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978-0-521-17965-2 - The Holstein Papers, Volume III

Edited by Norman Rich and M. H. Fisher

Excerpt

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CORRESPONDENCE

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1861

In November 1860 Friedrich von Holstein was provisionally admitted to the Prussian diplomatic service. Before final admission to the service, he had to serve a period of probation without pay in one of Prussia's diplomatic missions abroad and to pass a series of examinations in Berlin.

On 6 December Holstein received his first appointment as Attaché at the Prussian Legation in St Petersburg, where at that time Otto von Bismarck¹ was Minister. He arrived at his post in January 1861. From this period of his career come the first letters in the present collection.

1. August von Holstein to his Son²

Karlstein,³ 30 January 1861

My old darling boy,

I was terribly upset, and indeed all of us were, about your illness. May the good Lord grant that you are now better again. Write soon—quite briefly—to tell us how you are. Did you call in Herr Bismarck's doctor at once, and stay indoors? I expect you to do this immediately out of love and regard for me. Since the climate and the food are so different from here, and you are not used to them, you must take twice as much care of yourself at first. It will ease my mind if I can count on your doing this and doubtless you will do me this kindness! Write often until you are quite well—even if only a few lines to say how you are.

Your aunt⁴ and Ida⁵ send you their affectionate regards and their heartfelt sympathy. That you should welcome the period of mourning⁶

¹ Otto von Bismarck-Schönhausen, Count in 1865, Prince in 1871. Prussian Minister to the Federal Diet in Frankfurt, August 1851–9; Minister in St Petersburg, April 1859–62, in Paris, May–September 1862; Prussian Minister-President, 1862–72, 1873–90; Prussian Foreign Minister, 1862–90; Chancellor of the North German Confederation, 1867–71, of the German Reich, 1871–90.

² This letter is badly damaged.

³ In March 1848, August von Holstein sold his estate at Trebenow and took his family to live at Karlstein near Zehden an der Oder, the home of his sister Minna von Holtzendorff. The Holstein family did not stay long at Karlstein, but lived for the most part in Berlin or abroad. It was only after the death of his wife on 24 July 1858, and particularly after his son had gone to St Petersburg, that August von Holstein spent the greater part of his time at Karlstein.

⁴ Minna von Holtzendorff.

⁵ Ida von Holtzendorff. Daughter of Minna von Holtzendorff and a cousin of Friedrich von Holstein. On 2 October 1866 she married Alfred von Stülpnagel-Dargitz.

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia, had died on 2 January 1861.

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because the respite from social activity causes less interference with your work is a point of view I cannot share. It is precisely the social life, getting to know people and their character, that in my opinion really makes diplomatic life in St Petersburg so instructive and interesting, and I believe that you ought to attach even greater importance to this than to purely academic studies; I mean true social life and interesting people, and not that of the casinos or at Kroll's. When you are *completely* recovered, you must display your diplomatic talents by seeking to overcome the difficulties in this sphere, too, and build up as large and interesting circle of acquaintances as possible. In many respects it will not be different from Berlin, but to attain your ends you will have to disregard this and always remember that this is seed-time and as you sow, so will you reap. I am very sorry that Herr Loen¹ will be away for about another three weeks and I only hope that he does not remain away for good. Since he is soon to be []² to the command of a regiment, []² this would not be impossible. In my opinion you had therefore better not count on his return. If I am not mistaken, I believe he told me that he frequented the salons of the Russian nobility as well as those of the diplomatic corps and the financiers. You should find out about this from Herr Schlözer³ and act accordingly. Above all go as often as possible to Mme T's soirées where you will certainly find these three kinds of people together and will most easily make acquaintances. Social life will probably be liveliest in financial circles this year and also among the highest rank of business people, who in Russia are regarded as members of the nobility. If I were you, as soon as you are quite well again, I would ask Herr Schlözer to introduce you to his friends, unless you think that this would make you suspect in other circles. If Herr Loen is not back, talk frankly with Herr Bismarck about this. Since he has shown himself to be a kindly and well-disposed Chief to you in other matters, you can certainly speak to him quite frankly about this. Under no circumstances [before] you are well again, then do not neglect [].² As you say [nothing] about this perhaps it is not the case, yet the self-indulgence frequently shown by your colleagues from other countries might perhaps lead you to think that it is necessary only to do the one thing and neglect the other. I do not believe this of the son of your dear mother, yet everyone must watch over himself.

