

promises and honeyed words, to which the prince replied in language which at once informed the emperor that the time for dalliance had passed.

"I fear," said the Prince of Anhalt, in words which sovereigns are not accustomed to hear, "that this answer will rather tend to prolong the dispute than to tranquillize the united princes. I am bound in duty to represent to your imperial majesty the dangerous flame which I now see bursting forth in Germany. Your counselors are ill adapted to extinguish this rising flame—those counselors who have brought you into such imminent danger, and who have nearly destroyed public confidence, credit and prosperity throughout your dominions. I must likewise exhort your imperial majesty to take all important affairs into consideration yourself, intreating you to recollect the example of Julius Cæsar, who, had he not neglected to read the note presented to him as he was going to the capitol, would not have received the twenty wounds which caused his death."

This last remark threw the emperor into a paroxysm of terror. He had long been trembling from the apprehension of assassination. This allusion to Julius Cæsar he considered an intimation that his hour was at hand. His terror was so great that Prince Anhalt had to assure him, again and again, that he intended no such menace, and that he was not aware that any conspiracy was thought of any where, for his death. The emperor was, however, so alarmed that he promised any thing and every thing. He doubtless intended to fulfill his promise, but subsequent troubles arose which absorbed all his remaining feeble energies, and obliterated past engagements from his mind.

Matthias was watching all the events with the intensest eagerness, as affording a brilliant prospect to him, to obtain the crown of Bohemia, and the scepter of the empire. This ambition consumed his days and his nights, verifying the adage, "uneasy lies the head which wears a crown."

CHAPTER XIV.

RHODOLPH III. AND MATTHIAS.

FROM 1609 TO 1612.

DIFFICULTIES AS TO THE SUCCESSION.—HOSTILITY OF HENRY IV. TO THE HOUSE OF AUSTRIA.—ASSASSINATION OF HENRY IV.—SIMILARITY IN SULLY'S AND NAPOLEON'S PLANS.—EXULTATION OF THE CATHOLICS.—THE BROTHERS' COMPACT.—HOW RHODOLPH KEPT IT.—SEIZURE OF PRAGUE.—RHODOLPH A PRISONER.—THE KING'S ABDICATION.—CONDITIONS ATTACHED TO THE CROWN.—RAGE OF RHODOLPH.—MATTHIAS ELECTED KING.—THE EMPEROR'S RESIDENCE.—REJOICINGS OF THE PROTESTANTS.—REPLY OF THE AMBASSADORS.—THE NUREMBERG DIET.—THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL.—RHODOLPH'S HUMILIATION AND DEATH.

AND now suddenly arose another question which threatened to involve all Europe in war. The Duke of Cleves, Juliers, and Berg died without issue. This splendid duchy, or rather combination of duchies, spread over a territory of several thousand square miles, and was inhabited by over a million of inhabitants. There were many claimants to the succession, and the question was so singularly intricate and involved, that there were many who seemed to have an equal right to the possession. The emperor, by virtue of his imperial authority, issued an edict, putting the territory in sequestration, till the question should be decided by the proper tribunals, and, in the meantime, placing the territory in the hands of one of his own family as administrator.

This act, together with the known wishes of Spain to prevent so important a region, lying near the Netherlands, from falling into the hands of the Protestants, immediately changed the character of the dispute into a religious contest, and, as by magic, all Europe wheeled into line on the one side or the other. Every other question was lost sight of, in the all-

absorbing one, Shall the duchy fall into the hands of the Protestants or the Catholics?

Henry IV. of France zealously espoused the cause of the Protestants. He was very hostile to the house of Austria for the assistance it had lent to that celebrated league which for so many years had deluged France in blood, and kept Henry IV. from the throne; and he was particularly anxious to humble that proud power. Though Henry IV., after fighting for many years the battles of Protestantism, had, from motives of policy, avowed the Romish faith, he could never forget his mother's instructions, his early predilections and his old friends and supporters, the Protestants; and his sympathies were always with them. Henry IV., as sagacious and energetic as he was ambitious, saw that he could never expect a more favorable moment to strike the house of Austria than the one then presented. The Emperor Rhodolph was weak, and universally unpopular, not only with his own subjects, but throughout Germany. The Protestants were all inimical to him, and he was involved in desperate antagonism with his energetic brother Matthias. Still he was a formidable foe, as, in a war involving religious questions, he could rally around him all the Catholic powers of Europe.

