

Kaiser Wilhelm II

By POULTNEY BIGELOW

[The recent death of Wilhelm Hohenzollern, third ruler of the restored German Empire up to the close of the First World War, calls to mind that our good friend, Poultney Bigelow, was a boyhood chum and schoolmate of the late ex-Kaiser. Mr. Bigelow wrote about the Hohenzollern emperor and his social views in an article for the March-April 1912 issue of LAND AND FREEDOM (then known as THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW), which was a Special Number for Germany. However we may disagree with Mr. Bigelow's interpretation, we believe it is interesting enough to present to our readers at this time.—Ed.]

THE German Emperor has successfully deceived the world regarding his true character. On the surface he appears a medieval knight with cuirass, helmet and threatening sabre in his "mailed fist." He publicly repudiates allegiance to any law save that of God Almighty. The press knows him as a war-lord, impatient at any constitutional limitation and muttering to his ministers, "*Sic volo, sic jubeo.*" His last sensational appearance in our press is one whose background setting would be a Court of Impeachment or guillotine, had we in mind England or France. Germany has elected to her Imperial Parliament a very large proportion of Socialists who but a few years ago were regarded as outcasts of society. The Emperor had publicly branded them as tramps, vagrants, men without a country, and their chief illustrated organ, *Simplicissimus*, was forbidden at every railway stall in Prussia. Today a Socialist is elected to occupy the Speaker's chair of the Imperial Parliament, and the Constitutional Head of the State repudiates him, and in appearance gives public notice that he may nullify the organic law of the Empire if it suits his personal mood.

All this has to do with the external Emperor, and if we deal with externals only, we may be led astray.

Wilhelm II is a socialist—he is the greatest socialist on earth. He has no quarrel with socialism, but he very properly resents the mixing up of socialism and politics. Socialism has to do with the welfare of one's country—possibly of all countries. Politics has to do only with success at the next election. Theodore Roosevelt is a politician—Wilhelm II is a patriot.

About forty years ago, when I lived with a German family, fitting for an American collegiate, I saw something of "young Prince Wilhelm," as he was then called. Boys are not easily fooled by one another, and the impressions of childhood are apt to be not only lasting but remarkably accurate. The Emperor is no demagogue. He loves the applause of the world almost as much as our two competing candidates for the Presidency. Yet, closely as I have sought to follow his public career both before and since coming to the throne, I have never caught him playing the dem-

agogue or deceiving by false promises. He has made mistakes of judgment, or rather, he has been the victim of time-serving Ministers who had not the courage to oppose him; but throughout his quarter-century of Imperial rule he has been not only faithful to his pledges regarding the maintenance of peace, but he has never forfeited the highest title in my vocabulary, that of gentleman.

The German Emperor has been reared in a political atmosphere where the great problems discussed by Henry George are solved not by an appeal to party expediency or interested bosses, but by a cold scientific study of what is good for the State for all time. Wilhelm II has, I believe, read and pondered Henry George's monumental "Progress and Poverty," and it is no small credit to him and to the administration of which he is the head, that the first practical application of single tax principles should have been made in the Province of Confucius when Germany organized Kiau-Chow in 1897.

To say that Germany is fifty years ahead of this country in what is best in socialism is to state the matter with great moderation.

Germany has solved a dozen vital questions about which our highly paid politicians are pretending to wring their hands in despair; and moreover the reforms which Germany has made since my boyhood are nearly all socialistic in the best sense and conducive to the happiness of the whole people rather than for the enrichment of a favored few.

The Kaiser's government gives the people better railway service, better postal service, better trolley and tram-car service, and above all furnishes a national express or parcel post very much more efficient than anything we know in America, and at about one-tenth the cost in this country. These are all a species of partnership between the Government and the people. The list could be lengthened to include most admirably conducted municipal markets, municipal laundries, municipal street-lighting and in fact nearly every form of enterprise which with us tends to become a trust or monopoly very profitable to a few, but unjustly burdensome to the people at large.

While we are not of those hero-worshippers who look for salvation to any one man alone, we yet recognize the propriety of giving credit to Napoleon for the French Code which bears his name. We cordially assent when the venerable Wilhelm I is called "the founder of the German Empire." To the same degree, we deem it right that in any future record of the progress made in our times by humanitarian ideas, if credit is due to any one man, that man is the one who now rules over the most scientifically governed State of modern times—His Majesty Wilhelm II by the grace of God King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany.