

The nobles commanded Rhodolph to summon a diet. The humiliated, degraded, helpless emperor knew full well what this signified, but dared not disobey. He summoned a diet. It was immediately convened. Rhodolph sent in a message, saying,

"Since, on account of my advanced age, I am no longer capable of supporting the weight of government, I hereby abdicate the throne, and earnestly desire that my brother Matthias may be crowned without delay."

The diet were disposed very promptly to gratify the king in his expressed wishes. But there arose some very formidable difficulties. The German princes, who were attached to the cause which Rhodolph had so cordially espoused, and who foresaw that his fall threatened the ascendancy of Protestantism throughout the empire, sent their ambassadors to the Bohemian nobles with the menace of the vengeance of the empire, if they proceeded to the deposition of Rhodolph and to the inauguration of Matthias, whom they stigmatized as an usurper. This unexpected interposition reanimated the hopes of Rhodolph, and he instantly found such renovation of youth and strength as to feel quite able to bear the burden of the crown a little longer; and consequently, notwithstanding his abdication, through his friends, all the most accomplished mechanism of diplomacy, with its menaces, its bribes, and its artifice were employed to thwart the movements of Matthias and his friends.

There was still another very great difficulty. Matthias was very ambitious, and wished to be a sovereign, with sovereign power. He was very reluctant to surrender the least portion of those prerogatives which his regal ancestors had grasped. But the nobles deemed this a favorable opportunity to regain their lost power. They were disposed to make a hard bargain with Matthias. They demanded—1st, that the throne should no longer be hereditary, but elective; 2d, that the nobles should be permitted to meet in a diet, or congress,

to deliberate upon public affairs whenever and wherever they pleased; 3d, that all financial and military affairs should be left in their hands; 4th, that although the king might appoint all the great officers of state, they might remove any of them at pleasure; 5th, that it should be the privilege of the nobles to form all foreign alliances; 6th, that they were to be empowered to form an armed force by their own authority.

Matthias hesitated in giving his assent to such demands, which seemed to reduce him to a cipher, conferring upon him only the shadow of a crown. Rhodolph, however, who was eager to make any concessions, had his agents busy through the diet, with assurances that the emperor would grant all these concessions. But Rhodolph had fallen too low to rise again. The diet spurned all his offers, and chose Matthias, though he postponed his decision upon these articles until he could convene a future and more general diet. Rhodolph had eagerly caught at the hope of regaining his crown. As his messengers returned to him in the palace with the tidings of their defeat, he was overwhelmed with indignation, shame and despair. In a paroxysm of agony he threw up his window, and looking out upon the city, exclaimed,

"O Prague, unthankful Prague, who hast been so highly elevated by me; now thou spurnest at thy benefactor. May the curse and vengeance of God fall upon thee and all Bohemia."

The 23d of May was appointed for the coronation. The nobles drew up a paper, which they required Rhodolph to sign, absolving his subjects from their oath of allegiance to him. The degraded king writhed in helpless indignation, for he was a captive. With the foolish petulance of a spoiled child, as he affixed his signature in almost an illegible scrawl, he dashed blots of ink upon the paper, and then, tearing the pen to pieces, threw it upon the floor, and trampled it beneath his feet.

It was still apprehended that the adherents of Rhodolph



might make some armed demonstration in his favor. As a precaution against this, the city was filled with troops, the gates closed, and carefully guarded. The nobles met in the great hall of the palace. It was called a meeting of the States, for it included the higher nobles, the higher clergy, and a few citizens, as representatives of certain privileged cities. The forced abdication of Rhodolph was first read. It was as follows:—

“In conformity with the humble request of the States of our kingdom, we graciously declare the three estates, as well as all the inhabitants of all ranks and conditions, free from all subjection, duty and obligation; and we release them from their oath of allegiance, which they have taken to us as their king, with a view to prevent all future dissensions and confusion. We do this for the greater security and advantage of the whole kingdom of Bohemia, over which we have ruled six-and-thirty years, where we have almost always resided, and which, during our administration, has been maintained in peace, and increased in riches and splendor. We accordingly, in virtue of this present voluntary resignation, and after due reflection, do, from this day, release our subjects from all duty and obligation.”

