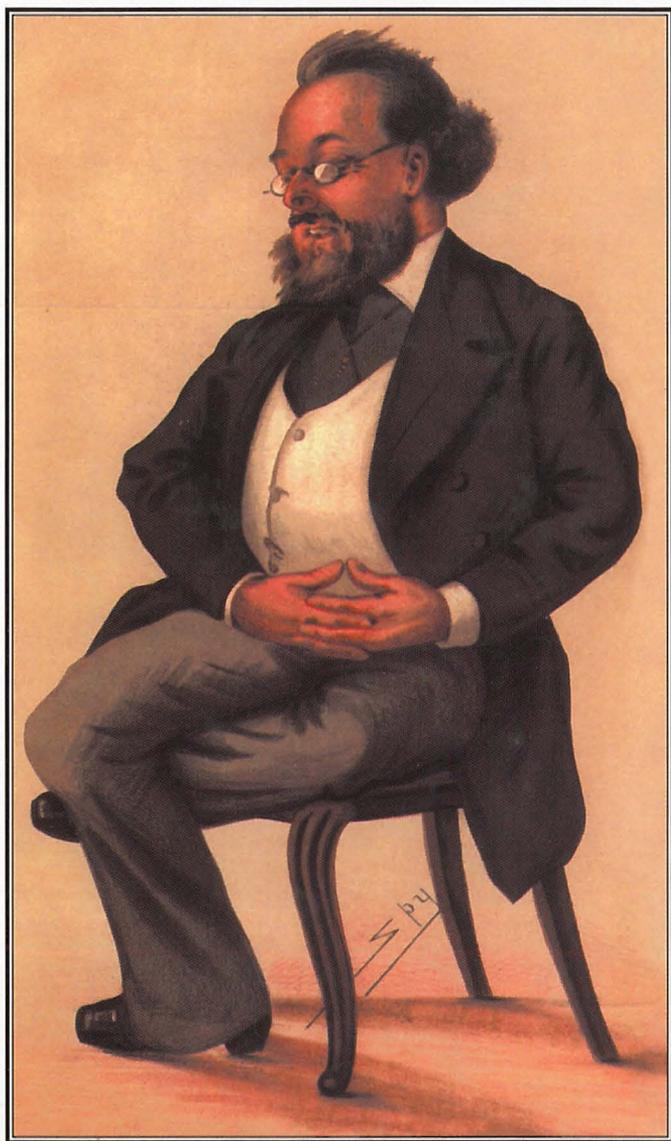


BISMARCK'S FAVOURITE ENGLISHMAN

Lord Odo Russell's Mission to Berlin



KARINA URBACH

I.B.Tauris

TO MY MOTHER
Wera Frydtberg-Urbach

BISMARCK'S
FAVOURITE
ENGLISHMAN

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Karina Urbach

I.B.Tauris *Publishers*
LONDON • NEW YORK

Published in 1999 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square, London, WC1B 4DZ
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
website: <http://www.ibtauris.com>

In the United States and Canada distributed by St Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

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ISBN 1 86064 438 4

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress catalog card: available

Typeset in Baskerville 10½/12pt by The Midlands Book Typesetting Co,
Loughborough, Leicestershire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by WBC Ltd, Bridgend

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I am most grateful to Mr Cosmo Russell for his permission to reproduce pictures of his grandfather. Tony Pictures is in possession of the Spy Cartoon of Lord Odo Russell and plate 4. The picture of Woburn Abbey is reproduced by kind permission of the Marquis of Tavistock and the Trustees of the Bedford Estate. The painting of the Berlin Embassy is used by courtesy of the Landesbildstelle Berlin. The Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin kindly gave permission to use plate 8. The Anton von Werner painting of the Berlin Congress is reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Acknowledgements

During a lavish college dinner I was once asked by a fairly intoxicated computer scientist why anyone in their right mind would want to waste their time on one of those 'mad Russells'. My reply closed the doors of the computer lab to me forever, but I hope that readers will be more persuaded as to the need for this study. If this is the case, it will be due to the best of all supervisors, Professor Derek Beales. His wisdom, professionalism and originality have made me a devoted member of his great fan club. I would also like to thank Dr Jonathan Steinberg for his wonderful help as well as Professor T.C.W. Blanning, Professor Richard Shannon and Dr Robert Tombs. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance given to me by Professor Klaus Hildebrand (in person) and Professor Paul Kennedy (by letter) during the early phases of my research.

Further thanks go to the people at the German Historical Institute – financially and otherwise. Peter Carpenter from the University of Cambridge Kurt Hahn Trust and the DAAD made it possible for me to come back to Cambridge. I would also like to thank the many archivists in Britain, Germany and the US, who helped me with my research, in particular Mr Harcourt Williams and Mrs Ann Mitchell at Woburn Abbey.

Without the patience of Professor Hermann Hiery at Bayreuth University, I would not have been able to turn my thesis into book form so quickly. His enthusiasm for research on Bismarck has been a great inspiration to me. Thanks to him I met Dr Lester Crook from Tauris Academic Press who, in the true tradition of 19th century publishers, passionately cares about the books he produces.

Bayreuth, September 1998.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1990, when Germany was in the midst of its reunion, Margaret Thatcher invited Hugh Trevor-Roper, Gordon Craig, Fritz Stern, Norman Stone and Timothy Garton Ash, to a secret meeting at Chequers (which stayed secret for a whole day).¹ The idea was to quiz them about the German soul, especially its more worrying aspects. Yet despite the efforts of these historians to allay her fears, Thatcher was not satisfied. In her memoirs she describes that at first she had hoped the Soviets would stop the 're-emergence' of a powerful Germany.² When Gorbachev failed her, she did her best to form an Anglo-French initiative to tie down the 'German giant':³ 'He [Mitterand] observed that in history the Germans were a people in constant movement and flux. At this I [Thatcher] produced from my handbag a map showing the various configurations of Germany in the past, which were not altogether reassuring about the future'.⁴ One of these configurations was of course a picture of Germany in the 19th century. It showed the results of Prussia's ascent in Germany after its battle for dominance with Austria and its war against France in 1870.

In comparison with Mrs Thatcher, however, British politicians in the 1870s did not fear Germany. They had permitted the unity process and now looked on curiously as to what would become of this Bismarckian creation. One of these British onlookers was Lord Odo Russell. As first British ambassador to the newly united Germany, he was for 14 years constantly around the German Chancellor — from their time together at the Versailles headquarters in 1870 until Russell's death in 1884. It is the aim of this book to investigate and understand the Germany that Russell, a British Liberal, observed. The main focus will be on the period 1870–1878, when the German Reich seemed to be an unknown quantity to Russell and when he undertook his most brilliant analysis of the Chancellor. To see through Russell's 'British spectacles' gives us two advantages. First, because Odo Russell was a foreigner he did not

suffer from the feelings of either deference or hatred which Bismarck's rule instilled in many Germans. Secondly, Russell's day-to-day assessments also protect us from the trap of seeing Bismarck as the great creator who guessed it all. We can learn that there were many options the Chancellor played with, and that the outcome was often quite uncertain. We will also see continuous changes in Odo's attitude towards Germany. His letters are like snaps, some taken on a bright day, some taken on a grey day or, when Bismarck seriously alarmed him, on a very dark one. For the Foreign Office (FO) and his friends in England such complexity was often difficult to handle, and they therefore just relied on the bits that appealed to their own rather vague ideas of Germany.

So who is Odo Russell? This book is not a biography but a monograph with a few biographical elements. The Victorians were of course obsessed with biographies, 'read not history, nothing but biography for that is life without theory',⁵ yet even if one does not agree with this claim of Disraeli, it seems appropriate when one writes about a Victorian such as Russell to give a glimpse of his private life and political value system.

It is perhaps fortunate that Russell did not write his memoirs because he might have given us, like so many of his colleagues, a biased retrospective assessment of his time in Germany. It would have been in some instances a defensive account, glossing over the less successful episodes of his career. Instead we have his private letters, which show the 'unguarded' diplomat. Unlike his official reports (many of which have become famous and are repeatedly cited in books on German-British relations), in his private letters he openly speaks his mind about 'Zornesbock' (Bismarck) as well as the ignorance of British politicians. Russell's correspondence was not intended by his wife to survive. In true Victorian melodramatic style she was reported to have burnt a great many of her husband's letters. Amongst those destroyed there must have been numerous entertaining ones from Odo's eccentric mother who had a scathing opinion on everything and everyone in London and Berlin — certainly a great loss to social historians. Despite this brutal destruction, a great deal of material did however survive. Like his autograph collection, which was found by his daughters in the 1920s, letters to and from Odo were discovered as late as the 1970s. Together with Odo's correspondences to his many German and British friends and the material at Woburn, they constitute the foundation of this work. Yet, if we depend on Russell for guidance through the first years after German unification, we also have to live with the disadvantage that the material itself often dictates which issues are discussed in this book. The

Congress of Berlin, for example, is badly documented in Russell's official dispatches as well as in his private papers since there was no need to write to the FO when the decision makers, Disraeli and Salisbury, were in Berlin with Russell. Also, when it comes to the issue of social unrest in Germany, it is lamentable that Odo only mentions it occasionally. As with many diplomats of his generation his interest in economic problems is also greatly limited, but he was eager to learn. Fighting against his 'ignorance', he embarked on a frantic crusade of research whenever a new German crisis had to be evaluated and reported on. A wide network of friends (among them his banker Baron Bleichröder) and colleagues (like Morier, Lytton and Layard) in almost every European capital, made it possible for Russell to be *au courant* with political happenings as well as diplomatic gossip. This comradely exchange of ideas gave Odo a wide perspective on the effects that German actions had abroad. In writing about Germany he mainly focused on Prussia, and regrettably did not show much interest in what was happening in other parts of the country. He left, for example, the *chargé d'affaires* in Munich or the Consul General in Düsseldorf, a 'free hand' to cover their own areas.

The title of this study might at first seem confusing for readers. Did Bismarck have a 'favourite' at all and could that person be a foreigner? When one thinks of Bismarck's relationship with Englishmen, the first name that usually comes to mind is Disraeli. He was called a 'friend' by the German Chancellor, who put up a picture of the British Prime Minister next to those of his wife and the Emperor. The question is, however, whether Bismarck was actually capable of real friendship with anyone outside his family circle. It seems that the only male person he had affection for was his son Herbert, whose personality he tried to model on himself — with a doubtful outcome. The German Chancellor was probably not capable of the kind of *Seelenverwandtschaft* [a relationship of total empathy and understanding] between men that had been popularised by the German romantics. Although Bismarck admired Bettina von Arnim, who was a representative of the romantic movement, he did not share his innermost feelings with anyone. The majority of his closer friendships had deteriorated since his rise to power.⁶ He had once said that he lacked the ability to admire people, and that it was a defect of his eyes that he saw human weaknesses sharper than qualities.⁷ Nonetheless he did have 'favourites'. Their stock was in constant flux. The best known of these 'favourites' today is Gerson von Bleichröder, who in Bismarck's autobiography appears only once, but whose close relationship with the Chancellor was uncovered by Fritz Stern in the 1970s. Odo Russell was also becoming a favourite

just like Bismarck's loyal secretaries, Bucher⁸ and Abeken. As with Bleichröder, in his selective memoirs the retired Chancellor only refers to Odo once. Still, Bismarck felt as close to Russell as it was possible for him. In return, Russell himself was greatly intrigued by Otto von Bismarck. The ambassador's primary preoccupation became that of decoding Bismarck's language — a 'search for clues'.⁹ This focus on Bismarck means that Russell often neglects the influence of other players on German affairs. This is certainly a great weakness of his analysis, but it does not in any way mean that he succumbs to Bismarck's 'glamour'.

