genossenschaft der Privilegierten, welche durch engen Anschluß an die Idee des selbstwilligen Königtums ihre eigene Sonderstellung im Staate zu behaupten suchten, als regierende Beamte, als Militärs, als Zugehörige des Hofes, als bevorzugte Grundbesitzer..." (36)

It was a clash of two ideologies

"Ein Zusammenstoß zweier grundverschiedener Weltanschauungen, was auf dem Terrain des preußischen Staates gegeneinander streitet." (36)

that were incompatible:

"Immer war dies ein tiefer Gegensatz auch in den gesamten sittlichen Grundlagen des Handelns: hier Ehre, dort Recht, hier Autorität, dort freie Selbstbestimmung, hier hingebender Glaube, dort selbständige Forschung, hier Vorrechte, dort freie Konkurrenz." (37)

Liberalism was fighting for its very survival in Prussia:

"Denn es ist in Wahrheit ein Kampf um das Leben, den der Liberalismus in Preußen zu führen hat." (37)

Freytag rejected any strategy for the Liberal Party that put unification by force of Prussian arms before the achievement of freedom and parliamentary government; to do this, Freytag argued, would be to degrade the individual citizen in order to exalt the state, as in the case of France.

"Und wir vermögen den Imperialismus auch dann nicht zu bewundern, wenn wir zugeben, daß er den Franzosen Macht und Ansehn in Europa vergrößert hat. Denn wir sehen zugleich, daß dies System die Individuen schwächer und politisch untüchtiger macht. Und wir wünschen unserm Preußen solche Größe nicht, welche gezwungen ist, die Bürger herabzuwürdigen, um den Staat zu heben." (38)

Freytag saw very clearly the dangers of liberal support for Bismarck. A powerful and greater Germany might be created but under Bismarck this would be at the expense of political freedom:

"Ferner aber ist die Forderung: erst Macht, dann Freiheit, wenn sie auf die gegenwärtigen Zustände in Preußen angewendet wird, auch gefährlich. Unser Liberalismus gleicht doch nicht einem einzelnen Glied, welches wir uns abhauen können, oder in die Tasche stecken, wie eine geballte Faust? Er ist unser bestes Leben selbst, und wie die Natur uns zwingt, unablässig Atem zu holen, müssen wir auch unser Freiheitsgefühl betätigen, wo wir veranlaßt sind zu reden, zu raten, zu handeln." (39)

To put support for Bismarck before the establishment of parliamentary government was to get one's priorities wrong; there was no need to support Bismarck to get progress towards German unity, once the liberals had control of the government, then on that very day, the problem of German unity would also be solved:

"...an dem Tage, wo unser Sieg entschieden wird, auch die deutsche Frage zur Entscheidung kommt. Denn unsere Arbeit muß dann sein, daß wir auf unsere Weise die Schranken niederreißen." (40)

The German question would be solved once the liberals had won political power in Prussia, to compromise the great aim with support for Bismarck would destroy liberalism.

Many a Prussian had felt

"geneigt, den Maßregeln eines Regimentes, welches ihnen persönlich feindselig erschien, in ihrem Gemüt Amnestie zu erteilen, weil sie die Hoffnung hatten, daß dasselbe Regiment nach Außen die höchsten Interessen des Staates mit erobernder Kraft vertreten werde." (41)

but, Freytag felt, Bismarck's handling of the Schleswig-Holstein question had demonstrated the contradictions of Bismarck's position

"Die Ereignisse haben die bittere Lehre gebracht, daß es niemals möglich ist, zu gleicher Zeit klein und groß, unsicher und fest, gereizt und überlegen zu handeln." (42)

and had also demonstrated a typical conservative Junker approach to the problem. The short-comings of his approach were the

"Folgen seiner Parteistellung, denen er sich nicht mehr entziehen kann." (43)

Freytag saw - quite correctly - that one of Bismarck's main concerns had been to prevent the establishment of an independent liberal duchy in the North of Germany,

"im Norden Deutschlands ein zweites Koburg" (44)
his whole strategy had been inspired by this narrow concern.

Freytag was keenly aware of how the liberals could have solved the problem if they had had control of the Prussian state, they had a superior understanding of the national interests of Germany and a deeper appreciation of and respect for the wishes of the people. Some liberals had grown dispirited by the signal lack of success brought by opposition and were prepared to trade their cooperation with the government for moves towards German unification; since they were themselves not in a position to implement such policies, they were inclined to support almost anyone - as Freytag complained - who could bring the dream of a united and greater Germany nearer realisation, even if it be the sworn enemy of liberalism himself, Herr von Bismarck. Freytag never lost sight of the fact that the dilemma the liberals found themselves in was due to the

"...ganz unerhörten und unparlamentarischen Situation... daß sie zwar durch die ihr gehörende Majorität die Handlungen der Regierung zu lähmen vermag, aber nicht die Kraft besitzt, die regierenden Minister selbst zur Abdikation zu veranlassen. Die Verfassungsgeschichte der größeren modernen Staaten hat wenig Analogien eines solchen Mißverhältnisses..." (45)

Freytag was far from seeing in Bismarck the great statesman and German patriot that other liberals were beginning to discover in him - it was, after all, Bismarck who stood between the opposition and their goal of parliamentary government and once that had been achieved, then a liberal government would show the world what a liberal and national foreign policy was like. Freytag clung obstinately to the idea of the liberal state in which the middle class, as the intellectual and moral leaders of the nation, ~~were~~ entitled to govern the country

as representatives of the people. Among the moderate liberals of the centre he was - and in this respect something of an exception - a radical, insisting that the system of monarchical government must be abolished. Some observers of the period have detected a conspicuous lack of political will to power among the middle class; this could not be said of Freytag.⁴⁶

III. Freitag and Treitschke, their discussion of Bismarck

Freytag and Treitschke had met in Leipzig in 1862, and while they were only in close personal contact for a few months in the winter of 1862 - Treitschke left Leipzig in August 1863 - they became firm friends and corresponded regularly.¹ From the beginning their friendship was a political friendship: both men were liberals and Prussian patriots, fired by a common purpose and the desire to rouse public opinion. Treitschke's article 'Das Schweigen der Presse in Preußen'² in which he took that organ of classical liberalism, the 'Preußische Jahrbücher', to task for their timid reaction to Bismarck's June measures (1863) represented the high watermark of their collaboration and friendship.³ Here was Treitschke, the liberal, doughtily defending one of the basic principles of liberalism, freedom of the press, against the repressive measures of the Junker Bismarck.

The developments of the succeeding years, however, Bismarck's success in Schleswig-Holstein, the defeat of Austria and the establishment of the North German Confederation brought about a change in Treitschke's attitude towards Bismarck. He became a fervent admirer of Bismarck's 'Machtpolitik' while Freitag remained in stubborn opposition. The first signs of differences between them arose over the question of whether Prussia should annex Schleswig-Holstein outright or allow the population to decide their political future for themselves. Publically Freitag favoured the latter course of action while Treitschke had come out in favour of annexation.⁴ He wrote to Freitag urging him to support a policy of annexation in the 'Grenzboten':

"Eine andere Bitte dagegen lege ich Ihnen ernstlich ans Herz. Wird es endlich nicht Zeit, daß die Grenzboten die Annexion für die heilsamste Lösung der brennenden Frage erklären? Die Preußischen Jahrbücher haben bereits Farbe bekannt. Bei dieser Frage muß sich's gleich zeigen, ob einer ein guter Preuße oder ein Parteifanatiker ist."⁽⁵⁾

Freytag's reply is at variance with the views he had expressed in the columns of the 'Grenzboten' where he had rejected the idea of annexation.⁶ In his letter to Treitschke he declared himself in favour of annexation:

"Sie selbst können die Annexion nicht feuriger wünschen als ich. Der Unterschied zwischen uns ist nur, daß ich sie nicht einen Augenblick für möglich gehalten habe, seit Bismarck mit Östreich die dänische Beute übernahm. Die Ereignisse haben mir leider Recht gegeben. ... Es war Wahnsinn, jede Maßregel von dem guten Willen Östreichs abhängig zu machen." (7)

Bismarck's inscrutable insistence on acting in collaboration with Austria had, in Freytag's opinion, unnecessarily limited Prussia's freedom of action; Austria was unlikely to agree to Prussia annexing the two provinces, yet, the only alternative in the situation that Bismarck had got himself into, was war, but

"...weder Bismarck noch Wilhelm wagen einen Krieg mit Östreich." (8)

Freytag simply could not see how Bismarck's approach could lead to success; he wrote to Treitschke:

"Recht haben Sie freilich in der Annahme, daß ich mich nicht überzeugen kann, Bismarcks politisches Experimentieren habe für Preußen die Aussicht auf dauernde Erfolge." (9)

Bismarck's choice of means and allies, while characteristic of a man whose political instincts and horizons belonged to a by-gone age, condemned his efforts to failure:

"Ich halte die Mittel, durch welche die preußische Regierung sich in den Besitz der Herzogtümer setzen will, auch für gänzlich eitel. Wir leben nicht mehr in der Zeit des großen Kurfürsten und des Jahres 1815; wer jetzt etwas durchsetzen will, kann das nur mit Benutzung des Liberalismus. Wer dieser Zeitströmung sich entgegenstemmt, wird immer in Gefahr sein, den Boden unter den Füßen zu verlieren, wer sie unehrlich benutzt, in Gefahr, seinen Gewinn wieder zu verlieren. Und es ist lehrreich zu beobachten, wie auch das Talent im Kampfe gegen dies Zeitgemäße seine Kraft verliert." (10)

A greater Germany under Prussia could only be achieved, Freytag believed, by the voluntary amalgamation of the German states under liberal governments, as an expression of the will

of the people, not, as under Bismarck, with all the apparatus of eighteenth century cabinet diplomacy. The other German states would only accept leadership in the German question from a liberal Prussia and the rest of Europe would only accept German unification if it were realised under the auspices of liberalism:

"Diese Erweiterung aber kann nach meiner innigen Überzeugung nur unter der Herrschaft liberaler Regierungsgrundsätze vor sich gehen. Es wird eine andere Zeit kommen, aber jetzt ist der Liberalismus die einzige Macht, welche für Preußen die gute Meinung des Auslandes zu werben vermag. Und wer das einsieht, muß auch die Konsequenzen auf sich nehmen." (11)

It was precisely Bismarck's repressive anti-liberalism that gave rise to such suspicion and distrust of Prussia in the other German states and in Europe generally; Freytag could not see any way in which Bismarck could unite the German states under such circumstances:

"Jetzt ist es im Ganzen betrachtet fruchtlos, dem Deutschen vom Beruf Preußens u.s.w. zu reden, er sieht nur empört den argen Mann Bismarck und die Rotte, welche unter seinem Vorsitz in Preußen die Fülle kleiner Scheußlichkeiten verübt, und er ruft, unter einem Baum, der solche Früchte trägt, mag ich nicht sitzen." (12)

Freytag shared Treitschke's desire for a Germany united under Prussian leadership:

"Ich wünsche zu erleben, daß Deutschland preußisch wird. Und ich sehe einen sicheren, unverlegbaren Weg, der in einem Decennium zu solchem Glück führen könnte." (13)

that was to say, by the democratic decision of popularly elected governments; his conviction that the liberals would solve the problem more effectively than Bismarck, had they been in power in Prussia, only added to his deep sense of frustration and anger at Bismarck's approach:

"Mit Trauer und Unwillen sehe ich, daß Preußen einen andern (Weg) einschlägt, der bei jedem neuen Schritt neue Gefahren heraufbeschwört und dem die derzeitige Kraft des Staates nicht gewachsen ist. Und wenn ich mich erstaunt frage, wie es möglich ist, daß solcher eigensinnig gewählter Umweg auch bei großem und freiem Urteil,

"wie das Ihrige ist, Beifall finden kann, so muß ich mir das dahin beantworten: Preußen hat seit 1815 gar keine auswärtige Politik getrieben, jetzt rührt sich ein Wollen, das wir lange ersehnt. Da ist natürlich, daß man in der ersten Freude darüber, daß überhaupt etwas geschieht, die Frage unterdrückt, ob es auch gut geschieht." (14)

Yet this was for Freytag the central issue, the very ground of his sustained opposition to Bismarck's foreign policy:

"Aber eine Kritik verhängnisvoller Versuche (i.e. Bismarck's policies) ist doch nicht abzuweisen, wenn man die Überzeugung hat, daß Etwas anders besser gemacht werden sollte." (15)

Freytag was appalled at Bismarck's double-dealing and his erratic handling of policy:

"Die gegenwärtige Politik Preußens hat für mich etwas sehr Widerwärtiges. Zunächst weil sie launisch mit kecken Einfällen operiert, denen jede nachhaltige Kraft fehlt, dann weil sie so erbärmlich und schamlos unehrlich ist. ... Der Fuchs, welcher lüstern nach den Trauben springt, ist nicht das Tier, dem ich mit Vertrauen zuzusehen vermag." (16)

Bismarck was admittedly

"ein sehr erfindungsreicher Kopf, aber er ist ein wenig zu frei von Bedenken." (17)

Freytag criticised Bismarck's handling of foreign policy on two counts: for his wrong-headed strategy and misguided choice of means, and for his duplicity. Treitschke agreed with Freytag that Bismarck's methods were

"teilweise verwerflich" (18)

and he denied being

"ein Bewunderer Bismarck's" (19)

adding that he felt it was his duty to support Bismarck because the alternatives were doubtful:

"Muß ich wählen zwischen solchen Parteien, so wähle ich Bismarck's Seite; denn er kämpft für Preußens Macht, für unsere legitime Stellung an Nord- und Ostsee." (20)

The differences between Freytag and Treitschke in their attitude to Bismarck and the whole vexed question of how progress could be made towards a united Germany were so great that neither of them touched on the question of Bismarck again in the correspondence. There are no more than a few remarks.

Treitschke became an ardent supporter of Bismarck, while Freytag, still committed to the liberal alternative, remained in fundamental opposition to Bismarck. Although the two friends exchanged letters fitfully up into the 1890's, the ideological gulf between them widened. Treitschke's studies of the parliamentary system in France and Italy had convinced him that it was a clumsy laborious means of government while Freytag remained loyal to the idea of parliament as the body of elected representatives representing the nation. Treitschke further came to believe that great outstanding individuals were the driving force in history and that progress was due to them, whereas Freytag believed that history threw up great men to embody the strivings of the nation. Treitschke believed that great men determined the course of history, Freytag believed that the nation was a more powerful entity than any individual and that great men could only dominate a nation for as long as they gave expression to the will of the nation, but that the nation would discard them when they had served their purpose. Freytag refused to accept Bismarck as the expression of Germany's striving for national unity - as Treitschke did - in the way that he viewed, for example, the figure of Luther. For Freytag it was essential that the great individual was at one with the nation; this had been the case with Luther, but he could never bring himself to recognise in the figure of Bismarck the embodiment of the German character and the strivings of the German people. He believed that Bismarck had usurped that role and that the nation would suffer in the long run for this distortion of its development. Treitschke, on the other hand, accorded very little importance to the people as such; they were more the object of power politics; historical greatness was for Treitschke almost an end in itself, just as for Nietzsche the individual great man was an end in himself.

Freytag's intellectual roots were firmly in the period prior to 1860, while Treitschke was still developing his ideas in the 1860's and was therefore influenced by the events of those years more than Freytag who had already arrived at some systematic interpretation of history. In the differences between the two men (when they first met Freytag was 46 and Treitschke was 28 years old) we can see the characteristic differences between the generation that grew up in the 1830's and 40's and the generation that grew up in the 1850's and 60's, the latter generation attempting to reinterpret the liberalism of Vormärz in the light of the events of the 1860's, notably Bismarck's success in establishing first the North German Confederation and then the German Empire. The failure of liberalism to achieve its declared aims and the success of Bismarck in realising at least one of those aims, namely the unification of Germany, was a major factor in the rejection by the younger generation of parliamentary methods of government as ineffective and unrealistic and the acceptance of power as the only real basis of politics with great men as the supreme exponents of power untrammelled by lesser mortals.²¹

VI. The events of 1866

a. Freytag's assessment of Bismarck's diplomacy.

On 9th April 1866 the Prussian delegate to the Bundestag in Frankfurt am Main, acting on instructions from Bismarck, submitted a resolution calling for the election of an all-German parliament on the basis of universal male suffrage. This was no new idea, for Bismarck had mooted such a scheme in 1862.¹ Freytag quite correctly suspected that Bismarck was attempting to weaken the opposition in Prussia by transferring the seat of popular political representation to Frankfurt and, more important, to diminish the strength of the largely middle-class liberal vote by extending the franchise to the labouring masses in town and country.²

This initiative signalled to Freytag that Bismarck was under considerable pressure, so much so that he had been obliged to engage - even if only as a tactic - on a truly national policy:

"Wir sind jetzt so weit gekommen, daß übel verdeckte Not auch in der deutschen Frage die Gegner der liberalen Partei (i.e. Bismarck) zwingt, unsere Wege zu betreten." (3)

Liberals should, Freytag urged, take this opportunity to popularise their conception of Germany's future:

"Hilft das preußische Reformprojekt zu nichts Anderem, so wird es doch ein gewaltiges Agitationsmittel in unserem Sinne, und unsere Aufgabe ist, dasselbe zu benutzen." (4)

Public discussion of the Prussian reform project was, however, overshadowed in the ensuing months by the prospect of war between Prussia and Austria. Up till now Freytag had been of the opinion that neither King William nor Bismarck, nor the General Staff would risk a war with Austria,⁵ but it now became apparent that Bismarck might, indeed, be contemplating war, in Freytag's eyes an admission of defeat for Bismarck's policy to date:

"Erst in den letzten Wochen hat man erkannt, daß auf dem betretenen Wege nicht weiter zu kommen ist, jetzt faßt man in der Verlegenheit an das Schwert." (6)

The military were supposed to save the situation for Bismarck:

"Es ist wohl möglich, daß die Aufgabe des Heeres wird, die Niederlagen Bismarcks wiedergutzumachen oder zu verdecken. Und meine Friedenshoffnungen werden schwach." (7)

The prospect of war between Austria and Prussia drew from Freytag a heavy sigh of regret that the liberal opposition had failed to bring down the system, and thus prevent such a confused and fateful policy from being attempted:

"Das Abgeordnetenhaus wird lebhaft empfinden, mit einem Schmerz, der uns allen an dem Herzen nagt, daß seine Opposition in den letzten Jahren nicht stark genug war, das System zu stürzen, und daß es deshalb, wie ganz Preußen, die Folgen der Regierungspolitik auch auf sein Leben nehmen muß." (8)

Freytag feared that Bismarck would be driven by the failures and defeats of the past months to declare a war that Prussia could not win decisively.⁹

When war had become almost inevitable (May 1866), the question as to whether Parliament should approve the war credits or refuse them, became a question of the utmost political importance. For Freytag this was a unique opportunity to put unprecedented pressure on the government, he urged the Lower House to refuse approval of the war credits until such time as the government was prepared to make the concessions demanded by the opposition, in short, the introduction of parliamentary government. That was the price the 'system' would have to pay to gain support for the war with Austria:

"Ist dem Staate ein Krieg unvermeidlich geworden, so darf es (das Abgeordnetenhaus) die Mittel, diesen Krieg zu führen, nicht verweigern, und es darf diese Mittel einem System nicht bewilligen, welches der Majorität des Volkes und seiner Vertreter für ungeeignet gilt, das Geschick des Staates zu bestimmen. Es würde also die Aufgabe haben, alle Verhandlungen über Bedarf und Politik des Staates abhängig zu machen von Einsetzung eines Ministeriums, dem es volles Vertrauen schenken kann." (10)

Freytag insisted that mere changes in the cabinet, for example, the dismissal of Bismarck, would not suffice to gain the support of parliament; a change of system was the prerequisite:

"Denn zur Beseitigung des Systems genügt in Preußen nicht der Wechsel der funktionierenden Minister, sondern eine gänzlich veränderte Stellung des Ministeriums zur Krone."¹¹

Freytag's demand that the war credits be refused, was not taken up by the moderates in the Progressive Party, the group he was closest to; it was adopted by the radical left-wing of the party who subsequently lost votes in the elections for parliament that took place in July 1866 while the war was on.¹² Freytag no longer represented the mainstream of moderate liberal thinking, the extremes to which he had been prepared to go to put pressure on the Bismarck cabinet to achieve parliamentary government isolated him from his political associates. The issue of parliamentary government, for Freytag the key issue, was already beginning to lose its importance to the industrial and commercial middle class who were more concerned with practical economics than with theoretical political constructs and were plainly prepared to come to an understanding with Bismarck as long as their interests were adequately looked after by the government.

"Schon nach dem Kriege von 1864 machte sich innerhalb der liberalen Opposition insofern ein gewisser Umschwung geltend, als eine vorwiegend wirtschaftlich interessierte Gruppe zu einer Annäherung an Bismarck kam, indem sie über die Billigung seiner freihändlerischen Wirtschaftspolitik den Versuch machten, zum Friedensschluß bezüglich des Konflikts zu kommen." (13)

Freytag was the 'Gelehrter' of 'Die verlorene Handschrift' not the 'Kaufmann' of 'Soll und Haben' and therefore unaffected by such economic considerations.

On 15th June 1866 war broke out between Austria and Prussia; on 3rd July the Austrian army was defeated at the battle of Königgrätz (Sadowa), while parliamentary elections in Prussia - held on the same day - resulted in a considerable

weakening of the radical opposition. A bill of indemnity submitted by Bismarck was accepted by the Lower House on 6th August, thus formally ending the constitutional conflict in Prussia. On 23rd August the peace treaty with Austria and her allies was signed which sanctioned the annexation by Prussia of the Kingdoms of Hanover and Hesse-Nassau and the important city of Frankfurt am Main, and the establishment of a North German state, the North German Confederation, with its capital in Berlin. In September the Lower House passed a vote of confidence in Bismarck's conduct of foreign policy by a substantial majority (230 votes to 83). Freytag's liberal strategy lay in ruins, all that he had feared had come to pass: the constitutional conflict had been resolved without a major concession being granted, Bismarck's prestige and the authority of monarchical government had been increased. Public opinion had swung over massively to those parties that supported Bismarck, in such a climate outright opposition to Bismarck was almost unthinkable.¹⁴

Freytag found it difficult to adapt to the new situation:¹⁵ while he approved wholeheartedly of the expansion of Prussia (which he saw as an important step towards German unity)¹⁶, he was obliged to acknowledge that it was Bismarck, the conservative aristocrat, who had played a major role in the achievement of this success¹⁷ and was therefore deeply unhappy¹⁸ that a Junker, locked in defiant combat with parliament and people in defence of absolutism, had presided over these triumphs:

"Der Gewinn ist uns geworden, durch kühnen Entschluß Einzelner (19), die sich vorher selbst in die Lage gebracht hatten, die warmen Sympathien der deutschen Stämme und ihrer populären Vertrauensmänner zu entbehren. Denn was sie während der letzten Jahre in Preußen getan oder zugelassen hatten, war oft so, daß es den Deutschen ihren stark ausgeprägten Sinn für Billigkeit und Gerechtigkeit empören mußte. Jetzt ist vielen unbehaglich, das Größte solchen zu verdanken, denen sie mißtrauten. ...

"Ja es ist wahr, das Volk verdankt einen großen Fortschritt dem Zufall, daß ein talentvoller und mutiger Mann die auswärtigen Geschäfte sehr patriotisch und sehr eigenwillig leitete. ... Diese Lage ist für den Patrioten, der sein Ideal des einigen Deutschland in warmem Herzen getragen und Jahre lang dafür in seiner Weise gearbeitet hat, sehr unbequem. Aber wir alle haben uns dabei zu finden." (20)

In an article two weeks later, the begrudging reserve had given way to a more positive tone:

"Wenn er auch sich nach der Schlacht bei Königgrätz nicht sogleich von den alten Vorstellungen, die ihn durch Jahre beherrscht hatten, befreite, so haben wir kein Recht mehr, ihm daraus einen Vorwurf zu machen. Denn er hat seitdem schnell und vollständig die Gunst der Situation zu benutzen gewußt und ungeheure Schwierigkeiten, welche auch das Publikum zu ahnen vermag, mit einer vortrefflichen Mischung von Festigkeit und Nachgiebigkeit überwunden. Das oft gesagte Wort gilt von ihm in ausgezeichnete Weise: er ist größer geworden mit seinen Zielen. Und wir erfüllen nur eine Pflicht des Patriotismus und loyaler Kampfweise, wenn wir einem früheren Gegner die warme und herzliche Anerkennung zollen, welche der Mann verdient, dem vergönnt war, so viel für Preußen und Deutschland zu tun." (21)

Had Freytag seen the proverbial error of his ways and abandoned his liberal principles? Had he, as Baumgarten had urged ²², resolved to support Bismarck? Apparently,

"Es ist ein früherer Gegner, der uns diesen großen Erfolg vorbereitet hat, unsere Aufgabe ist, daß wir ihn dabei stützen." (23)

but only as a temporary expedient. He recognised that the liberals could not afford to stand sullenly on one side, to do so would be to isolate them from public opinion and the mass of the people. They would only retain the support of the people if they

"loyal und mit ehrlichem Willen die begonnene Arbeit der preußischen Regierung im festen Einvernehmen mit derselben weiter führen. Wollen sie das nicht, so geht die neue Zeit über sie hinweg, sie verlieren ihre Berechtigung, die höchsten Interessen der Nation zu vertreten, und wir werden erleben, daß alte Gegner (i.e. Bismarck) unsere Ideen ausführen."

Tactical considerations governed very largely the nature and the expression of Freytag's response to the new situation, his support for Bismarck was a change of tactic, the strategy remained the same as before: to exert pressure on the system until it caved in. Freytag's praise of Bismarck's conduct of policy had seemed so unqualified that a friend Jordan wrote to him congratulating him on his change of heart:

"Wollen Sie mir, verehrtester Freund, in Rücksicht auf das vorletzte Heft besten Dank dafür gestatten, daß die Grünen nunmehr ihren Frieden mit 'General Bismarck' vollzogen und ratifiziert haben." (25)

Freytag replied:

"Was den Frieden mit Bismarck betrifft, so steht das freilich so. Meine Meinung über seinen Charakter habe ich nicht sehr geändert. Aber seine Stellung zu uns ist eine andere geworden. Und das wird wohl für eine Weile genügen." (26)

Freytag's tolerance of Bismarck was based on the fact that Bismarck had been obliged - for the moment - to make certain concessions to liberalism

"der Liberalismus, dem er jetzt weite Schranken öffnen muß." (27)

his very successes were liberal, not conservative:

"Im übrigen ist das Resultat ihres Sieges, daß sie mit unseren Ideen regieren müssen und daß sie sich nur durch sie behaupten können." (28)

Bismarck had been instrumental in creating a large unitary North German state, a development which - Freytag felt - must ultimately make Bismarck obsolete; the reorganisation of North Germany was but the beginning of a great development, the present state of affairs was only provisional:

"... in ganz Deutschland steht die Empfindung obenan, daß wir in einem großen Interimisticum leben, und im Beginn politischer Neubildungen, deren definitiver Abschluß noch in weiter Ferne liegen mag." (29)

Further development would in time lead to the triumph of liberalism:

"Zuverlässig wird der preußische Verfassungsentwurf vom 10. Juni in der Praxis durch den neuen Reichstag sehr bald Fortbildung und Erweiterung erfahren, aus dem Parlament für Verkehrsinteressen wird zuletzt eine

"wirkliche Volksvertretung werden und immer wieder wird man dabei auf die große Arbeit des Jahres 1849 hinblicken.(30) Diese weitere Ausführung ist Sache der Zukunft. ... Gerade jetzt ist der preußischen Opposition eine mächtige Aufgabe gestellt. ... Sieg und Herrschaft des Liberalismus ist in Deutschland fortan nicht mehr aufzuhalten, das Legitimitätsprinzip ist vernichtet, die letzten Überreste des Feudalstaats zerfallen." (31)

In this perspective Bismarck was for Freytag no more than a figure of transition; he wrote to Geffken:

"Denn die Zeit, welche jetzt so neu und imponierend erscheinen läßt, was wir lange bekämpft haben (i.e. Bismarckian absolutism), wird vorübergehen." (32)

Freytag also expected that, when the Crown Prince became King, Bismarck would be dismissed.³³ The year 1866 drew to a close with Freytag confident in the future.

b. Freytag's view of Bismarck in 1866

A comparison of Freytag's view of Bismarck the man before and after the war with Austria shows that following the defeat of Austria he displayed a more positive appreciation of Bismarck's skill and determination as a diplomat. Prior to the events of June and July 1866 Freytag had tended to see Bismarck as a man who, although eminently endowed with considerable personal qualities

"Er ist ein geistvoller Mann von unübertrefflicher Elastizität, um Auskunft nicht verlegen, bereit sich persönlich einzusetzen, kurz entschlossen, dem Vernehmen nach im persönlichen Verkehr wie in seinem Privatleben von großer Liebenswürdigkeit." (34)

suffered supremely from the pride and prejudice of his Junker background:

"Die innere Freiheit, mit welcher er die Personen beurteilt, und die Flüchtigkeit, mit welcher er Tatsachen behandelt, die Behendigkeit, mit welcher er sich aus der Befangenheit des Momentes heraushebt, und der Eigenwille, welcher sich eine Sachlage einbildet, Verachtung der Gegner und Ungeduld bei Hindernissen, das Selbstgefühl adeliger Ehre gegenüber bürgerlicher Gewissenhaftigkeit sind Eigenschaften eines Politikers, der aus dem preußischen Junkertum heraufkam." (35)

His masterful temperament, his intelligence, wit and intellectual resourcefulness were pressed into the service of a fateful typically Junker inability to see things as they are:

"ihm fehlt eine unbefangene Auffassung der Dinge; die Eindrücke, welche die Welt in seine Seele sendet, werden ihm zu schnell verzogen, was der gemeine Menschenverstand leicht findet, entzieht sich ihm." (36)

Indeed, his undoubted abilities became, Freytag believed, by their very virtuosity, obstacles to success in the real world; unable to judge a situation soberly, Bismarck would endeavour to contrive situations in which he was master, but which served no further purpose, he thus expended energy to no end:

"Bei solchem Mangel wird sogar seine reiche Begabung ein Hindernis für Erfolge; er wird in seiner politischen Tätigkeit immer aufregen, ärgern, Einzelne an sich fesseln, aber er wird ewig in Gefahr sein, die unrichtigen Mittel auch für ein gutes Ziel zu verwenden, sich über die

"Schwierigkeiten und über seine Hilfsquellen gröblich zu täuschen, statt mit sicherem Entschluß einen Plan zu verfolgen, sich an der Produktion zu befriedigen, welche ihm eine Reihe montierter Situationen gibt." (37)

Bismarck lacked the solidity and steady purposefulness of the middle class politician:

"Auch seinem Entschluß, wie energisch er erscheine, fehlt die nüchterne Stetigkeit. Wir Liberale vermissen an ihm außerdem andere Eigenschaften, welche wir an einem Staatsmanne nicht entbehren können." (38)

Bismarck was a dilettante, his immense vitality was basically unproductive; he was a man unrestrained by any ethical principles in whom wilful caprice and mood were decisive:

"Es ist ein blendendes, vielleicht fesselndes Wesen, es sind einige von den höchsten Eigenschaften eines preußischen Ministers darin, aber ihr Segen wird in das Gegenteil verkehrt durch dilettierende Unproduktivität und durch den Mangel an festen inneren Schranken, welche ihm die Willkür bändigen." (39)

Such was Freytag's portrait of Bismarck prior to the summer of 1866.

Whereas Bismarck's policy up ~~to~~ the defeat of Austria had been regarded by Freytag as a trail of blunders born of unmitigated confusion and aristocratic myopia, after the war he characterised Bismarck's conduct of policy as 'kühn', 'mutig' and 'rücksichtslos'; Bismarck was no longer the vacillating, if energetic amateur, now he was the single-minded statesman determined to achieve his ends:

"Es ist ein kräftiger, scharfsinniger und zum Äußersten entschlossener Mann, welcher jetzt die auswärtigen Geschäfte Preußens verwaltet. Die Sachlage gestattet ihm gerade jetzt, alle starken und bedeutenden Seiten seines Wesens geltend zu machen. Die Mittel, durch welche er sein hohes Ziel zu erreichen sucht, sind die einer sehr selbstwilligen und souveränen Natur." (40)

Freytag seemed to have recognised that he had previously underestimated Bismarck's strength of character.

Yet these published expressions of approval may have been more tactical than real; Freytag's privately expressed views recall more the make-shift and chance elements that

he felt characterised the system of monarchical government.
He complained to a friend Graf Baudissin:

"So wurde der Krieg, den Bismarck und Roon lange geträumt und gewünscht hatten, in seiner Ausführung und seinen Erfolgen teilweise improvisiert. Und diesen Charakter eines Impromptu hat auch das ganze Friedensgeschäft behalten. Zufällige Laune des Königs, eine kleine Vorliebe Bismarcks vermögen jetzt den Völkern Millionen aufzulegen und so und soviel Quadratmeilen preußisch oder oldenburgisch zu machen.

Es wäre Unrecht, dagegen zu eifern und sich darum die hohe Freude an dem Gewonnenen trüben zu lassen. Aber es macht zuweilen doch den Mut schwer, daß auch die Zukunft Sachsens dieser Art Zufall preisgegeben ist." (41)

V. The North German Confederation: Freytag as a member of the Reichstag(1866-1867)

According to the terms of the peace treaty signed with Austria Prussia annexed a number of formerly independent German states, which - together with Prussia - were to form the new North German Confederation. The draft constitution for the new state was published on 15th December 1866 and in February of the following year elections for the Constituent Reichstag were held; the first session of the new parliamentary body, meeting in Berlin, was opened on 24th February 1867. Freytag stood as a candidate for the National Liberal Party in Thuringia and was elected member for the constituency of Erfurt-Schleusingen-Ziegenrück.¹ He was thus able to witness at first-hand the parliamentary struggle between Bismarck and the Reichstag over the constitution.

The establishment of parliamentary government within a united Germany remained the aim of German liberalism: in this context the most important question facing the newly constituted Reichstag was - as Freytag reminded the readers of the 'Grenzboten'² - the question of parliamentary control of the executive, since here lay the key to further constitutional development:

"An der Entscheidung dieser Frage hängt, wie wir innig davon überzeugt, die gesamte parlamentarische Zukunft Preußens und Deutschlands. Hat Graf Bismarck die Absicht, den Reichstag zu dem künftigen Parlament des deutschen Reiches zu erheben, so muß er jedes Jahresbudget des Reiches zu einem Akt der Gesetzgebung machen." (3)

The right of parliament to control, approve or reject government expenditure was, in Freytag's view, crucial and he warned that failure on the part of the government - that is to say Bismarck - to concede would be to risk renewed parliamentary strife.⁴ On the whole Freytag was confident that, if the Liberals remained strong and united, they could shape the new constitution according to liberal principles:

"...gelingt es der nationalen Partei, in sich selbst

Verständigung und einheitliches Handeln durchzusetzen, so kann, wie auch der gegenwärtige Entwurf der Bundesverfassung beschaffen sei, eine große Umbildung des deutschen Verfassungslebens durch Reichstag und Bundesrat bewirkt werden." (5)

Freytag was supported in his confidence by historical precedent:

"Eine große parlamentarische Körperschaft, die Blüte der Nation, läßt sich nicht zu solcher Resignation verurteilen. Sie fordert um ihrer Autorität willen notwendig das Geldbewilligungsrecht. Wo man es irgend mit solchem eisernen Budget versuchte, hat man die Exemption desselben nicht bewahren können. Weder in den Niederlanden, noch in Frankreich, noch jetzt in Sachsen die 3jährige Periode. Es liegt im Wesen jeder Volksvertretung, die Hände an die Schnüre des Geldbeutels zu legen. Wer das verhindern will, kämpft in unserer Zeit einen sieglosen Kampf." (6)

The prospects for success appeared favourable, especially as Bismarck had apparently modified his views:

"...der erste Minister Preußens ist jetzt sehr verschieden von dem Mann, der im Jahr 1863 unwillig war, eine andere Politik einzuschlagen, als die Herr v. Scheel-Plessen riet." (7)

In the last week of February the draft constitution was finally published. While noting with satisfaction that measures were envisaged to secure standardisation throughout the Confederation in the fields of commerce, taxation, justice and communications,⁸ Freytag was distinctly unhappy about the omissions and their implications for liberal development in Germany:

"Ernster wird die Stimmung, wenn wir die Opfer betrachten, welche der Entwurf der freiheitlichen Entwicklung zumutet, und die Seitenpfade, auf denen er von dem bisherigen Verfassungsleben ableitet." (9)

Military expenditure was, for example,

"...der Kompetenz des Reichstages gänzlich und für immer entzogen." (10)

a circumstance that was bound to make

"...die Ausübung des Budgetrechts fast illusorisch." (11)

A running battle was fought between the liberals and Bismarck in the Reichstag over the question of the right of parliament to control the budget.¹² Freytag also complained that the

principle of government ministers being responsible to, and ultimately dependent on, parliament had been completely ignored in the draft constitution:

"Ein politischer Grundsatz also, älter als alle modernen Staaten, ist in dem Verfassungsentwurf nicht beachtet. ... Es ist keine Kontrolle der Staatseinnahme und Ausgabe durch die Nation möglich, wenn nicht die höchsten Beamten des Staates der Nation verantwortlich sind." (13)

Freytag believed that the Reichstag must have the absolute right to remove ministers who had lost the confidence of parliament; without this prerogative, the powers of budgetary control were

"...ein Unding ohne verantwortliches Ministerium." (14)

Freytag's criticisms of the draft constitution were, therefore, fairly fundamental.

Freytag's confidence proved, however, to be short-lived: any hopes that he may have had before coming to Berlin that the liberals would be able to force changes in the constitution, were soon abandoned. The optimism with which he had viewed future developments at the beginning of the year (1867) when he had written of a

"...Beginn eines großartigen politischen Lebens..." (15) had given way to a much more cautious, not to say, sceptical assessment of the situation:

"Es wird also die Majorität den Kampf auf Erweiterung des Budgetrechts richten. Mit welchem Erfolg steht dahin." (16)

Only a few days after arriving in Berlin he wrote to Jordan:

"Ich persönlich lasse mich hier umhertreiben, wie einen Kreisel. Die nationale Fraktion hat sich gebildet, Bennigsen Präsident derselben; außer Twesten, Unruh, Lasker ist von den Hannov. noch Miquel eine hervorragende Natur, neben ihm Braun. Bennigsen, mit dem ich auch allein konferierte, hat mir sehr gut gefallen, er ist persönlich weit preuß.(ischer) als wir dachten. Und bewährt sich als Leiter der Debatte vortrefflich.

Das Alles wird uns nicht viel nützen. Die Reg. will nicht nachgeben, und bei seiner Aufgabe: zu konzcedieren u. doch die Hauptsache nicht zu konzcedieren, wird der Reichstag zuletzt doch in die Finger der Minister kommen u. entweder als weiches Wachs umgedrückt werden, oder Gf. Bismarck selbst zwischen die Finger zu nehmen suchen u. darüber scheitern." (17)

As the deliberations wore on, Freytag became increasingly despondent; he became convinced that Bismarck who had already

established his personal undivided authority over the Reichstag, would block any attempt to liberalise the constitution:

"Man möchte uns lieber heute als morgen loswerden, und es ist gar nicht unmöglich, obgleich nicht wahrscheinlich, daß Bismarck eine en bloc-Annahme durch die Konservativen und Sachsen erzwingt. Es wird bei einem Haus v. ca. 250, etwa 100 Konservative, 13 Sachsen, welche Befehl haben, mit der Regierung zu gehen. Was die Ultramontanen machen werden, weiß man nicht, die Altliberalen aber ca. 12 sind wenigstens zum Teil für en bloc. Duncker unter den eifrigsten." (19)

Bismarck could probably muster a majority to support his draft constitution. Freytag concluded that the Reichstag had very little power, even less than the Prussian parliament.²⁰ Members served merely as a captive audience for Bismarck's oratory:

"Aber wir sind nur dazu da, um den Hintergrund für Bismarcks Konzepte zu bilden, und der Furioso genießt mit Behagen die Reize einer Anerkennung seines Rednertalents und ist besonders gegen unsere Leute sehr höflich." (21)

So what was the point, Freytag wondered, of debating:

"Jetzt sind die Verhandlungen im Grunde uninteressant, zumal wenn man sich der Ansicht getröstet, daß Bism. nur das von uns kontrasignierte Stück Papier (i.e. the constitution) braucht und daß im Grunde ziemlich gleichgültig ist, was darin steht, denn beobachtet wird es doch nicht werden... Bismarck will einen zweiten Krieg mit Frankr., bevor dort die neue Organ.(isation) fertig ist. All unsere Reichstagsarbeit ist ihm nur eine Vorbereitung dazu u. im Grunde lacht er - so argwöhne ich - über alle Amendements und Kontroversen, womit wir die Zeit sehr ernthhaft hinbringen." (22)

In the event Bismarck did concede that parliamentary control should be extended to military expenditure in principle, but not just yet; Freytag welcomed the fact that

"...das große Prinzip..., daß nach einer für die neue Heeresorganisation bewilligten Ausnahmezeit die gesamten Einnahmen und Ausgaben, welche in die Kompetenz des Bundesstaates fallen, auf dem Wege der Gesetzgebung mit künftigen Reichstagen jährlich vereinbart werden sollen." (23)

had been accepted by Bismarck, but he remained - justifiably - sceptical as to the future on this score:

"Ob durch Feststellung dieses Prinzips viel oder wenig für die Zukunft erreicht sei, muß die Erfahrung lehren." (24)

For the time being the government had

"...auf einige Jahre diktatorische Befugnisse." (25)

Realising that major changes in the constitution were out of the question, Freytag changed his tactic completely, gave up any idea of pressing for amendments and began urging members - through the columns of the 'Grenzboten' - to pass the constitution virtually as Bismarck had submitted it to the Reichstag for fear that amendments would be put which were unacceptable to Bismarck and that this would involve the House in protracted and fruitless discussion and only delay the conclusion of business:

"...die Amendements haben meist eine politische Ordnung im Auge, welche erst in vier und dreiviertel Jahren deutscher Zukunft lebendig werden soll, eine politische Ordnung, welche so, wie sie jetzt paktiert worden, nach menschlichem Voraussehen nicht tatsächlich wirksam werden kann." (26)

Freytag had reluctantly come to the conclusion that it was premature - given the political constellation ²⁷ - to attempt to implement a fully fledged liberal constitution; that was not possible under the circumstances. He was prepared to accept the constitution, unsatisfactory though it was, as a product of a specific historical circumstance, relying on developments in the future to complete the work of liberalising the constitution:

"Nun aber ist der Verfassungsentwurf ein Dokument, welches in konstitutionellem Sinn gut zu machen unmöglich ist. Sein Wert und Bedeutung für unsere Zukunft sind vielmehr, daß er die Formulierung geschlossener Verträge und ein originelles Produkt mühevoller Kompromisse zwischen souveränen Staaten... ist. Durch die Annahme desselben soll vor allem konstatiert werden, daß eine neue Basis für eine einheitliche Entwicklung deutscher Kraft gewonnen ist." (28)

In the very nature of things the constitution could be no more than:

"...eine feierliche Formulierung der bis jetzt gewonnenen Resultate, der erste Anfang einer gesetzlichen Gründung unseres neuen Lebens, aber auch der Anfang und Vermittlung eines weiteren Fortschritts." (29)

Freytag emphasised that the 1867 constitution represented a stage in a much more complex and altogether longer-term evolution:

"Was uns jetzt in einem Raume vereinigen soll, ist ein Notdach, schnell zusammengefügt und nicht auf Dauer berechnet. Auch was wir jetzt schaffen,...das wird, dessen bleiben wir uns bewußt, nur ein Interisticum und wahrscheinlich eines von kurzer Dauer." (30)

So convinced was he of the purely temporary and provisional nature of the constitutional arrangements - soon to be superseded by developments in the future - that he grew impatient with

attempts to modify the constitution; he spoke scathingly of those liberals who

"...diese Grundlage(i.e. the constitution as it stood) weiter führen und im Interesse freiheitlicher Entwicklung zahlreiche neue kleine Grundsteine hinzubringen wollen. Das ganze fremdartige Produkt des Jahres 1866 widerstrebt solcher Amendation." (31)

Freytag's main hope of stimulus to further development of the constitution lay in the radical changes that he believed were imminent in the political geography of Germany. War with France was in the air and in the event of such a war the south German states were bound to join the North.³² The south German states had developed strong liberal and parliamentary traditions, especially the state of Baden where Freytag's close friend Karl Mathy was Prime Minister. Freytag was sure that under such conditions the south German states would insist on modifications to the 1867 constitution:

"...die Südstaaten werden ihre Bedingungen nicht nur empfangen, auch stellen, und selbst wenn nur ein Friedensjahr vergönnt sein sollte, würde der nächste Reichstag wahrscheinlich keinen Abschnitt und vielleicht nur wenige Artikel finden, welche unverändert beibehalten werden können." (33)

Freytag thus looked forward to massive revision of the constitution in the years ahead precipitated by events.

Freytag's attitude to the constitutional debate was in large measure determined by his perspective of future developments; in such a scenario he attached little importance to the influence of figures such as Bismarck, believing as he did that the onward march of history was more powerful than individuals whose contribution and influence was marginal:

"Es ist sicher, daß in dieser Zeit einer gewaltigen Revolution...die Stellung Preußens zum Ausland und zu seinen Bundesgenossen, daß auch das Verhältnis der preußischen Regierung zum Volke große Änderungen erfahren wird. ... Wie die Schlacht bei Sadowa uns den Reichstag notwendig gemacht hat und den gegenwärtigen Verfassungsentwurf, so werden neue Erfolge oder Mißerfolge uns neue Programme unserer Zukunft, andere repräsentative Versammlungen und im Drange einer harten Zeit größere Rechte der Volksvertretung geben." (34)

The Bismarckian constitution of 1867 was but one small, but initial and necessary step in a greater forward movement, spanning perhaps a decade or so. Little did Freytag dream that it represented with minor modifications the maximum of political power that an elected body was to have in Germany until after defeat and revolution in 1918. What he believed was the beginning, turned out to be the end of constitutional development in Germany for sixty years.

Not only did Freytag regard Bismarck as a marginal figure in the broad sweep of history, but he also thought that Bismarck would not survive as Prime Minister for longer than a couple of years:

"Es gilt, ein paar Jahre gegen die persönliche Politik zweier Menschen(i.e. Bismarck and William I) sich zu behaupten, und die Forcen derselben ebensowohl für Deutschland zu benützen, als ihre fixen Ideen, soweit man sie nicht brechen kann, mit gutem Anstand zu ertragen." (35)

The Crown Prince would very shortly - as Freytag hoped - become King of Prussia and that would change everything;³⁶ in the interim

"Es gilt also Mittel zu finden, um die nächste kurze Zukunft zu passieren." (37)

Freytag seriously underestimated Bismarck, misled by his deterministic view of history in which individuals were in the last analysis unable to stem the tide of history; he regarded Bismarck as a figure of transition whose career in politics was destined to be short-lived.

Freytag decided to relinquish his seat as member for Erfurt after only six months(June 1867); he had come to the conclusion that he was not cut out to be a politician. He wrote to Duke Ernst explaining his decision:

"Außerdem habe ich in diesen Wochen einen stillen Entschluß gefaßt, der mir einige Entsagung gekostet hat. Ich gehe zum nächsten Reichstag nicht nach Berlin. ... fühle ich mich für die politische Laufbahn nicht allzu günstig ausgestattet. Doch kehre ich in meinen Federtopf zurück, wie Hans Dudelsack im Märchen. Denn ich habe für mein Volk eine andere Aufgabe zu erfüllen. Ich bin in einer Zeit, die in

energischer, aber einseitiger Kraftentfaltung begriffen ist, einer der wenigen Bewahrer der idealen Habe unseres Volkes. ...

In der Politik ist zweifelhaft, was ich leiste und nütze, in meinem Fach weiß ich. Damit ist nicht gemeint, daß ich mir den Mund zubinden will. Im Gegenteil. Aber ich entsage der Parlamentskarriere und werde nicht Politiker von Profession." (38)

b. The events of the years 1868 to 1870.

The years 1868 to 1870 brought none of the political changes in the political geography of Germany that Freytag had so earnestly hoped for;³⁹ indeed, the comparative inertia of these years produced in Freytag a pattern of reactions that was to become permanent: bouts of deep despondency at the lack of progress in the short term alternated with moods of optimism which were sustained by his rather determinist philosophy of historical progress. On the one hand he was exhilarated by the progress that ~~had~~ already been made towards bringing the German states together, developments which, he felt, had created a momentum⁴⁰ of its own that made further progress inevitable.

"Es ist eine sehr tröstliche Überzeugung, daß das Zusammenwachsen der Nord- und Südstaaten zu staatlicher Einheit doch unaufhaltsam vor sich gehe und doch nur eine Frage der Zeit sei." (41)

On the other hand he was deeply disturbed at the way Bismarck was concentrating so much power in his own hands, power which seemed to be directed ~~to~~ one end only, that of enabling him to resist pressure for constitutional change:

"Dort(Berlin) tritt übrigens jetzt ein, was seit vorigem Winter(1867) vorauszusehen war: die Auflösung der alten preußischen Staatsmaschine und die Konzentration ungeheurer Macht in Bismarcks Hand flößt Besorgnisse ein."(42)

The liberal struggle for changes in the constitution to extend the powers of the Reichstag in the years 1868 to 1870 was a failure; Bismarck successfully resisted, by fair means and foul, all attempts to curtail his own executive powers.⁴³ Freytag was not at all optimistic about prospects for modifying the constitution as long as Bismarck was Bundeskanzler.⁴⁴ A suggestion by Stosch that Freytag use his position as a journalist to initiate a campaign agitating for the establishment of a 'Reichsministerium'(a cabinet) to replace Bismarck's one-man rule⁴⁵ met with a sceptical response from Freytag, although he fully agreed with the desirability of the proposal:

"Wahrscheinlich wird das Resultat der Agitation, welche Bismarck mit tiefer Entrüstung betrachten muß, das sein, daß

"etwas neues Provisorisches und Ungenügendes erfunden wird. Er wird nie gleichberechtigte Kollegen im Bund neben sich ertragen; aber er wird sich herbeilassen, Räte mit weiteren Befugnissen und einer gewissen Selbständigkeit den einzelnen Branchen vorzusetzen. Damit werden wir uns bescheiden müssen." (46)

} Such a campaign would, however, be difficult in view of Bismarck's enormous prestige:

"Man kann in diesen Dingen nur mit Erfolg agitieren, überzeugen und drängen, wenn man an zahlreichen Beispielen und an jedem einzelnen Fall die Notwendigkeit der Änderung eindringlich machen kann. Zuerst ist die allgemeine Ansicht, daß Bismarck, wie er auch wirtschaftete, immer noch weit besser sei als seine ideenlosen und verkommenen Kollegen, und daß er, wie er auch sei, bei dem Werk nicht entbehrt werden könne. Es wird also der neue Gedanke sich nur Bahn brechen, wenn wiederholt auf die unerträglichen Übelstände des bisherigen Verfahrens hingewiesen werden kann." (47)

Freytag's assessment of Bismarck's determination to hold the Reichstag at bay - at almost any cost - was proved correct by Bismarck's characteristic handling of the 1868 Navy Bill. The liberals had promised their support for the bill, authorising the government to raise money to build ships for the Confederate Navy, on condition that Bismarck agreed to an extension of the authority of the Reichstag. This Bismarck declined to do, the Reichstag rejected the Bill, whereupon Bismarck withdrew the Bill and ordered the navy to be run down.

"Die Arbeiten für die Flotte wurden eingestellt, Schiffe abgetackelt, mühsam zusammengebrachte Werkstätten geschlossen, Arbeiter entlassen." (48)

The liberals finally came to heel:

"Nach erkannter Gefahr beschloß unsere Partei einmütig, das drohende Verderben von der Flotte abzuwenden." (49)

Bismarck had amply demonstrated that he held the whip-hand. The liberals came in for a good deal of criticism for allowing the situation to degenerate into such a crisis; Freytag defended their action, arguing that such crises were inevitable in a situation where the government was completely independent of parliament.⁵⁰ Freytag consoled himself with the thought that Bismarck's career would be short-lived:

"Bismarck ist doch nur möglich, in einer Tageszeit, welche aus der Nacht in das helle Licht herüberführt." (51)

Elsewhere he had referred to Bismarck as one of many

"Schatten aus vergangener Zeit, die noch in unsere Zeit ragen" (52)

He was

"Der größte Spätling dieser Vegetationsperiode, die in der Literatur von 1830 bis 1848 reicht." (53)

The theme of Bismarck as a figure of transition established itself as a constant under-current in Freytag's attitude to Bismarck in the 1860's. Indeed, the whole era was an age of transition and the years ahead, he believed, were to be years that saw great change in the political life of Germany. He expected the Crown Prince to take over soon as King of Prussia and initiate changes in the political structure commensurate with his declared liberal convictions. In the meantime it was the duty of the Liberal Party to prepare itself for government, to assume

"die Herrschaft im Staate." (54)

In July 1869 it seemed as if the years of waiting were at last nearly over: Bismarck relinquished the office of Prime Minister of Prussia and had been granted a leave of absence from his duties as Reichskanzler. Freytag took Bismarck's albeit temporary retirement from politics - due to illness - to be the beginning of the end, the long awaited end of Bismarck's autocratic and personal regime:

"Das war das wichtige Ereignis der vergangenen Woche, von dem wir wahrscheinlich einen neuen Abschnitt in der Entwicklung unseres Staates zu datieren haben." (55)

Freytag's account of the events leading up to Bismarck's illness assumes the tone of a political obituary:

"Wir betrachten mit menschlichem Anteil die Erkrankung, und der Dank welchen ihm die Nation schuldet, möge, so wünschen wir, ein helles Licht auf die Tage seiner Zurückgezogenheit werfen." (56)

According to his interpretation of events, ~~leading up to~~ Bismarck's illness was the consequence of a state of exhaustion

brought on by the realisation that he was no longer able to direct and control all aspects of government policy, that the constitutional structure that he had created was too unwieldy for him to operate successfully:

"Aber es ist auch nicht unmöglich, die Ansicht fern zu halten, daß seine gemütliche Niedergeschlagenheit durch eine peinliche immer schwerer lastende Empfindung vergrößert worden ist, durch die Empfindung, daß für seine Natur in der Lage, die er sich selbst geschaffen nicht weiter zu kommen ist. Seine ganze Leitung der Geschäfte war das Umtreiben einer sehr künstlichen Maschine, nur er verstand Stift und Schraube in Arbeit zu halten, wenn ihm einmal ein Teil versagte oder wider seinen Willen rotierte, dann mußte der ganze Mechanismus ins Stocken kommen. Schon im Jahr 1867 wurde das deutlich, aber gern beruhigte sich der Deutsche durch die Hoffnung, die neue Verfassung des Bundes sei nur der Anfang für eine konsequentere und einfachere Organisation, Grundlage zu energischem Ausbau. Unterdeß sind die Reibungen stärker geworden als der Meister." (57)

Freytag hoped that the crisis would demonstrate the inadequacy of the constitution and make demands for reform more plausible.

Bismarck's withdrawal was the climax of a series of crises between the King and himself; it looked as if Bismarck had finally lost the confidence of the King and that he might be dismissed.⁵⁸ Freytag assumed that Bismarck's days were numbered:

"Die Beurlaubung Bismarcks (Fall Usedom) hat merkwürdigerweise in Presse und Publikum weit weniger Aufsehen gemacht, als ich erwartete... Auf mich hat die Notiz gewirkt wie eine Trompete auf ein altes Husarenrößlein." (59)

Liberation was at hand!

"Wir haben aufgehört, Werkzeuge eines Einzelnen (i.e. Bismarck) zu sein." (60)

Open opposition to Bismarck in the years following the establishment of the Confederation had been difficult: Bismarck had made Prussia the dominant power in Germany

"...hatte durch Verwegenheit, Glück und wahrhaft große Qualitäten verstanden, sich so mit Ruhm und Größe Preußens zu identifizieren, daß wer ihn schlug, zugleich dem Staat weh tat. Und doch wurden die Bornes seines Wesens immer störender und sein Wesen immer unberechenbarer, Es war schwer, öffentlich zu sagen: er muß weg! wenn man nicht sich selbst oder einen anderen an seine Stelle zu setzen hatte..." (61)

Such was the dilemma of the Bismarck opposition; yet now the situation was changing rapidly, Freytag thought that he could detect the beginnings of a new broader opposition to Bismarck reminiscent of the 1860's:

"Es zieht sich langsam in Preußen wieder das Gewitter zusammen, das durch den Sturm von 66 auf einige Jahre zerstreut war. ...in der Bewegung, die jetzt in Preußen beginnt, vermag auch Bismarck nicht zu helfen. Dafür hat er keine Hilfsmittel in sich. Es wird also im Herbst unliebsames Gezänk beginnen. Wir wollen uns dadurch so wenig als möglich verstimmen lassen." (62)

The period following the 'indemnity bill' and the setting-up of the Confederation is seen by Freytag as an episode, a temporary cessation of hostilities; the confrontation of the early 1860's was re-emerging as resentment at Bismarck's continued opposition to constitutional change was mounting:

"Diese Wirtschaft Bismarcks, das ewige Interimisticum wird unerträglich..." (63)

He believed there was widespread discontent at the continued dominance of the state administration by the Prussian aristocracy:

"Die Unzufriedenheit in den alten Provinzen ist sehr groß. Das Adelsregiment wird unerträglich, die Verkehrtheit und junkerhafte Gewissenslosigkeit der Minister unleidlich." (64)

Freytag was in militant mood:

"Das aristokratische Familienregiment muß gebrochen werden." (65)

The opposition, he complained, lacked thrust:

"Auch was die Opposition sagt, ist mir nicht entschieden genug." (66)

The battle lines of the years of constitutional conflict were being resumed:

"Der Kampf welcher jetzt auf diesem Gebiet ziemlich schwächlich gegen das preußische Junkertum entbrennt, wird noch viele Schlachtfelder haben und die Hohenzollern werden das Feuer spüren." (67)

Freytag doubted whether Bismarck would be able to find a way out of the impasse; his failure to cope with the renewed opposition would quickly alienate what public support he still had:

"Die Miserabilitäten des Systems quetschen das Volk unaufhörlich wund. Was wir immer behaupteten, daß 1866

"nirgend schwerer zu überwinden sein werde als in Preußen selbst, das kommt jetzt zum Bewußtsein. Zunächst nur bei den Führern. Und seine immense Popularität wird noch eine Weile stützen. Aber daß er uns aus diesem Chaos nicht befreit, scheint mir sicher. Er wird sich sammeln und noch einen großen Ruck im Innern geben, und ich besorge, daß diese Explosion erst unter der nächsten Regierung eintritt." (68)

The reference to 'Explosion' is somewhat cryptic, but indicates that Freytag expected some major internal crisis, perhaps an attempt by Bismarck - under the liberal Crown Prince as Kaiser - to reassert his authority would precipitate some upheaval which he would be unlikely to survive as Reichskanzler. But Bismarck was not dismissed either in 1869 or later and Freytag had to accept that his hopes of a imminent end to the Bismarck regime were premature.

A major problem for liberals in the late 1860's was the turning away from apparently discredited liberal ideas that became associated with admiration for Bismarck and his successes as a statesman, as a German 'patriot'; the notion that liberalism had failed in its attempts to bring about national unity was gaining ground, a tendency that Freytag observed with great concern:

"Unter dem Zauber großer Erfolge und staatsmännischer Klugheit eines Mannes verbreitete sich die geheime Zuversicht, daß die höhere Einsicht und der Patriotismus eines Einzelnen mehr dauernden Wert habe, als die Anläufe und Bestrebungen von zwei Generationen deutscher Patrioten." (69)

He attempted to counter Bismarck's prestige by pointing out that Bismarck, the Junker, would never have taken heed of the wishes of the nation if the liberals had not pressed the claims of the people. He contended that Bismarck had been forced to take account of the wishes of the nation by the constant pressure the liberals had brought to bear and, he went on, this would continue to be the aim of liberal strategy:

"So weit wir richtig verstehen, was der Nation Not tut, arbeitet er (Bismarck) für uns, das heißt für die Zukunft Preußens, nicht wir für ihn." (70)

While Freytag conceded that Bismarck had played a major role in the moves towards German unity in the middle sixties, he stressed that even the achievements of great men like Bismarck had their limitations and that it was always necessary for the whole nation to adapt, evolve and refine such individual achievements:

"Es ist wahr, daß alle große Reformen im Leben einer Nation, wenn sie von Tausenden als Bedürfnis erkannt und geheischt sind, den Durchgang durch die Seele eines Mannes nehmen, welcher, die Machtmittel fest in der Hand haltend, den schwebenden Gedanken geschlossenen Willen zusetzt. Es ist auch ganz in der Ordnung, daß solchem Einzelnen, der zur Tat verdichtet, was vorher Sehnsucht, Wunsch, Bedürfnis war, der Ruhm und die Verantwortung für das Gewordene zufallen. Aber ebenso wahr ist, daß jeder Tat des Einzelnen auch viel Unfertiges und Individuelles, Beschränktes und Zufälliges anhängt, was wieder nur durch die unablässigen Korrekturen beseitigt werden kann, welche die Arbeit vieler, die angestrengte Tätigkeit der ganzen Nation dazu bringt. Was der Held allein erdacht, ob Luther, Cromwell, Friedrich II, Napoleon dauert, soweit es den Stempel des Persönlichen bewahrt, selten über sein eigenes Wirken hinaus, und der Segen seines Tuns wird späteren Geschlechtern vielleicht nur aus den Früchten deutlich, die seine Gegner gewinnen." (71)

With Bismarck's despotic tendencies in mind Freytag recommended the example of George Washington:

"Es war das Größte und Dauerhafteste an Washington, daß der bescheidene Mann nicht unternahm, den neuen Staat selbstwillig zu gestalten." (72)

There were signs too that the once solidly liberal middle class was beginning to assimilate certain aristocratic values and habits,⁷³ the most blatant expression of this being the increasing tendency for prominent members of the middle class to seek entry to the ranks of the nobility, thus, formally turning their backs on their middle class origins. This demonstrated their signal lack of pride, Freytag thought.⁷⁴ In the same context he denounced plans to resurrect the German imperial purple 'die abgestandene Kaiseridee von '48'⁷⁵ which would, he believed, only strengthen the aristocracy and the court at the expense of the middle class:

"Ein Kaisertum verlangt einen Kaiserhof. An Stelle einer jetzt bereits schädlichen Bevorzugung des hoffähigen

"Junkertums würde ein vornehmes Werben um eine weit schlechtere und abgeneigtere Aristokratie treten." (76)

It would encourage the formation of a socially divisive and conservative elite:

"So ist dem Fürsten nicht weniger als dem Staat nachteilig, wenn er neue Kraft, die er an sich heranziehen möchte, dadurch vom Volke löst, daß er ihr die Überlieferungen eines bestimmten Standes aneignet." (77)

Despite certain worrying tendencies in the present and the reversals and disappointments of the last few years of the decade, Freytag was able to detect a certain evolution in the constitutional structure: he argued that the institutions of the Confederation had taken on a 'life' independent of their author, Bismarck, who was now being gradually rendered superfluous by the inherent vital evolution of the very institutions he had created:

"Die Erfindung eines einzelnen Mannes (hat) bereits ein übermenschliches Leben gewonnen und (ist) ein lebendiges Stück unseres Volkstums geworden, dessen Gedeihen und Fortbildung nicht mehr von einem Individuum überherrscht werden kann, sondern seine Lebensgesetze sich selbst gebieterisch fordert. Durch drei Jahre war Graf Bismarck der Meister, und er hat uns alle gezwungen, als seine Gesellen an seiner Idee zu arbeiten. Jetzt regt sich in dem Werk ein eigenes Leben, jedes Organ, welches ihm nach dem Plan zugefügt wurde, fordert gebieterisch neue Organe und Spielraum zur Tätigkeit. Der Bundesstaat fängt an sich durch seine eigenen Konsequenzen weiter zu bilden. Weder die ihn zuerst gewollt, noch irgendwelche seiner Anhänger und Gegner vermögen dieses junge Leben in der Hauptsache zu hindern." (78)

Freytag's belief in historical progress is here plainly documented; he reaffirmed his belief that liberalism was on the advance:

"Denn trotz aller Schwächen der Liberalen gehört die nächste Zukunft doch dem Liberalismus." (79)

c. Freytag's biography 'Karl Mathy' (1869)

In the aftermath of Bismarck's successes in 1866 and '67 the view that liberalism as a set of ideas and a system of government were no longer relevant to the situation, had been gaining ground. There had been a good deal of heart-searching among liberals and many had swung round in support of Bismarck whose popularity was leading to a turning away from liberal ideas. Freytag was very much concerned at the way the German middle class was reacting to Bismarck's success; middle-class German liberals were tending to forget their historical mission to lay claim to political power in the state and challenge the power of the aristocracy. Freytag's biography of the south German politician Karl Mathy was intended to stem this process of disillusion with liberalism by putting Bismarck's achievements in the - for Freytag correct - perspective of a long struggle waged by the liberal middle class for a united Germany. The book was intended as a corrective to the popular myth that Bismarck had created the North German Confederation almost single-handed, the new state was, Freytag claimed, intellectually a creation of German liberalism.

"Die Biographie Mathys...habe ich dazu benützt, um den Deutschen etwas aus der nächsten Vergangenheit in das Gedächtnis zurückzurufen, was Viele über den Ereignissen von 1866 vergessen zu haben scheinen. Daß nämlich nicht ein Mann und ein Waffengang allein die Grundlage eines neuen Staates geschaffen, sondern daß Viele in aufreibendem geistigen Kampf seit zwei Jahrzehnten daran gearbeitet haben, die Gedanken und die einzelnen Bestimmungen der Verfassung des neuen Bundes als volkstümliche Forderungen hinzustellen." (80)

Freytag stressed that 1866 and the new North German state represented the fulfilment of long-standing liberal demands:

"Aber die Tat der Preußen vollbrachte nur der Rat, der Einundfünfzig von Heidelberg 18 Jahre, zum großen Teil vorher, begehrt hatte. Vieles Gewaltige, das im Jahr 1866 und den folgenden praktisch lebendig geworden ist, war bis in Einzelheiten Ausführung der großen Forderungen, welche der Südwesten Deutschlands durch lange Arbeit der Volksvertreter formuliert hatte." (81)

Later in the book Freytag argued that the 1867 Constitution was not the work of one man, Bismarck - as popular myth had it - but the result of ideas propagated by Liberals for over two decades:

"...jene Forderungen des 5. März (1849) (sind) in der Hauptsache durch die Verfassung des norddeutschen Bundes für 30 Millionen Deutsche zum Grundsatz des neuen Staates erhoben. Die politischen Gedanken, welche darin enthalten sind, wird niemand das Werk eines Einzelnen nennen wagen, denn sie wuchsen zu gleicher Zeit in Tausenden herauf, aber unvergänglich soll das Andenken der Führer bleiben, welche sie zuerst auf den Weg der praktischen Ausführung gebracht und aus dem Reich unbestimmter Ideale in die Wirklichkeit eingeführt haben." (82)

Despite Freytag's euphoria the liberal middle class was not to be allowed by Bismarck to influence the political - as opposed to the economic destiny - of Germany in the ensuing decades. The tragedy of the German liberal middle class was that, rejecting revolution as a means of procuring drastic fundamental reform, and relying on strictly constitutional means (on the pressure of public opinion and on the influence that came from economic power), they failed to bring about those changes in the political structure that would have permitted them to determine the political life of the nation and not just participate in a minor supporting role, as was the case under Bismarck. Freytag too felt the tragedy of this situation: Karl Mathy, the tireless constitutional liberal who had struggled and striven for German unity under the banner of liberalism, a man who represented for Freytag the alternative to Bismarck, the bourgeois statesman, was to be deprived of exercising political power in Bismarck's Germany:

"Wer den tätigen Mann sah... der konnte sich einer geheimen Trauer nicht entziehen. Hier war eine deutsche Kraft, in den härtesten politischen Kämpfen geschult, so sicher, so großartig, für die höchsten Angelegenheiten der Nation geschaffen, und dies Leben verrann in einer Tätigkeit, die doch nicht volle Befriedigung gab und die das Beste seines Wesens nicht zu voller Geltung brachte." (83)

The final blow was Bismarck's refusal to accept the entry to the North German Confederation submitted on behalf of the south German state of Baden by Karl Mathy, the Prime Minister.

"Mathy betrachtet als letzte Pflicht seiner Regierung, den Eintritt Badens vom Bund zu verlangen. Aber eine stärkere Macht hinderte das Vollbringen." (84)

Karl Mathy, the bourgeois statesman was intended by Freytag as an example to the German middle class:

"Und wenn sie in der Stunde heiterer Ruhe empfinden, daß von seiner Sicherheit etwas auf sie übergegangen ist, und wenn sie in der Stunde der Versuchung eine Festigkeit erkennen, die der Verkehr mit ihm in sie gelegt, dann mögen sie sich fröhlich bewußt sein, daß sein Bild und Wesen in ihnen fortlebt und aus ihnen übergeht in ihre Nachfahren." (85)

This was no doubt what Freytag hoped would be the effect of his biography. He made a point of emphasising that Mathy was but one admittedly outstanding example of a middle class politician and potential statesman. He stood for many:

"...dies merkwürdige Leben (ist) in vieler Beziehung typisch für die politische und soziale Fortbildung unserer Nation seit 1830." (86)

There were many more Mathys throughout Germany:

"Ungezählt ist die Fülle von Talenten und Charakteren, welche der gute Geist unserer Nation seit den letzten Geschlechtern verwandt hat, um uns aus der Dürftigkeit, Enge und Zersplitterung des deutschen Lebens herauszuheben. Ungezählt sind die pflichtvollen Beamten, Geschäftsmänner, Volkslehrer, welche in den kleinen Kreisen des viel geteilten Deutschlands ihr Leben aufwandten, zu bewahren, zu regieren und fortzubilden. Aber die stille, dauerhafte liebevolle Arbeit derer, welche mit ergrauendem Haar unter uns leben, ist wohl wert, daß wir sie aufsuchen und rühmen, denn was wir gewonnen haben und noch zu erreichen hoffen, das beruht auf ihrer geduldigen Tatkraft und ihrer Hingabe an Pflicht." (87)

Freytag sought to remind the German public of the liberal traditions to which they were heirs, he sought to inspire them with confidence in themselves. They should look to the likes of Karl Mathy and his qualities of determination, strength of purpose, energy and confidence. Freytag was thus trying to counteract the turning away from liberalism that was resulting from admiration of Bismarck and his successes (successes which had seriously shaken the confidence of the German middle class in itself). Freytag was seeking to restore that confidence at a time when a process of re-orientation of values and standards was threatening the hitherto liberal political culture of the middle class.

VI. 'Im neuen Reich'

a. Freytag and 'Im neuen Reich' (1871 - 78)

Bismarck exploited the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71) to unite the south and north German states and thus to found the second German Empire. William I of Prussia was proclaimed German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors in the palace of Versailles on 18th January 1871. The constitution of the new German Empire was essentially the same as that of 1867, adapted to take account of the economic, commercial and administrative consequences of the union. Constantin Frantz remarked that the constitution seemed concerned exclusively with matters pertaining to trade and tariffs etc.¹ The political power structure remained unchanged: there were no major constitutional changes. The Reichstag remained, in the words of Hugo Preuß,

"ein Parlament ohne Regierung", (2)

with the governor appointed by the Emperor; Bismarck was made formally responsible to the Reichstag, but he could not be removed by a vote of no-confidence. The legislative powers of the Reichstag were marginal: members were able to criticise bills submitted by the government, they could amend, bring pressure to bear on Bismarck, they could even refuse to pass bills. Against these obstructive powers Bismarck was able to mobilise public opinion in support of his policies (through his influence of the press), so that a recalcitrant Reichstag frequently found itself dissolved and members obliged to defend their seats against a barrage of propaganda from the press.

The liberals were anyway more inclined to support Bismarck than to oppose him, since they believed that progress would only come from cooperation. They did not wish to be thought responsible for a second constitutional conflict.

They were thus at a considerable disadvantage, since they neither wished for outright opposition - which would have rapidly led to full-scale confrontation - nor did they wish to support Bismarck unreservedly, although there were many in the liberal party who thought that this would be the best policy for the party.

Their debt of gratitude to Bismarck was great: the establishment of the German Empire represented the fulfilment of what had become the supreme goal of German liberalism, the creation of a powerful German state. Many liberals, including Freytag, had believed that such a state could only be created after parliamentary institutions had been established throughout Germany, which would then allow popularly elected parliaments to overrule the opposition of the old aristocratic ruling class to the creation of a unitary German state. The liberals had failed to establish such parliamentary bodies and they had thus failed to create a united Germany. This aim had been realised, instead, by a Prussian Junker who had achieved the unification of Germany, not by parliamentary votes, but by the use of diplomacy, state power and armies in the field.

Although the constitution of the German Empire as established in 1871 brought no advance towards the liberal ideal of parliamentary government, liberals were generally hopeful that the desired development would ensue in good time. They tended to regard the Empire as - intellectually at least - a legitimate child of German liberalism, so that they were prepared to register the deficiencies of the constitution for the moment, confident that they would soon have the opportunity to rectify them.³

Exhilarated by the achievements of the past year, Freytag was full of hope for the future:

"Es ist doch eine große Freude, durch die Arbeit von zehn Monaten auf einmal so erhöht zu sein. Trotz parlamentarischen

" und ultramontanem Ärger ist ja unserer Nation ein Gefühl von Kraft und Gedeihen obenauf, welches wir so lange nicht, vielleicht nie gehabt haben, Handel, Industrie Unternehmungslust wie beflügelt." (4)

The rapid economic expansion of the 'Gründerjahre' had strengthened the economic power of the middle class and had also engendered a new optimism and confidence that bode well for the future.

It was against this background that Freytag's Leipzig friend and publisher Hirzel launched a new weekly periodical appropriately entitled 'Im neuen Reich'. Alfred Dove, a close associate of Freytag, was to be editor, while Freytag himself was to be the principal commentator.⁵ Freytag's hopes for the future were reflected in an introductory article written by Dove (we can assume that the two friends had agreed what the political aims of the periodical were to be, so that the article also reflects Freytag's views); he emphasised that it was to be 'ein freisinniges Blatt'.⁶ The periodical would be a strong advocate of liberal constitutional progress; 1871 was, in Dove's view (echoing Freytag's sentiments of 1866), but

"...ein fröhlicher Anfang...nicht...ein feierliches Ende. Wohl ist die Fortbildung unserer Verfassung in betäubender Weise erschwert; die Summe der Reibungen, die zu überwinden sein wird, hat man so sehr erhöht, daß fast ein dauernder Stillstand zu befürchten steht. Da ist es recht an der Zeit, im Volke selber die inneren Triebkräfte des nationalen Geistes anzufachen, denn, wenn es sich erst in einmütigem Verlangen äußert, die Regierungen schwerlich widerstreben werden." (7)

The weekly would attempt to mobilise public opinion to put pressure on the government, it would press for the introduction of parliamentary institutions that would give political power to the elected representatives of the people. The make-shift and provisional nature of the 1871 constitution was criticised:

"Man möchte bedauern, daß der schwer erforschliche Staatsman (Bismarck), dem wir die schnelle Verwirklichung unserer nationalen Wünsche verdanken, wie er denn immer verwickelte provisorische Zustände zu schaffen liebt, weil sein eigener erfindsamer Geist sich in ihnen mit Geschick und fast mit Behagen bewegt, man möchte bedauern, daß er uns ein neues Provisorium bereitet hat, das unserem erregten Leben noch immer keine nahe Ruhe verspricht." (8)

It was a structure inspired by no more lofty principle than the preservation of Bismarck's personal power by a complex system of checks and balances:

"Dazu kommt, daß die neue Organisation des deutschen Reiches bis jetzt durchaus nach den Bedürfnissen einer einzelnen tatkräftigen Persönlichkeit zugeschnitten ist, welche hier gewinnend und übersehend, dort gewaltsam durchgreifend, Alle in persönlicher Scheu und Abhängigkeit zu binden weiß, die Kronen durch den Reichstag, die Volksvertreter durch den Bundesrat im Schach hält, und sich selbst größte Freiheit für Dispositionen nach dem Bedürfnis der Stunde vorzubehalten versteht." (9)

The constitution thus perpetuated the basic principle of the 1867 constitution, which in Freytag's words, had enabled Bismarck to

"den Bundesrat gegen das preußische Ministerium (zu stellen), den Reichstag gegen den Bundesrat, seinen König gegen die Fürsten und er müht sich, eine Gewalt durch die andere zu balancieren, um über alle zu regieren." (10)

The 1871 constitution thus invested effective political power - as Freytag pointed out ¹¹ - almost exclusively and eccentrically in the hands of Bismarck, he was, in strictly constitutional terms, to use Freytag's phrase

"ein verantwortlicher Tyrann." (12)

Freytag was doubtful whether such a curious structure was at all viable, depending as it did, on the ability of one man:

"Die neue Organisation des heiligen römischen Reiches ist ein so seltsam durchlöcherter Bau, daß selbst Fürst Bismarck nicht auf die Länge darin hausen kann. Und käme einmal ein Sturm, so mag das provisorische Gebäude zerworfen und zerblasen werden, als wäre es nie gewesen." (13)

Such a highly personalised constitutional structure could not be anything but vulnerable in times of crisis:

"Auch das neue Reich bietet durch seine Verfassung noch keine Bürgschaft für Kraft und Dauer." (14)

Only a liberal constitution, Freytag was implying, could guarantee stable political conditions. Yet, Bismarck had set his face against reform of the constitution, claiming that to try and achieve more at the moment would be to endanger what had already been achieved. ¹⁵

Freytag countered:

"Wir brauchten heut nicht wieder 'dem Erreichbaren das Wünschenswerte' zu opfern, wenn wir nur erst alle die gleichen Ziele für wünschenswert hielten. Dahin zu wirken, dafür, wenn es sein muß, zu kämpfen, ist eine Aufgabe, die sich diese Wochenschrift gestellt und darin vornehmlich erblickt sie die Berechtigung ihres Daseins." (16)

He rejected Bismarck's theory that constitutional reform, however desirable, was not possible; to this extent 'Im neuen Reich' was a journal of moderate opposition to Bismarck.

Bismarck was, however, particularly adept at circumventing the need for constitutional reform by modifying the structure in some small detail, as, for example, when Roon was appointed Prime Minister of Prussia (December 1872) to relieve Bismarck of pressure of work (Bismarck had up till then occupied the position of Imperial Chancellor and Prime Minister of Prussia). As Freytag pointed out Bismarck's influence was by no means diminished by this apparent reduction of his constitutional power:

"Die letzte Kabinettsordre über den Vorsitz im Staatsministerium ist vielfach so aufgefaßt worden, als wenn der Fürst Reichskanzler sich von den preußischen Geschäften zurückziehen und unzufrieden bei Seite auf seinen Reichstuhl setzen wollte. Das haben die Preußen sicher nicht zu fürchten. Er mag sich einmal plötzlich veranlaßt sehen, ganz von den Geschäften zu scheiden, aus Krankheit, Ermüdung oder andern übermächtigen persönlichen Gründen, aber solange er im Amte ist, wie es auch heiße, wird er schon dafür sorgen, daß nichts, was ihm bedeutend dünkt und was irgend in die Kreise seiner Tätigkeit reicht, ohne Einwirkung fertig gemacht wird." (17)

Freytag would have preferred

"...Ausbau der Reichsverfassung und Verwaltung. ...dieser Ausbau ist doch der dringendere und auch der, welcher gegenwärtig bessere Aussichten hat, durchgesetzt zu werden." (18)

This was, in Freytag's view, an example of Bismarck's gift for the half-solution, for genial improvisation,¹⁹ a gift that he did not hesitate to describe, in private, as 'krankhaft'.²⁰

Bismarck's aim was to retain supreme power in his own hands, to defend the prerogatives of his position and, as he claimed, those of the monarchy, against the claims of parliament. Bismarck's

inventive genius and his fertility of mind were employed in the cause of frustrating the aspirations of parliament to more control of government:

"Die Mischung von seltsamen Einfällen und Leichtsinn, welche einen lästigen Teufel durch einen größeren austreibt und diesen, wenn er widerwärtig wird, durch einen neuzitierten, und diese Genügsamkeit, welcher immer von der Hand in den Mund und sich auf künftige Einfälle und Inspirationen verläßt, hat bei aller Größe der Intentionen und bei allem Scharfblick etwas so krankhaftes, daß ich aus der Ferne ohne Kenntnis der Details mich ganz resignieren muß, einen festen Plan zu erkennen." (21)

The results of Bismarck's totally pragmatic approach, 'seine Methode, temporäre Hindernisse aus dem Wege zu räumen.' (22) was, in Freytag's view

"...durchaus unpraktisch und eine ungeheure Künstelei." (23)

In a letter to Karl von Normann, the Crown Prince's secretary, Freytag wrote:

"Dem alten Roon hätte ich mehr Klugheit zugetraut, als daß er sich auf solchem verlorenen Posten etablieren würde. ... Für mich hat der künstliche Apparat und das komplizierte Intriguenspiel, welches Bismarck für seine unablässig wechselnden Tagesinteressen jetzt in Bewegung setzt, etwas Beängstigendes. Man merkt immer deutlicher die Laune und Willkür, und zuletzt geht ihm dabei seine beste Gabe, der gesunde Menschenverstand, zum Henker." (24)

It was Bismarck's and Germany's misfortune that he was so skilled at intrigue and manipulation:

"Mir scheint, daß Bismarcks Unglück und Verhängnis gerade seine Fruchtbarkeit an Auskunftsmitteln und die damit verbundene Freude an gewagten und krummen Wegen, an Überraschungen und großen Funden sein wird. Doch es ist schwer, ein Ende zu finden, wenn man mit diesem Genius zu zanken beginnt." (25)

While large sections of the German public at the time saw Bismarck as acting with great single-mindedness and determination, Freytag's picture was quite different: he saw Bismarck as a facile and vacillating arch-improviser, drifting from crisis to crisis without any clear idea of where he was going, fully occupied with trying to find half-solutions to the problems with which he was confronted. Freytag saw Bismarck's approach to politics as characterized by 'Laune' and 'Willkür', by 'Leichtsinn' and 'seltsame Einfälle': all key words in Freytag's

attempt to come to grips with Bismarck's personality in the 1860's. The image of Bismarck that Freytag had established then, lived on.

Although such negative elements played an important part in Freytag's perception of Bismarck's personality, he did try to do justice to the more positive dimensions of Bismarck's character too, as the following analysis shows:

"Die Mischung von Leichtsinne und weitblickender Schlaueit, von rohem Eigenwillen und elastischer Biagsamkeit und wie die ungewöhnlichen chemischen Verbindungen in ihm sonst noch zu formulieren sind, machen fast unmöglich, ohne Wirbel mit ihm dahin zu fahren. Glücklicherweise hat er zwei deutsche Eigenschaften: ein Bedürfnis nach gemütlichen Verhältnissen - die er sich doch immer wieder zu ruinieren sucht, - und eine Sentimentalität, die allerdings zuweilen der eines heulenden Wolfes gleicht. Dennoch ist er im Grunde ein Kind, verzogen, in manchem verdorben, aber er ist doch ein Kindskopf. Wo er mißtraut und argwöhnt, was ihm ihm seiner Neigung zu krümmen Wegen leicht begegnet, wird er kratzbürstig und widerwärtig, wo er sich sicher fühlt, kann er zart und hingebend sein." (26)

Freytag concluded that Bismarck's success was due, not so much to his statesmanship, as to his ruthlessness and cunning:

"Es klingt wohl lächerlich, wenn man Bismarck einen Dilettanten in der Politik nennt, und doch war er ein ganz roher Dilettant, als er die Geschäfte übernahm, und er ist es in gewissem Sinne hoch. Daß er mehr durchgesetzt hat, als jeder geschulter Politiker, die ja in Preußen dürftig gesät waren, verdankt er seiner Stärke und rücksichtslosen Schlaueit in gegebenen Situationen, nicht seiner Umsicht und Kenntnis." (27)

Bismarck was clearly the antithesis of Freytag's ideal statesman in whom a concern for the national interest, moderation, tact, honesty and sobriety were the outstanding features, as in his friend Karl Mathy.

Yet Freytag was in a dilemma: although highly critical of Bismarck's approach - which was seen as the consequence of his powerful personality - he was unable to counsel outright opposition to Bismarck, as in the 1860's, because the alternatives to Bismarck were either unpalatable or non-existent.

The only real alternative to Bismarck was the Crown Prince, but for that they would all have to wait for the death of the Kaiser William I. Until then, Freytag believed that it was necessary to support Bismarck, albeit critically, as the lesser evil. The state was after all under attack from catholics and socialists and Bismarck had achieved a great deal for Germany, in the face of opposition from influential conservative forces. His conduct of foreign affairs was unexceptional, indeed, Freytag was anxious that Bismarck should not vacate the post of foreign Minister for fear of the consequences.²⁸ Together with the majority of the National Liberals Freytag supported Bismarck's anti-catholic measures,²⁹ though he criticised Bismarck for unnecessarily making 'Reichsfeinde' of virtually all catholics in the process;³⁰ Freytag also supported Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation.³¹ Freytag therefore supported the substance of Bismarck's policies, both at home and abroad; his more fundamental constitutional objections he felt obliged to suspend in the prevailing conditions. His hopes for radical liberal change - which he had not abandoned - rested now on the Crown Prince.

In the meantime the German public had to endure 'die Tyrannei und krumme Wege des großen Despoten...' ³² whose influence on the political culture of the German middle class was a cause of great concern to Freytag:

"Die Größe haben wir erreicht; jetzt werfen die Mittel, wodurch sie uns geworden, ihren Schatten über unsere Zukunft. Wir alle werden's noch bezahlen, daß Einer sich gewöhnt hat, selbstherrlich mit Puppen zu spielen. In solcher Zeit gibt es keine andere Hilfe für den Staat, als daß jeder, der berufen ist, in Geschäften und sonstwie auf die Öffentlichkeit zu wirken, in seinem Kreise unermüdlich arbeite, den Fluch, der an gewagter Tat hängt, klein zu machen." (33)

In this context he criticised the liberals for their dependence on Bismarck:

"Betrübend ist mir weiter gewesen zu sehen, wie wenig man in der liberalen Partei über den großen Bismarck hinauszusehen vermag, wie sehr man sich gewöhnt hat, alles mehr oder weniger durch seine Gläser zu betrachten." (34)

He chided them for their lack of initiative, and encouraged them to be more active in parliament and not to lose sight of the

ultimate aim of liberalism, namely, the establishment of parliamentary government in Germany:

"Es wird kein Schade sein, wenn die Majorität der Liberalen fortan weniger darauf vertraut, daß die Impulse zu Reformen von der Regierung ausgehen, und wenn sie durch größere Selbständigkeit sich und ihre Führer vorbereitet, einmal die Staatsgeschäfte in feste Hand zu nehmen." (35)

After the summer of 1873 Freytag's journalistic activity waned after the very active beginning in 1871. In that year he wrote 37 articles in all on a wide variety of political, cultural, historical and literary topics. In the following year he wrote 19 articles of which only six were concerned with contemporary political issues, the rest were of general historical and cultural interest. In 1874 the number of articles dropped to 6 of which only two were political in content. As he became more pre-occupied with the need to complete his ambitious cycle of novels 'Die Ahnen' - which he had started in 1871 - he had less time for regular journalism. After 1873 he only published political articles when the need arose, meanwhile his connection with the weekly became very informal. By the middle 1870's Gustav Freytag - who had been the major attraction of the new periodical when it had started - was not even a regular contributor.

Freytag's estrangement from 'Im neuen Reich' was not simply because he had less time, he was also deeply unhappy about the pro-Bismarck line the weekly had adopted, whereas it had started as an organ committed to constitutional reform. In 1879 Freytag complained to the publisher Hirzel:

"Das Schicksal des Neuen Reiches geht auch mir im Kopf herum. Fuchs hätte schon längst beseitigt werden sollen." (36)

Fuchs provided the Leipzig weekly with political reports from Berlin. As he was also the director of the government-controlled (i.e. Bismarck controlled) Wolf telegraph agency³⁷, it was not surprising that Freytag found his reports excessively pro-Bismarck. However, since he had virtually left the magazine, his only influence on the politics of 'Im neuen Reich' was through his personal links with the editor Alfred Dove.³⁸

The magazine appears to have got into financial difficulties in the late 1870's, a development which prompted Hirzel, the publisher to ask Freytag what he thought of the future of the magazine. Freytag, plainly unhappy at the political complexion the magazine had assumed, advised Hirzel to cease publication; ³⁹it lacked 'Charakter', he claimed, was 'in der letzten Zeit zu sehr Bismarck'.⁴⁰ Freytag thus helped to kill off the magazine with his advice to Hirzel because it had swung round in support of Bismarck:

"Aber das Karnickel(i.e. the magazine) mußte sterben, er kostete mehr, als er einbrachte, und, was eigentlich entschied, in Leipzig und Umgegend war kein Redakteur zu finden. Zuletzt stellte sich gar Bismarcksche Bewunderung ein. Da überlegte ich, daß ich in diese Gesellschaft nicht mehr paßte und als der unsichere Verleger anruf, gab ich selbst ihm den Sterbebrief." (41)

Freytag gives a rather different version of events in his memoirs:

"Dove übernahm noch auf einige Jahre die Leitung der Zeitschrift 'Im neuen Reich', welche Hirzel für unseren Kreis einrichtete, auch dorthin lieferte ich Beiträge, doch war ich der Ansicht, daß die Aufgabe, die ich als Tages-schriftsteller übernommen, gelöst sei. Durch fünfundzwanzig Jahre hatte ich...unter den Stimmführern der deutschen Presse gestanden. Was Traum und Sehnsucht meiner Jugend gewesen war, das war auf den Schlachtfeldern und in den Kabinetten, durch die Tapferkeit unserer Soldaten und durch die Größe unserer politischen Führer Wirklichkeit geworden: ein machtvoller deutscher Staat." (42)

Here Freytag gives the distinct impression that he retired from journalism because all that he had fought for in the columns of the 'Grenzboten' had been realised; yet, far from feeling that no more was to be done, Freytag had seen the task of 'Im neuen Reich' as promoting further constitutional reform by initiating informed public discussion. He had even hoped that the influence of 'Im neuen Reich' might exceed that of the pre-1871 'Grenzboten'.⁴³

Why the discrepancy? Freytag wrote his memoirs in the 1880's at a time when it had become clear that most of what he had hoped for by way of constitutional development, particularly the assumption of state power by the liberals within a system of parliamentary government, was not to be realised in his life-

-time. He was a disappointed man, and yet, as he had always taken the view that pessimism was a destructive force and that it was the prime task of the writer to encourage and inspire, he felt compelled to adapt his account to give the impression that he was fully satisfied with the development.⁴⁴ In this respect he was like many liberals of the Bismarck era who, in retrospect, saw only the setting-up of a mighty German state as the fulfilment of their liberal dreams and passed over the failure to establish liberal political institutions in silence. The fact that Bismarck is never once mentioned by name in the memoirs is surely significant. Even at the time that the weekly 'Im neuen Reich' had been closed Freytag was thinking of starting a new anti-Bismarck magazine,⁴⁵ such was his satisfaction with political developments in Bismarckian Germany.

b. The end of the 'Liberal Era'

Since 1877 Bismarck had been looking for some way of splitting the National Liberal party: he hoped that the right-wing of the party would then combine with the Conservatives to produce a new and more amenable, more reliable majority in the Reichstag to support his policies.⁴⁶ The strategy which the National Liberals had adopted had been to make Bismarck dependent on the party for support by co-operating with him on most matters, but reserving the right to withhold support in order to gain either modifications in proposed legislation or, if the issue were serious enough, to reject the bill out of hand, as with the anti-socialist bill. The party acted therefore as a corrective to government policy by virtue of its essentially pro-government stance and its indispensability to Bismarck. The party thus exerted an influence which, however marginal, Bismarck found urksome. Other party political combinations would make up more reliable, less tiresome majorities, but first, he would have to split the National Liberals. The rejection by the liberals of Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation - if not in principle, at least, in the drastic form that Bismarck submitted the bill to the House - was followed shortly afterwards by the second attempt within a month on the Kaiser's life (Nobiling 2 June 1878). This presented Bismarck with the opportunity he had been waiting for: he immediately ordered the dissolution of parliament and new elections were held.⁴⁷ Freytag was very concerned that the liberals might suffer at the polls on account of their failure - in his view mistaken - to support Bismarck's anti-socialist measures.⁴⁸ He feared that this would lead to the destruction of the dominant position of the National Liberals in the Reichstag, a position that was the basis of their strategy of 'critical support' of Bismarck:

"Sie (die nationale Partei) hat alle Schwächen einer großen liberalen Partei, aber auch allen Nutzen und Segen einer großen Partei. Wenn sie zerfiel, gäbe es keine politische Partei, welche zugleich deutsch und regierungsfreundlich wäre und doch den Überresten von tyrannischen Gelüsten und dummdreister Polizeiwilkkür zu widerstehen vermöchte." (49)

Reduced liberal representation would mean unstable majorities which, by their very nature, would not be able to resist the government or effectively oppose the government as the National Liberals had been able to do, Freytag believed:

"Wenn sie aus den neuen Wahlen so geschwächt hervorgeht, daß ihr Übergewicht im Reichstag aufhört, so werden wir zunächst eine schlappe, gefügte Regierungswirtschaft kleiner Fraktionen erhalten." (50)

In the absence of such constraints Freytag foresaw the government adopting more conservative policies, which, in turn, would provoke a shift to the left within the opposition:

"...und als unmittelbare Folge eine neue Fortschrittspartei mit all den Abgeschmacktheiten, welche durch eine biedere Hochbrust und ein kurzes Gedärm veranlaßt werden." (51)

Freytag was completely at a loss to understand what Bismarck's intentions were: he appeared - for no apparent reason other than political suicide - to be prepared to gamble a safe parliamentary majority:

"Es war von Bismarck eine selbstmörderische Torheit, den Reichstag durch Neuwahlen problematisch zu machen. ... Es ist merkwürdig, daß der alte Junker, welcher in Bismarck steckt, auf eine bessere konservative Partei, als die nationalliberale trotz ihrer Juristerei ist, zu hoffen wagt. Jede Schwächung der liberalen Majorität ist eine Schwächung des Reichstages, weil die Majoritäten beim Abstimmen zufällig werden, und also eine Schwächung des Reichskanzlers. Oder hofft er beim allgemeinen Wahlrecht auf eine Mehrheit adliger Gutsbesitzer und Landräte? Doch es ist fast unnütz, über die unsicheren Gedankensprünge, welche seine Verwaltungsmaßregeln charakterisieren, Glossen zu machen..." (52)

When the results of the elections were known (the National Liberals had - as Freytag had feared - lost 29 seats, while the two conservative parties had gained a total of 38 seats), Freytag was beside himself with anger:

"Was uns aber Bismärckchen vorsetzen wird, das wird schwer zu verschlucken sein. Ich kann den Zorn über diese frevelhafte und perfide Auflösung nicht loswerden: jetzt hat er einen Reichstag, bei welchem die Ultramontanen die relativ herrschende Partei sind, d.h. in demselben Stärkeverhältnis wie in dem früheren die Nationalliberalen." (53)

The same year (1878) saw a split of the party over the question of the introduction of protective tariffs, and thus a departure from the principle of free trade: Bismarck had come to favour tariffs as a source of finance for government expenditure that was independent of parliamentary scrutiny. Influential sections of manufacturing industry and agriculture also favoured the imposition of tariffs.⁵⁴ In addition to opening new sources of finance for the government, the imposition of tariffs was an issue that conveniently split the National Liberals:

"Von allen Parteien fanden sich die Nationalliberalen in der schwierigsten Lage. Sie waren aufgespalten in unbedingte Freihändler, in Anhänger eines mäßigen Schutzzolles und in die Befürworter eines Kompromisses." (55)

Although the National Liberals voted against the legislation, this was not before the party had been subject to considerable internal strife, leading to the departure of a group of fifteen members - the so-called 'Völk-Schauß-Hölder' group - from the party in order to support Bismarck's bill.⁵⁶ A year later - in 1880 - the left-wing of the party who had been the target of Bismarck's attacks, also left the party in order to oppose Bismarck more vigorously; these were the so-called 'Sezessionisten'. The National Liberal party never recovered from this upheaval.⁵⁷

But Freytag seemed unable to grasp the significance of events: he did not think that Bismarck would be able to govern for long without the support of the National Liberal party, indeed, the break with the party was contributing to a drastic decline in Bismarck's authority:

"Aber der alte Gegner hat sich selbst zum Schluß des Jahres (1878) sein Spiel verdorben. Für seinen Niedergang ist der neue schutzzöllnerische Einfall wohl entscheidend. Die Trennung von dem Kern der liberalen Partei ist jetzt erklärt, und alle Erinnerung an alte Größe wird nichts mehr verfangen; denn in Geldsachen hört die Gemütlichkeit auf. Die nationale Partei hat viel Schwäche und Unklugheit bewiesen; dennoch enthält sie einen so großen Teil der Intelligenz und auch der politischen Arbeitskraft, daß ohne ihre Unterstützung auf die Länge nicht mehr die Geschäfte zu führen sind." (58)

Public opinion was turning against Bismarck and his new 'schutzzöllnerische Einfall':⁵⁹

"Wie mir scheint, ist die öffentliche Meinung ihm gegenüber auf der Umkehr. Am meisten unter den Herren vom Landtag und Reichstag und, was wohl noch bedenklicher ist, unter den Beamten aller Ministerien." (60)

Freytag hoped that the immense public interest generated by the controversy over the introduction of protective tariffs would lead to a heightening of political consciousness and, as the vote in the Reichstag rejecting Bismarck's proposals suggested - the beginnings of a movement away from Bismarck towards greater independence:

"Der gegenwärtige Kampf um die Zölle, welche mit einem unerhörten Leichtsinns(61) in Szene gesetzt wurde, ist mir ganz recht. Denn er zwingt fast jedermann, Partei zu nehmen, und er regt in der Nation nicht nur alle Interessen des Geldbeutels, sondern was wichtiger ist, auch eine Teilnahme an den öffentlichen Angelegenheiten auf, welche uns aus der Stagnation der letzten Jahre heraushebt, wenn auch die erste Folge zuvörderst Verwirrung der Parteien ist. Möglich, daß dem Kanzler gelingt, aus den Ratlosen eine Majorität für sich zu gewinnen. Aber er hat eine Bewegung aufgeregt, welche nicht mehr still stehen und im Volke eine größere Selbständigkeit auch ihm gegenüber hervorrufen wird." (62)

The results of the 1881 general election appeared to confirm Freytag's view that there was a powerful movement against Bismarck, or at least, away from him. All the parties that regularly supported Bismarck lost heavily, the National Liberals being reduced from 98 seats to 45 seats. The pro-Bismarck parties were in a minority in the new Reichstag, an unprecedented state of affairs. Freytag was jubilant:

"Unterdes gratuliere ich in Gedanken uns zu dem Ausfall der Wahlen. Und zwar ernsthaft. ... Sie sind für ihn (Bismarck), unser Volk und für das Ausland ein Symptom, daß die Herrschaft des Einen, welcher der Nation sein Bild und Gepräge aufgezwungen hat, nicht unbedingt ist und ihrem Ende naht." (63)

It was the shift to the Left in the Reichstag which Freytag regarded as a bad thing, that increased the likelihood of Bismarck's being obliged to relinquish his autocratic style of government by an obstructive opposition majority. Freytag even dared to hope that Bismarck might find the situation so

intolerable as to resign and withdraw from politics altogether:

"Die geistvollen Aperçus des alten Junkers Bismarck über Sozialismus, Zölle und Steuern haben nur die Feinde des Reichs gestärkt und den Schwerpunkt des Liberalismus nach links, in die unfruchtbare Negation verschoben. Mit diesem Reichstag wird wenig zu machen sein. Ich hoffe, wir werden den Kanzler jetzt für das Innere los, vielleicht ganz..." (64)

Although he disapproved of the shift to the Left, he saw this same shift as a decisive step towards the emancipation of the German public from the dominant influence of Bismarck:

"Der beste Erfolg der Wahlen ist der, daß sie eine gewisse Emanzipation von dem übermächtigen Einfluß des Kanzlers auf die Gemüter darstellen. Spät und langsam erkennen die Deutschen, daß der Mann, dem sie nach deutscher Art alles Große und Gute angedichtet haben, nicht alle Eigenschaften eines Biedermannes besitzt; diese Erkenntnis ist leidig, aber sie war sehr nötig. Denn Seele und Leben einer Nation dürfen nicht lange von dem Gemüt und Gewissen eines Einzelnen abhängen und in ihrem wichtigsten Inhalt durch die Selbstherrlichkeit eines Mannes geleitet werden. Das Volk bezahlt solche Herrschaft zu teuer, wie groß auch der Fortschritt sei, den eine ihm bereitet hat. Die Zeit, wo die Größe des Einzelnen und die Lebensbedürfnisse der Nation in feindseligen Kampf kommen, ist nach 350 Jahren wieder einmal bei uns eingetreten. Wir aber erbitten von dem guten Geist unseres Volkes, daß die Einbuße, welche solchem Kampf zu folgen pflegt, nicht allzu groß sei." (65)

The elections of 1881 represented for Freytag a new phase in the great historical struggle of the German nation to realise itself, the nation was once again asserting itself.

Faced with an opposition majority in the Reichstag Bismarck had threatened to resign, a threat which Freytag could not take seriously: how many times had Bismarck threatened to resign and not actually done so:

"...meine Freude am Dasein ist nicht so gering...wie des Kanzlers an seinem Amte, dessen melancholische Aufkündigung sich mit Sicherheit voraussetzen ließ. Diese Theaterstreiche ziehen nicht mehr." (66)

For Freytag it was all just more evidence of Bismarck's tendency to play-act and dramatise for his own ends:

"...diese Künste haben viel an ihrer Wirkung verloren; man kennt jetzt ziemlich überall die Mischung von Löwe, Wolf und Fuchs, welche in der Seele dieses dramatischen Charakters vereinigt sind." (67)

The split caused by the left-wing 'Sezessionisten' when they left the National Liberal Party in August 1880 was, in Freytag's view, a major tragedy for German liberalism:

"...für uns alle ein Unglück von unabsehbarer Weite,...für mich das bitterste politische Leid meines Lebens." (68)

He had harsh words for the 'Sezessionisten', there could be no justification for their break-away:

"Die Männer, welche in der Verstimmung des Tages den Wert ihrer Bundesgenossenschaft zu gering achteten, glichen hochfahrenden Korpsstudenten, welche sich von ihren alten Häuptern scheiden. Es gibt für ihr Verhalten hundert Entschuldigungen, keine Rechtfertigung." (69)

As a result the National Liberal parliamentary group was for most of the 1880's relatively insignificant.⁷⁰ The fact that the radical liberals formed by far the larger political grouping in the Reichstag was no recommendation to Freytag, although they used their position to oppose Bismarck systematically; Freytag could not forgive them for having split the National Liberal Party⁷¹ nor could he overcome his hatred of radicalism. He remained loyal to the national liberals which still represented in his eyes 'die Intelligenz des Beamten- und Bürgertums',⁷² although, as he complained 'zuweilen im Auftreten schwächlich',⁷³ The new radical liberals were simply 'dumme Teufel',⁷⁴ who were playing into the hands of the socialists.

The split had reduced the influence of liberalism in the state:

"Unser parlamentarische Leben aber ist seitdem für Jahrzehnte verdorben, seine Bedeutung ebenso gemindert, wie der Regierung der Wert einer Rücksichtnahme auf das liberale Element im Staatsleben." (75)

Freytag was particularly bitter that it was only the catholic Centre Party that appeared to have survived Bismarck's attacks intact:

"...die tyrannische Taktlosigkeit des Kanzlers (hat) die Parteiverhältnisse in Deutschland so verstört...daß nur das Zentrum noch eine starke geschlossene Partei darbietet. ... So hat die Regierung und Bismarck in dem neuen Reichstag (1890) keine Majorität mehr und sie vermag mit dem Reichstag nur zu regieren, wenn sie das Zentrum d.h. die päpstliche Partei durch Konzessionen erkauft. Diese Konfusion erschwert auch die Behandlung der sozialen Frage." (76)

He concluded sadly that the creation of a unified German state had been brought about too rapidly for the German nation; German liberalism had been unable to digest Bismarck's achievements and had not proved equal to the task which his unification of the German states had set it, namely, of transforming a united Germany under a monarchical constitutional regime into a Germany under a liberal parliamentary system:

"Wir zahlen jetzt unsere Buße dafür, daß wir durch die Energie eines Einzelnen (Bismarck) fast plötzlich auf eine Höhe gehoben wurden, welcher die politische Schulung unserer Nation nicht gleichkam." (77)

German liberals had been unable to resist the influence of, and ultimately defeat the power of one man Bismarck.

VII. 'Im Ring der Gegner Bismarcks'(1)

a. Stosch and Freytag.

Even under the much changed party political conditions of the 1880's Freytag remained loyal to the strategy the National Liberals had pursued in the 1870's; he believed that there was little alternative for moderate liberals, like himself, as long as Bismarck was Chancellor. The liberals ought, in his opinion, to seek to maximise their parliamentary strength so that they could once again play the decisive role Freytag believed they had played in the so-called 'liberal era' of the 1870's. The strategy of 'critical support' precluded active or frequent opposition to Bismarck which, in view of Bismarck's popularity, Freytag did not regard as practical politics anyway; and he had little time for the noisy opposition of the Progressives to Bismarck, although he might have been expected to be sympathetic to their principled demands for liberal constitutional reform.²

Freytag's fairly fundamental ideological opposition to Bismarck and the Bismarck system found no expression in party political terms. Practical politics required that he support an essentially pro-Bismarck party. His opposition was, in this respect, to all intents and purposes suspended. Yet, there was hope of radical change, hope of a revolution from above where the liberals in the Reichstag had failed: the Crown Prince would one day become Kaiser and Freytag hoped that he would initiate a liberal revolution. Such hopes did not appear to contemporary liberal opponents of Bismarck as utopian as history proved them to be: there was every prospect of major changes in government when the Crown Prince became Kaiser, just as it was likely that Bismarck would resign or be dismissed.³ There existed a not inconsiderable number of prominent liberals and conservatives, experienced and knowledgeable men, who were opposed to Bismarck and ready to assume the reins of government office in his place. The alternative to Bismarck existed.⁴ It was with various members of this largely informal opposition,

made up of liberals and conservatives, that Freytag associated, most closely with such men as Franz von Roggenbach, Karl von Normann (Private Secretary to the Crown Prince) and Albrecht von Stosch, for many years (1872-1883) the Chief of the Admiralty under Bismarck.

Albrecht von Stosch, a moderate conservative and initially an admirer of Bismarck,⁵ was appointed Chief of the Admiralty in January 1872 with Bismarck's full approval. However, Bismarck was, as ever, quick to suspect collusion between Stosch and the liberal member of parliament Rickert, who was navy affairs spokesman in the budget committee of the Reichstag (and thus quite naturally had a great deal to do with Stosch). Bismarck publically denounced Stosch for alleged liberalism and linked him with the Crown Prince and the shadow 'Gladstone Cabinet', as Bismarck called it. Bismarck saw in Stosch a dangerous rival for his own position of Chancellor, although there is no evidence that Stosch entertained any such ambitions. Through his friendship with Stosch Freytag was closely involved, almost week by week, with the latter's struggle with Bismarck for political survival.⁶

The conflict between Stosch and Bismarck had smouldered for some years before Bismarck had the opportunity to launch direct attacks on Stosch in 1877.⁷ Up till then Bismarck had attempted to discredit Stosch's administration of the navy by picking on subordinates, as in the case of Captain Werner who, as commander of a squadron of vessels in the Mediterranean, had boarded what had appeared to be a pirate ship.⁸ As a result of a vicious press campaign unleashed against him, Werner was dismissed; Freytag was quite sure that Bismarck had directed the campaign and that the attack on Werner was really directed at Stosch:

"...wenn nicht vieles trügt, so wurde zwar Kapitän Werner getroffen, aber im Sinne lag ein anderer höherer Befehlshaber (i.e. Stosch), der gerade jetzt aus der Fremde, wo er seine Sache besonders gut gemacht hat, heimkehrt." (10)

Freytag had witnessed at first-hand the lengths to which Bismarck was prepared to go to dispose of opponents.

In 1877 Bismarck brought the differences between him and Stosch out into the open, he attacked Stosch in a speech to the Reichstag, accusing him of yielding to liberal pressure and thus of neglecting his duty to defend the interests of his department, the Admiralty, in sessions of parliamentary committees. Bismarck declared:

"Ich konnte nicht erwarten, daß die Autorität oder die Überredungsgabe des Herrn Richter (i.e. leader of the radical liberals) um so viel stärker wie die meinige auf die Marineverwaltung wirken würden." (11)

Bismarck presumably hoped that such an open disavowal of Stosch would oblige him to resign - after all it had worked in other instances. Freytag was indignant at Bismarck's technique of defamation and innuendo, of character assassination, he wrote to Stosch:

"Ich bin besorgt wegen Ihrer Affäre mit diesem rachsüchtigen Riesen Asprian und ich vermag nicht von hier abzureisen, bevor ich diesen politischen Handel ausgetragen weiß... Wie ein Blitz aus heiterem Himmel traf mich dieser Ausfall des Kanzlers, der durchaus nicht ruhen kann, bis er sich totgeschwätzt hat. Ich vermag seine Reden ohne empörte Proteste nicht mehr zu lesen, die Frechheit im Umbiegen der Tatsachen, das Schlottrige und Unsichre seines Gedächtnisses und die überall durchscheinende Gewissenlosigkeit, welche um augenblicklicher Wirkungen willen die Wahrheit preisgibt, werden unleidlich. Der Reichstag aber merkt endlich, spät genug, wie er als Säugling betrachtet wird, dem der Brei um den Mund gestrichen werden muß, damit er nicht schreie. Die Affäre mit Ihnen ist für den Kanzler schädlicher, als er selbst ahnt." (12)

Freytag advised Stosch to stay at his post, not to resign, since he thought that Bismarck would not last more than a couple of years:

"...gehen Sie nicht, wenn Sie es irgend vermeiden können. Tun Sie nicht ihm den Gefallen, dem Kaiser den Kummer, uns den Schaden an. Er hat noch zwei Jahre, dann ist er mit dem Reichstag fertig and wahrscheinlich auch sonst. Überdauern Sie ihn trotz seiner Ungebändigkeit." (13)

Freytag's advice notwithstanding Stosch requested his resignation, but Kaiser William I refused to accept it.

The whole affair highlighted Bismarck's deficiencies: his complete inability to work together with others, an inability which left him prey to all sorts of ideas which conceived in a moment, emerged as firm decisions: a case in point was his plan that he should be represented in the Reichstag by Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode:

"Das neue Projekt wird das Schicksal aller seiner Organisationsversuche haben: es wird etwas Halbes bleiben und an seiner Unfähigkeit zu kollegialem Zusammenwirken, wenn es überhaupt lebendig wird, in kurzem scheitern. Sie haben recht, es ist ihm seither alles mißlungen, weil er sich die guten Mitarbeiter entfremdet hat und in seiner Isolierung unter der Herrschaft jüher Einfälle steht; aber wie er einmal geworden ist, kann er nur durch sich selbst gestürzt werden und durch keinen anderen." (14)

Freytag was very sceptical about the success of any attempt to oust Bismarck from power; Bismarck was too firmly in the saddle for that, a view that conditioned Freytag's whole attitude to opposition to Bismarck, encouraging him to bide his time. The attack on Stosch was, in Freytag's view, an example of the way that personal feelings played a large part in Bismarck's decisions: Freytag feared that the attack on Stosch had been provoked by Stosch's favourable mention in the English press:

"Die glorreiche Erwähnung Ihrer Wirksamkeit in den englischen Zeitungen mag ebenso leicht schaden als nützen. Denn der Kanzler ist neidisch auf fremden Ruhm." (15)

The sinking in 1878 of the frigate 'Großer Kurfürst' off Folkstone as a result of a collision with another ship in the same squadron the 'König Wilhelm' gave Bismarck the opportunity to strike a blow directly at Stosch as Chief of the Admiralty. Instructions went out to Bismarck's minions in the press that the catastrophe was due to what was described as the 'Stosch system':

"...man hat seiner Marineleitung die Schuld an dem Zusammenstoß aufbürden wollen und große Zeitungen wurden nicht müde, sein System als schädlich für die deutsche Marine anzuklagen." (16)

Freytag was incensed by the campaign:

"Solange ich in der Schreiberei lebe, ist mir doch eine so alberne und dabei so erfolgreiche Agitation nicht vorgekommen als das Geschwätz über Ihre Marineleitung.

"Diesen Unsinn vermag ich nicht länger zu ertragen, und ich bin entschlossen, das Mönchsgelübde journalistischer Enthalttsamkeit, das ich vor Jahren abgelegt, zu brechen und ins Feld zu ziehen." (17)

The official report on the accident published by the government for public consumption contained, so Freytag maintained in the article he subsequently wrote in defence of Stosch, 'nur einen lückenhaften Auszug'¹⁸ of the proceedings of the court martial against the captains of the ships involved in the accident. In support of this contention Freytag quoted an instance where the evidence of witnesses who had testified that the captain of the 'Großer Kurfürst' had manoeuvred the ship badly, had been suppressed - deliberately, as Freytag went on to suggest:

"Diese Stelle berechtigt neben einigen anderen zu dem Schluß, daß souveräne Striche einer Feder in der Denkschrift gekürzt haben. Und dies Schriftstück, welches wie beiläufig und wie ohne amtliche Autorität erschienen, dürfte wohl in einer Weise offiziell sein, wie wenige ähnliche Aktenstücke, und wir dürfen annehmen, daß das Mitgeteilte Alles enthält, was ein maßgebender Wille von den Verhandlungen über das Unglück und seine Ursachen für das Publikum bestimmt hat." (19)

The 'maßgebender Wille' was none other than Bismarck who, Freytag cautiously implied, had manipulated the contents of the report to discredit Stosch.

In order to try and correct the impression that had been created by Bismarck-inspired reporting of the affair in the press²⁰ Freytag included in his article a spirited account of Stosch's work in building up the navy. He was saddened by the conformist pro-Bismarck reaction of some sections of the liberal press:

"Es wurde den hartnäckigen Tadeln schwer werden, sich und Anderen in Wahrheit deutlich zu machen, worin das falsche System besteht, welches durch Herrn von Stosch vertreten wird. Überhaupt war die Behandlung, welche der Marineleitung zu Teil wurde, bei einem Teil der liberalen Tagespresse zum Verwundern herb und ungerecht. Hat es dem Herrn von Stosch auch bei liberalen Zeitungen so sehr geschadet, daß er in der letzten Zeit nicht für einen Günstling des Fürsten Bismarck galt?" (21)

The manner in which Bismarck had been able to prevail upon large sections of the apparently independent liberal press to attack his political opponents, indicated the extent to which Bismarck was in a position to mould public opinion on an unprecedented scale through his relations with the press. A contemporary observer commented:

"Es ist wohl keine Übertreibung, wenn man sagt, die Macht des Kanzlers beruhe im wesentlichen auf einer gefügigen Presse, also auf dem Welfenfonds." (22)

Bismarck made further attempts to remove Stosch ²³, until he finally relinquished his post in 1883; Freytag wrote comfortingly:

"Der bereits mehrfach erwähnte Kanzler hat die Bosheit, die er gegen Sie ermesen, selbst an sich gerächt. Seit der Zeit geht ihm alles schlecht und sein Karren ist so verfahren, daß es ein Elend und eine Schande ist. Wenn wir nur nicht auch darauf saßen." (24)

But Bismarck was not satisfied, since he still regarded Stosch - who had close links with the Crown Prince - as his closest potential rival for the position of Chancellor, a danger that increased as the years went by and the possibility of the Crown Prince becoming Kaiser, became more real. Bismarck was quite determined to hound Stosch and discredit him completely. A concerted attack was mounted, led by the governmental daily, the 'Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung'. Freytag commented:

"Der letzte Angriff Bismarcks ...ist empörend. Ist sein Wortlaut so, wie ich ihn dem hiesigen 'Gothaer Tageblatt' entnehme, daß Sie nämlich Ihr amtliches Wissen der liberalen Opposition zur Disposition gestellt, so enthält er eine schwere Beleidigung, einen Angriff auf Ihre Amtsehre und eignet sich zur gerichtlichen Verfolgung, jedenfalls zur Klage gegen die Redaktion der Zeitung. Die Vorfrage für Sie ist nun die: hat der garstige Mann in seinem Haß sich verhaufen? Das ist wohl möglich, denn die Sorge um seine Macht vermag ihn blind zu machen, wie der rote Lappen den Truthahn. Nur ärgern Sie sich nicht sehr! Der Eindruck, den seine Angriffe bis jetzt machen, ist für Sie nicht nachteilig, wohl aber für ihn." (25)

This was rapidly followed by a second attack. Freytag urged Stosch not to allow himself to be provoked:

"Der zweite Angriff des bösen Mannes beweist, daß er Sie reizen will, in der Presse irgendwie zu antworten, damit seine Meute Gelegenheit erhält, immer wieder gegen Sie zu kläffen. Er denkt, etwas bleibt doch hängen. Ihr stolzes Schweigen ist...das allein Richtige. Nicht nur gegenüber den hohen Herrschaften (i.e. Crown Prince and wife), auch vor dem Publikum, welches mit Befremden und Mißbilligung diese schädlichen Ausbrüche eines häßlichen Haßes aufnimmt. Er schadet dadurch nur sich selbst, nicht Ihnen." (26)

Hearing of the fate of another victim of Bismarck's avenging spirit, Möllern, who was the head of the administration of the 'Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen', Freytag heaved a resigned sigh:

"Und wer hat Möllern gestürzt und hier wie überall die Staatsmaschine locker gemacht? Immer dasselbe. Es wird Zeit, daß er (Bismarck) zurückgetreten wird. Aber er ist so groß und dick und klug..." (27)

He was, however, encouraged by signs of mounting resistance to Bismarck's methods within the administration in Berlin:

"Dort wird die Launenhaftigkeit und Willkür und der deprimierende Hochmut am bittersten empfunden, und es wird schon richtig sein, was mir gestern ein langjähriger Verehrer des Fürsten erzählte, daß ihn in Berlin nichts so betroffen gemacht habe, als die Abneigung und der Grimm der Ministerialbeamten, welche den Kanzler als großen Wauwau für das schädliche Gespenst der preußischen Verwaltung halten. Im einzelnen hat er (Bismarck) sicher gegen diese Herren der Routine recht, im ganzen ist dieser Widerwille eine wohlverdiente Verurteilung." (28)

The civil service had been brutally subordinated to the governmental style of one man Bismarck and thus robbed of its independence. Freytag had hoped that, failing the achievement of parliamentary government under Bismarck

"...wir sind noch sehr weit von dem sogenannten parlamentarischen Regiment..." (29)

some form of compromise could have been evolved in which the civil servants in charge of various government departments could have been made subject to control by the Reichstag. Even this arrangement - which would have made it much more difficult for Bismarck to 'hire and fire' whoever he wished -

had been frustrated by Bismarck, and even if it were to be implemented, the idea of control would have been illusory, since the creation of a solidly pro-Bismarck administration. Freytag commented:

"Die glückliche Mischung: tüchtige, sachverständige Beamte als Regierende und ein patriotischer Reichstag als Kontrollinstanz hätten uns noch lange befriedigt und den politischen Forderungen der Nation genügt, wenn nicht ein Gewisser (Bismarck) durch sein tyrannisches und launenhaftes Dreinfahren das höhere Beamtentum vollständig desorganisiert und in seiner Geltung vermindert hätte." (30)

The disarray that resulted was extremely harmful for the administration of the nation:

"...die Auflösung und Generalkonfusion in den höheren Beamtenkreisen, das Strebertum und die launenhafte Willkür in der Staatsregierung (wird) zum größten Schaden für die Hohenzollern und für die Nation." (31)

and had given rise to that phenomenon of the 1880's in Germany, the careerist, the 'Streber'. Bismarck's destruction of an independent civil service might yet, Freytag mused, create a situation in which - quite contrary to Bismarck's intentions - parliament was the only authority left able to check and control the government:

"Bismarck ist es, der auf Umwegen und wider Willen die Tyrannei des Reichstages und das Majoritätenregiment dem Volke aufzwingen wird." (32)

b. Freytag and Kaiser Frederick III.

The Crown Prince had been the focus of the political hopes of the liberal anti-Bismarck opposition ever since the early 1870's; the prospect of his acceding to the imperial throne seemed to them to offer the only chance of reforming the German state according to enlightened liberal principles. The Crown Prince did not, however, possess the character that would have enabled him to fulfil these expectations. Indecisive, romantic, and under the influence of his intellectually superior wife Victoria, he developed a passivity that ill suited him for the role he had been assigned by the anti-Bismarck Fronde. He was given to bouts of extreme depression, when he would become totally indifferent to public affairs and shunned any involvement. His weaknesses - which were well known to those close to him - only inspired his political associates to intensify their efforts at influencing him. Stosch, for example, was concerned to counter what he believed to be the bad influence of the Crown Prince's wife.³³ The Crown Prince was caught in the cross-fire of conflicting attentions.

Freytag shared the hopes of the Crown Prince's circle, aware too, of his failings. He expressed pleasant surprise at the Crown Prince's application to the task as Regent when he temporarily took over the duties of Kaiser at the time of the attempts on his father's life (1878).

"Kurz vor dem Attentat wurde ich nach Berlin zitiert. ... Bei der Gelegenheit fand ich den Kronprinzen unzufrieden, gedrückt und keineswegs klar in dem, was er wollte. Um so mehr bin ich überrascht von verschiedenen Beobachtern zu vernehmen, daß in ihm seit Übernahme der Geschäfte eine vollständige Änderung eingetreten sei, und daß er nicht nur Besonnenheit und eine Festigkeit, die niemand so gehofft, erweise, sondern auch einen ernsten Fleiß und daß die mit ihm Verhandelnden ihr Erstaunen darüber nicht bergen könnten. Es wäre sehr zu wünschen, daß solche gute Applikation anhielte und nicht allein auf die gehobene und gespannte Stimmung zurückzuführen sei." (34)

Freytag's fears proved to be correct. The Kaiser recovered and the Crown Prince became once more increasingly prey to resignation.

and depression.³⁵ Freytag feared too that Bismarck would be able to dominate the Crown Prince when he became Kaiser:

"Ich wünsche ja niemandem Böses, am wenigsten ein Verhängnis, das vom irdischen Licht scheidet. Aber ich vermag die Ansicht nicht loszuwerden, daß der Kanzler, wenn er den alten Herrn überlebt, ein Verhängnis für den Nachfolger zu werden droht. Denn wenn ein Thronwechsel ihn im Amte findet, so ist kein Zweifel, daß er trotz alldem den neuen Kaiser unterkriegt." (36)

Some years later Freytag wrote to Duke Ernst:

"Die Hoffnung auf einzelne Menschen wird immer geringer... Der arme Kronprinz!" (37)

The Crown Prince, hope of liberals and constitutional conservatives alike, showed himself in later years to be more pre-occupied with the reestablishment of the glory of the German medieval empire than with the realisation of liberal ideals. The Crown Prince was particularly attached to the idea of reviving the imperial title and the trappings of imperial pomp, something to which Freytag had always been opposed. The Crown Prince was, in Freytag's view, promoting the influence and interests of the aristocracy and shoring up the monarchical structure with these ambitions. This he resented so much that in 1889 - less than a year after the Emperor Frederick's tragic death - he published 'Der Kronprinz und die deutsche Kaiserkrone'.³⁸ The book is ostensibly an account of Freytag's impressions during his stay at the headquarters of the Third Army in France of which the Crown Prince was Commander-in-Chief, the substance is an extended critique of the Crown Prince for his romantic attachment to the imperial title and the tendency - which Freytag saw as closely connected - to idealise public figures as heroes. Such hero-worship, Freytag declared, was a threat to German liberalism:

"...daß es für den gesamten Liberalismus eine politische Gefahr geworden ist, wollen sie nicht verstehen." (39)

He was aggrieved to see the German middle class indulge in uncritical adulation of heroes who were invariably aristocrats; it encouraged the spread of unhealthy monarchical attitudes within the middle class and strengthened the desire to adopt feudal aristocratic values.

