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Edited by Norman Rich and M. H. Fisher

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THE HOLSTEIN PAPERS

THE MEMOIRS, DIARIES AND
CORRESPONDENCE OF
FRIEDRICH VON HOLSTEIN
1837–1909

III
CORRESPONDENCE
1861–1896

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HOLSTEIN IN 1879
BY ANTON VON WERNER

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VOLUME III



CORRESPONDENCE

1861–1896



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PLATES

Holstein in 1879, by Anton von Werner

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Bismarck in 1888

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BISMARCK IN 1888

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INTRODUCTION

LETTERS form the largest part of the Holstein document collection. As filed by the archivists of the German Foreign Ministry, they make up seventy of the ninety-one volumes of the Holstein Papers. Only three of the letters preserved by Holstein himself antedate 1880. Holstein had kept no diaries before this time for reasons of diplomatic discretion, and this may also be the explanation for his failure to preserve his personal letters. Why he suddenly began keeping his letters after 1880 is impossible to determine, but in 1881 he began to keep a diary as well, and in 1883 he even began to write his memoirs. Both diaries and memoirs were soon abandoned, but Holstein kept up the practice of preserving his letters until the end of his life. When he died in 1909, these personal papers were the only possessions of any value that he was able to leave to his friend Frau von Lebbin in his will.

In keeping his personal letters after 1880, Holstein did not entirely abandon his long-established habits of discretion. Suspicious about the security of his office and his own flat, he began sending his diary entries and a large number of his letters to his cousin Ida von Stülpnagel for safekeeping. In later years he sent many of his personal papers to Frau von Lebbin for the same purpose.

Of all the letters preserved in the Holstein Papers, only a few could be called personal in the strictest sense of the term. The great majority formed part of that vast private-political correspondence that Holstein conducted throughout his career with the knowledge and approval of the four Chancellors under whom he served. Letter-writing of this kind was by no means unusual among members of the German foreign service. Almost every German diplomat of this period corresponded widely and at length about political matters with other members of the service. Holstein was outstanding only in the extent of his correspondence. Even his famous right to send private letters and telegrams on official matters through official channels was a privilege he shared with many other members of the Foreign Ministry.

The letters Holstein kept after 1880 reveal an impressive range of friends and acquaintances. His most important correspondence at this time was with Herbert and Wilhelm von Bismarck, the sons of the Chancellor, and with Paul von Hatzfeldt, the Ambassador to Constantinople, who was soon to become head of the German Foreign Ministry and was then for many years Ambassador in London. Holstein was also maintaining an active correspondence with his old chief in Paris, Prince Hohenlohe, later Governor of Alsace-Lorraine and

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German Chancellor; with Hohenlohe's First Secretary, Max von Thielmann; and with his Second Secretary, Bernhard von Bülow, who was also to become German Chancellor. In St Petersburg he was corresponding with the First Secretary, Wilhelm von Redern, and with the Second Secretary, Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter. Then there was Otto von Bülow, the Foreign Ministry representative on the staff of the Kaiser, Wilhelm von Thielau in Budapest, Ludwig von Plessen in Madrid, Derenthall in Rome, Brincken in Weimar, Hirschfeld in Constantinople, Stumm in London, and many others. It was a list that was to be subject to many changes in years to come but the list itself was always a long one.

Correspondence with Holstein was a privilege much cherished by members of the diplomatic corps. Holstein kept his friends supplied with political information which supplemented and filled in the official despatches sent to the diplomatic missions. He indicated the type of information required from a particular mission to fill in the gaps in Berlin's knowledge, and took the trouble to criticise the political reports not only of neophytes but of experienced officials. When one of his friends had a disagreement with his superior officers or had fallen into disfavour in Berlin because of some misunderstanding, Holstein went to great lengths to clear up the matter. It was to Holstein that his correspondents first turned with requests for promotion or transfer. They could then be sure of an expert appraisal of their chances before risking an official application. Holstein did a good deal himself to sponsor the promotion of his friends or their transfer to better posts. Nor were his activities on behalf of his friends all official. He arranged business matters in Berlin for those stationed abroad, or met wives and children who might be passing through the capital. He would send birthday congratulations to a young attaché who had just been sent to a foreign post, or telegraph parents about the promotion of a son before it had been officially announced. Such acts of kindness transcended utilitarian relationships and were the more appreciated because kindness was not a prominent characteristic of the German civil service. Yet the primary objectives of Holstein's letter-writing were information and influence. When a friend retired from the service, Holstein might do his best to secure him the maximum pension, but active correspondence soon ceased.