A question that will of course have to be addressed in this book is why one should look at a man from the second row, or as Paul Kennedy has put it, 'the historian in retrospect may wonder whether a good or bad diplomat made much difference to the overall course of Anglo-German relations'.¹⁰ It will, therefore, be necessary to consider whether Russell was simply an observer, informant and mediator or, alternatively, whether he had a more direct role and impact on the policies of the Whig and Tory governments that he served. Although there was a certain amount of mutual trust between the Foreign Secretaries and Russell, it will be seen that Odo was not always in accord with his government's position. The question will therefore be, how Russell managed to reconcile the divergence between his personal and political beliefs with the official stance of the FO. Although Odo was not officially a policy maker, he tried to act like one on two occasions — with very different outcomes.

To understand how Russell's analysis influenced British decision makers, we have to look at the extent to which his advice was valued by the various Foreign Secretaries and Prime Ministers he served under as well as by the Royal family. Historians have certainly treated him well. For the diplomatic historian Raymond Jones, Odo was 'brilliant'¹¹ and Paul Knaplund believed that '[Russell had] certain inborn personal qualities: exquisite tact, quick intelligence, and natural sympathy and kindliness'.¹² Kennedy, Hildebrand and Stern describe Odo Russell as the 'primus inter pares',¹³ 'the most brilliant and successful of all ambassadorial appointments in Berlin'.¹⁴ Winifried Taffs, who wrote a study on Odo Russell in the 1930s,¹⁵ did not have much material to work with, but enough it seems to idealise his every move. This is not the intention of this book. It will be seen that, despite being in possession of a sharp mind, plenty of experience and good contacts, Russell frequently made mistakes in his analysis of the Bismarckian policies, as, for example, his unshakeable belief that there would be another German-Austrian war. Yet when he is at his best, his letters are irresistible.

CHAPTER 2

Odo Russell's Profile

Family Background

For a better understanding of Odo Russell's *Weltanschauung*, it is necessary to examine the political as well as the family strands of his life. Both factors are inseparable, because his family life was full of politics and British politics was full of members of his family.

One could say that Odo's outlook on things was somewhat historical as it was formed by his family's history as much as by the beliefs of his political mentors. The term 'historical thinking' has been coined by Christopher Hill to explain the psychological heritage of the decision-makers in today's Foreign Office.¹ This idea can, in part, be adapted to the case of Odo Russell and his family. Naturally the family's strong traditional value system had a direct influence on Odo's actions and ingrained him with an 'ancestral outlook'. Yet what exactly was this value system he grew up with?

The Russells owed their political and economic power to their religion. Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church turned them into proud Protestants who loyally fought for their king. In return they were awarded vast amounts of land and, among their many titles, that of Earl of Bedford.² Although the achievements of the first Earls were important, the true family hero, however, turned out to be the son of the fifth Earl of Bedford — William Lord Russell. He had been involved in the Rye House plot and was seen by many of Odo's relatives as the embodiment of all their religious and political beliefs. The Russells named dozens of their sons after William and in 1820 John Russell even wrote a biography about him.³ To the family, William Lord Russell was a martyr who had fought for a 'constitutional limitation of monarchical power'. His execution in 1683 might have been a personal tragedy for his wife, but after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, it brought the Russell family the Dukedom.

It was natural that such a rebellious heritage should arouse certain expectations in every new Russell generation. The offspring were

encouraged to be politically active and to make use of their fortune for campaigning and their brains for writing. 'Whatever may be said about other families', John Russell wrote to his eldest brother:

I do not think ours ought to retire from active exertion. In all times of popular movement, the Russells have been on the 'forward' side. At the Reformation, the first Earl of Bedford; in Charles the First's days, Francis, the Great Earl; in Charles the Second's, William Lord Russell; in later times Francis, Duke of Bedford; our father, you; and lastly myself in the Reform Bill.⁴

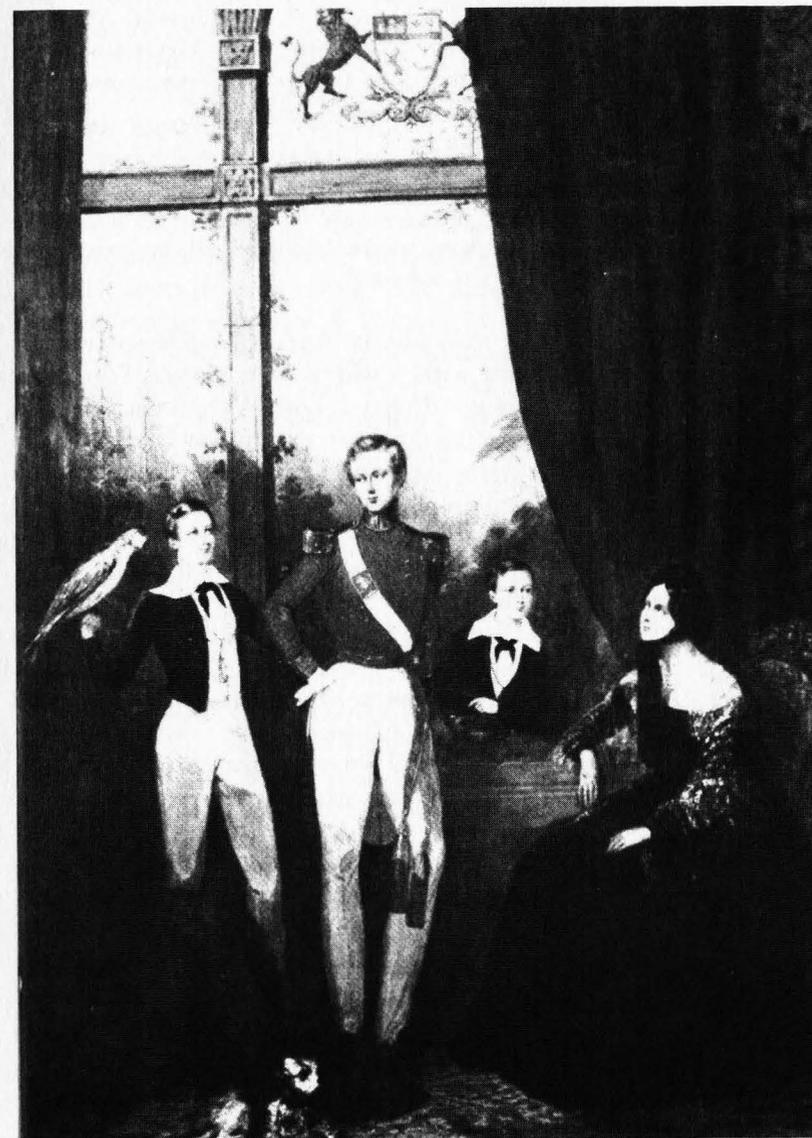
Such a legacy was strong enough to turn Odo into a diplomat instead of a gentleman of learning, and it also called a member of the following Russell generation, the 'radical' George, into politics. George Russell perhaps himself best expresses how his background and historical thinking made him a campaigner for Gladstone in 1878: 'To a man born and circumstanced as I was the call came with peculiar power. I had the love of Freedom in my blood. I had been trained to believe in and to serve the Liberal cause'.⁵ Though the Russells were — in some ways — rightly proud of the services they had given to England, Dominic Lieven has uncovered the arrogance that lay behind their ancestral perspective. While some members of the Russell family claimed to be Liberals, they at the same time shared a feeling of superiority, the belief that they were the 'chosen ones': 'The sacred circle of the Great Grandmotherhood', Lieven writes, 'was at its core a tight aristocratic clique brought up to believe that its ancestors' successful struggle for the Protestant, free constitution against Stuart absolutism was the key to England's subsequent rise to world supremacy'.⁶

The Dukes of Bedford had to juggle a political career with the time-consuming management of their estates around Woburn and their vast London properties. It is estimated that at around 1840 they had an annual income of £100,000.⁷ Their estates included rural and urban properties. In London they owned Bloomsbury and Covent Garden, which brought them enormous rents (for example, by 1880 the income from the Bloomsbury estate was £104,880 and Covent Garden brought them an extra £32,000 a year.) They also invested heavily and successfully in a variety of industries and had a very rewarding copper mine on their Cornish estate.⁸ Traditionally, it fell to the less well-off Russells to prove themselves in the outside world. Lord John Russell, the younger brother of Odo's father, was of course the most prominent member of the family: 'Much of his greatness will be discovered when his dispatches are published of which the world knows but little', Odo wrote about his uncle, 'and they will add glory to the name and to the

family'.⁹ Although Lord John's nephews admired him, they sometimes found him to be meddlesome: 'Uncle [John] is a great man when he escapes female influence', Odo wrote to his brother Arthur, 'it is lucky for him women cannot get into the House of Commons, or aunt John would do him much harm there too, poor woman, she means well'.¹⁰ In addition, some of John Russell's 'post-retirement' crusades were seen as embarrassing by Odo. It will be shown later that John Russell's stand on the *Kulturkampf* was, at a political level, convenient for Odo because it pleased Bismarck. However, in private Odo found it to be too radical. Also, John Russell's opinion on the Eastern Question was condemned by both Arthur and Odo. Referring to a letter John Russell had published in August 1875 in connection with the affairs in Turkey, Arthur wrote apologetically to Lady Derby: 'His [John Russell's] letter is much to be regretted. The obstinacy of old age makes it impossible to prevent him sending it to the press'.¹¹ Odo thought the same: 'I am glad Uncle John's pamphlet is not to appear. His letter did harm, for it was translated into every Slav dialect and given to the insurgents in Herzegovina to encourage them and was received by them with enthusiastic Zivio's'.¹² John Russell, on the other hand, must have himself often felt embarrassed by his own family, especially his benefactor the ninth Duke of Bedford. It was Odo who had first realised that 'Uncle John' had not saved anything. As a consequence, the ninth Duke of Bedford paid £3,000 to John Russell¹³ and made sure that his relatives were informed about this generous donation.