Henry IV., preparatory to pouring his troops into the German empire, entered into secret negotiations with England, Denmark, Switzerland, Venice, whom he easily purchased with offers of plunder, and with the Protestant princes of minor power on the continent. There were not a few, indifferent upon religious matters, who were ready to engage in any enterprise which would humble Spain and Austria. Henry collected a large force on the frontiers of Germany, and, with ample materials of war, was prepared, at a given signal, to burst into the territory of the empire.

The Catholics watched these movements with alarm, and began also to organize. Rhodolph, who, from his position as emperor, should have been their leader, was a wretched hy

pochondriac, trembling before imaginary terrors, a prey to the most gloomy superstitions, and still concealed in the secret chambers of his palace. He was a burden to his party, and was regarded by them with contempt. Matthias was watching him, as the tiger watches its prey. To human eyes it would appear that the destiny of the house of Austria was sealed. Just at that critical point, one of those unexpected events occurred, which so often rise to thwart the deepest laid schemes of man.

On the 14th of May, 1610, Henry IV. left the Louvre in his carriage to visit his prime minister, the illustrious Sully, who was sick. The city was thronged with the multitudes assembled to witness the triumphant entry of the queen, who had just been crowned. It was a beautiful spring morning, and the king sat in his carriage with several of his nobles, the windows of his carriage being drawn up. Just as the carriage was turning up from the rue St. Honore into the rue Ferronnerie, the passage was found blocked up by two carts. The moment the carriage stopped, a man sprung from the crowd upon one of the spokes of the wheel, and grasping a part of the coach with his right hand, with his left plunged a dagger to the hilt into the heart of Henry IV. Instantly withdrawing it, he repeated the blow, and with nervous strength again penetrated the heart. The king dropped dead into the arms of his friends, the blood gushing from the wound and from his mouth. The wretched assassin, a fanatic monk, Francis Ravailac, was immediately seized by the guard. With difficulty they protected him from being torn in pieces by the populace. He was reserved for a more terrible fate, and was subsequently put to death by the most frightful tortures human ingenuity could devise.

The poniard of the assassin changed the fate of Europe. Henry IV. had formed one of the grandest plans which ever entered the human mind. Though it is not at all probable that he could have executed it, the attempt, with the immense

means he had at his disposal, and with his energy as a warrior and diplomatist, would doubtless have entirely altered the aspect of human affairs. There was very much in his plan to secure the approval of all those enlightened men who were mourning over the incessant and cruel wars with which Europe was ever desolated. His intention was to reconstruct Europe into fifteen States, as nearly uniform in size and power as possible. These States were, according to their own choice, to be monarchical or republican, and were to be associated on a plan somewhat resembling that of the United States of North America. In each State the majority were to decide which religion, whether Protestant or Catholic, should be established. The Catholics were all to leave the Protestant States, and assemble in their own. In like manner the Protestants were to abandon the Catholic kingdoms. This was the very highest point to which the spirit of toleration had then attained. All Pagans and Mohammedans were to be driven out of Europe into Asia. A civil tribunal was to be organized to settle all national difficulties, so that there should be no more war. There was to be a standing army belonging to the confederacy, to preserve the peace, and enforce its decrees, consisting of two hundred and seventy thousand infantry, fifty thousand cavalry, two hundred cannon, and one hundred and twenty ships of war.

This plan was by no means so chimerical as at first glance it might seem to be. The sagacious Sully examined it in all its details, and gave it his cordial support. The coöperation of two or three of the leading powers would have invested the plan with sufficient moral and physical support to render its success even probable. But the single poniard of the monk Ravallac arrested it all.

The Emperor Napoleon I. had formed essentially the same plan, with the same humane desire to put an end to interminable wars; but he had adopted far nobler principles of toleration.