Holstein's circle of acquaintances was not confined to the diplomatic world. He corresponded with members of other departments of the government, prominent journalists, members of the Reichstag, with officials at Court and with army leaders. It was no coincidence that these correspondents were men in key positions in their various spheres. During the Bismarck era they included at one time or another Gerson Bleichröder, Bismarck's banker and financial adviser; Pindter, the editor of the official *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*; Rottenburg, one of Bismarck's most trusted officials in the Reich Chancellery; Götz von Seckendorff at the Court of the Crown Prince, and Adolf von Bülow, the Adjutant of Prince Wilhelm, the later Kaiser Wilhelm II.

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With the fall of Bismarck in 1890, Holstein's correspondence with Bismarck's sons ceased, but in the meantime he had established a close relationship with Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, the intimate friend and adviser of Kaiser Wilhelm II. In 1894 his old friend Prince Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe became Chancellor, and in 1900 the Chancellorship fell to his friend Bernhard von Bülow. He therefore remained in close touch with the direction of affairs. His influence also increased immeasurably. Whereas under Bismarck his role had been restricted—at least officially—to carrying out the Chancellor's policy, under Bismarck's successors Holstein himself became a formulator of policy. These successors were heavily dependent on his knowledge and experience, but above all they depended on him for ideas. The extent of this dependence was strikingly demonstrated by Bülow, who secretly engineered Holstein's dismissal in 1906 when he thought the old Counsellor had become a political liability. Only a few weeks after Holstein's dismissal, however, Bülow once again turned to him for advice, and from that time until Holstein's death in 1909 Bülow consulted him constantly.

Despite the great quantity of letters preserved by Holstein, there are numerous and serious gaps in his correspondence. Apart from the almost total absence of letters before 1880, there are sudden breaks in his correspondence with friends from whom he was receiving letters regularly, there is a very thin coverage of letters for entire years, and there are no letters at all from certain important figures with whom Holstein was known to have been in close contact. A number of these gaps can be explained. A break in a regular correspondence often occurred when Holstein's friend was in Berlin and letter-writing became unnecessary. There are many indications that Holstein destroyed numerous letters at the request of their writers—although he also preserved a good many he had been asked to destroy. Many of Holstein's personal letters on official matters were sent through official channels and were subsequently filed in the Foreign Ministry archive. A number of letters sent for safe-keeping to his cousin Ida von Stülpnagel were kept by her at the time of his death and were not handed over to Frau von Lebbin as Holstein's will had stipulated. In addition, whole sections of the Holstein archive were removed after Holstein's death. The historian Friedrich Thimme received permission from the owner of the Holstein Papers to take the Hatzfeldt letters for the years 1897–9 when working on a biography of Hatzfeldt. When the Holstein archive was confiscated by the Gestapo in 1935, Thimme did not hand these letters over to the German government. It is not known what became of them. Professor Thimme also seems to have removed the Radolin–Holstein letters from the period of the First Morocco Crisis, and these letters too have apparently been lost.

But apart from the gaps in the Holstein Correspondence that can be accounted for, there are a disconcerting number of gaps that have no satisfactory explanation. At the time of Bismarck's dismissal, for

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instance, Holstein was in close touch with General von Waldersee, who played a significant part in the events leading to the 1890 crisis. A publication of Waldersee's correspondence includes some highly suggestive letters from Holstein bearing on this problem, but the Holstein Papers contain only a handful of letters from Waldersee, and no important ones. The Holstein Papers contain no letters whatever from General von Schlieffen, who became Chief of the General Staff in 1891, although Holstein for years supplied Schlieffen with information on German foreign policy and the two men were in close touch with one another during the crucial months of the First Morocco Crisis.