It would, therefore, be a mistake to underestimate the Russells' intellectual prowess by assuming that they, privately, always agreed with each other. Their ideas of Liberalism sometimes differed considerably. At the one end of the spectrum Odo could be seen as the more conservative Whig; at the other end was George Russell who belonged to the radicals within the Liberal Party. When George campaigned for the abolition of the House of Lords, Odo's brother Hastings accused Gladstone of approving this notion and threatened to stop his support for the government as long as cousin George remained in the House.¹⁴ Almost every Russell tried to keep some of his own identity by occasionally disobeying the head of the family. Odo's father, Lord William Russell for example (another Russell named after the family hero), for a long time resented any interference by his family in his professional and private life. It is not surprising that William Russell suffered from attacks of depression if one considers that his younger brother was Prime Minister, whereas his older brother, Francis, inherited a fortune when he became the seventh Duke of Bedford. William might have been a textbook case for psychologists who believe that the second born child

often feels deprived of material goods and turns into a rebel. William did turn rebellion into his primary occupation and made the evils of primogeniture his favourite subject. It did not help much that the good-natured Francis tried to balance his brother's perspective: 'With respect to elder and younger brothers', he wrote to William, 'be assured that all positions in life have their due share of good and ill ... you are little aware of the cares and worries and plagues I have had to go through'.¹⁵ Whereas Francis and John had found their place in life, William changed his occupation three times. At first he tried his luck in the army. He served in the Peninsular wars and — after a stint as MP for Bedford — he became aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington in Paris. Here he met Odo's mother, Elizabeth Rawdon, for the first time.¹⁶ Though Elizabeth was a niece of the Marquis of Hastings, this did not put her in the 'same league' as the Russell family. Her father, The Hon. John Rawdon, was a simple minded soldier who liked to travel, spending his summers in Veneto and his winters in Vienna. As a consequence, Elizabeth had, for a British girl of her generation, an unconventional upbringing. She lived with her parents in France, Germany, Austria and Italy and in later life tried to re-enact her childhood memories by travelling the same paths with her sons. As a young girl her main capital assets were her quick wit, her intelligence and her looks. Elizabeth's outstanding beauty inspired Lord Byron in 1818 to a couple of lines in 'Beppo' ('I never saw but one — the stars withdrawn — whose bloom could after dancing dare the dawn') and the German Emperor William I would many years later confess to Odo how much he had once yearned to dance with this beautiful woman. Despite Elizabeth's Tory sympathies and the disadvantage of acquiring a mother-in-law who was described by society as 'odious', William Russell married Elizabeth in 1817.¹⁷ Though he had wanted to live in England, his more flamboyant wife preferred the continent. They therefore spent the next years travelling and idling around Europe, until it was arranged for William to enter the diplomatic service. By then he had already three sons: Hastings, born in 1819, Arthur, in 1825 and, lastly, Odo who was born in Florence in 1829. The family seemed to have fought over Odo's name: the sixth Duke of Bedford wanted the child to be named after a king, whereas Lady William Russell thought this a highly unoriginal idea. In the end it was decided to give the infant the unusual name 'Odo'. There seem to be two possible reasons for this choice of name: the first Russell, who had, according to the incompetent family librarian J.H.Wiffen, accompanied William the Conqueror, was called Hugh or Odo, whereas in another version, which Odo Russell himself preferred, he had been named after a saint — St. Otho.¹⁸



*Lady William Russell and her three sons. From left to right: Arthur, Hastings and Odo.
Painting by Julius Shoppe*

Odo spent his early years in Italy and Germany, the countries that would later play such a great part in his career. His father had been sent to Württemberg in 1833 and in 1835 he achieved his most prestigious posting — Prussia.¹⁹ In later years Queen Victoria was said to have congratulated Odo's mother on the great achievements of her husband and son. Odo wrote about this to Arthur:

The story you tell me of the Queen saying to MM (his mother) 'I hope you will not mind your son having a higher rank than his father, etc., etc.,' I have heard, but do not know whether it is authentic or not. The Queen however may have done so, for she asked me at Osborne whether MM did or did not mind my rank being higher than my father's was at Berlin.²⁰

After some highly dramatic years with his wife, William Russell started a much remarked on affair with a widowed lady from Frankfurt. Although the Russells never got divorced, Lord William tried his best to avoid his wife and always seemed to leave town rather hurriedly once she threatened to be *ante portas*. The Duchess of Dino summed it up succinctly: 'Anything that separates him from Lady Russell always suits his taste'.²¹ The problem was that they liked to take their cures in the same spas and therefore had to make sure in advance that they would not meet. Hastings, their unfortunate go-between, probably suffered most from this situation. For years he tried to mediate between his parents, but even when William Russell was about to die in Genoa in 1846, it took a great deal of persuasion to make Lady William come and see him. Odo and Arthur felt awkward in the presence of their dying father, and Lady William Russell did not forgive him. Despite such shortcomings, Lady William's greatest achievement was her positive influence in the education of her sons: 'His [Odo's] unorthodox education had provided him with exceptional linguistic skills and far-ranging knowledge. He mixed easily, ... had charm ... his high integrity and tact were invaluable'.²² Odo was encouraged by his mother to make friends with a variety of people including scholars, artists, the bourgeoisie and 'even' trades people.²³ As a result he would later lack aristocratic arrogance and, on the contrary, developed an unusual modesty that was to be remarked upon in Berlin.

Odo, Arthur and Hastings called their mother 'MM' and half feared, half worshipped her. Her witty writing style was one of the things they liked: 'Two of [her letters] are so full of wit' Odo wrote in the 1850s, 'that I rolled about on my sofa and laughed until I screamed all alone in my room! MM writes the best letters in the world when she chooses to do so — I make subjects of conversation of the contents of them — and I am generally found very amusing'.²⁴ The feared side

of Lady Russell was her harsh criticisms. Her eldest son Hastings was the first target of her spite: 'I want encouragement, and not rebuff,' Hastings wrote in despair, 'without a little vanity [self-esteem] nothing would be done in this world, and to be constantly told by one's mother that one is an idiot, a coward and a liar is very disheartening'.²⁵ Lady William Russell was, even for the time, a very old-fashioned disciplinarian. Her sons were not allowed to sit down in her presence and had to attend to all her wishes.²⁶ By instilling in Odo this royal treatment towards women, Lady William equipped him with all the right ingredients to become a successful courtier.

With their French tutor,²⁷ Mr Drocourt, the young Russells travelled extensively through Europe. By the time they came of age, they did not have to do the grand tour any more — their whole life had already been one. They were fluent in three or four languages (the accounts vary somewhat on this point. Odo certainly spoke Italian well, and his French and German were both possibly flawless. Whether he spoke Dutch and Spanish too, as Hogarth claims, has not been proved)²⁸ and their love for languages was such that up to old age they used German expressions in their letters, some of them written in a Berlin dialect. Odo, especially, felt attracted by everything German and Austrian, and, by the time he joined the diplomatic service, was so germanised in his writing, that his brothers had to point out 'un-British expressions'.²⁹ In his youth Odo was first influenced by German authors, ploughing through Kotzebue's 42 volumes of drama as well as reading Goethe and Schiller. French and English authors (including his favourites, Carlyle and Eliot) interested him later, and for his autograph collection he only bought letters from famous German novelists and playwrights, including a letter from Goethe in which he mentions Kleist's '*Der zerbrochene Krug*'.³⁰ Odo's cultural memories of Germany never changed. However, after unification, he learnt to distinguish between the Germany of his youth, which had been full of poetry and music, and the 'new' Germany of the 1870s. Karl Deutsch's argument, that 'decision-making is about combining new information with old memories', in many ways fitted Odo's approach to Bismarck's Germany.

At first, the Russell family did not interfere with Lady William's upbringing of her sons abroad. They only began to become concerned about the future of Arthur and Odo once they came of age. Blakiston claims that Lady William Russell was put under pressure by her brother-in-law, John Russell, to release her sons and send them back to England.³¹ At the time it was not seen as a recommendable experiment to study abroad, as Lord Acton remembered in the 1890s:

I can remember when people used to say that the Russells were heavily handicapped because they were educated at home — or rather abroad; and that they knew foreign languages so much better than anybody else that they never could be master of their own. But the official success of one brother, and the social success of the other, deprive us of these explanations.³²

In 1849 John Russell gave Arthur a position as his own private secretary and persuaded Odo to join the diplomatic service.³³ Arthur worked for his uncle for 5 years and then, after a 3-year break, became a member of parliament for Tavistock. Hastings' future had already been taken care of. At 19 he entered the army as a lieutenant in the Scots Fusilier Guards and then became the heir-presumptive to his cousin, the eighth Duke of Bedford. The Duke was a broody figure who suffered from melancholia and shyness. He was a hypochondriac who had already decided at Eton that he despised life and would not endure it for long. His uncle John Russell summed up the condition as 'a bad stomach, Byron and Voltaire have been the causes of the mischief'.³⁴ Although the Duke sat in parliament for a time, he did not have any great social or political ambitions. Politics he left to Uncle John (his favourite motto was 'Lord John is always right') and the management of the estates to his cousin Hastings. During a visit to Woburn, Disraeli commented that the eighth Duke 'fancies himself unable to encounter the world. He detests the country and country life'.³⁵ On his reluctance to marry and produce an heir, the Duke remarked, according to Disraeli: 'Could I have a better son than Hastings?' Disraeli was certainly a good psychologist, being one of the few people who noticed that the Duke's shyness was a common Russell family trait:

Odo Russell just arrived from Rome ... via Paris. He brought the new toy, Pharach's serpent. Quite a miracle! A most agreeable party, which it could not fail to be with such guests and such a host and hostess for Lady Elizabeth is quite worthy of her husband (Hastings). The predominant feature and organic deficiency of the Russell family is shyness. Even Hastings is not free from it, though he struggles to cover it with an air of uneasy gaiety.³⁶

When the troubled eighth Duke of Bedford died and Hastings acceded to the Dukedom in 1872, his family was jubilant. Odo could not 'conceal his delight at the idea that your long labours are at last rewarded and that you have ascended the throne of your ancestors and can govern your Dukedom absolutely for yourself. *Le Duc est mort, vive le Duc!*'³⁷ Being the brother of a Duke meant that Arthur and Odo could apply to become Lords. At first Odo pretended not to be interested in this title, but he soon found out that it would be an enormous help at the German court. Apart from enabling them to take

the title, Hastings also became the financial benefactor of his brothers and their large families, a fact that made his relationship with them uneasy. From the beginning Hastings did not cope well with his newly acquired wealth and complained about what Henry James called 'the dark and merciless things which lie behind great possession'. He developed a certain meanness (which occasionally alternated with great bouts of generosity) and became cynical about his brothers', probably genuine, concern for his well being. Odo sometimes despaired that he constantly had to defend his requests for some financial support from Hastings: 'For 21 years have I struggled against the many temptations of an expensive profession, in which money is so great an element of success, to avoid the almost unavoidable debts contracted by all colleagues and never have I sought to take advantage of the wealth at your command'.³⁸ However, Odo's acceptance of the ambassadorship in Berlin was only made possible by Hastings' offer to support him financially.³⁹ A British ambassador was expected to have great private means, and it is therefore not surprising that in most of his letters to Hastings, Odo is talking about money problems:⁴⁰ 'The Congress [of Berlin] puts me to unexpected expense in this summer season. Constant receptions ... and an open house When the feast of nations is over I must ask for some compensation if it is not offered by HMG'.⁴¹ His happiness was, however, secured whenever there was a cheque from Hastings in the post: 'Thanks to Hastings' constant and most generous assistance I am financially so well off that I can meet all my representative duties largely and handsomely'.⁴² Some of Odo's letters requesting financial help finish on the pathetic note: 'My widow and orphans will thank you'. Like many Victorians Odo was obsessed with mortality, and wrote about his eventual death in a rather morbid way. Although he was deeply upset when one of his children was dangerously ill, he at the same time made contingent plans for a tasteful funeral. He was also eager to help Hastings in arranging a memorial room at Woburn for his late mother. It was furnished with all her possessions, from her books to her reading glasses.

