

***GEORGE
HESEKIEL***



***THE LIFE
OF BISMARCK***

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Table of Contents

Book the First. The Bismarcks of Olden Time

Chapter I. Name and Origin

Chapter II. Castellans at Burgstall Castle [1270-1550.]

Chapter III. The Permutation [1550-1563.]

Chapter IV. The Bismarcks of Schönhausen [1563-1800.]

Chapter V. Armorial Bearings

Chapter VI. The Neighborhood of Bismarck's Birthplace

Chapter VII. Schönhausen

Book the Second. Youth

Chapter I. School and College Days

Chapter II. University and Military Life [1832-1844.]

Chapter III. Betrothal and Marriage [1847.]

Book the Third. Learning the Business

Chapter I. Introductory. "Ut Sciat Regnare"

Chapter II. The Assembly of the Three Estates [1847.]

Chapter III. The Days of March [1848.]

Chapter IV. Conservative Leadership [1849-1851.]

Book the Fourth. On the Voyage of Life

Chapter I. On the Voyage of Life [1851-1859.]

Chapter II. Bismarck on the Neva [1859-1862.]

Chapter III. Bismarck on the Seine [1862.]

Book the Fifth. Minister-President and Count

Chapter I. The Crisis

Chapter II. The Man at the Helm

Chapter III. The Great Year 1866

Chapter IV. Major-General and Chancellor of the Federation

Chapter V. A Ball at Bismarck's

Chapter VI. Bismarck's House at Berlin

Chapter VII. Varzin

Appendix A.

Appendix B. The Prussian Constitution of 1847

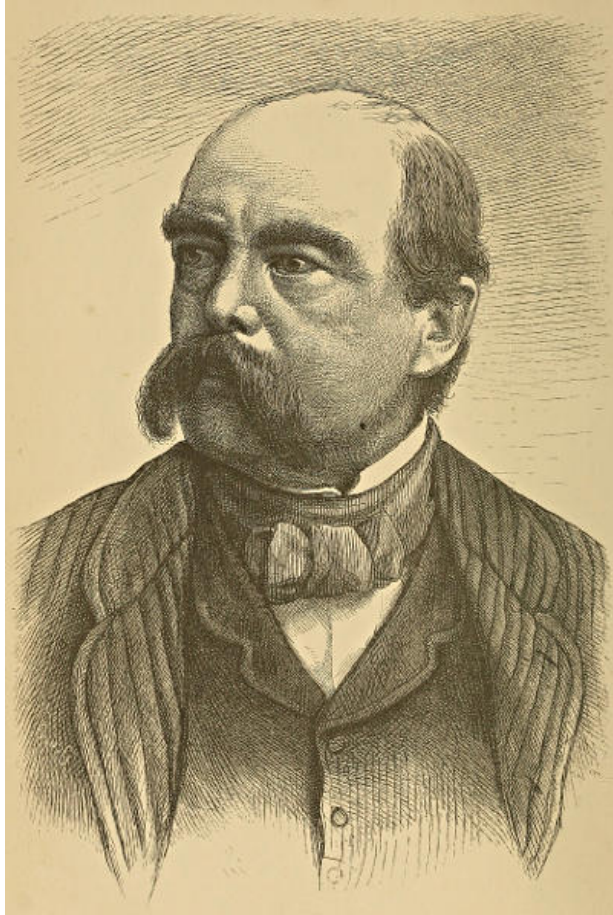
Ordinance of the Third of February, 1847, for the Formation of the United Diet

Ordinance of the Third of February, 1847, Respecting the Periodical Assembling of the Committee of the United Diet and Its Privileges

Ordinance for the Formation of a Deputation of the Diet for the Affairs of the State Debts

Opening of the Prussian Diet. The King's Speech. April, 1847

Appendix C.



COUNT OTTO VON BISMARCK.

Book the First.
The Bismarcks of Olden Time

[Table of Contents](#)

Chapter I.

Name and Origin

Table of Contents

Bismarck on the Biese.—The Bismarck Louse.—Derivation of the Name Bismarck.—Wendic Origin Untenable.—The Bismarcks in Priegnitz and Ruppin.—Riedel's Erroneous Theory.—The Bismarcks of Stendal.—Members of City Guilds.—Claus von Bismarck of Stendal.—Rise of the Family into the Highest Rank in the Fourteenth Century.

In the Alt Mark, belonging to the circle of Stendal, lies the small town of Bismarck on the Biese. It is an old and famous place, for south of the town stands an ancient tower, known as the Bismarck Louse. Tradition states that the tower received its name from a gigantic louse which inhabited it, and that the peasants of the district had every day to provide huge quantities of meat for the monster's food. In this legend we can trace the popular spirit of the sober Alt Mark—it laughs at the pilgrimages which were made in the thirteenth century to Bismarck in honor of a holy cross, said to have fallen from heaven. These pilgrimages, at first greatly encouraged by the lords of the soil, as they found in them a rich source of income, soon came to a sanguinary end, from the severe strife occasioned by these very revenues.