Now, my dear old fellow, when you are completely restored to health and quite in your usual *train*, tell us about your life and how you spend your days, for even the least important things are, as you can well imagine, of the greatest interest to me, old rascal. Have you made your bow to all the Imperial Family? And have you been pre-

¹ Leopold, Baron von Loen. Prussian Military Attaché in St Petersburg, 1858–65.

² Gap in the text.

³ Kurd von Schlözer. Secretary of the Legation in St Petersburg, 1857–62; temporary Chargé d'Affaires in Copenhagen, 1863; Secretary of the Prussian Legation to the Holy See, 1864–9; Consul-General of the North German Federation in Mexico, 1869–71; German Minister in Washington, 1871–82, to the Holy See, 1882–92. (See his *Petersburger Briefe 1867–1862* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921).)

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sented to Duke Georg?¹ []² Your other news greatly interested us. As [some people] have wondered why you didn't join the army, I hope you answered—what is, after all, the truth—that while you were out chamois-hunting []² and this affected the eyes []² only after the usual smallpox []² and are now completely recovered. If you have [not already done this] then do not forget to do so when the occasion calls for it, so that it should not be thought that you were a shirker³ []⁴

2. August von Holstein to his Son

27 February–2 March 1861⁵

My dear boy,

God bless you! I send you this greeting from Berlin where we arrived to-day, Wednesday. [...]

Thursday night. [...] From there⁶ I went to Herr Loen to commend you to him once again; he leaves on 15 March at the earliest, and I should think it will probably be later. He told me—do not let anybody know about this—that H. v. S[chlözer] had spoken very favourably of you in a letter; you spoke and wrote English and French very well, though in the conduct of affairs you were naturally lacking in experience and would have to acquire this in the course of time.⁷ L. thinks that it would be useful for you to be on good terms with him. S[chlözer], like Hr B[ismarck], has little to do with Russian families; he, L., on the other hand, believes that one should associate with the people of the country in which one is living, and is therefore on friendly terms with many Russian families; he advises you to endeavour to establish similar friendships. But they are very suspicious of foreigners and one must be very cautious—you may therefore have been quite right in this—and especially cautious in one's manner of speaking and one's judgments. By a single ill-founded, ill-considered or erroneous utterance one could forfeit one's standing in society, and once lost it would be very difficult to regain. You must be specially careful about this and at the same time very polite to everybody [...]

Friday evening

I heard to-day—do not say anything about this since it is possibly not true—that H. v. Loen is to be replaced at St Petersburg by the commanding officer of the Eighth Hussar Regiment, Major von Rauch. For your sake I am very sorry. I am afraid that it will happen. However, by that time you will have learned the ropes anyway. Be sure

¹ Georg, Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Russian Lieutenant-General and Inspector General of the Army.

² Gap in the text.

³ Holstein was rejected for military service because of a 'weak chest and general bodily weakness'. (From the Foreign Ministry personnel files.)

⁴ The rest of the letter is damaged.

⁵ This long letter was written in the course of several days. Only a small part is printed here.

⁶ In the section of the letter omitted here, August von Holstein described his round of visits in Berlin.

⁷ See Schlözer, *Petersburger Briefe*, pp. 187–8.

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to follow his advice and that of Fallois carefully, and be on your guard against thoughtless remarks and witticisms. And another thing: your Chief cannot stand thoughtlessness, so think twice about what you say, even when you are with him *en famille* [...]

I have heard from Cohn¹ that you have withdrawn 500 roubles. Write down exactly what you spend, since otherwise I might suspect that other hands are dipping into your purse. Apart from this 500, an amount of over 3,400 Th[alers] has been paid either to you in cash or in settlement of your accounts since the day on which you left for Trieste.² I did not therefore expect that you would already be in need of money. Keep your accounts accurately and avoid senseless and extravagant tips. [...]

Since your bear-hunt gave you great pleasure, it was also a source of joy for us; it is obvious that every place has its own customs, for we should never sell even the pelt of a fox before we had caught it, whereas in St Petersburg one pays for the whole bear in advance.³ Now good-night and adieu, my dear boy. God guard and keep you.

Your very loving

Father

Berlin, 2 March 1861

(for it is already 12.30.)

Do you keep your money safely locked up? Otherwise I had better buy you a small cash-box with a reliable lock. [...]