“One of my great plans,” said he at St. Helena, “was the rejoining, the concentration of those same geographical nations which have been disunited and parcelled out by revolution and policy. There are dispersed in Europe upwards of thirty millions of French, fifteen millions of Spaniards, fifteen millions of Italians, and thirty millions of Germans. It was my intention to incorporate these several people each into one nation. It would have been a noble thing to have advanced into posterity with such a train, and attended by the blessings of future ages. I felt myself worthy of this glory.

“After this summary simplification, it would have been possible to indulge the chimera of the *beau idéal* of civilization. In this state of things there would have been some chance of establishing in every country a unity of codes, of principles, of opinions, of sentiments, views and interests. Then perhaps, by the help of the universal diffusion of knowledge, one might have thought of attempting in the great human family the application of the American Congress, or the Amphictyons of Greece. What a perspective of power, grandeur, happiness and prosperity would thus have appeared.

“The concentration of thirty or forty millions of Frenchmen was completed and perfected. That of fifteen millions of Spaniards was nearly accomplished. Because I did not subdue the Spaniards, it will henceforth be argued that they were invincible, for nothing is more common than to convert accident into principle. But the fact is that they were actually conquered, and, at the very moment when they escaped me, the Cortes of Cadiz were secretly in treaty with me. They were not delivered either by their own resistance or by the efforts of the English, but by the reverses which I sustained at different points, and, above all, by the error I committed in transferring my whole forces to the distance of three thousand miles from them. Had it not been for this, the Spanish government would have been shortly consolidated, the public mind would have been tranquilized, and hostile parties

would have been rallied together. Three or four years would have restored the Spaniards to profound peace and brilliant prosperity. They would have become a compact nation, and I should have well deserved their gratitude, for I should have saved them from the tyranny by which they are now oppressed, and the terrible agitations which await them.

“With regard to the fifteen millions of Italians, their concentration was already far advanced; it only wanted maturity. The people were daily becoming more firmly established in the unity of principles and legislation, and also in the unity of thought and feeling—that certain and infallible cement of human thought and concentration. The union of Piedmont to France, and the junction of Parma, Tuscany and Rome, were, in my mind, only temporary measures, intended merely to guarantee and promote the national education of the Italians. The portions of Italy that were united to France, though that union might have been regarded as the result of invasion on our part, were, in spite of their Italian patriotism, the very places that continued most attached to us.

“All the south of Europe, therefore, would soon have been rendered compact in point of locality, views, opinions, sentiments and interests. In this state of things, what would have been the weight of all the nations of the North? What human efforts could have broken through so strong a barrier? The concentration of the Germans must have been effected more gradually, and therefore I had done no more than simplify their monstrous complication. Not that they were unprepared for centralization; on the contrary, they were too well prepared for it, and they might have blindly risen in reaction against us before they had comprehended our designs. How happens it that no German prince has yet formed a just notion of the spirit of his nation, and turned it to good account? Certainly if Heaven had made me a prince of Germany, amid the critical events of our times I should infallibly have governed the thirty millions of Germans combined; and,

from what I know of them, I think I may venture to affirm that if they had once elected and proclaimed me they would not have forsaken me, and I should never have been at St. Helena.

“At all events,” the emperor continued, after a moment’s pause, “this concentration will be brought about sooner or later by the very force of events. The impulse is given, and I think that since my fall and the destruction of my system, no grand equilibrium can possibly be established in Europe except by the concentration and confederation of the principal nations. The sovereign who in the first great conflict shall sincerely embrace the cause of the people, will find himself at the head of Europe, and may attempt whatever he pleases.”

Thus similar were the plans of these two most illustrious men. But from this digression let us return to the affairs of Austria. With the death of Henry IV., fell the stupendous plan which his genius conceived, and which his genius alone could execute. The Protestants, all over Europe, regarded his death as a terrible blow. Still they did not despair of securing the contested duchy for a Protestant prince. The fall of Henry IV. raised from the Catholics a shout of exultation, and they redoubled their zeal.

