

## How St. George's, Berlin, could have become a cathedral: an excerpt from

“BISHOP BURY  
LATE BISHOP OF NORTH  
AND CENTRAL EUROPE

*Memoir*”

BY  
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### CHAPTER VI

#### *A CLERICAL DIPLOMATIST*

THERE are many instances of Bishop Bury's **far-reaching** influence on the Continent in political as well as in ecclesiastical affairs. [...]

That oft-repeated story, now known as 'The Emperor's Telegram,' is best given here in the Bishop's own words:

One of the most interesting incidents which even in my varied experience of life has ever come my way began in 1911, at Munich, where we had our first Conference and the laying of the foundation-stone of the new church, for which the City Council had given us one of the very best sites in their possession. A small deputation waited on me, coming from the City Council of Homburg, to ask if I would come there in the autumn and dedicate a memorial to King Edward VII in our English church, and for which they asked permission to place it there. King Edward, when Prince of Wales, had, in a sense, been the making of Homburg, and they wished to show, therefore, their grateful appreciation of his great courtesy to them and for all the popularity he had given to Homburg. Prussian law forbade the placing of a memorial to any foreign ruler in any public place, but they said they were told that the English Church was not technically a public place, but a private church for the British community, and "if we can place it there, therefore," they said, "and have a service of dedication, we shall all feel very happy and content, and if you will agree to come and conduct the service we will ask the Emperor if he also will attend and unveil the tablet." I agreed, of course. This was early in the year, and it was well on in August before the Emperor could give a date for the ceremony. At somewhat short notice, he finally fixed upon August 12th, when he would be staying with his youngest sister at Königsberg, close to Homburg. Between the spring and August, however, things had marched with unusual rapidity in European affairs.

At that very time the German gunboat *Panther* was at Agadir, on the Morocco coast, Mr. Lloyd George had made his speech with respect to it, and we were undoubtedly on the very brink of war.

The German Emperor, in fixing the date, had added also, "I should like the Bishop to give us a short address." I knew that a somewhat unusual gathering, both of British and Germans, would be present, and that I should have to give that address in what I cannot help describing as a somewhat electric atmosphere. It occurred to me, therefore, to ask Sir Arthur Bigge, now Lord Stamfordham, if he would ask King George to kindly give me a little message which I could embroider and make into a suitable address which could give no offence. He said he would do so, and was sure that His Majesty would send a message. This was early in the week, but I had to leave on the Thursday night, the 10th, to be in time for the service. All went well, however, and I managed, instead of the message from the King, which had not arrived, to enlarge upon a sentence of Lord Haldane's spoken in the previous June, at the Summer School at Oxford. "We and the Germans," he said, "have so many things in common and are so near akin that we make the great mistake of thinking that we understand each other. We do not understand each other, however, as our national developments have proceeded on such different lines, and we ought to begin and study very carefully each other's point of view."

The Emperor was apparently quite satisfied with both the address and the service, and left a message with his host, Herr von Maister, with whom he was lunching, that he would like me to come and lunch also. There was quite a distinguished party, from eighteen to twenty — I remember that I sat next to Prince Albert, son of Princess Christian — and the Emperor was in high spirits. Later, in the billiard room, he entered into conversation with me, and became very excited over the political situation, but I managed to change the conversation by speaking about my own work abroad, and the best centre I could have. He at once said, "Berlin. There is no place like it, and you could put your stool in my mother's church there, for it is Imperial property." He then turned to talk with Sir Frank Lascelles, and I escaped to get over my excitement — I have not nearly described, *I dare not*, all that took place. After a little while, Herr Rucker von Jenisch came to me with a telegram. "The Emperor has just had this from King George. It has given him the greatest possible pleasure and he wants you to read it. This has been a splendid thing to do." It was a message of thanks and appreciation for the Emperor's kind presence in unveiling the monument to his father, and signed George R.I. While I was looking at it, the Emperor called out, still seated on a corner of the billiard table, and smoking, "Has the Bishop seen that telegram?" "Yes, sir," I said, approaching with it in my hand. "Don't you think it is a very charming telegram?" he said. "Yes, I do, sir, and I am sure that His Majesty means all that he says." "Oh, yes," he said, "I am sure he does, and now we must write him a suitable reply." "We," I thought to myself. "What can he mean?" But to my astonishment I found half a sheet of notepaper pushed in my direction with a pencil. "Now what would you say if you were writing it?" he went on. So taking out my fountain pen I wrote what I should have said under the circumstances, with some hesitation. Reading it over,

he said, "Delightful. Just what I would have said myself," and taking up the pencil he wrote "Willy" at the bottom, and my telegram therefore went. It was not his, except the signature.

I again retired to my chair to regain my breath, for I had not been accustomed to such "Imperial Majesty" experiences, and presently Herr von Jenisch approached and said, "The telegram has gone. Oh, it has been a splendid thing altogether." "Do you think," said I, "that I might have that paper that I have just written?" "Yes," said he, "of course. I will get it for you." Then evidently his Prussian caution awoke, and he said, "Why did you want it?" It was then I made my mistake, for instead of saying, "It will be so interesting to keep as a souvenir," I said, "I should like to read it out in church tomorrow." He said, "Then you shall. I will get you a typed copy and another of your King's message," which was all, of course, that I got.