Freytag complained to Ilse Strakosch:

"Unter den übrigen Eingängen...war auch eine Mitteilung von Döllinger, dem Kanzler des Maximiliansorden. Anzeige, daß die Mitglieder dh. höchstes - bayrisches Dekret - eine eigene Staatstracht erhalten haben. Dieser Unsinn ist ein Zeichen der Zeit. Die Befestigung und das Vorherrschen der monarchischen Stimmungen, die Freude an Repräsentation und höfischem Prunk bringen solche Pilze: Ordenswirtschaft, Adeln, usw. Und man wird allmählich zur entschiedenen Opposition gegen einen Pömp gedrängt, der Niemandem große, sehr Vielen nur niedrige und kleine Empfindungen gibt." (40)

Hero-worship frequently inflated the arrogance of those admired, but the prime danger, for Freytag, was that it blinded the admirer to the more negative aspects of the admired hero, precluding dispassionate ^{judgment thus perpetuating} and subservient habits of thought. He warned:

"...wie jede Art von Herzenswärme, birgt diese gemütvollte Ergebenheit eine Gefahr, und es bedarf für den Deutschen der Wachsamkeit, damit er in der Hingabe nicht das ehrliche Urteil verliere." (41)

Freytag was of the opinion

"daß den Gebietern unseres Staates besser gedeihen muß, über solche zu herrschen, welche sich eine selbständige Auffassung bewahren, als über die, welche Nacken und Meinung gefügig beugen." (42)

In an analysis of the way in which nations build up a picture of great public figures, Freytag concluded that two factors were particularly influential: the first lay in the German national character:

"Das deutsche Treugefühl, die holde Tugend der Germanen, ist seit der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart in unverminderter Stärke geschäftig die Bilder der höchsten Herren unseres Volkes zu formen." (43)

The second, which was linked to the first, was the ancient German urge 'zuf lieben und zu verehren'.⁴⁴ This was a dangerous urge:

"Außerdem aber ist in vielen Fällen jene Sehnsucht des Herzens übermächtig, in der Gestalt wiederzufinden, was das Gemüt der Zeitgenossen ersehnt." (45)

While Freytag was prepared to concede that the public can sometimes grasp

"...mehr ahnend als verstehend, die Wesenheit besser als die zerlegende Kritik." (46)

he believed that sometimes the public could be very wrong:

"In anderen Fällen ist das wirkliche Leben der Großen, ja auch das Tüchtige in ihrem Wirken, in vielem anders beschaffen, als die Entferntstehenden sich einbilden." (47)

The unfriendly public reaction to Freytag's book was, in his view, confirmation of his analysis:

"Die treuen Deutschen sind in großer Zahl nicht zufrieden, daß ihnen das Idealbild, welches sie sich seit 20 Jahren von 'unserem Fritz' gemacht hatten, verstört worden ist, und sie sind geneigt, den Störenfried dafür verantwortlich zu machen. ... Das ist die deutsche Gefolgstreue, von der auch in der Schrift die Rede ist." (48)

There is no reference to Bismarck in the book, but what Freytag says of the idealisation of the Crown Prince is also valid in the case of Bismarck, whose popularity Freytag had already interpreted as an expression of the ancient urge 'zu lieben und zu verehren'.

The purpose of the book was to make the public more aware of the dangers of idealising public figures, politicians and statesmen. The particular figure dealt with in the book was the Crown Prince, but it was the more general tendency that concerned Freytag. He was battling against a tendency that was an outstanding feature of the age: the cult of the great individual. Freytag's view of history dated from the early decades of the nineteenth century with its belief in ideal and material forces, in the importance of the collective as the motor of historical evolution in which individuals were at most expressions of underlying developments. Historians of the second half of the century - Treitschke foremost among them - tended to emphasise the contribution of the great historical figures to development. This view of history seemed to accord particularly well with the course of German history overshadowed by figures like Luther, Frederick the Great and, latterly, Bismarck.

Freytag did not revise his view of history and continued to regard periods of history dominated by such great individuals as basically undesirable:

"Auch uns wird nicht erspart werden, wenn die Herrschaft des alten Herrn (i.e. Kaiser William I) noch lange dauert,

"alle die Leiden durchzumachen, welche dem Aufschwunge folgen, der durch die Tyrannis des einzelnen Mannes (Bismarck) bewirkt wurde. Wir haben Segen und Fluch solcher Zeiten in Deutschland bereits früher zweimal gekostet, unter Luther und Friedrich dem Großen. Jetzt schaltet der dritte, und er ist von Charakter und Gemüt sehr viel schlechter, als jene beiden." (49)

He continued to regard the cult of the individual as incompatible with those civic virtues which he believed to be the hall-mark of the true German: independence, pride, uprightness. In his critique of Kaiser Frederick Freytag was fighting a belated rear-guard action in defence of the waning influence of the liberal middle class values that he believed in.

In the ninety-nine days that Kaiser Frederick III was formally the supreme power in the German Empire none of the hopes for political change which had been placed in him were realised. The Kaiser was a dying man. There were consequently no major changes in government, Bismarck was not dismissed. The whole apparatus of the state remained firmly in Bismarck's grasp. The Kaiser had neither the will nor the energy to pursue a course of action that conflicted with Bismarck's views, while those who would have supported him in a confrontation with Bismarck were so few in number that it is unlikely that they would have made much headway.

Even after the death of Kaiser Frederick (15th June 1888) Bismarck continued to fear the influence of those who had been close to the late Kaiser, he particularly wished to discredit the reputation of the late Kaiser's wife, the Kaiserin Victoria. Two men, a professor at the University of Strasbourg, Geffken, and an English diplomat, Morier, who both had close links with the late Kaiser and his circle, became the objects of Bismarck's attentions.

Geffken was responsible for the publication of a series of extracts from the diary of the Crown Prince Frederick, as he was at the time of the Franco-Prussian war⁵⁰; the extracts dealt with the Crown Prince's attachment to the idea of reviving

the title and glory of Kaiser and Reich, but also with his concern and commitment to a

"freisinnigen Ausbau Deutschlands." (51)

Bismarck suspected that the publication had been instigated by Victoria, the late Kaiser's wife, a strong-willed woman of high liberal principles and, as Bismarck believed, the source of various conspiracies against him.⁵² He reacted immediately and had Geffken arrested and charged with treason, claiming that the published extracts were forgeries.

Freytag thought that the extracts were genuine⁵³ and believed that Bismarck knew this too:

"Ich denke, der Kanzler weiß so gut wie andere, daß bei der Untersuchung gegen Geffken nicht viel herauskommen wird." (54)

It was a useful pretext to attack the Kaiserin:

"Er (Bismarck) hält aber diese Veranlassung für günstig, etwas gegen die Kaiserin und ihre Indiskretionen zu unternehmen. Und wenn ihm gelänge, für solches Eingreifen Material zu finden, so würde er nicht durch das Gericht, aber durch Vortrag beim Kaiser gegen sie vorgehen und ihr das Publizieren aus der Vergangenheit, vielleicht sogar ihren Aufenthalt in Deutschland zu verleiden bemüht sein." (55)

Freytag and Stosch were both required to appear in court and give evidence in the trial against Geffken⁵⁶; Stosch's friend Roggenbach had his apartment searched and his papers examined in his absence.⁵⁷ Yet, despite the methods that Bismarck had employed against Geffken, Freytag was markedly less incensed by Bismarck's drastic action against Geffken, as compared with his reaction to Bismarck's treatment of Stosch. Perhaps because he regarded Geffken as guilty:

"Mir tut leid, daß der alte Groll Bismarcks gegen ihn (Geffken) das Maß des Verständigen so sehr übertrumpft. Auch unklug ist es, den armen eitlen Burschen mit solchen Keulenschlägen zu treffen, denn es wird der billige Sinn der Deutschen dadurch auf die Seite des Schuldigen hinübergezogen." (58)

Thus, although mildly critical of Bismarck's wild approach:

"Er (Bismarck) ist wie der Riese Wate mit der Eisenstange in unserer alten Heldensage, der immer an einer Kette geführt werden mußte, weil er schonungslos gegen Freund und Feind um sich schlug. Aber den Kanzler hält niemand an der Kette." (59)

he applauded Bismarck's intentions:

"So ist denn Geffken, die arme Motte ins Licht geflogen. Daß er das Tagebuch ohne Wissen der Kaiserin Friedrich in Druck gegeben, ist kaum anzunehmen; er hat es mit ihrem Wissen getan, so kann ihn nur das eine trösten, daß er als Ritter leidet... Vielleicht finden Sie auch einen Zusammenhang zwischen Bismarcks Berserkerzorn gegen den Indis- kreten und zwischen der Flugschrift '99Tage'. Offenbar hat Bismarck einen Feldzug gegen die englischen Weiberintrigen für nötig gehalten." (60)

In December 1888 an article in the 'Kölnische Zeitung', 'inspired' by Bismarck, accused the English diplomat Morier of having furnished the French with military intelligence - information about German troop movements - in 1870. The article revealed that this was the reason why Bismarck had declined to accept Morier as British ambassador to Berlin, as the Kaiserin Victoria had wished.⁶¹ Such public accusations were unprecedented. Freytag's reaction was relatively restrained:

"Allzu scharf macht schartig, und zuletzt hat der Kanzler den Schaden von diesem Verfolgungseifer." (62)

Bismarck's charges against Morier were a blunder, in Freytag's view, but no more. He wrote to Duke Ernst:

"Zuverlässig verfolgen Eure Hoheit den Fall Morier mit Anteil. Höchstdieselben wissen, daß ich persönlich für diesen großen Fuchs der englischen Diplomatie nicht zu viel übrig habe, obgleich er bei der zweiten oder dritten Flasche ein prächtiger Konrad war. Aber das offiziöse Verfahren gegen ihn, welches ihn unserem Kaiser gründlich verleiden soll, ist ein Fehler, weil es auf zu unsicherer Grundlage zu viel beweisen will." (63)

Proceedings against Geffken were dropped on 4th January 1889 after he had spent three months in custody, while it was clear that in the case of Morier Bismarck had overstepped the mark. Both affairs ended in defeat for Bismarck with public opinion increasingly unhappy as to his ruthless methods:

"Diese Niederlagen des Kanzlers werden bewirken, daß er im Reichstag durch einige große Aktionen sich wieder in die verminderte Pöpopularität hineinlanciert. Er war immer am meisten Löwe, wenn er eine Dummheit gemacht hatte..." (64)

As far as Freytag could observe even admirers of Bismarck were saddened by his excesses:

"Denn soweit ich in meiner Einsamkeit merke, ist der Schrecken und die Trauer über seine Operationen auch unter seinen Verehrern sehr groß." (65)

For once Freytag was fully in agreement with the criticism levelled at Bismarck by the radical liberal opposition in the Reichstag for his conduct:

"Die wohlverdienten Vorwürfe, welche die Opposition dem Kanzler zuteil werden ließ, möchten wir gern als den Schluß der unglücklichen Affaire registrieren." (66)

Freytag's criticism of Bismarck in these two instances seems to have lost that undertone of bitterness and scorn that was present in earlier years; he now seemed content to record Bismarck's blunders and gloss the legitimate criticisms of others. But he has little indignation of his own to add. These two scandals prompted other contemporary observers to pass much more damning comment on Bismarck's behaviour. Freiherr von Loë wrote:

"Nachdem die Jagd auf Reichsfeinde der einzige Sport des Reichskanzlers geworden, strebt er, den Begriff des Reichsfeindes mit der Annahme seiner vermeintlichen oder persönlichen Gegner zu identifizieren und alle Rücksichten auf das Wohl der Dynastie und des Vaterlandes diesem Sport zu unterordnen... Die Hälfte der Nation wird aus Familienrücksichten in die Reichsacht getan." (67)

while von Schweinitz, German ambassador to Russia, wrote in his diary:

"Wenn es der Vernichtung eines persönlichen Feindes, der Beseitigung hemmender Einflüsse oder einem hochpolitischen, ökonomischen oder soziologischen Zwecke galt, einer Staatsaktion oder einer kleinlichen Hofintrigue, immer war Bismarck bereit, alles in die Schanze zu schlagen.." (68)

c. Bismarck and Kaiser William II.

A feeling was spreading in Germany in 1889 that Bismarck - with his 'Verfolgungseifer' ⁶⁹ and his handling of the Samoa Islands affair ⁷⁰ - was losing his masterful control of events; an article in a Berlin newspaper carried the headline in April 1889 'Es gelingt nichts mehr.' ⁷¹, reflecting this mood. Freytag, too, felt that Bismarck's conduct of policy over the last year had demonstrated a degree of senility:

"Es bleibt dem Kanzler und uns nicht erspart, daß der Kanzler die Schicksale eines alternden Reformators durchzumachen hat: Verengung des Gesichtskreises, Tatenunlust und Größenwahn. Ähnliches ist auch höher organisierten Männern, Luther und Friedrich II nicht erspart worden." (72)

In his differences of opinion with the young Kaiser William II Freytag sided with the Kaiser:

"In den Differenzpunkten hat der Kaiser Recht, die Gesetzgebung stockt, in den Finanzen und der inneren Verwaltung ist bei dem Eigensinn und der Launenhaftigkeit des Kanzlers Ordnung nicht mehr zu erhalten, in der sozialen Frage ist der Kanzler entschieden aufsätzig und will dem Kaiser nicht folgen. Die Konferenz aller zivilisierten Regierungen über die soziale Gesetzgebung, die deutsche Behandlung der Frage in Staatsrecht hat der Kaiser gegen Bismarck durchgesetzt und diesen sieht sich da, wo er bis jetzt Alleinherrscher war, zur Seite geschoben und die Taktik des jungen Kaisers, ihn gut zu behandeln aber über seinen Kopf weg zu handeln, wird ihm unerträglich." (73)

Freytag felt sure that the friction between Bismarck and the Kaiser, especially over the 'social question', that is to say, on how best to 'contain' the working class, where the Kaiser appeared determined to act independently and, if need be, against Bismarck's advice, would lead to Bismarck's removal from the post of Reichskanzler. ⁷⁴ Or Bismarck would resign, since he was not capable to sharing power ⁷⁵; either way his departure was, in Freytag's view, only a matter of time.

"Gekommen wäre die Trennung unter allen Umständen." (76)
Bismarck's departure from government would, Freytag felt, have grave consequences for the conduct of Germany's foreign policy, as the Kaiser seemed to be so head-strong and lacking in experience;

"Dagegen wieder ist Bismarck in den auswärtigen Geschäften dem Kaiser an Klugheit, hoher Auffassung und Erfahrung unendlich überlegen, und nach dieser Richtung wäre sein Abgang von unberechenbaren Folgen." (77)

Bismarck was, quite simply:

"...nach außen hin...unersetzlich." (78)

Bismarck submitted his resignation and he was formally relieved of his duties as Reichskanzler on 20th March 1890.

Freytag wrote to Ilse Strakosch:

"Daß er (Bismarck) ging, war im Ganzen doch ein Malheur." (79)

He sensed a lack of direction, the firm hand at the helm was missing:

"Irre ich mich, wenn mir vorkommt, als ob schon jetzt, bevor Bismarck seinen Sitz geräumt hat, die Vorboten einer führerlosen, schwierigen Zukunft durch die Seelen fliegen." (80)

Freytag foresaw great social instability and unrest:

"Aber überall fühlen die Menschen, daß die Sicherheit des alten Staatslebens zu Ende geht und große Erschütterungen uns bevorstehen." (81)

Yet, his initial concern, anxiety even at the consequences of Bismarck's departure ⁸² seem to have been dispelled within a few days: in reply to a friend Dreyfus who regretted Bismarck's resignation, Freytag said simply:

"Dann macht's ein Andrer." (83)

He had come to feel that Bismarck's departure was a necessity:

"Und doch war sein Scheiden aus dem Amte eine Notwendigkeit, ganz abgesehen von den Herrschergelüsten des jungen Kaisers." (84)

While Freytag was certainly aware of the young Kaiser's inexperience - especially in the field of foreign policy - this awareness was matched by a feeling that Bismarck's abilities as a statesman had been failing fast. He no longer seemed so concerned that Germany would suffer without Bismarck at the helm:

"Ob freilich sein Abgang ein großer Verlust für den Staat werden mag, kann erst die Zukunft zeigen." (85)

Freytag was guardedly optimistic about the future of Germany. He believed that Germany was entering a phase of wide-spread social disruption with the growth of the trade unions and the socialist party (Social Democratic Party) as mass movements,

but he did not believe that Bismarck with his plans for further anti-socialist measures would have been able to do more than postpone the final day of reckoning.⁸⁶ The advance of socialism and with it the deepening of the crisis in German society was, in the short-term, inevitable.⁸⁷ The Kaiser's patent social reform plans would only exacerbate the crisis:

"Diese (die sozialen Reformpläne des Kaisers) werden verunglücken, wenigstens werden sie die Prätensionen der Arbeiter so steigern, daß eine Krisis unvermeidlich in Kurzem ausbricht." (88)

Such a crisis was in the long run inevitable, but it would be a crisis that would contain the seeds of regeneration:

"Einmal gekommen wäre sie (die Krisis) doch. Je länger das Fieber im Körper der Nation gearbeitet hat, desto geringer wird ihre Widerstandsfähigkeit. Ein offener Ausbruch der sozialen Krankheit findet uns jetzt noch stark, noch haben wir den Wohlstand, das Landvolk, das Heer, in 20 Jahren ist uns dies Alles unsicher geworden. Jetzt vermögen wir durch Gesetz, unsere Kraft und unser Blut noch, sie zu besiegen usw. Nach der Reformation und der Erfindung des Bücherdrucks kamen der Bauernkrieg und die Wiedertäufer, nach Voltaire und Rousseau kamen die Jakobiner und das moderne Staatswesen, daß nach einer so plötzlichen und ungeheuren Entwicklung der produktiven Menschenkraft, wie wir seit Eisenbahnen und Dampfmaschinen erlebt, auch die Schatten dieses plötzlichen Lichtes sich auf uns legen, ist unvermeidlich. In diesen Schatten aber treiben die Keime eines neuen Lebens aus dem Boden der Volkskraft. Kurz, erst müssen wir uns mit den Sozialisten hauen, dann mag etwas Großes und Gutes aus der Geschichte kommen." (89)

Within such a perspective of developments in Germany, the question as to whether Bismarck should stay or go, was almost of no consequence.

VIII. Bismarck in retirement

At the time of Bismarck's resignation the sympathy of the public ~~was~~ overwhelmingly with Bismarck:

"Die Entlassung Bismarcks erscheint immer mehr als ein Bruch zwischen der alten und neuen Zeit und die Sympathien sind überwiegend auf Bismarcks Seite." (1)

This sense that an era was coming to an end and the subsequent widespread feeling of insecurity made the German public - so Freytag observed - all the more conscious of his achievements for which the public now had an urge to demonstrate its gratitude:

"Immer noch dauert die tiefe Bewegung, welche Bismarcks Abgang in den Gemütern verursacht hat, überall wollen die Deutschen ihm ihre Dankbarkeit aussprechen und durch Festfeiern erweisen." (2)

Bismarck's popularity, the beginnings of what was later to become a regular 'cult', was such that Freytag speculated whether Bismarck might not be tempted to return to government in response to popular demand:

"Die große nationale Menge wird diesen Winter einen Ruf nach Bismarck erheben, dem der Kaiser nicht zu widerstehen vermag. Die Frage ist, will Bismarck wieder regieren oder treibt er nur Rachesport? Will er noch einmal in den Stuhl, so werden ihn Millionen Fäuste hineinheben." (3)

Freytag believed that Bismarck had been singularly fortunate in that his timely dismissal had spared him and the nation the spectacle of a bitter confrontation between Bismarck and the Reichstag, a confrontation that would have ended in disreputable defeat for Bismarck:

"Der Kaiser hat...ihm(Bismarck) den größten Dienst geleistet, der ihm erwiesen werden konnte, er hat ihn verhindert, vor dem Reichstage und der Welt im Kampfe zu erweisen, daß er alt und einseitig geworden ist, und den Folgen seiner früheren Taten, auch der großen, allmählich zum Opfer fallen mußte, was jedem historischen Helden, der sich auslebt, begegnet." (4)

Such great popularity as Bismarck enjoyed was only possible because he had been obliged to step down before any such confrontation developed:

"Aber als Betrachter von Menschenleben vermochte ich eine stille Bewunderung gütiger Vorsehung nicht abzuwehren. Jedem großen geschichtlichen Leben wird zuletzt ein tragisches Schicksal bereitet; durch vieles, was man erlebt und getan hat, borniert man sich selbst die Unbefangenheit, innere Freiheit und Größe; je länger man sich geltend macht, desto größer wird die Macht der widerstrebenden Kräfte. Auch Bismarck mußte das erleben.⁽⁵⁾ Hätte ihn der Kaiser noch kurze Zeit im Amte ertragen, er würde sich an Junkern, Ultramontanen und Sozialisten abgenutzt haben und sein Scheiden wäre eine dauernde Bitterkeit geworden. Jetzt aber ... eine Popularität und eine Betätigung der allgemeinen Dankbarkeit, wie sie nie ein Deutscher gehabt hat." (6)

Bismarck had not been

"...durch weithin sichtbare Ereignisse überwunden und als nicht mehr brauchbar widerlegt worden und er ging ab in voller Ehre, ohne vernichtende Niederlage." (7)

Yet, apparently - as Freytag commented - Bismarck did not appreciate his good fortune; he continued to wish to exert an influence on the course of events:

"Bismarck aber, der dieses hohe Glück, ungebrochen und bewundert zu enden, gar nicht versteht, ist jetzt in dringender Gefahr, freiwillig und eigenwillig die Menschheit auf seine Schwächen: die Herrschsucht, die zornige Verbissenheit gegen Alle, die seinem Ehrgeiz wehe tun, die maßlose Selbstsucht und den Mangel innerer Vornehmheit aufmerksam zu machen, sich in seinen alten Tagen selber klein zu machen und das große Bild, das er für die Nachwelt geworden ist, mit zweifelhaften kleinen Zügen zu versehen." (8)

It seemed to Freytag that Bismarck's resentment at his dismissal knew no bounds:

"Bismarck sitzt grollend auf dem Lande und wird nächstens unter die Journalisten gehen, um seinem verhaltenen Grimm Luft zu machen." (9)

Bismarck treated the German public to a long series of 'inside-stories' and 'revelations' about government policy in an unscrupulous attempt to mobilise public opinion against the - as he thought - mistaken policies of the Kaiser and his government under his successor Caprivi,¹⁰ behaviour which Freytag interpreted as inspired by Bismarck's fear of being forgotten, of his need to be in the limelight:

"Der Kanzler fährt fort, von sich sprechen zu machen, das ist wohl der letzte Grund seiner Offenbarungen. Er fürchtet, vergessen zu werden. ...denn der starke Mann erweist sich als schwächlich." (11)

Freytag spoke with contempt of Bismarck's need to be the centre of public attention:

"Derweilen macht die Politik Sommerferien und wenn der alte Kanzler nicht für die Journalisten freundlich sorgte, wären sie übel daran. Aber sein Geschwätz wird eine Entschuldigung für die eitle Großmannssucht der geborenen Fürsten. Wenn ein solcher Mann von ungewöhnlicher Kraft dem geckenhaften Bedürfnis, täglich von sich reden zu machen, so sehr verfallen konnte..." (12)

Bismarck's actions were, in Freytag's view, motivated overwhelmingly by negative traits in his character, could be explained in terms of Bismarck's psychological needs.

Freytag positively fulminated at Bismarck's megalomania, his obstreperous claims to be the founder and creator of the German Empire, views that were apparently willingly propagated by 'friendly' newspapers:

"Daß Bismarck jetzt die 'Allg.Ztg.' zum Sprachrohr seiner Offenbarungen macht, bezeichnet einen Fortschritt seines Einflusses auf die Presse und war eine geschickte Operation ... Dem Kaiser aber wird er durch seine Enthüllungen immer furchtbarer. Als Journalist ist er ein Seitenstück zu Gutzkow, es ist auch ihm unleidlich, wenn ein anderer, wie z.B. der kleine Moltke, gerühmt und gefeiert wird, und er betrachtet den Ruhm für Errichtung des Reiches wie einen großen Käse, der ihm allein gehört, wer sich ein Stück abschneidet, ist ein Räuber." (13)

In view of all this Freytag was plainly surprised that Bismarck's popularity continued undiminished:

"Die Deutschen haben wieder einmal eine ungeheure Bowle von Liebe und Verehrung gebracht, zu Ehren Bismarcks ausgetrunken, Männlein und Fräulein... So muß man zugeben, daß Völker sehr dankbar sein können gegen solche, welche sie unterhalten und noch mehr gegen solche, welche sie tyrannisiert haben." (14)

The 'Bismarck cult' was too much for Freytag:

"Nun will ich Ihnen das Geständnis ablegen, daß ich herzlich wünsche, der 1. April (Bismarck's birthday) wäre vorüber und wir der Lektüre von Bismarck auf einige Zeit enthoben. Es wird des Guten zu viel." (15)

Ironically Freytag was invited to become a member of a committee formed to erect a statue to Bismarck; he only accepted, he explained to Ilse Strakosch, because he did not wish his reservations as regards Bismarck to become known:

"Gern hätt ich 'nein' gesagt, weil ich Denkmäler für Lebende als unpassend betrachte, da ich aber meine törichten Landsleute nicht zurückhalten kann, weil die Sache schon zu weit gediehen ist und meine Weigerung falsch gedeutet werden könnte, so gab ich meinen Namen, aber nicht freudig. ... Ich wollte in dieser Sache nicht abstecken und nicht als Opponent in die Öffentlichkeit kommen." (16)

IX. Bismarck and Germany: the problematic of the nation and the great individual

a. Historical personalities in the 'Bilder'.

According to the Hegelian view of history all change had a meaning and a purpose, indeed, change was itself expression of progress towards the fulfilment of that purpose, a progress that was gradual, sometimes difficult to identify, but ultimately inexorable.¹ In this great scheme of things individual historical personalities played a relatively minor role, they were at most unconscious instruments of the self-realising 'Weltgeist'. Such a view of history with its assumption of progress was generally accepted in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century. Freytag's own interpretation of the course and purpose of history was not dissimilar - if more limited - except that for Freytag the motor force in history was not the 'Weltgeist', but what he called the life-force, 'Lebenskraft' of the nation.² He saw German history as the long struggle of the German ethnic soul 'Volksseele' to achieve ever more perfect expression of its own nature.³ In Freytag's view the Reformation was a reaction of the 'ethnic soul' to the psychological alienation that resulted from the restrictions of the medieval church:

"Und doch war es das heiße Bedürfnis deutscher Natur, sich im herzlichen Verhältnis zu empfinden mit dem Allmächtigen, unauslöschlich war die Sehnsucht, die Liebe Gottes zu gewinnen. (4)

...
Zahllos waren die Schäden der Kirche, gegen Alle erhob sich das verletzte sittliche Gefühl der Deutschen, aber Kern der ganzen Bewegung war der Kampf gegen die Gnadenmittel, durch welche die Herzensbedürfnisse des deutschen Volkes so widerwärtig verhöhnt wurden." (5)

The ancient Germanic nature of the Germans asserted itself:

"Es war dem Staate und der Kirche des Mittelalters nicht gelungen, die alte Eigenwilligkeit der Germanen zu beugen." (6)

The German character was, as Freytag thought, something essentially fixed and unchanging,⁷ enshrined in the 'Volksseele'; only the degree of self-realisation of the essential German character

varied, according to historical circumstances. The Reformation was an historical reassertion by the 'Volksseele' of its essential nature:

"...tiefer liegen die Quellen dieses mächtigen Stromes, aus dem Grunde des deutschen Gemüts entspringen sie und durch geheimnisvollen Zug des Herzens werden sie ans Licht geführt, um zerstörend und befruchtend das Leben der Nation zu gestalten!" (8)

Individual men have but a restricted role to play, the determinant of historical progress is the 'Volkskraft':

"Alle großen Schöpfungen der Volkskraft...sind für uns nicht mehr die Resultate einzelner Männer, sie sind organische Schöpfungen eines höheren Lebens..." (9)

Men might believe that they were free to act, but it was the 'Volkskraft', endowed with the irresistible power of a natural force, that prescribed the course of history.

"Aber nicht mehr bewußt, nicht so zweckvoll und verständig wie die Willenskraft des Mannes, arbeitet das Leben des Volkes. Das Freie, Verständige in der Geschichte vertritt der Mann, die Volkskraft wirkt unablässig mit dem dunklen Zwange einer Urgewalt und ihre geistigen Bildungen entsprechen zuweilen in auffallender Weise dem Gestaltungsprozeß der still schaffenden Naturkraft." (10)

Freytag's ideas on the relationship between great men and the nations that brought them forth, the problem of the influence of the one on the other, were arrived at as a result of his study of the Reformation and, more particularly, the career of Martin Luther. Here was a man of unbounded energy and determination, a powerful personality who exerted a decisive influence on the course of German history. Yet Freytag did not consider Luther to be the originator of the movement, there were other, deeper sources:

"Aber sieht man näher zu, so sind stillwirkende Kräfte lange geschäftig gewesen..." (11)

The German national 'soul' had stirred, this was the root cause, not Luther, who was no more than an expression of these stirrings.

Freytag believed that

"sich in der Seele jedes Menschen auch ein Miniaturbild von der Persönlichkeit eines Volkes findet." (12)

The individual was very much

"...ein Reflex des Volkes." (13)

very much a product of ethnic forces.¹⁴ In each individual the national psyche was inhibited in its expression by the personal qualities of that individual.

"Jeder Mensch trägt und bildet in seiner Seele die geistige Habe des Volkes, jeder besitzt die Sprache, ein Wissen, eine Empfindung für Recht und Sitte, in jedem aber erscheint dies allgemeine Nationale gefärbt, eingeengt, beschränkt durch seine Individualität. Die ganze Sprache, das gesamte sittliche Empfinden repräsentiert nicht das Individuum, sie stellen sich nur dar, wie ein Akkord in dem Zusammenklingen der einzelnen verbundenen Töne, in der Gesamtheit, dem Volke." (15)

Great historical individuals were accordingly men who crystallized the striving of the 'Volksseele':

"Millionen leben so, daß der Inhalt ihres Daseins still und unbemerkt mit dem großen Strome zusammenrinnt. Nach allen Richtungen aber entwickeln sich aus der Menge bedeutende Persönlichkeiten, die als Gestaltende größeren Einfluß auf das Ganze gewinnen. Zuweilen erhebt sich eine gewaltige Menschenkraft, welche in großen Gebieten auf eine Zeitlang das übermenschliche Leben des Volkes beherrscht und einer ganzen Zeit das Gepräge eines einzelnen Geistes aufdrückt. Dann wird unserm Auge das gemeinsame Leben, welches auch durch unser Haupt und unser Herz dahinströmt, fast so vertraut, wie uns die Seele eines einzelnen Menschen werden kann; dann erscheint die ganze Kraft des Volkes auf einige Jahre im Dienste des Einzelnen, ihm wie einem Herrn gehorchend. Das sind die großen Perioden in der Bildung eines Volkes." (16)

Great men were nonetheless the tools and instruments of the all-pervasive 'Volkskraft'.

The great historical personality was at one and the same time the focal point of national striving and its very imperfect realiser, imperfect because of his restricted individuality. No one man could encompass within himself the purposes of the 'Volkskraft' nor fully express its workings over a long period of time, the 'Volkskraft' never rested, it was moving ceaselessly while the individual was necessarily incapable of similar continual change. Thus, however profound the influence of one man might be on the course of a nation's development -

and Freytag conceded that such great figures did periodically arise in the history of a nation, in German history, for example, Luther and Frederick the Great - that influence was only exerted as long as it was 'sanctioned', that is to say, consonant with the purposes of the 'Volkskraft'. When this was no longer the case - as inevitably happened - contradictions arose as the national psyche struggled to free itself from what had become the cramping influence of the great individual:

"Aber solche Herrschaft einer einzelnen geschlossenen Persönlichkeit erträgt der Geist einer Nation nicht lange. Wie stark eine Kraft, wie groß die Zielpunkte seien, Leben und Kraft und Bedürfnisse der Nation sind vielseitiger. Der ewige Gegensatz zwischen Mann und Volk wird sichtbar." (17)

If the nation were to remain healthy and vital, such contradictions were necessary:

"...die Seele des Volkes bedarf zu ihrem Leben unvereinbare Gegensätze, ein unablässiges Arbeiten nach den verschiedensten Richtungen. Vieles, was der Einzelne nicht in seinem Wesen aufzunehmen vermochte, erhebt sich zum Streit gegen ihn. Die Reaktion der Welt beginnt." (18)

The national psyche rebels, the great individual is discarded. But his influence lives on as a facet of the nation's life:

"Zuletzt beschränkt sich der geistige Inhalt des einzelnen Lebens in seiner Schule, es krystallisiert zu einem einzelnen Bildungselement des Volkes." (19)

Thus, the nation moves forward in a series of steps, in the continuous dialectic between the individual and the nation.

"Vom solchem Standpunkt verläuft das Leben der Nation in einer unaufhörlichen Wechselwirkung des Ganzen auf den Einzelnen und des Mannes auf das Ganze." (20)

The great men of history were - in Freytag's view - those men who gave supreme expression to the strivings of the nation and who realised, for a time, those strivings. Great men were therefore essentially democratically charismatic figures. Whether men could be regarded as 'great' or not was for Freytag a question as to whether they had contributed positively to the progress of the nation towards greater freedom, towards greater self-expression of the national psyche. Luther was a great man because he liberated the German nation from the restrictions

of a culture alien to its nature; the figure of Frederick the Great presented more of a problem, since in Freytag's eyes he was very much a tyrant, and this was difficult to reconcile with notions of 'liberation' and 'self-expression'.²¹ However, he seems to have believed that the influence of Frederick had not hindered the underlying trend of history, the rise of the German middle class to pre-eminence.²²

b. The problem of Bismarck's popularity

Freytag's interpretation of the forces that lay at the root of historical development, and of the role of the individual and his influence on that development, is crucial for an understanding of his attitude towards Bismarck. As we have noted, great men were in Freytag's view, thrown up by the life-force from the midst of the people to represent and express the desires and the needs of the national psyche, the 'Volksseele'. Such great men were, however, individuals and therefore not able to give expression to all facets of the strivings of the 'Volksseele'; they were readily cast aside by the reaction that inevitably set in to the restrictions that the dominant influence of a single mind sought to impose. Freytag's study of history had convinced him that all great national heroes are ultimately rejected, since no one man could encompass the needs and wishes of the nation.

Freytag had evolved these theories in the earlier part of his life as a systematic psychologically based interpretation of the course of German history from the earliest times.²³ His 'Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit' written in the 1850's and 60's before the advent of Bismarck as 'Iron Chancellor' and his decisive influence on developments in Germany, reflect the importance that Freytag attached to the 'Volk', the national community as opposed to the individual. Even after his experience of Bismarck Freytag was reluctant to modify his views and continued to maintain that the nation could not be dominated for long by one person.²⁴

In his assessment of Bismarck's influence on the German nation Freytag vacillated between two opposing notions: on the one hand he stubbornly maintained that Bismarck's despotism was a mere phase and that the reaction would soon arise, on the other hand - when the expected reaction failed to materialise -

he invoked by way of explanation the ancient urge of all Germans to have great heroes which they can look up to and admire. This latter line of thought predominated in the late 1880's in Freytag's attitude to Bismarck.

In the early years of Bismarck's chancellorship Freytag tended - indeed, his interpretation of history predisposed him to do - to overrate the strength of any widespread criticism or opposition to Bismarck to which Bismarck was in the twenty-four years of his political career frequently subjected. Such waves of criticism were accordingly usually taken by Freytag as the emergence of that reaction he had posited in his historical writings. That Freytag also wished to see Bismarck removed from power, that he impatiently awaited the take-over of political power in the German Empire by the Liberals, added no doubt to his propensity to see major shifts of opinion where others saw ripples of discontent.²⁵

In 1869, when Bismarck was temporarily relieved of his duties, Freytag trumpeted:

"Wir haben aufgehört, Werkzeuge eines Einzelnen zu sein." (26)

Opposition to Bismarck was, he believed, mounting:

"Es zieht sich langsam in Preußen wieder das Gewitter zusammen, das durch den Sturm von 66 auf einige Jahre zerstreut war. Die Unzufriedenheit in den alten Provinzen ist sehr groß. ... Aber in der Bewegung, die jetzt in Preußen beginnt, vermag auch Bismarck nicht zu helfen. Dafür hat er keine Hilfsmittel." (27)

He confidently expected Bismarck's popularity to fall away:

"...seine immense Popularität wird noch eine Weile stützen. Aber daß er uns aus diesem Chaos nicht befreit, scheint mir sicher. Er wird sich sammeln und noch einen Ruck im Innern geben, und ich besorge, daß diese Explosion erst unter der nächsten Regierung eintritt." (28)

But Bismarck returned to his duties, the storm clouds of renewed conflict blew over and Bismarckian normality was restored.

In the critical years 1879 - 1881, which saw the peak of popular opposition to Bismarck with an anti-Bismarck majority in the Reichstag (1881), Freytag again believed and hoped.

"wir werden den Kanzler jetzt für das Innere los, vielleicht ganz..." (29)

Bismarck's regime would soon be no more:

"...es ist ein Glück, daß die Wahlen so ausgefallen sind. Sie sind für ihn, unser Volk und für das Ausland ein Symptom, daß die Herrschaft des einen, welcher der Nation sein Bild und Gepräge aufgezwungen hat, nicht unbedingt ist und ihrem Ende naht." (30)

The nation was at last - so Freytag thought - asserting its own identity against the imposition of Bismarck's influence:

"Der beste Erfolg der Wahlen ist der, daß sie eine gewisse Emanzipation von dem übermächtigen Einfluß des Kanzlers auf die Gemüter darstellen." (31)

But Freytag was to be disappointed, Bismarck and his regime endured. Freytag resigned himself to the inevitable:

"Es wird Zeit, daß er zurückgetreten wird. Aber er ist so groß und dick und klug..." (32)

When Bismarck finally made his exit Freytag was prompted to reiterate - not entirely convincingly - his view that

"...je länger man sich geltend macht, desto größer wird die Macht der widerstrebenden Kräfte. Auch Bismarck mußte das erleben." (33)

This was hardly borne out by Freytag's own observations of Bismarck's undiminished popularity. Like the Hegelian dialectic, Freytag's view of the 'dominant individual' and 'reaction' were so general that they fitted almost any situation without throwing light on cause and effect. Freytag's comparative lack of intellectual flexibility - faced with the phenomenon of Bismarck - was in no small measure due to Freytag's age. He was after all fifty years of age when the Prussian army defeated the Austrians and their allies in 1866, hardly an age at which to embark on a radical revision of one's interpretation of history. He had conceived and elaborated his philosophy of history long before the years of Bismarck's hegemony. Consequently he sought - rather lamely - to fit Bismarck into his established scheme.

Bismarck's popularity always remained something of a mystery to Freytag; he was never quite able to grasp and accept what was a contradiction of what he believed to be the usual pattern. Freytag found it impossible to regard Bismarck initially as anything but a product of a caste dedicated to the maintenance of social and political privilege; he did not consider Bismarck as a product of the national cultural environment, he was, indeed, a product of one of the most unfruitful periods of German history:

"Das Junge Deutschland, das Junkertum in seinen eleganten Typen: Freiligrath, Lenau, Fürst Pückler, Lichnowsky, mit Freude am Gewagten, ohne feste Grundsätze, ohne Schule, abhängig vorzugsweise von französischer Bildung. Der große Spätling dieser Vegetationsperiode, die in der Literatur von 1830 bis 1848 reicht, scheint mir Bismarck."
(34)

He was.....

"...ein Nachfolger der schmalen Bildungsschicht der touristischen Dilettanten." (35)

Even after the establishment of the German Empire, Freytag refused to regard Bismarck as the embodiment of the national striving of the German middle class for a liberal parliamentary state. In order to get to grips with this phenomenon of Bismarck's popularity, Freytag had recourse to two assumptions: first, he believed that the Germans as a race, had an innate and very powerful need to admire heroic figures. If the need was satisfied, then, as a nation, the Germans were capable of unbounded loyalty and service:

"Wo die Deutschen aber einmal der Bedürfnisse germanischer Natur nachgebend, lieben und vertrauen, dann sind sie treu und opferfähig." (36)

Conversely, if this vital need was frustrated, Germans could become very difficult:

"Der Deutsche wird ein widerhaariger, schwer zu behandelnder Gesell, sobald er nicht lieben und verehren kann." (37)

This need was frequently so strong - and this was Freytag's second assumption - that Germans tended in the absence of real heroes, to 'create' heroes in order to satisfy this powerful need. This Freytag identified as their tendency to idealise, a fateful weakness, in Freytag's view, but one which, he believed,

was an objective psychological reality. It was these two character traits in the basic German nature that Freytag saw as the explanation of Bismarck's popularity. Bismarck, the popular hero, was simply a projection of the needs of the people, he was their creation. They were unwilling to see him in any other light or acknowledge the existence of qualities in him that did not accord with the current picture of him as a bluff patriotic statesman, strong-willed and skilled, ruthless and determined, but candid.

"Die Deutschen haben sich den Charakter ihres Reichskanzlers nach den Bedürfnissen ihres Gemüts zugerichtet, sie suchen mit eifrigem Behagen aus jeder Lebensäußerung desselben gerade das heraus, was ihren Vorstellungen entspricht, ja sie sind abgeneigt, Worte und Taten bedeutsam zu finden, welche sich dem volksmäßigen Ideal eines eigenwilligen aber höchst sinnigen, eines klugen bis zur Rücksichtslosigkeit offenenherzigen Staatslenkers nicht ebenso bequem fügen." (38)

In Freytag's view this was a very partial picture of Bismarck's character:

"Möglich, daß Fürst Bismarck in Wahrheit nach seinen Stärken und Schwächen wesentlich anders beschaffen ist, als der Deutsche ihn jetzt sehen will." (39)

c. Bismarck's influence on the evolution of the German character

After 1870 Bismarck's highly personalised system of government had established itself; large sections of public opinion, including the 'national liberal' middle class, supported Bismarck as the founder of the Empire and guarantor of future stability at home and Germany's position as a great power in the world. The middle class liberals did not wish to remove Bismarck from power; they for the most part thankfully accepted his enlightened tyranny, renouncing their own ambitions to political power. This was the measure of the gradual but cumulative revolution in political attitudes that Bismarck's hold on the German nation was leading to - a development that Freytag deplored and which he tried in his small way to correct.⁴⁰ But slowly and surely Bismarck was moulding the political consciousness of the German people in his own political image. His influence was analogous with that of Luther:

"Immer größer wird die Einwirkung des Einen auf die Vielen, mächtig zieht er die ganze Nation in seine Bahnen, er wird ihr Held, ihr Vorbild, die Lebenskraft von Millionen erscheint zusammengefaßt in einem Mann." (41)

In the case of Bismarck, the dominance was harmful:

"Denn Seele und Leben einer Nation dürfen nicht lange von dem Gemüt und Gewissen eines Einzelnen abhängen und in ihrem wichtigsten Inhalt durch die Selbstherrlichkeit eines Mannes geleitet werden. Das Volk bezahlt solche Herrschaft zu teuer, wie groß auch der Fortschritt sei, den der eine ihm bereitet hat." (42)

The price the German nation would pay for the unification of Germany under the aegis of Bismarck was their tutelage to a despot; Freytag feared that the German nation, which was for him the German middle class, would remain in a state of immature dependence as a result of Bismarck's regime; he feared the demise and extinction of liberal political ambition

"...sich das höchste irdische Besitztum, den Staat, zu bilden." (43)

as the middle class adopted the alien feudal values and life style of the aristocracy.

Freytag had thought that the 1881 elections were the beginning of a reversal of this trend.

"...eine gewisse Emanzipation von dem übermächtigen Einfluß des Kanzlers auf die Gemüter." (44)

but Bismarck's influence was already too powerful. Freytag warned:

"Wir werden noch lange daran zu tragen haben, daß die politische Kraft der Nation sich durch 1½ Jahrzehnt in einem Mann personifiziert hat. Und mit dem großen Glück und Fortschritt dieser Zeit auch den Schaden tragen, welche sich an solche Herrschaft eines Einzelnen heftet." (45)

A further consequence of Bismarck's autocratic style, his contemptuous treatment of opposition and ruthless persecution of opponents had led to a deterioration of political mores in Germany:

"Daß Cäsar Bismarck so frevelhaft und grob in die Stimmungen und Maßregeln der Konfliktzeit vor 1866 zurückplumpt, ist doch sehr merkwürdig. Auch uns wird nicht erspart werden, wenn die Herrschaft des alten Herrn noch lange dauert (i.e. William I), alle die Leiden durchzumachen, welche dem Aufschwunge folgen, der durch die Tyrannis des einzelnen Mannes bewirkt wurde. Wir haben Segen und Fluch solcher Zeiten in Deutschland bereits früher zweimal gekostet, unter Luther und Friedrich dem Großen. Jetzt schaltet der dritte, und er ist von Charakter und Gemüt sehr viel schlechter, als jene beiden. Die Häßlichkeit seines Wesens drückt sich in der Seele des Volkes ab, und erzeugt mit einer fürchterlichen Naturnotwendigkeit ein oppositionelles Gegenbild von entsprechender Häßlichkeit." (46)

In later years Freytag concluded that Bismarck had been too strong a personality for the German nation with its political immaturity, to digest. Bismarck had given the Germans a united fatherland and established Germany as a European power, but the price had been the imposition of his own autocratic regime and the consequent debilitation of German liberalism:

"Unser Leidwesen ist klar. Wenn ein willenskräftiger, in der Wahl seiner Mittel wenig bedenklicher Mann einen kleinen Herrengeist zwingt, das Größte zu tun, so bezahlen solch unnatürliches Verhältnis alle Beteiligten, der eigentliche Regent, der Fürst, das benützte und behandelte Volk. Die Größe haben wir erreicht; jetzt werfen die Mittel,

wodurch sie uns geworden, ihren Schatten über unsere Zukunft. Wir alle werden's noch bezahlen, daß Einer sich gewöhnt hat, selbstherrlich mit Puppen zu spielen." (47)

Freytag would have preferred the unification to have been achieved more gradually, instead of it being 'thrust' on the German nation by Bismarck:

"Wir zahlen jetzt unsere Buße dafür, daß wir durch die Lebensbedürfnisse des preußischen Staates und durch die Energie eines Einzelnen fast plötzlich auf eine Höhe hinaufgehoben wurden, welcher die politische Schulung unserer Nation nicht gleichkam." (48)

As it was, the course of history could not be changed and the price would have to be paid:

"...so muß man zugeben, daß Völker sehr dankbar sein können gegen solche, welche sie unterhalten, und noch mehr gegen solche, welche sie tyrannisiert haben." (49)

10. Freytag and Bismarck: summary.

For most of Bismarck's political career - especially in the turbulent years of the constitutional conflict in Prussia - Freytag was highly critical of Bismarck, though he was careful to disassociate himself from what he regarded as the negative (but systematic) opposition to Bismarck that came from the radical wing of German liberalism, the Progressive Party. The high-point of Freytag's opposition to Bismarck were the articles he wrote for the 'Grenzboten' at the time of the constitutional conflict (1862-66) which are outstanding examples of sustained and systematic critique of Bismarck and his policies, inspired by the unshakeable conviction that middle class liberalism represented the best elements in the German nation and were the only political force that could unite the German nation. At no subsequent point in his life did Freytag achieve such a concentration of intellectual and moral energy in his opposition to Bismarck. In later life Freytag adopted a less militant stance, but he was after all 55 years of age when the second German Empire was established in 1871. He was one of the moving spirits in the moderate liberal opposition of the Crown Prince Frederick and his circle to Bismarck and he had links with other liberal and conservative opponents of the Bismarck system. Such opposition was not, however, motivated by any intense hatred of Bismarck or his policies, but more by a feeling that such moderate liberals were better able to govern Germany in an enlightened manner according to the interests of the national liberal middle class.

There are roughly three stages in the evolution of Freytag's attitude to Bismarck. The first stage is represented by his unmitigated opposition to Bismarck as Prime Minister of Prussia from 1862 up to the defeat of Austria in the summer of 1866. The second stage is from the summer of 1866 to the defeat of France and the setting up of the Empire in 1871 and the third stage is from 1871 to the 1880's. The year 1866 which

brought war between Austria and Prussia, the defeat of Austria and the establishment of the North German Confederation had a decisive influence on Freytag's strategy of opposition to Bismarck since at a stroke the credibility of the liberal alternative that he was advocating was severely shaken. The setting-up of the North German Confederation, hailed as a triumph of Bismarck's diplomacy, was seen as a major step towards the achievement of German unity. The movement of opinion in favour of Bismarck and towards support for his policies and methods which resulted robbed Freytag of the ground-swell support he had been able to rely on in his opposition to Bismarck since the early 1860's. With this dramatic change in public opinion towards Bismarck outright opposition was no longer feasible. Freytag turned his attention towards combatting both as a writer and a journalist the erosion of liberal values that was linked with Bismarck's successes. After the disillusionment of the late 1860's and early 1870's with the signal lack of progress towards liberal parliamentary government (Bismarck's position appeared as firm as ever) Freytag shelved his public opposition to Bismarck, restricting himself to the private more conspiratorial opposition of the Crown Prince's circle in the belief that the accession of the Crown Prince Frederick to the imperial title would mean the end of the Bismarck system. Periods of more outspoken criticism of Bismarck tended to coincide with periods when Bismarck's departure from the political scene seemed imminent. Thus, although one can speak of stages in the development of Freytag's attitude to Bismarck, it would perhaps be more correct to regard his view of Bismarck as vacillating considerably within a spectrum of declining opposition.

a. Freytag's attitude to Bismarck in the years of the constitutional conflict (1862-66)

For Freytag the constitutional conflict in Prussia represented the final phase of the historic clash between the declining aristocracy and the economically and culturally dominant middle class. In this world-historical conflict Bismarck represented the Junker class, the status quo, the existing political power structure based on the landed aristocracy and its control of the army and the civil administration with the monarchy at the apex. Freytag believed that by its refusal to ally itself with the middle class the Prussian aristocracy had signed its own death warrant; it was a class that had forfeited any claim to a place in modern capitalist scientific society, it had set its face against modernity and progress. Bismarck had been summoned - in Freytag's view - to make a final attempt to defend the minority interests of the aristocracy against the legitimate demands of the nation as represented in parliament by the liberal and very largely middle class majority. It was the historic task of the middle class - of this Freytag was convinced - to wrest political power from the hands of a parasitical aristocracy and establish the national bourgeois state in Germany.

The constitutional conflict was - as Freytag viewed it - the death-throes of the Junker dominated monarchical system of government in Prussia. His efforts as a journalist and political activist were bent towards hastening what he regarded as the inevitable downfall of the 'system' and its replacement by a liberal system of parliamentary government. As he wrote in the 'Grenzboten':

"Der Kampf des Abgeordnetenhauses gegen das Ministerium (ist) gar kein Streit, welcher durch eine einzelne Organisation beendet werden kann. In Wirklichkeit steht die Frage in Preußen nur so, ob persönlicher Wille, ob parlamentarische Regierung die Geschicke des Landes bestimmen soll." (1)

Freytag's opposition was, in the first instance, opposition to the 'system' that Bismarck was defending; his attacks on Bismarck and his critique of Bismarck's policies were intended to rouse public

opinion to more resolute opposition to the 'system'. Freytag did not just wish to discredit Bismarck and his policies, that was just one step towards the ultimate goal of removing the whole system:

"Nicht den Grafen Bismarck will sie (i.e. die Opposition) beseitigen, sondern das System." (2)

Attacks on Bismarck were part and parcel of the general onslaught on the political system in Prussia.

Freytag's confidence in the ultimate triumph of liberalism over absolutism led him to seriously underestimate Bismarck's more enduring qualities, his tenacity, his courage and single-mindedness. Freytag's picture of Bismarck at this time emphasised Bismarck's intellectual agility and resourcefulness which were taken to indicate a lack of principle and shallowness. Freytag saw Bismarck as one of that cultured breed of Junker that emerged in the 1830's and 40's in Germany of which Prince Pückler-Muskau was the most famous example.³ Bismarck was also a product of that very unhealthy period of German history and he displayed all the characteristics that Freytag found most objectionable in the period: elegance bordering on dandyism, wit, humour, consummate urbanity and refinement, affected cosmopolitan airs. Having first branded Bismarck as a latter-day Prince Pückler-Muskau, Freytag proceeded to force Bismarck into this mould: he was, in consequence, seen by Freytag as a dilettante, recklessly embarking on all sorts of daring experiments, but completely lacking in application and seriousness of purpose, lacking, too, in determination and will-power to see a course of action through to its conclusion. Given this picture of Bismarck it is not surprising that Freytag underestimated the degree to which Bismarck was prepared to act in defiance of public opinion.

Bismarck represented a class and a system of government that Freytag wished to see swept away, it was, thus, almost inevitable that he should attack almost any measure that Bismarck took. His opposition reached its climax just prior to the war with Austria in 1866: Freytag was convinced that Bismarck would be

obliged to yield to public and parliamentary pressure since he would be in no position to wage a major war without the support of parliament and people. The imminence of war made concessions inevitable, Freytag thought. He was, however, mistaken in his assessment of the dependence of the government on the loyalty of the people, he had always believed that Prussia was virtually ungovernable without the support of the liberals. In the event the war with Austria was waged successfully despite the fact that parliament refused to grant war credits.

b. Freytag's attitude to Bismarck following the defeat of Austria and the establishment of the North German Confederation. (1866-69)

Freytag gratefully approved of the unification of the north German states under Prussia in 1866, although he disapproved of the way the Confederation had been established, namely, as a result of treaties between Prussia and the other states - who had sided with Austria - negotiated by a small number of diplomats representing essentially dynastic - not national - interests. Freytag deplored the fact that the populations of the territories involved were not consulted. Such feelings of gratitude were short-lived: the 1867 constitution fell sadly short of what Freytag as a liberal had hoped for. Bismarck seemed determined as ever to prevent progress towards parliamentary government. Freytag wrote:

"Es ist über Deutschland eine neue Zeit gekommen, neue Zielpunkte seiner höchsten Interessen... Wenige haben so bewußt und klar diesen Fortschritt vorausgesehen, und in gewissem Sinne gewollt, als E.H. Und jetzt da er gekommen ist, wird die Seele doch seiner nur in einzelnen Stunden froh." (4)

Freytag still hoped that, given time, the liberals would be able to force changes in the system of government, as seemed possible when Bismarck was temporarily relieved of his duties as Chancellor in 1859.

However, opposition to Bismarck in the post-1866 years was psychologically more difficult: Bismarck's political successes had persuaded many liberals that the only realistic course of action open to liberals was to support Bismarck for as long as he seemed willing to work for national unity. Bismarck's readiness to espouse the cause of national unity, albeit on his own monarchical, anti-liberal terms, made opposition seem obstructive and unpatriotic. Freytag's objections to Bismarck in the post-1866 period were not to the handling of German national policy, with the exception of the Baden question, as had been the case throughout the years of the constitutional conflict, but to his autocratic style and disdainful treatment of parliament, his resistance to the introduction of liberal institutions.

Freytag's main concern in the late 1860's was not, however, to attack Bismarck's policies; he was more perturbed at the demoralising influence of Bismarck's successes on the political confidence of the liberal middle class. The middle class appeared to have lost faith in its own ability to realise its own liberal political ambitions, a phenomenon that Freytag observed with great concern. He attempted to counter this tendency by pointing out - in his biography 'Karl Mathy' - that it was not just due to the efforts of Bismarck that the new Confederation had been established. On the contrary, it was, Freytag argued, the pressure exerted by the liberals - as the prime movers in the cause of German unity - which had obliged Bismarck to adopt their policy. Freytag was primarily concerned to prevent the middle class from falling into what he regarded as the error of ascribing recent successes solely to the efforts of one man Bismarck. The figure of Karl Mathy represented the liberal alternative to Bismarck, both as a person, statesman and as an ideology. Mathy's warm patriotism, his devotion to ideal values, his steadfastness and honesty, his tireless struggle for liberal principles contrasted with Bismarck's adventurist and expedient diplomacy. Bismarck's policy of unification by means of war was compared with the peaceful liberal alternative of a voluntary union of states as agreed by elected parliaments, unhindered by the objections of monarchical bureaucracies and armies dominated by the aristocracy. Freytag continued to believe in the feasibility and relevance of this liberal alternative at a time when many liberals were inclined to dismiss it as impractical. Bismarck's 'Realpolitik' was regarded as the more likely guarantor of success, since he had the means at his disposal, whereas the liberals were still in powerless opposition. 'Karl Mathy' was a brave attempt to restore to the middle class a confidence in the relevance of liberalism to the creation of a united Germany, a belief that had been badly shaken by Bismarck's achievements.

c. Freytag's attitude to Bismarck after 1871

The establishment of the German Empire - the unification of the north and south German states - represented the fulfilment of one of the twin aims of German liberalism, the creation of a united Germany, an aim which Freytag himself had fought for most of his life as a journalist, writer and political activist. However, as with the setting-up of the Confederation in 1866, Freytag was saddened that the achievement of national unity had been more the result of the political genius of a Prussian Junker than due directly to the struggle of German liberals. German liberals were once more obliged to thank Bismarck for the realisation of their political aims. This had the distinct disadvantage from Freytag's point of view that success would only further encourage liberals to forsake their principles for support of Bismarck. Freytag was too keenly aware of this and of the liberal alternative - an alternative that had been thwarted by Bismarck - to feel any lasting gratitude to Bismarck.

In the early years of the Empire Freytag was strongly critical of Bismarck's attempts to prevent the Reichstag extending its powers and thus evolving into a genuinely parliamentary body. Yet room for sustained criticism of Bismarck was limited in the National Liberal camp, since it was party policy to make the party indispensable to Bismarck by generally supporting his policies. Freytag loyally supported this strategy despite his reservations. He was thus induced to 'shelve' his opposition to Bismarck and set his hopes for a liberal Germany on the day when the Crown Prince Frederick became Emperor, an event that would hopefully end the Bismarck system. Freytag adopted a wait-and-see attitude, waiting for the removal of Bismarck from power, although as the years passed he became increasingly sceptical of the Crown Prince's ability to remove Bismarck and initiate a liberal development.

One major reason for his considerably less militant stance in the post-1871 period was that he had no substantial objections to the general aims of Bismarck's policies at home and broad. Freytag approved wholeheartedly of the anti-catholic 'Kulturkampf', although he regretted - for nationalist reasons⁵ - Bismarck's unsubtle persecution of all Catholics regardless after the attempt made on his life by the catholic Kullmann in 1874. Freytag also supported Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation⁶ and appears to have had no major objections to Bismarck's plans to introduce protective tariffs, an issue which subsequently split the National Liberal Party. Bismarck's handling of foreign policy earned Freytag's unqualified approval:

"Nach außen hin...unersetzlich." (7)

He was hardly, therefore, at odds with Bismarck over the substance of his policies, as he had been in the early 1860's; it was rather Bismarck's autocratic style that angered Freytag and ensured that the flame of opposition to Bismarck continued to burn. Freytag summed up his attitude to Bismarck

"In diplomatischem Kampf unübertrefflich...im Innern, zu sehr geneigt, mit den Menschen und Jedem zu spielen." (8)

He wished that Bismarck could have been instructed to restrict his activities - as a statesman - to the conduct of foreign policy:

"Es ist doch ein Elend und kann grimmig machen, daß uns der Mann gefehlt hat, welcher imstande war, dem großen Diplomaten zu gebieten, nimm Dein Auswärtiges und beschränke Dich darauf." (9)

Freytag's friendship with Admiral Stosch, a prominent victim of Bismarck's paranoic fear of potential political rivals, gave him first-hand experience of Bismarck's ruthless persecution of opponents. But Freytag's justifiable resentment did not blind him to Bismarck's achievements for Germany: albeit reluctantly, he recognised that

"...wie der Bursch auch ist, wir sind ihm tief verschuldet." (10)

Freytag's continued opposition - in spite of the apparent lack of differences with regard to policies - was more the expression of his resentment of the fact that Bismarck had blocked the liberals' road to political power in Germany. Freytag was never really able to forgive Bismarck for that.

