

Coossal Blunders of some Big Men

Russia's Czar Holds the Record With George III a Good Second



COUNT BISMARCK WHOSE GREATEST BLUNDER WAS TRYING TO "BLUFF" EMPEROR WILLIAM



MAXIMILIAN, BLUNDERINGLY SENT TO MEXICO TO BE EMPEROR BY NAPOLEON III.

Burchard's Famous "Three R's" That Beat Blaine for President



REV. DR. BURCHARD WHO MADE THE FAMOUS "RUM, ROMANISM AND REBELLION" BLUNDER.

BY DEXTER MARSHALL.
BLUNDERS are sometimes the instruments used by destiny to overrule man's cleverness and shape history. The present Russian Czar has made more blunders than any other living monarch, but the greatest blunder perpetrated by a ruler within the past 200 years was made before 1776, by King George III, his Prime Minister, Lord North, and the other advisers who counseled the course which he pursued toward the American colonists.

shrugged their shoulders and writhed in deprecatory fashion all over the room. Only two of all these present seemed unaware that the great mistake of the campaign had been made. They were the clergyman speaker and the candidate. Burchard dived along through his fatuous little speech, while Blaine seemed immersed in thought. His mind, apparently, was wandering far away from the

The story of King George's blunder and the resulting independent Nation on this side of the water has filled many of the most important pages of history since he made it, and is bound to fill many more before the book is finally closed. Some of these pages tell of gross blunders made by Americans, not the least of which, in its effect upon political history, was brought to mind the other day by this notice:

Died—At Santa Ana, Cal., Frank W. Mack, after a lingering illness.

Not that Mack was responsible for the big blunder which his death recalls. Far from it. But he—a newspaper reporter—was the instrument chosen by destiny to make the blunder public.

The man really responsible for the blunder was a New York political manager, who arranged a certain meeting at the Fifth Avenue Hotel along in the latter part of the Presidential campaign of 1854, when Blaine was the candidate of the Republicans and Cleveland of the Democrats. It was this man's idea that the Blaine cause would be tremendously furthered if a reception could be arranged at which Blaine and a number of clergymen should meet. I have heard that Blaine was doubtful about the wisdom of the meeting, and it is certain that some of his advisers were outspoken in their efforts to prevent it, showing mighty little respect for the notion of "bringing preachers into the political game."

But the reception was held nevertheless. One of the ministers was the Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Burchard, at that time president of Rutgers Female College, an educational institution that has long since passed out of the public eye. On Sunday he filled the pulpit of a struggling Presbyterian church.

Burchard was selected to deliver the address of welcome. Almost from the beginning he showed how wise had been those who objected to "bringing preachers into the political game" by making the famous declaration that the antecedents of the political party to which he was opposed were "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion."

Chiefly because the reception had been got up for clergymen perhaps it was very largely attended, but only one reporter—Mack—was present. He represented the Press Association. His man was sure to be there; the news market was a lively one that day, and there being little probability that the "preachers' reception" could yield anything worthy of special attention the New York papers did not "cover" it specially.

I had it from Mack himself not long before his death that he had no notion of being called upon to make much of a report and that he was rather disgusted that so unimportant an assignment had fallen to his lot. He was then in his early twenties and had not made his mark. In spite of his ambition to do this as soon as ever he could, he went to the hotel in a listless frame of mind, quite different from his usual mental attitude toward his work.

Most of those expected were late in arriving and this bored the distinguished candidate as much as it did the reporter. At last, however, opening was in the room to warrant the opening of the function, and the clergyman—destiny's choice as the man to speak the blundering words that should overthrow one great political party and put another in power—stepped forward and began to talk.

room in which he was being addressed. More than one who saw him doubted that he heard Burchard's burning words at all.

Whether he could have said anything in response to check the tide which began to set so strongly against him when the new "three R's" were sent on lightning wings over the wires to the four corners of the land is questionable, even had he heard them. At all events, he took no notice of them either then or when he saw them in print. But Burchard had cast the die for Blaine and lost.

Mack's amazement was so great that he nearly forgot to transcribe the phrase and the earlier part of the sentence to which it belonged, but he finally pulled himself together and wrote it all down. Then he began to fidget, since it was getting late, and unless he got his dispatch on the wire soon it could not reach the afternoon papers in time for "the edition." But he had not long to wait. Burchard quickly drew his remarks to a close and Blaine's response was short. He told a friend the same day that he did not hear the phrase. He said that if he had he could have answered it satisfactorily.

