

INTRODUCTION

For British diplomats posted to Germany 1871 was a year of vigilant observation. The Franco-Prussian War, France's defeat, and the subsequent Treaty of Frankfurt, the proclamation of the German Emperor and the establishment of imperial institutions for the newly unified Germany were of epochal significance both for Germany and her European neighbours. Benjamin Disraeli's notorious assessment of the Franco-Prussian War representing 'the German Revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of last century' epitomizes the magnitude of change as perceived from the other side of the Channel.¹ However, as Paul M. Kennedy has observed, 'perceptions of Germany were not clear-cut and absolute, but complex and relative',² and British envoys to the *Kaiserreich* contributed to these multi-layered assessments in many ways and for many years to come.

The present volume presents a comprehensive selection of diplomatic correspondence that was sent from the British missions in Germany to the Foreign Office between 1871 and 1883; it is the first of a two-volume mini-series which covers the years up to 1897. For Great Britain, as for the other Great Powers of Europe, it seemed necessary 'to keep a watchful eye over the new Empire'.³ Indeed, regardless of their individual inclinations towards German unity diplomats were predestined to fulfil a role as 'watch dogs',⁴ and until the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 they filed well over 25,000 dispatches to the respective secretaries of state for foreign affairs. In so doing they contributed not only to the making of British foreign policy,⁵ but provided an invaluable repository for the history of

¹Speech in House of Commons, 9 February 1871, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Ser. III, Vol. 204 (1871), col. 81.

²Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London, 1980), p. 27.

³Howard to Granville, 23 January 1871, TNA FO 9/208.

⁴Evidence, Malmesbury (21 March 1870), Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic and Consular Services; together with the proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix, 25 July 1870 [382] (1870), qq. 778.

⁵See in general T.G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge, 2011).

Anglo-German relations which serves as the backbone of numerous scholarly works and historical editions.

The two volumes of *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich, 1871–1897* concentrate on Anglo-German history prior to German *Weltpolitik* and complement the two seminal editorial series of diplomatic documents before 1914: *British Documents on the Origins of War, 1898–1914* and *British Documents on Foreign Affairs (Part I; F)*.⁶ In this series, therefore, Anglo-German relations and the disputed question of antagonism are put into a broader chronological framework and historical context.

The diplomatic correspondence before 1898 modifies traditional – and often teleological – accounts of Anglo-German history not least because it highlights the volatility of relations, and the heterogeneous character of perceptions of Germany; indeed, the dispatches cover a wide and, at times, surprising range of diplomatic, political, social, and cultural affairs.⁷ To a great extent the diversity of these British observations is due to the simultaneous reportage emanating from five permanent diplomatic missions: the Berlin embassy, and continuing independent representation in four of Germany's twenty-seven constituent states in Darmstadt (Hesse and, from July 1871, simultaneously accredited to Baden), Dresden (Saxony), Munich (Bavaria), and Stuttgart (Württemberg). Correspondence from these so-called 'minor missions', which were maintained despite misgivings about their existence at the Berlin Foreign Office on Wilhelmstrasse, opens up new and comparative perspectives. In this respect *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich* builds on the preceding series, *British Envoys to Germany, 1818–1866*.⁸

I

The preservation of several British diplomatic missions in Germany is one of the most notable continuities in official Anglo-German relations

⁶ *British Documents on the Origins of War, 1898–1914*, 11 vols (London 1926–1938); *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print: Part I, Series F, Europe*, 35 vols (Frederick, MD, 1987–1991). The Foreign Office correspondence on Germany is available on microfilm from 1906 onwards: *Confidential British Foreign Office Political Correspondence: Germany, Series 1, 1906–1925: Part 1, 1906–1919* (Bethesda, MD, 2005).

⁷ See Jan Rieger, 'Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), pp. 579–617; and the chapter 'British Views of Germany, 1815–1914', in James Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich: Portraits and Pathways* (Toronto, 2015), pp. 44–85.

⁸ *British Envoys to Germany, 1818–1866*, Royal Historical Society, Camden Fifth Series, 4 vols (Cambridge, 2000–2010). The omission of 1867 to 1870 is intended to enable the publication of a substantial selection of dispatches in two coherent and balanced volumes, an aim that would have been compromised by the inclusion of vast reportage on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. It is hoped that this gap can be closed at a future time.

between 1815 and 1914 – it was, however, not undisputed. From the 1850s doubts about the usefulness of these missions and criticisms of the cost were brought forward in Parliament, and these reverberated in the press and featured prominently in several parliamentary Select Committees and Royal Commissions.⁹ With the exception of the legation in Hanover, which was closed down in August 1866 on account of the annexation of the Kingdom of Hanover by Prussia, and the consulate general in Hamburg, which had served as a diplomatic legation to the Hanse towns since 1841 but was discontinued from 1 July 1870, the map of independent posts remained largely unchanged and outlasted the founding of the new *Kaiserreich*.¹⁰ In lieu of the closed British mission at the Diet of the German Confederation at Frankfurt, the representation at the Grand Duchy of Hesse, in nearby Darmstadt, gained autonomy in 1866 and continued to exist – alongside the embassy in Berlin and the other smaller legations – until diplomatic relations with Germany were broken off in August 1914. The only exception to this continuity was the amalgamation of Stuttgart and Munich in 1890.

Yet, although the Foreign Office succeeded in fighting off calls for the total abolition of the minor missions, diplomatic representation to Germany was not left unscathed. From an institutional point of view, the most important change was the downgrading of second- and third-class missions to fourth-class missions, which were headed by secretaries of legation, secretaries of embassy, or ministers resident, instead of envoys extraordinary and ministers plenipotentiary. This development began with Robert Morier's appointment to Darmstadt in November 1866. The following year, in December 1867, another secretary of legation, Joseph Hume Burnley, was accredited to Dresden, a mission which had been withdrawn in August 1866 but which was reinstated in consequence of 'a feeling of disappointment, and [...] of annoyance, in Germany'.¹¹ In 1872, after a short interlude as chargé d'affaires at Stuttgart, Morier succeeded Henry Howard at Munich; Howard was the last of the former envoys extraordinary to be replaced by a lower-ranking diplomat.

⁹On the committees and the development of diplomacy in general see Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815–1914* (Gerrards Cross, 1983); for the missions in Germany see Markus Mösslang, 'Gestaltungsraum und lokale Lebenswelt: Britische Diplomaten an ihren deutschen Standorten, 1815–1914', in Hillard von Thiesen and Christian Windler (eds), *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen: Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel* (Cologne and Vienna, 2010), pp. 199–215.

¹⁰For information on British missions and diplomats see *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook* (London, 1852–1914).

¹¹Evidence, Derby (2 May 1870), Report from the Select Committee, qq. 2428.

Over the following decades dispatches regularly reported upon the peculiarities and, at least from the respective diplomats' point of view, the hardships of everyday diplomatic practice in these rump-missions which in many cases – and especially during the summer months – were staffed with one diplomat only. In 1871, by contrast, the diplomatic personnel at the Berlin embassy, besides the ambassador, consisted of one secretary of embassy (who was in charge during the ambassador's absence), a military attaché (who contributed valuable insights into and contacts with the German army), as well as five further second and third secretaries and attachés.¹² Against this background the smaller missions' requests for assistance in order to master tedious daily demands, and be able to attend 'to work of more real interest and importance',¹³ seem not unreasonable. Desires for a more adequate salary were especially urgent: 'Without a private fortune', Joseph Hume Burnley wrote from Dresden, 'no man could live here on the official salary and it would be much more charitable to abolish the Post altogether than to condemn a man to live in a style not becoming the representative of a rich country like that of England.'¹⁴ For Burnley's successor, George Strachey, who had to endure increased prices and a doubling of house rents, his financial limitations were 'no longer compatible with respectability' and, in his view, ultimately led to a 'loss of prestige' and 'utility' for the legation.¹⁵

These problems notwithstanding, being a head of mission, however small, offered the chance to prove oneself and – in distinction to other colleagues of similar rank elsewhere – to be in continuous communication with the foreign secretary. Three of the diplomats presented in this volume, Robert Morier, Francis Clare Ford, and Charles Scott eventually reached the highest echelons of the diplomatic service, becoming ambassadors in the 1880s and 1890s. While their reportage indicates their talents and ability for greater future tasks – something especially true of Morier¹⁶ – the occupational stagnation of others, such as Joseph Burnley and George Strachey, who retired from their posts in Germany, cannot simply be ascribed to lesser forms of patronage or professional inability but also indicates the uncertainties of a diplomatic career and the general blockage in the pipeline for promotions. Indeed – just as was the case for

¹² *The Foreign Office List* (1872), pp. 8–11.

¹³ Morier to Derby, 8 August 1874, FO 9/224.

¹⁴ Burnley to Granville, 7 July 1871, FO 68/153.

¹⁵ Strachey to Derby, 18 March 1874, FO 68/158 (not included in this volume) and 27 January 1875, FO 68/159.

¹⁶ For Morier's early career in Germany see Scott W. Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy and German Unification: The Early Career of Robert Morier* (Westport, 2000); Rosslyn Wemyss, *Memoirs and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Morier, G.B.C., From 1826–1876*, 2 vols (London, 1911).

three colleagues who died during their tenure in Germany¹⁷ – Burnley and Strachey had joined the diplomatic service as attachés before the more restrictive policy of entry was introduced in the 1850s.¹⁸ It is not without irony that George Strachey, when asked about the expediency of the smaller German missions in 1861, fourteen years before being appointed to Dresden, answered that they may form ‘valuable nurseries for agents of a lower rank than minister’.¹⁹ This argument was repeated by the foreign secretary, the Earl of Clarendon, in the Select Committee on Diplomatic Service in 1870.²⁰ However, it was probably just as important that the Foreign Office did not want to relinquish posts that would not be replaced elsewhere – never mind the fiscal pressure from Parliament.

The evidence given before the Select Committee sheds light on some of the additional reasons behind the perpetuation of the legations in Germany. The fact that the other European powers kept their diplomatic representation in the minor states was probably the strongest argument.²¹ Any closure would have undermined British claims to a leading role in international politics and would have had – as in the case of Dresden in 1866 – ‘an unseemly appearance in the eyes of Europe’.²² This was also true in the cases of Darmstadt and Coburg, where close ties between the respective courts and the British royal house existed. At Darmstadt, Queen Victoria’s second daughter, Princess Alice, was married to Prince Ludwig, heir to the Grand Duchy of Hesse. Similar connections prevailed at Coburg where Britain had been represented by a *chargé d’affaires* since Victoria’s marriage to Albert in 1841, ‘with this additional bond, that Her Majesty’s second son will succeed to the present Duke’.²³ While the permanent under-secretary for foreign affairs, Edmund Hammond, in his well-prepared defence of these two so-called family missions, attributed to Darmstadt ‘a certain degree of political importance’, he confined himself in the case of Coburg to the observation ‘that the change in the political status of Germany affords no valid

¹⁷Evan Montague Baillie, Gerard Francis Gould, and William Nassau Jocelyn died while serving in Germany, aged 50, 48, and 60 respectively.

¹⁸Jones, *Diplomatic Service*, pp. 159–63.

¹⁹Evidence, Strachey (30 May 1861), Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic Service; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index 23 July 1861 [459] (1861), qq. 2701.

²⁰Evidence, Clarendon (16 June 1870), Report from the Select Committee, qq. 3931.

²¹For a list of foreign representatives at the lesser German courts see, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into Civil Establishments of the Different Offices of State at Home and Abroad [C. 6172] (1890), Appendix, p. 182.

²²Hammond, Memo in preparation of Committee 1870, 3 March 1870, FO 391/27; see also Evidence, Hammond (10 March 1870), Report from the Select Committee, qq. 164.

²³*Ibid.*

reason' to discontinue the presence of a diplomat who is 'an injury to nobody'.²⁴ Indeed, Charles Townshend Barnard's sporadic and meagre correspondence from Coburg, which is not included in this edition, confirms – at least from a British point of view – the impression that Coburg was a politically negligible entity. The Select Committee was, however, successfully assured of the diplomatic value of the other missions. The evidence given from March to July 1870 repeatedly referred to the unclear state of German affairs, and it is remarkable that in the following March, three months after unification had taken place, witnesses stressed the continued autonomy of the individual states and their importance for German and European affairs – and especially emphasized Bavaria's future importance. The committee concluded in May 1871 that, 'in the present condition of Europe', it was 'not prepared to recommend an immediate reduction of the smaller German missions'; yet it was 'of opinion, that there is a reasonable likelihood, at a no very distant date, that there may cease to be any good grounds for maintaining some of them'.²⁵

On this premise, choosing the right personnel for the disputed German missions seemed essential. In the course of reshuffling the posts in the new German Empire and creating 'chargé d'affaireships'²⁶ in Darmstadt, Stuttgart, and Munich, the foreign secretary, Lord Granville, wrote to Gladstone: 'This will be in the spirit of the recommendation of the Diplomatic Committee, and we shall have three most intelligent men in Germany to watch the progress of unification.'²⁷ Evan Montagu Baillie, George Petre, and Robert Morier lived up to these high expectations and set the standard of reportage for their successors, which included close observations of the smaller states that could not easily be provided from Berlin as well as more general considerations of German policy. The dockets of the dispatches from these missions reveal that they were treated on the same basis as those from more important legations and embassies. With few exceptions these letters were read by the foreign secretary (Granville, Derby, and Salisbury) and also forwarded to the Queen and the prime minister. Two-thirds of the dispatches selected for this volume reached either Gladstone or Disraeli. This remarkable dissemination corresponds with the diplomats' self-image as independent representatives as well

²⁴Ibid. qq. 163–166.

²⁵238, First Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic and Consular Services; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index, 18 May 1871 [238] (1871), p. vi.

²⁶Evidence, Morier (30 June 1870), Report from the Select Committee, qq. 4514.

