

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIBERATION OF ITALY.



TO understand those intrigues of cabinets and those majestic military movements which have recently arrested the attention of the whole civilized world, it is necessary that there should be brief allusion to the liberation of Italy from Austrian domination by the combined armies of France and Sardinia.

By the treaties of 1815, the constitutional kingdoms of Italy, which, by the aid of the French Empire, had been established upon the foundation of equal rights for all men, were overthrown. Italy was cut up into petty States, over which the old despotic *régimes* were inaugurated. Thus parcelled out, most of these States were merely provinces of Austria; and the vast armies of Austria watched with an eagle-eye, ready instantly to quell any popular uprising in any part of the Italian Peninsula. The kings, dukes, and princes whom the allies had placed over these petty States, were the guardians of Austrian despotism.

Upon the re-establishment of the empire in France in 1852, the popular masses all over Italy were greatly excited with the desire of regaining their former liber-

ties. Victor Emanuel was King of Sardinia; Count Cavour, his prime-minister. They applied to the newly-elected French emperor to learn if France would support Sardinia against Austria, should Sardinia commence the work of popular reform within her own kingdom. The pledge was promptly given.

Sardinia entered upon enactments of liberty. Schools were established, aristocratic privileges were abolished, freedom of worship was proclaimed, and freedom of the press restrained only by laws of libel. Austria vigorously remonstrated, and gathered an army of two hundred and fifty thousand troops upon the Sardinian frontier. These reforms in Sardinia would excite discontent in despotic Austria.

The French minister in Austria informed the court in Vienna, in very significant diplomatic phrase, "that France could not look with indifference upon the invasion of Sardinia by the Austrian troops."

The latter part of April, 1859, the Austrian troops crossed the Ticino, and commenced a rapid march upon Turin, the capital of Sardinia. The Emperor of France immediately issued a proclamation, dated Tuileries, May 3, 1859, containing the following words:—

"Austria, in causing her army to enter the territory of the King of Sardinia, our ally, declares war against us. She thus violates treaties, justice, and menaces our frontiers. We are led to inquire what can be the reason for this sudden invasion. Is it that Austria has brought matters to this extremity,—that she must either rule up to the Alps, or Italy must be free to the shores of the Adriatic?"

"The natural allies of France have been always those who seek the amelioration of humanity. When she

draws the sword, it is not to subjugate, but to liberate. The object of this war is, then, to restore Italy to herself, and not to impose upon her a change of masters."

Two hundred thousand French troops were immediately transported to the plains of Sardinia. The French nation, with great unanimity, approved of the measure. M. Thiers, leading the opposition in the Legislative Corps, severely condemned it. He declared that enlightened statesmanship demanded that Italy should be kept divided into fragmentary States, and not that a strong kingdom of twenty-five millions of people should be organized on the frontiers of France. He urged that France should aid in maintaining the treaties of 1815. But the voice of the French nation was almost unanimously with the government.

After a series of sanguinary conflicts, the Austrians were driven out of Sardinia. Upon the plains of Magenta and Solferino, they encountered another terrible defeat, which liberated Lombardy. All Italy now rose in insurrection against its Austrian oppressors. The duchies of Tuscany, Parma, Modena, chased the Austrian rulers out of their domains. From all parts of Italy, the young men crowded to the liberating banners of France and Sardinia.

All dynastic Europe was alarmed. The spirit of the old French Revolution of 1789 seemed to have burst from its long burial, and to be again menacing every feudal throne. Hungarians were grasping their arms. Poles were shouting the battle-cry of freedom. Ireland was clamoring for deliverance from that English throne by which it had been so terribly oppressed.

In hot haste, a coalition was formed against France and regenerated Italy. It was not only the wish but

the intention of France and Sardinia to liberate Venetia. Thus all Italy, delivered from the despotism of the Austrians, would be the master of its own destinies, and could organize such institutions as it might see fit to adopt.

England has always chosen alliance with despots, rather than with the advocates of popular liberty. If the twenty-five millions of Italy, emancipated by the aid of French armies, were to be consolidated into one kingdom or one confederacy, under the banner of the abolition of aristocratic privilege and the establishment of equal rights for all, Italy and France would be in sympathy. The two kingdoms, renouncing feudalism, would support each other. This would add amazingly to the strength of the principles of reform throughout Europe.

Under these circumstances, England and Prussia entered into an alliance, and informed Sardinia and France, that, if they made any attempt whatever to liberate Venetia, all the military power of England and of Prussia should be combined with that of Austria to repel the movement.

This was a fearful threat. There were indications that other leading northern dynasties would also co-operate with England and Prussia. This would surely lead to an invasion of France from the Rhine. All Europe would thus be plunged into one of the most desolating wars earth ever witnessed.