Bismarck does not, as some assert, derive its name from the Biese, because in the year 1203, when it is first mentioned in the records, it is called Biscopsmarck, or Bishopsmark, afterwards corrupted into Bismarck. It belonged to the Bishops of Havelberg, who erected a fort here as a defense of their Mark, on the frontiers of the Sprengels of Halberstadt. From the little town the noble family of Bismarck has its name.

It is a tradition of later times, by no means historically confirmed, that the Bismarcks were a noble family of Bohemia, settled by Charlemagne in the Alt Mark, and the founders of the town of Bismarck, which received its name from them. It is further erroneously asserted, that the Bismarcks, after the decease of the very powerful Count von Osterburg, had shared the county with the family of Alvensleben; and thus the town of Bismarck passed into the possession of the Alvenslebens.² This last is only stated to account for the circumstance of the holding of Bismarck in the fourteenth century as a fief by the Alvenslebens; it being forgotten that in those days the title went with the office, and that a county could not therefore be in the possession of two families.

As groundless is the tradition of the Wendic descent of the Bismarcks. According to this, the actual name of this noble family should be Bij-smarku, in Wendic, "Beware of the Christ-thorn." Not very happily has the double trefoil in the arms of the Bismarcks been identified with the Christ-thorn—as a proof of their Wendic descent.

The Bismarcks are rather, as are all the families of knightly rank in the Alt Mark, the descendants of German warriors who, under the Guelph, the Ascanian, or other princes, had conquered the Slavic lands on both banks of the Elbe for Christianity and German civilization, and had then settled themselves on those lands as fief-holders. The Bismarcks belonged to the warrior family of Biscopsmarck-Bishopsmark-Bismarck, and when surnames came into use, called themselves after their dwelling-place—von Bismarck. Of course, they retained the name after the loss or cession of their original seat.

Like many other knightly families of the Alt Mark, the Bismarcks gradually spread towards the East, conquering greater space for German Christian culture, subduing the Wends or driving them back towards the Oder. Thus the

Bismarcks also appear, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, as warrior knights in Priegnitz and the region of Ruppin.

We can not understand how a historian of such general intelligence as Riedel, can object to this course of development, presenting so many analogies in the series of other races of nobility in the Alt Mark. According to this writer, it appears “credible and plausible” that the chivalric race of Bismarck, found at the beginning of the fourteenth century in the region of Priegnitz and Ruppin, should have descended from the Castellans at Bismarck, who were provided with some territorial fiefs on the downfall of the episcopal castle. “On the other hand,” says Riedel, “those citizen families to be found in the cities of the Mark and in Stendal, bearing the name of Bismarck, whence that branch arose, the energy of which not only equalized the Von Bismarcks with the highest nobility of the Mark, but has surpassed all of them, by the principles of unprejudiced historical inquiry are proved to be self-distinguished, and the descendants of plain citizens of the little town Bismarck, which had flourished so well under episcopal protection.”

This is, however, an assertion supported by nothing, except, perhaps, by an accidental negative—the circumstance that up to the present time no seal has been found of the undoubtedly chivalric Bismarcks in Priegnitz and Ruppin; for the identity of armorial bearings would necessarily establish the common origin of the knightly Bismarcks, and those of Stendal, beyond all question. But we do not understand Riedel’s objection, as he does not deny that the Bismarcks entered the first rank of the aristocracy of the Alt Mark in the same fourteenth century. It would be almost puerile, by means of fantastic explanations respecting the races bearing the name of Bismarck, to deprive the Minister of the rank of Junker,³ and thus claim him as a plebeian.

For if the Bismarcks of Stendal appear in the character of citizens since the thirteenth century, it proves nothing as to their chivalric descent, but may almost be used as an argument in favor of it. It is well known and unquestioned that a whole series of knightly families have settled themselves in towns, and taken part in municipal government, in all places at first more or less patrician in character. Thus it fared with the Bismarcks in Stendal, and not with them only, but with the Schadewachts and other Alt Mark knightly races, members of which took their places in the municipal government of Stendal. The Bismarcks were then attached to the most distinguished, honorable, and influential Guild of Tailors (cloth-merchants), because every inhabitant of a town was obliged to belong to some guild. But to infer from this that the Bismarcks were of citizen birth, would be as absurd as to deny the nobility of the Iron Duke, the victor of Waterloo, because the Worshipful Company of Merchant Tailors in London, as recognizing his fame, made him free of their guild. It is in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in fact, and especially in the towns of the Marks, that we find the noblest families—even the Margrave himself—associated with citizen guilds. At the same time it mattered not at all whether such members occupied themselves with the trade; for we are not, in this place, speaking of position, but descent. And if the practice of handicrafts and commerce were not then, as later, held to be incompatible with noble birth—although, in general, the practice was uncommon—the descendants of noble houses, on leaving the towns, naturally re-entered their own rank of territorial lords.

It is, therefore, explicable that Claus von Bismarck, Freeman of the Guild of Tailors in Stendal, could step from that position into the first rank of the Alt Mark nobility.