It can now be established with certainty that Holstein himself destroyed a large number of his letters dealing with particular problems. Thanks to the efforts of Professor Frauendienst and the Muster-schmidt-Verlag, the publishers of the German edition, the letters from Holstein to Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld were made available to the editors through the kindness of the present Prince Eulenburg. In addition to preserving the letters Holstein had written to him, Prince Eulenburg also made copies of his letters to Holstein, and from these it can be seen that Holstein destroyed Eulenburg's letters dealing with the Bismarck crisis of 1890 and the Caprivi crisis of 1894, to name only two examples. On 11 December 1894 Holstein wrote to Eulenburg: 'Your letters have *all* been destroyed. In cleaning out my desk recently during the crisis, I did not let a single one escape.'

All this might lead to the assumption that Holstein not only destroyed many letters soon after he received them, but that he edited his entire document collection before his death, carefully eliminating all material that might injure his historical reputation. Such an assumption is not altogether valid, however. The Eulenburg Papers reveal that many of the letters Holstein destroyed were thoroughly innocuous, they do not establish him as playing a crucial part in the dismissal of Bismarck or Caprivi, and indeed numerous documents destroyed by Holstein show him in a highly favourable light. Furthermore it is extraordinary to find how many letters and private papers Holstein retained in his archive that might be considered compromising. In pursuing his secret and enormously dangerous personal policy during the last years of Bismarck's Chancellorship, he not only kept letters revealing this policy but recorded his activities in his diaries. Similarly, he kept the letters he received from the journalist Maximilian Harden, including copies of letters he wrote to Bülow on Harden's behalf. These letters reveal the extremely close relationship existing between Holstein and Harden and would have been all the proof many of Holstein's enemies needed to show that he was the guiding spirit behind Harden's journalistic campaign against Eulenburg and his friends, as these enemies contended. The existence of so much unfavourable material in the Holstein Papers makes it difficult to establish a rationale or system behind Holstein's destruction of documents. It is quite possible that there was none.

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In an effort to fill in some of the gaps in the Holstein Papers, we have included in the present publication all Holstein documents of historical interest which we have found in the files of the German Foreign Ministry and in other collections deposited in the Foreign Ministry archive. Thus we have tried to fill in the gap caused by the removal of the Hatzfeldt letters with documents from the files of the German Embassy in London, and the gap in the Radolin letters from the Radolin Papers in the Foreign Ministry files. When the originals of documents were found of which there were only copies in the Holstein Papers, the text of the original has been printed, and any important textual differences have been indicated in footnotes. Whenever documents from other collections have been used, their origin has been noted.

In making use of the Foreign Ministry files, we were inevitably guided by a passage in the introduction to the catalogue of the Holstein Papers prepared by the official archivists of the German Foreign Ministry in 1941. '(1) Because of their close interconnection with the secret political documents of the Foreign Ministry, the Holstein Papers cannot in future be submitted in their entirety to the examination of private researchers any more than the secret files themselves. (2) Certain sections of the Papers can be submitted to private researchers, if at all, only if they form a unity in themselves and if their substantive and formal connection with other parts of the Papers as well as with other previously published literature can be established from the beginning.' Following up these statements, we have used the Holstein Papers to trace material in the official files that might not have been made available to researchers in the past. The results in most cases were far from sensational. Official archivists, by refusing to release documents to researchers, often confer on such documents far greater importance than they actually possess. Nevertheless, the effort to relate all documents on foreign policy in the Holstein Papers to the official files of the German Foreign Ministry has filled in many gaps on subjects covered lightly or not at all in official German document publications.

The Foreign Ministry itself added a number of documents to the Holstein collection which are especially interesting because they come from the pre-1880 period. These were letters written to Holstein while he was serving as Attaché in St Petersburg in 1861 and which were found in the archive of the St Petersburg Embassy after Holstein's death. In March 1910 the German Foreign Ministry gave these letters—most of them from Holstein's father—to Frau von Lebbin, the heiress of the Holstein Papers, and they were subsequently incorporated in the Holstein archive.