²⁷Granville to Gladstone, 18 October 1871, in Agatha Ramm (ed.), *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1868–1876*, Royal Historical Society, Camden Third Series, Vols 81–82, 2 vols (London, 1952), Vol. II p. 276.

as with their seemingly ascribed role of ‘the English Minister’²⁸ in their host countries.

Nevertheless, there was only one fully fledged ambassador to imperial Germany, and the strict separation of the four minor missions (five, including Coburg) from business in Berlin echoed the prominent and detached status of the British embassy there. Indeed, the exclusive attitude of the Berlin embassy is perhaps reflected in the scant reference that it made to the correspondence of the minor missions, despite the fact that this was often sent to the Foreign Office via Berlin, or forwarded to the latter in original or copy. The ambassadorship also came with the seasonal calendar of the new capital city and the obligations of being accredited to an imperial court.²⁹ Lord Augustus Loftus’ delivery of his letter of recall as well as his successor’s, Lord Odo Russell’s, description of the presentation of his credentials illustrate the ceremonial and formal aspects of diplomacy which were – for the most part – lacking in the smaller territories. Here, as can be seen in the case of a court ball in Munich in 1875, for example, court etiquette did not permit permanent *chargé d’affaires* to rank with other heads of missions.³⁰

In Berlin, where Russell was doyen of the diplomatic corps, the role of ambassador allowed direct access to the emperor. Amongst a number of similar sorts of dispatches, the account of a private interview following the funeral of Prince Carl of Prussia in 1883 indicates a close personal relationship between Wilhelm and Russell, then Baron Amptill, which had no equivalent at the smaller German courts.³¹ To a considerable extent Russell’s appointment in October 1871, which was deemed necessary in consequence of Lord Loftus’ unpopularity in Berlin, rested on his existing personal acquaintance with both Wilhelm and the Prussian chancellor Bismarck, which he had cultivated when on a special mission to the headquarters of the German Army in Versailles from November 1870 to March 1871.³² By contrast the diplomats in Darmstadt, Dresden, Munich, and Stuttgart were more detached from the courts in their respective

²⁸ Strachey to Derby, 27 January 1875, FO 68/159.

²⁹ See Hans Philippi, ‘Die Botschafter der europäischen Mächte am Berliner Hofe 1871–1914: Eine Skizze’, in Oswald Hauser (ed.), *Vorträge und Studien zur preußisch-deutschen Geschichte* (Cologne and Vienna, 1983), pp. 159–250.

³⁰ See Morier to Derby, 4 February 1875, FO 9/226 (not included in this volume).

³¹ Amptill to Granville, 24 January 1883, FO 64/1024. (Russell was created Baron Amptill in March 1881).

³² For Odo Russell’s ambassadorship see Winifred Taffs, *Ambassador to Bismarck: Lord Odo Russell, First Baron Amptill* (London, 1938); Karina Urbach, *Bismarck’s Favourite Englishman: Lord Odo Russell’s Mission to Berlin* (London, 1999); and Paul Knaplund (ed.), *Letters from the Berlin Embassy: Selections from the Private Correspondence of British Representatives at Berlin and Foreign Secretary Lord Granville, 1871–1874, 1880–1885* (Washington, DC, 1944).

capitals and their daily routines less constrained by the machinery of local governments, programmes of social engagements, and general politicking. Accordingly, they keenly reported on their audiences with their respective sovereigns or when, having been in conversation with representatives of other nations, they were able to furnish insights into international developments. Only occasionally were such dispatches marked confidential or secret. The diplomatic backwaters nonetheless allowed the diplomats more leeway in their reportage and they often provided more comprehensive assessments of the domestic situation and public opinion than was possible in times of hectic diplomatic manoeuvres in Berlin. In this way, they provided the Foreign Office with a multifaceted and also – with regard to the peculiarities of developments beyond Prussia and Berlin – more nuanced picture of the new *Kaiserreich*.

II

British envoys were not unanimous in their views but mostly sympathetic towards the solution of the German question in 1870–1.³³ Negotiations between Prussia and the states of Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, and Hesse in the autumn of 1870 and the conclusion of the November treaties had set the course for the new empire – although from a foreign observer’s point of view these were overshadowed by the Franco-Prussian War. In fact, when Wilhelm I was formally proclaimed German Emperor in January 1871, Her Majesty’s representatives, with the notable exception of Henry Howard in Munich, did not feel prompted to comment on the occasion nor does their reportage reflect the full extent of political change in the newly unified Germany. It is striking, for example, that the elections to the new *Reichstag*, which replaced the Diet of the North German Confederation, and its sittings drew little more attention than was usually devoted to parliamentary proceedings in Germany. Likewise, at a state level, many of the dispatches on political life in the smaller capitals and their respective courts suggest that the diplomats took the political unification of Germany in their stride. This also rings true for reportage on incidents of chiefly local interest, more ‘exotic’ topics, as

³³See in general Klaus Hildebrand, ‘Großbritannien und die deutsche Reichsgründung’, in Eberhard Kolb (ed.), *Europa und die Reichsgründung: Preußen-Deutschland in der Sicht der großen europäischen Mächte, 1860–1880* (Munich, 1980), pp. 9–62; and Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, pp. 3–153.

well as general social and economic issues,³⁴ which British diplomats on the spot continued to have occasion and time to report upon.

Despite this ‘business as usual’ attitude the coverage of newsworthy items in Germany naturally evolved. Firstly, the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the conclusion of the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May 1871 allowed the envoys to write significantly more dispatches on domestic affairs than had been the case in 1870. Secondly, diplomats, who had previously speculated on the future relationship between a new federation and its constituent states – or reported on such speculations – now focused on the implementation of the new federal procedures and especially on the integration of the three smaller kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg, as well as the two grand duchies of Hesse and Baden, within the Prussian-dominated empire.

The usage of terms like ‘Emperor King’ for Wilhelm I, ‘Reichsrath’ for *Reichstag*, and ‘Imperial German Council of the Realm’ for the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council) indicate that British diplomats had to adapt to the language of the new *Reich* and its institutions.³⁵ At the same time they provided the Foreign Office with information on the terms and conditions of the imperial machinery, especially on the legislative competence of the empire. Robert Morier had earned his reputation as an expert on German constitutional matters of Germany in his junior years at the Berlin legation (1858–1866) and was probably best suited to this task. At his successive posts in Darmstadt, Stuttgart, and Munich he never tired of informing London of the intricacies of German constitutional practice. Two of these often long-winded dispatches are included in this volume.³⁶ Frequent references to the so-called ‘reserved rights’ of Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, and Hesse as well to the blocking minority in the Federal Council were also made by other diplomats, for example, when they reported on the extension of imperial competence to civil law. However, the picture which emerges from these dispatches of the 1870s is neither distinct nor consistent. Particularly in the early years of the *Kaiserreich* the extent of the reallocation of political power in Germany was subject to speculation, not least because of the differing evidence in the individual states. A report on the King of Württemberg’s opinion regarding the superfluousness of state parliaments and a report on

³⁴In most cases economic issues were dealt with in anaemically written reports, and were largely based on German statistics. These dispatches, marked ‘Commercial’, are for the most part not included in this selection.