Riedel is also the only historian who, in contradiction to earlier and later authorities, asserts the descent of the Bismarcks from a citizen family in Stendal, instead of from

the Castellans of the episcopal castle of that name. Even, however, had he been able to determine this beyond a doubt, it would not have proved the plebeian descent of the Minister-President, but only that the nobility of his family reaches no higher than the fourteenth century—in itself a sufficiently long pedigree.

Chapter II. Castellans at Burgstall Castle [1270-1550.]

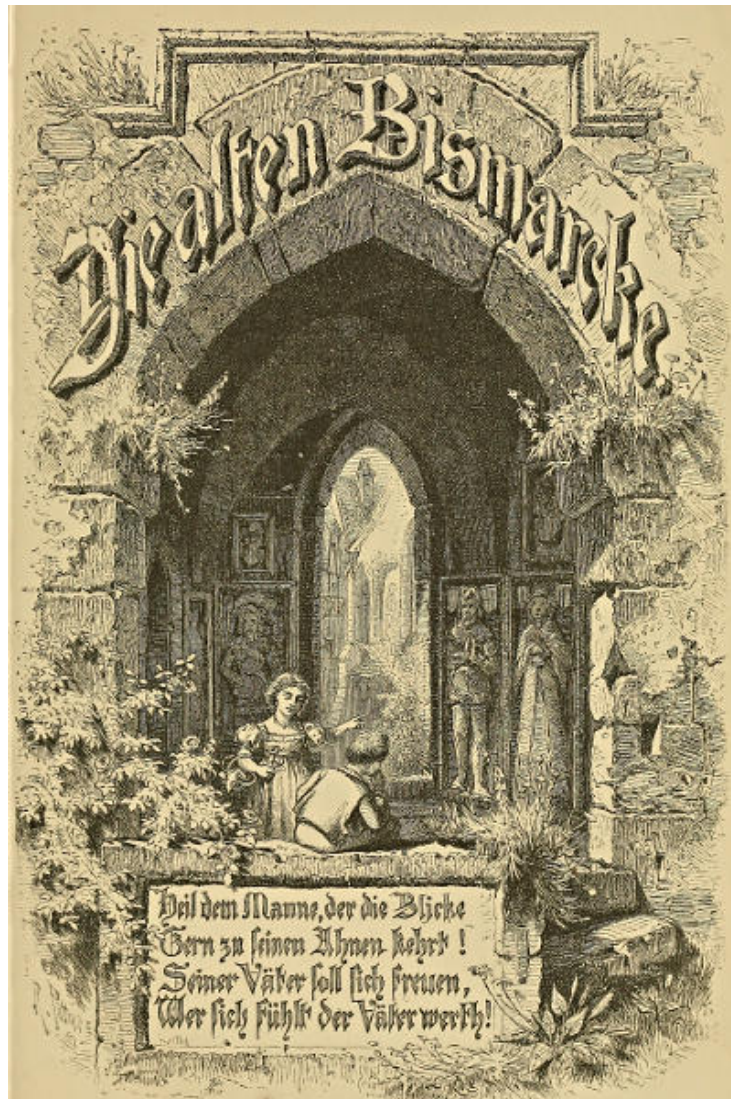
Table of Contents

Rulo von Bismarck, 1309-1338.—Excommunicated.—Claus von Bismarck.—His Policy.—Created Castellan of Burgstall, 1345.—Castellans.—Reconciliation with Stendal, 1350.—Councillor to the Margrave, 1353.—Dietrich Kogelwiet, 1361.—His White Hood.—Claus in his Service, while Archbishop of Magdeburg.—The Emperor Charles IV.—The Independence of Brandenburg threatened.—Chamberlain to the Margrave, 1368.—Subjection of the Marks to Bohemia, 1373.—Claus retires into Private Life.—Death about 1377.—Claus II., 1403.—Claus III. and Henning.—Friedrich I. appoints Henning a Judge.—Ludolf.—His Sons.—Pantaleon.—Henning III. *obit circa* 1528.—Claus Electoral Ranger, 1512.—Ludolf von Bismarck.—Electoral Sheriff of Boetzow, 1513.—His Descendants.

As the ancestor of the race of Bismarck, we find among the Bismarcks in Stendal, where they had been known since 1270, a certain Rule or Rulo, otherwise Rudolf von Bismarck, whose name appears in the records from 1309 to 1338. This personage was a respected member of the Guild of Tailors, often its guide and master, as also a member of the Town Council of Stendal.

In the sparse notices contained in the records concerning him, it appears that Rule von Bismarck was held in high esteem for his prudence and wealth. He represented Stendal in the most important negotiations with princely courts, carried out political arrangements of every kind, and in every position maintained a high status among his fellow-

townspeople. He is also to be regarded as one of the founders of the town schools in Stendal, and met heavy opposition from the Nicholas Cathedral foundation, which claimed the establishment of schools as its sole privilege. But under his direction the Council maintained its plans as to the establishment of city schools, and realized these despite of the ban of the Church; probably this, the first Bismarck of whom we have any knowledge, died an excommunicated man, for his long dispute with the authorities was only accommodated at a much later period by his son. Rule left behind him four sons, Nicholas I., commonly called Claus, Rulo II., known during his father's life (and so called in the records) as Rulekin (the little Rule); the others were John and Christian.