In addition to documents from the Foreign Ministry archive we have included a small number of Holstein letters we received in type-script from Baroness Vera von der Heydt, the present heiress of the Holstein Papers. These letters seem to have come from the archive of her father, the banker Paul von Schwabach, who received the Holstein Papers as a gift from Frau von Lebbin in 1913 and who had an

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extensive document collection in his own right. The most significant of Baroness von der Heydt's documents were typewritten copies of Holstein's letters to the British journalist Valentine Chirol. We have not been able to discover how these copies got into the Schwabach archive.

Also included among Baroness von der Heydt's typescript were a number of Holstein letters marked as coming from the Bernhard von Bülow Papers. It was only after these letters had been incorporated in the present edition that we learned they had originally been given to Dr Helmuth Rogge while he and Baroness von der Heydt were working together on an edition of the Holstein Papers before they were confiscated by the Gestapo. As Dr Rogge has indicated that he does not intend to publish all of these documents from the Bülow Papers himself, we are keeping some of the copies we received through Baroness von der Heydt in this edition.

Dr Rogge has also most graciously allowed us to see microfilm copies of Holstein's letters to Maximilian Harden which he has edited.¹ The opportunity to see both sides of this complicated correspondence has greatly aided us in our own task of editing the Harden-Holstein letters. Dr Rogge has been good enough to go over our edition for the years 1906-9, making numerous suggestions and correcting numerous errors. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to Dr Rogge for this kindness.

The editors have made every effort to include in the present volumes all letters of historical significance found in the Holstein Papers. We have printed the majority of the copies or drafts of letters written by Holstein himself not only for the sake of the Holstein record, but because it is evident that he considered letters of which he made a handwritten copy important.

By far the largest number of documents in the Holstein collection are letters written to Holstein. Most of these letters have not been included in this edition. For the most part the omitted letters were from friends in diplomatic posts outside the mainstream of policy, including the smaller German states, letters from people of little historical interest, or letters which add nothing further to our knowledge of the period. From the letters selected for publication, details of private life (when these did not affect policy) have usually been omitted, as well as material fully covered by other document publications such as *Die Grosse Politik*. All omissions have been marked thus: [...].

In editing the present volumes, we have refrained from any attempt to correct interpretations of Holstein's policy or character current in other historical literature. Wherever necessary we have elucidated the text by reference to the files of the German Foreign Ministry, to printed documents or memoir literature, or to works based on unpublished documents. We have tried to correct errors of fact, but apart

¹ *Holstein und Harden* (München 1959).

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from that Holstein and his correspondents have been allowed to speak for themselves.

The correspondence has been arranged chronologically, and the date has been uniformly written at the head of each document for the sake of clarity. Spelling and punctuation have been standardised.

As in the previous volumes, the translation is intended to follow the original as closely as possible, but the many styles of the letters and the hasty nature of much of the writing posed numerous problems. We have tried to reproduce in some measure the flavour of the various writers, and have therefore followed faithfully the stilted phrases of Holstein's father, the involved subtleties of Hatzfeldt's diplomatic arguments, or the raw humour of Kiderlen-Wächter. In general, however, we have attempted to make the translation readable and intelligible, even when the German original left much to be desired on both counts. At the same time we have tried to avoid giving our own interpretation to points left vague or ambiguous by the writers.

We wish to express our thanks to Michigan State University for a series of All-University research grants which have materially aided in the preparation of these volumes; to Mrs Joan Spencer and Mr Ian F. D. Morrow for their work on the translation; and to Mrs Joan Rich for her help in making the index.

Once again we would like to thank Professor Werner Frauendienst for his co-operation in producing the German edition and for numerous suggestions for improvements that have been incorporated in both the English and German editions.

As was the case with the previous two volumes, we bear final responsibility for the selection of the material to be published, the textual accuracy of the documents, the translation, and the editorial work for both the German and English editions.

Microfilms of all the manuscripts in the Holstein collection, together with a corrected typewritten transcript of these documents, will be made available to scholars in the Public Record Office in London and the National Archives in Washington at the time of the publication of these volumes.

NORMAN RICH
M. H. FISHER

1960