Yet it was not only, or even primarily, Bismarck's autocratic methods that caused Freytag most concern in the post-1871 era; it was rather the threat that Bismarck and his prestige posed to the survival of liberalism as the ideology of the German middle class that disturbed him most of all. Freytag was keenly aware of the deeply anti-liberal influence Bismarck was exerting on the evolution of political attitudes within the German middle class, an influence that Freytag deplored since it represented the continued - and in the latter decades of the century - and increasing subservience of the middle class which Freytag had struggled all his life to rouse and inspire to political action, to the political sway of the Prussian Junker. Freytag still hoped that one day liberalism would triumph and the middle class would assume political power in Germany, a hope that was destined to grow increasingly utopian as the conservative alliance between the Junker-dominated political establishment and the wealthy middle class was consolidated. It was an alliance that spelled the end of liberalism as an independent political force, as the middle class relinquished their claim to the exercise of political power and finally abandoned any attempt to reorganise society according to liberal principles. Freytag was more inclined to blame Bismarck than the middle class itself for this development.

In his search for an explanation for the immense popularity of Bismarck and the decline of liberalism Freytag ascribed major blame to what he regarded as the crucial weakness in the German character, the need to 'love and admire'. It was on this deep psychological need in the German national psyche that Bismarck was able to build his cult and thus reinforce his hold on the German nation. Freytag hoped that the character of the German nation would prove resilient enough to survive Bismarck's corrupting influence. However, he admitted

"Wir werden noch lange daran zu tragen haben, daß die politische Kraft der Nation sich durch eineinhalb Jahrzehnt in einem Mann personifiziert hat. Und mit dem großen Glück und Fortschritt dieser Zeit auch den Schaden tragen, welcher sich an solche Herrschaft eines Einzelnen heftet." (11)

Just as in his life-time Freytag had looked forward - in vain - to a massive reaction against Bismarck's despotism, so he hoped that Germany would be able to throw off the spell of Bismarck's influence as soon as he was no longer in power, that the course of German history would once again conform to its preordained path as Bismarck's influence was erased. Towards the end of his life Freytag was obliged to conclude that Bismarck had all but robbed the German middle class of the will to political power and that he had thus frustrated the achievement of political maturity which had been Freytag's life's work, as a journalist and writer. The German people would, he reflected sadly, ultimately pay the price:

"Denn Seele und Leben einer Nation dürfen nicht lange von dem Gemüt und Gewissen eines Einzelnen abhängen und in ihrem wichtigsten Inhalt durch die Selbstherrlichkeit eines Mannes geleitet werden. Das Volk bezahlt solche Herrschaft zu teuer, wie groß auch der Fortschritt sei, den der eine ihm bereitet hat." (12)

G. Politics in literature: Freytag as a political writer

†. a. Politics in Literature

Literature was for Freytag an art-form; the writer was an artist in the same way as the painter or the sculptor. A writer was a poet (Dichter) and that which he created was a 'work of art' (Kunstwerk). The reality of ordinary life was too crude, too unaesthetic to be the proper subject of a work of art; reality had to be 'idealised' before it could be legitimately incorporated into a literary work of art - a view of literature that made the inclusion of contemporary political and social issues, let alone their discussion, in the novel difficult. Such a predominantly aesthetic view of literature was a barrier to the development of the novel of social realism, since political and social issues were deemed by their very inclusion to impair the art-value of literature. The inclusion of such issues was incompatible with a concept of literature as an art-form subject to primarily aesthetic laws. Literature was not regarded as a mirror of the real world, but as a poetic, and thus, idealised and aesthetically satisfying reflection of reality.

"Es ist wahr, der Dichter hat das Recht, seine Stoffe aus jedem Gebiet der realen Menschenwelt zu wählen, d.h. aus jedem Gebiete, welches ihm möglich macht, den Stoff mit souveräner Freiheit zu idealisieren, zu einer einheitlichen Handlung zu gestalten, deren Verlauf sich aus sich selber vollständig erklärt, deren Charaktere nur als Träger der Handlung durch die Dichtearbeit sich menschlichen Anteil gewinnen.

Die Bedeutung des Stoffes in der Wirklichkeit, ja auch die realen Vorbilder der poetischen Charaktere sollen im Kunstwerk unwesentlich werden gegenüber dieser Dichtearbeit, welche der höchsten Sehnsucht des Gemütes und dem tiefsten Verständnis der Menschennatur, wie beide dem Volke und der Zeit des Dichters möglich sind, gerecht werden muß. Aus diesem Grunde wird dem Dichter jedes Gebiet der Stoffe unheimisch bleiben, bei welchem er ein übermächtiges Eindringen realer Wirklichkeit nicht abwehren kann. Ihm selbst wie seinem Publikum werden dadurch die Unbefangenheit und die frei gehobene Stimmung, als die Grundlagen jedes schönen Genußes vermindert." (1)

The intrusion of reality is seen as a threat to the aesthetic pleasure of the reader. The intellectual and spiritual elevation of the reader is regarded as the prime purpose of literature.

Freytag felt that the inclusion of social and political issues must inevitably make literature into a vehicle for political agitation and controversy which could hardly be conducive to spiritual elevation:

"Öffentliche Charaktere, welche so bekannt sind, daß der Dichter nur ihre wirkliche Erscheinung kopieren kann; ungelöste politische und soziale Streitfragen, welche den Zuschauer in den Zank des Marktes hineinziehen, wird er vermeiden. Er wird sogar, wo er ernste Sammlung der Hörer fordern muß, Schlagworte des Tages darum besonders mißachten, weil diese Hilfstruppen die Seelen an unkünstlerische Interessen mahnen." (2)

Social and political problems that were a matter of contemporary controversy were not, in Freytag's view, capable of aesthetically satisfying literary formation. Only certain aspects of reality were considered worthy of literary treatment. Freytag speaks of the need:

"unsere Bretter von unkünstlerischer Wirklichkeit rein zu halten." (3)

Freytag formulated his objections to the inclusion of social and political issues in drama, and thus in literature, even more drastically in his 'Technik des Dramas' (1863); he wrote:

"Wenn vollends ein Dichter die Kunst dazu entwürdigen wollte, soziale Verbildungen des wirklichen Lebens, Tyrannei der Reichen, die gequälte Lage Gedrückter, die Stellung der Armen, welche von der Gesellschaft fast nur Leid empfangen, polemisch und tendenzvoll zur Handlung eines Dramas zu verwerten, so würde er durch solche Arbeit wahrscheinlich das Interesse seiner Zuschauer lebhaft erregen, aber diese Teilnahme würde am Ende des Stückes in einer quälenden Verstimmung untergehen. Die Schilderung der Gemütsprozesse eines gemeinen Verbrechers gehört in den Saal des Schwurgerichts, die Sorge um Besserung der armen und gedrückten Klassen soll ein wichtiger Teil unserer praktischen Interessen im Leben sein, die Muse der Kunst ist keine barmherzige Schwester." (4)

Freytag was concerned about the social problems of the time,⁵ just as he was actively involved in the political issues of the day, but he felt that there was no place for such matters in literature if it was to maintain its quality as a work of art.

Life and literature were two separate areas.

"Gerade jetzt (1867), wo die Politik unter den Interessen der Nation oben steht, soll der Dichter das Recht des schönen Schaffens mit Selbstgefühl und treu gegen seine Kunst vor seinem Geschlecht geltend machen." (6)

The writer needed 'eine gewisse heitere Ruhe' Freytag observed, 'ein ruhiges Wohlgefühl', in order to create. These qualities were impaired if the writer was concerned to illustrate social and political ideas in literary form. Writing of 'Jungdeutschland' Freytag commented:

"Es war die Signatur der nächsten Vergangenheit, einer unbefriedigten, gedrückten, unruhig heischenden Zeit, daß sich dem Gelehrten und noch mehr dem reizbaren Dichter in Stoff und Charakter seiner Arbeiten die sozialen und politischen Forderungen des Volkes übermächtig eindrängten. Nur zu oft hat das beflissene Streben, eine Tendenz zu exemplifizieren, die heitere Wärme verringert." (7)

The passionate involvement of the writers of 'Jungdeutschland' in the political and social issues of the day met with Freytag's disapproval. The hall-mark of a work of literary art was serenity, warmth, quiet and distance. Freytag curtly relegated politics to the realm of farce and comedy.

Freytag's aesthetic views made it difficult for him to include aspects of reality in literature which he wished to include, but which at the same time he was obliged to acknowledge as 'unkünstlerisch' and therefore not worthy of inclusion. He came up against this problem when writing the volume entitled 'Die Geschwister' of his series 'Die Ahnen'. He wrote to Stosch:

"Daß das Schicksal anständiger Leute zuletzt von der Laune, Stimmung, den Zufällen eines kleinen Tyrannen, der sich wohlmeinend aber sehr verbittert ist, abhängt, erschwert dem Erfindenden, welcher einen schönen Eindruck nach Möglichkeit zu erstreben hat, das Geschäft sehr." (8)

Human tragedy was unaesthetic if it depressed the reader. Because he felt a personal horror at the dependence of individuals on the will and whim of some absolutist tyrant, Freytag was unable to create the 'schönen Eindruck' which he felt was the purpose of literature. He concluded, hardly solving the problem:

"Nur durch eine lustspielartige Haltung wird das Verhältnis leidlich, in Wirklichkeit würden solche Zustände uns allen unerträglich sein." (9)

Freytag was thus mainly concerned with the effect of literature on the reader, the reader's aesthetic experience was of prime importance; literature should uplift, elevate and console:

"Ihm wie uns ist die Hauptwirkung des Dramas die Entladung von den trüben und beengenden Stimmungen des Tages, welche uns durch den Jammer und das Fürchterliche in der Welt kommen." (10)

The spectator of a drama - and we may assume, the reader of the novel - should experience

"...die schöne Klarheit und fröhliche Gehobenheit". (11)

Drama should help him

"...selbst auf Stunden größer, freier, edler zu machen." (12)

The spectator should be made aware of divine purpose at work in man's life, so that, even if the individual man's existence is destroyed, the spectator will see it all as part of the divine purpose, an insight which Freytag believed would uplift the spectator and be a source of moral strength:

"Der Hörer fühlt und erkennt, daß die Gottheit, welche sein Leben leitet, auch wo sie das einzelne menschliche Dasein zerbricht, in liebevollem Bündnis mit dem Menschengeschlecht handelt und er selbst fühlt sich schöpferisch gehoben, als einig mit der großen regierenden Gewalt." (13)

In his writings of the theory of literature up to about 1870 Freytag insisted that the novel and drama should shun contemporary issues. In his memoirs (1887), however, he modified this position and recognised that the modern novel did concern itself mainly with contemporary issues:

"Die Darstellungen solcher Einwirkungen der Zeitideen, der großen Wandlungen in der Politik und im sozialen Leben, und die Kämpfe, welche dadurch in dem Individuum aufgeregt werden, gelten ja für das Gebiet, in welchem der moderne Roman vorzugsweise seine Erfolge zu suchen hat." (14)

Although Freytag recognised the changed function of the novel, he still had grave reservations, fearing that the aesthetic

effect which he rated so highly would be impaired by the 'Tendenz' of the author:

"Außerdem legt der Verfasser das offene Bekenntnis ab, daß ihm ein Roman, in welchem die Hauptpersonen vorzugsweise unter der Einwirkung und im Kampf mit politischen, religiösen, sozialen Ideen geschildert werden, nicht als die höchste und schönste, ja kaum als eine würdige Aufgabe des Dichters erscheint. Unvermeidlich drängt sich bei solchem Inhalt die Tendenz in den Vordergrund, und der größten Dichterkraft wird es nur schwer gelingen, mit der sonnigen Klarheit und der stolzen Unbefangenheit, welche das Kunstwerk vom Schaffenden fordert, Licht und Schatten zu verteilen." (15)

If the novel was allowed to become a forum for discussion or presentation of contemporary issues, then the aesthetic effect, Freytag believed, would be lost and this was of paramount importance:

"Die Muse der Poesie vermag ihre Schönheit nur da ganz zu enthüllen, wo sie allein als Herrin gebietet. Wird sie Dienerin und Parteigenossin in solchen Kämpfen des wirklichen Lebens, welche die Menschen einer Zeit leidenschaftlich umhertreiben, so büßt sie gerade das ein, was ihr bester Inhalt ist: die befreiende und erhebende Einwirkung auf die Gemüter." (16)

Freytag disapproved of the writer whose presentation of reality included

"...die beengenden Mißbildungen und die harten Konflikte der Politik." (17)

since the effect of such novels was to produce discontentment with the social and political status quo:

"...er würde den stärksten Anteil, welcher er erregt, nicht der Poesie, sondern der Unzufriedenheit seiner Zeitgenossen mit dem Bestehenden verdanken." (18)

Freytag concluded:

"Politische, religiöse und soziale Romane sind, wie ernst auch ihr Inhalt sein möge, nichts Besseres im Reiche der Poesie als Demimonde." (19)

The role of literature, as Freytag conceived it, was essentially psychological: through the medium of aesthetic experience the reader should achieve intellectual and moral renewal. His concern with the aesthetic value of literature was nothing to do with art for art's sake, aesthetic pleasure was, for Freytag, a means to an end, that end being the inspiration and

encouragement of the reader. Literature that was predominantly critical in its presentation of reality would be bound, Freytag felt, to depress the reader and spread despondency; the effects of such literature were therefore unfruitful and destructive. Literature, on the other hand, which was poetic and aesthetically satisfying would inspire and mobilise the reader. It was Freytag's concern, since literature had this very direct influence on the psychological state of the reading public, that the middle class reading public in Germany should be inspired and uplifted by what they read and not made despondent. Freytag was thus - even if at one remove - pursuing a political end in his insistence on the aesthetic category as primary in literature, since it was in the recuperative value of the aesthetic experience of literature that the source of renewal lay for the middle class reader.

Freytag's principal objection to the literature of the 'Young Germany' period was that it levelled its criticism at certain aspects of middle class life as well as at the aristocracy. The points of criticism may well have been correct, but that was not the issue for Freytag; what was important was the effect, and in this case to attack the middle class was to undermine Germany's hope for a liberal future. He approved wholeheartedly of Julian Schmidt's attacks on the 'Young Germany' writers:

"Doch der letzte Grund seines Unwillens war immer ehrenwert, es war der Haß gegen das Gemachte und Gleißende, gegen ungesunde Weichlichkeit und gegen eine anspruchsvolle Schönseligkeit, welche an den Grundlagen unseres nationalen Gedeihens, an Zucht und Sitte und deutschem Pflichtgefühl rüttelte mit einem Hochmut, dessen letzte Ursache Schwäche des Talents oder gar des Charakters war." (20)

Freytag felt that the criticisms of Gutzkow and his fellow-writers were, quite simply, unpatriotic: if the German middle class was to be educated to an understanding of its task of reforming the state and society along liberal lines, and if it was to develop a confidence to equal that task, then this could only be achieved - of this Freytag was convinced - by positive

inspiration, not by negative criticism. It should be remembered that Freytag was faced with a middle class whose self-confidence in political matters had been shaken by the failure of the 1848/49 Revolution and the subsequent success of reactionary forces throughout Germany.²¹ Freytag saw it as his main task to combat

"...die Mutlosigkeit und Zerfahrenheit im Volke." (22)

Freytag's comments on D.F. Strauß's book 'Der alte und der neue Glaube' (1872) are characteristic of his attitude to literature:

"Eine solche Art, de rebus omnibus et quibusdam aliis zu sprechen, halte ich für einen Mißgriff, der leider dem Verfasser um so übler steht, als der Grundton eine herbe Resignation ist, die sich mit etwas Kunst und Literatur über die Ode zu beruhigen sucht, in welche sein denkender Geist hineinstarrt. Das Buch wird sehr gelesen werden und der gute Verleger wird ein glänzendes Geschäft machen, aber eine gute und kräftigende Wirkung wird es nicht ausüben... Es kommt jetzt gar nicht in erster Linie darauf an, den Deutschen zu sagen, daß sie nicht mehr glauben sollen, sondern nach den elenden Gesellen Schopenhauer und Hartmann gilt es vielmehr, ihnen stolzen und frischen Mut zu schaffen und Freude am Leben. Davon ist in dem Buche jämmerlich wenig zu spüren." (23)

Freytag's judgement of the book is based almost exclusively on his assessment of its influence and effect on the reading public and much less on the validity of Strauß's views. He may be entirely correct, but such views - Freytag argues - are not relevant to the task of educating the middle class. He reacted in much the same way to the Russian novelist Turgenjew; Julius von Eckhardt, a close associate of Freytag on the 'Grenzboten' recounted the following conversation:

"Aus der ersten Unterredung ist mir ein besonders charakteristisches Wort in der Erinnerung heften geblieben. Es kam auf Turgenjew die Rede, ... Freytag ließ dem außerordentlichen Talent des russischen Schriftstellers...volle Anerkennung zuteil werden, verhehlte aber nicht, daß die Art desselben ihm innerlich fremd geblieben sei. 'Der Dichter', so führte er aus, 'muß am Leben, an den Menschen und an dem eigenen Schaffen Freude haben - er muß an die Menschheit und an sein Volk glauben. Das vermisse ich bei Turgenjew - durch seine Schöpfungen geht ein unheimlich pessimistischer Zug.' " (24)

The English novelist Dickens, on the other hand, met with Freytag's unqualified approval; it was Dicken's humour and what Freytag took to be an essentially optimistic view of life that he found exemplary:

"Die fröhliche Auffassung des Lebens, das unendliche Behagen, der wackere Sinn, welcher hinter der drolligen Art hervorleuchtet, waren den Deutschen von damals so rührend... Und alles war modernes Leben, im Grunde alltägliche Wirklichkeit und die eigene Weise zu empfinden, nur verklärt durch das liebevolle Gemüt eines echten Dichters. Hunderttausenden gab das Buch (Die Pickwicker) frohe Stunden, gehobene Stimmung." (25)

Freytag's basic purpose in writing was to educate the German middle class for its political role by seeking to inculcate a lively sense of pride in the cultural and economic achievements of the middle class; his aim was to strengthen the morale of the middle class:

"Wir aber wollen bürgerliches Wesen zu Ehren bringen." (26)

Such a clearly political and social purpose would appear to conflict with Freytag's views on the nature and function of literature and the role of social and political issues in literature. In practice Freytag offended against his own theoretical enunciations.

In the 1830's and 40's the corpus of literary and aesthetic values evolved by German classicism was challenged by the writers of Jungdeutschland, who wished to extend the role of literature as a moral and aesthetic force into an instrument for political, social and individual emancipation. Freytag firmly rejected the ideas of Jungdeutschland, which he regarded as too negative. He regarded the classical ideas as the sole terms in which literature could be defined as art. Yet, as a writer whose main concern was basically the same as that of the Young Germany school, he had adopted a view of literature that was not in accord with his own underlying purpose in writing which was manifestly to influence the readers' interpretation of the contemporary social and political scene. While rejecting

the explicit social and political commitment demanded by Young Germany, Freytag's novels are as political in purpose and content as the novels of that much-maligned contemporary Spielhagen.

b. 'Soll und Haben' (1854)

All Freytag's dramas and novels have a quite definite political and social purpose (Tendenz). Freytag was well aware of this, so that it was not a case of him saying one thing and doing something different. He admitted that his own novels were 'Tendenzwerke' and was quite prepared to forego the claim to them being works of art, more concerned to exploit the possibilities of the literary medium to inspire the German nation with a picture of its own achievement: as Freytag wrote in the dedicatory preface to the novel:

"Was mein edler Fürst damals sprach: Über die Verwirrung der letzten Jahre, über die Mutlosigkeit und müde Abspannung der Nation und über den Beruf der Dichter, die gerade in solcher Zeit dem Volke einen Spiegel seiner Tüchtigkeit vorhalten sollen zur Freude und zur Erhebung."
(27)

Freytag's novel was written in response to the depressed situation in Germany in the 1850's, a situation in which the middle class had lost all interest in politics and had withdrawn into other interests. Freytag candidly admitted that aesthetic considerations were secondary to the general political purpose:

"In solcher Zeit, wo die stärksten politischen Leidenschaften in das Leben jedes einzelnen dringen, weicht die heitere Ruhe, welche der Schaffende zur künstlerischen Gestaltung braucht, leicht von seinem Arbeitstisch. Ach! sie hat dem deutschen Dichter seit langem gefehlt. Nur zu sehr fehlt das Behagen am fremden und eigenen Leben, die Sicherheit fehlt und der frohe Stolz, mit welchem die Schriftsteller anderer Sprachen auf die Vergangenheit und Gegenwart ihres Volkes blicken, im Überfluß hat der Deutsche Demütigungen, unerfüllte Wünsche und eifrigen Zorn. 'Dem Schönen in edelster Form den höchsten Ausdruck zu geben' ist nicht jeder Zeit vergönnt ..." (28)

In a letter to Geffcken he wrote:

"Was Sie mir über den Roman 'Soll und Haben' so wohlwollend schreiben, hat mir eine große Freude gemacht. Denn Sie müssen mir erlauben, Sie als ein ausgezeichnetes Mitglied der stillen Gemeinde zu betrachten, für welche ich geschrieben habe. Wenn das Publikum wohlwollend über die Unterhaltungsfähigkeit des Buches urteilt, so ist mir das schon recht, aber im Grunde lag mir während der Arbeit am meisten an der Tendenz und zwar an der politischen. Das mag für diese und künftige Kunstleistungen ein Übelstand

"sein, aber gern will ich auf den Dichterruhm verzichten, welcher nur durch eine vollständige Freiheit gegenüber den Erscheinungen des wirklichen Lebens erworben werden kann. Überall fühle ich mich in einem stillen Eifer, den ich am liebsten einen preußischen nennen möchte." (29)

The theme of Freytag's novel

"Ruin eines adligen Gutsbesitzers" (30)

linked with a positive description of the Breslau merchant Schröter was intended to encourage a dispirited middle class with a picture of its economic achievements. Discussion of political issues play a very minor role in the novel; Freytag preferred to present the reader with an apparently objective and convincing description of events in which the events spoke for themselves. Thus, the aristocracy is not described as inept in so many words, but it is clear from the demise of the Rothsattel family that the aristocracy is economically on the decline, unable to adapt itself to the conditions of the modern capitalist world - a truly encouraging spectacle for the hard-pressed middle class!

Freytag's theoretical objection to political novels was based on the view that the aesthetic pleasure derived by the reader, the uplifting of the spirit would be lost if tendentious description intruded. In his case - this novel is a good example - the aim of the novel, its quite blatant 'Tendenz' did not impair the aesthetic appreciation of the novel for the average middle class reader, since, as Freytag himself observed, it was the 'Tendenz' which heightened the reader's aesthetic appreciation of the novel:

"Der Leser zwar wird derlei Erfindung, im Falle sie nämlich seinem eigenen Standpunkt entspricht, mit Wärme entgegenkommen, und er wird die poetische Gestaltungskraft, welche der Dichter dabei erweist, mit besonderer Freude genießen." (30)

The strictly aesthetic demand that literature should uplift the reader was, in Freytag's case, achieved by the political 'Tendenz' of his novels which was generally calculated to inspire the middle class reader with a sense of importance of that class. This was in practice the prime function of literature, a concern that prevented him from embarking on any critical social novels.

II. The political content of Freytag's 'Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit' 1859 - 1866.

In 'Soll und Haben' Freytag had depicted the commercial middle class as efficient, productive and cultured, in sharp contrast to the aristocracy which was patently decadent and economically in decline. The play 'Die Fabier' (1859) presented a dramatic picture of the clash between the ruling Fabians in ancient Rome and the claims of the people to political power. The demise of the Fabians was intended by Freytag as a parallel to the demise of the political power of the Prussian aristocracy in the face of demands for political power by the middle class. The play was thus a picture of the social and political struggle between the Junker and the middle class in Prussia.¹

With the accession of William I to the throne in Prussia (1858) as Regent liberals hoped that the prolonged period of reactionary government under Manteuffel was over and that constitutional development would now resume. The change in the political atmosphere is reflected in a change of emphasis in Freytag's approach: up till now he had tended to concentrate his attention on depicting the imminent decline of the aristocracy, now he shifted his attention to an examination of the historical roots and origins of the German middle class.

Freytag sought to show that the present constitutional struggle was the culmination of many centuries of historical development, that the renewed advance of constitutionalism was but one more phase in the long history of the German nation's struggle for freedom. The general thesis of the 'Bilder' was that after the rather primitive freedoms and tribal democracy of the German tribes, the German nation was subjugated by Christianity and the medieval church; it was then liberated by Luther both spiritually and intellectually. After the destruction wrought by the Thirty Years War the German nation recovered slowly, developing first, by rejecting French models, a truly national

culture and finally awakening to political maturity in the first half of the nineteenth century. The development of Germany from 1648 was towards freedom and the creation of the German nation state: the twin aims of German liberalism.

The 'Bilder' are essentially the history of the emergence of the German middle class, since it was the middle class that embodied progress and culture and without a strong middle class no nation could develop into a politically mature state.² The middle class were assumed by Freytag to embody the essential virtues of the German nation. The middle class was the German nation:

"Das Bürgertum ist nicht mehr wie im Mittelalter ein Stand, der anderen Ständen gegenübersteht, es ist die Nation selbst geworden." (3)

The progress of the German nation was due entirely to the rise of the middle class:

"Die Entwicklung der Deutschen aber, welche hier in kleinen Bildern dargestellt wurde, ist zugleich die Zeit des Wachstums und der Befreiung des deutschen Bürgers." (4)

In the 'Bilder' Freytag wished to give an account of this progress towards freedom:

"wie das Leben des Volkes sich allmählich zu größerer Freiheit heraufarbeitete." (5)

This process of liberation inevitably led to the rule of the privileged class, the aristocracy, being challenged:

"Es war eine von den Aufgaben dieser Blätter die Erhebung der deutschen Volksseele aus der Vernichtung und ... der tyrannischen Herrschaft von Privilegierten darzustellen." (6)

The claim of the middle class to challenge the power of the aristocracy was based on the dominant position of the middle class in commerce and culture:

"Denn in dem deutschen Bürgertum liegt die edelste Kraft, die Führerschaft auf dem Gebiet idealer und praktischer Interessen." (7)

It was the intellectual and moral culture of the middle class that would ensure a healthy body politic and a vital nation state:

"...immer aber, solange es Geschichte gibt, hat sich eine neue Erhebung so vollzogen, daß die Kräftigung des Staatskörpers und der geistige Fortschritt Hand in Hand gingen."(8)

Not only must the middle class, as Freytag interpreted its role, seek to assume control of the political destiny of the nation, it must also shape society as a whole according to its own values and standards. The aristocracy were to be absorbed by their adoption of middle class values while the lower orders were to be raised by universal education. Bourgeois values would thus unite society:

"Wir aber haben das Recht zu hoffen...den alten Gegensatz zwischen Volk und Gebildeten aufzuheben und nicht nur den Bauer, auch den Fürsten und den Mann von altem Landgeschlecht mit dem Segen der freien bürgerlichen Bildung zu erfüllen."(9)

The purpose of the book was to show how the middle class rose to a dominant position in society - if not in the state - and were able to impose its values on the other classes in society:

"Der Zweck dieses Buches ist, zu zeigen, wie die Deutschen aus Privatmenschen allmählich...politische Männer wurden... wie mit der wachsenden Bildung das Bürgertum erstarkte, wie es Adel und Bauern seinem Einfluß unterwarf, zuletzt die Besonderheit der Stände beseitigte und die Charaktere nach seinen Bedürfnissen und Gesichtspunkten zu formen begann."(10)

The final stage in this centuries-long struggle had now been reached as the middle class attempted to establish itself as the politically dominant class in society:

"Sie (die deutsche Volksseele) ist jetzt mitten in starker Anstrengung, sich das höchste irdische Besitztum, den Staat, zu bilden." (11)

Freytag was confident that the middle class would win the struggle and addressed the following words to aristocratic readers:

"Der deutsche Bürger ist in der glücklichen Lage, die Familien von altem Landgeschlecht mit warmem, menschlichem Anteil zu betrachten. Sie sind ihm mit teuren Erinnerungen verwachsen, sie sind in großer Zahl gute und zuverlässige Mitarbeiter im Staat, in Wissenschaft, für Kultur und Volksbildung geworden. Er wird nachsichtig gegen sie sein, wenn einzelnen von ihnen noch ein unsicheres Hängen in alten Standesüberlieferungen das Urteil befangen macht, er wird mit Lächeln zusehen, wenn sich ihr Blick sehnsüchtig in die geschwundene Zeit zurückwendet, wo ihre Vorrechte zahlreich und unbestritten waren,

"er wird, vielleicht geschickter als sie selbst, die Vergangenheit ihres Geschlechts durchforschen, wo wirklich in ihm Tüchtigkeit und Gemeinsinn zutage kam. Aber er wird ein unerbittlicher Gegner aller der politischen und sozialen Vorrechte sein, durch welche sie noch jetzt eine Sonderstellung im Volke beanspruchen. Nicht weil er ihnen diese Gewohnheit mißgönnt oder sich selbst an ihre Stelle drängen möchte, sondern weil er ohne Freude erkennt, daß ihnen dadurch die Unbefangenheit des Urteils, Verständnis der Welt, zuweilen die Festigkeit des Charakters verringert wird, und weil einige dieser abgelegten Traditionen, wie ihre Privilegien des Hofes, sogar unsere Fürsten in die Gefahr setzen, in dem engen Gesichtskreis deutscher Junker zu verkümmern." (12)

It was part of Freytag's intention to provide a framework for the constitutional struggle against the Junker in Prussia. Freytag was concerned to persuade his readers that the present struggle was embedded in the unfolding logic of history; it was no chance encounter, no incidental clash between two groups in society. It was the historical clash of the old and the new, of the emerging with the declining. Since Freytag's purpose was to inspire and encourage the middle class in their struggle, he was concerned to show that the struggle was but a phase in the inevitable march of history the course of which had preordained the middle class to assume by virtue of their superiority the dominant position in society and to remould society in its own image. History was on the side of the liberals against the Junker. This conviction was a source of inspiration to Freytag:

"Wir meinen, für die Deutschen ist jetzt die Zeit gekommen, wo seine Seele über die Vergangenheit des eigenen Volkes dahinfliegen darf, wie die Lerche am Frühlingsmorgen über den dämmerigen Grund. Frohlockend fühlen wir, daß wir etwas werden, wir begreifen jetzt, wie wir geworden sind, und wir vermögen in den zweitausend Jahren unseres geschichtlichen Lebens eine Weisheit und Vernunft zu ahnen, deren Walten uns glücklich macht. ... Möge auch dieses Buch ein wenig dazu helfen, daß unser Kampf und Verlust unserer Ahnen verständlich werde, Kampf und Sieg der Gegenwart aber groß und glückverheißend." (13)

The 'Bilder' thus have a highly political content which is directly related to the contemporary political struggle and which was intended by Freytag to inspire the liberal opposition in parliament and its middle class supporters with confidence in the ultimate victory of liberalism. Ultimately, then, the aim of the work is political.¹⁴

III. 'Die verlorene Handschrift' (1864)

In the 'Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit' Freytag had traced the development of the German nation from the point of view of the national liberal bourgeoisie. He had described the rise of the middle class to a position of dominance in German society economically and culturally, concluding that the time had come for the middle class, as the representatives of progress, to assume political power and unify Germany. The 'Bilder' formed a cultural back-cloth - cultural propaganda - to the political conflict between the middle class and the aristocracy. In much the same way Freytag paints a lurid picture of a moribund princely court in the novel 'Die verlorene Handschrift' published at the height of the constitutional conflict between the Prussian parliament and Bismarck. Freytag set out to describe in this novel

"den Cäsarenwahn des Fürsten." (15)

Freytag regarded the court and its dependence on the absolute and frequently arbitrary will of the Prince as the source of many unworthy characteristics, such as sycophancy. The absolutism of the court corrupted both the Prince by cutting him off from the people and the Prince's associates who would often seek to use him for their own ends. The hero of the novel Felix Werner, a professor, is persuaded to enter the service of the Prince for the sake of his love of ~~science~~^{scholarship} (he is searching for a lost manuscript of Tacitus). The irony of the situation is that the manuscript in question is Tacitus' description of the moral and spiritual corruption of tyrants and kings:

"...die Geschichte einer Tyrannenherrschaft, welche die edlen Geschlechter vertilgt, eine hohe und reiche Bildung heraufstiebt und verdirbt, vor allem die Herrschenden selbst mit wenigen Ausnahmen entmenschlicht. Wir haben bis zur Gegenwart kaum ein anderes Werk, dessen Verfasser so spähend in die Seelen einer ganzen Reihe von Fürsten blickt, so scharf und genau die Verwüstung schildert, welche die dämonische Krankheit der Könige in den verschiedensten Naturen hervorgebracht hat." (16)

The relevance of such descriptions would have been obvious to most liberal readers of the day.

Although the action of the novel is not placed in time, references to the contemporary political struggle make the comments relevant in content. Many of the observations made by characters in the novel are of direct and undisguised relevance to the political situation in Prussia in 1864. The main cause of the conflict is seen as the isolation of the monarch, surrounded as he is by the court, cut off from the people and their aspirations:

"...und ich meine allerdings, der Kampf, welcher in unserem Vaterlande auf verschiedenen Gebieten entbrannt ist, wird nicht eher mit einem guten Frieden enden, als bis die Gefahren beseitigt sind, welche die alte Hofordnung unserer Fürsten bereitet." (17)

The army is seen as dedicated to the support of princely absolutism, a timely reminder to the liberal reader that the army needed to be emancipated from the grip of the aristocracy if the army were to be neutral in politics:

"Die Zeit, in welcher wir zu leben verurteilt sind, hat eine engere Verbindung der Höfe mit den Heeren unvermeidlich gemacht, und was einst besser unterblieb, ist jetzt eine Stütze fürstlicher Stellung geworden." (18)

The novel criticises the education of Princes:

"Das flache zerstreute Wesen ihrer Erziehung, welches ihnen fast die Möglichkeit nimmt, an irgend einem Gebiete geistiger Arbeit ein warmes Interesse zu nehmen, macht sie auch später für das Leben und für ihre Regentenpflicht wenig brauchbar. Und wir nehmen teil an diesem Unrecht, wenn wir Jünglinge, die in Wahrheit nicht die Kenntnisse eines Tertianers haben, mit dem Schein und Firnis wissenschaftlicher Kultur überziehen." (19)

Princes should attend lectures like other students. The Prince in the novel expresses reservations about his own education and complains that he had been brought up to attach importance to 'representation':

"Über diesem Zurichten für den Schein ist meine Kindheit vergangen." (20)

The Prince is comparatively educated and cultured. Freytag stresses that

"...er war nie Militär gewesen." (21)

but, with obvious reference to Prussia,

"er enthielt sich nicht sarkastischer Bemerkungen über die kriegerischen Neigungen anderer Friedensfürsten, und sein Hof blieb lange Zeit frei von militärischer Umgebung." (22)

The Prince is relatively enlightened, but even so, the court was not free from the influence of the military:

"Doch allmählich machte er der Mode einige Zugeständnisse, auch seine Adjutanten wurden einflußreiche Mitglieder des Hofhaltes." (23)

The Prince is unusually critical of his own position and that of the aristocracy:

"Das ist Verhängnis der Fürsten, unser aller Unglück, daß die tüchtigste Bildung unserer Zeit selten freundlich auf uns wirkt. Die frische Luft fehlt dem Kreis, in dem wir leben. Wir sind alle weich und stubenkrank. Was uns nahe tritt, muß sich unsern Vorurteilen anbequemen, und wir gewöhnen uns, die Menschen nur nach der künstlichen Ordnung zu schätzen, die wir selbst erdacht." (24)

The Princess, too, is clear in her own mind that the aristocracy is doomed:

"Halten Sie mich nicht für einen weißen Raben, es gibt klügere als ich, die in der Stille ebenso urteilen, aber wir finden uns aus den Schranken nicht heraus und wir klammern uns daran, obgleich wir wissen, daß die Stütze schwach ist. Denn wie der Kolibri die Schlange, so betrachten wir das Antlitz, welches uns die neue Zeit entgegenhält, mit Schauder und hilfloser Erwartung." (25)

Freytag conjures up a picture of an aristocracy politically demoralised, haunted by fear of imminent decline, a spectacle surely intended to inspire the middle class to press home their attacks on the - apparently moribund - aristocracy more vehemently. The novel is a literary incitement to opposition! Even the Lord Chamberlain (Oberhofmeister) acknowledges the great advances the middle class has made:

"Ich bin bereit, die großen Fortschritte anzuerkennen, welche das Bürgertum in den letzten fünfzig Jahren gemacht hat." (26)

and frankly admits that the aristocracy had probably lost the leadership of the nation:

"Ich bin zum Manne erwachsen in der Vorstellung, daß Fürsten und Adel die geborenen Führer der Nation sind. Ich sehe mit Trauer, daß sie auf lange, vielleicht für immer, diese Führung verlieren." (27)

The atmosphere at court is heavy with decay:

"Aber ich fühle, daß die Luft, in der ich lebe, immer schwüler wird, die Spannung der Gegensätze gefährlicher. Wenn ich zurücksehe auf ein langes Leben, so graut mir zuweilen vor dem Siechtum, das ich geschaut... Die Gestalten, welche in dieser Zeit verkommen sind, werden der Nachwelt nicht fürchterlich erscheinen, aber grotesk und verächtlich." (28)

Part of this process of decline was reflected in the deterioration in the style of aristocratic diplomacy:

"Die Diplomatie hat aufgehört, vornehm zu sein. Man brüskiert, man aventuriert, nicht nur der Adel der Gesinnung, sogar der anmutige Schein desselben fehlt, an den Höfen hat unsichere Kleinlichkeit, ein mürrisches gereiztes abschließendes Wesen überhand genommen, in der Diplomatie Ungezogenheiten und Leichtsinne ohne Kenntnisse und ohne männlichen Willen. Unsere Prinzen klirren als bewaffnete Müßiggänger einher, die alte Hofzucht ist verloren, man fühlt sich haltlos auf der Defensive und sucht in törichten Übergriffen sein Heil. Es ist schwer sich die Empfindung fernzuhalten, daß es mit diesem Treiben unaufhaltsam abwärts gehe." (29)

Such a description is reminiscent of the tone of articles Freytag wrote at the time of the constitutional conflict criticising Bismarck's methods and policies. This passage could therefore be taken by many contemporary readers to be an attack on Bismarck's diplomacy, especially with the references to 'Leichtsinn' and 'törichte Übergriffe', while the conclusion, as expressed by the Oberhofmeister

"daß es mit diesem Treiben unaufhaltsam abwärts gehe." (30) could have been lifted straight from an article in the 'Grenzboten' on Bismarck's method of government.³¹

Freytag paints a drastic picture of the consequences of princely absolutism:

"Die zufälligen Forderungen eines ungebändigten Willens werden rücksichtslos, die Seele verliert allmählich das Urteil über Böses und Gut, der persönliche Wunsch erscheint den Regierenden sofort als Bedürfnis des Staates, jede Laune des Augenblicks heischt Befriedigung. Das Mißtrauen gegen Unabhängige führt zu kopflosem Argwohn, wer sich nicht fügt, wird als Feind beseitigt, wer sich geschmeidig anzupassen versteht, ist sicher eine Herrschaft über den Herrscher auszuüben." (32)

Absolutism produced servile subjects:

"Die Herrschaft aber hat den Menschen zum Sklaven gemacht... In dieser knechtischen Unterwürfigkeit aller und der Sicherheit der Herrschaft wuchert bald der Egoismus." (33)

Such corruption can only be prevented by the healthy influence of elected parliaments and a vigorous public opinion:

"Hundert Beispiele lehren, daß frühere Herrscher selbst bei großen äußeren Erfolgen an innerer Verwüstung litten, wo nicht eine starke öffentliche Meinung und kräftige Teilnahme des Volkes am Staat sie unablässig zwang, sich selbst zu behüten." (34)

Absolutism was a scourge on mankind:

"Was Pest und Krieg verdarben ist wenig gegen die verhängnisvolle Verwüstung der Völker, welche durch dies besondere Leiden der Herrscher (i.e. absolutism) angerichtet wurde." (35)

Yet there is hope, even for the aristocracy:

"Solange die Nation sich selbst verjüngt, vermag sie auch ihre Fürsten und die Leiter ihrer Geschäfte mit neuem Leben zu erfüllen. Denn wir sind nicht Römer, sondern warmherzige und dauerhafte Germanen." (36)

The novel thus holds out to the aristocracy the hand of reconciliation on strictly middle class terms. The Prince, the diplomat represents the old dying order, while Professor Werner represents the new age:

"Der Greis und der jugendfrische Mann, der Diplomat und der Gelehrte standen einander gegenüber, der eine Sprecher für die Welt, welche sich abwärts neigte, der andere Verkünder der Lehren, welche unablässig die alte Welt erneuern." (37)

The middle class could be confident that it was on the ascent:

"Denn das ist das höchste und unzerstörbare Glück des Menschen, wenn er vertrauend auf das werdende, mit Hoffnung auf das zukünftige blicken kann. Und so leben wir. Viel Schwaches, viel verdorbenes und absterbendes umgibt uns, aber dazwischen wächst eine unendliche Fülle von junger Kraft herauf. Wurzel und Stamm unseres Volkslebens sind gesund." (38)

The novel had direct relevance to the struggle of the liberal middle class with the aristocratic conservatives led by Bismarck. The novel presents the middle class reader with a lurid picture of the corruption and decadence of the aristocracy and of courtly life. The aristocracy is - conveniently - depicted as thoroughly

demoralised, utterly convinced of its superfluohsness and impending obsolescence. Freytag's message to the reader is that the middle class will inject new life into the decaying institutions of the state, the middle class is the new life-force that will replace the effete exhausted and corrupt aristocracy as the ruling class in Germany. 'Die verlorene Handschrift' is thus a highly charged political novel, an integral part of the middle class struggle against Bismarck's defence of monarchical absolutism and the power of the aristocracy.³⁸

IV. The novels of the Bismarck era: 'Die Ahnen' 1872 - 1880

The first decade of the Empire under Bismarck as Chancellor saw the publication of a series of six novels ¹ 'Die Ahnen', in which Freytag attempted to present a picture of the life of the German people across the centuries through the fate of the various members of a family in succeeding generations. The novels are, thus, a literary version of the 'Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit' and, as such, a restatement of Freytag's interpretation of the course of German history in literary form. The series was prompted by the defeat of France and the establishment of the German Empire which was seen by Freytag as the fulfilment of a thousand years of German history with the achievement of unity and nationhood by the German people. In his memoirs he recalls how his experience at first hand ² of the decisive stages of the war - he was present at the battle of Sedan - inspired him to embark on 'Die Ahnen':

"...die mächtigen Eindrücke jener Wochen arbeiteten in der Seele fort; schon während ich auf den Landstrassen Frankreichs im Gedränge der Männer, Rosse und Fuhrwerke einherzog, waren mir immer wieder die Einbrüche unserer germanischen Vorfahren in das römische Gallien eingefallen, ich sah sie auf Flößen und Holzschinden über die Ströme schwimmen, hörte hinter dem Hurra meiner Landsleute vom fünften und elften Korps das Harageschrei der alten Franken und Alemannen, ich verglich die deutsche Weise mit der fremden, und überdachte, wie die deutschen Kriegsherren und ihre Heere sich im Laufe der Jahrhunderte gewandelt haben bis zu der nationalen Einrichtung unseres Kriegswesens, dem größten und eigentümlichsten Gebilde des modernen Staates. Aus solchen Träumen und aus einem gewissen historischen Stil, welcher meiner Erfindung durch die Erlebnisse von 1870 gekommen war, entstand allmählich die Idee zu dem Roman 'Die Ahnen'." (3)

Freytag's highly developed sense of the continuity of history transfigured the German troops marching into France into Germanic warriors marauding Roman Gaul under Ariovistus. In his mind's eye present events were endowed with the epic grandeur of events from the distant past. For Freytag this was not illogical: the German soldiers of 1870 were the direct descendants of the warriors of the first century, their

essential character as Germans had changed very little over the centuries:

"Der Zusammenhang des Menschen, nicht nur mit seinen Zeitgenossen, auch mit seinen Vorfahren, und die geheimnisvolle Einwirkung derselben auf seine Seele und seinen Leib, auf alle Äußerungen seiner Lebenskraft und auf sein Schicksal waren mir seit meiner Jugend besonders bedeutsam erschienen."
(4)

Freytag believed that

"...im letzten Grunde der Vorfahr in dem Enkel wieder lebendig wird." (5)

The Germans of the first century were basically the same as the Germans of the late nineteenth century; significantly the members of the family in 'Die Ahnen' have roughly the same character in each succeeding generation, illustrating the essential stability of the German national character. What changes there were, Freytag regarded as minor aberrations brought about by the influence of unfavourable circumstances. Within the particular historical setting of the age the characters of the novels were intended to present various facets of the typical German.

The early Germans were seen by Freytag as the least corrupted by circumstances and they stood as ideal figures, as examples of an uninhibited expression of the German character. In his 'Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit' Freytag describes the early Germans as follows:

"Wo die Germanen ihr eigenes Leben gestalten, steht schrankenlose Hingabe, ein höchst demokratischer Stolz neben der äußersten Gebundenheit in der Gemeinde, eine geringe Festigkeit des Staatszusammenhangs der Stammgenossen, die großartigste Opferung für sittliche Ideen neben zu geringem Interesse an dem Vorteil der Allgemeinheit, trotzige Selbstwilligkeit in Übernahme von Pflichten, schwache Ausbildung aller Strafgesetze, aber ein ungemeines Gefühl für Billigkeit, Stolz gegen Größere und tiefe Verehrung vor altem Geschlechtsadel." (6)

Of all the novels the first volume 'Ingo and Ingrabah' paints the most consistently favourable picture of the Germans: they were proud independent individualists with a highly developed sense of justice and equality, they were ready to sacrifice themselves for ideals and for the community. In 'Ingo and Ingrabah' the picture of the life of the early Germans corresponds to this

description: the tribe was the ideal democratic community, the King or Leader was democratically elected, he was a constitutional monarch obliged by custom to rule in accordance with the express wish of the people.⁷ The relationship between the King and his people was one of harmony.⁸ Decisions were arrived at by means of public debate and a show of hands.⁹ The members of the tribe were upstanding fearless men who only served a cause if they believed it to be just, service of one's leader was not an ideal in itself.¹⁰ Freytag denied that the early Germans were submissive to their overlords and insisted that their service was the service of free men. Freytag believed that, contrary to what was generally thought, the early Germans had not been barbaric, but generous, noble and humane.¹¹ He defended his portrayal of Ingo against criticisms that he had idealised the character of the early Germans.¹² He did agree, however, that, when the early Germans committed themselves in service, then their submission was total:

"Doch merkwürdig, diesem verhängnisvollen Freiheitsgefühl des Germanen stand gegenüber eine Geneigtheit, sich rücksichtslos anderen hinzugeben, die ebenfalls in sehr eigentümlicher Weise hervorbrach. Es war die Hingabe an Personen, entweder einseitig oder mit gegenseitiger Verpflichtung. Germanisch war bei diesem Verhältnis, daß es freiwillig sein mußte... Die Selbstentäußerung, welche sie forderte, die Treue, welche dabei geübt wurde, war Stolz und Ehre des Sterblichen." (13)

Freytag detected the very same tendency in his contemporaries:

"Der Trieb zu lieben und zu verehren ist von unserem Volke von je so unwiderstehlich gewesen, daß die Deutschen sich ein Objekt ihrer Hingabe erfinden müssen, wenn sie zufällig keins haben. Sie umgeben dann leicht den Erwählten mit aller Poesie ihres warmen Gemüts und ihnen ist alsdann lästig zu prüfen, ob das Original in Wahrheit ihrer Hingabe wert ist. ...noch jetzt ist dasselbe Gefühl ebenso oft ein Quell sittlicher Empfindungen als eines gedankenlosen Bedientensinnes." (14)

He regarded this feature of the German character as a fatal weakness; it was, in his view, the psychological basis for the uncritical admiration of Bismarck so many contemporaries indulged in:

"Es ist recht charakteristisch für die guten warmherzigen Deutschen, daß die Popularität Bismarcks eine Höhe erreicht hat wie wohl nie die eines deutschen Mannes. ... Alles Edle und Große wird ihm zugetraut und als selbstverständlich aus innerem Herzensbedürfnis in sein Wesen gelegt. Man merkt, es liegt den Menschen weniger daran, einen Charakter genau zu verstehen, als dem Drange zu lieben und zu verehren, ein Objekt zu schaffen. ... Das ist so deutsch, so dumm und so kindsköpfig rührend. Es ist ein uralter Zug, unsere eingegorene Schwäche." (15)

Against this Freytag wished to assert and give prominence to other more positive features of the German character; he emphasised, both in his 'Bilder' and in the novel 'Ingo and Ingraban' the fearless independence of the early Germans, their deep love of freedom and the democratic structure of the tribal community.

Such figures were meant as deliberate contrasts and as a corrective to those aspects of the German character which had flourished under the influence of Bismarck. Freytag hoped that the reader would be inspired by his novel to imitate the virtues portrayed. He confided to Stosch:

"Soll ich Ihnen aber meine stille Absicht dabei gestehen, so war es die, ein Lesebuch zu schreiben, das einst unserer Jugend die Art unseres Volkes wert machen soll." (16)

The emphasis given by Freytag to ^{the} democratic virtues of his Germanic heroes would appear to be motivated by the desire to combat the stultifying influence of the Bismarck cult; he was invoking the freedom-loving character of the early Germans against the subservient and authoritarian character of many middle class Germans of his own day, who, Freytag felt, had fallen prey to that powerful instinct, the urge to serve and admire at the expense of a love of freedom and justice. To this limited extent the novel could be described as an anti-Bismarck novel, it sought to reassert those liberal values which were threatened by the Bismarck cult.

Part of this strategy is reflected in the treatment of great historical personalities in 'Die Ahnen': the members of the ruling caste, Kings and Emperors, are without exception portrayed

in an unsympathetic light: King Bisino is portrayed as a devious, ruthless character ¹⁷ in contrast to Ingo, the free farmer. The same juxtaposition is repeated throughout the series: the independence of the free farmer is contrasted with the oppressive policies of the Kings. ¹⁸ King Henry in the 'Nest der Zaunkönige' is depicted as a cold calculating man, similarly Emperor Frederick is portrayed without warmth, as is Albert of Hohenzollern. Frederick William I, the father of Frederick the Great is painted in more positive colours, but it is clear that Freytag had too many reservations about the man to be enthusiastic, while his portrait of Frederick the Great himself betrays his uneasy feeling at the accumulation of absolute power in the hands of one individual. The lesson for the reader is clear: distrust Kings and other hereditary leaders. The heroes of the novels are figures with a middle class or peasant back-ground, figures with which the reader would be able to identify himself, while the unfavourable portrayal of the ruling class figures would encourage readers to adopt a similar hostile attitude to the aristocratic ruling class in Bismarck's Germany.

The picture that Freytag gives in the last novel of the series 'Aus einer kleinen Stadt' (1880) of reconciliation between the aristocracy and the middle class united under the banner of liberalism ¹⁹ must have struck many a reader as distinctly other-worldly, so stark was the contrast with the real situation in which the aristocracy was still very much a privileged class in society, dominating the political and social establishment, as Freytag himself noted:

"Es besteht glücklicherweise bei uns kein offener Kampf zwischen Adel und Bürgertum, wohl aber ein stiller. Und wir haben dafür zu sorgen, daß der Prozeß der Verbindung der mittelalterlichen Stände zu einheitlicher Nation ohne Gewaltsamkeit und ohne offene Fehde sich allmählich vollziehe. Noch ist darin manches zu tun. Noch sind unsere Fürsten erzogen und gewöhnt, sich vor allem als die Ersten des Adels zu betrachten, die höchsten Stellen im Heer und Beamtentum sind fast ganz in den Händen des Adels, der Hofdienst ausschließlich. Nun sind unter König Wilhelm und dem jungen Kaiser die Ansprüche des Adels gestiegen. ...

"Wenn unsere Regierung in den Ruf kommt, durch den Adel das Volk regieren zu wollen, geht die Loyalität der Deutschen verloren und das monarchistische Regiment wird ihnen verleidet. Das ist die Gefahr. Und deshalb muß der Staatsmann und jeder Patriot auf diese wunde Stelle im Gefühl der Nation genau achten. Es sind jetzt einige Anzeichen zu erkennen, daß dies Mißtrauen zunimmt, und schon in naher Zukunft mag die Regierung darüber unangenehme Erfahrungen machen." (20)

Freytag seems to have been reluctant - or unable - to accept that the middle class and the aristocracy were well on the way to being reconciled by the 1880's by a surrender on the part of the middle class of its liberal ideology and the adoption of the feudal values of the aristocracy. 'Die Ahnen' is a literary protest against the influence of Bismarck on the political culture of the German middle class; the novels represent an attempt to correct this influence by the presentation of ideal figures in German history embodying qualities that were in contrast to those nurtured by Bismarck. Against the Bismarckian ideals of service, obedience and loyalty Freytag invoked the ancient Germanic ideals of freedom, justice, equality, independence and democratic constitutionalism.

Bismarck and his influence on political values in Germany are, thus, not expressly referred to in this cycle of novels; Freytag had declined to write novels about the contemporary social and political scene in Germany under Bismarck, preferring to treat the glories of the German past. The reality of the contemporary situation was far from elevating: the middle class had failed to oust the aristocracy who continued to exercise effective political power in Germany, the commercial middle class had plunged into an orgy of financial speculation after 1870 in the period known as the 'Gründerjahre', fortunes were won and lost, the middle class seemed more intent on making money than on creating a liberal Germany. Freytag felt unable to write a novel about such conditions:

"Das Buch (Ingo und Ingraban) wird die Erwartung des großen Leseublikums bitter enttäuschen, man forderte einen Roman 'Der Kaufmann', der wahrscheinlich gegen die modernen Wuchergeschäfte Front machen sollte. So schmeichelhaft dies gute Zutrauen war, ich vermochte ihm diesmal nicht zu entsprechen." (21)

The present offered little by way of positive inspiration. Freytag

turned rather to a past that was still intact, where the issues were clear-cut and the middle class clearly on the ascent.

"Freytag schrieb diesen Romanzyklus in einem Augenblick, in dem das Bürgertum sich schon in einer allgemeinen Gesellschaftskrise auflöste. Die Werte, an die er glaubte, zwangen ihn zum Geschichtsroman." (22)

His very real concern at the political development in the Bismarck era, particularly with regard to the middle class and its relation to the aristocracy and Bismarck, was not expressed in a socially critical novel, the issues were transposed into the past and dealt with in historical guise. Freytag's dramatic polemic against the imperial purple in 'Ingo und Ingraban' ²³ for example reflects his concern at the re-establishment of the imperial title in 1871 which, he feared, would lead to an increase in the power and influence of the aristocracy. Rather than confront the middle class with a negative picture of its present ills, Freytag chose to depict positive heroes from the past in the hope that the reader would identify with them and thus reject the illiberal values of Bismarck Germany.

Given the situation in the early 1880's Freytag's attempt was bound to be very much a rear-guard action in a battle that Bismarck was winning. The liberal of the 1830's had found it easy to identify himself with the freedom-loving German peasant, indeed, the freedoms and constitution of the early Germans were invoked as precedents. By the end of the nineteenth century the situation had changed completely: now the formerly liberal middle class tended to support Bismarck and had become conservative in politics. The average member of the middle class was proud now, not of his freedoms, his independence and his constitutional rights, but of his loyal and obedient service to Emperor and fatherland. ²⁴ Freytag's picture of the early Germans was pre-Bismarck: in the 1880's and 90's readers took due note of the nationalism in Freytag's novels, but were blind to the liberalism.

V. Bismarck in the novel

Freytag saw himself very much as a mentor and preceptor of the German middle class. The purpose of all his activities, whether as a writer, journalist or political activist, was to inculcate the middle class with a sense of its role in German history and its destiny in the present. The dramas and novels Freytag wrote served the same purpose: to inspire the middle class in its crucial struggle with the aristocracy. His literary strategy in this was always the same: he presented the reader with a picture of reality in which the middle class or peasant hero was very largely a positive hero, while members of the aristocracy tended to be negative characters, that is, in so far as they had declined to adopt middle class values. 'Die verlorene Handschrift' (1864) written at the height of the constitutional struggle in Prussia between Bismarck and the liberal-dominated parliament, was Freytag's last vaguely contemporary novel, thereafter he turned towards the historical novel, since it was in the German past that he found the positive heroes he required to sustain his literary strategy. In such a strategy there was no room for the contemporary socially critical novel and therefore no place for a critical and detailed treatment of the question of Bismarck and his influence on developments in Germany. Freytag did, however, attempt to combat Bismarck's corrosive influence on liberal values indirectly by presenting in his novels heroes from the past whose allegiance was to the human values enshrined in constitutional liberalism.

Spielhagen and Bismarck

Spielhagen and Bismarck

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A. Spielhagen's life and political development

A. Spielhagen's life and political development.

Friedrich Spielhagen was born in Magdeburg on 24th February 1829, the fourth son of a Prussian civil servant, an engineer by profession ('königlicher Wasserbauinspektor'). The family moved to Stralsund on the Baltic coast when Spielhagen was six years old and it was here that he spent his childhood. He attended the local Gymnasium and took the Abitur in 1847. At an early age Spielhagen developed a keen interest in literature and had soon decided that he wanted to become a writer; he even edited a poetry sheet at school.¹ His wide reading was virtually the only source of intellectual stimulation, as the political atmosphere both at home and in the town of Stralsund was very conservative.² He came to admire the poetry of Freiligrath and Heine, attracted by what he described as

"...den Duft des Modernen, des Aktuellen... Ein prickelnder Reiz, den zum Beispiel Uhlands Romantik gar nicht auf mich ausübte." (3)

Yet, it was not the political message as such that drew him to these poets

"Die politische Leidenschaft schlummerte eben noch zu tief in dem jugendlichen Busen." (4)

as a much more diffuse and heady enthusiasm for freedom - a characteristic of the political lyric of the 'Vormärz' period - which he shared with many young contemporaries. Not that freedom was some abstract ideal for Spielhagen: his reading of E.M.Arndt's 'Erinnerungen aus dem äußeren Leben'⁵ opened his eyes to the appalling living and working conditions of farm workers and their families ('Katenleute') in Pommerania, they were little better than serfs,⁶ human beings condemned to be prisoners of a social system that denied them human dignity and freedom. Spielhagen's own observations of conditions in rural Pommerania confirmed what he had read and deeply offended his sense of justice. He was angered by the humorous idealised picture of life on the land given by Fritz Reuter⁷ and by the way in which society at large complacently accepted such conditions.⁸

When Spielhagen left Stralsund for Bonn in 1848 to study law, he had no clearly formulated political philosophy, but he already thought of himself as a republican:

"In Ermangelung jeder realen politischen Anschauung bekannte ich mich zu jener Freiheit, von der man um Himmelswillen nicht zu sagen wüßte, was man unter derselben versteht oder mit ihr meint, und für deren fehlenden Begriff das Wort Republik nicht immer zur rechten Zeit sich einstellt." (9)

A few weeks before his departure for Bonn revolution had erupted in Paris and there had been demonstrations in Berlin, so he decided to visit Berlin en route for Bonn, more out of youthful curiosity than from any desire to take part in the revolution:

"...wollte ich doch meinen Anteil an der Berliner Herrlichkeit gehabt haben." (10)

as he later - somewhat cynically - recalled. He sympathised with the call for liberal constitutional reform, declaring himself in favour of a republic, but he was repelled by the antics of some of the revolutionaries:

"Erschienen mir die strahlend erregten Gesichter, denen man auf Schritt und Tritt begegnete, nur als der Widerschein der eigenen frohgemuten, gehobenen Stimmung, so machte die Prahlhansigkeit, mit der ich Leute, die ich als die friedlichsten Menschen von der Welt kannte, sich vom Morgen bis Abend mit Flinten und Säbeln schleppen sah, einen komischen, ja widerwärtigen Eindruck. ... Mein Gemüt schwankte unerquicklich zwischen Begeisterung und Ernüchterung, Sympathie und Widerwillen." (11)

Spielhagen did not stay long enough in Berlin to become involved in revolutionary activities so that his experience of the revolution - actual street-fighting did not occur until after he had left for Bonn - brought no new appreciation of the role of politics in society. Spielhagen's memoirs give no hint that the political and social aims of the 1848 Revolution were fully grasped, indeed, his reaction seems to have been primarily one of aesthetic horror:

"Und...das nicht sowohl, weil ich das Zwecklose, ja Gefährliche dieses Gebahrens durchschaut hätte, als, weil es meinen Geschmack beleidigte, dem alles Übertriebene von jeher ein Greuel war." (12)

Spielhagen's understanding of the events was not helped by his abstruse discussions with Adalbert Mecklenburg, a friend who was studying in Berlin at the time. Mecklenburg finally persuaded

Spielhagen that the true republican should disassociate himself from the revolution; those who took up arms against the monarchy were, he claimed, in reality crypto-royalists:

"Ich(i.e. Mecklenburg) unterscheide also zwischen wirklichen Republikanern und solchen, die es bloß äußerlich und eigentlich Kryptoroyalisten sind. Die letzterem erkennt man daran, daß sie das Königtum, den Adel und was damit zusammenhängt - ich meine in Sonderheit das Pfaffentum - hassen, verabscheuen, ein Kreuz davor schlagen, mit Stumpf und Stiel ausrotten möchten. Und eben dadurch: durch ihren Haß usw.beweisen, daß sie im Grund ihres Herzens von dem allen noch nicht losgelöst haben, es für sie noch existiert - ich meine: nicht bloß in der Wirklichkeit, die ja augenfällig und mit Händen greifbar ist, sondern : nicht augenfällig, nicht greifbar, in der Tiefe ihres Herzens, in der der ganze mittelalterliche Plunder noch seine saftigen, ungestörten Wurzeln hat, die eines schönen Tages bei anderem Wetter, wenn der Wind sich gedreht hat, auch wieder lustig ausschlagen und die prächtigsten Blätter und Blüten treiben werden." (13)

In Adalbert's view the true republican was the man who had emancipated himself from belief in the legitimacy of existing political institutions to such a degree that they no longer existed; indeed, to act as if they existed, for example, by attempting to change the status quo, was to betray a despicable lingering belief in the viability of the status quo.