THE BISMARCKS OF OLD.

The younger brothers soon fell into the background. Claus von Bismarck was an individual of remarkable character, which, based upon the honored name of the family, and the wealth he had inherited, aided him in extending the sphere of his influence far beyond that of his town circle. In testimony of respect to the memory of his father, he was immediately assigned the councillor's seat, vacant by his father's death. Claus, acting with great moderation, next distinguished himself in settling the internal differences of the town, and reconciled the Church with the memory of his father by large donations, and by

the establishment of a memorial festival. Very early in his career, however, he occupied a singular and duplex political attitude. In the town, with animation and wisdom, he headed the patrician element against the democratic innovations of the lower guilds, and stood at the front of the aristocratic conservative party in Stendal. But in the country he sided more and more with the Margrave, at that time of Bavarian origin, and gradually became one of the leaders of that patriotic Brandenburg association, which sought to reunite the Marks, separated by the death of Waldemar the Great, under one government.

The political activity of Claus von Bismarck in the fourteenth century, offers many points of similarity to that of his descendant Otto von Bismarck in the nineteenth century.

In his contest with the democratic party in Stendal, Claus von Bismarck was not very successful. After a long and obstinate fight, the aristocratic Guild of Tailors was worsted. The members of it, and among them Claus von Bismarck, were driven out and banished. He now returned to the country, where he possessed numerous estates, inherited from his father; but he did not remain quiet. We see him in continued activity on behalf of the Margrave Ludwig, for whom he conducted the most intricate negotiations, and to whom he lent considerable sums of money.

The reward of his political assiduity was proportionate to its importance. On the 15th of June, 1345, the Margrave granted the Castle of Burgstall, one of the strongholds of the country, protecting the southern frontier of the Alt Mark towards Magdeburg, to Claus von Bismarck and his descendants, and their brothers, as a fief. Thus the Bismarcks entered the first rank of the nobility of the Alt Mark, as Castellans.⁴

These Castellan families in the Alt Mark, although they could not claim any right to a higher rank, formed a

privileged class of the chivalric nobility, which maintained itself by the possession of castles—then of great importance for the defense of the country. The Castellans under the Luxemburg dynasty, like the members of the Bohemian nobility, were called *nobiles*, while other classes of the nobility were only denominated “worshipful,” or *strenui*. They had ingress and precedence at the Diets before the others, were not summoned to those assemblies by proclamation, but by writ, and were immediately under the jurisdiction of the Land Captain, while ordinary knights were subject to the Courts of Justice of the province. Although the Castellans maintained a portion of these rights to very recent times, they were never any thing more than Alt Mark Junkers, whose families possessed some privileges beyond the rest.

Among the Castellans of the fourteenth century were the Von der Schulenburgs, the Von Alvenslebens, the Von Bartenslebens, the Von Jagows, the Von Knesebecks,⁵ and the Von Bismarcks of Burgstall.

On the outbreak of the terrible storm which accompanied the appearance of the pretender Waldemar—whose claims have, however, not yet been disproved—Claus von Bismarck prudently withdrew himself, and awaited the conclusion of these troubles at the Castle of Burgstall. It was the only thing he could do, for, in the position of circumstances, he could afford no assistance to the Bavarian Margrave, with whom he was intimately connected, and on the general question he could give no decision, as the person of Waldemar the Great had never been known to him.

About this time, 1350, a reconciliation took place between the banished aristocratic party and the town of Stendal. Some of the members returned thither, but Claus von Bismarck, as may be supposed, remained at Burgstall; but it would appear that from that time forward he stood on friendly terms with his native city.

In the year 1853, he became still more closely connected with the Margrave, in the capacity of Privy Councillor; and in this post, which carried no emolument with it whatever, he exhibited energy of such a wise character that Bismarck's government, despite of the wretched and sorrowful state of things at the time, bore rich fruits, not only for the Alt Mark, but for miserable Brandenburg in general.

In the year 1361, Claus quitted the service of Brandenburg for that of the Archbishop of Magdeburg, in consequence of his near relative, Dietrich von Portitz, known as Kagelwiet or Kogelwiet—*i.e.*, White Kogel or hood—having ascended the archiepiscopal throne of St. Moritz.⁶

Dietrich von Portitz, whose relationship to Claus is unquestionable, but whose precise affinity is not clear, was a native of Stendal. He had embraced the ecclesiastical profession, and had shown such a genius for government, even as a monk at Lehnin, that the Bishop of Brandenburg, Ludwig von Neiendorff, intrusted him with the administration of his diocese, much to his own advantage. The Emperor, Charles IV., early recognized the importance of this man; created him Bishop of Sarepta and Chancellor of Bohemia, subsequently procured him the Bishopric of Minden, and finally the Archbishopric of Magdeburg. The cognomen of Kagelwiet or Kogelwiet this distinguished person received from a castle of this name in Bohemia, but according to some, from the white hood which he had assumed in orders at Lehnin. A tradition asserts that the Bohemian magnates, envious of the eminence of the Chancellor, accused him of fraud, and referred the Emperor to the iron chest which stood in Dietrich's private chamber. When Charles IV. had this chest opened by Dietrich, there was only found within it the monk's frock, the white hood of Brother Dietrich of Lehnin.