³⁵Loftus to Granville, 25 March 1871, FO 64/719; Strachey to Derby, 21 October 1874, FO 68/158; Jerningham to Derby, 3 June 1875, FO 30/244; Russell to Granville, 22 December 1872, FO 64/748.

³⁶Morier to Granville, 27 December 1871, FO 82/150 and 9 November 1873, FO 9/220.

the Saxon chambers' dedication 'to stem the tide which threatens to overwhelm their separate existence' can be found within three weeks of each other, in early 1872.³⁷

Assessing inter-state relations and German federalism was probably the most difficult task for British observers – especially for Odo Russell whose presence in Berlin and his proximity to the imperial chancellor seem at times to have led him to misjudge the federal dimensions of the empire. This can be seen in two dispatches in this selection. In February 1872 Lord Odo predicted that the Prussian school inspection bill, if rejected by the Prussian *Landtag*, might ultimately be passed by the German *Reichstag* and the Federal Council – yet neither body had legislative powers over Prussian schools.³⁸ More significant, and illustrative of fundamental discrepancies between reports from Berlin and the other missions, is Russell's assessment of Bismarck's imperial railway purchase scheme in February 1876. While he estimated that the 'acquisition of the whole German Railway system by the Empire [was] merely a question of time',³⁹ reports from the minor missions sketched in a more complicated, particularistic, and ultimately more realistic picture. The existing state railways were unified only in 1920.

Railways are but one example of imperial legislation which called for reflections on federal integration, German nation-building, and unity, and which gave rise to different views. Yet reports from Berlin, where imperial policy was conceived, and reports from the smaller German capitals, where it was echoed in the local press and parliaments, also complement each other. At times the first-hand experience in the *Länder* yielded deeper insights into the imperial government. This is evident in a dispatch on the ministry in Hesse, for example, which, noted 'the very slight importance, if any, that attaches to the general sayings of Ministers in the position of Messrs Hofmann & Freydorf', yet deemed those 'sayings' to be representative of the Bismarckian party in Germany.⁴⁰ In justification of his post in Saxony, George Strachey likewise stressed Dresden's importance as 'an official suburb of Berlin', 'probably unsurpassed as a German "Ear of Dionysius"'.⁴¹

Although diplomats occasionally felt cut off from the imperial seat of power, they did not refrain from assessing the more general state of the empire. The annual Sedan Day celebrations, elections to the *Reichstag*,

³⁷Morier to Granville, 27 February 1872, FO 82/153; Burnley to Granville, 19 March 1872, FO 68/155.

³⁸Russell to Granville, 24 February 1872, FO 64/742.

³⁹Russell to Derby, 28 April 1876, FO 64/851.

⁴⁰Jerningham to Derby, 13 May 1875, FO 30/244 (not included in this volume).

⁴¹Strachey to Derby, 27 January 1875, FO 68/159.

or the ‘state visits’ of the German Emperor – in the case of Bavaria their notable absence – provided opportunities for such commentary. In particular, the dispatches on Ludwig II of Bavaria, whose eccentricities piqued British curiosity, show that internal German relations were symbolically charged. The selection in this volume includes reports on Ludwig II’s aversion to the German national flag and rumours of Bavarian military uniforms being changed to emulate those of the imperial army.⁴² Postings at the other German courts offered fewer opportunities to report on the sensitivities of the German princes in the new imperial setting. However, like their colleagues in Munich, most diplomats were aware of the delicate (and symbolic) balance between the princely houses of Germany – including the Hohenzollerns. For example, on the occasion of Wilhelm’s I visit to Saxony in 1876 it was reported ‘that the Emperor, if I may say, did not bring the Empire with him to Leipsic’.⁴³

No less significant in the envoys’ appraisal of German unity were observations on Prussian dominance, and so-called Prussianization. Here well-known patterns from the time of the German Confederation continue to appear in the reportage with Bavaria, Württemberg, and Saxony at the forefront of anti-Prussian resentment. Reports from Hesse, on the other hand, point to the comparatively smooth implementation of Prussian ‘ambitions’, not least due to the subservience of Hesse’s minister president and ‘trusted agent of Prince Bismarck’, Karl von Hofmann. ‘Your Lordship’, so Hubert Jerningham informed the Earl of Derby in January 1876, ‘may gather on the whole, that the great policy which made Prussia work her own ends by means of the magic words, German Fatherland, is fast reaping its fruits.’⁴⁴

While British diplomats ascribed varying degrees of particularism and political autonomy to the individual German states they raised little doubts about the stability or durability of the empire. Instead they pointed to the coexistence of the realms of imperial and state power, and the states’ corresponding loyalties. This was as true for Prussia in her adjustments to the empire as it was for the smaller states. Odo Russell’s long interviews with Wilhelm and Bismarck, in particular, give evidence of the complications which arose from the dual capacities of emperor and Prussian king on the one hand, and German chancellor and Prussian minister president on the other. Bismarck’s remarks on his relationship with Wilhelm are of

⁴²Morier to Granville, 25 November 1873, FO 9/220; Morier to Granville, 27 February 1873, FO 9/219.

⁴³Strachey to Derby, 8 September 1876, FO 68/160.

⁴⁴Jerningham to Derby, 3 January 1876, FO 30/245.

‘startling frankness’ and, although his statements were to some extent calculated, they leave little doubt about his appetite for power and general feeling of superiority. In 1872 Lord Odo Russell felt compelled to ask, ‘how long the Emperor will submit to his tyranny?’⁴⁵ Yet, in the following years, and after numerous threats of resignation, the imbalance of relations between the emperor and his chancellor only increased. In an account of Bismarck’s ‘private and personal policy’ Russell wrote ‘that absolute power is indispensable to him to fulfil his mission, and that to secure absolute power and consolidate his tenure of Office against all opposition, the employment of cunning and force are justifiable’.⁴⁶ The impression of Bismarck’s overall dominance in German politics is confirmed in the correspondence from the smaller German courts – albeit in a more distanced tone in comparison to Russell’s. Given the varying political climates in their host countries it is not surprising that the envoys registered divergent attitudes towards the ‘Almighty Chancellor’, describing him as both the ‘hope of his country’ and ‘its bugbear’.⁴⁷

The ambivalence inherent in Bismarck’s domestic policies become especially apparent in the numerous reports on the church conflicts which shaped the early years of the new *Kaiserreich*, both in reaction to the Vatican decrees of 1870 and the emergence of political Catholicism in the form of the *Zentrum* party. British diplomats similarly rejected the dogma of papal infallibility and were sympathetic to notions of containing Vatican influences, but their reports on religious affairs varied substantially according to location. From Berlin Odo Russell recorded in December 1874 that according to ‘Many thoughtful and moderate German politicians [...] it will become the mission of Germany to undertake a religious war for the purpose of destroying the Roman Catholic Church which stands in the way of the progressive Culture of Humanity’.⁴⁸ Reports from Stuttgart and Dresden registered ‘exemption from religious strife’⁴⁹ and ‘no desire to identify [...] with Prussia’s religious quarrels’,⁵⁰ while dispatches from Darmstadt and Munich noted the characteristics of the respective church policies and struggles. Two people featured prominently there: Bishop Ketteler of Mainz, ‘the Catholic Champion of Southern Germany’⁵¹ and adversary of the imperial chancellor, and Ignaz von Döllinger, church

⁴⁵Russell to Granville, 22 December 1872, FO 64/748.