Matthias was then chosen king, in accordance with all the ancient customs of the hereditary monarchy of Bohemia. The States immediately proceeded to his coronation. Every effort was made to dazzle the multitude with the splendors of the coronation, and to throw a halo of glory around the event, not merely as the accession of a new monarch to the throne, but as the introduction of a great reform in reinstating the nation in its pristine rights.

While the capital was resounding with these rejoicings, Rhodolph had retired to a villa at some distance from the city, in a secluded glen among the mountains, that he might close his ears against the hateful sounds. The next day Matthias, fraternally or maliciously, for it is not easy to judge which

motive actuated him, sent a stinging message of assumed gratitude to his brother, thanking him for relinquishing in his brother's favor his throne and his palaces, and expressing the hope that they might still live together in fraternal confidence and affection.

Matthias and the States consulted their own honor rather than Rhodolph's merits, in treating him with great magnanimity. Though Rhodolph had lost, one by one, all his own hereditary or acquired territories, Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, he still retained the imperial crown of Germany. This gave him rank and certain official honors, with but little real power. The emperor, who was also a powerful sovereign in his own right, could marshal his own forces to establish his decrees. But the emperor, who had no treasury or army of his own, was powerless indeed.

The emperor was permitted to occupy one of the palaces at Prague. He received an annual pension of nearly a million of dollars; and the territories and revenues of four lordships were conferred upon him. Matthias having consolidated his government, and appointed the great officers of his kingdom, left Prague without having any interview with his brother, and returned to his central capital at Vienna, where he married Anne, daughter of his uncle Ferdinand of Tyrol.

The Protestants all over the German empire hailed these events with public rejoicing. Rhodolph had been their implacable foe. He was now disarmed and incapable of doing them any serious injury. Matthias was professedly their friend, had been placed in power mainly as their sovereign, and was now invested with such power, as sovereign of the collected realms of Austria, that he could effectually protect them from persecution. This success emboldened them to unite in a strong, wide-spread confederacy for the protection of their rights. The Protestant nobles and princes, with the most distinguished of their clergy from all parts of the German em-



pire, held a congress at Rothenburg. This great assembly, in the number, splendor and dignity of its attendants, vied with regal diets. Many of the most illustrious princes of the empire were there in person, with imposing retinues. The emperor and Matthias both deemed it expedient to send ambassadors to the meeting. The congress at Rothenburg was one of the most memorable movements of the Protestant party. They drew up minute regulations for the government of their confederacy, established a system of taxation among themselves, made efficient arrangements for the levying of troops, established arsenals and magazines, and strongly garrisoned a fortress, to be the nucleus of their gathering should they at any time be compelled to appeal to arms.

Rhodolph, through his ambassadors, appeared before this resplendent assembly the mean and miserable sycophant he ever was in days of disaster. He was so silly as to try to win them again to his cause. He coaxed and made the most liberal promises, but all in vain. Their reply was indignant and decisive, yet dignified.

"We have too long," they replied, "been duped by specious and deceitful promises. We now demand actions, not words. Let the emperor show us by the acts of his administration that his spirit is changed, and then, and then only, can we confide in him."

Matthias was still apprehensive that the emperor might rally the Catholic forces of Germany, and in union with the pope and the formidable power of the Spanish court, make an attempt to recover his Bohemian throne. It was manifest that with any energy of character, Rhodolph might combine Catholic Europe, and inundate the plains of Germany with blood. While it was very important, therefore, that Matthias should do every thing he could to avoid exasperating the Catholics, it was essential to his cause that he should rally around him the sympathies of the Protestants.

The ambassadors of Matthias respectfully announced to the

congress the events which had transpired in Bohemia in the transference of the crown, and solicited the support of the congress. The Protestant princes received this communication with satisfaction, promised their support in case it should be needed, and, conscious of the danger of provoking Rhodolph to any desperate efforts to rouse the Catholics, recommended that he should be treated with brotherly kindness, and, at the same time, watched with a vigilant eye.