3. August von Holstein to his Son

[23 March 1861]

My old darling boy,

Your dear letter of the 16th gave us all great pleasure; it was all the greater because yesterday morning Herr Meyer-Cohn played a clever trick by writing to ask whether he should forward a letter from you to me that he had received from the Foreign Ministry. I was so enraged by this joke that I was all the more delightfully surprised by your letter. I am so glad that you are well; and so—touch wood!—am I. I am very much pleased that you are gradually finding your way about in society, for I believe that nowhere else will you have a better opportunity of acquiring what you still lack in the way of social polish and elegance of manner. With your talents you will find this easy to achieve if you apply resolute determination and persistence. I believe it will be the same with your knowledge of your profession and its routine, although this will take longer. Do not lose heart, but strive on unceasingly with the resolution that is yours when you wish to use it to train yourself and to satisfy your Chief. A short time ago I heard it said that one of the best traits in his character was that he went to quite excep-

¹ *Geheimer Kommerzienrat* Meyer-Cohn. Banker to August von Holstein and subsequently to his son.

² Holstein made a trip to Italy in the autumn of 1860. (See *The Holstein Papers*, vol. I, *Memoirs*, p. 1.)

³ For Holstein's description of a bear-hunt, see *Memoirs*, pp. 10–11.

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tional lengths in championing and protecting, as well as commending, those among his subordinates who won his approval. If at times he can be violent and brutally outspoken, do not let yourself be drawn into opposition and ingratitude on that account, especially as he has your good at heart. How do you get on with his children? Do be careful with the governess; as a class such people are only too often as pretentious as they are touchy, and often they exercise great influence with the family, and therefore can easily do much harm. So be polite to her, yet at the same time avoid thereby any closer acquaintanceship. This—the closer acquaintanceship—as a rule leads very quickly to raillery and teasing, and they in turn give rise to wounded feelings and enmity. Your announcement that you will not dance more than is compatible with your health gave me much pleasure. Take good care of yourself in general, for the climate there makes this even more necessary than at home; and especially in spring when the mists rise from the marshes, you must be very careful not to catch cold. You must also do this for the sake of your appearance because a drawn face does not suit you and I am always hoping you will make a rich marriage—now don't go pulling such a long face that I can see it from here—resign from government service, live in the country, cut a figure in the Chamber in winter and keep a house. To put your mind at rest, I will add that although I mean a sensible marriage, I do not thereby mean a marriage contrary to inclination. I was also very glad to hear that you frequently visit the Consul-General¹ because you can certainly learn a lot from him, whether it be general information or practical advice for your future. But elderly gentlemen are often crotchety, so take care that you do not visit him more often than you think is agreeable to him. I am exceedingly pleased to hear that you are now being introduced more frequently into the society of the Russian aristocracy, because I am firmly of the opinion that this is far more useful for you and that you will enjoy yourself there far better than in purely diplomatic circles. Miss no opportunity of being very attentive to elderly ladies, because this will be of great assistance in opening doors and giving you a place in society; and also do not forget to pay the obligatory calls mentioned by Herr Loen. It was not in your own best interest to have written so cursorily to the Countess Veronika.² You want all the news from Berlin, yet she can hardly reply other than in the manner in which you wrote to her. Her reply can therefore only be very brief; if you want a lot of information, especially from women, then you must not write too briefly and casually to them since with the best will in the world they cannot reply otherwise. [...] You have not answered my question whether you read the *Kreuzzeitung* daily with all its news and announcements; I would advise you to do so, for in this way you will keep in touch with your own country. Today, Saturday the 23rd, that clever Cohn sent me your letter of 7/23 Febr. The incidental expenses appear to me to be enorm-

¹ Konstantin von Fehleisen. Consul-General of Baden in St Petersburg.

² Veronika von Hacke, *née* von Flemming. A daughter of the Hereditary Marshal of Pomerania, and an old friend of the Holstein family. On 20 July 1860 she married Count Edwin Hacke.

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ously heavy; still I know you well enough to be certain that you avoid what is unnecessary; you will have to do whatever is unavoidable. Can you not buy a carriage from somebody who is going away? As you are now already better known I would think that this should not be difficult. But be most careful in dealing with Herr T; such people are no better than Jews. What did not please me in your letter was to see that you have up to now really avoided all social gatherings. I am wholly of Herr Bismarck's opinion in this matter. You are thereby losing one of the great advantages of your stay there; you will in consequence learn less of the world and people and how to get on with them, and you will be sorry later that you did not make better use of your opportunity. Your official work and your health are the first consideration, but when these do not suffer I think it only right and wise that you should take part as much as possible in social life, and by that I mean true social life, and not that of young men about town, but you know my views on this matter as well as I know yours. I was truly astonished that Herr Bismarck should have been so kind and thoughtful about rooms for you, and consequently I am more than ever convinced that you should pay as little heed to Hr S[chlöder] in this regard as in that of the prescribed calls. [...]