⁴⁶Russell to Derby, 16 October 1874, FO 64/806.

⁴⁷Morier to Derby, 14 April 1875, FO 9/226; Jerningham to Derby, 11 May 1875, FO 30/244.

⁴⁸Russell to Derby, 7 December 1874, FO 64/807.

⁴⁹Petre to Derby, 30 April 1875, FO 82/159.

⁵⁰Strachey to Derby, 6 April 1874, FO 68/158.

⁵¹Jerningham to Granville, 8 August 1873, FO 30/241.

historian at Munich University, whose resistance to the dogma of papal infallibility contributed to the formation of the so-called Old Catholic movement. It is symptomatic of the uncertainty over the future of German Catholicism that Old Catholics, who ultimately proved to be a marginal group of sectarians, attracted the diplomats' full attention. Odo Russell even saw the possible 'establishment of a loyal State Catholic Church with Bishop Reinkens at its head as German Anti-Pope'.⁵² Such early assessments, which to some extent mirror the general attitude against ultramontane tendencies, gradually petered out and were increasingly replaced by concerns over excessive *Kulturkampf* measures, which were largely confined to Prussia. Eventually all envoys came to agree that the illiberal May Laws of 1873 and 1874 – 'the silly war waged against a few old and powerless prelates' – had backfired and proved to be the 'most gigantic political failure of our time'.⁵³

The remarkable attention paid to the *Kulturkampf* corresponds with the importance of religious questions in the wider European context as well as with widespread suspicion of the Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain, not least in connection with the Irish Home Rule movement. The background of the disputed Anglo-Irish relationship explains some of 'the British unease at Bismarck's repressive methods'.⁵⁴ Given their general aversion towards radicalism it seems no coincidence that the diplomats frequently linked their observations on ultramontane Catholicism with political movements at the other end of the political spectrum: 'the two greatest enemies of the temporal and spiritual development of Germany are the International of London and the Church of Rome'.⁵⁵

Reports on strikes and riots, 'the moral condition of the working classes',⁵⁶ workers' insurance schemes, links with the *International Workingmen's Association* in London, the socialist party, its programme and causing of agitation, indicate interest and concern in equal measure for Britain and Germany alike. In many cases such dispatches were forwarded to the Home Office. Regardless of the envoys' unanimous condemnation of the 'pernicious principles'⁵⁷ espoused by socialism, they also gave consideration to the social and economic origins of radicalization. George Petre, writing in 1878, for example, noted: 'The great feeders of Socialism in Germany are, undoubtedly,

⁵²Russell to Granville, 17 December 1873, FO 64/777.

⁵³Jerningham to Derby, 3 June 1875, FO 30/244; Strachey to Granville, 25 June 1880, FO 68/164.

⁵⁴Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, p. 108.

⁵⁵Russell to Granville, 30 March 1872, FO 64/743.

⁵⁶Baillie to Granville, 6 June 1872, FO 30/240.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

the heavy and increasing pressure of taxation, and the general paralysis of industry.⁵⁸

In a similar fashion to ‘Prince Bismarck’s crusade against Ultramontanism’⁵⁹ the ‘legislative crusade against the Socialist propaganda’,⁶⁰ which was implemented in the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878, was assessed as being counterproductive and indicative of Germany’s more general political culture. George Strachey, in particular, based in industrialized Saxony, delved deep into the condition of socialism and its prosecution by the German authorities, often with biting wit and sarcasm. After the first assassination attempt on Wilhelm I, in May 1878, he identified the underlying reason – and the ‘worst impulses of fanaticism’ – as being the ‘daily German round of prosecution, punishment, and surveillance’.⁶¹ Even more telling of Strachey’s liberal stance than his revulsion at German authoritarianism was his interest in the parliamentary abilities of one of the most prominent socialist politicians, August Bebel. ‘Very few Saxons’, Strachey stated in the run-up to the *Reichstag* elections of 1881, ‘are politically educated enough to see that if a Bebel exists he ought to be in Parliament.’⁶² Indeed, consternation about the state of German parliamentarism, which dated back to British observations on the early German constitutions after 1815, unified all envoys when they reported on ‘startling anomalies’, which ‘belonged [...] not to the reign of Queen Victoria, but to our Stuart and Tudor times’.⁶³ Odo Russell (then Lord Ampthill) wrote in 1882, ‘Parliamentary Government is not likely to commence in Germany until after the death of the present Emperor and of his Chancellor.’⁶⁴

Such assessments were shaped by deep-rooted convictions of the British diplomatic establishment and applied to all aspects of constitutional life and legal practice; in fact, the liberal achievements and traditions of the smaller German states went somewhat disregarded in the period. The prosecution of Bismarck’s adversary, the former German ambassador to Paris, Harry Graf von Arnim-Suckow, provides but one example of reports on juridical matters which reveal the distaste of British observers. The accounts about the passing of the imperial military law, which linked Bismarck’s foreign policy with his domestic agenda of fighting against the parliamentary

⁵⁸Petre to Salisbury, 29 May 1878, FO 82/162.

⁵⁹Morier to Granville, 29 March 1872, FO 9/215.

⁶⁰Strachey to Salisbury, 16 May 1878, FO 68/162.

⁶¹Strachey to Salisbury, 16 May 1878, FO 68/162.

⁶²Strachey to Granville, 26 October 1881, FO 68/165.

⁶³Gould to Granville, 12 November 1882, FO 82/166; Strachey to Salisbury, 22 January 1879, FO 68/163.

⁶⁴Ampthill to Granville, 13 January 1882, FO 64/1005.

control of government, are also especially noteworthy. Here, as in other less obvious cases, dispatches from Germany and its component states reflect the envoys' concern about constitutional developments, and ultimately about British interests in the stability of the new *Kaiserreich*, internally as well as with regard to foreign relations.