In order to receive a bonus from Hastings, Odo had to present himself as a good investment for the family. Whenever there appeared a positive article on his work in Italy or Germany, Odo immediately sent it to his brother for the family scrapbook. In 1875, for example, Hastings was proudly informed by Odo that a *Spectator* article 'of 30 January 75 headed "Lord Granville" makes honourable mention of me'⁴³ and in 1878 a *Times* article 'Bismarck during the war of 1870' informed its readers about Odo on 'page eight, second column'.⁴⁴ In the same year Odo advised Hastings to read Moritz Busch's book about

the Franco-Prussian war, *Graf Bismarck und seine Leute während des Krieges mit Frankreich*, which in his opinion should be put in the library at Woburn 'as I am occasionally mentioned in it'.⁴⁵ Without giving away any confidential information, Odo also repeatedly mentioned how satisfied Lord Derby was with the work done at Berlin, and employing calculated understatement, Odo talked of discussions he had had with the leaders of the day, 'which may not be unsatisfactory to HMG'.⁴⁶ To have an ambassador for a brother must also have contributed to Hastings' prestige. As George Russell argues, it was a question of social status for every host to have an ambassador, whether mediocre or famous, among his dinner guests. 'I daresay that ambassador has been blundering all his life', a character in *Endymion* exclaims, 'and yet there is something in that Star and Ribbon. I do not know how you feel, but I could almost go down on my knees to him'.⁴⁷

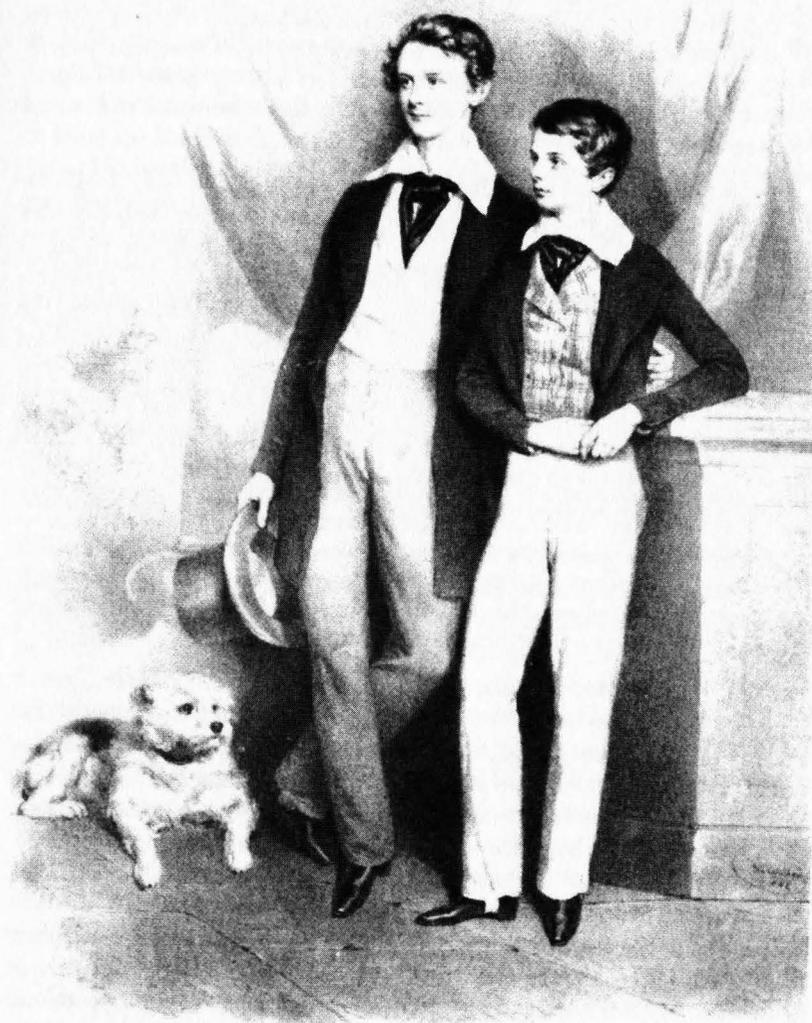
The impressive family seat at Woburn also proved useful for Odo's social standing in Berlin. He often asked Hastings to entertain influential German politicians and aristocrats who were travelling around England, including the Prussian Crown Princess and Herbert von Bismarck. They were all as impressed by Woburn as Disraeli had been in 1865:

[it is] fine from its greatness and completeness, everything that the chief seat of a princely English family requires. The house, though not beautiful in its exterior, is vast. ... There are stables not unworthy of Chantilly ... a gallery of sculpture, the finest private one, perhaps, in the world. A mass of choice and rare collections of all kinds which have been accumulating for centuries.⁴⁸

Grant Duff was less flattering in his verdict. He thought that the house itself was:

hideous, but full to overflowing of treasures — so full that no better place can be found for the magnificent service of Sevres, given by Louis XV to the Duke of Bedford when he was ambassador to France, than a cupboard room which is used, if I recollect rightly, for the upper servants to take tea in.⁴⁹

Arthur and Odo were often invited to Woburn but they also had their own stamping grounds. Arthur's active social life, in particular, could have been judged equal to that of his ambassador brother. Arthur was, despite his shy nature, very clubbable and greatly valued as a listener and loyal friend. He became an enthusiastic member of numerous London clubs (the Athenaeum, the Cosmopolitan and Grillons) and co-founded the Breakfast Club in 1866.⁵⁰ To be seen in the right clubs was essential for a Russell.⁵¹ There were political clubs like the conservative Carlton and the liberal Reform Club, but the most exclusive ones were the Athenaeum, Brooks's and the Garrick Club. Odo Russell was not



Odo (right) with Arthur, the brother he felt closest to.
Lithograph by Kriehuber.

as lucky with his club memberships as was Arthur. Short of money, he tried to leave the Marlborough Club at one point, a move that upset the Prince of Wales. His secretary Knollys wrote to Odo:

The Prince of Wales understood that you have withdrawn your name from the Marlborough Club, and he desires me to write how sorry he is to hear of it. He would I think take it as a compliment to himself were you to reconsider the matter, as he was so anxious that you should become a member of the club in question, that he proposed you yourself, a thing which, with one exception he has never done before, unless for relations.⁵²

Because of his manifold club activities, Arthur's work as an MP for Tavistock suffered. In 28 years he only managed to give two speeches in the House of Commons (one was his maiden speech, the other 'a spirited defence' of Odo's work in Rome). However, for the time this was not that unusual. In Trollope's novel about an MP, *Phineas Finn*, the hero tells his sweetheart that 'not one in ten who go into Parliament ever do say anything'.⁵³ (Trollope, Arthur and Odo were members of the Athenaeum Club and most certainly met there. It has even been suggested that Trollope used the Duke of Bedford and the Russell family as models for his books.) According to his friend Grant Duff, Arthur was at his wittiest off stage when it came to his little aperçus:

Arthur made an excellent House of Commons answer to Simeon, who meeting him, as he came out of one of the earlier gatherings which took place at the Deanery in Westminster rushed up to him with an appearance of great embarrassment and said: 'Well, is there a God?' 'Oh yes', replied Arthur, 'we had a good majority'.⁵⁴

However, Arthur could not be described as a 'full-blooded' politician, as Odo correctly analysed: 'in truth your mind and tendencies are "cosmopolitan", above party prejudice, philosophical, fair to all, and taking interest in the true, the good and the beautiful everywhere. *En un mot: ein vorherrschender Universalismus* [a universalist]'.⁵⁵ Perhaps Odo was also thinking of one of Trollope's characters when he wrote these lines. In *Phineas Finn*, the two heroes, the Whig aristocrat Palliser and the middle-class social climber Finn, represent the different 'ideals of British political life where individuals are elected to submerge their individuality in parties: for Palliser it is "service", for Phineas "independence"'.⁵⁶ Arthur was a mixture of both men, finding his independence outside his party, but feeling bound to serve the liberal cause loyally. His true talents lay more in academic work. He was an active member of the Geographical Society, and became interested in Darwinism at an early stage. Odo was intrigued by Arthur's new passion: 'Your letters have lately shown a leaning towards Darwin, here in Germany he is a Demigod, and old people wring their hands and groan to think that Goethe did not live long enough to enjoy the happiness

"Darwinismus" can give'.⁵⁷ In a conversation with a German professor about Darwinism, Odo came to the, not very scientific but from a social point of view convincing, conclusion 'that if Darwin's selection was true, humanity must degenerate, because in our society and civilisation human beings don't couple and procreate by selection, but for 'conveyance, money, position, rank, relationship etc. etc. there can be no improvement in the breed, but the contrary'.⁵⁸ After espousing such heretical ideas, Odo would never have been admitted to the inner circle of Darwinists. Their sense of humour was limited. Arthur wrote to Layard in 1890 about a scientists' club: 'I think all men of eminence get into the club in time unless they be anti-Darwinist, then the scientific men veto and nobody can venture to say a word'.⁵⁹ Such despotism was, however, against Arthur's liberal notions: 'When I see how intolerant and unforgiving Huxley and the biologists are to anyone who has dared to criticise them, I feel very grateful that Darwinism is not yet our established church'.⁶⁰ Like his close friend Matthew Arnold, Arthur was interested in education and thought about ways to reform public schools and universities. He was also a member of the Metaphysical Society, which had been founded in 1869 and met nine times a year until its disbandment in 1880.⁶¹ Odo called its members 'the forty of the future academy', or less flatteringly, 'the atheists'.⁶² Among them were Walter Bagehot, William Gladstone, Thomas Henry Huxley, Henry Edward Manning (not exactly an atheist), John Ruskin, John Seeley, Henry Sidgwick and Sir Mont Stuart E. Grant Duff, to name only a few. Their routine was to have dinner together at the Grosvenor Hotel and then one of them would present a paper. As Lytton Strachey put it in his, as usual, cynical and inaccurate way: 'they met once a month during the palmy years of the seventies to discuss, in strict privacy, the fundamental problems of the destiny of man'.⁶³ Arthur's papers for the Metaphysical Society, which are today deposited in the Cambridge University Library, show his balanced view on the opportunities and limits of scientific research. It was not surprising that he was eventually asked by his friend Grant Duff to become a fellow of the University of London, a career move that impressed Odo.⁶⁴ Yet, like his friend Acton, Arthur was so overloaded with material, as well as respect for the written word, that he suffered from writer's block. As a consequence he did not live up to his family's high expectations, feeling pestered by Odo's constant encouragements to write about certain issues. Arthur's obituary perhaps rightly summed up his life as that of a 'patron and speculator rather than a contributor',⁶⁵ whereas Noel Blakiston's more flattering judgement portrays him as a 'philosopher and savant'.⁶⁶

Like Arthur, Odo enjoyed the company of scholars and surrounded himself at Berlin with university professors. Russell was especially fascinated by behaviourism, even before this subject was invented. His

curiosity concerned not only the breeding patterns of his beloved fish but also, when he became a father himself, his children's ways of expression. The way in which his twins behaved, he sensed (despite living in a pre-Freudian world) as being dangerously peculiar. He could not tell them apart and whenever he asked for one of their names, the addressee remained silent while his twin pointed to him. They also developed their own language, which worried their parents considerably.⁶⁷ However, even Odo himself was known for his slightly eccentric behaviour. According to Blakiston he used to carry snakes and other living creatures around in his pockets when he was in the countryside. Still, he did not match the description Raymond A. Jones gives of some of Russell's colleagues. The 19th-century diplomatic service, Jones claims, 'had probably more than its fair share of eccentric and difficult personalities'.⁶⁸ Compared with David Urquhart's madness or Sir Henry Elliot's adventures, Odo's career seems uneventful. His mild peculiarities were only focused on his private life and were therefore perfectly tolerable to his chiefs.