Rhodolph, disappointed here, summoned an electoral meeting of the empire, to be held at Nuremberg on the 14th of December, 1711. He hoped that a majority of the electors would be his friends. Before this body he presented a very pathetic account of his grievances, delineating in most melancholy colors the sorrows which attend fallen grandeur. He detailed his privations and necessities, the straits to which he was reduced by poverty, his utter inability to maintain a state befitting the imperial dignity, and implored them, with the eloquence of a Neapolitan mendicant, to grant him a suitable establishment, and not to abandon him, in his old age, to penury and dishonor.

The reply of the electors to the dispirited, degraded, down-trodden old monarch was the unkindest cut of all. Much as Rhodolph is to be execrated and despised, one can hardly refrain from an emotion of sympathy in view of this new blow which fell upon him. A deputation sent from the electoral college met him in his palace at Prague. Mercilessly they recapitulated most of the complaints which the Protestants had brought against him, declined rendering him any pecuniary relief, and requested him to nominate some one to be chosen as his successor on the imperial throne.

"The emperor," said the delegation in conclusion, "is himself the principal author of his own distresses and misfortunes. The contempt into which he has fallen and the disgrace which, through him, is reflected upon the empire, is derived from his own indolence and his obstinacy in following perverse counsels.



He might have escaped all these calamities if, instead of resigning himself to corrupt and interested ministers, he had followed the salutary counsels of the electors."

They closed this overwhelming announcement by demanding the immediate assembling of a diet to elect an emperor to succeed him on the throne of Germany. Rhodolph, not yet quite sufficiently humiliated to officiate as his own executioner, though he promised to summon a diet, evaded the fulfillment of his promise. The electors, not disposed to dally with him at all, called the assembly by their own authority to meet on the 31st of May.

This seemed to be the finishing blow. Rhodolph, now sixty years of age, enfeebled and emaciated by disease and melancholy, threw himself upon his bed to die. Death, so often invoked in vain by the miserable, came to his aid. He welcomed its approach. To those around his bed he remarked,

"When a youth, I experienced the most exquisite pleasure in returning from Spain to my native country. How much more joyful ought I to be when I am about to be delivered from the calamities of human nature, and transferred to a heavenly country where there is no change of time, and where no sorrow can enter!"

In the tomb let him be forgotten.

## CHAPTER XV.

MATTHIAS.

FROM 1612 TO 1619.

MATTHIAS ELECTED EMPEROR OF GERMANY.—HIS DESPOTIC CHARACTER.—HIS PLANS THWARTED.—MULHEIM.—GATHERING CLOUDS.—FAMILY INTRIGUE.—CORONATION OF FERDINAND.—HIS BIGOTRY.—HENRY, COUNT OF THURN.—CONVENTION AT PRAQUE.—THE KING'S REPLY.—THE DIE CAST.—AMUSING DEFENSE OF AN OUTRAGE.—FERDINAND'S MANIFESTO.—SEIZURE OF CARDINAL KLESER.—THE KING'S RAGE.—RETREAT OF THE KING'S TROOPS.—HUMILIATION OF FERDINAND.—THE DIFFICULTIES REFERRED.—DEATH OF MATTHIAS.

UPON the death of Rhodolph, Matthias promptly offered himself as a candidate for the imperial crown. But the Catholics, suspicious of Matthias, in consequence of his connection with the Protestants, centered upon the Archduke Albert, sovereign of the Netherlands, as their candidate. Many of the Protestants, also, jealous of the vast power Matthias was attaining, and not having full confidence in his integrity, offered their suffrages to Maximilian, the younger brother of Matthias. But notwithstanding this want of unanimity, political intrigue removed all difficulties and Matthias was unanimously elected Emperor of Germany.

The new emperor was a man of renown. His wonderful achievements had arrested the attention of Europe, and it was expected that in his hands the administration of the empire would be conducted with almost unprecedented skill and vigor. But clouds and storms immediately began to lower around the throne. Matthias had no spirit of toleration in his heart, and every tolerant act he had assented to, had been extorted from him. He was, by nature, a despot, and most reluctantly, for the sake of grasping the reins of power, he had relinquished