God keep you, my darling boy, and defend you. This is the heartfelt wish of your Father. [...]

Do you accompany Hr. and Fr. v. Bismarck¹ to communion? I think this would greatly please our beloved Mama.

4. August von Holstein to his Son

26 March 1861

My dear boy,

[...] Finally some remarks on your last two letters. On quiet reflection you will certainly agree with me that you are partly missing or not attaining the object of your present appointment by the solitary existence you have led for the past three months: for you particularly wanted to go to St P[etersburg] because there you would most quickly learn the ins and outs of diplomacy. This includes not only a knowledge of diplomatic practice, but in particular a knowledge of men and of the way to handle them and to get one's own way with them. But how can you learn this if you shut yourself up and make calls only now after nearly three months? I certainly advise you always to give priority to your official work, but then you should go into society as much as you can *without* injury to your health. In this connection also I share Herr Loen's opinion that the association with Russian families in particular will be as pleasant as it will be useful for you. Nor can I agree with you that you could not again visit F[ehleisen] for the reasons you give. Here I wholly share Mama's view; that you must look on this as time spent in study, not in amusement. You can easily move in such society without accepting what is distasteful to you or contrary to your prin-

¹ Johanna von Bismarck, *née* von Puttkamer. The wife of Otto von Bismarck.

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principles. In Herr Loen's company—please remember me to him—I hope you will by now have left a fair number of visiting-cards and that you are coming properly into circulation. Write to us very fully about all this because it is of such interest to us. As to your expenditure, you know that I [have] complete confidence in you in this respect also, and that distrust of you always was, and will be, foreign to me, but I do believe that with the best intentions you must often spend more than is necessary or than you get value for, partly through inexperience, ignorance of affairs or trickery. Try therefore to guard yourself as much as possible against these three, and especially against your servant. For since you cannot cover small incidental expenses with 50 roubles monthly—although Herr Loen put a high figure on everything—I think that your Leporello must look upon himself as part of you and feeds at your expense, etc, as, for example, in regard to the price of laundry and the number of articles for the laundry, etc. The local townspeople must certainly get these things more cheaply than you in the diplomatic corps. If I were you I would try to avoid such unnecessary expenses. On the other hand you know that I am never opposed to useful expenditures or to those that give real pleasure. For example—your hunt was enormously expensive yet despite this I am very glad that you had it. [...]

Don't upset your digestion with Easter eggs and similar heavy foods, though this will be hard to avoid!

Now an affectionate farewell, my dear boy, enjoy the holidays and write again soon. In his thoughts you are embraced by your very loving Father.

The flights of the wild ducks, etc., make a magnificent spectacle every evening now. If only you were here to set them in motion.

5. August von Holstein to his Son

Karlstein, 4 April 1861

My own darling boy,

[...] I cannot remember ever having known so early and warm a spring at home. The violets have been in bloom for the past eight days, most of the trees are putting out their leaves, peas and summer rye are already one inch high, while yesterday the sheep were already sent out to pasture, although burning is still going on and there is plenty of fodder. The day before yesterday we even had a thunderstorm. In St Petersburg it will certainly not be so warm. Watch out in the spring mornings and evenings that you do not catch cold. It is so easy to catch cold then. For this reason we have spent a very quiet Easter here; the main event and the cause of most joy was the arrival of your dear letters on the morning of the 1st. Early that morning I felt I ought to send a messenger for the post, and we were still drinking our coffee when we were most pleasantly surprised and overjoyed at the arrival of your letters of the 23rd and 26th. What concerned me most on your account was the news that your Chief is going on leave for several