Like their mother, who learned Hebrew in old age, the Russell sons accumulated, driven by their 'teutonic thirst for knowledge', books on every possible subject,⁶⁹ and corresponded with several museum directors about their favourite hobby-horse, the natural sciences. Even when in later life their professions hardly allowed them the time to read for pleasure, they approached their mother for advice on what books to buy: 'I want history, facts, truth, life and can no longer toil through novels,' Odo wrote in 1859 to her, knowing that she would send him the right books.⁷⁰ He shared his love for history with his uncle John Russell 'who regularly read aloud [from history books] to his family'.⁷¹ To be interested in new inventions and academic challenges was a character trait all Russells seemed to share. The Dukes of Bedford were renowned for their modernisation, for example, being the first to introduce electricity and, today, using natural power-resources. When typewriters were developed,⁷² Hastings proudly produced letters for his brothers on this latest 'printing machine': 'Your letter printing machine must be delightful', Odo wrote to Hastings, 'often and often have I wondered that Morse's telegraph had not yet been applied to letter printing'.⁷³ Odo naturally could not keep this latest Russell discovery to himself:

Your printed letters are wonderful. I told the Emperor William, the Empress Augusta, the Grand Duke of Baden and his wife about them last night at dinner and they took it all for chaff and wouldn't believe me that letters could be printed like telegrams nowadays — 'Excellency *belieben wohl zu scherzen* [are joking]'.⁷⁴

Unlike their friend, Matthew Arnold, who was so 'sensitive to the stresses of the age', the Russells welcomed the new technologies and scientific

challenges wholeheartedly. They shared the Victorian belief in a rational world, facing the future with excitement and curiosity. In one instance Odo even accompanied his wife to the dentist to see her tooth being pulled out under the latest invention, 'laughing gas'. Duly he reported back to his brother: 'a horrid operation to look at, but she says she felt no pain at all'.⁷⁵ Odo's chief in later years, Lord Salisbury, was another trend-setter aristocrat who shared a similar enthusiasm for the latest technology.⁷⁶ In his leisure time, he personally supervised the installation of electric light at the family seat, Hatfield.⁷⁷ Aristocratic families such as the Bedfords and Salisburys were aware that they had to be forward looking and to set new standards of living, so that they would not become anachronistic themselves, overrun by the affluent upper-middle classes. Far from being pessimistic and backward thinking, they would have agreed with Hobsbawm's verdict that 'the long 19th century was a period of almost uninterrupted material, intellectual and moral progress'.⁷⁸

Although Odo communicated extensively with his family, one should not assume that he had no other confidantes. He corresponded with a variety of colleagues, friends and acquaintances all over Europe. Influential English friends were, however, of particular importance to him because they could keep up his stock at the FO, in parliament and in London society while he was abroad. This does not, however, mean that Russell only recruited people who were useful to him politically. One of his closest friends, for example, was Lord Acton⁷⁹ who, despite his friendship with Gladstone, was for a long time of no political value to Odo and worked mainly as an intellectual stimulant for him. Another friend was the liberal MP William Cartwright.⁸⁰ A cosmopolitan in the true sense, he travelled to the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian war. On his way home he met the German Crown Princess in 1871, who judged him to be a defender of the German cause in England. To her mother, Queen Victoria, she wrote:

I have made the acquaintance of a Mr Cartwright (a friend of Morier's and Lady William Russell's sons) a very agreeable and intellectual man ... He understands Germany thoroughly and is very well calculated to clear away the heap of prejudice and nonsense which has gathered in German heads about England.⁸¹

Not even Russell would have thought so highly of Cartwright's political judgement. Cartwright was famous for his chaotic ideas (and therefore called Cartwrong by his friends), yet his charming character appealed to Russell nonetheless. In choosing his friends, Odo followed the motto that friendship was only possible among equals. Though he socialised with his superiors, he was not a close friend of Granville or Gladstone.

His real friends were only people of the same standing, such as, for example, Morier⁸² and Layard.⁸³ They all more or less shared the same political beliefs, were all waiting impatiently to be made ambassadors, and they all followed, apart from politics, other intellectual interests and pursuits, such as literature and science. Morier was, because of his connections with Germany, particularly close to the Russell family. He had, together with Baron Stockmar and the Prince Consort, for many years propagated a British-Prussian alliance. He was on good terms with Augusta, the Queen of Prussia, as well as with the Crown Princess — both sworn enemies of Bismarck. Together they tried to counterbalance Bismarck's influence on the King, who was in their opinion 'a mere tool of the wicked man'. Bismarck in return put Morier under police surveillance on and off during the 1860s. Morier's prospects of one day becoming British ambassador to Berlin were shattered by the spread of rumours. The irony is that he never ceased to promote a strong and united Germany — loyally defending the Prussian stance in the 1866 and 1870 wars. However, he, and many British Liberals like him, could not abide Bismarck's method of delivery for the birth of Germany — by caesarean section as it were rather than more natural means.

Odo's closest female friend was Lady Salisbury, a mentor of many rising young men.⁸⁴ Although she was a Tory, Russell seems to have owed a great deal to her intellectually and emotionally.⁸⁵ He was also in love with her. Yet, it is not clear from their letters, which have only recently been acquired by the Hatfield archive, whether theirs was more than a platonic relationship. Lady Salisbury certainly helped Russell through difficult times:

As the sculptor models clay into shape, so have you modelled the most important, the deepest, most lasting recollections of my life and given me light in the darkness of the clay period years ago — and now, single words from you suffice to convey volumes, worlds, *Life* to my mind.⁸⁶

Every time he had to leave her, he was desperate: '*Zwei Seelen ein Gedanke, zwei Herzen ein Schlag!* [two souls, one thought, two hearts one beat]. And my tears are dropping down on the blotting book and I must leave the Club and hide myself before anyone sees me'.⁸⁷ Odo knew that it was a hopeless love, yet through most of the 1860s he could not forget her:

You touch on so many points that awaken thought and a longing for an exchange of ideas that your letters appear to me like your conversation. In both you exercise that mysterious fascination I call magnetism, and while I read your letter I can see your well-known eyes looking at me out of your handwriting and I can hear your insinuating voice.⁸⁸

The relationship cooled off, however, when Lady Salisbury married Lord Derby — a move that outraged all her admirers considerably, and made her in 1874 the wife of Odo's chief.

A few words have to be said about Odo's marriage. After he had realised that Lady Salisbury could not become his wife, Odo, at the age of 40 considered marrying a 'compatible woman', Lady Emily Villiers. Emily was one of the daughters of Odo's chief, Lord Clarendon. According to the Queen of Holland, Emily was not Clarendon's favourite daughter, but she looked very much like him: 'She has a Villiers face'.⁸⁹ Odo's shyness in private affairs (which Disraeli had detected so well) became evident during the courting of his wife to be. With Lady Salisbury he discussed at length whether it was feasible at all to propose to Emily:

I like Emily very much, but a middle-aged fat man of 40 wearing spectacles and having no money and no prospects, could not more be expected to pretend to Emily than he could to the Sun, Moon and Stars. If he did, he would be first turned out of the House for his impudence and then ridiculed for his folly and he might with a shadow of justice be called a Buffoon, a flirt, a Humbug and an affected puppy etc. ... Should I ... turn traitor to my Ex-chief who has confidence enough in me to allow me to frequent his house — and put everyone to inconvenience by making a fool of myself and casting ridicule on a young lady I esteem, love and respect? Add to that, that much as I may esteem ... E. I have no reason to believe that she cares more for me than for W.H. whom she is said to have refused.⁹⁰

For the following month, Lady Salisbury was showered with similar letters full of self-doubt from Odo. It was only through this courting that he became acutely aware of his 'poverty':

If I proposed and was asked what I had to live on, I could only confess in all humility that I had not enough to indulge Emily in the luxury way she is accustomed to — she little knows how simple my habits are, how small my wants — she does not know how a poor gentleman lives abroad — she scarcely knows me and would be bitterly disappointed in me, if she knew me.⁹¹

To his genuine surprise, Emily accepted him. As was to be expected his mother was up in arms against the match, claiming that she needed at least one son as a travel companion. Hastings was therefore instructed to make it clear to Odo that the family could not financially support such an expensive match. Tormented by this economical and emotional blackmail, Odo wrote to his confidante Lady Salisbury: 'Mama has told him [Arthur] that if I marry at all she will die next week and she must have a bachelor son and can't bear the idea'.⁹²

He did marry and she did not die. How proud Odo Russell was of this match and of his wife's background is revealed in a letter he wrote to his mother after the birth of his first son, Oliver: 'Emily descending

from the Chancellor Clarendon on her father's side and from Lord Bacon by her mother. Two intellectual *Ahnen* [ancestors]'.⁹³ Though Odo's marriage turned out to be a great social success (and brought Russell personal happiness and six children) it was not a calculated one and at first worked as a career hindrance for him. In 1869, when a position in Madrid came up, his father-in-law, Lord Clarendon, wrote to Hammond: 'Odo would be the right man but I don't venture to send him as the outbreak against nepotism would be bad for us both'.⁹⁴

In Odo's professional life the Russell connection was a social, financial and political necessity, but it could also play a disruptive part. In 1875, Lord Derby, for example, asked Odo, at the behest of the Russells, whether he wanted 'a change'⁹⁵ from his Berlin post. Russell reacted vehemently to the suggestion: 'It would be the greatest favour if you leave me here until death or pension ends my career'.⁹⁶ It is quite likely that the Russells had grave objections against one of their members serving under a Tory ministry and — as will be shown later — in 1878 they successfully dissuaded Odo from accepting a peerage from Lord Beaconsfield. This behaviour still seemed to follow the old-fashioned perception of diplomats as being loyal to their party. However, since the 1860s a continuity was established in the Foreign Office, which transcended changes in the government: 'Foreign policy went across party lines and, for the most part, incoming administrations took on the obligations and commitments of their predecessor'.⁹⁷ Odo was also kept on by Disraeli and Derby because he was an outstanding expert on German affairs and an ideal representative for Britain. No Tory diplomat at the time could have equalled that.⁹⁸

In his book on European aristocracy, Lieven rightly claims that 'the 19th century was a good time to be an aristocrat... The Victorian nobleman was likely to enjoy a longer, more comfortable existence'.⁹⁹ To be a member of the Russell family meant that one belonged to the elite within this aristocratic elite. Such exclusive membership offered an ideal springboard into the inner circle of Britain's decision-makers, as well as social and financial security. Odo made full use of all his political chances. He could have adopted an indulgent lifestyle like his brother Arthur,¹⁰⁰ but he chose instead to dedicate his life to the more glamorous, but also more demanding, public service — a commitment that was in line with the family's values: 'It was easier for someone with the family history of a Russell to play a constructive role in Victorian Europe than was the case with an aristocrat still imbued with a sense of nostalgia for his family's lost status under the old *Reich*'.¹⁰¹ Odo Russell's professional success would prove that the British aristocracy was still capable of reinventing itself in a rapidly changing world.

Inside the System

When Russell joined the diplomatic service in 1849, Europe had been experiencing one of its stormiest times since the Napoleonic wars. The year of 1848 — 'the most eventful year in the history of Europe' according to *The Economist*¹ — had certainly been an 'annus horribilis' for European monarchs. A revolution had first broken out in Paris and then spread rapidly all over the continent. In England, the April 10th demonstration of the Chartists was perceived as the return of the 'Jacobian devils'.² Prince Albert already feared that 'European War is at our doors' and made his wife leave London.³ In the end the 'reactionaries' triumphed, but this did not mean that the events of 1848–1849 were soon forgotten. Especially Austria, the country to which Odo was first posted,⁴ would never forgive Lord Palmerston for his sympathy towards liberal movements on the continent. As a result, the British embassy in Vienna was the first target of the Austrian government's displeasure. For the first time, Odo experienced what it was like to live in a social vacuum. In the past, Austria had been a country which he had known well and in which he felt at home. As children, Hastings had been invited to shooting parties with Prince Esterházy and Prince Schwarzenberg, while Odo and Arthur had played with the Emperors-to-be of Mexico and Austria, Maximilian and Franz Joseph, respectively. Odo's closest friend at the time had been the son of Count Szechenyi, who would, many years later, become his colleague in Berlin. Yet, despite these excellent old contacts, Austrian society turned out to be extremely difficult for Russell to conquer in 1849. It irritated him when his old circle of friends welcomed him — half jokingly, half in earnest — as an English 'spy': 'Your mission here is as good as known to us,' Mucki Waldstein, a childhood friend claimed, 'you are here to make reports on the state of this country to Lord Palmerston'.⁵ Odo told Mucki that such was the natural business of a diplomat, but this did not make him a spy. While he publicly tried to laugh off such accusations, his private letters show how concerned he was. He started to have great doubts as to whether diplomacy suited him at all, and after only a year in Vienna his worried family arranged for him to come back to London and work at the Foreign Office. In the 19th century such a return to base was quite an unusual event. It will be shown later how Russell profited from his two different experiences of the Foreign Office: as a diplomat looking at it from the outside and also when actually working within it — seeing how the despatches of his fellow diplomats were used or abused.