As to the relationship between the Archbishop Dietrich Kogelwiet and Claus Bismarck, it must be admitted that it has not been clearly established by the records. But we think we do not err in assuming that Dietrich Kogelwiet was also one of the Bismarcks of Stendal of the same family as Claus von Bismarck. He certainly is called Dietrich von Portitz, but we must not consider this singular in an age when brothers even existed with different surnames; and, on the other hand, an identical name by no means establishes any relationship, or places it beyond doubt.

Common armorial bearings were a much surer index to family affinity between their wearers than identical names. We can not, as before stated, absolutely prove from the records that the Archbishop Dietrich Kogelwiet was a Bismarck: it may be decided by later researches, but there are several reasons for considering this to be the case. There was no family of Portitz at Stendal, to claim the Archbishop, as a scion of their house—an important fact, as the birthplace of Dietrich is ascertained to have been Stendal.

When Dietrich Kogelwiet entered on the government of the Archbishopric of Magdeburg, he immediately summoned his relative, Claus Bismarck, to assist in his administration. Such an invitation might have been the more welcome, in consequence of the hopeless condition of the Margrave's affairs. It must not be forgotten that Claus was not only a vassal to Brandenburg, but to Magdeburg, and was connected by blood and friendship with many members of the Cathedral community.

Thus Claus von Bismarck, in conjunction with the knight Meinecke von Schierstaedt, became General Commandant of Magdeburg. The duties were so shared between them that Von Schierstaedt fulfilled the office of Minister of War, while Von Bismarck was Minister of the Interior and of Finance. Foreign affairs, and especially those relating to Brandenburg, the Archbishop had reserved for himself—why, we shall presently see. We must not, however, regard the various duties in those days as so clearly defined as in a modern government; the distinctions were less obvious, and thus we see Claus von Bismarck in many a battle-field, fighting bravely beside Schierstaedt. Dietrich Kogelwiet and his two chief servants, in fact, carried on a really model government. In the course of a few years the very considerable debts of the Archbishopric were liquidated, estates pawned or wholly alienated were redeemed, and the security of the subjects of the See fixed in a manner rarely known in Germany at that era. Bismarck's constant care was devoted to the protection of the peasantry against the frequent outbreaks, usually ending in the plunder or destruction of property; for his clear insight had perceived that the safety of the life and property of the subject was bound up with that of the liege lord's income—apparently a secret to most rulers of that time.

Thus this six years' administration of the See by Bismarck became a great blessing to it, and Dietrich Kogelwiet recognized the fact by implicit confidence,

although—a very remarkable circumstance, impossible at the present day—he was opposed to Bismarck in his foreign policy.

The politic Emperor Charles IV. had especially seated his Bohemian Chancellor upon the archiepiscopal throne of St. Moritz, with the absolute intention of securing in him an efficient co-operator in his extensive plans. Dietrich Kogelwiet was to aid in the conquest of the Mark of Brandenburg for the great Bohemian empire which Charles IV. sought to erect from Lübeck to the coast of the Adriatic for the house of Lützelburg. Dietrich Kogelwiet had from old been a chief supporter of these aims, and, as Archbishop of Magdeburg, he succeeded only too well, considering the weakness and poverty of the Bavarian Margrave, in ensnaring him and bringing him into relations which rendered him an unconditional and very abject dependent of the Emperor. At the death of the Archbishop, after a reign of six years, the independence of Brandenburg was lost, and the councillors of the Margrave consisted of imperial servants alien to Brandenburg.

Claus von Bismarck held utterly aloof from this policy of his chief, for his Brandenburg patriotism desired the maintenance of the independence of the Marks. He saw no safety in the division of his native land, and its final subjection to the crown of Bohemia. Despite of these differences, the Archbishop held fast to his “dear uncle”—a designation applied in those days as cousin is now—bequeathed to him the greater part of his wealth, appointed him his executor, and a member of the interregnum provided to exist until the enthronement of his successor in the See.

When Bismarck had acquitted himself of his duties towards the Church of Magdeburg, and had overcome the many obstacles towards a settlement of the inheritance of Dietrich Kogelwiet, he did what he had probably long since designed. He returned to the service of the Margrave of

Brandenburg. This step can only be explained by the high patriotism which actuated this excellent man. For himself he had nothing to gain by such a step, and he must have been aware of the sacrifice he was making, for the affairs of the Margrave at that time were in the utmost confusion, and in a ruinous condition. The national income had long been anticipated, money was rare, and the partially justified concurrent government of the imperial councillors seemed to render it impossible to save the autonomy of Brandenburg.

The Emperor Charles, to whom Bismarck's conduct was sufficiently intelligible, sought with great pains to win him to his party, but in vain. The faithful Alt Mark Junker, in 1368, became administrator of the Margrave's government in the capacity of Chamberlain, and conducted his patriotic labor with such energy and wisdom, that by the October of that year the imperial councillors placed about the Margrave were dismissed, and their posts entirely filled by Brandenburgers of Bismarck's party. In this new Council there sat Dietrich von der Schulenburg, Bishop of Brandenburg, the noblest prelate in the land; Count Albert von Lindau, Lord of Ruppin, the chief vassal of the Margrave; Bismarck himself was Chamberlain for the Alt Mark; Marshal Sir Lippold von Bredow for the Middle Mark; and Justice Otto von Moerner represented the New Mark.

Bismarck and his friends now actively promoted the safety of Brandenburg independence by every means in their power during a period of five years. Bismarck was the soul of this patriotic struggle against the policy and rapacity of the mighty Emperor. His wisdom and energy were visible in every department of the State; his immense wealth he freely sacrificed in every direction; and the results were so important that they forced the disconcerted Emperor to a measure which even Bismarck had not been able to foresee as a wholly unexpected proceeding.

The politic Charles, who had never speculated upon an appeal to arms, and who depended on the cunning, of which he was so great a master, before displayed in his counsels, suddenly seized the sword. He perceived that he was unable to outwit Bismarck, and was compelled to emerge from his lair and break up the independence of Brandenburg by force. Bismarck could not oppose his mighty army, and thus by the treaty of Fürstenwald the independence of Brandenburg was lost, on the 13th of August, 1373; the Marks fell into the hands of Bohemia.

After this destruction of his patriotic plans, Claus von Bismarck retired into private life, most probably to Burgstall; but the proximity of the great Emperor, who held his court at Tangermünde, forced him to retreat from the former place. Neither Claus nor his sons ever served the house of Lützelburg. He then retired to his native city of Stendal, and occupied himself with religious duties and the affairs of the Hospital of St. Gertrude, which he had founded at the Uengling Gate of Stendal in 1370. Probably this foundation again embroiled the aged man with the ecclesiastical authorities during his closing years, and he seems to have died in excommunication, like his father. We do not know either the year of the birth or death of this illustrious and patriotic man. He appears first in the records in the year 1328, and we lose sight of him in 1377. He is buried at Burgstall, with the simple inscription, "*Nicolaus de Bismarck miles*" on the tomb. He bequeathed to his sons a fortune of great amount in those days—consisting of lands, treasures, and ready money.

These sons, Rule, Claus II., and John, with the patriotic spirit of their father, held aloof from the Emperor Charles IV., despite of all the efforts he made to draw the rich and illustrious possessors of Burgstall to the Court at Tangermünde. Claus became a knight, and is thence mentioned in precedence of his elder brother Rule in the records, from the year 1376. Rule died without heirs; the

knight Claus alone left any family, and died in 1403. The third brother, John, became an ecclesiastic, and was still living in 1431.

The sons of the knight Claus were respectively named Claus III., and Henning. They inhabited Burgstall in common, but in consequence of a dispute with the Chapter of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas, in Stendal, they were excommunicated; but they do not appear to have suffered much in consequence, as public opinion had long since declared against the abuse of excommunication common with the Churchmen. Claus and Henning were brave but peaceable individuals, who had a most difficult position to maintain during the bloody feuds and endless fighting of that convulsed age. The brethren Bismarck were the first among the nobility of the Alt Mark to take the part of the Burgrave Frederick von Nürnberg, regarding that great prince as the saviour and deliverer of the Marks.

Frederick I. seems also to have had confidence in the Bismarcks, for in 1414 he appointed Henning one of the judges in the great suit of felony against Werner von Holzendorff,⁷ who occupied, in the capacity of the Margrave's captain, the castle Boetzow—now Oranienburg—and had betrayed this castle to Dietrich von Quitzow.⁸ Claus on his part served the electoral prince in pecuniary matters, but he died in 1437, and his brother Henning had preceded him to the grave by ten years.

As Henning's only son Ruloff had died in his youth without issue, the sons of Claus alone succeeded to the property. Their names were Ludolf, Heide (Heidrich), and Henning. They inherited that love for country life and the pleasures of the chase peculiar to the Bismarcks. These brothers improved and increased the condition of the house, which seems to have suffered amidst the strife of the evil days of previous generations. The time of Ludolf's death is

unknown; Heide was living in 1489; Henning died in 1505—his wife was Sabine von Alvensleben.

The male heirs of Ludolf and Henning divided the property of their fathers, but preserved much in common—the residence of Burgstall Castle among the rest.

The four sons of Ludolf were Günther, Ludolf, George, and Pantaleon. They were ennobled, together with their cousins, in 1499, by the Elector Joachim I., but the two elder brothers soon died without male heirs, and the third brother, George, was childless; it does not appear that he was ever married. Pantaleon alone left a son, Henning III., by his wife Ottilien von Bredow, who died before 1528, leaving four sons behind him—Henry, Levin, Frederick, and Laurence. Levin and Laurence soon disappear from the records, and Henry, married to Ilse from the Kattenwinkel, and Frederick, wedded to Anna von Wenckstern, appear as the representatives of the elder stock of Ludolf. All these Bismarcks lived in peaceful retirement, on the best terms, at Burgstall, with their cousins of the younger Henning-branch of the family.