"Dem wahrhaften Republikaner...kann das nicht begegnen aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil jene Herrschaften gar nicht für ihn existieren, weil sie für ihn nur Wahngelbilde armer schwacher Menschen sind." (14)

Adalbert was clearly a great philosopher, but hardly a man of action. The revolution did not keep Spielhagen in Berlin and he soon left for Bonn.

Spielhagen stayed at Bonn university for three semesters, studying first law and then, turning to his true interests, philosophy and Greek literature.¹⁵ While he was at Bonn he attended the trial of Ferdinand Lassalle at the Cologne assize courts and was impressed by Lassalle's defence of himself.¹⁶ He was also a member of the 'Frankonia' students' corporation and this brought him into close contact with many politically active radicals and revolutionaries, such as Kinkel and Schurz.

Spielhagen, however, remained aloof, content to observe,¹⁷ although he later admitted that he had been intellectually and emotionally involved in the revolutionary events of 1848, even though he had not taken an active part.¹⁸ The news of the uprising in Frankfurt in September 1849 in defence of the Frankfurt Constitution prompted him to go to Frankfurt, though again he did not become involved.¹⁹ Spielhagen spent his final year at university at Greifswald, without, however, completing his studies.

After a year in the army, the compulsory 'Dienstjahr', Spielhagen took a post as a tutor with the von Braun family at Pustow on the island of Rügen.²⁰ He stayed here for two years, but, after an unhappy love-affair, left for Leipzig where, on the advice of a friend Overbeck, he began work on a doctoral thesis, hoping on completion to enter the university as a Privatdozent. Lack of progress²¹ induced him to try his hand at acting, but his debut at Magdeburg (summer 1855) was a signal failure.²² He was therefore glad to accept the post of English teacher, arranged for him by an English friend Robert Hall Wesley, at Dr. Hauschild's 'Modernes Gesamt-Gymnasium' in Leipzig, a private school run on enlightened progressive lines.²³ While he was at Leipzig Spielhagen found time to write his first short story 'Klara Vera'; he also translated American and English literature into German²⁴ and had a number of essays on literary topics published.²⁵ 'Klara Vera' was finally published in Hanover in 1857 by the same publisher who had commissioned Spielhagen's translations.²⁶ The publication of 'Klara Vera' prompted a (certain Mr.) Ehrenreich Eichholz, editor of the Hanover daily 'Zeitung für Norddeutschland', to write to Spielhagen inviting him to contribute a short story to the newspaper or to join the newspaper as cultural editor (Feuilletonredakteur).²⁷ Spielhagen declined the offer of a post on the newspaper, but sent his second short story 'Auf der Düne'. Eichholz decided not to publish it on the grounds that it was far too 'realistic'.²⁸ It was at this time that Spielhagen began writing his first full-length novel 'Problematische Naturen'.

The spring of 1860 saw Spielhagen in Thuringia with the army as an 'Einjährig-Freiwilliger', he was offered a regular commission but he declined.²⁹ When the year was up, he decided against returning to teaching at the Gymnasium in Leipzig (he had had differences with the new headmaster) and resolved to try his luck as a writer, since he had in the meantime finished the first part of 'Problematische Naturen'. When it was published in 1860, it was a best-seller. Spielhagen received an offer of the post of editor of Weber's 'Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung',³⁰ but he decided instead to accept the longstanding offer from Eichholz to become literary editor of the 'Zeitung für Norddeutschland'.³¹ He moved to Hanover to take up his appointment on 1st October 1860.

The unsettled nature of his life and his preoccupation with literary and aesthetic matters had allowed for little development of Spielhagen's interest in politics,³² a situation which the move to Hanover changed radically. Here, in the 'spezifisch politische Atmosphäre'³³ of the newspaper, he was in daily contact with liberals and republicans,³⁴ members of the liberal 'Nationalverein'.³⁵ He began to appreciate the supreme importance of politics in society, an insight that was henceforth to have a profound influence on his literary work; his whole concept of the novel 'Problematische Naturen' - the first part of which he had completed before moving to Hanover - was changed:

"Die ursprünglich einfache Aufgabe: die Geschichte einer problematischen Natur zu erzählen, hatte sich mithin zu der sehr viel komplizierteren erweitert: das Bild einer Kultur zu entwerfen, aus welcher dergleichen Naturen mit mehr oder weniger zwingender Notwendigkeit hervorgehen." (36)

The task was now to depict

"...die Genesis der problematischen Naturen aus der Misere des öffentlichen Lebens." (37)

an altogether much more complex and daunting undertaking:

"Gerade aber bei Abfassung dieses Romans, des ersten größeren, den ich unternahm, war mir der innige Zusammenhang, in welchem das Individuum mit der Gesamtheit steht, und auf den ich früher kaum geachtet hatte, zu klarem Bewußtsein gekommen: die ungeheure Bedeutung des Milieu, wie man heute sagen würde; die Erkenntnis, daß der Mensch nicht wie ein

Meteorstein aus dem Himmel fällt, sondern inmitten ganz bestimmter familiärer, sozialer, ökonomischer, politischer Bedingungen aufwächst, die man verstehen muß, wenn man verstehen will, wie er denn nun gerade so und nicht anders geworden ist. So war auch das Ende meines Romanhelden auf den Berliner Barrikaden der 48er Märztage kein willkürlicher, nur, um der Sache ein Ende zu machen, gewaltsam herbeigezogener, sondern der logische, mit dem ersten Federstriche gesetzte Schluß des Ganzen." (38)

Yet such insights came too late for any radical reorganisation of the structure and substance of the novel.³⁹

While Spielhagen was at Hanover his vague and till then largely latent republican views matured into a more coherent political philosophy:⁴⁰ speaking of himself in the third person he described his hatred of autocracy:

"Er war ein geborener Tyrannenhasser, Hasser alles dessen, was nach Autokratie schmeckt. So war nicht der einzelne Adelige, der vielleicht sein lieber Freund war, wohl aber die Adels-Institution als solche ihm gründlich widerwärtig. (41) Daß die Republik die Panacee für alle sozialen Schäden sei, glaubte er keinen Augenblick, dennoch sah er in ihr die einzige eines mündigen Volkes würdige Staatsform." (42)

His political position at this time (1861) he described as that of radical republican:

"Alles in allem war sein politisch-religiöses Programm das des linken Flügels der Radikalen der Paulskirche von 1848." (43)

In October 1862 Spielhagen moved to Berlin where he founded and edited a weekly called the 'Deutsche Wochenschrift'.⁴⁴ As the constitutional conflict between Bismarck and the liberal majority in the Prussian House of Representatives ('Abgeordnetenhaus') already dominated the political scene, it was natural that Spielhagen, as a radical, should take an anti-Junker and anti-Bismarck line,⁴⁵ although Spielhagen was himself mainly concerned with the literary content of the magazine. He regarded literature as a force which was able to transcend the party political arena and portray what he referred to as

"...die ewigen Wahrheiten des Menschenlebens." (46)

in the context of contemporary society. The writer's task was

to hold up a mirror to the society of his time and thus reflect society in all its aspects in the novel. Spielhagen believed that the act of confronting the reader through the medium of the novel with a panoramic picture of society would make the reader more aware politically and socially, it was a means of educating the nation.⁴⁷ With characteristic confidence he regarded the demands of radical liberalism - represented by the left-wing of the Progressive Party - as the self-evident legitimate political expression of the basic 'Wahrheiten des Menschenlebens' to which it was the task of the writer to give expression:

"Wir wollen der hohen Würde der Dichtkunst nicht vergessen. Wir wollen aus dem reinen Gold der Poesie kein politisches Kapital schlagen, wenn wir es nicht können, ohne darüber zum Falschmünzer zu werden; wir wollen nicht vergessen, daß wir jeder Partei, die es ehrlich meint, und vor allem der Partei, zu der wir uns bekennen, am besten dienen, wenn wir die ewigen Wahrheiten, die des Menschenlebens eigentlicher Inhalt und Gehalt sind, zum möglichst vollendeten Ausdruck bringen; und wenn je einmal unsere Hand vor leidenschaftlicher politischer Erregung zittern sollte, so wollen wir wieder und wieder auf die Heroen unserer Dichtkunst weisen, immer wieder daran erinnern, daß nur, wenn wir die leuchtenden Spuren dieser verfolgen, die für alle Zeit gelebt haben, der wahre und rechte Fortschritt möglich ist." (48)

In his early years in Berlin Spielhagen also edited the 'Sonntagsblatt für Jedermann aus dem Volke'.⁴⁹ He declined the offer of post of cultural and literary editor (Feuilletonredakteur) on the leading liberal newspaper in Berlin, the 'Nationalzeitung', probably because he did not wish to get too deeply involved in journalism and wished to have time to write novels.⁵⁰

Spielhagen lived a full social life, associating with many of the leading figures in the Berlin society of the 1860's,⁵¹ particularly prominent members of the Progressive Party such as Waldeck, Twesten, Löwe-Calbe⁵², Virchow, Lasker and Duncker.⁵³ He was, therefore, well placed to observe contemporary bourgeois society. He frequently sounded out his political friends on the issues of the day and would have taken part in the wide-ranging discussions of political and social questions, so that he was able to gain a fairly accurate and comprehensive

picture of the various points of view within the liberal middle class. More importantly it meant that the picture of society he painted in his novels, the ideas and attitudes he depicted, were the result of careful observation, not the product of his own imagination.⁵⁴ The political and social developments depicted in Spielhagen's novels were invariably experienced by him at first-hand.⁵⁵ In the 1860's he published two full-scale novels 'Die von Hohenstein'(1864) and 'In Reih und Glied'(1867).

Spielhagen shared with his liberal and republican contemporaries the hope that Germany would be united in his life-time and therefore welcomed the unification of the German states in 1871; at the same time he was aware that Bismarck who was a Junker and committed to conservative policies might exploit his prestige and newly won authority as founder of the German Empire to consolidate the political power of the Junker dominated establishment in Prussia and foil attempts by liberals to invest the German parliament (Reichstag) with real political power.⁵⁶ Such fears were proved justified by subsequent developments. The National Liberals had hoped to gain liberal concessions from Bismarck by co-operating with him and making themselves indispensable. Spielhagen recognised that in practice they were unable to check Bismarck in vital matters or block his exercise of power, let alone wrest liberal measures from him that would lead to a parliamentarisation of the system.⁵⁷ In Spielhagen's view the National Liberals allowed themselves to be too easily intimidated by Bismarck's power and achievement.⁵⁸ His criticism of the National Liberals and his consistently radical, frequently anti-Bismarck stance soon isolated him from the mainstream of liberal politics in Bismarckian Germany:

"Die Aufrichtung des Deutschen Reiches, die auch er(i.e. Spielhagen, referring to himself in the third person) mit Freuden begrüßt, war Vielen eine Abschlagszahlung gewesen, für die sie willig einen beträchtlichen Posten von der liberalen Rechnung, die sie einstmals der Regierung präsentiert hatten, streichen zu dürfen glaubten. (59) Da er von diesem Abstrich nichts wissen wollte, vielmehr der

"Meinung war, es habe das Volk, das mit Strömen seines Blutes den Einheitsbau gekittet, jetzt doppelt und dreifach das Recht, die Einrichtung im Innern nach seinen Wünschen und Bedürfnissen zu treffen, und er diese Überzeugung, wie er es gewohnt, mit Freimut nachdrücklich aussprach, gelangte er in den Ruf eines Mannes, der, wie er nichts vergessen, so auch nichts gelernt habe." (60)

Radical and republican opinion had no choice, however - so Spielhagen felt - but to accept the structure of the Germany Bismarck had created, albeit reluctantly, as the basis for evolution:

"Was 1866 begonnen, vollendete 70-71; Deutschland als kompakte Weltmacht war geschaffen. Gar nicht so, wie die Ideologen es gewünscht und geträumt. Was blieb ihnen übrig, als sich in die veränderten Verhältnisse wenigstens äußerlich zu schicken. Im Herzen Groll und Mißmut bewahrend. Nur ganz Geschmeidige unter ihnen brachten es fertig, mit den leitenden Männern der neuen Zeit eine intime Fühlung zu gewinnen." (61)

Beneath the superficial geographical and political unity that Bismarck had so dramatically given Germany, Spielhagen saw deep ideological divisions being created: he saw a gulf set between the older and the younger generation in German society, between the generation that had matured in the struggle for liberal ideas and the generation that appeared to have no political beliefs other than admiration for Bismarck and his highly successful 'Realpolitik':

"Der Krieg von 1870 mußte kommen, die Mainlinie wenigstens aus der politischen Geographie Deutschlands zu entfernen. Aber sehr viel fehlte daran, daß auch die Herzen und die Seelen sich gefunden hätten. Denn hier bildete sich nicht etwa ein Strom die Grenze; zwischen ihnen klappte ein viel tieferer Riß; und der keineswegs zu lokalisieren, sondern hic et ubique war. Da gab es einen älteren Stamm von Leuten, die der große Napoleon als Ideologen bezeichnet haben würde; einen anderen jüngeren, der sich lieber von praktischen Gesichtspunkten leiten ließ, und als dessen representative man - obgleich er dem Lebensalter nach zu der ersten Kategorie gehörte - man Bismarck nehmen darf. Jene waren durch die Schule Kants und Hegels gegangen; verehrten in Goethe und Schiller die niemals zu übertreffenden Dioskuren; waren auf Mozart und Beethoven eingeschworen; politisch in ihrer Gesinnung Republikaner und nicht wenige von ihnen hatten 1848 ihre Doktrin praktisch betätigt; immer bereit, für jede Emanzipation einzutreten - die der Juden nicht in letzter Linie. ... Desto leichter fanden sich die Jüngeren in die so gründlich veränderten Verhältnisse, in welche die noch Jüngeren ja erst hineingeboren wurden, um in ihnen aufzuwachsen. Von Ideologie war bei ihnen wenig mehr zu spüren. Die Welt war ein Auster, die es zu öffnen galt. Erfolg wurde Trumpf." (62)

Spielhagen followed the demise of liberalism, both as a political force and as a philosophy, in the Bismarck era with great concern. Bismarck's break with the liberals in 1879 and the subsequent split in the National Liberal Party finally destroyed the hopes of many liberals of achieving liberal institutions in Germany. In the 1880's Spielhagen had serious doubts about the opposition of the radical liberals to Bismarck's welfare legislation and deplored liberal indifference to the so-called 'social question', that is the containment of the emerging working class within bourgeois capitalist society. In the 1870's Spielhagen had been generally unsympathetic to the socialist parties, since socialism had declared itself to be a revolutionary movement and Spielhagen was opposed to revolution. The dramatic rise during the 1870's and 80's of the socialist party, the Social Democratic Party as the political organisation of the working class⁶³ - due amongst other things to the failure of the liberals to represent the interests of the lower orders⁶⁴ - reflected the rapid creation of an urban and industrial proletariat in Germany, as industrialisation proceeded apace in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Spielhagen followed these developments closely and was able to observe for himself the conditions of the working class in Berlin. He had always been aware that social conditions could imprison human beings, depriving them of basic freedoms; now, in the 1880's, recognising the plight of the vast mass of working class people, Spielhagen became more sympathetic to the demands of the Social Democratic Party,⁶⁵ while still objecting to the revolutionary doctrines of the party. He hoped that the upper class in German society could be persuaded to reform society from above.⁶⁶

The radical liberal party ('Freisinn') with which Spielhagen had been most closely associated for most of his political life remained strictly in favour of laissez faire economic and social policies and opposed Bismarck's social legislation as unwarranted state intervention. Spielhagen was appalled by what

he interpreted as a callous lack of concern for the welfare of the working class:

"Aber mit dem leichten, fröhlichen Manchestertum ist es vorbei, unwiederbringlich vorbei. Es war vielleicht Bismarcks größte Tat, daß er das erkannte." (67)

Spielhagen supported Bismarck's social legislation because it reflected his hope that the upper class would reform society from above and make revolution less likely:

"...denn trügen nicht alle Zeichen, so nähern wir uns immer mehr einer Zeit - und stehen vielleicht schon mit einem Fuße in ihr - welche ihre Ziele nur erreichen kann dadurch, daß sie das Individuelle dem Generellen opfert, oder es doch nur so weit gelten läßt, als es sich noch tauglich erweist, dem letzteren zu dienen." (68)

His criticism of the radical liberals in this matter isolated him from many of his close political friends.

In the course of the 1890's Spielhagen's sympathies with the political as well as the social demands of the Social Democratic Party grew, although he still found it difficult to accept the revolutionary doctrine which was at this time still a prominent feature of socialism in Germany:

"So nennen Sie mich meinetwegen einen Sozialisten. Ich werde nicht widersprechen. Ich bin es, je mehr ich über die Menschheit und die Zukunft meines Volkes sinne, immer bewußter und deutlicher geworden - wenn ich mich auch zu der Partei, die diesen Namen trägt, wohl nicht bekennen darf, weil sie mit der ökonomischen Reform, die notwendig und unvermeidlich ist, allerhand leere und utopische Schrullen verquickt, die nur verwirren." (69)

By the end of the decade Spielhagen seems to have overcome his earlier reservations, he gave the following extremely positive account of the political demands of the socialists:

"Mögen, sagen sie (i.e. the socialists), der Wunderglaube, den ihr Religion nennt; eure monarchisch-konstitutionelle Regierung(70); eure kapitalistische Wirtschaft früher immerhin, weil sie den Verhältnissen entsprachen, zu Recht bestanden haben - heute sind sie schreiendes Unrecht. Eure Religion zwingt uns zum Austritt aus der Kirche, oder macht uns zu Heuchlern; euer Königtum von Gottes Gnaden mit seiner feudalen Gefolgschaft(71) und seiner Beamtenhierarchie ist ein trauriger Anarchismus in den Augen eines mündigen Volkes, das sich selbst zu regieren gelernt hat; eure Wirtschaftstheorie und Praxis liefert Millionen, die denselben Anspruch wie ihr, auf ein menschenwürdiges Dasein haben, rettungslos dem Proletariat und seinen fürchterlichen

"Folgen aus. So denn, da eure Institutionen offenbar den aktuellen Verhältnissen nicht mehr gewachsen sind, ja, ihnen Hohn sprechen, müssen sie fallen und dem sozialdemokratischen Gemeinwesen Platz machen, als der den jetzigen Kulturzuständen der Menschheit einzig und allein homogenen Form." (72)

Spielhagen believed that the Social Democratic Party was developing into a party of radical social reform by parliamentary, not revolutionary, means, to such a party he gave his whole-hearted support.⁷³ He hoped that liberals and socialists would combine to make a concerted effort to implement parliamentary government and state socialism.⁷⁴ This was a view that was increasingly subscribed to in left-wing liberal circles: Theodor Barth, the editor of the liberal 'Die Nation', for example, advocated such an alliance, as did the historian Theodor Mommsen.⁷⁵ Spielhagen summed up his political development in the following way:

"Alles in allem war sein politisch-religiöses Programm das des linkesten Flügels der Radikalen der Paulskirche von 1848, modifiziert durch die Erfahrungen eines halben Jahrhunderts, die ihn aber nicht weiter nach rechts, sondern nach links gedrängt hatten, so weit, daß er mit den Sozialdemokraten die bestehende staatliche und wirtschaftliche Ordnung ohne die einschneidendsten Veränderungen auf die Dauer für unhaltbar ansah." (76)

Spielhagen turned to the socialist party out of a deep sense of disillusion with the culture and moral values of the middle class in Bismarckian Germany; he viewed the situation in Germany at the turn of the century with deep pessimism, a pessimism that was, however, paradoxically balanced by a faith in ultimate progress towards a juster social order:

"Es mag ja sein - daß wir erst gründliche Materialisten werden, gesteigertes Streber- und Junkertum, den Imperialismus und seinen greulichen Begleiter: den Byzantismus in den Kauf nehmen mußten, bevor sich der Deutsche auf sein Bestes, auf das, was ihm den Vorrang unter allen Nationen garantiert: seinen hochherzigen, weltbürgerlichen Idealismus wieder besinnen und aus dem Traumland von früher in sonnenhelle Wirklichkeit hinüberretten konnte." (77)

He never lost faith in the ultimate realisation of his political and social ideals, as the heroine of his last novel puts it:

"So ward ich zum zweitenmal Sozialdemokratin und bin es geblieben; keine Utopistin, aber lebend und, ich denke, sterbend in der Überzeugung, daß eine Zeit kommt und wohl schon angebrochen ist, in der eine rein menschliche, von

"keiner Offenbarung und keinem Dogma beschränkte Wissenschaft mit den Überresten mittelalterlicher Pfäfferei und feudaler Herrlichkeit, wie pomphaft sie sich auch noch heute spreizen und wieviel geistesdumpfe Hörige vor ihnen knieen, aufräumen und das einzig menschenwürdige Ideal: alles durch das Volk und alles für das Volk zur Wirklichkeit machen wird, soweit die Unvollkommenheit es zuläßt, die nun ~~einmal~~ einmal allem Menschlichen ewig anhaftet."(78)

Spielhagen died on 25th February 1911.

B. Spielhagen's view of the role of literature

B. Spielhagen's view of literature: the scope of the novel:

It was Spielhagen's study of Greek literature and civilisation while he was at Bonn ¹ that laid the foundations for his concept of the nature and function of epic literature.² The modern novel, he felt, should be modelled on the Greek epic with appropriate modifications

"...die poetische Wiedergabe..., die ich in keinem anderen Lichte sah, als in dem für unsere modernen Zwecke modifizierten der klassischen Dichtung." (3)

if it were to claim to be a work of art, since it was, as Spielhagen believed, in the Greek epic that the unchanging nature of the epic had most perfectly manifested itself, a conclusion that he had reached under the influence of his study of Wilhelm von Humboldt's aesthetic writings:

"Hier fand ich das von einem feinsten Geiste in seiner höchsten Reinheit erfaßte Schema der griechischen Poesie angewandt auf ein modernes Poem, das heißt also: an einem bestimmten Fall die Möglichkeit dessen nachgewiesen, was ich als Postulat in Zukunft für mich selbst erstrebte: als ein Bürger unserer Zeit dichten zu können, ohne der Sonne Homers den Rücken zu kehren. Nachdem ich einmal diesen Grundgedanken des genialen Werkes mir zu eigen gemacht, wurde mir das andere...spielend leicht." (4)

It was in particular the concept of totality that Spielhagen took to be the distinguishing feature of the epic, and thus of the novel:

"Die Erkenntnis, daß das zu Erstrebende und womöglich zu Erringende ein Gewaltiges sei, da ich nicht mehr und nicht weniger darunter verstand als das ganze moderne Leben, welches ich erfaßt und begriffen haben müsse, bevor ich an die poetische Wiedergabe denken dürfe..." (5)

The novel should, thus, be concerned to present to the reader 'die Menschheit in ihrer Totalität'⁶ and give a total, panoramic picture of contemporary society:

"Der Roman hat es weniger auf eine möglichst interessante Handlung abzusehen, als auf eine möglichst vollkommene Übersicht der Breite und Weite des Menschenlebens." (7)

The novel was the only literary form capable of encompassing all aspects of contemporary life in one vast panorama:

"Denn ich sah in der Aufgabe des Dramas, wie Shakespeare sie definiert ('dem Jahrhundert und Körper der Zeit den Abdruck seiner Gestalt zu zeigen') auch die des Romans, als eines

"Gefäßes, groß und solide genug, sämtliche Strömungen des
aktuellen Lebens in sich aufzunehmen." (8)

While Spielhagen would not claim to be original in his understanding of the role of the novel (despite his references to Humboldt's aesthetic ideas) - the idea of the panoramic novel was fairly common currency in the 1840's and 50's in Germany⁹ - he made the most valiant attempts at carrying out what was a daunting task for any novelist: to depict

"...die Menschheit...als ganzes, in Zusammenhang mit, in der Abhängigkeit von der Natur, in der Bedingtheit von den Kultur- und sonstigen Verhältnissen, die in dem betreffenden Volke in der bestimmten Epoche die herrschenden waren." (10)

b. The place of politics in the novel

Spielhagen had already decided before he moved to Hanover that the modern novel should present a total picture of contemporary society, but, as his first full-length novel indicated, he was still far from clear as to the implications of such an understanding of the scope of the novel. It was his stay at Hanover with its close contact and involvement in liberal politics that convinced him of the importance of including political and social issues in the novel. His first novel 'Problematische Naturen', written while he was still at Leipzig, certainly gave a broad picture of provincial German society in the decade prior to the 1848 revolution, but it was still very much a tale of adventure and intrigue with little treatment of political and social developments in the period. His second novel 'Die von Hohenstein', conceived in Hanover and finished in Berlin, was by contrast first and foremost a political 'Zeitroman', dealing with the 1848 Revolution in Frankfurt.¹¹ Spielhagen wanted passionately to influence the course of events in society¹² in line with his own republican ideals and he regarded the novel as the best means of communicating with the public.¹³ The treatment of political and social issues was for Spielhagen an integral part of the brief of the modern progressive writer:

"Von der 'Grauen Hexe Politik' zu sprechen ist jetzt landläufig...als ob es nicht höchste Pflicht und freudigster Stolz des vollen Menschen wäre, für die Gesamtheit, der ihm das Schicksal zugeteilt hat, nach besten Kräften zu sinnen und zu schaffen." (14)

Spielhagen rejected F.T.Vischer's view that the novel should above all deal with the fate of an individual, as in the traditional 'Bildungsroman'; Spielhagen felt that the fate of nations was no less important and was, therefore, an appropriate theme for the modern novel:

"Ich halte(im Gegensatz zu Vischer) dafür, daß das größte Schauspiel, nämlich eine Darstellung - nicht bloß des Wahnsinns, das in den Widersprüchen der Subjektivität liegt, sondern des Wahnsinns des öffentlichen Lebens, der Geschichte, des Staates allerdings und zwar recht eigentlich auch in den Roman gehört." (15)

In Spielhagen's view the modern writer had a moral responsibility

to include social and political issues in the novel, since this was the particular contribution the writer made to the intellectual education of the nation, in Spielhagen's view an integral part of the writer's duty to society:

"Nein, wie wir nun einmal sind, wir können nicht mehr in Zauberpalästen auf stillen Geisterinseln mit Wesen wohnen, deren verklärte oder halbverklärte Leiber keine staatlich-politische Kleider und Falten umgeben. ..." (16)

Spielhagen criticised Goethe for not allowing his heroes to enter

"...die Sphäre des handelnden politischen Lebens, des politischen Lebens, welches das unveräußerliches Gebiet der Tragödie großen Stils von den Persern des Äschylus bis auf Schillers Wallenstein gewesen ist und in alle Ewigkeit bleiben wird." (17)

The expression and discussion of political issues at length in the novel - especially views as radical as those expressed in Spielhagen's novels - was regarded by many contemporaries as an offence against objectivity as well as being highly unpoetic. Spielhagen was frequently accused of being partial; Behr dubs him a 'Parteidichter'¹⁸ while Meyer dismisses his novels as 'verhaltene Parlamentsreden'.¹⁹ Spielhagen defended the inclusion of political issues in the novel:

"Es ist nicht wahr, daß der Roman vor der Politik Halt machen muß, weil es nicht möglich sei, in der politischen Sphäre die dichterische Objektivität zu bewahren. Die kann man auch in anderen Sphären ebenso gut verlieren, vorausgesetzt, daß man überhaupt welche zu verlieren hat." (20)

He was well aware that objectivity of content (as opposed to objectivity of form upon which he always insisted)²¹ was in practice limited by a large number of factors, such as the experience of the writer, his intellectual development, his political and philosophical views,²² but he felt that the writer should strive to be objective, describe reality as he honestly sees it.²³ He gave the following piece of advice to critics when examining the work of an author and distinguished clearly between the two types of objectivity, of form and content:

"Das Geschäft (des Kritikers) (hat) zu untersuchen und festzustellen, erstens: wie weit der Horizont des Menschentreibens ist, welches der Blick des Dichters umfaßt; zweitens: ob er diesen Kreis bis zu seiner Peripherie nach allen Richtungen mit einer reichen wohlgegliederten Fabel

"gleichsam bedeckt hat; drittens: ob er dies mit den legitimen epischen Mitteln zustande gebracht hat, d.h. dadurch, daß er uns nur handelnde Menschen vorführt in ihrer Bedingtheit durch ihre gesellschaftliche und physische Umgebung... viertens und letztens: wie weit mit dieser rein technischen und im engeren Sinne poetischen Objektivität der nach allseitiger Billigkeit strebenden Darstellung Hand in Hand geht; oder anders ausgedrückt, ob der Dichter im schlimmen und gemeinen Sinne tendenziös ist, oder nur soweit jeder moderne Epiker ist, weil er nichts anderes als seine subjektive Auffassung zur Darstellung bringen kann." (24)

Spielhagen tended to regard it, therefore, not only as inevitable that a writer would have a certain bias, but as desirable that the writer should have a point of view: he compared 'tendenziös im schlimmen Sinne'²⁵ with 'tendenziös im guten Sinne':

"Im guten Sinne muß er(i.e. the writer) es nach meiner Meinung nämlich immer sein, d.h. er muß immer, weil er gar nicht anders kann, auf einem bestimmten Standpunkt stehen. Und wohl ihm, und wohl seinen Lesern, je fester er auf diesem Standpunkt steht, und freilich auch, je höher dieser Standpunkt ist. Aber das Letztere - die Höhe des Standpunktes - sollte ihm immer erst in zweiter Linie kümmern, deshalb, weil die Fundamentalbedingungen im Leben und in der Kunst ist, überhaupt einen Standpunkt einnehmen, sich auf einen Standpunkt festhalten zu können. Wer die Welt kennt, weiß, wie selten diese Kraft gefunden wird, die man von jedem zu fordern glaubt." (26)

The novel represents the individual writer's attempt to come to terms with the problems and issues with which he is trying to deal,²⁷ and for Spielhagen with his concern for totality these issues were predominantly social and political.

As Spielhagen observed the middle class turn its back on the humanitarian and liberal culture of the early nineteenth century, his conviction that the writer had a moral obligation to raise his voice in defence of ideal values became all the firmer. He felt that the writer was the guardian of such values and should protest at the denigration of liberal, democratic and humane values.²⁸ Spielhagen's novels reflect, therefore, both his own views on specific problems, albeit obliquely²⁹ as well as his presentation of typical individuals and opinions of the time.³⁰ Sometimes his own indecision is reflected by a sympathetic drawing of two opposite points of view.³¹

C. Bismarck in the novels of Spielhagen

C. Bismarck in the novels of Spielhagen

Bismarck does not appear as a character in any of Spielhagen's novels,¹ but Spielhagen was not primarily interested in the personality and character of Bismarck as in his influence on the political and intellectual development in Germany. The demise of liberal values and the emergence of new, less idealistic attitudes in the post-1871 era were trends which Spielhagen attributed directly to Bismarck's example; for Spielhagen's purpose - and it was with such trends that he was mainly concerned - discussion of Bismarck was more relevant than the actual appearance of the man in any novel.² Bismarck and his policies and influence are discussed by characters, sometimes at great length; these discussions serve two purposes: they give Spielhagen the opportunity to approach the problem of Bismarck from a number of directions and arrange a confrontation of points of view, and thus to reflect contemporary discussion of Bismarck. The spectrum of views given by Spielhagen in his 'account' of contemporary discussion is much broader than most middle class liberals of the time would have thought necessary, given Spielhagen's own political radicalism, he saw fit to include - and give greater prominence to - radical liberal and socialist criticism of Bismarck. Certain characters reflect Spielhagen's own views and contribution to the Bismarck debate, usually such characters are radical or progressive liberals who maintained a systematic opposition to Bismarck throughout his career as Chancellor. Spielhagen was thus able, quite legitimately, to express his own views while apparently giving an account of a typical radical liberal.

I : The novels of the 1870's.

a. In Reih' und Glied. (1866)³

The action of the novel centres on the attempt by the hero Leo Gutmann to set up state-financed factories by seeking support for such a scheme from the Prince Regent; Gutmann's plan founders when hostile conservatives intrigue against him and the Prince withdraws his support. He is finally killed in a duel with a Junker Henri von Tuchheim. Most of the important figures in the novel are modelled on contemporary persons:⁴ Leo Gutmann is modelled on the working-class leader Ferdinand Lassalle,⁵ while Henri von Tuchheim is a thinly disguised portrait of Bismarck. The plot was inspired by Lassalle's approaches to Bismarck in 1863: he was prepared to enter into an alliance with Bismarck to support the political status quo if Bismarck would in return agree to the setting-up of state factories (or national workshops, as they were known in France) and the granting of universal male suffrage.⁶ It was to be an alliance of the proletariat and the monarchy against the liberal and capitalist middle class which, in the constitutional struggle of the early 1860's in Prussia, seemed about to force through the introduction of parliamentary government, a step that would have meant the control of the state by the liberal bourgeoisie.⁷ Nothing, however, came of the plan.

Tuchheim alias Bismarck plays no major role in the action of the novel except to shoot Gutmann alias Lassalle at the end. Tuchheim appears early on in the novel as adviser to the Prince Regent (alias William I), but he is not recognisable as Bismarck, only towards the conclusion of the novel does he emerge more clearly as Bismarck. It is possible that, since the novel was completed towards the end of 1866, the events of the latter half of that momentous year in German history - with the defeat of Austria, the ending of the bitter constitutional struggle in Prussia and the setting-up of a north German state dominated by a much enlarged Prussia - opened Spielhagen's eyes to the importance of Bismarck for the future, both in Germany and in Europe, and that he therefore decided to develop the figure of

Tuchheim into a Bismarck-like figure in the remaining sections of the novel. The picture Spielhagen paints of Bismarck in the character of Tuchheim is necessarily coloured by his interpretation of Bismarck's role in the events already referred to: two main features stand out: Bismarck is seen, and portrayed, as a wily statesman with far-reaching plans for the future of Prussia and Germany, he is also seen as a potentially very dangerous man for whom ends supremely justify ruthless means.

Tuchheim, like Bismarck a Junker, is adviser to the Prince Regent; he has ambitions for a powerful Prussia and a united Germany:

"Königliche Hoheit kennen ja mein Programm von dem, was geschehen muß, wenn unserem Staate die politische Machtstellung werden soll, die ihm gebührt." (8)

When the Prince Regent, ruling on behalf of his sick father, asks Tuchheim for his advice regarding the political situation, Tuchheim recommends war:

"Ein zum Kampf gerüstetes, in den Kampf ziehendes Heer, das heißt: Eure königliche Hoheit an der Spitze dieses Heeres; Eure königliche Hoheit einmal an der Spitze eines kampflustigen und - woran ich nicht zweifle - siegreich zurückkehrenden Heeres, das heißt: Abdankung des Königs und königliche Hoheit als Protektor des Reiches." (9)

Tuchheim recommends a dangerous course of action fraught with risks that could end in disaster, but his purpose is clear: to achieve by military means what cannot be achieved by diplomatic means and to exploit success on the battle-field to create a united Empire. The Prince has reservations, he is reluctant to take military action against his 'fürstlichen Brüder' and set himself up over them as 'Protektor des Reichs'.¹⁰ Tuchheim has nothing but contempt for such scruples

"Über Henris Gesicht flog ein Lächeln bitterster Verachtung." (11)

He despises the Prince's lack of political ambition:

"Und einen solchen Mann mußte man seinen gnädigsten Herrn nennen, mußte auf ihn alle Hoffnungen einer großen staatsmännischen Zukunft setzen!" (12)

Tuchheim is portrayed as a statesman with dangerously ambitious plans for the future, as a man bound by no moral code or respect for traditional dynastic allegiances when they become obstacles

to his plans for a united Germany, a man who is prepared to go to achieve his ends, a man ruthless in his exploitation of others. Tuchheim's cynical contempt for the Prince is overdrawn in the novel, but the trait - one of Bismarck's most objectionable - remains accurately observed.

While preparing for the duel with Tuchheim, Gutmann says of his opponent in conversation with his second Marquis de Sade(sic):

"...ich behaupte, dieser Mann wird binnen weniger Jahre der Lenker unserer Geschicke sein." (13)

making it clear to the reader that this Tuchheim is really Bismarck. The relationship between William I of Prussia and Bismarck, that is to say between the Prince Regent and Tuchheim, is neatly sketched in against the background of events from the late 1850's when William, as Prince Regent, introduced certain liberal reforms(the 'Neue Ära' 1858), to the appointment of Bismarck as Prime Minister:

"Der Prinz wird seine paar liberalen Trümpfe bald genug ausgespielt haben, und dann muß er immer einem Manne, wie Henri, der ihm durch seine Festigkeit imponiert und der vor keinem Mittel zurückschrickt, in die Hände fallen." (14)

The character sketch is rounded off by Gutmann's predictions for the future:

"Henri von Tuchheim ist kein verächtlicher Gegner. Ich schieße in ihm einen Mann tot, der aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach, würde er noch am Leben bleiben, meinem Vaterlande, ja vielleicht Europa noch viel Blut und Tränen kosten wird." (15)

The irony of the statement is that Gutmann is killed (not Tuchheim; Spielhagen confronts the reader with a dramatic prediction which he hopes will make the reader aware of the cost in terms of human lives of Bismarck's policies up till 1866.

The events of 1866 had made it clear to Spielhagen that Bismarck was a statesman who was going to dominate the German political scene in the future. He felt the need to present a picture of Bismarck that would oblige the reader to reconsider his attitude to Bismarck, a need that had become evident as the majority of liberals in parliament had been prepared to discontinue their opposition to Bismarck and co-operate with him, a decision

that split the Progressive Party. The decision to co-operate was in Spielhagen's eyes a grave mistake, it would be taken as a sign of weakness and pro-Bismarck liberals in the novel are criticised accordingly. Gutmann's views on Tuchheim alias Bismarck express Spielhagen's own reservations about Bismarck and the threat he posed to liberalism.¹⁶

It is in this light and against this background that we must see the introduction of the figure of Bismarck into the novel: by presenting what amounts to a dramatic character study of Bismarck the statesman Spielhagen hoped to alert his readers to the dangers of supporting such an unprincipled and ruthless man. Bismarck is portrayed as a man who has nothing but contempt for ideals, moral values, traditional loyalties or even the monarchy, a man who is consumed by ambition, who would go to war to create a united Germany and all this in order to gain supreme power for himself. Spielhagen also hoped to remind the reader in the prevailing atmosphere of nationalist enthusiasm (1866) of the cost in human terms of what Bismarck had so far achieved.

b. Allzeit Voran (1872)

This novel was written in the year following the establishment of the German Empire and is an expression of Spielhagen's reservations as to both the means whereby the unification of the German states was achieved and the consequences of this for Germany's further political development. In short, the novel is a discussion of the Bismarckian solution to the problem of German unity.

The action of the novel takes place in a small German state in the weeks immediately preceding the outbreak of war between France and Germany and extends into the war itself, including a remarkably vivid and realistic description of wounded soldiers in the field after the battle of Gravelotte.¹⁷ The war is seen as caused by France with the course of events leading up to the outbreak of war faithfully reproduced and integrated into the novel.¹⁸ The further development of Germany - and most contemporaries expected great changes to flow from the unification of Germany - after the war is the subject of extensive debate and speculation.

Curiously enough Bismarck's role in the events of 1870 is not brought out at all in the novel. Spielhagen assumed that Bismarck's influence on the course of events in the future would be minor, transcended and overshadowed by the much more significant confrontation between the aristocracy and the middle class which he believed was to be the major issue in the years after the war. The aristocracy is portrayed as unwilling to accept the middle class as equals, concerned to maintain their considerable political and social privileges; this attitude is contrasted with that of the liberal middle class which is depicted as concerned with the freedom and welfare of the nation as a whole. This contrast is summed up in the juxtaposition of 'bürgerliches Nationalbewußtsein' and 'adeliger Kastengeist'. Hedwig, the young liberal, criticises the Junker Graf:

"Hätten Sie eine Ahnung davon, daß aus diesem Kriege

"Deutschland frei und glücklich hervorgehen könnte, im Sinne jener von Ihnen so tief verachteten Schwärmer und Ideologen - Sie würden lieber Ihren Degen zerbrechen als ihn in solcher Sache ziehen. Das ist Ihr Patriotismus und Ihr Heldenmut." (19)

Graf Steinburg who represents the more progressive type of Prussian Junker realised - like Bismarck - that concessions would have to be made to their liberal opponents if they were to retain their influence; he explains his strategy to Hedwig - with unusual frankness:

"Das heißt für uns, daß wir, wenn wir uns erhalten wollen... uns assoziieren müssen, ebenso wie alle Welt sich heutzutage assoziiert, und daß wir uns eine Firma wählen, unter der wir gemeinschaftlich für unsere Interessen wirken und streben können, weil die Interessen dieser Firma wesentlich auch die unseren sind: ich meine ein starkes Königtum von Gottes Gnaden." (20)

Even the more progressive aristocrats, therefore, desire to maintain a strong monarchy which will protect their interests and privileged position in society, whatever other concessions they may be prepared to make, as, for instance, support for a united Germany. Spielhagen's portrait of Graf Steinburg is an exposition of Bismarck's strategy whose goal - whatever else he may concede²¹ was a strong monarchy to protect aristocratic privileges in the army and the state from encroachment by liberals in the name of parliamentary government.

Hedwig attacks Graf Steinburg for his contempt of the middle class and working class Germans,²² reminding him that the military honours of which he is so proud were gained in battles fought by ordinary soldiers. The Count counters this criticism by pointing out that the ambition of every aristocrat is to serve the state, to which Hedwig replies:

"Dem Staat, den Sie kennen; dem Staat, in welchem Sie nichts weiter als eine ungeheure Domäne zum Nutzen und Frommen Ihrer Familie sehen." (23)

Spielhagen feared that future liberal evolution in Germany would be thwarted by attempts by the Prussian aristocracy to retain their power; he saw Bismarck as an outstanding member of this class and exponent - in the figure of Graf Steinburg - of such a policy. Criticism of the Junker class by Hedwig serves to

draw the readers' attention to the consolidation of political power achieved by the Junker as a class under the aegis of Bismarck's regime after 1871. Strong words of criticism of the Prussian aristocracy are voiced by a member of a south German noble family, reflecting Spielhagen's own attitude:

"Den Krieg mehr oder weniger um des Krieges willen wollen, ist absolut nicht zu rechtfertigen, denn es heißt wissentlich oder unwissentlich, die Elemente nähren, aus denen der Krieg erwächst. Und auf diesem Standpunkt steht, so viel ich sehen kann, mit seltenen Ausnahmen, der ganze preußische Militäradel und alles, was mit demselben zusammenhängt. Diese Tendenz gibt ihm nun in einer Zeit, die mit kriegerischen Elementen so gesättigt ist, wie leider die unsere, ein ungemeines Übergewicht über alle anderen Stände." (24)

The Prussian officer class is attacked for its lack of independence, its ideal of unquestioning loyal service:

"Die Trolows sind so recht der eigentliche Typus des jungen Militäradels, der nur in der Gefolgschaft und an den Höfen so rühriger kriegerischer Fürsten, wie es die Hohenzollern sind, gedeiht und alle etwaigen Wandlungen, die in dem Hause des Lehensherrn vorgehen, genau mitmacht, wie der Schatten die Bewegungen seines Körpers." (25)

Such criticism of the Junker as the ruling class in Prussia is coupled with a characterisation of the Prussian state as

"...der stärkste Hort, die eigentliche Zwingburg des Absolutismus auf Erden...die preußische Monarchie, der preußische Militärstaat." (26)

While the more liberal south German nobility certainly had reservations about the dominant role of the Prussian aristocracy in Bismarck's Reich it is unlikely that they would have expressed their views quite so radically. Spielhagen's concern was to warn his readers against a system of centralised administration under which the Prussian civil service - dominated by the aristocracy - would spread to the rest of Germany, bringing with it its military traditions.

There is criticism here of Bismarck, too: it is Bismarck's particular dynastic solution to the problem of German unity that enabled Prussia to extend its hegemony over Germany and it is Bismarck as Chancellor who will ensure that progress towards liberal parliamentary government is blocked. Bismarck stood for that brand of monarchical conservatism that was prepared to make

concessions to the demands of an age of liberalism and nationalism in order to retain effective control in their own hands. Graf Steinburg advocates the same approach and is, in this sense, a Bismarck figure in the novel.

Spielhagen has no illusions about the qualities of the middle class:

"Wenn ich in dem Grafen den Typ des ehrgeizigen, wie Stahl biegsamen und zugleich spröden preußischen Junkertums zu erkennen glaubte, so sah ich in Horst das Bild des deutschen Bürgertums mit seiner Überfülle von Geist und Wissen, von Talenten aller Art, von Fleiß, Ehrbarkeit - köstliche Eigenschaften, denen doch der rechte Lohn nicht wird und werden kann, da der angeborene und annerzogene Sinn des opferfrohen Duldens, des resignierten Tragens, des zuwartenden Gewährenlassens wohl den Acker bestellen und die Saat sähen, aber nicht die Ernte mit kräftiger Sichel schneiden und in die eigenen Scheuern bringen kann; ein Bild, das anzieht und rührt, aber auch ebenso oft abstößt und unseren Zorn erregt." (27)

The liberals appear to lack the decisive political will, as evidenced in their failure to impose a liberal development in Germany. Although Gutmann fails in his lone attempt to bring about social change - in the novel 'In Reih' und Glied' - Spielhagen did try to show that he had very little choice if he was to act at all in his genuine concern to alleviate the lot of the working class. He stood isolated from the mass of liberals who showed little concern. In the years following the establishment of the North German Confederation (1866) Spielhagen had criticised the liberals for their failure to influence the course of events in spite of the fact that they were the largest party in the Reichstag. His criticism of the typical middle class German in this novel testify to his disappointment and to his fears for the future, and are in this sense a warning to the liberal reader not to underestimate the determination of the Prussian aristocracy to maintain its position as the ruling class. Herr Körnicke, a liberal, says:

"Preußen oder Sachsen oder Österreicher, das ist für mich ganz gleich; in ein paar Jahren sind wir doch alle Republikaner." (28)

The reader, living in the period after 1871 would be keenly aware of the fallacy of such a hope.

Spielhagen invites the reader to contrast the liberal hopes and attitudes prior to the founding of the German Empire - as depicted in the novel - with the reality; precisely because the reader is familiar with the way in which Germany developed after 1871, speculation in the novel about the years ahead becomes significant. An example of this is the discussion between Hermann, a liberal and Rosel, a French agent: Rosel speculates:

"Nun aber ist doch in dem Kampf zwischen Frankreich und Preußen nur zweierlei möglich: entweder Preußen siegt oder Frankreich. Im ersten Falle ist...Frankreich nach der ersten verlorenen Schlacht eine Republik... Ihr werdet haben, was wir soeben los wurden, die militärische Diktatur und den Imperialismus." (29)

Whereas victory for Prussia would mean a consolidation of the Prussian military state, defeat would bring liberation from militarism and absolutism:³⁰

"Es ist unmöglich..., wenn die deutschen Republikaner nicht wissen sollten...was alle Republikaner in allen Ländern der Erde wissen: daß der stärkste Hort, die eigentliche Zwingburg des Absolutismus auf Erden die preußische Monarchie, der preußische Militärstaat ist. Fällt diese Burg in Trümmer, so ist die Republik, die Weltrepublik nur eine Frage der nächsten Zeit. Bleibt sie stehen, wird sie sogar befestigt, so ist die Verwirklichung unserer Ideale vielleicht auf Jahrhunderte hinausgeschoben." (31)

Rosel's prediction that a German victory over France in the war that had just broken out, would lead to military dictatorship and imperialism in the new Germany would probably been dismissed by most contemporary readers as nonsense; yet we can see from hindsight that it was not so inaccurate a 'prediction'. Rosel expresses Spielhagen's fears for the future political development of Germany and it was part of his political strategy as a radical liberal writer to alert the reader to the dangers he perceived. He hoped that the questioning of widely accepted assumptions - in this case, the assumption that the unification of Germany à la Bismarck was largely unproblematical - would provoke the reader into a re-examination of the issues under discussion and focus the reader's attention on the basically conservative structure of the new Reich. The reader might, on reflection, still regard Rosel's remarks as totally unjustified, but there was a chance that he would recognise the truth of his

basic contention, namely, that victory for Prussia would enhance the prestige of the military and consolidate their grip on the state.

Such thought-provoking speculation - from a radical liberal point of view, Spielhagen's own position - is supplemented at the end of the novel by doubts about the future of Germany expressed by the two principal liberal figures in the novel Hedwig and Hermann. Hermann is a typical south German liberal, hostile to Prussia:

"Unter der Sache aber verstehe ich und verstand ich damals die Autonomie der deutschen Stämme gegenüber der Vergewaltigung, die von Preußen ausging, den Kampf der Freiheit, die ich liebte und für die ich leben wollte, gegen die Herrschaft einer brutalen Gewalt, die ich bis in den Tod haßte und als deren höchsten politischen Ausdruck ich den preußischen Militärstaat ansah." (32)

But, as Hedwig points out to him, liberals have little choice, since Prussia is the only German state able to unify Germany:

"Von der Not hat uns Preußen doch auch einmal erlöst, und kann uns auch fürder nur Preußen erlösen; und deshalb muß jeder, der es ehrlich mit Deutschland meint, jetzt zu Preußen halten, wie sehr es ihm auch sonst gegen den Strich gehen mag." (33)

Hermann asks Hedwig, in turn, whether she has any doubts that Germany will emerge from the present war as 'ein einiges und freies Vaterland'?³⁴

"Wenn ich mit Ja antwortete...sagte ich nicht die ganze Wahrheit, und antworte ich mit Nein, verschweige ich wieder meinen letzten Gedanken. Mein Herz ist eben zwiefach geteilt. Nicht daß ich an dem Siege zweifelte, ich habe nie auch nur einen Augenblick gezweifelt, daß wir siegen würden; wir haben gesiegt, wir werden siegen, Deutschland wird aus diesem Kriege hervorgehen in einer Macht und Herrlichkeit, die unsere kühnsten Hoffnungen überflügelt. Aber...werden wir, was wir so gefunden, zu bewahren verstehen? Wird das gutherzige leichtbewegliche Volk nicht wieder des Sieges besten Teil an die abtreten, die es zum Siege führten, und die den Sieg noch immer für sich ausgebeutet, das heißt, das Volk und schließlich sich selbst um den unermeßlichen Gewinn gebracht haben!" (35)

A thought-provoking question indeed! Hedwig's doubts are brushed aside by Hermann:

"Ich habe ein unendliches Vertrauen zu unseres Volkes eingeborener Kraft, zu seinem gesunden Sinn, seinem geraden Verstande, seinem rastlosen, unerschöpflichen Genie..." (36)

Hermann's optimism, characteristic of the majority of national

liberals at this time, contrasts with the more pessimistic tenor of Hedwig's assessment, representing radical liberal reservations as to the political structure in Germany in the immediate post-1871 era. Spielhagen's fears that liberal development in Bismarckian Germany would be frustrated and that the unification of Germany under Bismarck would lead to a strengthening of the position of the aristocracy in Prussia were more than justified. The aristocracy became the social and political model for large sections of the German middle class, ultimately significant sections of the middle class joined forces with the aristocracy to combat socialism, splitting the National Liberal party and liberalism died as an effective political force in Germany.

The basic confrontation is between the middle class liberals and the aristocrat conservatives in this novel, reflecting what Spielhagen took to be the major question of the future. Spielhagen's criticism of the aristocracy and of the absolutist and militarist traditions of Prussia are at the same time criticisms of Bismarck, the supreme protagonist of monarchical absolutism and the interests of the Prussian aristocracy. Thus, although Bismarck does not figure in the novel, his essential strategy, expounded by Count Steinburg, is exposed as seeking above all to consolidate the political power of the monarchy and the aristocracy at the expense of the liberal middle class. Indeed, under Bismarck, liberalism was to be bullied, battered, cajoled and finally rendered harmless, a development that Spielhagen discusses critically in his next major novel 'Sturmflut'.

c. Sturmflut (1877)

'Sturmflut' was written under the impact of a number of events and developments that took place in Germany between the years 1873 and 1876. In 1873 Germany was plunged into economic crisis when the period of boom known as the 'Gründerjahre',³⁷ which had been induced by the influx of the millions from French reparations, came to a sudden end. The 'Gründerjahre' had also been a period of fairly unrestrained financial speculation and it was Eduard Lasker, a national liberal member of the Reichstag who revealed in a dramatic speech to the Reichstag on 7th February 1873 that certain railway companies had - with the active collusion of state officials - indulged in financial manipulation on a large scale. High-ranking civil servants and members of the Prussian aristocracy were deeply implicated.³⁸ Lasker, a prominent left-wing member of the National Liberal party was a personal friend of Spielhagen. Shocked at the 'Epidemie entfesselter Geldgier' and at the 'moralische Geschäftsverwilderung',³⁹ Spielhagen resolved to write a novel and had originally planned to make Lasker the hero,⁴⁰ but the practical difficulties involved were too great. Lasker's revelations represent the climax of the novel as his speech is discussed at a spectacular social gathering in Berlin at the sumptuous home of Philipp Schmidt, the financial magnate.

The year 1874 saw the bitter parliamentary battle between Bismarck and the Reichstag over the right to control government expenditure on the armed forces, the so-called 'eiserner Etat'. The Reichstag rejected proposals submitted by Bismarck which, if implemented, would have removed military expenditure from the control of parliament for all time. A compromise was finally worked out whereby the military budget was approved for a period of seven years (Septennat).⁴¹ The liberal parties did not, on the whole, exploit to the full their position as majority parties, intimidated as they were by the supreme political skill of Bismarck and his hold over public opinion.⁴² The 1870's also witnessed the 'Kulturkampf', the struggle between the rights of the secular state and political catholicism (ultramontanism); the

liberals supported Bismarck's anti-catholic legislation. In 1872 the Jesuits were declared a proscribed organisation; one of the principal figures of intrigue in the novel is an Italian Jesuit Giraldi.

The years following the economic collapse of 1873 saw a rapid rise in support for socialist parties by working-class voters. In 1875 the two socialist parties united to form the 'Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei'.⁴³ The number of members elected to the Reichstag rose from two in 1871 to twelve in 1877; the party polled nearly half a million votes in the Reichstag elections in 1877.

All these developments are reflected in 'Sturmflut'.

2. Characters in the novel and their attitudes to Bismarck

The characters in the novel are intended to represent individuals typical of the period, expressing views and prejudices which Spielhagen had observed and which he regarded as representative for their class and position in society.⁴⁴ Spielhagen brings a selection of opinions on Bismarck from a cross-section of social groups. The characters are depicted very largely in terms of their attitude to Bismarck, seen by Spielhagen as symptomatic of a character's basic philosophy of life. Bismarck thus becomes a test of, and touch-stone for each character's values and priorities. Generally, approval of Bismarck and his policies indicates priority attached to the creation of a powerful Germany with markedly less interest for the nature of developments inside Germany, while opposition to Bismarck is usually inspired by concern at Bismarck's influence, arising from a more ideological outlook, be it traditional conservative, catholic, liberal-democratic or socialist,⁴⁵ from a conviction that the values enshrined in such ideologies and a political and social order based on them, were more important than the establishment of a united and powerful German state.⁴⁶

Admirers of Bismarck are portrayed as impressed above all by the epic dimensions of his personality, they are overawed by his genius and by his unprecedented success where others had failed.⁴⁷ Opponents of Bismarck are more concerned with his political aims and his methods and with the probable consequences of his policies and rule for Germany. Opposition to Bismarck was frequently denigrated as narrow party politics, not least by Bismarck himself who referred to his opponents as 'Reichsfeinde'.⁴⁸ Most of those opposed to Bismarck are members of the older generation, while Bismarck's admirers are to be found mainly among members of the younger generation, a difference in attitude that Spielhagen regarded as the second great division in German society (the first being that between the aristocracy and the middle class), a division that was fraught with consequences for the political future of Germany.⁴⁹

3. Admirers of Bismarck

Reinhold Schmidt, a young man and nephew of Ernst Schmidt, a republican entrepreneur, is a sailor whose decisive experience has been the dramatic increase in Germany's standing abroad since Bismarck united Germany and made her strong. Reinhold describes the humiliation of belonging to a people that had not achieved the status of nation:

"...einem Volke anzugehören, das keine Nation ist." (50)

Germans were held in contempt abroad, were looked down on and were dependent on others for help and protection. Now that Germany has been united Reinhold can hold his head up high proud to be a citizen of the new German Empire:

"...da durfte ich so fest auftreten wie andere." (51)

Germany is now capable of protecting her own interests abroad, she has both the will and the power to do so. All this is the work of Bismarck. Reinhold describes how he hurried from Southampton to Koblenz to join the army on hearing of the outbreak of war between France and Germany. He never doubted the justice of the cause and speaks with great satisfaction of having done his patriotic duty.⁵²

While his uncle Ernst Schmidt has - as a republican - considerable reservations about Bismarck and his aims, Reinhold has a disarmingly simplistic view of the task ahead:

"Ich meine, die Sache ist so groß und so schwer, daß sie jedes Paares kräftiger Schultern bedarf, damit sie aus der Stelle rücke; und sie ist so gut und so heilig, daß ich den beklagen möchte, der nicht aus voller Überzeugung mittrat und mittun will oder kann." (53)

Reinhold is happy to devote and dedicate himself to the task of building a Germany that will be powerful and respected abroad; to this end he is prepared to support Bismarck uncritically. He has little conception - and Spielhagen emphasises Reinhold's lack of political experience and insight - of the grave political and social divisions in German society and sees no need for institutions that ensure popular control over those who exercise political power. Reinhold's political philosophy is a disturbing combination of naive political idealism and an emotional

commitment to the idea of Germany as a great power. While admitting that he has been struck by the wide-spread discontent he detected on his return to Germany from overseas, Reinhold put this impression down to the fact that he had come into contact with people who were dissatisfied for personal and particular reasons:

"Ich will es nur gestehen: ich habe während der wenigen Tage, die ich jetzt in der Heimat weile, manche Erfahrung gemacht, die meiner Hoffnung zu spotten schien; aber ich habe nicht glauben mögen, daß ich richtig gesehen. Im Gegenteil, ich bin überzeugt, daß mich nur der Zufall wiederholt mit Menschen in Berührung gebracht, die aus diesem oder jenem rein persönlichen Grund mit dem Stand der Dinge unzufrieden, von den augenblicklichen Verhältnissen wenigstens nicht ganz befriedigt sind, wie verschiedene Herren, die ich bei dem Grafen Golm traf." (54)

Reinhold had expected that the unification of Germany would solve all problems: that Germany

"...ein Land sein werde, voll Freude und Frieden und Sonnenschein in allen Herzen und auf allen Gesichtern." (55)

His experience abroad, the establishment of Germany as an internationally respected European power, remains the basis for his admiration of Bismarck:

"Ich bin kein Politiker - ich habe, glaube ich, verzweifelt wenig Anlage dazu und habe jedenfalls keine Zeit gehabt, diese etwaige Anlage auszubilden. Ich kann dir deshalb nicht widersprechen, wenn du mir sagst, daß hierzulande leider nicht alles ist, wie es sein sollte. Aber dann wirst du mir auch zugeben, ...daß die Sache, von der andern Seite - ich meine von drüben, vom Bord eines Schiffes, von einem fremden Hafen jenseits des Ozeans aus gesehen - sich ganz anders und sehr viel besser ausnimmt; und ich meine, du kannst mir nicht verargen, daß ich günstiger über den Mann(i.e. Bismarck) denke und - gerade heraus - einen tiefen Respekt vor ihm empfinde, dem wir doch schließlich den Respekt zu verdanken haben, dessen der deutsche Name sich jetzt über die ganze Welt zu erfreuen hat." (56)

Reinhold's experience as a soldier has obviously left its mark too: he expresses his admiration for Prussian military discipline and argues that progress can only be made if each individual obeys the orders he receives.⁵⁷ Reinhold rejects the republican ideals of his uncle, democracy leads to stagnation('Läßigkeit'), a situation he contrasts with the fast-moving efficiency of the German military machine, an attitude that is oblivious of the political questions as to who issues the orders, in whose name,

in the service of which policies and in whose interests. Society should be organised along military lines, mobilised in the pursuit of national greatness, such is Reinhold's programme:

"Jeder weiß von vornherein, daß unbedingter Gehorsam seine erste und letzte Pflicht ist; ja, was viel mehr sagen will, jeder auch der Roheste, fühlt, daß der Ungehorsam nicht bloß ein Verbrechen, sondern ein Unsinn sein würde, der, wenn man ihn nur im kleinsten Falle zuließe, das Ganze zerstören müßte - daß dieser ungeheure, wunderbar komplizierte Mechanismus, den man Armee nennt, nur arbeiten kann, wenn jedes kleinste Rad und jedes kleinste Zähnchen am kleinsten Rade an seiner Stelle und zu seiner Zeit genau das tut, was ihm vorgeschrieben. ...
Warum soll ich leugnen, daß mir die straffe preußische militärische Disziplin ganz gewaltig imponiert hat? Bei uns, in unserem kleinen republikanischen Gemeinwesen, geht alles ein wenig läßig zu; niemand versteht recht die Kunst zu kommandieren, und niemand will sich kommandieren lassen. ...
Von dem allen ist in der Armee nicht die Rede." (58)

Reinhold is lost for an answer when his uncle points out that it was Prussian soldiers who were obeying orders who shot down patriots at Rastatt.⁵⁹

Spielhagen depicts Reinhold as a likeable enough young man: in the notes he wrote Reinhold is described as

"...mutig, gutmütig, dabei intelligent, ohne tiefere Bildung." (60)

Admiration for Bismarck fits neatly into a pattern of values which reflect a highly simplistic and authoritarian approach to political life. Military virtues, discipline and absolute obedience to commands are for Reinhold the appropriate response to the leadership of iron men like Bismarck. Reinhold stresses the satisfaction he derives from knowing that he has done his duty as a soldier, his ambition is

"...dem Vaterland zu dienen." (61)

to which Ernst Schmidt pointedly retorts:

"Es scheint, daß dir das Dienen zum Bedürfnis geworden ist." (62)

Spielhagen observed that many members of the younger generation regarded 'obedience' as an ideal value, an end in itself; perhaps Reinhold is the prototype of that generation of Germans who found emotional satisfaction in effusive admiration of great men and in patriotic obedience to them. It is interesting that,

although Spielhagen clearly regarded Reinhold as a young man with very mistaken and wrong-headed ideas, he is portrayed as an amiable character. The moral is apparent: under the impact of the war with France and, more importantly, Bismarck's leadership virtues are propagated which are essentially those of the 'subject'(Untertan), as opposed to those worthy of a free citizen in the republican tradition(Staatsbürger). Reinhold is a pleasant young man whose authoritarian and militaristic values derive naively and directly from his experience and from his admiration of Bismarck. In this respect Reinhold must be an extreme example of the influence of Bismarck and his achievements on the political attitudes of a typical young German in the 1870's. Yet, Spielhagen also intended that the character of Reinhold should also be in some way representative, representative of that generation of young Germans for whom the war with France and the establishment of the German Empire was the decisive experience, a generation that knew no bounds in its admiration for Bismarck, who regarded him as the creator of the new Germany and who, in consequence, adopted his achievements and methods as their own.⁶³ Admiration for Bismarck is in Reinhold's case combined with a burning desire to serve the German Fatherland with a deep devotion to the ideals of military service. National greatness was the unquestioned goal and such greatness was to be attained by the mass of citizens obeying orders from above, their reward was to be the feeling that they were citizens of a mighty nation. It is the spectacle of a whole nation mobilised, like an army on the move, in the unstinting service of national greatness that delights Reinhold's unpolitical mind; as such, he is a portrait of a youth corrupted by pre-fascist values.