III

Despite a great preponderance of reports on German domestic affairs in the early years of the *Kaiserreich*, British foreign policy interests remained central to the envoys' reportage and their significance only increased over the period – in terms of the dispatch contents and the comments they elicited from Foreign Office officials (found on the docket). Anglo-German relations were affected in their own right by Germany's stature as a newly unified nation, but they were also influenced by the German Empire's evolving relationships with the other major European powers. In 1871 Henry Howard was concerned about Germany's becoming 'a not less danger to the repose of Europe than the power which it has now all but annihilated' and a few years later Robert Morier, writing in ever colourful language on German public opinion, reported on the 'constant state of fever and alarm' wrought by the 'susceptibilities and heart burnings' of the 'swaggering giants and the trembling dwarfs' that were the continental powers.⁶⁵

In a period which saw times of wariness punctuated by positive mutual references, indeed tentative discussion of an alliance, Anglo-German relationships can best be described as up and down.⁶⁶ Yet these oscillations did not give rise to a sense that relations were persistently problematic or underwritten by something more pernicious. Dispatches from Germany provided a barometer of Britain's standing in Germany, fluctuating in accordance with accounts of politics and ideals, social matters, the nature of internationally pressing affairs, and the direction of foreign policy, as well as reflecting differences of opinion between different German milieux and classes. While they testified to Wilhelm I loyally maintaining a certain 'partiality to England'⁶⁷ and holding Britain in warm regard throughout the period, British diplomats

⁶⁵Howard to Granville, 23 January 1871, FO 9/208; Morier to Derby, 14 April 1875, FO 9/226.

⁶⁶See in general Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*; Taffs, *Ambassador to Bismarck*; Urbach, *Bismarck's Favourite Englishman*; Christian Hoyer, *Salisbury und Deutschland: Außenpolitisches Denken und britische Deutschlandpolitik zwischen 1856 und 1880* (Husum, 2008).

⁶⁷Strachey to Granville, 8 September 1876, FO 68/160.

portrayed German political figureheads, the public, and the press as more capricious. In 1872, for example, Odo Russell reported that England provided ‘three black spots’ on Bismarck’s ‘political horizon’ through her ‘Neutrality, her Fleet and her Freedom’.⁶⁸ Yet upon the announcement of Disraeli’s accession to power, in 1874, Russell noted the mutual exchange of good wishes for future relations between the new British cabinet and Bismarck, and the latter’s earnest wish to see ‘Germany as the natural Ally of England’.⁶⁹ By contrast, George Strachey sent back a mixture of references from Saxony about how ‘out of fashion’ Britain was in the political stakes and of public discussion about the discrepancies between the political ideals of both lands.⁷⁰ Yet Disraeli was later ‘credited with a return to the genuine traditions of old English policy and Eloquence’.⁷¹ In fact, when Gladstone and the Liberals regained power, in 1880, Strachey wrote a lengthy dispatch about public despondence regarding the British political changeover. Although he was reporting on Saxony, he read the situation as ‘typical of Germany’. In part, he wrote, this was due to Conservatism being in the ascendancy and, with respect to the Eastern Question, it was feared that a British Liberal administration might seek to ‘undo the settlement of Berlin’ (Treaty of Berlin, 1878).⁷² By 1882, however, in response to the British occupation of Egypt, numerous envoys, including Strachey, reported a widespread, if not universal, shift of perception back in British favour. Indeed, Strachey was privy to a personal compliment from the emperor about the performance of the British army which ‘impressed [him] as if coming from Frederick the Great’.⁷³

Intertwined with assessments of Anglo-German relations were observations about the new asymmetrical and angst-ridden Franco-German relationship and its implications for Britain. Here, legacies of the Franco-Prussian War proved to be an important determinant of perception. It had been commonplace in the German states to criticize British neutrality as compromised during the Franco-Prussian War, and this notion periodically resurfaced in German discourse. In 1876, for example, the secretary of embassy, Hugh MacDonell, reported from Berlin on ‘unsympathetic’ feelings towards England and blamed the German press for ‘sedulously cultivat[ing]’ them based upon ‘a sentimental grievance as to the supposed benevolent neutrality

⁶⁸Russell to Granville, 30 October 1872, FO 64/747.

⁶⁹Russell to Derby, 27 February 1874, FO 64/802.

⁷⁰Strachey to Granville, 13 July 1876, FO 68/162; Strachey to Granville, 25 April 1883, FO 68/167.

⁷¹Strachey to Salisbury, 25 April 1878, FO 68/162.

⁷²Strachey to Granville, 7 May 1880, FO 68/164.

⁷³Strachey to Granville, 18 September 1882, FO 68/166.

shewn by England towards France in the late War'.⁷⁴ However, the ebb and flow of Anglophobic misgivings, which were perceived to be particularly strong in the territories of the minor missions, were not considered to be proportionately dangerous. In general – and despite German suspicions of British 'leanings towards France' – British observers were persuaded that 'Unfriendly dispositions [...] remain in a very dormant state.'⁷⁵

As for the Franco-German relationship itself, a number of war legacies also influenced the diplomats' estimations, although they were interpreted in different ways. Russell, for example, was concerned about the negative effects of the five billion franc war indemnity imposed upon France: 'The Prussians have not only tasted glory, – they have also tasted Money: – Their glory has been crowned with wealth'. He foresaw the German military and financial worlds being susceptible to 'another War indemnity'.⁷⁶ Reports from Darmstadt and Dresden were more pragmatic and instead positively assessed the financial benefits that the war indemnity had provided to the separate states and united Germany.⁷⁷ The most prevalent legacy of the Franco-Prussian War, however, can be found in observations about German policy being 'based on the conviction that the French war of revenge is inevitable'.⁷⁸ An acute moment of tension was the 'War-in-Sight' crisis of 1875, although this seemed to be a greater cause for concern at home in Britain than amongst the diplomats in Germany who reacted with relative composure. In Berlin, Russell reported upon the orchestration of the crisis by Bismarck and the alarmist rhetoric of the German press, but believed that the matter would quickly blow over. He noted 'a general impression that peace will be preserved during the present year'.⁷⁹ Russell also noted the views of the German military leaders, which suggested that the difficulties posed by the military budget in the domestic context were as important as desires for a foreign war. In the smaller states the diplomats described public feelings about another war with France; initially of a German national antagonism towards the French, and a wave of certitude that war would occur. But they also portrayed more multifaceted responses: of a public 'ardently' desiring 'peace', and of the damaging effects that

⁷⁴MacDonell to Derby, 7 July 1876, FO 64/853.

⁷⁵Russell to Granville, 24 December 1872, FO 64/748; Strachey to Derby, 13 July 1876, FO 68/160.

⁷⁶Russell to Granville, 9 January 1874, FO 64/801.

⁷⁷Jerningham to Derby, 3 January 1876, FO 30/245, and Strachey to Salisbury, 31 December 1878, FO 68/162.

⁷⁸Russell to Granville, 30 October 1872, FO 64/747.