Henning II. and his wife Sabine von Alvensleben had as sons, Busso, Claus, Dietrich, and Ludolf. Dietrich and Busso dying in early youth, Claus became in 1512 the Electoral Ranger of the great estate of Gardelegen (the forests of Jävenitz and Letzling). The rangers were in those days high officials (chief foresters); the title, however, they did not obtain until the time of King Frederick William I., with considerable privileges. The foresters were then literally called heath-runners (*Haide-läufer*)—rangers, in fact.

Ludolf von Bismarck in 1513 became Electoral Sheriff of Boetzow, the present Oranienburg. His activity appears to have been applied to the protection of the Electoral game preserves. Ludolf was reckoned one of the best horsemen and warriors of his era, although we do not learn any thing respecting his prowess. He seems to have been very active in the establishment of the militia of the Alt Mark, and died

in 1534. His wife, Hedwig von Doeberitz, long survived him. In the year 1543, the Elector Joachim owed her a thousand thalers, and she was still alive in 1562. Ludolf's sons were Jobst, Joachim, and George.

Joachim was killed at the siege of Magdeburg, at which he was present with his brothers. Jobst married Emerentia Schenk von Lützendorf. George married Armengard von Alvensleben.

We thus see the castle of Burgstall in the middle of the sixteenth century inhabited by two pairs of brothers, with four households; Henry and Frederick representing the elder or Ludolf branch of the Bismarcks, and Jobst and George the younger one through Henning. Ludolf's widow also resided at Burgstall.

Chapter III.

The Permutation

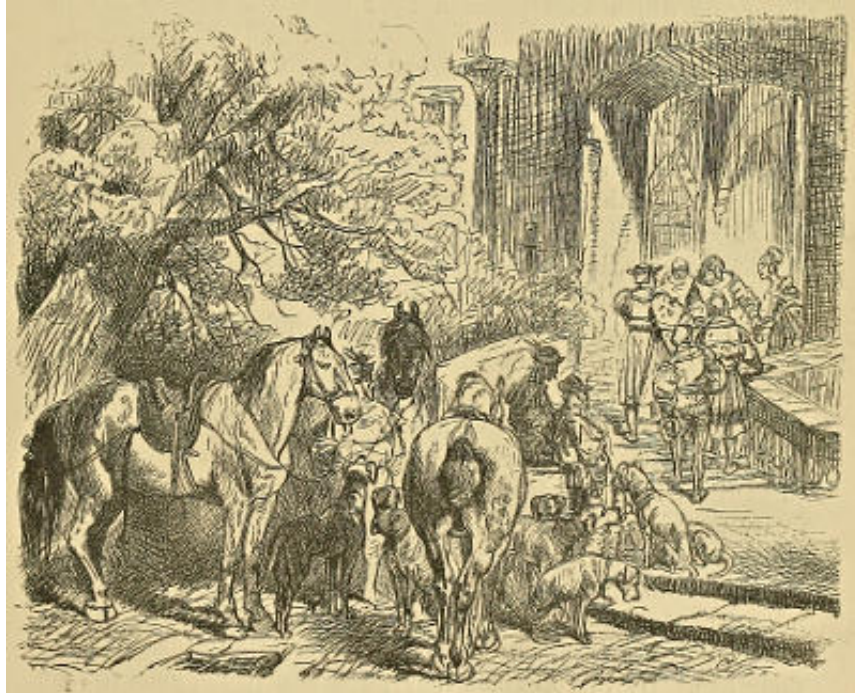
[1550-1563.]

[Table of Contents](#)

Changes.—The Electoral Prince John George and Burgstall.—Forest-rights.—The Exchange of Burgstall for Crevese.—Schönhausen and Fischbeck.—The Permutation completed, 1563.

Doomed to a sorrowful termination was the peaceful life of the family of the Bismarcks at Burgstall. All the Bismarcks were eager sportsmen, and there was no spot in the whole of the Brandenburg country better adapted for sport than their castle, situated in the midst of the great preserve of Gardelegen, the woods of the Tanger, and of the Ohre.

These preserves were not only the most considerable, but also the most well-stocked in the Marks; and although only a small portion belonged to the Bismarcks, they enjoyed forest privileges conjointly with their neighbors to the fullest extent. It was not remarkable, therefore, to find the Castellans of Burgstall “mighty hunters;” but a still mightier hunter was destined to overwhelm them, and compel them to give up their privileges in forest and moor.



Every one of the descendants of the great Frankish prince, the Burgrave Frederick von Nürnberg—all the powerful Electors and noble Margraves of Brandenburg—were considerable sportsmen. They had early perceived that no place was more convenient than Burgstall Castle, when they desired to hunt near the Tanger, through the forest of Gardelegen, the Drömling, and other preserves of the Ohre. They often visited their trusty vassals at Burgstall, and for weeks together were welcome guests of the Bismarcks, whose wealth could well maintain the expensive hospitality of princely guests. The Electors John Cicero and Joachim Nestor were frequently at Burgstall. We know that the Bismarcks were one of the first families of the country, allied to the new Frank rulers; even at a later time the Bismarcks were proud of their loyalty to their liege lords; but the intimate personal relations which the Bismarcks maintained with the Electors John Cicero, Joachim Nestor, Joachim Hector, and the Electoral Prince and Margrave John George, engendered feelings of personal affection and respect, far surpassing the ordinary loyalty of vassals.