C a r l a v o n W a l l b a c h , an aristocratic lady of hair-raisingly superficial culture, professes a deep interest in philosophy; her effusive comments betray her lack of study and grasp, while her affected drawing-room language reveal her

dilettante approach to philosophy which is really no more than a rather unusual social grace. She is heard to remark:

"Schopenhauer hat mir eine unglaubliche Freude gemacht - finden Sie Hartmann nicht auch entzückend." (64)

Carla von Wallbach's view of Bismarck is appropriately philosophical: he is perceived as the mighty architect of the epoch, the source of all political wisdom, the supreme genius of the present age. Bismarck is stripped of all earthly attributes, such as ambition, character and policies and transfigured into a world-historical figure of superhuman mythical proportions. Carla's admiration for Bismarck owes much to the worship of great historical personalities, the cult of the hero associated with Treitschke, the historian and Nietzsche the philosopher; her peculiarly philosophical approach to history and the contemporary scene with its bold and dramatic, though thoroughly abstruse synthesis of persons and ideas became highly fashionable after the first World War in Germany. With almost Spenglerian authority she declares:

"Es gibt in diesem Moment nur drei Männer, die man studieren und immer wieder studieren muß: Bismarck, Hartmann und Wagner: die Politik der Gegenwart, die Musik der Zukunft vermittelt durch die Philosophie des Unbewußten - da haben Sie die Signatur des Jahrhunderts." (65)

While Reinhold Schmidt and Carla von Wallbach are basically naive in their attitude to Bismarck, Philipp Schmidt admires Bismarck for his ruthlessness. Philipp Schmidt is the son of Ernst Schmidt and has made a fortune as an eminently successful speculator out of the financial dealings of the boom years (Gründerjahre). It is probable that Strousberg, an 'Eisenbahnkönig'⁶⁶ was the real-life model for the figure of Philipp Schmidt. Schmidt's idol is worldly success and for him Bismarck is the supreme exponent of the ideology of success:

"Ja, meine Herrschaften, ich gestehe: er ist mein Ideal; aber - ein unerreichbares!" (67)

There is a large measure of identification of himself with Bismarck; he regards himself as a disciple of Bismarck's methods and principles, Bismarck is his intellectual mentor, his justification for his own unscrupulous dealings:

"Bismarck ist mein Mann - ich schwöre auf Bismarck - ich gehe mit Bismarck durch Dick und Dünn. Der kennt auch den Rummel - und wie!" (68)

Any advantage must be ruthlessly exploited, following Bismarck's example:

"In unserer Zeit darf man die Personen und die Sachen nicht mit Sammethanschuhen anfassen wollen; sonst kommt man unter den Schlitten, ehe man sich's versieht. Bismarck tut's auch nicht; der greift durch!" (69)

Reinhold's objection that

"...in der Politik ist manches erlaubt, was für das bürgerliche Leben unstatthaft wäre." (70)

is swept aside by Philipp:

"Gänzlich überwundener Standpunkt! Im Gegenteil, wir sind, Gott sei Dank, zu der Überzeugung gekommen, daß hier, wie dort, alle Vorteile gelten." (71)

Philipp Schmidt has adapted Bismarck's principles of Realpolitik to commercial life, for him success is the end that justifies the means. Moral scruples militate against the achievement of success and are therefore discarded as anachronisms in Schmidt's modern philosophy.

Spielhagen is clearly suggesting that Schmidt's code of practice, his philosophy of life is inspired by Bismarck's example in the realm of politics. Other factors such as the intensity of competition and the opportunities for speculation are more likely to have led to a deterioration in business ethics than simply the influence of Bismarck's example,⁷² but for Spielhagen the link was there, even if only as a justification. Bismarck's ruthless treatment of parliament and use of state power certainly helped to create an atmosphere in which exploitation of one's advantages of power and influence came to be looked upon as the shrewd, natural thing to do. Bismarck had acquired a reputation as a statesman who believed that the question of right was largely determined by the possession of might; to the extent that admirers of Bismarck shared this maxim and modelled their own political attitudes on what they took to be the principles of Bismarck's action as a statesman, he can be said to have unwittingly given currency to an attitude that was to have a

fatal influence on political culture in Germany in later years when, under the impact of 'social darwinism' the idea that might is right was further sanctioned in the 'Kampf ums Dasein'. Thirty years before Heinrich Mann, Spielhagen describes characters whose political philosophy is a combination of nationalism, militarism and the will to dominate others and both writers point to the influence of Bismarck on the evolution of such pre-fascist attitudes.⁷³

Count von Golm's approach to Bismarck is quite devoid of emotion and based on agreement with Bismarck's overall political strategy: the preservation of the political and social hegemony of the Prussian aristocracy. Count von Golm is himself a conservative Pommeranian nobleman who regards it as a mark of Bismarck's genius and skill as a statesman that he recognised - where many conservatives had not - the need to make concessions to liberalism⁷⁴ in order to harness it as a political force to Bismarck's own ends, the consolidation of the status quo:

"Ich habe es allerdings immer für eine politische Notwendigkeit gehalten und für einen Beweis seiner eminenten staatsmännischen Begabung, daß Fürst Bismarck sich zur Ausführung seiner großen Ideen gewisser Mittel bedient hat, deren er sich gewiß lieber nicht bedient hätte, schon deshalb, weil er so den allzu genauen Kontakt mit Personen nicht vermeiden konnte, deren Berührung ihm früher wenigstens herzlich odios war." (75)

Although von Golm disapproves of the rampant capitalist speculation that resulted from reparations paid by France to Germany - indeed, he disapproves of capitalism - he regards this as a necessary evil, as a concession that Bismarck was obliged to make to liberal capitalism.

"Ich betrachte es auch als eine notwendige Konsequenz dieses Unglücks, daß er(Bismarck), um jene Personen abzulohnen, die neue Ära des Schachers und der ungemessenen Gewinnsucht durch die unseligen Milliarden inauguriert hat, hat inaugurierten müssen." (76)

Von Golm supports Bismarck's policies for a united Germany, he is anti-liberal, anti-capitalist and anti-particularist; Bismarck's policies, including concessions to liberalism, are necessary if the Prussian Junker are to retain power in Germany. The Count's position is roughly that of Bismarck himself.

4. Opponents of Bismarck

General von Werben's opposition to Bismarck is based on his belief that the concessions that Bismarck has made to liberalism are completely unnecessary and a calamity:

"Ich halte dieses Faktieren des Fürsten mit jenen Personen, Parteien, Schichten der Bevölkerung, Klassen der Gesellschaft - nennen Sie's, wie Sie wollen - allerdings mit Ihnen, Herr Graf, für ein Unglück, aber keineswegs für ein notwendiges." (77)

The General has a very traditional conservative view of the state: its strength rests in a loyal nobility, a zealous civil service and a faithful army.

"Der rocher de bronze, auf welchem das preußische Königtum stabilisiert ist: ein loyaler Adel, ein eifriges Beamtentum, ein treues Kriegsheer - sie waren stark genug, das deutsche Kaisertum zu tragen, wenn es doch schon einmal ein deutsches und kein preußisches Kaisertum, oder überhaupt ein Kaiser sein mußte." (78)

Von Werben represents the unrepentant particularist Prussian point of view to whom cooperation with liberals is anathema, after all, he argues, such concessions were not necessary in the past. In company with General von Werben is a high-ranking civil servant (Regierungspräsident) whose name we never learn, but who is known to Ernst Schmidt the republican:

"Ich kenne ihn sehr gut, schon von 1847 her, wo er im Vereinigten Landtage auf der äußersten Rechten saß. Jetzt gehört er zu der Opposition: ich meine zu der versteckten des alten soliden Beamtentums, die mit dem allmächtigen Majordomus (Bismarck) grollt und seiner genialen Wirtschaft lieber heute als morgen ein Ende machen möchte." (79)

The 'Regierungspräsident' reflects the under-current of opposition to Bismarck from within the administration.

Ernst Schmidt is described in the notes that Spielhagen wrote for the novel thus:

"Kaufmann, Kohlen- und Holzhändler August Schrott, Demokrat vor 66, hält sich in seinem Gewissen für verpflichtet, Bismarck für den Mörder der deutschen Freiheit zu halten, obgleich er im Grunde stolz auf die deutschen und auf die eigenen Erfolge ist, die nur auf diese Weise zustande gekommen." (80)

Schmidt, as he was later renamed, was conceived as a republican opponent whose hatred of Bismarck was based on his conviction that

Bismarck had 'murdered' German liberty. This simple portrait was later modified, making Schmidt into a Bismarck-like figure and thus introducing an additional motive for Schmidt's opposition to Bismarck:

"Onkel Ernst, schöner Mann, mit prächtigem Haarwuchs, groß, stattlich, imponierende Gestalt und Haltung - ein Mensch zum Herrscher geboren; sich innerlich Bismarck verwandt fühlend und ihn deshalb hassend, ohne über diesen Widerspruch hinüberkommen zu können." (81)

This change in Spielhagen's conception of the character of Ernst Schmidt from politically motivated opposition to Bismarck to psychologically motivated hatred - making him much less of an ideal hero (as in the draft for the novel) and more of an embittered human being - reflects Spielhagen's own indecision towards the character of Schmidt and the political ideals he stands for, the republican ideals of the 1848 Revolution. Schmidt's long career as a republican who had fought on the barricades in Berlin in 1848, had been a delegate at the Prussian National Assembly and had worked hard to establish liberal political institutions in Prussia (had even been imprisoned for his political activities) demonstrates the political gulf between himself and Bismarck.⁸² To this extent Schmidt represents Spielhagen's own political point of view. But Spielhagen also had reservations about such intractable opposition to Bismarck: his sympathetic drawing of young Reinhold and Reinhold's persuasive arguments indicate Spielhagen's readiness to acknowledge that Bismarck had achieved a great deal for Germany. He was torn between gratitude for the unification of Germany and anger at Bismarck's continued opposition to liberal institutions, he may even have felt that the old republican ideals were in need of modification if they were to remain relevant in face of what Bismarck had achieved. In contrast Schmidt with his inflexibility and his stubborn refusal to retract or compromise his political principles comes across as a domineering, cantankerous old man: Reinhold despairs of coming to an understanding with his uncle in their discussions on the political situation in Germany and when the workers in Schmidt's factory threaten to go on strike Schmidt imperiously rejects his

nephew's advice that he take a leaf out of Bismarck's book and concede the workers' demands:⁸³

"Ich kann es nicht; ich kann nicht nachgeben, ohne mich selber aufzugeben, ohne aufzuhören, der zu sein, der ich bin." (84)

Schmidt's authoritarian stance as a factory-owner contrasts with his avowed belief in the republican values of liberty, fraternity and equality. As he explains to Reinhold:

"Ich habe es nie begreifen können, daß Menschen einen Zwang dulden, den sie abzuschütteln imstande sind, ich meine: einen ungerechtfertigten Zwang, der nicht aus der Natur des Menschen mit Notwendigkeit hervorgeht, wie Krankheit und Tod, oder aus der Natur der Gesellschaft wie Gesetz und Ordnung; sondern von den Menschen aus ihrer Willkür, Habsucht, Herzenshärte heraus an andern Menschen verübt und von den andern Menschen in ihrer Dummheit, Stumpfheit und Feigheit ertragen wird." (85)

Confronted with increasing socialist agitation amongst his workers for social and economic equality Schmidt has revised some of his views and no longer believes that

"...ein freies Gemeinwesen, eine Republik gleichberechtigter, von keinen Exemptionen und Vorrechten Einzelner geknechteter und geschändeter Menschen." (86)

is feasible.

In his attitude to Bismarck Schmidt's dilemma is the dilemma of all liberals in Bismarck's Germany: while he hates Bismarck for his resistance to liberal change, he is at the same time obliged to face the fact that this same man, a conservative Junker, realised a liberal dream, the unification of Germany. Bismarck happily allowed the notion that he was the founder of the new united Germany to be propagated, as Ernst Schmidt remarks bitterly:

"Ich kenne das Lied...er(Bismarck) hat es ja oft genug gesungen, der schlaue Finkler und singt es noch jeden Augenblick, wenn die Gimpel einmal nicht ins Netz wollen: wer hat 1864, wer hat 1866, wer hat 1870 gemacht? ich! ich! ich!" (87)

If Bismarck had not presided over the unification of Germany, his task of defending the monarchical system of government would have been immeasurably more difficult, since it was precisely his prestige and authority as creator and architect of the Empire

that was the basis for his immense popularity. When Reinhold argues that Bismarck is responsible for the unification of Germany, Ernst Schmidt is quick to point out that countless numbers of German liberals struggled for the realisation of German unity.⁸⁸ In his view Bismarck had merely completed a task the ground-work for which had been carried out by many prior to 1866 and 1870:

"Weil man die letzte Schaufel Erde wegnimmt, hat man deshalb ein alleiniges Anrecht auf den Schatz, den andere mit unsäglicher Arbeit und Mühe aus den Tiefen der Erde soweit geschürft und gehoben. Noch heute wäre Schleswig-Holstein dänisch, hätten es die Junker erobern, noch heute wäre Deutschland in tausend Fetzen zerrissen, hätten die Junker es zusammenflicken sollen; noch heute flatterten die Raben um den Kyffhäuser, hätten nicht tausend und abertausend patriotische Herzen und Köpfe von Deutschlands Einheit geschwärmt, für Deutschlands Größe gedacht Tag und Nacht - die Herzen und die Köpfe von Männern, die mañüdafür nicht mit Grafen- und Fürstentiteln und Dotationen beschenkt und begnadigt hat." (89)

Schmidt is at this point substantially reflecting Spielhagen's own position and concern which was to try to put Bismarck's undoubted achievements into the perspective of half a century of liberal struggle. Schmidt is correct in pointing out to Reinhold that the Junker were generally unsympathetic to the idea of a united Germany that would absorb Prussia and that it was largely liberal pressure that obliged Bismarck to embark on a policy of unification. However, Reinhold remains unconvinced, for him one point is crucial and that is that Bismarck not only worked for German unity, as Schmidt and others had done, but he achieved it; Bismarck's efforts, as opposed to theirs, had been crowned with success, to which Schmidt can only reply:

" - ich glaube auch nicht, daß auf dem ganzen Erdenrund ein anderer den Mann(Bismarck) so haßt, wie ich." (90)

Bismarck's triumph is Schmidt's defeat.

The main brunt of Schmidt's criticism is, however, not directed against Bismarck, but against the liberal parties who, in Schmidt's eyes, appear to have abandoned the struggle for liberty and representative government. At least, in the 1860's

the liberal parties resisted, but now they were bartering away political freedom for trifling economic concessions:

"Gut! es war ein Kampf - ein mit sehr ungleichen Waffen geführter verzweifelter Kampf - meinetwegen! aber doch ein Kampf! Was ist denn das jetzt? Ein Jahrmarkt ist's und eine Trödelbude, wo sie über den Ladentisch hinüber und herüber schachern und einen Fetzen unserer alten stolzen Freiheitsfahne nach dem anderen verganten an den Mann, der sie alle in der Tasche hat und von dem sie wissen, daß er sie in der Tasche hat(i.e. Bismarck)." (91)

Bismarck was able to thwart all attempts to liberalise the political structure of the Empire, as the National Liberal party was too easily intimidated by Bismarck. Schmidt's criticism of Bismarck is bitter, but his criticism of the liberal parties for their capitulation to Bismarck is even harsher:

"...heiße ich Bismarck? bin ich Reichskanzler oder Ministerpräsident? versinken sie in atemloses Schweigen, so ich mich von meinem Sitz erhebe? zittern sie, wenn ich die Augenbrauen zusammenziehe? ducken sie sich, wenn ich um einen Ton lauter spreche? kriechen sie zu Kreuz, wenn ich drohe, den Karren stecken zu lassen(92)? steht eine Armee hinter mir, wenn ich mit dem Fuß stampfe?" (93)

Like Spielhagen, Schmidt is isolated from the main current of liberal thinking and political action by his republicanism and his outright opposition to Bismarck: Schmidt reflects sadly

"Ich passe eben nicht mehr in diese Welt, so wenig wie sie zu mir paßt..." (94)

Schmidt's criticism of Bismarck and of the increasingly supine liberal middle class and his attempt to justify his opposition to Bismarck reflects very much of Spielhagen's own position.

Schmidt's hostility to Bismarck is further fuelled by his belief that Bismarck is responsible for the increase in industrial conflict in Germany and for the rise of socialism. He sees a direct connection between Bismarck's political principle of 'Macht vor Recht' and attempts by workers to assert their muscle-power by organising strikes. All workers joining Schmidt's factory are required to sign a declaration that they are not members of any socialist organisation; when three workers who signed are discovered to be socialists, they are dismissed.⁹⁵ Schmidt has no sympathy for the conditions in which the workers live, claiming that their misfortune is due to their

lack of discipline, their drunkenness.⁹⁶ For Schmidt the workers have broken faith by threatening to go on strike, he turns to Reinhold:

"Da hast du eine Probe von der herrlichen preußischen Disziplin, die dir im Kriege so imponiert hat; da hast du ein Stück von der neuesten deutschen Treue und Redlichkeit, wie sie in Bismarcks Schule gelernt haben!" (97)

Bismarck is blamed for the lack of loyalty of the workers:

"Wer ist es gewesen, der das Wort gesprochen, daß Macht vor Recht geht? oder wer, wenn er es nicht gesprochen, hat durch seine Handlungen so viel dazu beigetragen, daß der verruchte Satz zum Grundsatz der jetzigen Menschen geworden ist, nach dem sie ihr Tun und Lassen regeln?" (98)

There follows a long catalogue of criticisms of Bismarck: he it was who by his contempt for the Reichstag and its members, discredited parliament and the idea of parliamentary government, who by his unprincipled use of every means at his disposal provided the working class with an object lesson in the success which contempt for law and order can bring:

"Wer hat unser gutes ehrliches Volk gelehrt, wie man mit denen, die sie zu ihren Vertretern bestellt haben, in ewigem Konflikt lebt und über die Köpfe dieser ihrer Vertreter weg nach seinen Zielen greift?" (99)

Bismarck had achieved his ends, Schmidt continues, by the unashamed use of force to threaten and intimidate:

"Wer hat...unser Volk gelehrt...wie man sich eine Armee schafft und eine gefügige Partei, die zu allem Ja und Amen sagt, und was man sonst braucht, um diese Ziele zu erreichen?" (100)

By his strategy of brutal confrontation Bismarck had created a situation - so Schmidt argues - in which bitter and irreconcilable conflict is normality; this has led, in turn, so Schmidt concludes, to an increase in conflict between employers and their workers. Schmidt blames Bismarck for revolutionising the working masses, people who at one time were so loyal and upright:

"Hast du es nicht gehört, das Wort von den Arbeiterbataillonen? Sie sind schon längst kein toller Traum mehr eines hirnerbrannten Schwärmers. Sie sind eine Wirklichkeit, die drohend wächst wie eine Lawine und sich früher oder später vernichtend über uns alle wälzen wird. Wer kann es ihnen verdenken? Macht geht vor Recht! Und so ist die Revolution in Permanenz erklärt, und der Krieg aller gegen alle." (101)

Schmidt is adamantly opposed to socialism whose demands he finds quite unjustified, although he does fear that they will triumph in the end. He argues that if Bismarck had not defeated the liberals in their bid to establish genuine parliamentary government, unrest among the workers could have been channelled through the representative institutions of a liberal constitution and the conflict of interest between employers and workers could have been resolved in a peaceful and orderly fashion. Now it was too late: the workers had rejected parliamentary means and were dreaming of revolution, of abolishing the whole social order and it was Bismarck who had shown the way to success by his use of force and his strategy of conflict.

While Bismarck's attempt to curb the political influence of the Catholic church and ward off what he regarded as a threat to the state by means of fairly repressive measures no doubt helped to poison the political atmosphere in Germany and divide society into hostile camps, it is doubtful whether Bismarck can be held responsible for the increase in industrial unrest and for the rise of the socialist parties which was more a consequence of the rapid economic development of the 1870's and the ensuing urbanisation and proletarianisation of the lower classes. Spielhagen himself did not regard Bismarck as responsible for the rise of socialism in the 1870's in Germany: he had shown in his novel 'In Reih' und Glied' how unsympathetic the liberal parties and the employers were to the idea of social reform. Schmidt is an example of just such a liberal. Spielhagen saw the liberals themselves as - in part - responsible for the rise of revolutionary socialism by their failure to respond to the need for social reform.

G i r a l d i , an Italian Jesuit, represents the scheming nature of the Roman Catholic church, as it was seen by many liberals at the time of the 'Kulturkampf'(1871-1878). Spielhagen was passionately opposed to institutionalised Christianity, whether catholic or protestant and to what he regarded as the

reactionary influence of the Church, what he called 'das Pfaffentum', though he had no objections to the humanist ethical message of Christianity.¹⁰² Giralaldi thus represents a power and an institution of which Spielhagen disapproves and to this extent he had no quarrel with Bismarck's anti-catholic measures.

Spielhagen employs the figure of Giralaldi, an opponent of Bismarck and implicated in political intrigue of the blackest kind, to offer an interesting evaluation of Bismarck's policies. Giralaldi believes that Bismarck has deliberately concealed his real aims, the 'Kulturkampf' is a massive distraction to divert the public's attention from his real goal which is to consolidate the power of the Prussian monarchy. Bismarck may be in alliance with the liberals on this one particular issue, but he will change his stance when it suits his ultimate goal, because he is basically - as Giralaldi puts it - the 'Majordomus der Hohenzollern'.¹⁰³ Although Bismarck is no conservative in the traditional sense, neither is he a liberal, his liberalism is, in Giralaldi's opinion, 'zur Schau getragen'.¹⁰⁴ Bismarck is a Prussian Junker and his supreme political goal is the preservation of the monarchical system of government as the best defence of Junker interests:

"Glauben Sie mir, Exzellenz, dieser Mann(Bismarck), trotz seines geflissentlich zur Schau getragenen Liberalismus, Aristokrat vom Wirbel bis zur Zehe und trotz seiner Aufgeklärtheit voller mittelalterlich-romantischer Schrullen, kann von Herzen nie etwas anderes wollen, und wird nie etwas anderes wollen, als ein Königtum von Gottes Gnaden." (105)

Giralaldi goes on to argue that, by opposing the Roman Catholic church Bismarck is attacking the very principle upon which his political system depends for its survival: the belief in the divine right of kings 'Das Königtum von Gottes Gnaden'¹⁰⁶:

"Ohne Priester aber kein Gott und kein Königtum von Gottes Gnaden - das heißt, er sägt sich den Ast ab, auf dem er sitzt." (107)

While recognising that Bismarck's aim was a strong monarchy, Giralaldi overestimates the degree to which Bismarck was dependent on either the monarch - at least as long as Emperor William I was alive - or on religion as an ideological support. In the long term Giralaldi was no doubt correct in thinking that

the secularisation of society and consequently of the institutions of state were a threat to the basis of monarchical authority. Giraldi believes that the contradiction in Bismarck's political strategy between his aim of a strong monarchical government and his means which at that moment consisted of concessions to capitalist and constitutional liberalism coupled with attacks on established religion must ultimately lead to a collapse of the precarious structure he is attempting to build. By sowing the seeds of revolution Bismarck is undermining the foundation of his own edifice:

"Er wird...gezwungen werden, den Widerspruch seines Zweckes - das Königtum von Gottes Gnaden - und seiner Mittel, die er aus der Rüstkammer der Revolution entlehnt hat - immer offener darzulegen; und dieser Widerspruch, in den er rettungslos hineintreibt und aus dem die Revolution hervorgehen muß - denn kein Volk duldet auf die Dauer ein in sich widerspruchvolles Regime - ist das Steinchen, das schon im Rollen ist und die Lawine entfesseln und den Koloß zerschmettern wird." (108)

Giraldi deduces the collapse of the regime from its contradictory nature. The contradiction was, however, soon resolved with the ending of the 'Kulturkampf' (1878) and the catholic Centre Party became from the 1880's onwards a major partner in the centre-right parliamentary alliance upon which Bismarck depended for majorities in the Reichstag.

Giraldi predicts Bismarck's failure to subdue the Roman Catholic church by the use of legal restrictions; Bismarck had, he claims, fundamentally mistaken the nature of the Church:

"Wir sind, wie wir immer waren und immer sein werden. Und Exzellenz, daß er das nicht begreift, daß er glaubt, uns durch Drohungen und Schrecken einzuschüchtern und zu Geschöpfen seines Willen machen zu können - das ist sein Achillesferse. Er wird, wenn er sieht, daß er auf diesem Wege nicht weiter kommt,...versuchen, mit uns zu paktieren." (109)

He even foresees Bismarck being ultimately obliged to come to an arrangement with the Church.

The novel was completed before the 'Kulturkampf' was abandoned, and before Bismarck had broken with the liberals, yet both developments are adumbrated in the novel: the failure

of the 'Kulturkampf' is predicted by Giraldi and he also exposes Bismarck's sham liberalism concealing a conservative monarchical ideology.¹¹⁰ He also implies that Bismarck will soon be seeking a pact with the Catholic church and the Centre Party. An altogether very discerning analysis of the overall political situation in Germany at the time of the 'Kulturkampf' and the prospects for the future! Bismarck might have been able to emasculate liberalism by his unification of Germany, but he was less successful in his attempts to defeat catholicism or later socialism. Neither catholicism or socialism were prepared to surrender their basic aims for any concessions that Bismarck might have been able to grant. Ultimately it must be said that Bismarck suffered defeat at the hands of the catholics and the socialists.

Exzellenz, with whom Giraldi discusses Bismarck, remains an anonymous figure, but is probably Windthorst, the leader of the catholic Centre Party. At one point in his evaluation of Bismarck's policies and the viability of his regime Giraldi claims that Bismarck's days are numbered:

"...ich sehe bereits das Steinchen aus der Höhe fallen, das dem Koloß die Füße zerschmettern wird." (111)

Bismarck's regime will founder, he says, on the contradiction between his aims which are to establish 'das starke preußische Königtum'¹¹² and the means, 'Mittel, die er aus der Rüstkammer der Revolution entlehnt hat',¹¹³ as, for example, his granting of universal male suffrage. Exzellenz brushes this optimistic assessment of Bismarck's imminent demise to one side, pointing out that it is based on logical abstraction and fails to take one vital factor into account, namely Bismarck's personality:

"Glauben Sie mir, verehrter Freund, der Beurteilung solcher wahrhaft historischen Größen ist die räumliche Entfernung ebenso ungünstig, wie die Entfernung der Zeit. Ihr in Rom glaubt euch alles durch die Logik der Tatsachen erklären zu können, was einzig auf Rechnung der überwältigenden Persönlichkeit des Mannes kommt..." (114)

Bismarck's power and influence, his hold over people was in no small measure due to his forceful personality and to his authoritative exercise of power:

"Menschen wie er, meine ich, lassen sich überhaupt gar nicht par distance verstehen; die Hälfte zum mindestens des Zaubers, den sie auf ihre Zeitgenossen ausüben, liegt in

"ihrer Persönlichkeit. Man muß solchen Leuten eben persönlich nahe stehen, sich mit ihnen in der Kammer herumzanken, sie in eine Hofsoiree treten sehen, um zu begreifen, warum die Bestien vor diesem Löwen in den Staub ducken und selbst, wenn sie Opposition machen, es doch nur bis zum Schweifwedeln bringen." (115)

Arguments such as those put forward by Giraldis with the emphasis on internal logical consistency ignored - Exzellenz replies - those qualities in Bismarck's character which played a decisive role in maintaining his power; Exzellenz warns Giraldis not to underestimate Bismarck's intelligence, resilience, courage or ruthlessness:

"...er ist mutig - bis zur Tollkühnheit: er liefert täglich Beweise davon." (116)

Exzellenz appears to be of the opinion that Bismarck's power is assured as long as he is able to continue to intimidate or cajole parliament into supporting his policies, whereas Giraldis sees Bismarck as undermining - by his concessions to atheistic liberalism - the very structure he wishes to secure: the monarchy.

What purpose do the Bismarck discussions fulfil in 'Sturmflut'? To what extent has Spielhagen merely attempted to give an account of significant contemporary discussion of Bismarck - the novel as mirror - to what extent has he intervened himself in the discussion, either subtly by means of characterisation or more openly? Most figures represent a recognisable aspect of contemporary discussion of Bismarck and to this extent Spielhagen has fulfilled what he believed to be the prime task of the novel, to mirror major trends in society. The views of Count von Golm, of General von Werben and the President correspond fairly clearly to the two major schools of thinking on Bismarck within the Prussian conservative camp in the 1870's, while Ernst Schmidt's opposition to Bismarck is representative of republican thinking, although this was very much a minority voice in the post-1870 period. Carla von Wallbach's views - Spielhagen draws a superb caricature of the female salon intellectual - reflect at a facile and superficial level - an approach to Bismarck that was linked with the emergence in the Bismarck era of a cult of heroes, a tendency to

to revere men of great intellectual and artistic stature.¹¹⁷ Philipp Schmidt, Reinhold Schmidt and Giraldi are characters whose views are less readily identifiable as representative of any particular section of contemporary thinking. Although Philipp Schmidt is probably modelled on Strousberg, the railway magnate and financial speculator, the very explicit link that Spielhagen establishes between his ruthless business methods and Bismarck's political practice suggest that he is more a product of Spielhagen's mind rather than a carefully observed representative man. He serves - all too obviously - to illustrate the corrupting influence of Bismarck's example and success on moral and political values and remains a Spielhagen hypothesis, although entirely convincing as a character within the action of the novel. On the other hand, Spielhagen may well have observed contemporary businessmen speak in such terms: only an examination of contemporary attitudes - in the case of Strousberg, an examination of biographical material - could establish to what extent such attitudes were 'real', that is to say, accurately observed and recorded.

Reinhold Schmidt falls into the same category: in one way it is an extraordinarily prescient portrait of a young man who has succumbed to the false values of nationalism and militarism, and as such, seems more typical of the 1890's and later than of the 1870's. Did Spielhagen actually come across such attitudes in the young people of his day, or is Reinhold a product of Spielhagen's mind, a composite character, a distillation of a number of observed contemporary trends?

Giraldi is a special case, a member of the catholic hierarchy whose analysis of Bismarck's policies and their aims bear the stamp of Spielhagen's own approach: Giraldi's assessment of Bismarck's central aim, the preservation and consolidation of the Prussian monarchy, coincides with Count von Golm's views and thus acquires a certain weight. It is, however, curious that Spielhagen should have chosen a Jesuit as a medium for

the expression of his own assessment of Bismarck's overall political strategy.

Spielhagen did not content himself with a mere reflection of contemporary Bismarck discussion: his characterisation of those who are enthusiastic admirers of Bismarck - Philipp Schmidt and Carla von Wallbach - is negative in the extreme, excepting for the moment the figure of Reinhold Schmidt. Count Golm, a conservative supporter of Bismarck's strategy of containment by concession is in contrast neither negative nor positive. Equally, the conservative Prussian particularist opponents of Bismarck - General von Werben and the President - are not particularly negative characters either. Of those who oppose Bismarck Giraldi is painted in the blackest, most sinister colours, but even Ernst Schmidt, the liberal republican is hardly a positive character as his opposition is portrayed as stemming from intractable hostility to Bismarck the man. From the point of view of characterisation Spielhagen can hardly be said to have weighted the dice subtly in favour of opponents of Bismarck, as might be expected, given Spielhagen's own republican sentiments.

Spielhagen's intentions are realised in a somewhat different way: the figure of Philipp Schmidt and Giraldi represent Spielhagen's own contribution to the debate on Bismarck. Each of these characters represents an important idea that he was trying to get across to the liberal-minded reading public of his day. Philipp Schmidt illustrates the link between the worship of material success, whatever the cost, and Bismarck's influence. Spielhagen no doubt hoped that the reader would reject both Philipp Schmidt's philosophy together with its apparent author, Bismarck. Giraldi's thought-provoking analysis of Bismarck's strategy concludes that, whatever stance he may adopt at any one moment, Bismarck is basically committed to defend the monarchy and the aristocracy against inroads from parliamentary middle class influence. Spielhagen felt that many contemporaries were apt - in the atmosphere of the 'liberal era' when the National Liberals regarded themselves as the 'government party' - to forget that Bismarck was above all a

Prussian conservative Junker in spite of his role as founder of the German Empire. Giraldi's contribution would serve to remind readers of this.

II : The novels of the 1880's.

a. Was will das werden? (1887)

The novel was written against the background of the rise of the Social Democratic Party, a rise that continued even after Bismarck had attempted to suppress it as a political organisation by the anti-socialist measures of 1878.¹ The phenomenal increase in electoral support for the party - although the party was forbidden, individual members were allowed to stand as candidates at elections for the Reichstag - made Spielhagen aware of the conditions under which the large majority of working-class people lived and worked. In 'Sturmflut' his attitude to socialists and to the working-class had not been particularly sympathetic,² now not only is he sympathetic, but the aim of this novel is to plead the cause of socialism.³

Bismarck had broken with the National Liberal Party in 1878; after a momentary upsurge in the early 1880's liberalism began to decline as a political and intellectual force. Spielhagen had always regretted the liberals' lack of sympathy with the interests of the working class. In this novel he demonstrates the need for drastic social reform which he believes can only be brought about by an alliance between liberalism and socialism. The purpose of the novel is explained in the closing paragraph:⁴ it is to demonstrate the justice of the socialist cause. This is done by mapping out in the course of the novel the development of the hero, Lothar Lorenz from a liberal-minded admirer of Bismarck to a revolutionary opponent of Bismarck and bourgeois society. The novel is in this sense a political 'Bildungsroman'.⁵ But Spielhagen is also concerned to show sympathetically how the hero comes to an understanding of the need for socialism and why he allies himself to the working-class struggle.

The major cause of change in Lorenz's initially fairly orthodox political views is his first-hand experience of the misery of the working class; he turns against a society that can.

complacently accept such conditions. Spielhagen depicts the attitudes of the middle and upper classes in society towards the working class, high-lighting their lack of concern for social reform and showing, too, their reliance on Bismarck to solve the problem of working class discontent. In the figures that Spielhagen introduces in the novel admiration and support for Bismarck usually goes hand in hand with a fair degree of indifference to the lot of working people. It is Lorenz's realisation of the urgency of the social question and his anger at Bismarck's attempt to suppress political expression of working class discontent that turns him into an opponent of Bismarck. Spielhagen thus confronts the reader with the social problem and questions the validity of the anti-socialist case. He seeks to enlighten and inform the reader about conditions in Germany. The final speech by Count Pahlen is an impassioned appeal to the middle class to abandon hypocritical adherence to a sham Christianity and to take the social challenge of the Christian message seriously and seek to realise Christian values in society.⁶

2. Lothar Lorenz's development.

As a young lad Lothar Lorenz has much the same capacity for uncritical admiration as Reinhold, the object of his admiration is a dashing figure of a man, Major von Vogtriz.⁷ Lothar's admiration for the Major is described in terms that point to Bismarck's influence and hold on large sections of the German people:

"Wie aber Phantasie und Gemüt eines Volkes von einer mächtigen Persönlichkeit, die unter ihm aufsteht, so ergriffen und erfüllt werden kann, daß seinem eisernen Willen nachzuleben, höchste Ehre und Pflicht scheint und Denken und Empfinden eines jeden allmählich die Farbe seines Denkens und Empfindens annimmt, so war jetzt der Major für mich mein Ideal und mein Heros..." (8)

He is otherwise fairly indifferent to developments in politics, showing no interest in the 1866 war between Prussia and Austria.⁹ This generally apolitical attitude co-exists with a startlingly enlightened brand of anti-clericalism, as Lothar is a confirmed free-thinker.¹⁰ Lothar's principal companions in his youth are both sons of the Prussian aristocracy, Ulrich von Vogtriz, known as Schlagdoro and Adalbert von Werin. Confronted with Schlagdoro's devoted admiration for Bismarck and linked with that, the importance Schlagdoro attaches to submission and absolute obedience, Lothar rejects both, his friend and his views, revealing basic objections to authority imposed on the individual in the name of traditional privilege. Lothar, whose father had been a revolutionary republican,¹¹ asserts his republican beliefs:

"...ich war ein Fürstenhasser und Republikaner, wie der Vater seinerzeit gewesen ist. ... Wie konnt ich da für die Gefolgschaft mich erwärmen, in die, wie Schlagdoro sagte, die Vogtriz ihren Stolz setzten!" (12)

At this stage he is already a firm republican opponent of Bismarck and his reactionary policies:

"...Schlagdoros spezielle Schwärmerei war (Bismarck): den ersten und stärksten aller Männer, den glänzenden Paladin, den getreuen Eckart, der Schirmvogt des Königiums von Gottes Gnaden! Schlimm genug für ihn in meinen Augen, wenn er eine Institution auf einem rocher de bronze befestigen half, die die freien Griechen und Römer nie ertragen, und selbst Barbarenvölker abgeschüttelt hatten, sobald sie sich mündig fühlten." (13)

Lothar's friendship with Schlagdoro is further threatened when he learns that it was a member of the Vogtriz family who had been in command of a battalion dispatched to help quell the 1848 Revolution, a Vogtriz who had given the order to shoot at revolutionaries, fighters for freedom and justice in a republic, among whom was Lothar Lorenz's own father. He recognises the Junker class as the enemies of freedom, as opponents of the very ideals he holds dear:

"Es war, als wären die nächsten Tage dazu ausersehen, gerade nach dieser Seite hin mein Gemüt noch mehr zu verdüstern, meine Oppositionslust zu schüren und mich nachdrücklich daran zu mahnen, daß ich mich wahr und wahrhaftig im Lager meiner Feinde befinde." (14)

Lothar perceives the gulf fixed between himself and the Vogtriz:

"...eine Kluft...unüberbrückbar, die zwischen Menschen befestigt ist, von denen die einen zäh am Autoritätsglauben hängen, die anderen sich vor keinem Gesetz beugen wollen, gegen dessen Rechtmäßigkeit ihre Vernunft sich auflehnt und ihr Herz protestiert." (15)

The aristocracy represented by Schlagdoro accepts and seeks to bolster the authority of existing monarchical institutions, because it is in their interests to do so; the liberal middle class seeks - equally because it is in its interest - to change society in order to implement the ideals of liberty and representative government. This necessarily meant challenging the authority of existing institutions, as exemplified in Lothar Lorenz's republicanism. Lothar's opposition to the social and political status quo is reinforced when Schlagdoro's father, Herr von Vogtriz, claims that it is the duty of every Prussian patriot to defend the sovereign power of the monarchy, 'das Königtum von Gottes Gnaden'. He goes on to complain that Bismarck has undermined the principle of monarchical government in Prussia by usurping power that rightly belongs to the King and Emperor. In terms reminiscent of Frederick William IV's rejection of a written constitution as coming between the monarch and the people, Herr von Vogtriz denounces Bismarck for coming between the King and the people:

"Überhaupt sei es ein Kreuz und ein Elend, daß man bei jedem Schritt auf Bismarck stoße und immer erst fragen muß, wie Bismarck sich zu der Sache gestellt habe. Das sei in der guten alten Zeit nicht so gewesen. Da habe man einfach

"gefragt, was will der König? und damit basta! Diese Einrichtung, daß ein verantwortlicher Minister zwischen dem König und seinem Volke stehe, sei auch nur wieder eine Erfindung von 1848." (16)

Ultra-conservative Prussian aristocrats like von Vogtriz regard Bismarck as having betrayed - by his concessions to constitutionalism - the principles upon which the Prussian monarchy was founded, as having undermined the authority of the monarchy as an institution. Herr von Vogtriz also regards Bismarck as something of an irresponsible adventurer, a militarist who, preoccupied with international affairs, spends his time arranging wars and neglects the vital interests of his fellow Junkers: Bismarck was - in Vogtriz's opinion - to blame for the war with France:

"Jawohl Bismarck! er habe die Suppe eingebrockt, möchte er sie doch allein auszuessen haben. Jawohl Krieg! das sage sich so leicht und möge auch ein prächtiges Ding sein für junge Herren besonders...mit einem tüchtigen Pack Schulden auf dem Rücken, die dann hübsch zu Hause bei dem Herrn Papa blieben, der sie bezahlen möge, wenn er könne! Erst sollte einmal der Herr Kanzler der schreienden Not der Landwirte steuern durch vernünftige Kornzölle und staatliche Unterstützung der Kommunen..." (17)

Lothar Lorenz finds himself increasingly out of sympathy with all he hears in the company of aristocrats; finally, even his idol as a young lad, Major von Vogtriz reveals himself as an opponent of republicanism and a supporter of Bismarck's power politics. Major von Vogtriz emphasises the need for strong leaders like Bismarck:

"Da, wo Sie Ihr höchstes Ideal, die Freiheit suchen, liegt es nicht, weder für Sie persönlich, noch für die Nation. Wir Deutsche verstehen alles; uns selbst disziplinieren, verstehen wir nicht. Wir können alles, wenn wir die rechten Führer haben, denen wir folgen dürfen; wir sind die Beute von Nationen, die nicht so viel wert und nicht so stark sind, wie wir, sobald uns diese Führer fehlen. Unsere Geschichte beweist es von Anbeginn bis auf den heutigen Tag." (18)

Germany has only been great when it has had great leaders: the success of Bismarck and the failure of the 1848 Revolution proved that the Germans as a nation lacked the discipline to exercise individual freedom without degenerating into anarchy. Major von Vogtriz argues that a democratic republic is impossible for Germany and the Germans, since it does not suit their national

character.¹⁹ The implication is that you would have to change the national character of the Germans to introduce republican government that would work; the nineteenth century was general in its agreement that national character was, by and large, a fairly permanent phenomenon. As Major von Vogtriz puts it:

"Man muß ein Volk nehmen, wie es ist; Dinge von ihm verlangen, die es nicht leisten kann; ihm Institutionen zumuten, die nun und nimmer aus seinem Wesen hervorgehen, heißt einen Birnbaum haben, von dem man Äpfel pflücken will. Die Republik ist eine schöne Sache - für andere, nicht für uns Deutsche. Darum, wer an unser Königtum rührt, das Gottes Gnade uns gewährt hat, und das mit Gottes Gnaden uns zu den höchsten Höhen der Bildung und Freiheit führen wird, versündigt sich an dem Geist und Leib der deutschen Nation." (20)

Lothar Lorenz rejects such views, freedom is the mark of a true man, not obedience:

"...ein Gefolgsmann, das heißt: ein Mensch, der sich des höchsten Gutes des Menschen, der Freiheit seines Denkens und Handelns, begeben hat, um der Vassall seines Lehnherrn zu sein, das heißt: der Schatten eines Schatten!" (21)

Lorenz's friendship with Ulrich von Vogtriz thus gives him the opportunity to frequent the houses of the Pommeranian aristocracy, an experience that considerably reinforces his latent - and up till then rather intellectual - adherence to the ideals and values of republicanism. He concludes that the aristocracy is egocentric and arrogant and maintains its position only thanks to a servile middle class:

"Unsere Sache war die gute (i.e. republicanism), und sie würde einst triumphieren über die jener, die anders und besser zu sein glaubten als wir, während ihr Anders- und Besserein nur in den Vorteilen bestand, mit denen sie sich gegenseitig fütterten, und die ihnen von der sklavischen Gesellschaft sanktioniert wurden." (22)

Even his close friend Ulrich was corrupted:

"Maria hatte recht, von diesem Standeshochmut und dieser Standesborniertheit würde sich auch Ulrich niemals frei machen können, so brav er sonst war und wie sehr er sie lieben möchte." (23)

Lothar Lorenz's other companion as a youth is Adalbert von Werin. Both Adalbert and his sister are, in contrast to Ulrich, very critical of conditions in Germany. Their mother, Frau von Werin, is an impressive eccentric who has dedicated herself to the

task of rehabilitating her husband's reputation who - she is convinced - was wrongfully convicted. She hopes to achieve this by writing letters of petition to Bismarck, the only person empowered - as she believes - to reverse a decision of the courts. This is partly out of a recognition of Bismarck's position of supreme power in Germany and partly - and more obscurely - because she has evolved a system, distilled from her reading of Goethe's 'Faust', whereby the world is controlled by a hierarchy of demons in which Bismarck is the principal demon. Adalbert explains his mother's notions to Lothar:

"...denn sie hat bald herausgefunden, daß der Mann (Bismarck) an Geist und noch mehr an Willenskraft alle anderen überragt, wie ein Riese gewöhnliche Sterbliche, die dem Riesen nun wohl oder übel Heerfolge leisten müssen. Was aber für uns mit sehr natürlichen Dingen zugeht, und darin besteht, daß endlich einmal wieder ein Kraftmensch erstanden ist unter Millionen von Schwächlingen, hat für sie einen ganz anderen Zusammenhang." (24)

For all her demonology Frau von Werin is clear enough as to Bismarck's political aims, she writes to him in one of her letters

"Es wird ein Pyrrhus-Sieg (sein) für das Königtum von Gottes Gnaden, dessen Erhalter und Mehrer Sie ja doch sein möchten und von Ihrem Standpunkt sein müssen." (25)

Spielhagen thus employs the curious figure of Frau von Werin to remind the reader that Bismarck's essential aim is to preserve and increase the power of the monarch against attempts by parliament to assert its influence; she is also the medium for criticism of the resurgence of feudal ideas of 'service' and 'loyalty' within the upper classes, a development not unconnected with Bismarck's autocracy.²⁶

A further momentous step in Lothar Lorenz's political development is taken when his republican-inspired opposition to Bismarck is turned to ardent admiration with the news of victory over the French armies in the Franco-Prussian war:

"Eine Freudenwelle flutete durch mein Herz, in die doch ein Tropfen Neid sich mischte. Wenn sie so fortführen zu siegen, was blieb für mich übrig? Würde nicht der Krieg zu Ende sein, bevor ich das Gewehr in die Hand bekam?" (27)

Lothar resolves to join the army and play his part in what for him is a 'holy war'; to Adalbert's objections that notions of a 'holy war' are mistaken, Lothar replies that he is taking the same step as

thousands of others:

"Wie? rief ich: das, was ein großes Volk einmütig erstrebt, wofür es Gut und Blut getrost aufs Spiel setzt, das nennst du kein Ziel? Vaterlandsliebe, der Kampf für die bedrohte Freiheit, die geschändete Ehre - das wäre kein heiliger Kampf?" (28)

The basis of their friendship, a common belief in humanism - Adalbert had befriended Lothar after Lothar had written an essay on 'Lessings Humanismus und Nathan der Weise'²⁹ - is threatened by Lothar's war fever, but Adalbert believes that sooner or later he will realise that both the decision to fight and his admiration for Bismarck are mistaken.³⁰ In the light of his newfound enthusiasm for Bismarck Lothar does not reject his liberal beliefs, but attempts a synthesis in which Goethe, representing the humanism of Weimar classicism, and Bismarck, the man of action, are seen as two aspects of the German spirit:

"O Goethes Volk, O Goldstück halb gepräget,
Halb nur geachtet auf dem Markt des Lebens,
Zu leicht befunden in der Völker Rat -
Den vollen Kurs schuf der dir unentwegt,
Er, Bismarck, der Erfüller deines Strebens,
Des Idealen; er, der Mann der Tat."

.....

Giganten beid im Planen und Vollbringen;
Und beide deutsch bis zu der Seele Grunde." (31)

The pathos is typical of many of the Bismarck poems written at the time.³²

Both Adalbert and Professor Willy, an 1848 radical and teacher at the school, are opposed to the war with France and try to dissuade Lothar from joining up. Adalbert utterly repudiates the idea of a 'holy war'; for him all war is evil, since it sows the seeds of future conflict. He refuses to believe that the meaning of history and man's inevitable fate is to stagger from one war to the next:

"Aber ich fürchte, du hältst zu fest an der Botschaft, der uralten, deren Bimbam durch die ganze Weltgeschichte läutet, und der sie gläubig gefolgt sind: die Assyrer und Ägypter, Meder und Perser, Griechen und Römer und Germanen und wie sie alle heißen, über tausend und abertausend Schlachtfelder und durch Meere von Blut, immer für Freiheit, Ehre und Vaterland, immer nach demselben Ziel der Obmacht des Stärkeren über den Schwächeren, die dann von dem demnächst Stärkeren abermals in Frage gestellt wird,

"worauf der wüste Kampf sich erneuert in schauerlicher Monotonie. Nein, und tausendmal nein! das kann nicht das Letzte sein, weshalb es die Natur zu einem Menschengehirn gebracht hat!" (33)

Adalbert rebels against a fatalism which has condemned man to accept poverty and war as inevitable. He is an utopian revolutionary fired by a vision of society in which slavery and injustice, poverty and war is abolished, a vision sustained by a belief that the spirit of humanity will descend - as did the Holy Ghost at the first Whitsuntide - at some point in the future on the people, filling them with a new zeal and a new vision of a 'befreite Menschheit'.³⁴ Adalbert's opposition to the war is part of his conviction that the course of human history must be radically altered towards the goals of peace, freedom and social justice. This makes him a bitter critic of the privileged and wealthy classes in society and a fiery opponent of Bismarck whom he sees as defending the interests of the ruling class. Called upon to raise his glass to Bismarck, Adalbert refuses:

"Ob ich den König ehren will, steht mir nicht frei...
Ob ich einen Bürger meines Volkes und wäre er der Nächste an dem Thron, ehren will, das steht bei mir: ich werde es tun, wenn ich Ehrfurcht vor ihm empfinde, ich werde es nicht tun, empfinde ich sie nicht. Nun denn: vor Graf Bismarck empfinde ich diese Ehrfurcht nicht." (35)

Professor Willy's opposition to the war is based on his belief that the whole thing was engineered by Bismarck; he also fears the consequences of victory for the humanist values of German culture. Already, he complains to Lothar, vicious anti-French propaganda and the glorification of war is having its effect on the youth of Germany:

"Mit solchen wüsten Bildern wird nun die jugendliche Phantasie erfüllt! die falschen Vorstellungen berichtigen sich wohl mit der Zeit, aber der Eindruck bleibt. Diese Generation, wenn sie herangewachsen, wird es mit dem Menschenleben so genau nicht nehmen." (36)

Professor Willy blames Bismarck for the decline in idealism and humanism, Bismarck has thoroughly corrupted the younger generation:

"Ist das denn eine Jugend? Diese klugen Greise von neunzehn Jahren, die für unsere Ideale nur ein mitleidiges Lächeln haben und nichts auf der Welt bewundern außer sich selbst. Nein doch, ich habe den Mann vergessen, der für sie die

"Verkörperung des Zeitgeistes und ihr Vorbild ist, dem sie nachzuleben glauben, wenn sie ihm abgucken, wenn das eben dies Geschlecht der ideenlosen Nachbeter und Nachtreter einem Genie...abgucken kann." (37)

With the storm-clouds of war gathering he looks back nostalgically to the cultural achievements of German classicism as the great age of idealism:³⁸

"Ja, es wird dunkel um uns, die wir noch an Ideale glauben, sehr dunkel! Ich sehe schon die völlige Nacht hereinbrechen; und Gott mag wissen, wann es, oder ob es jemals wieder tagen wird. Wenn das Salz dumm wird, womit soll man salzen? Wir Deutsche waren einst das Salz der Erde, als Goethes Genius unsrer geistigen Physiognomie seinen Stempel aufgedrückt und ihr damit den höchsten Ausdruck gegeben hatte, dessen sie fähig ist." (39)

But Lothar cannot accept that Bismarck's influence has been so thoroughly destructive of idealism, Bismarck had merely given expression to a dimension of the German character that had been hitherto neglected:

"Wie hatte der Professor gesagt? 'Goethe hat unsrer geistigen Physiognomie seinen Stempel aufgedrückt und ihr damit den höchsten Ausdruck gegeben!' Nun ja, gewiß! aber nach der einen Seite doch nur. Hätte er die heilige Notwendigkeit dieses Krieges verstanden? Nein. Mein Gott, was hätte der Mann nicht verstanden! Vielleicht eines - nein, sicher, eines nicht: sein Volk mit fester Hand vor die Entscheidung zu führen: hier mußt du siegen oder untergehen! nicht ein wehrloses Volk! ein Volk, dem den Arm zum Kampf gestählt, die Waffen für den Kampf geschmiedet und geschärft! Ja, wahrlich, das war doch auch ein höchster Ausdruck des deutschen Geistes, und dessen wir bis dahin ermangelt hatten. Das war die andere Seite der Medaille! Auf der ersten Goethe - auf der anderen - Bismarck." (40)

After the war Lothar Lorenz spends some time at the home of a most unusual member of the aristocracy, a duke, an admirer of Lassalle and a man whose commitment to republican and socialist ideals has made him a bitter opponent of Bismarck. The Duke reproaches the Germans for their lack of political will,⁴¹ blaming this dependence on Bismarck and his achievements for the German nation. He finds it particularly significant that Bismarck is able, without contradiction, to credit himself with the achievement of German unity, as if no-one else had contributed to the struggle, a fact - as the Duke comments - which

reflected the sad lack of confidence of the German people in their own abilities. That the German public should be prepared to accept and celebrate Bismarck as the creator of a united Germany ⁴² is a source of considerable resentment to the Duke. While conceding that Bismarck is a political realist ⁴³ he denies that Bismarck is a genius

"...am wenigsten Genialität, die ihm alle Welt beimißt." (44)

How could Bismarck be a genius? He lacked all originality:

"Genialität! So nenne man mir doch nur eine einzige Idee, von der man sagen könnte, sie sei aus dieses Menschen Kopf entsprungen?" (45)

The Duke proceeds to enumerate the various sources of Bismarck's political strategy: the liberals had wanted to unite Germany long before Bismarck, the 'Nationalverein' had advocated a united Germany under Prussian hegemony; not even Bismarck's 'Realpolitik' was original:

"Hatter nicht seine Ideen eine nach der anderen zusammengetragen von unsern politischen Denkern? bei Justus Möser angefangen bis auf Lassalle. ... Die ganze Theorie von Blut und Eisen, die ganze Lehre von den sogenannten Rechtsfragen, die im Grunde Machtfragen sind - alles, alles können Sie bei Lassalle lesen in schönster, klarster überzeugendster Auseinandersetzung..." (46)

The Duke regrets the untimely death of Lassalle whose political aims were a true reflection of the 'Zeitgeist':

"...die Emanzipation, die Vermenschlichung des vierten Standes. Die Übersetzung der papierenen Menschenrechte von 1789 in die Wirklichkeit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts - mit einem Worte: die Zwecke und Ziele der Sozialdemokratie." (47)

The Duke is a highly improbable figure, hardly a representative member of the aristocracy in the Germany of the 1880's, there must have been very few dukes who so openly embraced the cause of republican socialism. What was Spielhagen's aim in creating such a character? To the extent that the Duke stands for that synthesis of liberal and socialist ideals which Spielhagen believed was the only solution to Germany's social ills, he is a symbolic figure, rather like Fontane's Dubslav von Stechlin. Perhaps Spielhagen thought - with Lassalle in mind - that an aristocrat as an advocate of social democracy would carry more weight with the average middle class reader.

Under the influence of the Duke Lothar comes to distinguish between Bismarck's achievements for Germany - which remain - and his conservative policies which Lothar decides he cannot support; he reasserts his basically liberal beliefs. His admiration of Bismarck, as expressed in the sonette 'Goethe und Bismarck' is discarded and replaced by a more balanced and differentiated assessment of Bismarck:

"...so räumte ich denn vor der Hand ehrlich ein, daß ich allerdings nur eine kurze Zeit lang für den gewissen Jemand geschwärmt habe; und daß, obgleich meine politischen Überzeugungen...nach einer ganz anderen Richtung gingen, ich doch die Genialität des Mannes und seinen ungeheuren Verdienste um unser Volk willig anerkenne." (48)

Lothar Lorenz's admiration for Bismarck remains an episode, a phase in his political development.⁴⁹ While he is a guest of the Duke, he works on a play about Müntzer, indicating the revolutionary direction in which his political thinking is moving.

The final stage of his development is his experience of a doss-house-cum-hide-out for criminals in Hamburg. Lothar Lorenz had planned to emigrate to America, but gives his ticket instead to a socialist fleeing from political persecution under Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation. What he sees - the dregs of society - shakes his whole being:

"O, der grauenhaften Stunde, die mir noch heute nach Jahren in ihren gräßlichen Einzelheiten dann und wann ein Traum zurückbringt, aus dem ich in Angstschweiß gebadet, erwache! und mir einreden möchte, es sei eben nur ein Traum und nicht denkbar, daß so wahnsinnig Scheußliches in der Wirklichkeit existiere." (50)

In the light of his experience Lothar feels that he has been living an unreal life, ignorant of the existence of such degradation and misery; he realises that Adalbert was right:

"Es ist leicht, Optimist zu sein, wenn man nicht sehen will oder - sehen kann." (51)

It was only possible to be an optimist about the state of German society on the basis of ignorance of social misery.

Lothar discusses Bismarck with August, the socialist to whom he gives his ticket: August impatiently brushes aside Bismarck's

unification of Germany as irrelevant. Germany may have been united geographically and politically, he says, but nothing else changed:

"Und dann ein paar Jahre Festung und hinterher noch eben so viele Zuchthaus. Und das alles, weil man kein Tyrannenknecht ist (52) und sich für die Tyrannen nicht die Knochen entzwei schießen lassen will, daß sie ihre schönen Siege gewinnen und sich Retter des Vaterlandes schelten lassen, damit's doch hübsch beim alten bleibt." (53)

Spielhagen saw the fears that he had expressed in 'Allzeit Voran' confirmed by subsequent developments.⁵⁴ The divide in 1871 had been between a conservative aristocracy and a liberal middle class; now, in the 1880's, with the aristocracy and the middle class very largely in the same political camp, the great divide was between the upper classes and the vast mass of workers in town and country. Hearing of anti-semitic riots in his home-town in which soldiers fired on the crowd, Lothar considers:

"Er (Thomas Müntzer) hätte an jenem Tage gestanden auf der Seite der Tausende und Tausende, die in soziale Zustände hineingeboren werden, deren Druck sie sich nur in verschwindenden Ausnahmen entziehen können, während die Masse im Bann der Armut, des Elends, der Unwissenheit verharren muß. Bis sie dann in ihrer Unwissenheit und ihrem Unverstand zu Mitteln greifen und zu Schritten sich drängen lassen, deren letzte Folge darin besteht, daß die Vertreter der staatlichen Ordnung auf sie Feuer zu geben gezwungen sind. So taugt doch wohl diese Ordnung nicht ganz? So ist doch wohl etwas faul in diesem Staate?" (55)

Lothar Lorenz's experiences have brought him to the point where he seriously begins to question the structure of society. Major von Vogtriz who had given the order to fire on the ignorant and wretched crowd, had protected the social order and was always bound to do so as he had a vested interest in the maintenance of the present political structure.⁵⁶ The Major was defending a society that sought to perpetuate the division of mankind into two camps:

"Es ging ein Riß durch die Menschheit, daß sich als Todfeinde bekämpfen mußten, deren Herzen sich sonst in herzlicher Liebe gefunden haben würden." (57)

Lothar is repelled by the Major's action and his admiration for the Major turns to hatred. Lothar does not blame the poor for rioting, on the contrary he sympathises with their action and displays a compassionate insight into their situation:

he watches crowds of working people swarming along a street in Berlin:

"...und dennoch schwoll und schwoll es unerschöpflich aus dem Abgrund des Elends, sich ergießend durch die endlosen abendlichen Straßen über die von Schmutz und Regen schlüpfrigen Trottoirs beim Flackerlicht der Laternen in wimmelnden schwarzen ununterbrochenen Zeilen von Menschen, aus deren Mienen kaum jemals Genügen und Zuversicht blickten, fast ausnahmslos Verdrossenheit über das Heute und Sorge für das Morgen, wenn es zum besten war. Und dann, im raschen Sinken, Stumpfheit und Dumpfheit von Seelen, die nie gedacht oder zu denken und für das Morgen zu sorgen längst verlernt haben. Und tiefer und tiefer: Verbissenheit, Wut, Verzweiflung. Zuunterst die Grauengestalten, die ich in dem Hamburger Verbrecherkeller kennen gelernt; das Verbrechen, gegen das sich die Menschheit nur wehren kann, wie gegen das wilde Tier, das in die umfriedete Herde bricht. Das waren keine schwarzen Phantasien eines pessimistischen weltentfremdeten Poeten." (58)

Lothar is frankly shocked at the complacency of the bourgeoisie which dismisses the social problems of the day as due to the stupidity and lack of discipline of the working masses,⁵⁹ a view that he rejects. He sees the working class as the victims of a social order whose hall-mark is inequality and social deprivation on a vast scale.