At the FO Russell kept in touch with Austrian politics and he was eventually sent back to Vienna again. By then, Lord Palmerston had ceased to be Foreign Secretary and anti-British feeling slowly subsided. However, in Odo's opinion, this was for the wrong reasons:

It would be really difficult to describe the effect that Lord Palmerston's resignation made on the population of Vienna! The coffee-houses and *Bier*-rooms were filled with people. Long live Queen Victoria was the general cry ... I imagine that when the news of Napoleon's capture by the English after Waterloo was known to the world there could not have been a more sincere joy in any of the population of Europe as here. Their joy was foolish and showed brutal ignorance.⁶

The background to Palmerston's fall did, however, have more to do with Austria than Odo would have liked to admit. In the revolution of 1848, Kossuth had led the Hungarian uprising, which was eventually suppressed by the joint effort of Austria and Russia. For the Austrian government, Kossuth was a most wanted villain; for Palmerston, Austria's retaliation in Hungary was a monstrosity and Kossuth had to be helped. The Foreign Secretary willingly gave Kossuth asylum and in 1851 Palmerston had to be persuaded by his cabinet colleagues not to receive the Hungarian personally. Instead, he met a deputation which thanked him for his support and called the Emperors of Austria and Russia 'odious and detestable assassins'.⁷ Palmerston did not seem to mind such language. The Prime Minister at the time, Lord John Russell, decided to turn a blind eye to the incident but, in December 1851, when Palmerston committed a second blunder (he expressed — without cabinet consultation — to the French ambassador Count Walewski his approval of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*), he was 'released from his duties'.⁸ The ousting of Palmerston by John Russell had the happy side-effect for Odo that he was welcomed into Viennese society again.

Odo's teachers during the 1850s were not only the ambassadors and the senior colleagues he worked for at the embassy, but also two men from the home front, Edmund Hammond and Austen Layard. Hammond had joined the FO in 1824 and served it for almost 50 years.⁹ He supervised four political departments, including the German one.¹⁰ From 1854 to 1873 he was Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and had the reputation among diplomats of being a strict 'nanny': 'He sent private warnings about high play at whist, "smuggling" in the diplomatic bag, illegible handwriting, careless docketing and consular inactivity'.¹¹ As far as foreign affairs were concerned, Hammond was more of a devoted bureaucrat than a visionary. He certainly did not understand the unification movements in Italy and Germany. His favourite motto — 'in quietness and confidence shall be our strength'¹² — naturally caused

friction with Odo, who regretted that Britain was only playing a secondary role on the continent.¹³ However, Russell learned to tolerate Hammond's position and valued him as a teacher. Sir Austen Henry Layard, Odo's other mentor, was in the early 1850s and 1860s Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and had also accumulated a vast wealth of experience as a diplomat. Craftsmanship in writing was one of the most vital skills that both Hammond and Layard tried to instil into Odo.¹⁴ For his letters to be distinguished from those of all the other despatches that reached the FO, it was important for Odo to develop his own incisive style:

I cannot sufficiently thank you for showing me my faults [Odo wrote to Layard] it is the act of a true friend and I am grateful to you for it. I had endeavoured to use generally plain and straightforward language and to avoid "phrasing", and I am sincerely obliged to you for pointing out to me that I have not succeeded for I shall now exert myself much more in that direction. Tell me whom you consider a really good model of despatch style? — I am most anxious to write plain, good English.¹⁵

Arthur also tried to influence Odo's writing style, but he was a less patient teacher than Layard: '[Your despatches] are in a strange un-English style, but with no faults of grammar ... As your business is to write, you should do it well and the only way is to read often, daily, some of the great writers of English prose'.¹⁶ Odo obviously succeeded in improving his style during the 1860s and proudly quoted from a letter Gladstone had sent to Clarendon: 'My dear Clarendon, whenever there is an Odo in the box, satisfaction instantly predominates'.¹⁷ Even a Tory seemed to appreciate Odo's despatches. In 1859, Arthur passed on a surprising compliment to Odo:

I met Disraeli walking to the House who instantly took my arm. He has done this before and it makes me very shy for when we get to the House members stare awfully. But what I wanted to say is this: he told he often had occasion to see your despatches and approved highly of them.¹⁸

There is a recognisable difference between Odo's despatches and those of his colleagues. Apart from his distinctive writing style, many other diplomats were not as able at condensing events as he was and often bored their readers at the FO with useless trivia. Russell had recognised this common mistake during his work at the FO. Many of the incoming despatches were, in his opinion, a sheer waste of paper, never read or used: 'I was deeply struck by the inconvenience arising from the fact that our representatives abroad are given to writing an innumerable quantity of useless dispatches which take up men's time to no purpose whatever'.¹⁹

Odo's thorough education made him approach his diplomatic work in a similar way to that of a scholar writing a paper. He did research on each subject, from the history of the Roman church to the problems of the Polish minority in Germany, by asking as many experts as possible for advice, reading widely on the topics and then writing everything down in as clear a form as possible.²⁰ This was much more than one could expect from the average diplomat. Russell himself was appalled by the way his colleagues in Rome approached their work. To Layard he wrote:

It takes time and trouble to be really well informed in Rome as you know and I do not wish to imitate my colleagues and send you volumes of useless *on dits* which in the end only mislead the home government. I marvel at the trash the R.R. of France, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Prussia, Bavaria, etc., etc., send home and to all appearances believe in.²¹

Every minor despatch was crafted by Odo with great precision, going through several drafts. There is a similarity to Bismarck's well-honed, precise instructions to his ambassadors (which became public during the Arnim trial and impressed Odo considerably).

Another important lesson Russell learned over the years in his relations with the FO headquarters was that, although faults were tolerated, disloyalty was not. In the following chapters it will be shown that during his long career Odo, naturally, made several mistakes. The FO was most accepting of such errors, often without any great consequences for the culprit. In David Hare's play *Plenty*, the Chief Clerk at the FO makes a point that is as valid today as it was a hundred years ago:

It's not enough to be clever, everyone here is clever, everyone is gifted, everyone is diligent. These are simply the minimum skills. Far more important is an attitude of mind. Along the corridor I boast a colleague who in 1945 drafted a memorandum to the government advising them not to accept the Volkswagen works as war reparation, because Volkswagen plainly had no commercial future Unlikely as it may seem, that man has risen to the very, very top. He has forbearance. He is gracious. He is sociable I am saying that certain qualities are valued here above a simple gift of being right or wrong. Qualities sometimes hard to define.²²

These rather vague gifts are today fashionably labelled by psychologists as 'emotional intelligence'. This is the type of intelligence that makes it possible for people to survive in new social environments, to build up human relationships and a system of communication that supports them on a personal as well as on a professional level. If we look at Odo's growing social success during his postings in Rome and Berlin and his down-to-earth approach to problems, one could say that he was a master of emotional psychology, without necessarily having the most analytical head in the FO. He succeeded in giving his British and

foreign colleagues the impression that he was not evasive on subjects, but sincerely willing to provide the information they were after. He perfected his uncle's advice in that direction: 'Lord Russell told me he would have given me the same instructions as Talleyrand gave a young French diplomat "parlez vous beaucoup — mais ne dites rien"'.²³

Apart from having mentors in the FO and amongst politicians, it was also becoming increasingly important in the second half of the 19th century to be on good terms with the British press. Odo realised this vital need to keep up 'his stock' at home, and to learn to humour journalists (in Versailles he got to know his namesake, the *Times* correspondent William Russell; in Berlin he later helped the British journalist Kingston to get out of custody). Odo's friend Morier seemed to be quite jealous of these close contacts with journalists: 'to remain in such a profession is suicide — of course this does not apply to you who have the good fortune ... to be the pet of the FO, of the *Spectator*, the *Daily Telegraph* and generally of the public'.²⁴ Still, over the years, the press would occasionally criticise Russell's actions. In such instances, he immediately wrote defensive letters to his brother Hastings, asserting the correctness of his actions.

After his periods in Vienna and at the FO, Odo also spent some time in Paris. His first assignment to France in 1852, which only lasted a few months, was pushed for by his mother, who was a good friend of the ambassador in Paris, Lord Cowley. Odo yielded to this second experiment abroad, but was not pleased. To Arthur he wrote:

One year at home has opened my eyes to the ... discomforts of the continent, never was I so struck by, so aware of the superiority, the greatness of England. When you [Arthur] go abroad again you will feel what I have felt — we could not before for we did not know our country. 10 days in Paris have opened my eyes again. I have seen our diplomats that I had forgotten, I have been able to compare our Statesmen with Foreign ones — I have compared the different corresponding classes with each other, the institutions and the state of society ... I feel, I understand what position I can occupy with time and by labour at home, I understand how much chance had done for me and I feel that it is my own country I must study and must know to attain my point and occupy the position that I may one day enjoy ... — I feel my ignorance more than ever and I mean to study.²⁵

In France, two crises came at once for Odo: he felt homesick realising how much he missed his own country, and again he doubted whether he had made the right decision as far as his professional life was concerned. He was also deeply unhappy about his private life, which was dominated by his ever-demanding mother. In later years Odo would long for a few days holiday in Paris (even though it was a Republic by then), but in the 1850s he resented the newly established

regime of Napoleon III. After the *coup d'état* of 2 December 1851, the opposition had been suppressed and critics of Napoleon III imprisoned.²⁶ The majority of parties and classes quickly aligned themselves with the new man and seemed to eagerly rally around the Bonapartist sun. For Russell such 'moral insanity' was repellent:

The state of French Society from a moral point of view, is very beastly and the only difference between the so called good and bad society that I can see is that the bad shows and gives itself as it is, while the good attempts to look virtuous, de facto they are exactly in the same state of moral development, I had a false idea of Paris corruption, it is much worse than I thought, it disgusts me!²⁷

A personal encounter with Napoleon did not help much either, but did at least produce a typical Russell *bon mot*. When asked how he had felt facing the French Emperor, Odo had commented: '*J'ai senti comme l'empereur, que j'étais le neveu de mon oncle*'²⁸ [I felt, like the Emperor, that I am my uncle's son]. Odo's estimation of monarchs was, in his younger years, quite critical. Although he made an exception as far as his own Queen was concerned, the Russell family trait to be suspicious of monarchical power was deeply rooted in him. Napoleon III was, in his opinion, a power-greedy actor and the Emperor Franz Joseph, his former playfellow, was also sceptically scrutinised. The young Franz Joseph of the 1850s was far from being the seemingly paternal father figure of the 1900s. On the contrary, to Odo he looked like a most obstinate ruler who was still unsure about his place in the world and therefore constantly tried to prove his new-won power:

The little Emperor is full of courage and obstinacy! How can he be anything else. No one dares say a word of advice! He delights in review — and has them at a 4 hours notice once or twice a week — much to the disgust of soldiers and officers in winter. His Majesty insisted on having a review during the hard frost — he was advised against it, but uselessly — the review took place. Two *carassiers* fell and broke their necks! The Camarilla concealed this event from fear of giving pain to HM. During a review, an *anständiger Weisswaschwarenhandlungscommis* [a decent employee of a linen and washing powder shop] excited by the sight passed the Emperor smoking and forgot to take off his hat — he was taken into custody, flogged in prison and condemned to 2 years *schweren Kerker* [a severe prison sentence]. This created bad blood of course.²⁹

Franz Joseph was ingrained with the reactionary beliefs of his mother Sophie and Count Grünne. Grünne was a military man, who believed that the Austrian people should be ruled with the same methods as was an army. Any form of culture (music, literature and especially theatre) sprang, according to Grünne, from subversive liberal sources and was therefore highly dangerous. Franz Joseph copied this narrow-mindedness

and felt reluctant to go to see a performance of Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* on the centenary of the poet's birth because 'we have better things and people to celebrate'.³⁰ (It is no wonder that Franz Joseph's wife, the capricious but artistic Elisabeth, would go berserk in such an environment.) Despite his criticism of Franz Joseph, Odo also saw the tragic side in the life of this young Emperor who had to carry so many responsibilities and seemed to be alone with them. This became apparent in April 1852 when Prince Schwarzenberg, who had been Franz Joseph's greatest support, died of a heart attack. Odo, in true melodramatic style, reported home what he had heard about this from a friend at court:

The Emperor rushed in to the room ... he flew to the Prince's bed and seized his hand and finding his best friend and faithful servant was dead, passed his hand over his eyes and nearly fainted! A second later he went down on his knees and prayed silently for quarter of an hour ... then he got up looking deadly pale, kissed the cheek of the dead man, proceeded to his writing table, opened a drawer, took some papers he seemed to know and concealed them in his pocket — then he locked carefully every other drawer, took the keys and went home. The Emperor is to be pitied, he has lost a friend to whom the House of Habsburg owes its present strength. Austria has lost a Minister, who putting aside the awful blunders he committed internally certainly understood her interests in Germany and had he lived some years longer, might, by his system have made all Germany obey Austria's will and wish 'de facto'. Prussia has lost her most dangerous, her greatest enemy — whether she will understand how to make use of her good luck is now the question.³¹

Prophetic words indeed.

In 1854 Russell was transferred from Paris to Constantinople. Both cities were at the time the only two British First Class Embassies and it seemed perfect training for him to gain experience in them. While his two short postings in 'fickle' Paris had been, in his opinion, a failure, Constantinople was an instant success. This was certainly unexpected by everyone who knew Odo's new chief. Lord Stratford de Redcliffe was called 'Buyuk Eltchi' or Elchi (the great ambassador)³² both by the Turkish and by Odo and he was in every way charismatic. However, his management skills, as far as his staff was concerned, left something to be desired. Hammond, Lord Clarendon, Lord Cowley and Field Marshal Rose had never managed to get on with him. Yet from the moment they had first met by chance in 1852, Odo was immediately taken by Stratford: 'It is long since I have gazed upon so clever a face'.³³ Once settled in Constantinople, Odo quickly became an honorary member of the small club of people who managed to get on with Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. From the start Russell was determined to turn this posting into a success:

I was firmly resolved, on coming out here, to do all in my power and to leave no means untried to be as useful to Lord Stratford as I had tried to be to my former chiefs ... I beat about for a long time in the dark, but my resolution was always before me.³⁴

It was Odo's perceptive analysis of people's character that made him react to Stratford's outbursts in the right way. He found out that though the ambassador 'boils over like a kettle',³⁵ he soon calmed down again and, momentarily, even felt ashamed and apologetic about his behaviour. He could also be generous as far as money was concerned, but in return he expected entire submission. Criticisms of any kind were not welcomed. Odo accepted these terms and was soon indispensable. He drafted despatches that were praised and not altered at all by his chief — a new experience that helped him to gain more self-esteem. It almost seemed as if Stratford had long waited for a soul-mate such as Odo and now could not refrain from confiding in him. The emotional dependence went so far that Odo was not even allowed to be ill: 'Elchi won't even read his dispatches and letters if I am not by his side to listen to him; I have literally known him allow the correspondence of 4 days to accumulate unopened and unsealed because I was in bed with a headache. *Quis credat?*'³⁶ Of course, the situation at the embassy was a special one at the time and, since the outbreak of the Crimean War Stratford needed all the support he could get from his staff. The Elchi (who had romantic feelings for Poland) was a resolved enemy of Russia. The Russian threat to Turkey, and its consequences for the security of the road to India, were again and again drummed into Russell. The great ambassador wanted an absolute victory over his Russian foes and went so far as to try to undermine the Vienna conference of 1855 to which John Russell had been appointed. Instead of furnishing Lord Russell with all relevant information, Stratford seemed slow to fulfil the instructions of the FO. The obvious reason was, according to Clarendon, that: 'Stratford won't allow the Porte to make peace — on the contrary, he doesn't think we have made sacrifices enough and he wants a much more magnificent war and a guarantee for the remainder of the Turkish loan'.³⁷ After the end of the Crimean War, Stratford favoured a harsher peace settlement, a demand that, if it had been successful, would have prevented Russell from embarking on his famous Black Sea mission 14 years later.

Although Odo stood loyally by Stratford, he was not that much of a hawk himself. Of course, he did not feel much sympathy for Russia, either politically or emotionally. As a Whig he despised the Russian reactionary system. None of his close friends were Russians and, like

the Prussian Crown Princess, he often used the word 'Russian' for everything negative. But his approach to Russia remained pragmatic. While he would successfully use Stratford's hawk-like guise to bully Bismarck during the Black Sea Question in 1870, 5 years later, during the Eastern Question of 1875, his desire for mediation in the region was greater than his dismissiveness of the Pan Slavists. In the 1850s, however, the male bonding between Stratford and Russell did not come to an end because of political divergences over Russia, but on rather trivial grounds. Odo fell in love with Stratford's daughter Catherine. The great Elchi, like every Victorian father would have done, forbade the marriage for pecuniary reasons.³⁸ After this incident, it was clear that Russell could not remain in Constantinople. In 1857 he packed his bags and left for Washington. Leaving a first-class embassy to go to a former colony seemed at the time a step backwards for a promising diplomat. In a way, this move illustrates that Russell did not have a perfect masterplan for his career; on the contrary, in the 1850s he was by no means a young man in a hurry.

In Constantinople Russell had read every Greek history book he could get 'hold of. In Washington, however, he read not only for educational reasons but also as a form of escapism: 'I am reading a great deal now', Odo wrote to his mother from Washington, 'it is the only thing I care for, my books and my fireside. My colleagues and society bore me to death and I avoid them like the plague'.³⁹ His new chief, Lord Napier, was a far less inspiring figure than Stratford. Lady Napier also failed to become a friend of Russell. The Napier children, when asked the tactful question whether they preferred their father or their mother, were quick to answer that 'the person they loved most was Odo Russell'.⁴⁰ Naturally, Lady Napier was none too happy about this and barely talked to Russell afterwards. Because the 'family embassy' at Washington turned out to be a cold one indeed, Odo turned to his natural family resources again. Arthur was invited to America and brought Russell 'civilising conversation'.⁴¹ Together they went on an adventure trip, visiting the, at the time fairly tourist free, Niagara Falls and — always family-conscious — the site of the Battle of Brandywine, where Lady William's father had lost a leg during the Revolutionary War. It was a relief to get away from Washington for Odo, who was convinced that the 'horrid' living conditions in the capital ruined his health:

The houses in Washington are all low and people not only live generally on the ground floor but even a good deal under ground, in what they call the basement, because it is cool in summer and warm in winter. The houses are all miserably

small, without water and without water closets, the ladies cack in pots, which the nigger carries away, and the men go to a dung hill or to the stables at the back of their houses, all this is unhealthy in hot weather for there are no drains and no sewers. ... Amongst these is the President's mansion or White House which is also thought to be unhealthy.⁴²

Yet, despite all his complaints about America, Russell noted that something within society was about to change dramatically and this change interested him: 'There is, as I have said before, nothing whatever to like in this country ... but the political and social condition of the country is immensely interesting and I hope to acquire much useful knowledge here'.⁴³ It was obvious for him that the slave-problem, for one, had to be solved. As an experiment Russell bought a slave and tried to treat him well by paying him an extra wage. He soon realised that most of the money would go to the original slave owner and that the whole enterprise was more or less in vain.⁴⁴ He decided that the whole system was rotten and that this was mainly because the Americans had what today would be called an 'attitude problem'. Some of the highest echelons of American society seemed to think nothing of abusing Black people:

Last year a member of Congress at one of the principal hotels here ... shot the waiter with his revolver in the *Speisesaal* [dining room] because he was not sufficiently civil. The waiter was a Negro and died on the spot — everyone thought the member of Congress quite right and he is a great favourite in society here.⁴⁵

That such a violent man was celebrated rather than condemned was, in Odo's opinion, due to the irritating gun culture that the Americans indulged in:

People in this country depend ... on their revolvers for protection. In the hotels a printed paper in every room invites you to lock your door and give money or precious objects to the Innkeeper — for nothing can be answered for and Americans who call on you for an evening visit will place their revolver in a corner with their hat and gloves as a thing of course. It takes some time to get accustomed to all this.⁴⁶

Another thing that seems not to have changed in Washington's political society for the last 150 years is that, 'you have to be constantly on your guard when you speak to [people] for everything you say and do not say is published in the papers'.⁴⁷ Odo also could not come to terms with the darker sides of American night-life. Having lived in capitals such as Paris and London, it is surprising that this scene had escaped him before, but in America, prostitution must have been a much more obvious and straightforward profession:



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the native American prefers hotels because he passes his day at the bar drinking spirits all day long and discussing the events of the day. At New York the hotels are excellent — but here [in Washington] they are atrocious — known to be worse than any all over the United States — indeed they are all used here by naughty women as bad houses.⁴⁸

After such a Sodom and Gomorrah, a transfer to Rome seemed to be the only alternative for the virtuous Russell.