This has to be remembered when it is sought to understand the events which took place in 1562 among the Bismarcks in their right light.

When the hunt-loving Electoral Prince, the Margrave John George, became administrator in the year 1553 for his youthful son, the postulated Bishop of the See of Havelberg, he followed the chase more enthusiastically than ever, and founded the hunting-box in Netzlingen, purchased from the Alvenslebens in 1555, known as Letzlingen. In order to establish wider preserves for the new edifice, he everywhere attacked the privileges of the Bismarcks; and his object was to abridge or to abrogate their forest rights in all directions. The Bismarcks, known to us as zealous sportsmen, did not wish to dispose of their forest rights; their position at Burgstall did not admit of pecuniary compensation; but they, nevertheless, from a feeling of respect for the Electoral Prince, consented to a treaty which considerably circumscribed their privileges, much to their disadvantage. This treaty was signed at Zechlin, on the 1st July, 1555, in person, the Prince residing at that place. They asked for no compensation from the Prince, but allowed him to fix it as he pleased, accepting without a murmur a deed acknowledging a debt of three thousand *gulden*, a sum by no means representing the amount of their loss. By this sacrifice they purchased peace, however, for but a very short time; for while the differences continued between the Margrave's huntsmen and those of Bismarck, the Electoral Prince could not but perceive that the Castellanship of Burgstall stuck like a wedge in the centre of his preserves. He desired to have the entire control from Letzlingen, where John George habitually held his court, to the castle of Tangermünde; hence it was necessary to dispossess the Bismarcks of Burgstall.

This honorable and faithful family suffered deeply, when, in the beginning of the year 1562, the Electoral Prince proposed to them to exchange Burgstall for other lands. He

first offered them the convent of Arendsee; but the Bismarcks, who could not, at first, contemplate the resignation of their ancient family-seat, declined to this procedure. The affair was of such an unusual character that it created the greatest excitement. Even the Chapter at Magdeburg, to whom the Bismarcks were lieges for several possessions at Burgstall, was set in commotion. They dreaded an enlargement of the boundary of Brandenburg, beyond this purchase of Burgstall, to the detriment of the archiepiscopate. The Archbishop of Magdeburg, the Margrave Sigismund, and brother of the Electoral Prince, also wrote, apparently at the instance of his Chapter, to him, "that he hoped he would desist from his intention, and leave the Bismarcks in peaceful possession of their lands, and allow other folks to have a hare, a buck, or a stag."

John George, however, was not the man to be so easily dissuaded from his purpose. He continued to ply the Bismarcks with propositions of exchange, which they as steadily rejected, being unwilling to resign Burgstall. But their rejection was of no advantage to them, for their loyal principles were outraged at this difference with their liege lord; and, besides, it became very evident to them that the Electoral Prince had no intention of abandoning his plans. If the brothers and cousins Von Bismarck had possessed a spark of speculation, they might, under the circumstances, have obtained compensation of such magnitude as to have formed an enormous revenue for their house; but such thoughts were remote from these loyal and simple-minded country Junkers.

The Electoral Prince, who knew his men, employed measures which he saw must lead to his object without fail. On the 12th of October, 1562, he wrote, from Letzlingen, a letter in very ungracious terms, in which he gave up his project of exchange in the greatest anger, but allowed a whole series of minor difficulties to become apparent for the future.

The Bismarcks replied in a highly respectful manner, and reminded the Electoral Prince, in almost touching accents, “that their ancestors and themselves had for a long time sat worthily under the Electoral Princes, had served them with blood and substance willingly, and testified themselves to be honest, upright, and true subjects, and would willingly have met the estimable Elector and Prince, the Margrave of Brandenburg, in these very matters; although they might be forgiven for hesitating at an exchange which would transport their ancient race to other places, and they would prefer to remain in their ancestral seat, granted them by Almighty God, rather than idly to depart therefrom.”

This letter, however, was the limit of the powers of the Bismarcks. The Electoral Prince had taken his measures only too well. There now ensued very active and weighty negotiations as to the compensation to be given for Burgstall. This was not easily to be found, and these negotiations prove, as also their final result, that the Bismarcks agreed to the surrender of Burgstall out of respect to the Prince, and from an apprehension of setting themselves in actual hostility to the authorities as the result of any further refusal.

The representatives of the elder race—Henry and Frederick—first assented, and took for their shares in Burgstall the Abbey of Crevese, a foundation of Benedictine nuns. The income of this property, with all its appurtenances, did not amount by far to those enjoyed by the brothers in Burgstall; but no better estate could be found, and the Prince therefore commanded the payment of considerable sums in satisfaction—not, however, exceeding the moderate amount of two thousand *thalers*.