Attendance at a socialist meeting convinces Lothar that socialism is the only solution. He realises that the workers are chained by economic necessity to the system, that there is no escape for them; they are, in turn, products of a system which stultifies and depraves.⁶⁰ Lothar Lorenz becomes a revolutionary socialist, his aim the emancipation of the working class:

"...ein Revolutionär.., der eingesehen zu haben glaubt, daß bei dem jetzigen Stande unsrer staatlichen und sozialen Verhältnisse die weitaus größere Majorität, die der Armen und Elenden, niemals in den Vollbesitz ihrer angeborenen, ihnen auch gesetzlich verheißenen, aber - nicht durch den Willen der Einzelnen, sondern eben durch die Verhältnisse - vorenthaltenen Menschenrechte gelangen kann; und der deshalb bei seinem bescheidenen Teil versucht und bemüht ist, den Wandel dieser Verhältnisse heraufzuführen." (61)

Lothar joins Adalbert and a group of revolutionary socialists, including a Russian anarchist Count Pahlen⁶² and Colonel von Vogtriz, who has been dismissed from the Conservative Party. The strategy and tactics of revolutionary change are discussed at great

length in the group. Lothar expresses his revolutionary exhilaration in a number of poems:

"...als Zeichen der revolutionären Stimmung, in der ich mich damals befand, und die so weit ablag von der, aus der heraus ich auf der Schule die Bismarck-Sonette geschrieben hatte." (63)

All three poems are sharply anti-Bismarck and also critical of the pro-Bismarck middle class. The first poem, entitled simply 'Junker' is intended to remind the reader that Bismarck is first and foremost a Prussian Junker, that his loyalties are primarily to Junker interests. The main target for criticism in the poem are those who express their admiration of Bismarck in their attempts to imitate his Junker manner:

"Doch sie, die blindlings folget, die Kohorte,
Dem Goliath, der ebnete die Bahn,
Schwört (da sie sich nichts Höheres weiß) zum Worte;

Steckt protzig an den Hut den frechen Klunker;
Und jeder glaubt, er hab' was Recht's getan,
Hat er sich weidlich aufgespielt als Junker." (64)

In the second poem 'Zweiter Klasse' the Junker is criticised for his contempt of the middle class; Lothar is astonished that the middle class can respond to such contempt by eagerly imitating the Junker in manners, attitudes and politics:

"Nun faß" ich nimmermehr, wie die Kanaille,
Die bürgerliche, gleichfalls schwört auf 'Taille'
Und säbelrasselnd klappert mit den Sporen.

Ihr tut mir leid, ihr Junker zweiter Klasse!
Wie ihr euch krampfet an des Hochmuts Sparren,
Man krediert euch nicht die Schneid', die Verve.

Es lacht ob euch der Junker echter Rasse,
Und einer zu dem andern spricht mit Schnarren:
Nun ja, ein Kamerad - von der Reserve!" (65)

The poems are an expression of Spielhagen's own disillusionment with the middle class - of which he was himself a member - now that they had abandoned all claim to political power in Bismarck's Germany; instead they were eager to adopt Junker attitudes and conservative principles.

The third poem consists of four sonnets contrasting the sayings of Christ with the standards of contemporary society: the first sonnet concludes:

"Gebt endlich zu, wie wenig es bedeute,

"Nennt ihr noch 'christlich' den modernen Staat!" (66)

The second sonnet is a juxtaposition of Christ's teachings and the principles of Bismarckian 'Realpolitik':

"Ist christlich euer Tun von Blut und Eisen?
Ist christlich euer Satz: vor Recht gilt Macht?" (67)

The sonnet concludes that concern with material wealth has become so predominant that even the spirit of charity found in pagan societies has been suffocated. The third sonnet exposes the sham of modern institutionalised Christianity: the Church is anxious to conceal the truth that there is no life after death in paradise since if the lower classes discovered this, they would clamour for decent living conditions in this life. The final sonnet warns of the consequences of Bismarck's enslavement of the German nation: the first verse states the commonly held view that Bismarck was infallible, a political genius, a priest of the oracle. The second verse describes the reaction of the people which is to yield up absolute power and authority to Bismarck the infallible to rule over the people as he sees fit, untrammelled by lesser, narrower minds. A parallel is then made between the absolutism of Bismarck and the absolutism of Frederick the Great: both men were generally acknowledged as great, both ruled over slaves, not citizens. The final stanza points out that such great men die without a heritage, except the heritage of an enslaved nation. In the case of Frederick the Great the consequence of this was defeat at the hands of Napoleon; Spielhagen has the uneasy feeling that at some time in the future the enslavement of the middle class by Bismarck will avenge itself and lead to some catastrophe. It is unlikely that Spielhagen was thinking in terms of some future military defeat of Germany; his reference to the defeat of Prussia was designed to shock the reader into a consideration of present trends in German society and their possible consequences in the future.

After a long and circuitous political evolution Lothar Lorenz finally turned to socialism as the only political philosophy that offered a radical alternative to the feudal pyramid of exploitation, misery and injustice which constituted contemporary capitalist society.

3. Social Christianity and liberalism in the Bismarck era

Spielhagen deals with two important developments in German society in the late 1880's: the emergence of a specifically political and socially oriented Christianity and the decline of liberalism. Towards the end of the novel Pastor Renner - who had been parish priest to the von Vogtriz family - reappears as leader of a new political party that is agitating for social reform within a strictly monarchical system of government. Renner represents the 'Christlich-Soziale Partei' of Stoecker which advocated a 'soziales Königtum'.⁶⁸ Although opposed to Bismarck's anti-clerical 'Kulturkampf',⁶⁹ Pastor Renner's concept of the social order is not far removed from that of Bismarck:

"Ein Volk von Brüdern im Herrn und Schutz und Schirm des Königtums von Gottes Gnaden." (70)

Pastor Renner's Christianity is an appeal to traditional authority supplemented by promises of social reform to alleviate the worst excesses of free enterprise capitalism, but reform was only to be permitted insofar as it did not encroach on the essential privileged position of the ruling class. Renner's strategy is very similar to that of Bismarck: attempting by means of social reform to win the support of the working class - and thus prevent revolution - while preserving the existing hierarchical structure of society and especially, allowing the army and the aristocracy to retain their feudal positions in society. Spielhagen suggests that Christian socialism - as propagated by Renner with the full support of the establishment - would mean political dictatorship under the monarchy and militarism.⁷¹

The latter part of the novel is concerned with the decline of liberalism under Bismarck. The two representative figures in the novel are Professor Willy and Professor Hunnius, both members of the academic middle class (Bildungsbürgertum); they represent the two main streams of liberal thought that developed in response to Bismarck. Professor Hunnius had been an 1848 radical who believed that Germany could only be united if the monarchy was abolished; his adherence to republican ideals were more a means to an end, namely, unification, rather than the end itself. Professor Hunnius

freely admits that he was mistaken:

"Ich habe im Frankfurter Parlament gesessen auf der äußersten Linken und war der Überzeugung, daß Deutschland nur durch die Republik zur Einigkeit gelangen könne. Nun sind wir zur Einigkeit auf dem besten Wege, der ein ganz, ganz anderer Weg ist; ja, wir haben sie eigentlich bereits, die heißersehnte Einigkeit, und ich habe mich überzeugen müssen, daß meine damalige Überzeugung ein Irrtum war." (72)

Later in the novel Professor Hunnius who was elected to the Reichstag as a member of the National Liberal Party and had supported Bismarck, is presented as a dejected, broken man:

"Es geht mit dem Liberalismus abwärts, jetzt noch langsam, aber die retrograde Schnelligkeit wird schon kommen nach den Gesetzen des Falles auf der schiefen Ebene. Es ist das Schicksal aller Mittelparteien in Zeiten, wie die unsre, wo die Gemüter in einer Weise erregt sind, daß ihnen nur das Extreme genügt. Der Staatssozialismus auf der einen, der Sozialismus sans phrase auf der anderen Seite; was dazwischen ist: die fleißige, stetige Arbeit; die Aufbesserung der materiellen Verhältnisse des Volkes peu à peu; die allmähliche, wenn auch in kleinen Dimensionen fortschreitende Hebung seines moralischen Niveaus; die sukzessive Erweiterung seines intellektuellen Horizontes - das alles ist ja nichts, weniger als nichts in den Augen der Heißsporne des Absolutismus und des Radikalismus." (73)

Professor Hunnius's brand of liberalism with its emphasis on slow but steady moral and intellectual improvement had been overtaken by the speed of social change in Germany and the creation by the industrial revolution of an urban proletariat. He is unable to recognise that it is the failure of the liberal middle class to take the initiative with social reform that has given rise to unrest and radicalism among the working population and blames the Jews for the decline of liberalism.⁷⁴

The other representative of liberalism is Professor Willy, he too was an 1848 republican, but, unlike Professor Hunnius, he has retained his ideals and has not abandoned his republican principles because Bismarck has unified Germany. Professor Willy is a member of the Progressive Party, the other more radical liberal party that persisted in its opposition to Bismarck after 1866.⁷⁵ He has strong sympathies with the socialists, agreeing with their aims but objecting to the means, namely, revolution; he thus takes up a position very similar to that of Spielhagen himself at this time. Count Pahlen pleads in the concluding paragraphs of the novel for

an alliance between liberalism and socialism to realise the social republic of liberty, fraternity and equality.⁷⁶ Those liberals who - in Spielhagen's view - compromised their liberal principles and supported Bismarck are portrayed in the novel as disappointed men clinging to unreal hopes in a world they no longer understand, while those radical liberals who were in the Progressive Party are depicted as alive to the urgency of social reform. This is a rather tendentious picture of the Progressive Party, since there was, in fact, little prospect of a rapprochement between the liberals of the Progressive Party and the socialists of the Social Democratic Party in the 1880's; indeed, the party voted against Bismarck's social welfare legislation. There were undoubtedly radical liberals who believed - as does Professor Hunnius - that liberalism could only survive if it allied itself with socialism, and this was a view that was later in the 1890's to gain increasing acceptance in left-wing liberal circles.⁷⁷ Spielhagen is clearly using the novel as a vehicle for his own view that such an alliance was the only solution to the problems German society faced.

4. Conclusions

The novel is an ambitious attempt to give a panoramic picture of society in Germany from the 1860's to the 1880's, as seen through the eyes of, and as experienced at first-hand by, the hero Lothar Lorenz. The purpose of the novel is to show how members of the upper and middle classes become revolutionary socialists by describing, in the first instance, the political evolution of the hero Lothar Lorenz, a member of the republican middle class, and, in the second instance, the political commitment of such figures as Adalbert von Werin, Count Pahlen and Colonel von Vogtriz. Spielhagen believed that it was necessary to convince the upper and middle strata of German society of the need for drastic social and political reform; the novel serves this end. Spielhagen believed that it was preferable for reform, genuine and radical reform, to be initiated from above rather than through revolution.⁷⁸ Bourgeois society is seen as complacent under Bismarck's tutelage, while Bismarck's own strategy, as represented by Pastor Renner, is diagnosed as a bundle of half-measures, designed to alleviate material poverty and distress, while continuing to deprive the working class of their political rights.

Bismarck and discussion of his policies and influence do not play a major role in the novel; he is rather the eminence grise of the novel, so much a part of the establishment, the author and originator of its mentality that criticism of the social order inevitably implies criticism of Bismarck's defence of that order. Those who are most trenchant in their criticism of society are also bitter opponents of Bismarck, while, conversely, those who support the status quo are usually supporters of Bismarck. Bismarck's general aims are once again identified as the strengthening of the monarchy at the expense of parliament and a concern to preserve the power and position of the Junker. More particularly Spielhagen blames Bismarck for his influence as 'Verkörperung des Zeitgeistes und ihr Vorbild'⁷⁹ on the younger generation, for their militarism and lack of idealism. Lothar Lorenz's central experience is his rejection of Bismarck - and his own admiration of Bismarck - because

he has realised that Bismarck's ultimate aims involve defence of what to Lothar Lorenz is a basically unjust and unfree social and political order.

b. Ein neuer Pharao (1889)1. Introduction

In 1887 Carl Schurz, a revolutionary republican who had fled from Germany to the United States after the collapse of the 1848 Revolution, revisited Germany. He was a friend of Spielhagen - they had known each other as students in the same corporation at Bonn - and probably visited him in Berlin. A similar situation exists in the novel 'Ein neuer Pharao': Smith, whose original name was von Alden, was also a republican revolutionary of aristocratic background who had to go into exile; in the late 1880's he returns to Germany where he is confronted by Bismarckian political attitudes. He soon comes to the conclusion that Bismarck's Germany is no place for a liberal republican and returns to America.

His opposite number in the endless political discussions is a Dr. Brunn, the representative of Bismarckian Germany. Brunn, like Alden, was a member of the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament, but, under the influence of developments in Germany since 1866, he has adopted a less rigorously liberal position and is inclined to regard conditions under Bismarck as satisfactory. The two protagonists, Smith and Brunn, represent the two strands of liberalism that developed in reaction to Bismarck's achievements; Brunn is an admirer and supporter of Bismarck, Smith an opponent. Thus the republican liberalism of 1848 (Smith) confronts the Bismarckian national liberalism of the 1880's (Brunn).

Spielhagen attempts to assess the moral and political relevance of the two brands of liberalism to the political situation in Germany in the 1880's. Are the 1848 ideals still valid or are they, as Brunn asserts, hopelessly old-fashioned and no longer relevant? Bismarckian Germany had largely abandoned the liberal principles of the previous generation; Brunn exemplifies in his career the gradual transformation from constitutional liberalism to national liberalism, though he does

retain a somewhat wistful allegiance to the ideals of liberalism. The younger generation in the novel are completely products of the Bismarckian era for whom liberalism is a matter of history, an unpatriotic ideology that failed in the past and was now irrelevant. A new type of political man, the man of Bismarckian principles, had emerged, a product of the course of German history under the influence of one man, Bismarck.

"Der neue Pharao ist die veränderte Zeit; sein Nichtwissen von Joseph die veränderte Denkweise der Menschen, der veränderte Mensch." (80)

The confrontation between Smith and Brunn obliges Brunn to reassess his political position and attitude towards Bismarckian Germany. Brunn's initial satisfaction, his 'Loblied auf die deutschen Zustände' contrast markedly with his resignation and weary melancholy at the end of the novel; in his protracted conversations with Smith he has come to realise that the political development in Germany under Bismarck is far from satisfactory. Just as in 'Was will das werden?' the hero developed from a liberal admirer of Bismarck into a socialist opponent, so, too, in this novel there is a development away from admiration of Bismarck and fairly uncritical support of his policies to a more sober view of the situation.⁸¹ The political discussions between Smith and Brunn are paralleled by characters and events which clearly illustrate the nature of the 'neuer Pharao', the changed attitudes and changed men of Germany. The two representatives of the new Bismarckian Germany are Herbert Ilicius and Hartmut Selk. Herbert Ilicius is a civil servant, a conservative, a careerist and social climber, Bismarck is his model in all that he does; Hartmut Selk is a socialist, an outcast with a chip on his shoulder, yet he too sees in Bismarck a model for his own behaviour. Their respective political positions are at opposite ends of the spectrum, but their basic attitudes to life are the same; they illustrate the polarisation in German society that Spielhagen felt was due to Bismarck's influence.

2. Smith's critique of Bismarckian Germany

In the first of his many discussions with Brunn, Smith describes Bismarck's Germany as a grave-yard, a grave-yard of the hopes that liberals had had of setting-up a parliamentary system in Germany: not only had no progress been made towards the establishment of a liberal system of government, but the liberalism of Bismarckian Germany appeared to have very little in common with the liberalism that had inspired the struggles of 1848 and the 1860's.⁸² Smith concedes that he should not expect time to have stood still in the forty years that he has been away in America, but he is nonetheless somewhat bewildered by Dr. Brunn's glowing account of conditions in Germany and his hopes for the future. Smith begins to wonder whether Brunn was ever a true liberal:

"Vielleicht war er nie Republikaner, wie ich es von ganzem Herzen gewesen bin." (83)

Brunn's liberalism had - it appeared - capitulated so willingly to Bismarck's conservatism that Smith doubts the sincerity of his claim to be a liberal.⁸⁴ While Dr. Brunn is apparently convinced that all is well, Smith in a review of his impressions of Germany points to the defeats that liberalism has suffered. The monarchy, far from being weakened and circumscribed by constitutional safe-guards, had strengthened its position under Bismarck:

"...das Königtum von Gottes Gnaden, wie es sich jetzt prächtiger und machtvoller als je etabliert hat." (85)

The constitutional demands of liberalism have been contained and absorbed by what has remained essentially a monarchical system of government. Political power in Germany, Smith claims, has been effectively retained by the aristocracy, while the middle class has no more than marginal influence on the political destiny of Germany. Smith regards this as a consequence of the unification of Germany under Bismarck.⁸⁶ He goes on to criticise the nationalism of Germany's political stance under Bismarck and points out that this is a contradiction of the aims of liberalism:

"Ich halte weiter dafür, daß die Zustände, wie sich jetzt

"bei uns herausgebildet haben, wahrhaft gesund nicht sind, sondern, unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Erziehung der Menschheit zu ihren höchsten Zielen, als eine Reaktion und als ein Hemmnis angesehen werden müssen, in ihrem Schoße nicht Heil und Segen zeitigend, sondern das Gegenteil von beiden." (87)

Smith predicts catastrophe if Germany persists on its present nationalist course:

"...daß diese nationale Politik, welche nur danach strebt, die Nation mächtig zu machen und vorherrschend vor den andern, nichts weiter ist als das alte Manchestertum...auf die großen Verhältnisse der Völker und der Menschheit übertragen. Das muß aber in seiner Konsequenz und Verallgemeinerung - denn die anderen Nationen machen es ja nicht anders und nicht besser - zu einem Weltenbrande führen." (88)

Germany's strength in the past had lain in the idealism and humanism of its cultural achievements,⁸⁹ now it, too, had embarked on a policy of imperialism and military might. Smith is also sceptical of the success of Bismarck's social policies:

"Ich glaube nicht an die Heilkraft dieser Volksbeglückung von oben herab; ich glaube, vielmehr: ich bin fest überzeugt, daß die politische Reaktion ihr Versprechen, selbst wenn sie es ehrlich meint, nicht einlösen kann." (90)

The conservative establishment would only allow political and social reform that did not endanger their own dominant position in society, a situation - as Smith believes - that the working class is unlikely to accept. Smith's analysis of German society in the 1880's is an indictment of the policies pursued by Bismarck, policies which Smith believes will, in the long run, threaten the stability of Germany internally and her security externally.

The first conversation between Smith and Brunn and the ensuing conversation between Smith and Ralph, a young American friend, serve as a vehicle for radical criticism of conditions and developments in Germany based - ostensibly, in the terms of the novel - on Smith's observations since his arrival in Germany. Bismarck is mentioned only very seldom in the novel but he is - directly or indirectly - the cause of much that Smith finds objectionable.⁹¹ Spielhagen's readers would be aware enough of the contemporary situation to appreciate the links between Smith's points of criticism and Bismarck's influence without Spielhagen

having to make them explicit. Bismarck's influence on the younger generation is illustrated in the figures of Herbert Ilicius and Hartmut Selk.

Ralph is inclined to think that Smith's criticisms are exaggerated; however, when asked by Smith what his impressions were, he is obliged to concede many of the points that Smith had made. Thus Ralph, the reluctant critic, comes to roughly the same conclusions as Smith. This is the direction in which Spielhagen wishes to lead the 'reluctant' reader, away from an uncritical to a critical view of the situation. Ralph confirms that anti-liberal and reactionary views predominate:

"Ich habe in den vielfachen Gesprächen, die ich mit den älteren Herrschaften - Herren und Damen - führte, Behauptungen aufstellen, Ansichten vertreten hören, die allerdings nichts, aber auch gar nichts 'von Joseph' (i.e. liberalism) wußten." (92)

Most thought that the socialists should be suppressed - brutally:

"Da ist mir besonders ein eisgrauer General erinnerlich, der geradezu fürchterlich war. Daß er Eure Sozialdemokraten einfach ad unum omnes niederzukartätschen wünschte, war das wenigste." (93)

Free institutions were regarded as impossible in Germany; some conservatives even suggested that the present fairly innocuous constitution would have to be replaced by a more authoritarian system in order to deal with political and social unrest among the working class.

"Dabei hatte man die Höflichkeit, unsre freien Institutionen gelten zu lassen; aber eben nur für Amerika. In Deutschland, in Europa seien dergleichen unmöglich, wie denn auch wir über kurz oder lang mit den inzwischen völlig veränderten sozialen Verhältnissen unsre Verfassung von Grund aus revidieren müßten." (94)

A further suggestion was to extend

"...den Religionsunterricht in den Volksschulen auf mindestens zwölf Stunden wöchentlich..." (95)

The members of the younger generation Ralph spoke to were just as reactionary: Herbert Ilicius, a 'representative man' thought too that

"...dem wachsenden sozialdemokratischen Wahnsinn...endlich die Zwangsjacke werde angelegt werden müssen..." (96)

He prides himself on his realistic approach to life; he has a contempt for idealism and admiration for the superior 'Willenmensch' as exemplified by Bismarck. In these respects he is typical of the younger generation who would in time determine the road Germany took:

"Herbert, mit seinen zweifellos bedeutenden reellen Qualitäten und der damit vielleicht obligaten Verstandesnüchternheit und bewußten Abwendung von einer poetisch-idealen Auffassung des Lebens als die richtigen representative men eines wichtigen Teils der jetzigen deutschen Jugend erschienen." (97)

Ralph's observations are supported by those of another American, Miss Anne Curtis who has come to the conclusion that German youth, although infinitely more cultured than American youth, was not as independent. Spielhagen had already registered his unease at the way German youth appeared to have a need to serve some great cause, to follow and be led, in his novel of the 1870's 'Sturmflut'.⁹⁸ In the latter decades of the nineteenth century this tendency to submit eagerly to authority was sublimated into an ideal, that of 'Germanic fealty' (germanische Gefolgschaft).⁹⁹ The feudal concept of 'obedience to one's lord' had been preserved as an integral part of the code of conduct of the Prussian military caste, a concept that was now adopted by the middle class as an expression of its loyalty to the monarchical state from which it also, however, expected protection of its economic interests.¹⁰⁰ This 'feudalisation' of the middle class coincided with - and was itself the cause of - a re-interpretation of those qualities that were taken to constitute the essential German character. Whereas in the earlier part of the nineteenth century - against a background of struggle by the liberal middle class for constitutional rights - the early Germans had been invoked as models of freedom and justice, possessed of ancient rights, the emphasis in the latter part of the century shifted to their 'loyalty' (Nibelungentreue) and 'obedience' (Gefolgschaft). That the period of greatest interest in the nature of the German national character, 'das deutsche Wesen' should have coincided with the establishment of Bismarck's Germany had one unfortunate consequence: features peculiar to German society under Bismarck were identified and then postulated as expressions of the

unchanging German character. Thus conservative and feudal virtues and qualities were propagated as expressions of the essential German character, while liberal and democratic virtues were dismissed as alien and un-German. Even to such staunch republicans as Spielhagen German history seemed to confirm that the Germans were by nature a subservient people:

"Um es mit einem Wort zu sagen: es mangelt ihm in betrübendem Maß an der persönlichen Initiative. Sie hat ihm immer gemangelt. Unter seinen großen Kaisern hob sich das deutsche Volk jedesmal mächtig in die Höhe; unter den schwachen sank es sofort wieder herab. Es will geführt sein. Ist das nach Sedan sehr viel anders geworden? Ich glaube nicht. Es will mir scheinen, als ob die Neigung zum selfgovernment, bei dem jeder entschlossen und mutig mit zugreifen muß, bei meinen Landsleuten noch immer das schämige Knospenstadium nicht überwunden hat, sie noch immer ihre Direktive sich gern von höchster Stelle geben lassen." (101)

The Bismarckian constitution with its emphasis on a powerful Chancellor aided by a consultative Reichstag was widely seen as consonant with the German national character:

"Wir halten vorerst beim Kaisertum. Es hat in dem germanischen Gefolgschaftsgeist eine weitaus solidere Basis als drüben(i.e. France) das Cäsarentum in der gallischen Neuerungssucht." (102)

Thus the monarchical system of government established by Bismarck was sanctified by its alleged appropriateness to the immutable racial characteristics of the German nation. By the same token Bismarck was hailed and portrayed as a Germanic hero.¹⁰³ Submission to his authority became allegorically transposed into a positive Germanic virtue, obedience sublimated into an act of affirmation. Opposition to authority was regarded as unworthy of a German vassal.¹⁰⁴

A further discussion between Smith and Brunn in which Smith has a further opportunity to air his criticisms of Germany, is provoked by Brunn's confident assertion that conditions in Germany are the envy of the world:

"So gebe ich denn auch jetzt die Hoffnung nicht auf, Sie, Herr Baron, werden, wenn sie die neudeutschen Zustände erst besser kennen gelernt und sich in dieselben eingelebt haben, den stolzen Bau unsrer Einheit und Macht, wie er jetzt vor einer staunenden und neidvollen Welt prangend dasteht, bewundernd anerkennen, und, was ja dann selbstredend ist,

"gern beitragen, diejenigen Teile, welche in der Eile vergessen oder meinetwegen auch mißraten sind, hinzuzufügen, oder in Harmonie mit dem übrigen zu bringen." (105)

Brunn's naive optimism as to the prospects for liberal reform of the Constitution ('Teile, welche in der Eile vergessen...') contrasts both with Bismarck's notorious resistance to any such change and the darker mutterings from conservative quarters that the Constitution should be revised, as it was too liberal.¹⁰⁶

With his gaze fixed on Bismarck's achievements he appears unable to appreciate the essentially anti-liberal and anti-parliamentarian thrust of Bismarck's internal policies. Smith can only express his amazement that Brunn is able to live with political and social conditions which must be anathema to him as a liberal:

"Ja, offen gestanden, ich kann nicht wohl begreifen, woher Sie selbst trotz Ihres machtvollen Naturells und elastischen Temperaments die Kraft und den Mut hernehmen, Dinge zu ertragen, die Ihnen doch ein Abscheu sein müssen, wie mir, weil sie dem deutschen Wesen, wie wir es geliebt und heilig in uns selbst bewahrt haben, unziemlich, ja diametral entgegengesetzt sind: diesen prahlerischen, säbëlraselnden Chauvinismus; diese Loyalität, die sich Friedrich Wilhelm IV Wort zum Wahlspruch genommen zu haben scheint, und sich in ihrer byzantischen Übertreibung erst recht schön dünkt; diesen krassen Materialismus, der jeder idealen Wallung hohnvoll ein Schnippchen schlägt; dieses Strebertum bei Jung und Alt, dem der Erfolg alles ist, es mögen die Mittel sein, wie sie wollen. Das ist mein Deutschland nicht." (107)

A formidable catalogue: chauvinism, militarism, materialism, subservience to authority, contempt for idealism and the worship of success. Significantly those who subscribe most blatantly to the new philosophies of realism and success are also admirers of Bismarck. The picture is made even darker by the misery of the working class:

"Und unter dieser gleißenden Oberfläche grollt und murrst die misera plebs - mit zwiefachem Recht. Daß sie elend ist, wer wagte es zu leugnen? und soll sie es nicht als einen Hohn empfinden, daß man ihr kaltblütig Entbehrungen ansinnt, die von den Besitzenden auch nicht einer freiwillig auf sich nimmt?" (108)

Smith is probably referring to the rise in the cost of bread and other basic imported food-stuffs following the imposition of protective tariffs. Brunn replies that Bismarck is planning social legislation that will go a long way to alleviate present conditions.¹⁰⁹ He relies characteristically on Bismarck to

provide a solution to the social question.

Smith's conversations with Herbert Ilicius and Hartmut Selk, two young representative men of the Bismarck era, are once again confrontations of the liberalism of the 1840's with the Bismarckian realism of the 1880's. In his conversation with Selk - who is a socialist - the issue is whether the ends can justify the means, more particularly, whether the just cause of socialism can justify attempts on the life of the monarch.¹¹⁰ Smith maintains that evil means will corrupt even the holiest cause:

"Der Königsmörder selbst, falls er sich etwas bei seiner greulichen Tat denkt und nicht bereits dem Wahnsinn verfallen ist, was will er anders als der Erfolg seiner Sache um jeden Preis? Aber wäre die Sache noch so gut: mit unheiligen Mitteln entwertet man die beste, erreicht man heilige Ziele nie, weil, wer sie anwendet, indem er sie anwendet, moralisch geschädigt wird." (111)

Selk, who has been imprisoned for his political beliefs, regards force as a legitimate political weapon; he is convinced that socialism can never win against the ideology of Bismarckian realism unless it fights on equal terms and adopts the same methods:

"Nach meiner Einsicht und Überzeugung hat nie und nirgends der Idealismus im Kampfe mit dem Materialismus eine Chance gehabt, verschmähte er die Waffen, deren jener sich bedient." (112)

The lesson of Bismarck's success has not been lost on the younger generation, as Selk continues:

"Macht geht vor Recht, heißt die Losung der Zeit; genauer, wer die Macht hat, kann diktieren, was Recht sein soll, Recht ist. An diesem Fundamentalsatz kann der Wille des Einzelnen nichts ändern; wir müssen es nehmen, wie es ist." (113)

As Ernst Schmidt in 'Sturmflut' remarked, the general application of Bismarckian principles plunges society into a permanent state of revolution.¹¹⁴ Smith, himself a former revolutionary who had fought on the barricades of 1848 and 1849 for his ideal of freedom, now disclaims revolution as a means of changing society; he points out that revolution was followed by counter-revolution and suppression, this was, at least, the bitter experience of

German revolutionaries like von Alden alias Smith:

"Ich habe bereits zweimal für meine Freiheitsideale das Schwert gezogen. Dennoch sage ich: mit dem Schwerte wird nichts geschaffen, was nicht ein andres Schwert wieder vernichten könnte." (115)

If the 1848 Revolution had been successful, then Smith would hardly have been able to argue the point with Selk in this way. Defeat had persuaded most German revolutionaries that gradual progress towards freedom was better than revolution, since it was less likely to provoke counter-revolution:

"Ewiges, Unvergängliches schafft nur die stille Kraft der Vernunft, vor der allein die Tyrannei zittern würde, wenn sie eine Ahnung ihrer Unwiderstehlichkeit hätte." (116)

Smith's Hegelian belief in ultimate progress, even in the face of the political stagnation of Bismarckian Germany, reflects Spielhagen's own view that the Bismarck era would in the larger perspective of history be seen to be

"...eine nur scheinbar falsche in Wahrheit...ganz unvermeidliche Krümmung des durchaus richtigen Weges." (117)

Smith's idealistic view of historical progress contrasts sharply with Selk's belief that the vested interests of capitalism and the state will only be overcome by use of force, i.e. revolution. Certainly Bismarck's suppression of the socialist movement encouraged socialists to think that positive progress could only be achieved by force. Selk's attitude is to this extent a direct reaction to Bismarck's policy of suppression.

Smith's brief confrontation with Herbert Ilicius is interesting for the way Spielhagen describes Herbert's reaction to Smith; he is, in short, impressed by this fine figure of a man:

"Und was er (Herbert) als das peinlichste empfand: der alte Mann, der eigentlich ein kompletter Narr war und mit seinem urvorweltlichen Bart und Haar auch wie einer aussah, imponierte ihm mit jedem Augenblicke mehr. Er hatte in seinem Leben schon manchen vornehmen und vornehmsten Herrn gesehen, keinen, der in seiner Haltung, der Weise sich zu bewegen, zu sprechen so ganz der Grandseigneur gewesen war." (118)

Smith is the ideal Spielhagen hero, the republican aristocrat and he obliges - by virtue of his power as author - Herbert to pay tribute!

The final conversation between Smith and Brunn takes place on the platform of the Centralbahnhof Berlin Friedrichstrasse, Smith has decided to return to America. The conversation takes on the air of a balance sheet, a review of conditions in Bismarck's Germany and a final challenge to Brunn. The two men discuss Bismarck, the 1848 Revolution and developments over the last decade. Both Smith and Brunn agree that liberals laid the intellectual foundation for Bismarck's unification of Germany:

"Aber ohne achtundvierzig trotz seiner Tollheiten, der blutigen und unblutigen, trotz seines verfehlten Kaiserkrönungsversuches und Rumpfparlaments - wo wäre das zum Kriege vereinigte Deutschland, Versailles und der Reichstag?" (119)

They protest against the idolisation of Bismarck by the younger generation who believed that Bismarck, and he alone, had created the powerful and united Germany that was their Fatherland. Liberals felt cheated, they felt that their part should be recognised. A contemporary liberal historian exclaimed:

"...ich sage noch einmal: ohne 1848 kein 1870..." (120)

The unification of Germany in 1871 had been made possible, liberals believed, because they had propagated the idea and had by their influence on public opinion obliged Bismarck to concede the German nation's overwhelming desire for political unity. The younger generation was little inclined to differentiate and made Bismarck, the founder of the 'Reich', their hero. With the passing of the older generation that had committed itself to liberalism as its political and social philosophy, the fate of liberalism was sealed:

"Das alte Geschlecht hat abgewirtschaftet. Das neue, das seit achtundvierzig entstanden ist, will sein eigenes Leben, nicht behelligt von den unbequemen Traditionen einer Vergangenheit, die ihm nur seine Zirkel stören." (121)

Liberalism had been defeated and discredited, it was now superceded by the conservative 'realism' inspired by Bismarck's example. Smith nonetheless reaffirms his belief that Bismarck's attempt to stem the forward movement of history and preserve an essentially feudal structure in Germany will fail in the end.¹²²

Although convinced of the eternal validity of the republican ideals of 1848¹²³ Smith concedes that any attempt to establish

a republic in Germany under the prevailing conditions would be doomed to fail (as the centre-left coalition parties were to discover in the years of the Weimar Republic). A republic could only be established if the pillars of bourgeois capitalist society were abolished:

"Heutzutage eine Republik gründen und den alten Kirchenglauben, das alte Besitz- und Erbrecht, das alte ökonomische System - mit einem Worte: die Grundsäulen des jetzigen Gesellschaftszustandes unangetastet lassen, heißt: einen neuen Wein in alte Schläuche füllen wollen." (124)

Smith sees the only hope for the realisation of his republican ideals in a democratic socialist society.¹²⁵ and he believes that whatever efforts the establishment may make to solve the social question, they will be unable to prevent the spread of radical and socialist ideas:

"Es (i.e. das Kaisertum)...bemüht sich...den radikalen Forderungen, welche unter der konservativen Oberfläche gären, gerecht zu werden. Es mag ja Mangel meiner Einsicht sein, wenn ich des Glaubens war und bin, daß es das auf die Dauer, die ich vorläufig unbeschränkt sein lasse, seiner Natur nach nicht kann." (126)

For this Smith blames primarily the materialism and nihilism fashionable in certain upper and middle class circles.¹²⁷ The younger generation with their admiration of success and contempt for idealism is seen as responsible for the spread of similar ideas among the working class:

"Und die jeunesse dorée mit ihren après nous le déluge; die studierte Jugend mit ihrer Verhöhnung aller Ideologie und ihrer Anbetung des praktischen Erfolges, gehen sie nicht mit einem Beispiele voran, dem nachzueifern der junge Handwerker, der Arbeiter, der Proletar nur zu gewillt sind? Mit dem: Ja, Bauer, das ist ganz was anders! speist man die Leute heut' zu Tage nicht mehr ab. Der Skeptizismus, der bei den gebildeten Leuten von heute de rigueur ist; der Pessimismus, mit dem die Blasierten koquettieren, und der in ernstesten Gemütern sich zu lebensverachtender Verzweiflung vertieft - sollten sie sich nicht zu schlimmen Taten umsetzen bei denen, welche sich durch Zustände, die in ihren Augen rein willkürlich sind, des Glückes sieben Sachen vorenthalten; sich, wenn die Dinge so bleiben, zu ewiger Armut und Elendigkeit verurteilt sehen? Denken Sie an die scheußlichen Attentate!" (128)

By connecting as cause and effect the attitude of the upper classes and the revolutionary mood of the working class Spielhagen was trying to demonstrate to his largely middle-class readership

the consequences of their own intellectual and moral decadence.

Smith warns Brunn not to overestimate Bismarck's apparent attachment to liberalism and his willingness to work together with the Liberals:

"Überdies, der große Agamemnon traut Ihnen nicht, so freundlich er sich geben mag; hält Sie und Ihresgleichen mit Recht für Kryptorepublikaner; wird euch nicht auf die Stelle stellen, die euch gebührt. So werdet ihr schließlich doch vergeblich gekämpft und gerungen haben." (129)

Smith is speaking with the invaluable benefit of hindsight: Bismarck broke with the National Liberals the following year (the action of the novel is set in the year 1878)¹³⁰ and thus brought the so-called 'liberal era' to an abrupt end. Spielhagen takes the opportunity to reiterate through Smith his interpretation of Bismarck's essentially anti-liberal aims: to strengthen the monarchy at the expense of parliament. Smith leaves Germany while Brunn remains to carry on the struggle, although it is unclear whether he has really changed his evaluation of conditions in Germany under Bismarck despite his long discussions with Smith.¹³¹ Smith's contrasting pessimistic assessment of the prospects for liberalism in Germany - a consequence of his more unconditional commitment to liberal ideas - is only tempered by his unshaken belief in the attainment of the ultimate goal at some point in the future:

"Aber ich weiß, der Moses - worunter ich keinen einzelnen Menschen verstehe, sondern der Genius der Menschheit - er wird seine Wiedergeburt feiern. Und wird seine auf Vernunft und Wissenschaft gegründeten Gesetze in das Herz seines Volkes schreiben, das dann den Weg finden wird aus der Wüste der heutigen Erfolgenbeterei und des Materialismus in das gelobte Land der Zukunft. Und der Pharao, der in dem gelobten Lande regieren wird, wird wieder von Joseph wissen - dem Joseph der Humanität und des Idealismus - mehr, viel mehr, als der neue Pharao, der heute regiert, sich irgend träumen läßt." (132)

even if present conditions appear to preclude such progress.

3. Brunn's defence of Bismarckian Germany

Brunn, like Smith-von Alden had been a member of the 1848 Frankfurt parliament and had also been obliged to flee from Germany on account of his republican beliefs, but had returned ten years later when an amnesty had been declared. Whereas Smith has retained a pre-Bismarckian interpretation of liberalism with emphasis on individual liberty and the achievement of self-government, Brunn sees the main task of German liberalism as the creation of

"...die Einheit, die geeinigte Macht eines wahrhaft deutschen Reiches." (133)

Brunn was more sensitive to Germany's lack of power and international prestige than he was to the lack of liberty.¹³⁴ His liberalism was a means to an end: parliamentary institutions were seen as the only way of attaining political unity in Germany in the face of opposition from entrenched aristocratic and dynastic interests. The slogan was 'Einheit durch Freiheit'. Liberty was a means whereby the end unity would be achieved, a unity that would establish Germany as a European power. National liberalism's commitment to constitutional reform was far from unconditional and rather precarious; it was liable to succumb to conservative policies aimed at achieving the same goal, namely, unity. Germany was, in the event, united by the efforts of a Prussian Junker Otto von Bismarck in pursuit of conservative policies with the result that Brunn, shaken in his belief in liberalism by its failure to achieve the supreme goal of national unity,¹³⁵ abandons his opposition to Bismarck and realising that this was the only way the German states would be united, in common with many other Liberals gave his support to Bismarck:

"...bis (ich) endlich erkannte, daß es dem störrischen Volke auferlegt werden müßte, damit es seine in allen Richtungen sich zersplitternde Kraft auf das eine Ziel lenke, das zur Zeit unerreichbar war: die Einheit... wer dann, wie ich, in dem, was nun folgte: dem gewaltigen Kriege mit dem Erbfeind der Nation, nur die furchtbare Konsequenz der großen Idee erblickte, die in herrlichste, unsere kühnsten Träume überflügelnde Wirklichkeit und Wesenhaftigkeit trat... wer, wie ich, nachdem er sich

"beschämt und beglückt von seinem Irrtum abgewandt, mit seinen schwachen Kräften das Gewaltige, das ins Rollen gekommen, hat fördern helfen..." (136)

The victories of the Franco-Prussian war and the foundation of the German Empire confirmed liberals like Brunn in their support of Bismarck. Accordingly, Brunn's main concern for the present (1878) is not the reform of the Reichstag, but the maintenance of Germany's position as a major power in Europe:

"...wer, sage ich, wollte da zurückschrecken vor den Hemmnissen, die sich der Erreichung des letzten Zieles noch entgegenstemmen? wer sich irre machen lassen durch den Anschein, daß die Last, die wir wälzen, manchmal still zu stehen scheint? wer nicht hoffen, daß unser Volk die machtvolle, ausschlaggebende Stellung, die es sich so glorreich errungen, auch glorreich behaupten wird?" (137)

Brunn's liberalism is the nationalist power politics liberalism of Treitschke, his constitutional liberalism is no more than a spectre, a memory from the past. He sees Germany's future entirely in terms of its role as a world power, and expresses his complete support of Bismarck's policies:

"...Herbeischaffung des Geldes für die Wehrbarmachung der Nation nach außen, ruhige Entwicklung im Innern - Tabaksmopol und Sozialistengesetz." (138)

Brunn's unqualified support for Bismarck's anti-socialist measures, for his plan to deprive the Reichstag of budgetary control by the imposition of protectionist customs dues and the establishment of a state monopoly in tobacco places him on the right-wing of the National Liberal Party in close proximity to the Conservatives. Indeed, the differences between Brunn and Herbert Ilicius, both admirers and supporters of Bismarck, are minimal, more a matter of expression than of substance. Herbert is less veiled in his description of Bismarck's policies:

"...Bismarck, der mit dem alten verrotteten Freihandelssystem gründlich aufzuräumen entschlossen ist, weil sich nur so die Mittel schaffen lassen, die wir für unsere Armee brauchen, und um den verdammten Sozialdemokraten die hungrigen Mäuler soweit zu stopfen." (139)

Spielhagen is showing the reader how liberals like Brunn were really furthering the cause of conservatism by their uncritical support of Bismarck's programme.

With his support of Bismarck and his conservative views, it

is not surprising that Smith should suspect Brunn of having deserted his liberal principles, a charge which, however, Brunn rejects.¹⁴⁰ He asserts that they have the same aims:

"Und da hoffe ich denn: der Strom wird auch uns beide noch einmal zusammenführen, sowenig es auch jetzt den Anschein dazu hat." (141)

Brunn analyses the differences between the two of them as one of tactic, not of political substance:

"Ohne Idealismus ist doch all unser Tun und Treiben nur tönend Erz und klingende Schelle. Darin, glaube ich, stimmen wir völlig überein, und unsre ganze Differenz ist, soviel ich sehe, die: ich halte dafür, daß wir in das Land des echten Idealismus nur durch die heutige Wüste des Realismus gelangen können; Ihnen ist der Wüstenweg ein für allemal ein Irrweg. Oder mit einem andren Bilde: Sie möchten das edle deutsche Gold völlig rein halten; ich will es, damit es den rechten Kurs auf dem Markte des Lebens habe, mit einer Portion dauerhaften Messings legieren." (142)

Brunn claims to be a political realist who is prepared to compromise his principles for the sake of the progress that comes from abandoning an unfruitful stance of opposition. As a member of the National Liberal Party Brunn could point to much legislation that bore the imprint of liberal influence, whereas the Progressive Party, which remained in opposition to Bismarck, may have their principled stand to their credit, but their influence on the course of events was negligible. Despite what Brunn says his brand of Bismarckian liberalism has very little in common with the humanitarian liberalism of Smith; Brunn pays lip-service to idealism and tries to persuade Smith that his support of Bismarck is compatible with belief in humanitarian liberal ideals.

Brunn fails to understand the basis for Smith's criticism of Germany: at one point he expresses the hope that Smith will moderate his criticism of Germany when he discovers for himself how powerful and influential Germany has become under Bismarck:

"So gebe ich denn auch jetzt die Hoffnung nicht auf, Sie, Herr Baron, werden, wenn Sie die neudeutschen Zustände erst besser kennen gelernt und sich in dieselben eingelebt haben, den stolzen Bau unsrer Einheit und Macht, wie er jetzt vor einer staunenden und neidvollen Welt prangend dasteht, bewundernd anerkennen." (143)

A few minor improvements could be made, he admits, but essentially Brunn is satisfied with conditions. He is unperturbed by the conservative nature of the political structure established by Bismarck. Brunn is not so much a Liberal, as a Conservative with a liberal past. Brunn exemplifies the alliance between right-wing liberalism and conservatism effected by Bismarck in defence of the interests of the ruling classes.

4. Herbert Ilicius: a representative man of the Bismarck era.

Herbert Ilicius is an enthusiastic admirer of Bismarck; he is an aristocrat and a conservative who supports Bismarck not only because he agrees with Bismarck's policies, but because he regards Bismarck's political style as exemplary, the only possible approach in such turbulent times. Herbert is a second Philipp Schmidt, subscribing to the same brash ruthless realism that views all politics as an amoral struggle for power and dominance. Spielhagen describes him as one of the representative men of the age.¹⁴⁴ Herbert's aggressive Bismarckian conservatism is contrasted with his father's conservatism with its paternalistic concern for the poor; he dismisses a social conscience and similar humanitarian considerations as obsolete

"...er...will oder kann nicht begreifen, daß eine andere Zeit gekommen ist: die Zeit Bismarcks." (145)

since they only serve to aid the enemies of the status quo and are, therefore, thoroughly impractical:

"Vielleicht sind unsere Empfindungen der süßen Plebs gegenüber nicht ganz so überschwänglich humanistisch wie die Eurer Demokraten von achtundvierzig...aber praktischer sind wir jedenfalls - darauf kannst Du Dich verlassen - alles andere ist nur Rederei und blauer Dunst." (146)

He has nothing but contempt for his father's opposition to Bismarck's anti-socialist measures for which pains Geheimrat Ilicius was removed from office. Like Philipp Schmidt, Herbert is in favour of the application of Bismarckian realist principles in private life as well as in politics:

"Glaube mir, liebes Kind (Marie, his sister): mit Deinem Idealismus kommt man heute nicht mehr aus. Im Staate und in der Familie - überall muß man mit Tatsachen rechnen. Wer das nicht kann, ist verloren." (147)

Herbert, himself an aristocrat, believes that the aristocracy as a class are predestined to rule Germany:

"Wir sind die Herren - von Gottes- und Rechtswegen, weil wir die Zeit verstehen, unser staatsmännisches Metier verstehen; weil wir die Kraft gehabt haben, aus uns hervorgehen zu lassen, der es in dem Metier zur höchsten Meisterschaft gebracht (i.e. Bismarck) und eine Schule gemacht hat, in die freilich Dummköpfe nicht gehören, in der aber kluge Köpfe es auch zur Meisterschaft bringen können. Bringen müssen. Laßt nur noch so ein fünf, ein zwei Jahre vielleicht nur ins

"Land gehen, und man wird von Herbert Ilicius zu reden haben!" (148)

Bismarck is for Herbert the Iron Chancellor, the man of will, who takes circumstances by the scruff of the neck and bends them to serve his own ends, imposing his own design on the course of history. Bismarck's success had, in Herbert's eyes, little to do with 'good luck' and everything to do with his iron will to dominate:

"Und was heißt Glück? Vierundsechzig - sechsundsechzig - siebenzig - waren das Glücksfälle? Ein Narr mag das denken! Die Sorte Glück fällt einem nicht in den Schoß; die packt man mit starken Armen und zwingt sie zu sich her, daß sie dienen muß - eine gehorsame Magd. Davon hat die blöde Menge keinen Begriff; es wäre auch schlimm, hätte sie das. Aber dafür ist gesorgt: sie wird bleiben, was sie ist und immer war. Und diese hirnverbrannten Schwärmer von Achtundvierzig, sie sollen uns doch wahrlich das Konzept nicht verderben. Mögen sie mit ihren verrosteten Waffen rasseln, wie der katholische Pfaff mit den Knochen seines Heiligen - wer glaubt denn noch daran? Und die sozialdemokratische Brut - wie weit bringt sie es denn? Zu Programmen, von denen das eine das andre auffrißt; zu Krawallen, die man mit dem Kolben niederschlägt; zu einem Hödel, den man um einen Kopf kürzer macht; zu einem unverschämten Intriganten, wie Hartmut, den man zur Tür hinauswirft." (149)

Herbert represents the authoritarian right-wing of the German political spectrum which was an integral part of Bismarck's heritage to the German nation.

5. Bismarck in the novel 'Ein neuer Pharao'.

The novel is an examination of the state of liberalism in the Germany of the 1870's. The most decisive influence on the evolution of German liberalism since the ignominious failure of 1848 was Bismarck and his outstanding success in creating a united German state. In the years following the establishment of the German Empire the protestant liberal middle class were well satisfied on the whole with Bismarck's authoritative conduct or policy, both at home (Kulturkampf and anti-socialist measures) and abroad (Germany a European power, protective tariffs). Bracher sums up Bismarck's influence on the liberal middle class as follows:

"Das deutsche Bürgertum kapitulierte vor dem vielzitierten Wort Bismarcks, nicht durch Reden und Majoritätsbeschlüsse würden die großen Fragen der Zeit entschieden, sondern durch Eisen und Blut. Gleichzeitig fürchtete es die Forderungen des aufsteigenden Sozialismus und die Folgen einer konsequenten Demokratisierung. ... Unter dem Eindruck der Bismarckschen Erfolge akzeptierten weite Kreise des Bürgertums jene vulgäre, zynische Auffassung, daß es in der Realpolitik allein auf die Macht und nicht auf Recht und Moral ankomme. Es dominierten die autoritären Ordnungs- und Prestigevorstellungen... Machtkultur und Untertanengeist waren die beiden Pole dieser Fehlhaltung." (150)

Brunn represents the typical middle class liberal of the Bismarck era. Both he and Herbert point to Bismarck's achievements for Germany and to the relevance of his approach to the problems of the present. 'Realism' is the key to Bismarck's success. Spielhagen goes so far as to draw a parallel between Bismarck's political realism and naturalism. A university lecturer argues that just as Bismarck had demonstrated the bankruptcy of liberalism and idealism, by the same token, German literature by the application of realist principles will achieve new creative power and greatness:

"Der Weg, den wir gehen (i.e. naturalism), ist genau derselbe, welchen der größte Staatsmann aller Zeiten gegangen ist und gehen mußte, um Deutschland aus der Misere seiner veralteten Zustände zu seiner heutigen Machtfülle empor zu heben. Immer hat er gefragt: 'Was ist?' Und konnte sich der oder das Gefragte in seiner Existenzberechtigung nicht ausweisen, sprach er ihm die Existenz ab, gleichviel ob es sich dabei um Staaten handelte, wie Hannover und Hessen, oder um politische Parteien, wie die Nationalliberalen, sogenannten Fortschrittsleute, Sozialdemokraten e tutti quanti. Und so meine ich: wie unser großer Kanzler auf seinem

"Wege der rein sachdenklichen Politik sein Ziel eines modernen deutschen Großstaates erreicht hat, werden wir auch auf dem unsern des rein wissenschaftlich experimentellen Vorgehens das einer mächtigen modernen deutschen Literatur erreichen." (151)

Even naturalism in its experimental realism is - by bold analogy - invested with Bismarck's authority, an intellectual stance that was by no means unknown in Germany in the 1880's: Spielhagen was, for instance, attacked by a certain professor of literature, B. Litzmann of Bonn University, for his failure to appreciate Bismarck and asserted that a writer's reputation would be determined by his attitude to Bismarck:

"Ich bin der festen Überzeugung, daß das Urteil der Nachwelt über jeden im politischen und literarischen Leben des letzten Viertels des 19. Jahrhunderts eine Rolle spielenden Deutschen wesentlich mit bestimmt werden wird durch das größere oder geringere Verständnis, das der dem größten staatsmännischen Genie, das je in Deutschland auferstanden, Bismarck entgegengebracht hat. Daß Spielhagen diesem Gewaltigen gegenüber nichts anderes empfunden als das Gefühl eines lastenden Druckes...das zeigt, daß auch Spielhagen zu einem nationalen Dichter eine wesentliche Eigenschaft fehlt." (152)

Spielhagen hoped no doubt by his caricature to expose the superficiality of such views. He consistently regarded Bismarck's political actions as responsible for the decline of idealism and the rise of the ideology of success. Bismarck's amoral approach to political questions had infected the intellectual and political atmosphere in Germany with a cynicism that resulted in the disintegration of moral constraints in political life, hence the attempts on the Kaiser's life. Spielhagen believed that the present greatness and unity of Germany had been bought at the price of ideal and humanist values. In this novel Spielhagen points to two consequences of Bismarck's influence: the emergence of an anti-idealistic youth with Bismarck as its hero and the rise of a socialist movement which apparently regarded assassination as a legitimate weapon in the class struggle. While it is historically incorrect to portray the socialist movement as cynically and 'realistically' advocating assassination as part of the struggle - in the figure of Hartmut Selk - Spielhagen's hypothesis is tendentially valid, as there can

be little doubt that the prohibition and harassment of the socialist party in the 1880's led to a radicalisation of its ideological stance.¹⁵³ Spielhagen's hypothesis as regards the decline of idealism among the liberal middle class is substantially correct: although lip-service was paid to idealism - it lingered on as a trait of the German national character - it had been superceded by an understanding of the goals of international and national life that owed more to a pernicious combination of social darwinistic thinking and Bismarckian 'Realpolitik' - as exemplified in the figure of Dr. Brunn - than to the ideals of Weimar classicism. The decline of idealism and humanism is for Spielhagen the outstanding characteristic of the Bismarck era, and almost entirely, in his opinion, due to Bismarck's influence.¹⁵⁴

Specific reference to Bismarck is also made in connection with the 'dismissal' of Geheimrat Ilicius, Herbert's father: Geheimrat Ilicius, a high-ranking civil servant and co-founder of the right-wing conservative 'Kreuzzeitung',¹⁵⁵ is asked to tender his resignation on account of his criticism of Bismarck's proposed anti-socialist legislation.¹⁵⁶ The letter requesting his resignation - and thus obviating the need for disciplinary measures - from his superior continues significantly:

"Ist es doch nicht ohne ein heimliches Gefühl des Neides, daß ich Sie aus dem Staatsdienst scheiden sehe! Heutzutage procul negotiis zu sein, welchem Manne von auch nur einiger Selbständigkeit muß das nichts als ein Ziel erscheinen, 'aufs innigste zu wünschen'! " (157)

Bismarck would not tolerate criticism of his policies from the civil service, he wished his policies to be carried out without question; officials who were unable to do this, were removed, thus creating a largely conservative 'gesinnungstreues Beamtentum'. Eyck quotes Caprivi, Bismarck's successor as Chancellor:

"Bismarcks Nachfolger Caprivi hat nach seinem eigenen Sturz in einem Privatbrief die schwere Schädigung festgestellt, die der große Kanzler dem deutschen Beamtentum zugefügt hat, 'indem er jeden Widerspruch persönlich nahm und die Charaktere beugte oder entfernte.'" (158)

This incident is inserted in the novel to illustrate Bismarck's

determination to brook no criticism or opposition from within the civil service, but also to demonstrate Herbert's complete lack of sympathy with his father's fate.

In this novel Bismarck's policies are interpreted as an attempt to stem what Spielhagen believed to be the inevitable forward movement of historical progress towards a free, just and humane social order by the preservation of a feudal political structure ('Königtum von Gottes Gnaden') within an industrial capitalist society. The political energies of the liberal middle class were linked to - and later merged with - the interests of the establishment by Bismarck's realisation of German unity, by the emphasis on national greatness and military power and the preservation of the status quo against threats from democratic or socialist movements. Spielhagen wished to illustrate the extent to which 'Bismarckian' liberals like Dr. Brunn had sacrificed their former liberal convictions to the idea of national greatness. Brunn is depicted as serving the interests of the conservative establishment.¹⁵⁹ The middle class had capitulated to materialism and to the worship of success, both consequences, directly or indirectly, of Bismarck's influence, an influence that is seen by Spielhagen as destructive of all those moral qualities that make a nation truly great. While able to appreciate the achievements of men like Bismarck, Spielhagen refused to accept that the material and military power of a nation was the hall-mark of greatness:

"...Ehre und Ruhm den Tausenden, die früher und später gebangt, gesorgt, gelitten, ihr Leben dafür gelassen haben, daß Deutschland aus tiefster politischer Erniedrigung sich heraushob und heute als eine Weltmacht dasteht, deren Stimme im Rat der Nationen niemand überhören darf; deren Freundschaft allen wert ist; die anzugreifen sich der schlimmste Feind dreimal besinnen muß. Aber, wie Ross und Reische die steile Höhe nicht schützen, auf der Fürsten stehen, so ist die äußere Macht eines Volkes allein niemals die Gewähr für die Dauer seiner Herrschaft... In lapidaren Lettern steht es geschrieben auf den Tafeln der Weltgeschichte. Minder deutlich, doch für den Tieferblickenden lesbar genug: daß die wahre, die unüberwindliche Stärke eines Volkes seine Menschlichkeit ist, d.h. der sittliche Geist, der in ihm waltet." (160)

In this novel - as in his last novels 'Opfer' and 'Freigeboren' -

is deeply pessimistic at the reactionary trends in German society as liberalism is replaced by authoritarian conservatism and imperialist nationalism. Yet, he retained an almost mystical belief that the period of reaction under Bismarck contained the seeds of renewal.¹⁶¹

III : The novels of the 1890's.

a. Selbstgerecht. (1896)

In this novel the hero, Raimund Busch, a freedom-loving individual of republican convictions, describes his own gradual disillusion with politics, as he became discouraged by the abdication of the people to Bismarck:

"An den öffentlichen Dingen, die er früher mit Eifer verfolgte, hatte er das Interesse verloren, seitdem das Volk abgedankt und die Bestimmung über seine Geschicke in die Hände des einen Mannes gelegt, dem es als seinem Diktator unbedingt gehorsamte." (1)

In Bismarck's Germany the cause of freedom was a lost cause and the breed of free men a dying breed:

"...und wie er die Sache des Volkes ansah, ging es mit ihr unaufhaltsam bergab. Der freie Mannesmut, der Stolz vor Königsthronen, sie starben kläglich dahin in einem Geschlecht, das nur noch nach dem Beifall und den etwaigen Belohnungen und Auszeichnungen schielte, die es von oben her zu gewärtigen habe." (2)

Bismarck had turned the German people into a nation of subservient sycophants, they had abandoned their inalienable rights to freedom and selfgovernment for the sake of material wealth. Indeed, it was in Spielhagen's estimation the blatant materialism of the middle class that was one of the causes of working class militancy. By their own unbridled materialism the middle class had forfeited any moral claim to leadership of the nation and this made revolution almost inevitable:

"...ein Geschlecht, das in dem Streben nach materiellen Erfolgen aufging und sich nicht genug darüber wundern konnte, daß die Millionen da unten so entsetzliche materielle Gelüste hätten und für sich von Erfolgen träumten, die ihnen in irgend einer Utopie, nimmermehr aber auf dieser Erde gewährt werden mochten. Er sah die große Umwälzung kommen, wie die Meeresflut, allgewaltig, unaufhaltsam. Dem elementaren Walten so ungehürer Mächte gegenüber, was will da die schwache Kraft des Einzelnen! Dennoch würde er nicht geschwiegen und seine Stimme laut erhoben haben, wäre er ein Schriftsteller, ein Redner gewesen." (3)

The main weight of very bitter criticism is levelled against the middle class for succumbing to Bismarck and abandoning the struggle for freedom. The middle class had failed in Spielhagen's view

politically by its submission to Bismarck and morally by its concern with wealth and indifference to the social problems of the day.

b. Opfer. (1900)

References to Bismarck are sparse and are primarily in connection with a discussion of egalitarianism. The novel is concerned with the attempt of Count Wilfried, a member of the Prussian aristocracy, to live his life according to the socialist principles he has come to believe in. He fails and returns defeated to his own class. Spielhagen had always tended to see individuals as products of their environment long before naturalism elevated the idea into a dogma.⁴ In this novel environment is understood as a class-determined environment. Count Wilfried has been able to free himself from the influence of his class environment to the extent that he has had the courage to become an avowed socialist⁵, but, when he tries to live in conditions similar to those tolerated by the mass of the working class, he finds that he cannot stomach it, so corrupted is he despite his good intentions by the ease and elegance of the life to which he has been accustomed. He breaks off a relationship with a working-class girl and returns to his aristocratic surroundings.