British relations with the Pope had not been cordial since 1534. Though Lord Melbourne had once played with the idea of sending an official envoy to the Vatican, the penalty of *Praemunire*, i.e. the 'punishment of anyone acknowledging the Pope of Rome',⁴⁹ made this a difficult endeavour. Odo would later explain to a junior diplomat that interest in accumulating information about the Vatican had increased when, in the 1820s, a British secretary of the Legation in Munich went to Italy for a cure and stayed there. Though he died despite the cure, his political reports were found useful and the FO decided to send a successor. Officially he was accredited to the British Legation in Florence and sent only as chargé d'affaires to Rome. The first one to be successfully deployed in this manner was Henry Petre, followed by Lord Minto, Lord Lyons and eventually by Russell in 1858.⁵⁰ As with his predecessors, Russell was first accredited to his town of birth, Florence. When in 1860 Tuscany was annexed, the farce continued and Odo was accredited for a while to Naples. In practice he never lived in either place and was always throughout in Rome.⁵¹

From the time of his arrival, Italy changed Russell both outwardly and inwardly. He was now 30 years old and had decided to grow a beard to look more mature. According to Lady Paget he succeeded in resembling 'the image of a German professor'.⁵² For the first time he was the head of a mission (admittedly without any staff) and he must have felt that his early apprentice years were over. From a cultural point of view he could not have been in a more stimulating place. There was art all around him and he tried to surround himself with creative people. Over the years, for example, he got to know, and to charm, Elizabeth Browning. He not entirely truthfully praised her hero Napoleon III, which prompted another Italian tourist, Henry James, to write 'it worked in her as a malady and a doom'.⁵³ Unfortunately, Odo did not meet another expert of doom, Ibsen, who in the 1860s was on vacation in Italy to calm his nerves. It is not clear whether Odo got to know the interesting American visitors to Rome, W.D. Howells and Nathaniel Hawthorne. However, he was introduced to one of the most famous figures in Italy, Franz Liszt, later Abbé Liszt. Russell's good

tenor voice (constantly worked on by his eccentric Italian teacher Salvi) gave him the entree to the musical scene of Rome and he was even invited to sing for the Pope.⁵⁴ He was also involved with an amateur theatre group and became a most wanted leading man. This was caused more by his nationality than by his looks. The Italian princesses who produced the plays did not under any circumstances want to include Frenchmen as actors.⁵⁵

As usual Russell did not only mix with his class, but was also interested in what the average Italian thought. His servant 'Nazzareno', a Cavour supporter, was an entertaining yet often unreliable source. Nazzareno claimed that he knew Napoleon III personally and had once even worked for him as a spy. Whether this was true or not, Odo seemed fascinated by the idea and even learned something from his servant about the Roman criminal classes (Nazzareno seemed to be on suspiciously close terms with the pickpockets of the neighbourhood). Murders on the Corso were nothing unusual at the time and Odo, in true Victorian fashion, liked to 'revel in a good disaster'.⁵⁶ The British consuls in Rome (first Charles Newton and then Joseph Severn) had many gruesome stories with which to regale Odo. Their reports on cases of eloping British girls read today like Forster's novel *A Room with a View*. The sun and the romantic surroundings seemed to work a spell on British ladies and they ran away with Italian men on a regular basis. As Noel Blakiston shows, some very daring ones even tried to live by themselves in Rome. In one case, a newly blossomed British middle-class girl got completely out of hand and started to receive Italian men in her apartment until the police put a stop to it.⁵⁷

As was the case during his previous posting in America, Russell again experienced a tense social and political situation. Shortly after his arrival, on 19 December 1858, he had a conversation with Cavour in Turin and listened to his plans for unification (almost half a year earlier, on 21 July 1858, Cavour had met Napoleon III at Plombières to decide on a war with Austria). In a frank discussion with Russell, Cavour predicted war within a year: 'the best campaigning season begins in May. Austria will attack us then'.⁵⁸ When Russell replied that if Piedmont were to attack Austria first, it would lose the sympathy of Europe, Cavour asserted '[we will] make Austria attack us'.⁵⁹ Although Russell dutifully passed on the details of this conversation to the FO he was, until he could be convinced otherwise, of the opinion that Cavour was a dreamer.⁶⁰ Russell's doubts should not, however, give one the impression that he was against Italian unity as such. He did welcome the idea of a united Italy (in 1866 he would write enthusiastically: 'Venetia has been ceded; Italy is made, a great fact in

history”), yet remained a careful commentator — unlike his colleague in Turin, Sir James Hudson, who, as a keen Cavour supporter had overstepped his instructions. The main reason for Russell’s cautiousness was of course that if he had shown too much sympathy with the unity movement his excellent contacts to the Pope and Cardinal Antonelli would have suffered. The French-friendly Cardinal Secretary of State, Antonelli, was considered to be the *eminence grise* behind the Pope and was soon a good acquaintance of Russell. Like Cardinal Manning he obtained a special dispensation from Pius to talk to Odo ‘openly’: ‘There is a great advantage, *mon cher* Russell, in your unofficial position here. We can speak freely to each other; I can say things to you I could not say to your colleagues’.⁶¹ According to Russell, Antonelli was in reality only ‘the Pope’s best servant’⁶² and not as influential as many people thought. To Russell, the Pope himself, who would later be one of Bismarck’s greatest adversaries, was ‘of firm and independent character; his heart is charitable and benevolent and his mind is clear and logical; he means what he says’.⁶³ Pius IX, flatteringly, called Odo ‘*mio caro* Russell’ and ‘*mio figlio*’, and sometimes even displayed a great sense of humour. On one occasion, when he was displeased with the British government, he made this clear to Russell in a quite unobvious way. Odo had come for an interview to the Pope’s summer villa, Castel Gandolfo, and as usual wanted to kneel down briefly before the talk started. However, Pius kept him pressed down and Russell had to remain in that uncomfortable position during the whole conversation. It ended with Pius saying: ‘Ah, my son. I wish you were a Catholic. I should send you for a fortnight’s penance to the monastery at Genzano. It would do you a world of good’.⁶⁴ During another incident in July 1862, Russell, however, did not seem to get the joke. The Pope, whose position in Rome was again endangered, had asked whether he would be welcome in England. The exact words seem to have been: ‘Farewell, dear Mr Russell; who knows that one day I shall not be compelled to ask you for your hospitality’.⁶⁵ The fact that Odo took this statement seriously and passed it on to the FO led to a few embarrassing diplomatic exchanges. Another utterance by the Pope was also turned to Russell’s disadvantage. Members of the Pope’s inner circle had complained that he treated a Protestant (Russell) too well. This prompted Pius to say: ‘But he is a very bad Protestant’. Jowett quoted this joke against Russell in the context of the infallibility debate: ‘I doubt whether [Russell] has a comprehensive grasp of things; he is too much within ecclesiastical circles. The Pope said of him that he was not a good Catholic, but he was a bad Protestant, which I think expresses his political [point of view]’.⁶⁶ Such criticism of Russell started in 1870,

after the declaration of infallibility by Pius IX. When the infallibility dogma was discussed in the Vatican Council of 1870 there was opposition to it even within the church ranks. Russell naturally took a professional interest in the Pope’s declaration and the events surrounding it, but thanks to his friendship with the Catholic Acton, he also developed a personal curiosity in the spiritual uncertainties that the dogma caused for the faithful.⁶⁷ Acton himself had close ties with the church leaders of the German Catholics, who lobbied against the declaration of infallibility, one of them being his old mentor Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger. When Acton had first studied in Munich at the age of 16 (the Church of England had at the time made it impossible for Catholics to study at Cambridge or Oxford),⁶⁸ Döllinger had taught him theology and encouraged his pupil’s ultimately ruinous passion for collecting books (which is today the Cambridge University Library’s gain). When he became ambassador to Berlin, Odo would sometimes lose patience with Acton and Döllinger’s endless struggles with the Catholic Church hierarchy.⁶⁹ By then, Odo had heard all the arguments exhaustively for, after all, his Catholic friends in England had been critical of the Vatican’s policies for over a decade: ‘When I read Acton, ... and Henry Petre’s letters I cannot but think that with such elements of discord and disobedience in the church, it was the Pope’s duty to proclaim himself infallible and send them all to Hell!’⁷⁰ One should not of course conclude from this remark that Odo agreed with the Pontiff’s new dogma. He would always claim that the ‘Pope had made his church incredulous by the proclamation ... of his own infallibility’.⁷¹ However, this was, in Odo’s opinion, of interest to the ‘faithful only’.

Winifried Taffs claims that Russell was in a unique position to understand the inner life of a Catholic because his mother was one. It will be shown in the *Kulturkampf* chapter that this is incorrect. Still, after having partly grown up in Catholic countries such as Austria, Italy and France, he was not prejudiced against Catholics. This in itself was seen by some strong-minded British Protestants as a major sin. In his famous book *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey portrayed Odo as the willing puppet of the ‘evil’ English Archbishop (later Cardinal) Manning. For Lytton Strachey the infallibility story was a simple one to tell: Manning despised Odo’s friend Acton (‘such men are all vanity, they have the inflation of German professors and the ruthless talk of undergraduates’⁷²) and tried to alienate Russell from Acton by getting the former under his own spell: ‘soon poor Mr Russell was little better than a fly buzzing in gossamer’.⁷³ Here, Lytton Strachey was clearly underestimating Russell’s intelligence. He is not alone. Manning’s first

biographer, Purcell, also seems to be under the illusion that Odo had become a great sympathiser with everything Catholic.⁷⁴ In truth, Manning, like Antonelli, was for Russell mainly an important source of information which it would have been unwise to ignore. That Manning flattered himself by thinking that he was completely supported by Russell in his fight in support of the infallibility dogma, only shows what a clever diplomat Odo could be (S. Adshead supports this theory: 'though Odo did not like "Ultramontane fanatics" he was simply good at 'drawing Manning out')'.⁷⁵ Still, he did not lead Manning on completely: 'You know that my earnest wish is to do justice to all parties', Odo wrote to the cardinal, 'and for that I require knowledge'.⁷⁶ In relation to the infallibility issue Russell advised his government not to intervene for three main reasons. First, he knew that the Pope would not waver and that the opposition, whether right or wrong, would in the end be overruled by the Italian bishops anyway. Second, at this particular juncture in world affairs, with the Pope gradually losing more and more of his temporal power, Odo saw the fight not as a religious one like Acton and Döllinger had done, but as a political one. The dogma was necessary for the immediate survival of the Church. Finally, Odo was of the opinion that after Pius IX's death, as a reaction to the dogma, a more liberal faction within the Church would gain power.⁷⁷

Gladstone, who was kept informed about the debates in Rome by Acton, did not see matters Russell's way and pressed for a diplomatic intervention. This was successful in so far as the Cabinet decided to commission Russell to orally support the French Government's protests in Rome during April 1870. Odo followed these instructions half-heartedly. He won over Lord Clarendon who, though he personally rejected the infallibility dogma, was too much of a realist to start a quarrel with the Pope. Odo's prediction that the approval of the dogma would be passed easily turned out to be correct. Many of its critics preferred to leave Rome to avoid the humiliation of being beaten. After two months and 50 sessions the Vatican Council met for the last time on 18 July 1870. In the end, 533 members voted in favour and only two against the dogma.

The effects that this fight had on Odo's friends were mixed: Gladstone poured out his frustrations in his book on *Vaticanism*. Döllinger was excommunicated by the Pope. Acton only escaped this fate, according to his biographer Roland Hill, because he was so well connected.⁷⁸ (Here Russell's influence might have played a part too.)

Although Acton had not been pleased with Odo's 'realist approach' to the dogma, their friendship was never in serious danger. Throughout the struggle they were seen walking on the Pinicio together. On one

occasion they saw Pius IX blessing kneeling people. When the Pope recognised Odo and Emily Russell he gave them a special benediction, but then noticed that Acton stood next to them: 'and suddenly [the Pope] changed his hand from the vertical to the horizontal position, he made that rapid shaking movement of the first and second fingers by which the Italian signifies negation. No blessing for you, my friend, was indicated by the gesture with painful distinctness'.⁷⁹

Odo departed from Rome before the last Council session in July 1870. He would always remember his posting in Italy as the most fulfilled time of his life. James Rennell Rodd recounts in his memoirs a walk in Russell's garden in Potsdam:

I [observed] to him that the miniature Dome of the Garrison Church as seen framed in the trees reminded me of the form of the dome of St Peter's, and he said that it had actually been built on those lines and that he often came and sat in that part of the garden and played with the illusion that he was once more looking from the Pinicio into the Roman sunset.⁸⁰

Odo had once quoted Goethe to Lady Salisbury to express his love for the place: 'If you have seen Rome once you will never be entirely unhappy'.⁸¹