The various princes of the house of Austria, brothers, uncles, cousins, holding important posts all over the empire, were much alarmed in view of the peril to which the family ascending was exposed by the feebleness of Rhodolph. They held a private family conference, and decided that the interests of all required that there should be reconciliation between Matthias and Rhodolph; or that, in their divided state, they would fall victims to their numerous foes. The brothers agreed to an outward reconciliation; but there was not the slightest mitigation of the rancor which filled their hearts. Matthias, however, consented to acknowledge the superiority of his brother, the emperor, to honor him as the head of the family, and to hold his possessions as fiefs of Rhodolph intrusted to him by favor. Rhodolph, while hating Matthias, and watching for an

opportunity to crush him, promised to regard him hereafter as a brother and a friend.

And now Rhodolph developed unexpected energy, mingled with treachery and disgraceful duplicity. He secretly and treacherously invited the Archduke Leopold, who was also Bishop of Passau and Strasbourg, and one of the most bigoted of the warrior ecclesiastics of the papal church, to invade, with an army of sixteen thousand men, Rhodolph's own kingdom of Bohemia, under the plea that the wages of the soldiers had not been paid. It was his object, by thus introducing an army of Roman Catholics into his kingdom, and betraying into their hands several strong fortresses, then to place himself at their head, rally the Catholics of Bohemia around him, annul all the edicts of toleration, crush the Protestants, and then to march to the punishment of Matthias.

The troops, in accordance with their treacherous plan, burst into Upper Austria, where the emperor had provided that there should be no force to oppose them. They spread themselves over the country, robbing the Protestants and destroying their property with the most wanton cruelty. Crossing the Danube they continued their march and entered Bohemia. Still Rhodolph kept quiet in his palace, sending no force to oppose, but on the contrary contriving that towns and fortresses, left defenseless, should fall easily into their hands. Bohemia was in a terrible state of agitation. Wherever the invading army appeared, it wreaked dire vengeance upon the Protestants. The leaders of the Protestants hurriedly ran together, and, suspicious of treachery, sent an earnest appeal to the king.

The infamous emperor, not yet ready to lay aside the veil, called Heaven to witness that the irruption was made without his knowledge, and advised vigorous measures to repel the foe, while he carefully thwarted the execution of any such measures. At the same time he issued a proclamation to Leopold, commanding him to retire. Leopold understood all this be-

forehand, and smiling, pressed on. Aided by the treason of the king, they reached Prague, seized one of the gates, massacred the guard, and took possession of the capital. The emperor now came forward and disclosed his plans. The foreign troops, holding Prague and many other of the most important towns and fortresses in the kingdom, took the oath of allegiance to Rhodolph as their sovereign, and he placed in their hands five pieces of heavy artillery, which were planted in battery on an eminence which commanded the town. A part of Bohemia rallied around the king in support of these atrocious measures.

But all the Protestants, and all who had any sympathy with the Protestants, were exasperated to the highest pitch. They immediately dispatched messengers to Matthias and to their friends in Moravia, imploring aid. Matthias immediately started eight thousand Hungarians on the march. As they entered Bohemia with rapid steps and pushed their way toward Prague they were joined every hour by Protestant levies pouring in from all quarters. So rapidly did their ranks increase that Leopold's troops, not daring to await their arrival, in a panic, fled by night. They were pursued on their retreat, attacked, and put to flight with the loss of two thousand men. The ecclesiastical duke, in shame and confusion, slunk away to his episcopal castle of Passau.

The contemptible Rhodolph now first proposed terms of reconciliation, and then implored the clemency of his indignant conquerors. They turned from the overtures of the perjured monarch with disdain, burst into the city of Prague, surrounded every avenue to the palace, and took Rhodolph a prisoner. Soon Matthias arrived, mounted in regal splendor, at the head of a gorgeous retinue. The army received him with thunders of acclaim. Rhodolph, a captive in his palace, heard the explosion of artillery, the ringing of bells and the shouts of the populace, welcoming his dreaded and detested rival to the capital. It was the 20th of March, 1611.