There were all sorts of incidents that day at Herr von Maister's which were full of interest for me as throwing an entirely new light upon the personality of the one ruler who at that time was, if I may use the expression, under the world's searchlight. At times I could not realize that this was the great ruler of the German Empire, for he seemed to lay his dignity entirely aside.

He showed the most extraordinary versatility and widest interest in all sorts of things. Nothing indeed was devoid of interest that could be mentioned to him. I have never in all my experience come into contact with a mind that worked so swiftly, ready to turn in any direction, keen and alert, and yet seeming as it were merely to skim over the surface. At one time he would be serious, philosophical, and even theological. At another time political; at yet another, merry and irresponsible, like a boy, putting every one at their ease with him, and ready to listen to anything that was said.

He asked, for instance, how I had travelled in my late diocese, British Honduras, in Central America. I answered, "In every conceivable sort of craft — big liners, ordinary fruit boats, gasoline launches, little sailing sloops, and even canoes." "Did you never ride?" said he. "Well, all my stations were almost without exception on the coast, but now and then I did ride out into places amongst the plantations." "You can ride, then?" said he. "Oh, yes," I answered, and boasting a little, I fear. Never a good thing to do. "I used to ride races bareback and did not always lose." "Ah," said he "I thought somehow that you rode. Now, I should like you to come with me for my next hunt. Lascelles," said he, calling Sir Frank, "how does a bishop hunt in your country, in pink or black?" The ex-Ambassador shot a look in my direction as much as to say, "What on earth have you been saying?" "I have assured His Imperial Majesty," I answered, "that I should not have a shred of reputation left if I went hunting with him." The Emperor said, laughing gaily, "I tell you you shall come with me for my next hunt and I shall not forget." Mercifully, however, he did forget, though he did not forget to cause the Archbishop of Canterbury much perturbation by sending him a message that he wished me to take up episcopal duties in Berlin.

Looking with a somewhat blank feeling at the door as the Emperor left the room, I turned to Sir Frank Lascelles and said, "Is it possible that he can be often like this?" He said, "Oh, yes, and much more startling at times. But my firm conviction is that he does not want war, and that we shall never have it while he lives if he can possibly stop it." This is, I think, also a very widely-spread impression, and that he was over-ruled and found himself at the critical moment unable to avoid the consequences of all that had occurred, in which, without doubt, he had taken no small part.

Five years passed on, and I received a gracious invitation to spend from Saturday to Monday at Windsor Castle, where I found myself the only guest. And then His Majesty, in the course of the evening, when I mentioned the incident, told me that he had not received my message till the morning of the 12th, when he was at the Duke of Devonshire's for the grouse shooting, and had thought the best thing he could do then was to send a telegram. I told him of the circumstances, and added, "I should have had that telegram as a souvenir if I had only been straight enough to say why I wanted it." "Yes," said His Majesty, "it is always best to be straight." I could not help thinking of this when the Dean of Canterbury said recently that what characterized His Majesty the King was his dead straight sincerity.

Time again passed on, and in 1920 I was staying with Bishop Brent, who was Bishop then of Western New York, at Buffalo, where a certain Dr. Charles van Bergen was a very kind friend to me, motoring me to Niagara and other places of interest. I spent my last evening, and had supper, with him. As we talked afterwards, he said, "Have you ever met the German Emperor?" and I answered, "Yes." And gradually was led on to telling the incident again, as indeed I have often done, finishing up with, "If I had only been straight I should have had the telegram to show." He said, "I do not see at all why you should not have it to show." I stared at him in amazement, and said, "What can you mean?" He said, "I mean that my sister married Rucker von Jenisch's brother. She is the Countess de Grote, and lives in Berlin, and as Rucker von Jenisch was far too cautious to destroy such a paper you may be sure that it is in existence, and if any one can get it for you she can, and I may add, will if you mention my name."

The following year I was staying at the Embassy and walked across to see Herr von Kuhlman, whom I knew with respect to prisoners during the war. He was pleasant, as usual, and in answer to my inquiries told me that the Countess de Grote was in the South of France and that Rucker von Jenisch had died, "fortunately for him," he added, "just before the war." When I explained, without going into details, why I was asking, he said, "When you were announced Herr von Schubert was smoking a cigar with me and has left, but he is, as you know, very friendly to the English, and if I give you a note to him I am sure he will do what he can." I went across and told him briefly the circumstances, and said, "It was a half sheet of paper. I wrote it myself with a fountain pen, but the

Emperor wrote 'Willy' at the bottom of it with a pencil." Five days afterwards it was delivered at my address in London from the German Embassy, with a kind note from Herr von Schubert enclosing it, saying that it had been a very great pleasure to render this little act of kindness. I was delighted to have it ten years after it was written, and shall always value it as a special souvenir.