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months, probably until late in the autumn, and will therefore be away at least four to five months. I am very sorry about this, first of all for social reasons and then because of your career. As regards the former, you will lose a great deal and the same holds true of your work. By reason of his keen intelligence and penetrating insight, his society and judgment are highly instructive for you. In him and his wife you will also lose most benevolent patrons. For the short time that he is away, try to do your work with all the more regularity and devotion in order to gain his approval. Will you try to speak to him about your examination before his departure?¹ This would be most useful to you in any event, so that you get the necessary testimonials from him and not later on from some secretary acting on his behalf. The judgment of the latter would not be rated so highly by the Ministry as that of the Chief; that is to say, praise from such a person would be of little value, whereas his censure would carry full weight. Hence you must now be doubly careful of what you do. Take an early opportunity therefore of speaking with Herr von Bismarck. Who will take his place? How do you like the non-diplomatic work in your office? By that I mean the type of work that is performed by a district magistrate and belongs properly to his sphere of activity? I think that in years to come, when you get married and life abroad as a Secretary of Legation no longer appeals to you, you should try to become a district magistrate. In that case, this work in St Petersburg will be most useful to you. For that reason, try to acquire practical knowledge and ability in this field, too. Here also Herr von B[ismarck]'s judgment is certainly of great importance for you. It seems doubtful to me in these circumstances whether your personal studies in St Petersburg are as useful to you as they were in Berlin. After your official work is done, you should study men and life itself; here you must follow your judgment and reason more than your inclinations. You will always have time for academic studies, but not for mingling with the St Petersburg *haute volée* and *beau monde*. I am very glad that you are still enjoying the life and society there. Do not cease to take an interest in everything, and do not let yourself be led astray by your colleagues and the blasé manner of most diplomats, whose tastes are jaded, and who find everything uninteresting and boring, and find fault with everything. You have always followed another path, and I can only advise you to continue on it and not to allow your judgment to be affected by such conduct. Follow your own judgment only and of course the advice of older men who wish you well, like Herr Bismarck and Herr Loen. If you want to get something which will be of use to you for the future out of St Petersburg, something which your stay there, if properly used, certainly will and must give you, then you must do everything you can to get to know people and therefore live more sociably than heretofore. I do believe that if you want to engage in studies other than those connected with your work and your examination, the study of the Russian language would be of the greatest advantage to you. It will be very easy for you, and even if you get no im-

¹ The final examination for entry into the diplomatic service.

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mediate advantage from it and your colleagues do not regard it as essential, nevertheless one can never know whether it may not be useful in the future. The well-known Job Witzleben¹ chiefly owed his good fortune to it. It could easily happen in our unstable tragic times that we might fight as Russia's ally, and then diplomats would often be sent to join the staff at Headquarters. In such an event it would be an incalculable advantage for you if you spoke Russian, even without necessarily being a soldier. I am convinced that with your rapid grasp of things you would learn it very easily, and without a teacher, if you got hold of a Russian Ahn² and invariably talked Russian with your *Pani Kresling*.³ Think this over; perhaps knowledge of the language might help you socially? Has Herr Loen been kind enough to send your cards around with his? Always show yourself upright and frank with him, and act as I have advised you towards him and Herr B[ismarck]. That reminds me of a question I meant to ask: Are you always diplomatically reserved in your judgments and properly discreet? A diplomat makes fewer enemies this way and also makes people think that there is more behind his reserve than is usually the case. So avoid emphatic opinions and instead always confine yourself as far as possible to generalities. What sort of colleagues have you got in the diplomatic corps? After the holidays social life in St Petersburg must certainly be lively? I hope that you are going out as much as you can without injury to your health, which you must always look after very carefully. And do not neglect dancing, since, as you know, great importance is attached to this in Berlin. Do not dance more than your health will stand, but not less, and do not avoid dancing with women who are bad dancers; for that is the best way of practicing and gives great assurance in guiding one's partner. But do not dance more than your health will stand. Have you tried the mazurka? You ought to. Is conversation with ladies in St Petersburg just the same as in Berlin? That is to say, are they only interested in such subjects as people in society, the theatre, concerts, balls and entertainments? If so, then be a proper gossip with the best of them in the spirit of the old saying: When one is among wolves one must howl with them. You will find then that conversation presents no difficulty. [...]

What is the weather like there? For the past ten or twelve days I have not had a fire. Look after your fur coat carefully so that the moths do not get at it. It would be best if you gave it to the furrier to take care of. What have you done with the second kamchatka beaver collar? Have you tried to buy a droshky from a departing diplomat? I would strongly advise you to do so. And also for obvious reasons that you do not get unnecessary summer clothes made. Since *all* your things are unworn, and therefore new to St Petersburg, you do not need anything and can certainly use the money you would thus spend in a more

¹ Prussian Minister of State and of War, 1834–7.

² Franz Ahn. Publisher of foreign language textbooks.

³ The editors have transliterated August von Holstein's mixture of Roman and Greek characters.