⁷⁹Russell to Derby, 27 April 1875, FO 64/826 (not included in this volume).

war rumours had long been having on German trade and commerce.⁸⁰ Petre, in Stuttgart, observed that many Germans, supporters of the government and otherwise, 'would be much relieved' if Germany could have 'a time to rest'.⁸¹

In the end, the war scare of 1875 was defused by a joint Anglo-Russian intervention. Contrary to Russell's assessment of the situation, the British government instructed him to make a representation to the German government and express British 'regret' with regard to the mounting crisis.⁸² In contrast to the other British diplomats in Germany, this ultimately successful, personal involvement marked Russell out as an active diplomat with a sphere of agency in the heart of German power. Still, if Her Majesty's representatives in the minor states had lesser roles in high-powered diplomatic manoeuvrings throughout the period, they did not play a lesser part in keeping the Foreign Office informed about the German organs of public opinion, illustrating the ever increasing importance of the press in setting the political agenda, as was the case with the 'War-in-Sight' crisis. Despite the acknowledgment that 'there may be much newspaper declamation without any corresponding public irritation',⁸³ they sent regular dispatches about the positions adopted by the various local and regional newspapers on a wide range of issues from the major events of international affairs to the provincial dealings of the minor states, and they remained attuned to all kinds of references to Britain. This was true in relation to the press of both countries for the diplomats also responded to Anglo-German inaccuracies in the British newspapers. In 1876, for example, Strachey took issue with reports of "'the Germans" [...] shrugging their shoulders at Lord Salisbury's Mission' to Constantinople, chiding the Foreign Office that "'the Germans" in question are not to be found here, but in the Editors rooms in London'.⁸⁴ Likewise, Francis Clare Ford saw the need to rectify, as he strongly termed it, the 'perversion of the Truth' sustained by *The Times*' mistranslation of 'the Englischen Fräulein' (a female religious order) as 'Englishwomen'.⁸⁵

In addition to providing information about, and responding to, the new forces of the press, the envoys continued to incorporate their personal estimations when assessing Germany's wider relations with other foreign powers. With regard to the Austro-Hungarian Empire

⁸⁰Petre to Derby, 29 April 1875, FO 82/159.

⁸¹Ibid.; also Jerminham to Derby, 11 May 1875, FO 30/244.

⁸²Derby to Russell, 8 May 1875, FO 244/287 (not included in this volume).

⁸³Strachey to Derby, 13 July 1876, FO 68/160.

⁸⁴Strachey to Derby, 30 November 1876, FO 68/160.

⁸⁵Ford to Derby, 12 February 1875, FO 30/244.

the diplomatic old guard, in the form of Augustus Loftus, was quick to congratulate the new German Emperor 'on the cordial feeling which had been evinced towards Germany by Austria', seeing the cultivation of an 'intimate understanding' as 'the surest guarantee for the maintenance of peace in Europe'.⁸⁶ Loftus' successor Odo Russell, however, was much more wary about the vulnerable position of Austria-Hungary and the 'artificial ties' which bound it to Germany through the amenability of its foreign minister, Count Andrassy, towards Bismarck.⁸⁷ He was concerned that the union of Germany, Austria, and Russia in the *Dreikaiserbund* of 1873 would 'convert Austria into a vassal', and feared that legacies of the Franco-Prussian War such as an 'invincible [German] Army' and the experience of war as a 'profitable business' made Austria a tempting target to complete German unification.⁸⁸ Indeed, Russell believed that there was 'more reason to apprehend a War with Austria than with France',⁸⁹ and remained convinced of this for some years. As late as 1877 he reported that the national party viewed the incorporation of Austria as 'a mere question of time'.⁹⁰ These same ominous views of Austro-German relations did not appear in dispatches from the minor missions; instead they emphasized the smaller states' friendship for Austria.⁹¹ Bavaria, in particular, retained a political preference for Austria and reportage from Munich described the Bavarian king's 'unusual empressment' in his personal dealings with Archduke Rudolf, but his disinclination to pay the same favour to the German imperial family.⁹² On the whole, therefore, Austro-German relations were not perceived to be inflammatory and, by the time the Dual Alliance was concluded in 1879, it would seem that Russell's fears of an Austrian war were finally allayed. He assessed it as a 'guarantee of peace and safety for Germany' and noted that German politicians appreciated British approval of the policy.⁹³

If, with the exception of Russell, the relationship between Austria and Germany was seen as largely unproblematic, the opposite was true of Russo-German relations. The implications of a Russian resurgence for British interests in the East ensured that the Russo-German relationship was closely watched, and as British suspicions of Russia were roused so the reportage quickly turned more critical. Within two

⁸⁶ Loftus to Granville, 25 March 1871, FO 64/719.

⁸⁷ Russell to Derby, 30 November 1874, FO 64/807.

⁸⁸ Russell to Granville, 30 November 1873, FO 64/777, and 9 January 1874, FO 64/801.

⁸⁹ Russell to Derby, 30 November 1874, FO 64/807.

⁹⁰ Russell to Derby, 8 December 1877, FO 64/881.

⁹¹ See Strachey to Derby, 16 November 1876, FO 68/160, and Strachey to Granville, 7 May 1880, FO 68/164.

⁹² Stanton to Derby, 28 November 1877, FO 9/233.

⁹³ Russell to Salisbury, 21 November 1879, FO 64/936 and 24 October 1879, FO 64/935.

years Russell's reservations about the *Dreikaiserbund* had given way to an even more sober analysis. In his post facto interpretation of the 'War-in-Sight' crisis Russell posited that the League of the Three Emperors had provided Bismarck with an instrument to play power games in Europe, but he had been 'outwitted' by the Russians who, by playing peacekeeper, had enhanced their relationship with Austria, leaving Germany irritated, 'isolated' and 'burden[ed]' by the alliance.⁹⁴ The envoys' reportage subsequently illustrated the cooling-off in Russo-German relations and the crumbling of the triple alliance under the tensions produced by the Eastern Question. Their dispatches were diverse yet complementary. The Berlin embassy was more conversant in Bismarckian policy and the strategic implications of international relations, while the diplomats in all territories described the repercussions of political decision-making in German society. In response to the Russo-Turkish War, for example, Russell wrote of 'general exultation in Berlin' at the possibility that 'the Turk may be driven out of Europe'; Scott, however, in Darmstadt, noted a greater public interest in domestic affairs and hopes that neutrality would enable Germany to concentrate on remedying 'the present depressed condition of German trade and industry'.⁹⁵

Following the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (which is not covered in the dispatches as the leading figures of the British government and their principal German diplomat, Odo Russell, were all present) Anglo-German relations were portrayed as having taken a turn for the better. In 1880 Russell wrote of 'the perfect harmony now happily established between England and Germany' and outlined Bismarck's willingness to defer to the British government in matters relating to the execution of the Treaty of Berlin.⁹⁶ Relations with Russia, however, simmered rather more coolly on the part of both Germany and Britain. As the renewed growth in Slavic power began to unsettle the Foreign Office and pose the threat of a Russo-German war, the envoys again reported back on differing inflections of public opinion, ranging from strong public conviction of war in Württemberg to lacklustre attitudes in Bavaria.⁹⁷ Yet, in the face of acute concerns that the sale of the horses of the Russian ambassador to Berlin signified his recall to Russia for purposes of war, Russell was able to scale the crisis down to a personal matter and he explained away the misconstrued transaction

⁹⁴Russell to Derby, 3 January 1876, FO 64/850.

⁹⁵Russell to Derby, 20 April 1877, FO 64/877; Scott to Derby, 7 October 1877, FO 30/246.

⁹⁶Russell to Granville, 29 April 1880, FO 64/959.

⁹⁷Haggard to Granville, 19 April 1882, FO 82/166; MacDonell to Granville, 30 December 1882, FO 9/246.

as ‘a single pony which I bought for my children when Monsieur de Sabouroff’s son left Berlin for school in Russia’.⁹⁸

In contrast to Russell, whose information networks included a personal relationship with Bismarck and the main agents of the Berlin diplomatic corps, some of the other envoys complained of being cut off from German questions dealt with by the embassy, as well as British policies in international affairs. Nevertheless, through conversations with royalty, ministers, and worthies in their respective federal states, as well as by monitoring public opinion and the local press, the minor missions provided a kaleidoscope of insights into the resonance of international relations across Germany, of varying degrees of usefulness and interest for the Foreign Office. Russia provides an interesting index by which to assess the relative status of foreign affairs in the minor missions. In Darmstadt, for example, Russian affairs and the Eastern Question were significant thanks to the royal family connection brought about by the marriage of the Tsarevich Alexander Nikolayevich, from 1855 Alexander II, to Marie of Hesse and by Rhine in 1841, afterwards known as Maria Alexandrovna. This relationship made the Hessian monarchy a hub of diplomacy and the British representative had a semblance of being able to access privileged information. In 1877 Jerningham reported on speculation that Prince Alexander of Hesse’s close connections to Russia (that is, as brother-in-law to the tsar) would make him eligible to rule over a newly independent Bulgaria.⁹⁹ His assertion that these Russian sympathies would be important in the future was not wrong – Alexander’s son, Prince Battenberg, became the first Prince of Bulgaria in 1879. At the other missions, by contrast, relations with Russia were far less warm and Eastern matters consequently of less significance. Strachey described the Saxon elite as ‘decided Russophobes’ and with respect to the Eastern Question wrote in no uncertain terms that it was ‘an abuse of language to speak of a German “public opinion” on Turkish affairs’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, frustrated by his ‘somewhat limited Saxon horizon’, Strachey later extrapolated this view to encompass all foreign affairs, noting that: ‘It is not correct to speak of German Public Opinion with respect to Foreign Affairs.’¹⁰¹

In fact, the unification of Germany had curtailed the smaller states’ already modest horizons in the sphere of foreign relations and, at the same time as grumbling about their mixed fortunes when trying to

⁹⁸ Amphyll to Granville, 31 October 1883, FO 64/1027.

⁹⁹ Jerningham to Derby, 31 May 1877, FO 30/246.

¹⁰⁰ Strachey to Salisbury, 22 November 1879, FO 68/163; Strachey to Derby, 14 December 1876, FO 68/160.

¹⁰¹ Strachey to Granville, 7 May 1880, FO 68/164.

gain insights into topical international matters, the envoys' reportage also illustrates the diminishing role of these states. The Kingdom of Bavaria felt her loss of status most keenly. It was not long before Morier wrote to the Foreign Office about Bavaria's chagrin at being left in the dark about 'the secrets' of the chancellor's foreign policy and the 'state of paralysis' of Bavaria's own 'so-called foreign Affairs'.¹⁰² In 1874 he reported that the Bavarian minister for foreign affairs was reduced to saying 'nothing but what he conceives would be agreeable or at all events considered inoffensive in Berlin, but this if possible as a general and impersonal observation and not seldom in the shape of a platitude'.¹⁰³ Although the smaller states tenaciously clung to their independent rights of diplomatic representation throughout the period, British diplomats were less and less apt to regard them as a component part of German foreign policy. To some extent, the diplomats' notable interest in the institutional aspects of small-state diplomacy was motivated by self-preservation, as they had a stake in the future of their host countries keeping up diplomatic appearances and practices. However, by the late 1870s observations about the coexistence of imperial and small-state diplomatic structures had changed from how stunted and ineffective the latter were to describing them as an 'anomaly' that 'will probably in time die a natural death from atrophy'.¹⁰⁴

While reportage in the 1870s was largely about issues related to integration with the new *Kaiserreich* in domestic and European foreign spheres, the envoys also remained attuned to more distant international matters and their repercussions in Germany. They provided a mixed picture of positive and negative German responses to the wider forces of colonial affairs. Initially, German desires for self-consolidation were evident; seen, for example, in her pronouncements of official disinterest in colonies and responses to the 'the vexed subject of Emigration', such as ploys to discourage population movements to the British dominion of Canada.¹⁰⁵ However, the portrayal of Germany's ongoing lack of interest in far-flung foreign affairs began to include positive appraisals of other nations' actions and interventions, and the benefits that could be gained from them; in the case of Britain, her assertive position vis-à-vis Suez in 1876 and 'successful' move against Egyptian insurrection in 1882. This was neatly summed

¹⁰²Morier to Granville, 10 February 1874, FO 9/223; 30 January 1873, FO 9/219; and 15 February 1874, FO 9/223.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Cope to Salisbury, 17 December 1879, FO 9/239.

¹⁰⁵Russell to Derby, 6 February 1875, FO 64/824; also, Russell to Granville, 1 January 1873, FO 64/767.

up by Strachey: 'International jealousy is not a German vice. All steps likely to further the civilization of Egypt would meet with warm approval here. The Germans would be glad to know that there was a prospect of the resources of Africa being opened up by the only power competent to attempt the work.'¹⁰⁶ But there were also negative German responses to colonial matters. In 1881 Strachey informed the Foreign Office of the 'daily diatribes' in the German press over British policy in the Transvaal, astutely noting that the key point was 'some visible sympathy with the Boers'. This report – which can be read as a harbinger of future relations – was curtly dismissed by the Foreign Office when Tenterden, the permanent under-secretary, wrote on the docket: 'I would not send this stuff to the Colonial Office.'¹⁰⁷

With respect to Germany's own colonial aspirations, Francis Ottiwell Adams, then secretary of embassy in Berlin, first noted in October 1874 that the increased size of the German navy inspired pride in the emperor and the nation. He did not question the official, political lack of interest in colonies, but presciently wondered whether the general public would soon start to make colonial demands.¹⁰⁸ Odo Russell likewise argued that colonies would not be an issue while Bismarck was at the helm; but 'the pressure of public opinion' that he first observed in 1877 had evolved into a tinderbox of public sentiment by 1883 which, as he put it, 'need[ed] but a spark of encouragement from the Imperial Government to become a national conflagration'.¹⁰⁹ Looking ahead, this was indeed something which came to preoccupy Germany and its British observers throughout the 1880s. The gradual shift in focus from internal affairs to external affairs which becomes apparent in the dispatches of this volume of *British Envoys to the Kaiserreich* becomes even more so in the next, and concluding, volume.

¹⁰⁶ Strachey to Derby, 4 February 1876, FO 68/160.

¹⁰⁷ Strachey to Granville, 5 March 1881, FO 68/165.

¹⁰⁸ Adams to Derby, 3 October 1874, FO 64/806.

¹⁰⁹ Russell to Granville, 18 September 1880, FO 64/962; Amphill to Granville, 29 March 1883, FO 64/1025.