Without waiting to see what any one else had to say, Mack hastened away, knowing that the insignificant assignment which had been entrusted to his care had yielded something that would be read from one end of the country to the other. He played the part which Destiny had handed out to him as well as he knew how; in half an hour from the time the blunder was made he was spreading the news of it as widely as spreading

Some readers will remember what a rumpus it all kicked up. Before midnight hundreds of excited managing editors and city editors had sent out thousands of hurring reporters, some instructed to get interviews from men who would stand by Blaine in spite of Burchard's break, others to gather up all the condemnation thereof that they could find.

It caused a vast deal more excitement than any incident in any later Presidential campaign in my memory and gave to the Rev. Mr. Burchard a notoriety which caused him the most acute anguish, undermining his health so seriously that his son was forced to ask the newspapers to cease commenting upon it unmanly literally to death.

Burchard's was not the only big blunder of that campaign. The other one came after the election, when the claim upon the wire soon it could not reach the afternoon papers in time for "the edition." But he had not long to wait. Burchard quickly drew his remarks to a close and Blaine's response was short. He told a friend the same day that he did not hear the phrase. He said that if he had he could have answered it satisfactorily.

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It is a curious thing in the history of political blunders in this country that another of the most far-reaching of such mistakes was made by Roscoe Conkling, for years the strongest enemy within his



THE RUSSIAN CZAR, GREATEST BLUNDERER AMONG LIVING MONARCHS.



THE LATE COUNT HOHENLOHE, THE RECENT BLUNDERING PUBLICATION OF WHOSE MEMOIRS DISPLEASED THE GERMAN EMPEROR



NAPOLEON III, WHOSE BLUNDER IN ATTACKING PRUSSIA PUT HIM OFF THE IMPERIAL THRONE OF FRANCE

party's lines that Blaine ever had to fight.

The two blunders were not similar, however. Blaine suffered for the Burchard blunder, but he did not make it. Conkling suffered more severely than Blaine did, since Conkling was driven out of public life by his, while Blaine was not by Burchard's. But Conkling made his own blunder.

There are many among the younger readers of this article who have the haziest notions only as to the nature of the "Me Too" blunder which changed the course of political events quite as much as the Burchard "three R's" did, and only the other day, in a group of half a dozen fifty-year-olds, there was but one who could give a connected account of the episode.

It was the political sensation of 1851. Roscoe Conkling and Thomas Collier Platt, then respectively senior and junior Senator from New York, were not on very good terms with President Garfield, who, elected the previous year, had made Blaine Secretary of State, and had not consulted the New York Senators regarding the cabinet make-up. Soon after his inauguration, also, to make matters more acute, Garfield appointed Judge William B. Robertson Collector of Customs for the Port of New York.

As Judge Robertson was a prominent member of the so-called "half-breed" wing of the party, while Conkling was at the head of the "stalwart" wing, Conkling furiously objected. He declared that the President had violated the immemorial but traditional rule of courtesy to the Senators, which prescribed that they should be consulted and deferred to whenever an important appointment like that of Collector was to be made.

But while Conkling blazed with wrath and was long believed to be the originator of the course which he and Platt pursued, it has since been as-

serted that such was not the case. Anyway, they actually did have recourse to a modified form of English political practice. They resigned and appealed to their constituents—the New York Legislature, to be more exact—for vindication. Apparently there wasn't the slightest doubt of their triumphant re-election. This would show the President something he ought to know about.

Their resignation took place one day in May. It was then given out and denied by nobody that Conkling's brilliant mind conceived and laid out the whole scheme; that his imperious will put it through. Conkling resigned first. Platt resigned directly afterward and the wording of his resignation indicated clearly that he was following the lead of his illustrious colleague.

It was a sort of "Me Too" intonation that fastened upon him the nickname of "Me Too" Platt for many years.

Ten or 11 years later it came out that Conkling never thought of resigning until Platt broached the proposal and that, when he did resign, Conkling purposely not seeking re-election but retiring permanently from public life, practicing law and winning a competence. In 1852 A. R. Conkling, Roscoe's nephew, stated categorically that this was the case and that it was not until the following Sunday evening, May 22, that he changed his mind.

On that evening a meeting of his political friends was held at the New York home of Vice-President Chester A. Arthur, which Conkling attended,

as a little more than three years later, they were to spread the news of Burchard's break. The Legislature had adjourned on the previous Friday and its members had gone home over Sunday.

Before returning on Monday they had talked the whole matter over with the voters. It is probable that, had the election taken place before the legislators had got in touch with their own people, Conkling and Platt would have been re-elected, since the Legislature was naturally strongly "stalwart."