Wilfried's defence of his socialist convictions, particularly the egalitarian demands of socialism, draws scornful ridicule:

"Gleichheit! Lächerlich! Nicht zwei Blätter eines Baumes sind sich gleich, und bei den Menschen geht die Skala von den Schulze und Müller auf der Bierbank bis zu Bismarck." (6)

Demands for social equality are dismissed as unrealistic, given the obvious differences that exist between people and as unnatural, given that there is no equality in the world of nature, a view that clearly reflects the increasing currency of social darwinist thinking. More significantly, Bismarck's monumental personality is invoked as an example of superior genius:

"Die Bismarck - wenn man von ihm im Plural sprechen könnte - lassen sich von den Schulze und Müller nicht an die Wand drücken, wofür niemand dem Himmel dankbarer sein sollte als die Schulze und Müller..." (7)

Society needs to allow and encourage the rise of great men so that society can benefit from their influence; to shackle them with bogus restrictions, to stunt the growth of genius, is to

impoverish society. If Bismarck had been subject to such restrictions, then where would Germany be today? would there be a German Empire?⁸ Society at large, the mediocre mass, owed a debt of gratitude to great men like Bismarck, who, alone, were the authors of progress. Democracy was a threat to such men of genius.⁹ Justizrat Berner - the author of these remarks to Wilfried - has a deep reverence for genius and in his views reflects the widespread cult of genius that flourished in certain circles in Germany at this time.¹⁰ Berner's opposition to the 'Nivellierung' associated with egalitarianism is shared in the novel by Hermann Schulz, a young man and follower of Nietzsche's 'superman' ideology:

"...den jungen Mann, der sich zu Nietzsches Lehre bekannte, voll bitterer Verachtung der Herdenmenschen, die nur für den Übermenschen da sind, damit sie ihm als Folie dienen seiner Herrlichkeit und als Instrument, auf dem er seine souveränen Phantasien sich ausrasen lassen kann." (11)

The description suggests Bismarck who was regarded by many contemporaries as the outstanding example of the Nietzschean 'Übermensch', the outstanding genius who by virtue of his powerful and monumental character and his equally monumental achievements as statesman could not be measured by standards reserved for lesser fallible mortals. Narrow-minded moral precepts designed to keep the lower instincts of the 'herd' in check (Sklavenmoral) were simply inappropriate to Bismarck (Herrenmoral). It must remain a matter of speculation whether Nietzsche's ideas would have fallen on such fertile soil without the figure of Bismarck to provide a living example and proof. The embattled propertied classes who saw themselves as the guardians of culture seized on Nietzsche's ideas as justification for the exploitation of the many by the few, as a refutation of democracy. Such notions, superimposed on an interpretation of German history that stressed the role of great leaders and disparaged the mass,¹² and combined with a resurgence of feudal virtues, such as loyalty and obedience, were powerful weapons in the arsenal of conservatism against democracy in Germany. The emergence of a Germanic ideology with an emphasis on

leadership and obedience was a mythologisation (and thus rationalisation) of the collective reaction of the middle strata of German society to Bismarck. Bismarck radically changed the image educated Germans had of the German nation: prior to Bismarck educated middle class Germans regarded themselves as belonging to a nation of poets and thinkers ('Dichter und Denker'), a nation of idealists committed to the classical heritage of freedom and humanism which found its political expression in liberalism. After their experience of Bismarck many educated middle class Germans had learned to look upon themselves not so much as a nation, ^{but} as a race of Teutons, unbending in their loyalty to their leaders, eager to defend and extend German might and German culture. As Spielhagen saw, Bismarck was responsible - at least indirectly - for such a change.

c. Freigeboren. (1900)

This novel is an account - given in the first person - of the life of Antoinette von Kesselbrook from her school days to the last days of her life in Berlin, covering roughly the period from 1830 to 1880. Antoinette is in many respects Spielhagen himself, she shares with him her political evolution and her social experience; in other respects she is his ideal heroine: the completely free independent individual.¹³

The main action of the novel takes place in the years of the constitutional conflict in Prussia (1861-1866). Married to Philipp Bielefelder, the leader of the Progressive Party (the main opposition party) Antoinette comes into frequent contact with many of the leading political figures of the day. October 1862, when Bismarck was made Prime Minister in Prussia, finds her with a lively and informed interest in politics.¹⁴ Recognising the threat to liberalism posed by Bismarck, she is filled with hatred of him,¹⁵ an emotion that did not prevent her, however, from admiring his strength of character.¹⁶

"...denn hoch steht in meinen Augen ein Mann, der die engen Schranken, die dem Individuum gezogen sind, lösend, sich zum Typ - zum Typ seines Volkes - macht und ihm dies, sein gesteigertes Bild aufzuprägen imstande ist." (17)

She admires the exceptional qualities in Bismarck which have enabled him to transcend his background, she detects in him the sort of freedom she wishes for herself. Reference to Bismarck as a 'gesteigertes Bild seines Volkes' is strictly out of place in the 1860's; such turns of phrase were more typical of the 1880's, when Bismarck had become an established folk hero.¹⁸

Conversations with Dr.L., a prominent member of the Progressive Party, bring Antoinette to the realisation that opposition to Bismarck's army reform bill is a matter of political strategy, not of principle. She is taken aback to learn that liberals do not oppose the army reform itself, but only its implementation by Bismarck:

"Diese Unterredung geht mir sehr durch den Kopf. Ich beginne

"an der alleinseligmachenden Kraft des Parteidogmas zu zweifeln und in den Feuerwein meines Haßes gegen Herrn von Bismarck einiges Wasser zu gießen." (19)

So disillusioned is she with her discovery of the tactical nature of liberal opposition to Bismarck that her hatred of Bismarck is considerably mellowed, indeed, she becomes increasingly curious about Bismarck and resolves to attend a debate in the Lower House so as to see him in person. She is very impressed by his manner of speaking,²⁰ and leaves the public gallery overcome with admiration for him:

"Als ich hernach die enge, steile Treppe von der Zuhörertribüne herabging, murmelte ich vor mich hin: voilà un homme!" (21)

She had always dreamed of meeting a 'real' man, now she has seen Bismarck:

"Ein Mann! ein wahrhafter Mann! Es ist der Traum meines Lebens gewesen." (22)

Spielhagen motivates Antoinette's highly emotional admiration for Bismarck with her longing for a man she could admire and look up to (she despises her husband who was a great disappointment to her).

Antoinette's admiration for Bismarck brings about a radical change in her political views: when a certain Dr. H - a newspaper editor - pleads in the course of after-dinner conversation at the Bielefelder salon for a strong Prussia with a strong army (since a weak nation could never become free, whereas a strong nation would become free by virtue of its military strength) she sides with him, indicating how far she has moved from the majority view of the Progressive Party:

"Der Jammer der Kleinstaaterei - die einzige Rettung aus der Misere ein starkes Preußen, das ohne ein starkes Heer eine Schimäre sei - die Notwendigkeit einer Abrechnung mit Österreich, das aus Deutschland hinaus müsse - die Verkehrtheit, in einem Volke den Freiheitsbaum aufzurichten zu wollen, den jeder Feind, der in das wehrlose Land dringe, wieder umwerfen könne, während umgekehrt ein starkes Volk mit Naturnotwendigkeit die Freiheit aus sich erzeuge." (23)

Impatient with the protracted discussions that characterised the turgid liberal opposition to Bismarck Antoinette embraces 'realistic' policies associated with Bismarck: she condones Bismarck's confrontation with liberalism:

"Herr von Bismarck treibt es offenbar zum Bruch. Er hat recht,

"so kann es nicht bleiben. Oder soll es enden, wie das Frankfurter Parlament? Herrliche liberale Maxime, die wie Seifenblasen in der rauhen Luft der Wirklichkeit zerplatzen? Ich habe keine Geduld mehr mit diesen Schönrednern." (24)

She no longer credits the liberals with the political realism to be able to achieve their aims. Her admiration for Bismarck is born, in part, of her disillusionment with the liberals. Although a highly independent person in her intellectual views - she denies the existence of God, for example²⁵ - she falls a prey to Bismarck's powerful personality and adopts at the same time the political views of the pro-Bismarck nationalists. Spielhagen is at pains to depict Antoinette's conversion to Bismarckian politics as a highly emotional experience closely linked with admiration for the person of Bismarck.

Antoinette then meets Lassalle and in an emotional experience very similar in nature to her reaction to Bismarck's personality, is overcome with enthusiasm for him.²⁶ She asks Lassalle for his opinion of Bismarck. Lassalle considers that Bismarck has failed to do the one thing that would ensure the stability and permanence of his creation, namely, to build the edifice on the solid foundation of human rights and justice:

"Wer sich nur auf die Macht stütze, nur mit Macht operiere, werde immer an einen Punkt geraten, wo die große Macht auf eine größere stoße und zerschelle. Die größte aller Macht sei das Recht. Wer nicht verstände, das auf seine Seite zu bringen, müsse auf die Dauer immer den Kürzeren ziehen." (27)

Lassalle proceeds to predict Bismarck's strategy for the future, in reality Spielhagen's own critical account of the development:

"Das habe sich Bismarck nicht klar gemacht; könne es sich auch nicht klar machen als ein unphilosophischer Kopf und bloßer Empiriker, der mutig darauf los experimentiere, dem dabei auch vieles gelingen werde, unter anderm sehr wahrscheinlich die Zusammenschweißung der deutschen Bundesstaaten zu einem deutschen Staatenbunde - ein gewaltiger Erfolg, den ihm das Volk und die Geschichte hoch anrechnen würden, nur daß dem stolzen Gebäude das feste Fundament fehlen werde: die gesicherten Volksrechte, die in letzter Instanz mit den Menschenrechten zusammenfielen. Freilich werde er, wenn er sehe, daß sein Bau auf schwankendem Grunde stehe, klug, wie er sei, sich auf auf die besinnen und mit Streben und Futtermauern, etwa mit dem allgemeinen Wahlrecht und dergleichen, nachzuhelfen suchen; aber das werde eben Flickarbeit sein und bleiben." (28)

Bismarck's empire would suffer, Lassalle continues, the same fate as other empires which were founded on the suppression of the people's rights and the denial of social justice. To resuscitate the 'deutsches Kaisertum' would avail nothing:

"Vielleicht ein neues deutsches Kaisertum - bravissimo! Auch Cäsar sei ein famoser Reorganisator gewesen und habe seinen Nachfolgern den römischen Staat als einiges Reich hinterlassen - scheinbar aere perennius. Aber man habe die Rechnung ohne Christus gemacht; ihn, der die alt gewordene zerfahrene Menschheit fundamentaliter erneuert, das Reich der Gerechtigkeit auf Erden gegründet habe. Das sollte einer versuchen, Bismarck klar zu machen! ... Und ob er die Bergpredigt hundertmal gelesen habe und auswendig könne, sie bleibe ihm ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln. Er habe nur eine Christenlehre: Gebet dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist, verstanden..." (28)

Antoinette finds herself in complete agreement with Lassalle's political analysis of Bismarck's failings; under the influence of the socialist ideas he so eloquently and forcefully propounds she abandons her admiration for Bismarck and consequently her support for his policies. Later on she also rejects Lassalle, not because she no longer agreed with his political views, but because she felt that his personality left a great deal to be desired:

"Ich bin sehr betrübt. Dies Gemisch von Größe und Kleinheit, von hohen Gedanken und niederen Gelüsten in einer Menschenseele." (29)

He was too much of a Don Juan.³⁰

The death of old Herr Bielefelder, Antoinette's father-in-law to whom she was very attached, throws a shadow over her life, she loses all interest in politics. In the meantime the Progressive Party had split after Bismarck's establishment of the North German Confederation in 1866 over the issue of support for Bismarck. There were now two liberal parties, the pro-Bismarck National Liberal Party and the more radical anti-Bismarck Progressive Party. The split made effective opposition to Bismarck an illusion:

"...der Umschwung der Dinge, wie ihn Bismarck inaugurierte und der sich nun unaufhaltsam vollzog, brachte es als notwendige Folge mit sich. Die früher so einige Partei war in sich zerfallen, tatsächlich zersplittert. Aus ehemaligen Freunden waren erbitterte Gegner geworden, die

"sich hinüber und herüber der schmachvollen Felonie, für welche Treu und Glauben Ammenmärchen sind, des blöden Stumpfsinns anklagten, der nichts lernen und nichts vergessen kann. Wie redlich und eifrig ich mich auch bemühte, zu vermitteln, zu beschwichtigen; den streitbaren Männern klar zu machen, wieviel des Gemeinsamen, gemeinsam zu Erstrebenden ihnen trotz aller Differenzen noch immer blieb; wie sie doch...getrennt marschieren möchten, aber gemeinsam zu schlagen bereit und entschlossen sein müßten, sollte der Riese(i.e. Bismarck)...nicht eine Partei und eine Fraktion nach der andern unter seinen Riesenschritten zermalmen - ich konnte nichts erreichen. Das Tischtuch war zwischen ihnen zerschnitten, zur Freude des großen Webers, der emsig, unverdrossen, erfinderisch, mit virtuosem Geschick weiter an dem deutschen Kaisermantel webte, den er seinen Hohenzollern um die königlich preußischen Schultern hängen wollte." (31)

The events of 1866 - as Spielhagen interprets them - result in far-reaching and fateful changes in political life in Germany. The split in the liberal party isolates Antoinette's husband who is subsequently defeated by the conservative candidate in the elections for the first Reichstag(1866). Deserted by an electorate that apparently prefers monarchical conservatism and Bismarck(hence reference to 'ein Volk von Sklaven') a discouraged Philipp Bielefelder turns away from politics and abandons his liberal republican beliefs. He becomes a supporter of Bismarck:

"Es schien mir, daß zu den alten Kränkungen, die ihm seine Partei bereitet hatte, neue hinzugekommen waren; er war verbittert, erbittert; er wollte von ihr, von der ganzen Politik nichts mehr hören und sehen. Kam doch einmal die Rede auf politische Dinge, schwur er, der einstige Republikaner, Königs- und Adelshasser, auf Bismarck, der allein wisse, was er wolle, und wie man ein Volk von Sklaven regieren müsse." (32)

He henceforth devotes his time and energy to his banking business:

"Er wollte eine dominierende Stelle in der Geschäftswelt einnehmen, ungeheuer reich werden, alle Welt durch den Glanz seines Reichtums blenden." (33)

The Bielefelder salon becomes the meeting place, not as hitherto of politicians and journalists, but of writers, literary gentlemen and artists,³⁴ a shift that was symptomatic of the depoliticisation of the German middle class that followed their capitulation to Bismarck.

Antoinette, too, is a disillusioned and disappointed woman: she has, in turn, admired both Bismarck ^{and Lassalle}, only to finally reject both of them. She still admires Bismarck's genius as statesman:

"Ich war mir immer bewußt, daß es ein Großes darum sei, ein zur Zeit Erreichbares anzustreben und ins Werk zu setzen mit kluger Zuhilfenahme aller der Mittel, die der Augenblick bietet; aber das Größte sah ich darin nicht." (35)

but her approach to Bismarck is more sober, more critical:

"Ich mußte den Gewaltigen bewundern, und habe, ihn zu bewundern, niemals aufgehört; aber einen Standpunkt, von dem aus ich es mit ganzer Seele ohne Abzug hätte tun dürfen, konnte ich ihm gegenüber weder damals noch später gewinnen." (36)

Her opposition to Bismarck is no longer from the point of view of capitalist liberalism, but, under the influence of Lassalle, from the point of view of socialism, that is to say, the welfare of the mass of the people. Bismarck's greatest achievement is in Antoinette's view - quite logically - not the establishment of the German Empire, but the programme of social legislation, which she regards as a step on the road towards a more humane social order.³⁷ Such a cautiously optimistic interpretation of the significance for the future of Bismarck's welfare legislation contrasts starkly with the general gloom and despair of the last pages of the novel.³⁸

In her concern for social justice - and realising that there is very little the individual can do to alleviate poverty and distress - Antoinette finally joins the Social Democratic Party. It is clear that Spielhagen's hopes for the creation of a free and just social order were set on the socialists:

"...so kann, so darf es nicht länger gehen; wollen die Reichen, Satten durchaus nicht hören, mögen sie fühlen; mag die soziale Revolution sie lehren... So ward ich zum zweitenmal Sozialdemokratin und bin es geblieben; keine Utopistin, aber lebend und, ich denke, sterbend in der Überzeugung, daß eine Zeit kommt und wohl schon angebrochen ist, in der eine rein menschliche, von keiner Offenbarung und keinem Dogma beschränkte Wissenschaft mit den Überresten mittelalterlicher Pfäfferei und feudaler Herrlichkeit, wie pomphaft sie sich auch noch heute spreizen und wieviel geistesdumpfe Hörige vor ihnen

"knien, aufräumen und das einzig menschenwürdige Ideal: alles durch das Volk und alles für das Volk zur Wirklichkeit machen wird..." (39)

In the face of the more ominous developments of Wilhelminian society Antoinette reasserts her belief in ultimate progress, tries to see hope in what is a hopeless situation:

"Daß wir erst gründliche Materialisten werden, gesteigertes Streber- und Junkertum, den Imperialismus und seinen greulichen Begleiter: den Byzantismus in den Kauf nehmen mußten, bevor sich der Deutsche auf sein Bestes, auf das, was ihm den Vorrang unter allen Nationen garantiert: seinen hochherzigen, weltbürgerlichen Idealismus wieder besinnen und aus dem Traumland von früher in sonnenhelle Wirklichkeit hinüberretten konnte." (40)

However, she finally breaks down, falls ill and bed-ridden is increasingly prey to deepest pessimism. Her tormented mind is haunted by a vision of the re-crucifixion of Christ and his message by the modern capitalist world.⁴¹ With the perception of a disturbed mind she sees all great historical figures as

"...mehr oder weniger im Bann finsternen Mächte, die keines Menschen Kunst vertraulich macht; nicht immer willig, oder auch nur imstande, Gott zu geben, was Gottes ist." (42)

while individual men are just tiny cogs :

"Doch an dem Individuum ist auch wohl nicht eben viel gelegen: ein winzig Rädchen in dem ungeheueren Mechanismus, das, wenn verbraucht, unschwer zu ersetzen, während das Ganze rastlos weiter arbeitet..." (43)

Although it is not certain that Spielhagen was himself as morbidly pessimistic as Antoinette, the final pages of the novel do indicate that he must have been frequently subject to fits of despair at developments in Germany: the values which he prized above all other, the humane ideals of the classical tradition and the political demands of liberal republicanism had been trampled under foot. In his novels Spielhagen had shown dramatically how pervasive Bismarck's pernicious influence had been on the evolution of political attitudes and yet he felt the need to resist an entirely pessimistic assessment of future developments: the Bismarck era would, he hoped, prove to be

"...in Wahrheit nur eine ganz unvermeidliche Krümmung des durchaus richtigen (Weges)..." (44)

D. Spielhagen and Bismarck

D. Spielhagen and Bismarck.

a. Finder und Erfinder. (1890)

Spielhagen's main concern in this his autobiography was to give an account of his development as a writer, so that references to political issues are uncharacteristically sparse and generally made in passing. This restraint is conspicuous for a writer so convinced of the central importance of political and social issues; perhaps Spielhagen concentrated on his intellectual and literary development so as to rectify the reputation he had gained as an elevated party political hack, witness his voluminous theoretical outpourings. There are no direct references to Bismarck in 'Finder und Erfinder', but comments on situations and issues related to the problem of Bismarck and Germany do throw light on Spielhagen's attitude to politicians and statesmen in general and are therefore of interest for any assessment of his attitude to Bismarck, although they add nothing substantially new to the picture of Spielhagen as an opponent of Bismarck.

In a discussion of the book 'Traits' by the American philosopher and critic Emerson¹ Spielhagen takes the opportunity to sketch a portrait of Emerson, the man. Spielhagen clearly admired Emerson's self-assured independence of thought in the face of hostile criticism, his courage in describing things exactly as he saw them, his insistence on using his own faculties to examine evidence and judge for himself. Emerson was a man after Spielhagen's own heart, a man who refused fearlessly to submit to any authority other than that of his own intellect. Spielhagen's portrait of Emerson is a portrait of a truly free man.² Independence of thinking is a condition of freedom. Spielhagen rejects Carlyle's cult of the hero:³

"So war mir der Carlylesche Heroenkultus, an den Emerson in seinen 'Representative Men' mindestens streift, nichts weniger als sympathisch. Der Heroenkultus führt unmittelbar zu dem Götterglauben und der Götterglauben artet nur zu oft in Götzendienst aus." (4)

The cult of the hero is, in Spielhagen's opinion, a modern

version of pagan idolatry. It is clear from the way that Spielhagen describes the consequences of such hero-worship on those who indulge in it that he is thinking of the harmful debilitating effects of the Bismarck cult on political attitudes in German society:

"Denn dieser Kultus ist objektiv falsch, weil er aus einer phantastisch-unwissenschaftlichen Auffassung hervorgeht, und er ist subjektiv schädlich, weil er das uns so hochnötige Vertrauen zu uns selbst erschüttert, indem wir einer inkommensurablen Größe es nicht gleich tun, ja, nicht einmal mit Erfolg nacheifern zu können glauben; dagegen dann aber den leidigen Hang im Menschen, andere für sich arbeiten zu lassen, die Verantwortung auf anderer Leute Schultern zu schieben, mächtig nährt und so durchweg für die Trägen im Geist, die Unentschlossenen und Feigen im Gemüt einen allzeit bereiten Zufluchtshafen bietet. Wie uns aber die rationelle Verehrung geistiger Größe vor diesen Ausschweifungen schützt, die der irrationelle Kultus unweigerlich im Gefolge hat, so wird sie uns auch vor dem Laster des Neides freihalten, das die andere Seite des Kultus ausmacht und des freien Mannes nicht minder unwürdig ist." (5)

Respect for the achievements of great men is worthy of free men provided it does not diminish the individual's independent use of his critical faculties. Spielhagen points out that even great men owe their greatness to qualities which they have inherited and to circumstances in their development over which they had little or no control, thus showing how unseemly admiration of great men is. An understanding of the many factors that have contributed to a man's greatness inhibits uncritical admiration of great men as heroes.⁶ Spielhagen is attempting to demythologize the cult of the hero.

Spielhagen also argues that a man's greatness is not his character or personality⁷, but in the ideas and values that he stands for. Lassalle, for example, may well have been an objectionable individual⁸ but he did struggle to emancipate his fellow men, he served the 'Genius der Menschheit'.⁹ This approach is in direct contrast with the dominant view of the time which tended to emphasise the personal qualities of great men, not their achievements.¹⁰ All this is an attempt to subject the cult of heroes to the light of rational analysis.

Spielhagen was quite prepared to concede that Bismarck was a man of extraordinary qualities, a genius even, but, for Spielhagen, that was not the point. What was infinitely more important was the effect of this genius on the political evolution of the German nation and here it was that Spielhagen's objections were grounded: Bismarck had, by his policies and influence, weaned the middle strata from liberalism and turned them into supporters of the Germany he had built with its feudal structure, class conflict and imperialist ideology.

b. Spielhagen's assessment of Bismarck in 'Die Gegenwart' (1895)

In 1895 the Berlin weekly 'Die Gegenwart' published a number of assessments of Bismarck which they had requested from prominent German and European intellectuals.¹¹ The periodical had asked two questions:

"wie denken Sie über Bismarck? In welchem Werk haben Sie Bismarck behandelt oder auf ihn angespielt?" (12)

Spielhagen replied as follows:

"Die Gestalt Bismarcks selbst habe ich in keinem meiner Werke eingeführt, schon deshalb nicht, weil ich aus theoretisch-ästhetischen und noch mehr: praktisch-poetischen Gründen niemals noch lebende Personen in meinen Romanen vorführe. An Anspielungen auf Bismarck habe ich es allerdings nicht fehlen lassen, und das war in Romanen, deren Zeit die Gegenwart war, auch nicht zu vermeiden. So schreitet seine mächtige Gestalt durch den Hintergrund - wenn ich mich so ausdrücken darf - von 'Sturmflut', 'Ein neuer Pharao' und 'Was will das werden?'. In letzterem Roman lasse ich den jugendlichen Helden sich über Bismarck aussprechen in drei 'Goethe und Bismarck' überschriebenen Sonetten, die ich auch, in etwas veränderter Form, in meine 'Gedichte' aufgenommen habe, hier unter dem Titel 'Die Dioskuren'." (13)

He goes on to reply to Litzmann's attack on him:¹⁴

"Den Ausspruch Professor Litzmanns: die Stellung des betreffenden Autors zu Bismarck zum Wertmesser seiner Qualifikation als Dichter der Gegenwart zu nehmen, halte ich für völlig falsch. Professor Litzmann, als ein noch junger Mann, steht aber unter dem Zauber des Gewaltigen auf Friedrichsruh, gerade wie unsere ganze junge Generation. Von jemand, der, wie ich, bereits im Jahre 48 Republikaner war und es noch heute im Herzen ist, kann man die gleiche Begeisterung für den Begründer des Deutschen Reiches nicht erwarten; ich wäre ein Narr, wollte ich die Größe des Mannes nicht anerkennen, aber ich müßte meine langjährigen politischen und moralischen Überzeugungen verleugnen, um das ohne jede reservatio tun zu können. Ich müßte sehr, sehr weit ausholen, um klar zu legen, worin denn diese Reservationen bestehen. Ich habe eben ein Ideal vom deutschen Volke in meinem Kopfe, dem die Gegenwart in sehr vielen und sehr wichtigen Punkten nicht entspricht." (15)

Spielhagen's ideal was that of a 'mündiges Volk' of free men in which the republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity would be realised. In reply to Litzmann's dictum that a writer's attitude to Bismarck was what decided his quality as a writer,

Spielhagen wrote:

"Nach meiner Ansicht darf man den Dichter von heute nicht fragen: wie stehst Du zu Bismarck? sondern: wie stehst Du zu Christus? d.h. zu dem Evangelium von der Brüderschaft der Menschen? Ich glaube an dies Evangelium von ganzem Herzen, und daß, wer sich nicht zu ihr bekennt, früher oder später zu den Toten geworfen wird, ob sie auch heute aller Orten auf seinen Namen schwören." (16)

Bismarck's kingdom is rejected because it is not founded on the principles of Christianity. Spielhagen was convinced, as few were in his day, of the burning social relevance of the secular message of the Christian gospel.

c. Interview with Hermann Bahr (1894)

Bahr interviewed Spielhagen at his home in Charlottenburg, Berlin as part of a survey of antisemitism which was becoming a disquieting feature of political life in Germany.¹⁷ Spielhagen explained that he regarded economic conditions as responsible for the rise of antisemitism and that with an improvement of the economic situation antisemitism would disappear. Bahr interjects that this is precisely what the socialists are saying to which Spielhagen replies:

"So nennen Sie mich meinetwegen einen Sozialisten. Ich werde nicht widersprechen..." (18)

Spielhagen does not hesitate to describe Bismarck's social legislation as his greatest achievement; indeed, in a mood of rather desperate optimism he mistakes Bismarck's social measures for the beginnings of the new socialist order:

"...mit dem leichten fröhlichen Manchestertum ist es vorbei. Es war vielleicht Bismarcks größte Tat, daß er das erkannte und wenn auch seine Kraft, wohl seine ganze Art zur Vollendung nicht mehr reichte, doch den neuen Weg gewiesen hat. Und wenn Sie nur denken - Altersversorgung, Invalidenversicherung und so weiter - sind wir denn nicht schon mitten im Sozialismus? Lassen Sie ihn nur gewähren und uns auf den neuen Weg rüstig aufwärts steigen und Sie sollen sehen, wie vom Antisemitismus bald keine Spur mehr ist." (19)

Spielhagen thus made very much the same mistake as the National Liberals at the time of the founding of the German Empire, an achievement which they had regarded as a great beginning of a new liberal Germany. Spielhagen's opposition to Bismarck was certainly tempered in the last years of his life by the belief that Bismarck had pioneered social developments in Germany that would ultimately transform society. The actual task of changing society fell - as he believed - to the socialists where his political sympathies lay.²⁰

d. Am Wege (1903)

In this volume of miscellaneous writings there are a number of references to Bismarck which make it possible to define Spielhagen's attitude to Bismarck more accurately than would be the case by just relying on references in the novels. In 'Post festum', a third person account of his reaction to the celebration of his own seventieth birthday, Spielhagen attempts to explain his isolated position in society and comes to the conclusion that it is his independence and the frankness with which he expresses his fairly radical political and social views that have contributed to his isolation.²¹ He also implies that a critical review of Freytag's play 'Die Fabier' alienated the support of both Freytag and his close associate Julian Schmidt²² (both men exerted a considerable influence on the development of literary taste in the German middle class through the periodical 'Die Grenzboten').²³ As well as being ignored or disparaged by the critics of the national liberal literary establishment, Spielhagen was also the target for attacks from younger naturalist critics, such as the brothers Hart,²⁴ who saw in Spielhagen the arch exponent of the 'idealist' literature that they declared obsolete. He also offended many Jews by his belief that the decline of liberalism was linked to the wide support liberalism enjoyed amongst Jews.²⁵ Spielhagen had, therefore, by the 1880's alienated most sections of the literary establishment.²⁶ Spielhagen's comparative success in Russia and America led him to think that his isolation in Germany was due to his refusal to modify his radical liberal position, something that was understood and appreciated in freedom-loving America and in Russia with its more radical intellectual traditions.

"Er war ein geborener Tyrannenhasser, Hasser alles dessen, was nach Autorität schmeckt... Daß die Republik die Panacée für alle sozialen Schäden sei, glaubte er keinen Augenblick, dennoch sah er in ihr die einzige eines mündigen Volkes würdige Staatsform." (27)

Spielhagen continues:

"Solche Ansichten verstand man in Rußland, auch in den Kreisen der Gebildeten, die das Hauptkontingent seiner Leser stellten. In denen ganz besonders. In Deutschland hatte sich hierin ein Umschwung vollzogen, der nicht zu seinen Gunsten

"war. Die Aufrichtung des Deutschen Reiches, die er auch mit Freuden begrüßt, war Vielen eine Abschlagszahlung gewesen, für die sie willig einen beträchtlichen Posten von der liberalen Rechnung, die sie einstmals der Regierung präsentiert hatten, streichen zu dürfen glaubten. Da er von diesem Abstrich nichts wissen wollte, vielmehr der Meinung war, es habe das Volk, das mit Strömen seines Blutes den Einheitsbau gekittet, jetzt doppelt und dreifach das Recht, die Einrichtung im Innern nach seinen Wünschen und Bedürfnissen zu treffen, und er diese Überzeugung, wie er es gewohnt, mit Freimut nachdrücklich aussprach, gelangte er in den Ruf eines Mannes, der, wie er nichts vergessen, so auch nichts gelernt habe. Das entfremdete ihm viele alte Freunde und erwarb ihm keine neuen, die er nur in Kreisen hätte finden können, von welchem ihn jener Riß trennte, der zum ungeheueren Schaden beider Teile durch die Bildung unseres Volkes geht, und den zu beseitigen die Aufgabe und schwere Arbeit des kommenden Jahrhunderts sein wird." (28)

Spielhagen expresses his general opposition to the conservative political structure that Bismarck had erected, opposition inspired by the ideals that had been at the very centre of German liberalism from its very beginnings.

On 28th August 1899 Spielhagen delivered an address - included in this volume - commemorating the birth of Goethe in which he attempts to reintegrate the classical humanist tradition and the German national character at a time when the image the German nation had of itself was, under the baneful influence of Bismarck, neither liberal nor humanist. One aspect of nineteenth century nationalism was its search for a defined national character and for outstanding expressions of that character; the figures chosen frequently reflected the mood of the nation at a particular time, thus, in the years of political stagnation preceding the 1848 Revolution Hamlet was widely regarded as a typically German figure. Faust, too, was seen as an expression of German striving.²⁹ Both figures were taken from literature and thus testify to the powerful influence of literature as a cultural force in the first half of the nineteenth century in Germany. Later in the century Goethe, Luther and Bismarck were generally regarded as giving supreme expression to some dominant trait in the German national character. Max Nordau, for example, affirmed.

"...daß Fürst Bismarck den deutschen Menschen in vollkommener Ausgestaltung darstellt." (31)

Spielhagen presents Goethe as the most perfect, the most complete expression of the German character:

"...wenn man, wie billig, den Größten den nennen muß, der in nie vorher dagewesener und wohl kaum zu übertreffender Weise alles, aber alles, was das deutsche Wesen ausmacht, in sich vereinigt, den Typ des Deutschen in seiner höchsten Steigerung darstellt. Wer wäre ihm auf diese seine Mustergültigkeit hin vorzuziehen? ja nur an die Seite zu stellen?" (32)

Spielhagen proceeds to examine and reject in turn Lessing, who is far too critical and lacks sentimentality, Kant who is

"...für einen vollblütigen Germanen zu ausschließlich Stubengelehrter." (33)

Schiller, who is too full of pathos and even Luther whose religiosity and dogmatism are incompatible with 'deutsche Weit- und Weichherzigkeit'.³⁴ Frederick the Great and Bismarck are regarded as untypical exceptions:

"Kann man doch ohne Paradox behaupten, daß die Eigenschaften, auf denen ihre Größe basiert: ihre ungeheure Energie, die keine Rücksicht kennt, vor keiner Maßregel, und koste sie noch so ungeheure Opfer, zurückschreckt, wenn es die Erreichung des angestrebten Zieles gilt; ihr grandioses politisches Genie, das um so heller aufflammt, je schwieriger die zu lösende Aufgabe sich erweist; ihre odysseische Verschlagenheit, die den listigen Gegner immer noch zu überlisten versteht - daß diese Eigenschaften, ich will nicht sagen, undeutsch sind, aber bei den Deutschen zu selten gefunden werden, um nicht als phänomenale Ausnahmen in der Regel gelten zu müssen." (35)

Spielhagen was fighting a rear-guard action against changes in the German nation's image of its own character, changes that were closely linked with the ascendancy of Bismarckian realism and the decline of idealism. The 'Bismarckian' middle class turned to mighty heroes from the German past, such as Frederick the Great, and heroes of the present, such as Bismarck; such men were superlative expressions of the German spirit. Spielhagen counters this by pointing to the very exceptional nature of such characters and what is exceptional cannot by definition be the type. He returns to Goethe and emphasises that he is in every respect 'German to the core':

"...Goethe ist urdeutsch in dem, was er hat und wiederum urdeutsch in dem, woran es ihm gebricht. Urdeutsch in seiner Sentimentalität, seiner Weichheit, Anpassungsfähigkeit, seinem Liebedürfnis, seiner frauenhaften Gesinnung, seinem unersättlichen Bildungstrieb, der Universalität seines Genies. Und wiederum urdeutsch in

"der Schwäche des politischen Instinkts, des Dranges nach einem Schaffen auf dem Markte des Lebens im vollen Licht der Öffentlichkeit, des demagogischen Triebs, auf die Masse zu wirken; des Talents, sie zu führen, sie zu beherrschen. Er hat die Tugenden; er hat die Fehler der Deutschen. Und während man sich jene andere Heroen wohl auch zur Not als einer anderen Nation entsprossen vorstellen könnte, vermag man sich ihn einzig und allein als Deutschen zu denken." (36)

Spielhagen portrays Goethe as the supreme example of the free man:

"Und diese seine Herrschaft wird wachsen in dem Maße, in welchem die Menschen sich aus dem Wust der Vorurteile, der Platttheit des Banausentums, der Enge des Dogmenglaubens zur reinen, freien Menschlichkeit emporläutern. Vor der auch der Starrsinn des nationalen Dünkels erweichen muß so weit, daß der Traum des Dichters von einer alle Kulturvölker umfassende Weltliteratur in Erfüllung geht." (37)

Spielhagen is trying to harness the intellectual and emotional forces of nationalism to his ideal of the free man: the prototype free man is German:

"Der deutscheste der Deutschen ist auch der menschlichste Mensch." (38)

This is hardly an observation, more an appeal to the imagination of his contemporaries, an attempt to re-establish the values of the classical humanist tradition as represented in the figure of Goethe as an integral part of the German nation's image of itself. He is seeking to rehabilitate the discredited image of the German as the free idealistic individual, the tolerant citizen of the world, which was dismissed by most contemporaries as impractical and obsolete. Ziegler, a liberal historian, echoes a common sentiment when he writes:

"Bismarck hat uns zu Realisten gemacht." (39)

Spielhagen is combating Bismarck's influence in his description of Goethe as a national hero:

"Könnte je das deutsche Volk aus der Reihe der Völker entschwinden, man würde aus Goethes Gestalten den deutschen Menschen zu rekonstruieren vermögen, wie aus denen Homers den Hellenen.

An einem Dichter aber, der das Wesen seines Volkes so in seinem tiefsten Grunde erfaßt und für alle Zeiten ausgeprägt hat, darf die Wellen des Tages vorüberrauschen unbeachtet, ohne ihm ein Atom seiner Größe zu rauben. Damit ist das törichte Gerede von Goethes Mangel an deutsch-nationalem Sinn gerichtet. Ist es doch jetzt fast schon verstummt. Und wird vollends verstummen. Und er wird als

"deutsch-nationaler Heros anerkannt werden, selbst von denen, die fortfahren, in Luther den fluchwürdigen Ketzler, in Friedrich dem Großen den brutalen Eroberer, in Bismarck den Erzfeind freiheitlicher Entwicklung zu sehen." (40)

The last reference to Bismarck would tend to suggest that Spielhagen did not view Bismarck as an enemy of liberal development, but this must be taken to be what Spielhagen probably regarded as a necessary concession to public sensitivity with regard to criticism of Bismarck, since only a year later (1896) he openly describes Bismarck as a dictator.⁴¹ Spielhagen ends his address with a plea for a Germany whose power and influence in the world are moral and spiritual and castigates the importance attached to military strength.⁴² While Spielhagen does not suggest that Bismarck is responsible for the militarism and imperialism that was a growing feature of Germany at the turn of the century, he saw that Bismarck's defence of Junker hegemony in the state had preserved the influence of an essentially militarist class. In his novels Spielhagen pointed to the spread of militarist ideas among the younger 'Bismarck' generation. Indeed, almost without exception, figures in Spielhagen's novels who admire Bismarck and take him as a model for their own behaviour are invariably representative of the more unsavoury developments in German society.

e. Spielhagen and Bismarck: conclusions.

Spielhagen was a life-long republican. The ideals of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, the declaration of the rights of man formed the unchanging basis of his political philosophy. Spielhagen's opposition to Bismarck was entirely political in motivation; it was the opposition of the liberal republican to the conservative monarchist. He saw clearly what Bismarck's aims were: the preservation of the essentially feudal system of monarchical government against the claims of liberalism that sought to replace it with popular representative government; Bismarck was determined - as Spielhagen saw it - to preserve the political and social power of the aristocracy from attempts by the middle class to replace the aristocracy as the ruling class in Germany. This was in Spielhagen's view a programme of permanent counter-revolution and the antithesis of his own ideals. Where Spielhagen worked and wrote to educate and emancipate the German public in pursuit of his ideal: the free, responsible citizen, Bismarck strove, employing the panoply of state power and his control of the press, to maintain and consolidate the authoritarian 'Obrigkeitsstaat', to perpetuate the German 'Untertan'. It was Spielhagen's appreciation of Bismarck's basic strategy that inspired his fundamental opposition to Bismarck.

In the 1860's at the time of the constitutional conflict Spielhagen opposed Bismarck the Junker - whose brief was the defence of monarchical and aristocratic prerogatives - in the name of parliamentary sovereignty and the democratic rights of the people. He wrote articles for the radical democratic 'Volkszeitung' and himself edited a liberal weekly 'Die deutsche Wochenschrift'.

In 1871 the German Empire was established and Bismarck hailed as its architect. While Spielhagen welcomed the unification of the German states - and was prepared to acknowledge the part Bismarck had played as statesman in the

achievement of German unity - he was painfully aware that the political and social structure of the new Empire remained as before. The defeat of France had brought a re-organisation of Germany's political geography, had led to the establishment of a united Germany as a major European power, but the Prussian Junker class remained as firmly in control of power in a Germany united under Prussian hegemony as before. Spielhagen, although subject to considerable self-questioning with regard to the validity of republican ideals in Bismarckian Germany, found he could not accept the political structure as imposed by Bismarck in 1871, a structure which perpetuated in the name of a constitutional and imperial monarchy Bismarck's own unique position of power above a relatively ineffective Reichstag. Hopes that the aristocracy would accept the middle class as political partners - thus ending decades of conflict and initiating a new era of liberal evolution in Germany - were soon replaced by fears that with the political structure unchanged authoritarianism, nationalism, militarism and materialism would combine to destroy the liberal humanist tradition.

The proscription of the socialists (1878) stiffened Spielhagen's opposition to Bismarck; he was also embittered by liberal support for Bismarck's anti-socialist measures and by the general indifference of the middle class to the social problems that industrialisation and urbanisation were creating. The new Bismarck-inspired 'realism' of the middle class, their worship of success, their materialism and modern contempt for ideal values made Spielhagen fear for the future of Germany. These trends made him aware of the adverse influence of Bismarck on political and social values in German society: the lack of vigorous opposition to Bismarck in the Reichstag and the Bismarck cult of the younger generation (the two areas of influence that Spielhagen criticises in 'Strumflut') are seen as isolated phenomena in the 1870's; by the 1880's Spielhagen saw Bismarck's influence as all-embracing, as pervading every aspect of contemporary life. Sections of the aristocracy and the middle

class joined in admiration of their common hero Bismarck.

In the 1880's the social question assumed for Spielhagen an importance that transcended that of the question of political representation: confronted with poverty, disease and widespread social deprivation the question of political rights receded in his scale of priorities. Spielhagen found himself in his concern for social justice in opposition to the middle class who now shared with the conservative establishment a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo. Spielhagen welcomed Bismarck's social legislation and hailed it as his greatest achievement, without apparently appreciating Bismarck's political motives. It reconciled him in some measure to Bismarck's illiberal regime; he was particularly bitter that the Progressive Party - the party with which he had the closest links - should have opposed the measures. At this point in the evolution of his political thinking Spielhagen had adopted a Fabian-type approach to the social question: he believed that in order to avoid revolution, society would have to be reformed from above (perhaps he sympathised, therefore, with Bismarck's attempt to deprive the socialists of the basis of their political agitation by satisfying certain basic demands, and thus, prevent the development of a politically conscious workers' movement). Whatever his views were in the 1880's, by the 1890's he had been drawn more and more to the Social Democratic Party; he began to see in the party a movement that represented those democratic and republican ideals of equality and fraternity that he had spent his life struggling for. He also admired the way the party had not submitted to the massive pressure that Bismarck had brought to bear, but had struggled on undaunted.

As the Social Democratic Party increased in strength - in the period after the ban had been lifted in 1890 - Spielhagen began to see a real ray of hope for the future: he began to hope that the Bismarck era, which had brought the defeat of his ideals, would be no more than an interlude in the course of German history. This reawakened optimism was balanced by a strong current of pessimism in Spielhagen's thinking towards the end of his life:

he despaired that the Germans as a nation would ever develop into free-born men, influenced by the feudalisation of the German national character that resulted from widespread uncritical admiration of Bismarck. He even favoured - in the 1870's - Germany acquiring colonies in the hope that the tough environment there would encourage the German settlers to develop a sense of independence and self-reliance.⁴³

Spielhagen had witnessed in his life-time the emergence of a liberal middle class as a political force of the first order, he had witnessed its attempts to oust the aristocracy from power and he had witnessed the failure, decline and capitulation of liberalism at the hands of Bismarck. Bismarck had, as Mommsen put it...

"...der Nation des Rückgrat gebrochen." (44)

and Spielhagen would have concurred, only too aware of the influence that Bismarck had exerted on the development of Germany. Another contemporary, the sociologist Max Weber summed up the consequences of Bismarck's influence on Germany in the following way:

"Was war infolgedessen...Bismarcks politisches Erbe? Er hinterließ eine Nation ohne alle und jede politische Erziehung, tief unter dem Niveau, welches sie in dieser Hinsicht zwanzig Jahre vorher bereits erreicht hatte. Und vor allem eine Nation ohne allen und jeden politischen Willen, gewohnt, daß der große Staatsmann an ihrer Spitze für sie die Politik schon besorgen werden. Und ferner, als Folge der mißbräuchlichen Benutzung des monarchischen Gefühls als Deckschild eigener Machtinteressen im politischen Parteikampf, eine Nation, daran gewöhnt, unter der Firma der 'monarchischen Regierung' fatalistisch über sich ergehen zu lassen, was man über sie beschloß, ohne Kritik an der politischen Qualifikation derjenigen, welche sich nunmehr auf Bismarcks leergelassenen Sessel niederließen. ... Eine politische Tradition dagegen hinterließ der große Staatsmann überhaupt nicht. Innerlich selbständige Köpfe und vollends Charaktere hatte er weder herangezogen noch auch nur ertragen... Demgegenüber als ein rein negatives Ergebnis seines gewaltigen Prestiges ein völlig machtloses Parlament." (45)

Weber's observation of Bismarck's influence on the younger generation confirms and is confirmed by Spielhagen's description (references to novels inserted):

"Die Nachwirkung der gewaltigen Ereignisse von 1866 und 1870

"vollzog sich, wie oft, erst an der Generation, welche zwar die siegreichen Kriege als unauslöschlichen Jugendeindruck miterlebt (cf. Reinhold Schmidt in 'Sturmflut' and Lothar Lorenz in 'Was will das werden?'), von den tiefen innerpolitischen Spannungen und Problemen aber, welche sie begleiteten, keine eigene klare Anschauung hatte. In ihren Köpfen erst wurde Bismarck zur Legende. Jenes Geschlecht politischer Literaten, welches seit etwa 1878 in das öffentliche Leben eintrat, spaltete sich in seiner Haltung zu ihm in zwei ungleich große Hälften, von denen die eine, größere, nicht etwa die Großartigkeit seines feinen und beherrschenden Geistes, sondern ausschließlich den Einschlag von Gewalttätigkeit und List in seiner staatsmännischen Methode, das scheinbar oder wirklich Brutale daran anschwärmte (Philipp Schmidt in 'Sturmflut' and Herbert Ilicius in 'Ein neuer Pharao'), die andere aber mit kraftlosen Ressentiments dagegen reagierte. Wenn die zweite Spielart nach seinem Tode schnell verschwand, so wurde die erste seitdem literarisch erst recht gepflegt. Sie prägt seit langem die historische Legende der konservativen Politiker nicht nur, sondern auch ehrlich begeisterter Literaten und endlich aller jener Plebejer des Geistes, welche durch äußerliche Nachahmung seiner Gesten sich als Geist von seinem Geist zu legitimieren meinen." (46)

Spielhagen's opposition to Bismarck was not based on hostility or resentment of Bismarck as an autocratic ruler, or even to individual policies; his opposition was based on his perception of Bismarck's aims: the defeat of democratic liberalism and the preservation of an authoritarian feudal structure. The consequences of this for German political culture were far-reaching: liberal humanism declined, a spent and discredited force to be replaced by a cynical and ruthless realism, modelled on Bismarck, that was to the ideology of the German middle class in the twentieth century.

Spielhagen represents the stand of the uncorrupted humanist liberal against Bismarck and the values he promoted: nationalism, materialism, militarism. In an increasingly hostile and contemptuous atmosphere Spielhagen maintained his belief in the validity of democratic humanism and the social ethic of Christianity. It was Germany's tragedy that his message was dismissed as irrelevant and obsolete.

Conclusions

a. The writers and Bismarck

Of the three writers Spielhagen, a radical democrat, was the most consistent critic of Bismarck and of German society in the Bismarck era. He believed passionately in individual liberty and social justice, that is, freedom from economic oppression. His political ideal was the democratic republic of equal, free and responsible citizens. He rejected Bismarck as representing - and defending - a political and social order that was the antithesis of his ideal with its lack of concern for the liberty and the dignity of the individual. He further objected to the consolidation of authoritarian political attitudes and the 'brutalisation' of political mores that resulted from Bismarck's despotic exercise of power.

Freytag, a moderate constitutional liberal, was also a life-long opponent and critic of Bismarck. In the vanguard of the liberal struggle to bring down the monarchical system of government in Prussia in the 1860's and replace it with a system of parliamentary government, he bitterly resented Bismarck's ruthless defence of monarchical power and aristocratic privilege. None of Bismarck's later achievements - not even the unification of Germany - quite reconciled Freytag to the illiberal Bismarck regime and he continued to hope that Bismarck and his autocratic regime would in time give way to a liberal system of government. Given the lack of any popular opposition to Bismarck, Freytag looked to the Crown Prince Frederick, a known liberal sympathiser, to initiate such a development.

Fontane, by far the most positive in his attitude to Bismarck, confessed to being an admirer of Bismarck's political genius. Bismarck the statesman, the orator, the humorist held a particular, if fairly apolitical, fascination for Fontane. Bismarck's despotism was in Fontane's view fully justified by his achievements for Germany, indeed, his despotism was a

condition of Germany's greatness. Only very late in life - after Bismarck had resigned - did Fontane's dislike of Bismarck's petty autocratic style and growing megalomania escalate into outright rejection of Bismarck. He finally concluded that Bismarck the man lacked nobility and generosity while his achievements lacked moral significance.

While Fontane rejected Bismarck very largely because of his character, Freytag and Spielhagen rejected Bismarck for strictly political reasons. Bismarck represented a political system, monarchical, feudal and pseudo-parliamentary in nature, that they both wished to see replaced by another system. It was their belief in the continuing validity of this alternative that sustained their opposition to Bismarck.

b. The writers' perception of Bismarck's influence on German society

What phenomena in the subsequent development of Germany were commonly ascribed to the influence of Bismarck by his critics?¹

1. The very success of Bismarck as a statesman undermined the confidence of the German liberal middle class in their own political abilities.² By excluding the middle classes from the responsible exercise of political power Bismarck kept them in a state of political immaturity, excessively dependent on strong leadership.³

2. Bismarck's systematic vilification of his political opponents as 'enemies of Germany'(Reichsfeinde) with opposition to the government denounced as unpatriotic, encouraged political conformism('Byzantinismus') and led to a decline in standards of conduct in public life('Verwilderung der politischen Sitten'):

"Bismarcks unerbittlicher, mit den Machtmitteln des Staates geführter Kampf gegen politisch Andersdenkende (Hat) den Mut zur Selbständigkeit unterdrückt..." (4)

3. Bismarck's autocratic personality, his ruthlessness in the exercise of his power and his contempt for subordinates made him in the popular mind the incarnation of Nietzsche's amoral 'Übermensch'.

4. Bismarck's programmatic separation of politics and morality, his 'Realpolitik' with its emphasis on 'Blut und Eisen' corrupted public understanding of the nature of politics. The art of politics was reduced to a matter of 'Macht vor Recht', thereby encouraging reliance on military might and strong-arm tactics.

5. Bismarck's military posture⁵ promoted militarism.

Finally, Bismarck's influence was reinforced by the 'cult' that grew up:

"Die Mehrheit des deutschen Volkes wollte mit Bewußtsein in allen Stücken bismarckisch denken und fühlen." (6)

How does this assessment compare with each of the writer's view of Bismarck's influence.?

Compared to many prominent contemporaries, whether supporters

or opponents of Bismarck, Fontane had a very modest view of the extent and impact of Bismarck's influence on developments in Germany. Some of his more lyrical contemporaries spoke of Bismarck imprinting his stamp on the age either favourably, in which case almost every advance is ascribed to his beneficial and ubiquitous influence⁷ or unfavourably, in which case the responsibility for the political immaturity of the German nation is laid at Bismarck's feet. Fontane's understanding of history precluded ascribing too much influence to one man. Most of the major developments in Germany in the Bismarck era - in the social and political structure - Fontane regarded as the product of powerful underlying forces.⁸ There is little evidence to suggest that he perceived any thorough-going causal link between Bismarck's influence and the negative developments in German society which gave him such cause for concern.

Fontane noted that Germany had, under Bismarck, grown accustomed to being governed by a statesman possessed of exceptional abilities:

"Bismarcks Regiment, eine Genialitäts-Episode, hat uns daran gewöhnt an oberster Stelle mit dem Ausnahmefall zu rechnen, diesen als Regel zu nehmen, die Regel ist aber die Mittelmäßigkeit, die geistige und die moralische Dürftigkeit..." (9)

He later wrote, describing the origins and evolution of Prussia, of the lack of freedom and independence in German society:

"Ein Staat entstand...aber wie gut auch in seiner Art, es gehörte einer niedrigsten Kulturentwicklung an. Von Freiheit keine Rede. Und daran kranken wir noch. Aller gegebenen und gesetzlich garantierten Freiheiten zum Trotz, sind wir innerlich unfrei geblieben und teilen uns nach wie vor in Regierende und Regierte. Die Selbständigkeit fehlt, die Initiative; wir erwarten nach wie vor alles von der Regierung. Wir finden es bequem und vorteilhaft, uns regieren zu lassen." (10)

Fontane traces the lack of liberty to the traditions of absolutist Prussia, but makes no mention of Bismarck; there is apparently in Fontane's mind no link. The lack of 'Zivilcourage' was a further feature of public life in Germany (commonly ascribed to Bismarck's despotism) that Fontane observed: he complained of 'beständig wachsende Fortschritte...im Byzantismus'¹¹

Did Fontane see this trend as linked in any way to Bismarck's autocratic conduct? The evidence is tenuous. While he was aware that

"...neben einem solchen Despoten(i.e. Bismarck) nur unselbständige oder Köpfe zweiten oder dritten Ranges dienen können." (12)

and made the link between Bismarck's despotism and the emergence of the conformist 'Streber' in the state administration explicit in the figure of Innstetten, Fontane did not regard Bismarck's regime as responsible for the more general lack of 'Zivilcourage' in public life. Hedemeyer's observation that

"...wir schwelgen in einem unausgesetzten Götzen- und Opferdienst. Und was wir am willfährigsten opfern, das ist die freie Meinung..." (13)

suggests rather that he associated the byzantinism of public life with the Bismarck cult and the attendant - and voluntary - sacrifice of liberal principles by the middle class, for which Bismarck could hardly be blamed.

Fontane observed 'eine Kleinheit, eine Enge und Unfreiheit',¹⁴ in conditions in Germany, but makes no mention of Bismarck. He complained

"...freie Menschen von unbefangener Empfindung gibt es nicht mehr, alles steckt, zum Teil ohne es zu wissen... in Staatspatentheit und Offiziosität." (15)

Again, no mention of Bismarck. Bismarck's point, made after his resignation, that the Germans appeared to lack confidence in themselves,¹⁶ met with Fontane's approval, but he did not see Bismarck as linked in any way with this state of affairs. Fontane also saw no connection between the absolutism of the young Kaiser William II and Bismarck's life-long struggle against parliamentarism in Germany. In later life Fontane bemoaned the fact that parliament had only very limited powers to resist the absolutism of the Kaiser, but he appears to have attached no blame to Bismarck.

It might seem that Fontane had a blindspot when it came to assessing the impact of Bismarck's influence on political

developments in Germany. Fontane seems to have regarded Bismarck's influence as negligible. The much lamented 'Bory~~ussis~~mus', the militarism, chauvinism, materialism and imperialism of Germany in the 1880's and 1890's were all phenomena unconnected with Bismarck in Fontane's view. His list of 'etablierte Mächte' in Prussia did not include Bismarck:

"Sie wissen so gut wie ich oder besser als ich, daß es in unsrem guten Lande Preußen...etablierte Mächte gibt, denen man sich unterwirft. Diese Mächte sind verschieden: Geld, Adel, Offizier, Assessor, Professor... Im Ganzen aber darf man sagen, es gibt in Preußen nur 6 Idole und das Haupt-Idol, der Vitzliputzli des preußischen Kultus, ist der Leutnant, der Reserve-Offizier." (17)

Fontane observed a whole range of disturbing phenomena in German society in the 1880's and 1890's - especially those linked to the dominant position of the Prussian aristocracy - but he does not seem to have attempted to gather his observations together and relate them in a coherent total picture of historical cause and effect to the influence of Bismarck. We thus have in Fontane novels and other writings extremely vivid descriptions of individual symptoms, but no over-all diagnosis. Fontane underestimated the influence of Bismarck on Germany; this was due, for the most part, to the fact that he regarded others factors - for example, the aristocracy - as more decisive.

The latter decades of Freytag's life were overshadowed by the decline of liberalism as a political force in German public life, a decline that owed as much to the weakness of the middle class as to the despotism of Bismarck. The middle classes succumbed to the success of Bismarck's achievements where they had failed. While Freytag had in his writings tried to stem this decline, to reaffirm the preeminent political role of the middle class and strengthen its political will, the middle class itself had, by and large, no longer any wish to determine the political fate of Germany which was, anyway, in the capable hands of Bismarck.

Freytag regarded this development as very largely the consequence of a fatal flaw in the German national character:

the need to look up to and admire great men, a need that was so strong, so deeply rooted that, where no real heroes existed, heroes were created by the idealisation of leaders. Bismarck was one such hero, idealised, as Freytag complained, out of all proportion to satisfy the collective longing of the German soul for hero-worship. Freytag had hoped that Bismarck's despotism would provoke a massive counter-movement, but such hopes proved to be in vain.

While Freytag was distinctly uneasy about the possible consequences of Bismarck's regime on the course of German history and on the German people, he did not have any clear idea as to what these consequences might be. Freytag was extremely reluctant to subject the political culture of his own class, the middle class, to critical analysis, preferring to believe that the middle class was incapable of betraying its liberal traditions; he, thus, made no sustained attempt to assess the impact of Bismarck on the middle class. In the last years of his life Freytag was anyway too preoccupied with what he believed to be the threat to bourgeois society and the state posed by the socialists to give much thought to the possible consequences of Bismarck's influence. Despite his fears that the bourgeois camp had been considerably weakened by the emergence of the Catholic Centre Party as a major party (for which Freytag blamed Bismarck)¹⁸ Freytag reasserted - almost mechanically - his belief that in the inevitable confrontation between capital and labour that lay ahead¹⁹ the middle class (capital) would ultimately win through, if they 'dealt' quickly with the socialists.²⁰ The socialists replaced Bismarck as the main enemy of the middle class.²¹ On the whole Freytag does not seem to have been cognizant of the profound changes in the liberal political culture of the middle class in German society during the Bismarck era.

Of the three writers Spielhagen was most painfully aware of the destructive nature of Bismarck's influence on liberal political

attitudes in German society, particularly, in the middle class, and contrasts in this respect with Freytag's view. Spielhagen's firm commitment to radical politics and his sustained opposition to Bismarck's conservative politics made this almost inevitable. The decline of constitutional liberalism and its replacement - as the ideology of the middle class - by a brash nationalism inspired by Bismarckian principles of 'Realpolitik' is meticulously charted in Spielhagen's novels from 'Allzeit Voran'(1872) to 'Freigeboren'(1900). Bismarck's success, first, in staving off the liberal threat and finally, by his unification of Germany, in realising one of liberalism's prime goals, led to a withering away of parliamentary liberalism and a shift to nationalist aims. Spielhagen did not entirely blame Bismarck for this: he had harsh words for the middle class who had - in his opinion - capitulated to Bismarck without much of a struggle after he had created a united Germany. The middle class had, he complained, discarded all too readily their parliamentary liberalism(hence, the frequent figure of the renegade 'Bismarckian' liberal in Spielhagen's novels) and had supported him in pursuit of national greatness. Bismarck, the architect of the German Empire and the statesman who symbolised a united Germany's new found influence and prestige as a European power became the hero of the middle class, especially of the younger generation.

Bismarck's most pernicious influence in Spielhagen's view was the prestige and authority he lent to attitudes and ideas that were profoundly undemocratic. As Sienkiewicz commented ²² it mattered little whether Bismarck ever actually said that 'Macht geht vor Recht'; what was important was that he acted as if this dictum were the basis of his political action. Bismarck's example - and its widespread imitation - led to a 'brutalisation' of German political culture in which ideal values, such as humanism or republicanism, were scornfully dismissed as old-fashioned, impractical and unrealistic, while the ruthless exploitation of advantage for the achievement of success, the

uninhibited exercise of power were proclaimed the principles of the new age of Bismarckian realism. Spielhagen appreciated that such notions - strictly applied - would result in a situation of permanent social conflict within nations and between nations. Indeed, social darwinism with its doctrine of life as a continuous bitter struggle for survival, appeared to confirm such 'Bismarckian' ideas.

Bismarck also served to exemplify for many contemporaries the supreme figure of genius. It is unlikely that the cult of the genius would have reached such proportions had it not been for Bismarck's powerful personality as a striking example. The cult of the genius was employed - together with the more notorious Nietzschean 'Übermensch' concept - to disprove and discredit democratic ideas of equality and brotherhood.

The failure of German liberalism to unite Germany in contrast to Bismarck's awe-inspiring success, achieved by ruthlessly imposing his iron will on a recalcitrant people, persuaded many Germans that autocracy and authoritarian government were more consonant with the German national character than liberalism. The German was apparently 'der geborene Gefolgsmann' with a great innate capacity for loyal and obedient service, but no talent for the disciplines of self-government. The German nation's experience of Bismarck, the great despot-statesman, confirmed them in their role as subject ('Untertan') in the authoritarian state ('Obrigkeitsstaat'). Spielhagen also held Bismarck responsible for the political conformism (byzantinism) of public life by his ruthless removal of opponents and hounding of critics; this, in turn, gave rise to the careerist who was prepared to sacrifice all to his own success ('Streber'). All of these phenomena Spielhagen observed and recorded in his novels.

The contribution that each of the three novelists makes to an understanding of the way in which Bismarck influenced the political culture in Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century varies considerably. Freytag's commitment to the concept of literature as primarily a medium of political

inspiration for the middle class precluded critical analysis of the middle class and forced Freytag to turn to the historical novel. Nowhere did he describe the middle class of the Bismarck era. Fontane's concern with a detailed evocation of the political and intellectual atmosphere of the Berlin upper class of his day resulted in a number of memorable portraits of conservative opponents of Bismarck, but only in the figure of the Careerist ('Streber') Innstetten in 'Effi Briest' did he begin to explore the implications of Bismarck's despotic regime for human values. Spielhagen's concept of the novel as a forum for the discussion of the political and social issues of the day produced an unequalled literary analysis of the impact of Bismarck on the political and intellectual culture of the German middle class. His account is especially interesting for the links he establishes between Bismarck's influence and the genesis of anti-democratic and, in the event, prefascist attitudes. Of all the writers he comes closest by the breadth of his canvas to the concept of the realist novelist as 'social historian'.

