

BISMARCK IN DEBATE

Bismarck is by no means a finished, not even a ready or natural, orator. The knightly appearance of the Prince, his ease of manner, and above all, his reputation as diplomatist and statesman--would lead us to suppose him an orator--either one who would deliver a profound and well-arranged speech without hesitation or effort, or, still more, an orator of natural eloquence, whose words and figures would flow from his lips as the creations of the moment, and entrance or enkindle the hearts of his hearers. But this is not the case. Occasionally he may be seen at his desk winging his way rapidly with his quill over a narrow strip of paper; while some member is on the platform. All know what this means, and at a slight bow of his head the President announces that Prince Bismarck, Chancellor of the Empire, has the floor. As he rises there is a general demand for silence all over the House, with the exclamation, "He is speaking." He inclines his body toward the Assembly, winds his thumbs around each other, and, casts an occasional glance at the House; but he stops, hesitates, sometimes even stammers, and corrects himself; he seems to struggle with his words, which ascend unwillingly to his lips; after two or three there will be a short pause, when one can almost hear a suppressed swallow. He speaks without gesture, feeling, or emphasis, and often fails in the accentuation of final syllables, so as to weaken his thought. One wonders if this is the man with a parliamentary career behind of more than a quarter of a century, during which period he has been in every legislative body of his country, meeting with bitterest oppositions from the Liberal party in his early career, parrying their most caustic words in kind, and replying, with wonderful presence of mind, by the wittiest impromptus or the most cutting sarcasm. It is the same man, and presently he will prove it.

Gradually his speech flows with more warmth, and unfolds its peculiar attraction: a series of original, fresh, gritty, and significant expressions, which, tell more by their power than their beauty. His speeches are collections of sentences rather than the development of a smooth and logical train of reasoning. Many of them have gone into history as proverbial, such as "Cataline existencies," "Blood and iron," "Austria must move its center of gravity toward the Orient," etc. Some months ago, after listening to long diatribes about the evils of the recent wars, and the burdens which they have brought upon the people as a nation, he quietly arose and said: "After each one of the recent wars the nation has enjoyed a greater amount of parliamentary liberty than before them." This was strikingly true that it was folly to argue that they had led to tyranny. And he closed by saying: "But, nevertheless, gentlemen, the German nation has a right to expect from us that we shall prevent the return of such a catastrophe; and I am convinced that the allied governments desire nothing so much as to effect this purpose." With this beautiful admonition, simple though dignified, and expressed with fervor, he electrified the audience as if he were the greatest orator, and then sat down amid deafening applause from all parts of the House. Thus, with apparently no oratorical power, he seldom takes the floor without confirming his nation in the belief that, take him all in all, he is a statesman such as Germany has never before enrolled in her annals, and whom the world at large, may well envy her in possessing.--Prof. Wm. Wells: in Scribner for April. Oregonian, Sat. 4/17/85