But as the "half-breed" leaders had shrewdly suspected, the voters who had been urged in the campaign by Conkling to support Garfield, and had done so loyally, sympathized more with the President than with the Senators in their quarrel and were angry about the resignation. This was made so clear that no election was possible for a long time, and before it took place President Garfield was shot by Guitierrez. After that the ultimate defeat of Conkling and Platt was foreseen by everybody.

The contest was bitter, however, and lasted for weeks. It widened the already deep rift between the two wings of the Republican party in New York and brought about the state of party weakness which, in 1854, when Blaine was running for President, made it possible for the blundering words of Burchard to bring about defeat.

At first he was unalterably opposed to the plan for seeking re-election which the meeting enthusiastically endorsed, but he finally yielded, and, on Monday, went with Platt to Albany, where the Legislature was in session, to superintend in person the campaign for re-habilitation.

But the wires had been set to work carrying the news of the resignation, really responsible for the mental condition of Garfield's assassin, as so many believe, has often been discussed by those who delight to speculate on such matters. If so, then the great Senatorial resignation blunder was far more influential on political history than Burchard's.

Neither Blaine nor Conkling honestly the blunders that wrecked their fondest hopes. Blaine remained in public life, but Conkling never sought re-entrance, settling in New York and digging away at the practice of law as fervently and doggedly as he did when just beginning, many years earlier, at Utica. To the last he was as self-sufficient and as proud as he was during his public career.

As a talker Conkling was overwhelming. A few months before his death a certain man called upon him to get a bit of information. The ex-Senator got upon the subject of the resignation and discussed it for five hours, his caller never getting the slightest chance to explain why he had called. Finally, when he said good-by, Mr. Conkling grasped his hand heartily.

"Come in and see me again," he exclaimed. "Come any time. I do not like to hear you talk!"

Bismarck's Most Serious Blunder.
The blunder recently made by the present Prince Hohenlohe, of Germany, in publishing his father's memoirs without first consulting the Emperor has subjected the Prince to some personally uncomfortable moments, since the Emperor was very angry about the publication. But this blunder will have no serious consequences to anyone but the Prince. It will be remembered that the elder Hohenlohe succeeded Bismarck as Premier.

Bismarck's most serious blunder, which was told in detail in the book, drove him into retirement and probably had large influence upon the immediately following course of events. Bismarck's blunder was in siding with his man. He thought the present Emperor William, whose grandfather he had virtually made the first ruler of the modern German Empire, could be controlled. Believing this, Bismarck, who in turn had been made Prince by the man he made Emperor, set up his own will against his imperial master. The result might have been foreseen had anyone suspected the strength of the young Emperor's will and character.

Nobody did, however; least of all, Bismarck himself. To him, more even, perhaps than to the rest of the world, it was inconceivable that William would risk going it alone without the benefit of the ripe judgment, the wide experience, the profound political knowledge and the rocklike steadfastness of him, who, more than any other man, was responsible for the change of the Hohenzollerns from a royal to an imperial family. His surprise when he found that William was determined to be a real Emperor, that he was not content, as his grandfather had been, to be somewhat of a puppet, quickly changed to amazement and then to consternation.

When he realized all that the young monarch's mental attitude stood for, the old Prince had sense enough to yield, though he could not do so gracefully. And then the man who had boasted, soon after the close of the Franco-Prussian War, that if he couldn't unify the North German states as an empire with a Hohenzollern on the imperial throne he would unify it as a republic, got out of the service of the family he had dominated over for many years and disappeared permanently from public life. But he had the satisfaction of knowing, even in his hour of humiliation, that no blunder of his had cost his beloved Germany dear.

Some Imperial Blunders.
Colossal though the blunders of the Russian Czar have been, he has not yet had to suffer for them as Napoleon III, otherwise known as Louis Napoleon, had to suffer for his mistakes. His blunder in declaring war on the Germans in 1870 gave Bismarck the chance without which he might never have been able to prove his greatness.

Yet Louis Napoleon's blunder in attacking the Teutons, though of much greater influence upon world history, was specifically no more of a blunder than his sending Maximilian, Austrian Grand Duke and brother of the now reigning Emperor of Austria-Hungary, Francis Joseph, to Mexico to found an empire on North American soil in defiance of the Monroe Doctrine. But he was hardly responsible for either of these blunders; they were both planned by Eugene, his wife, who, still alive, has been spared more bitter years than most historic blunders have