Thus the liberating army of Sardinia and France was arrested in its march. The poor Venetians, to their unutterable disappointment, were left bound more firmly than ever, hand and foot, in Austrian chains. The peace of Villafranca, which liberated all of Italy except Vene-

tia from Austrian rule, sounded the death-knell of those peoples, who, not in Venetia only, but in Hungary, in Poland, and in various other parts of Europe, were rising to break their chains.

There is something very affecting in the tones in which the noble Kossuth pleaded, and pleaded in vain, with the British cabinet, not to intervene against Venetia, and in favor of Austria. The sympathies of the British *people* were cordially with Kossuth. In his celebrated speech in the London Tavern on the 20th of May, 1859, the lord-mayor being in the chair, the eloquent Hungarian said, —

“Now, my lord, I do not remember to have heard one single official or semi-official declaration, that, if her Majesty’s government were not to remain neutral, they would side with Sardinia and France against Austria; but I have heard many declarations forcibly leading to the inference that the alternative was either neutrality, or the support of Austria. We are told, that, if a French fleet should enter the Adriatic, it might be for the interest of England to oppose it; that, if Trieste were attacked, it might be for the interest of England to defend it; that it might be for the interest of England to defend Venice. From what? Of course, from the great misfortune of being emancipated from Austria.

“I love my fatherland more than myself, — more than any thing on earth. Inspired by this love, I ask one boon, one only boon, from England; and that is, that she shall not support Austria. England has not interfered for liberty: let her not interfere for the worst of despotisms, — Austria.”

To this imploring cry the cabinet of St. James paid no heed. England united with Prussia to help Austria

hold Venetia. Thus Venetians and Hungarians were left to groan in their chains. England, as well as all the other feudal monarchies, has ever been in great dread of any republican movement. A large part of the republicans hoped, that by a compromise, in which monarchical forms should be retained, this hostility might be in some degree disarmed, and that under these forms the spirit of republican equality might be established without provoking the armed hostility of Europe.

Father Gavazzi, one of the most renowned champions of Italian liberation, in a letter written to influence the British cabinet, dated Aug. 4, 1860, says, —

“We fight for the sole purpose of uniting all Italy under the constitutional sceptre of Victor Emanuel. Let Englishmen repudiate the idea that there is any thing republican in the present movement; since the most ardent advocates of republicanism have sacrificed their views to the great cause of our independence, unity, and constitutional liberties. Be sure, that, if there is no intervention in our fightings, we shall arrive to crown in the capital our dear Victor Emanuel king of Italy.”

Such was the state of affairs, when Bismarck, who had aided England in preventing the liberation of Venetia, suddenly changed his policy. He had for years been maturing his plans to consolidate Germany in one great empire, with the King of Prussia at its head. In that enterprise, Austria was Prussia’s only rival. Bismarck had made the most extraordinary preparation for war with Austria by raising an immense army, giving it the most perfect organization and discipline, and arming it with the most deadly weapons.

Still Austria was a very formidable military power

With her supremacy in Germany, she could bring a much larger force into the field than Prussia, though that energetic little kingdom had arrayed every able-bodied man under her banners. Bismarck, therefore, sent a confidential envoy to Victor Emanuel to inform him that Prussia was about to attack Austria from the north to obtain possession of both of the Elbe duchies; that this would furnish Italy with an admirable opportunity, by co-operating in an attack upon the south, to wrest Venetia from Austria.

Italy eagerly availed herself of the opportunity, though perfectly aware that she owed no thanks to Prussia, who was consulting only her own interests in the alliance. Thus the great Germanic war, so fatal to Austria, was ushered in.

"The London Times" of Dec. 12, 1866, contained the following very just tribute to the efforts of the Emperor of the French for the liberation of Italy:—

"The Italians must acknowledge in the Emperor of the French their greatest, most unwearied, most generous benefactor. To the Italians, the emperor has always been, at heart, that Louis Napoleon who took up arms for Italy, and against the temporal power, five and thirty years ago. It seems as if some vow made by the bedside of his brother, dying in his arms at Forli, swayed Napoleon's mind through life, and bade him go firmly, however slowly, to his goal. In all other measures, in any other home or foreign policy, the emperor had friends and opponents; but the Italian game was played by him single-handed, and the game is won."

M. Thiers, as we have mentioned, was bitterly opposed to the aid which the imperial government lent Italy in escaping from Austrian domination, and becoming a con-

solidated kingdom. In his celebrated speech before the Legislative Corps on the 18th of March, 1867, he said,—

"As for me, when distinguished Italians have spoken to me of unity, I have said to them, 'No, no, never! For my part, I will never consent to it.' And if, at the time when that question came up, I had had the honor to hold in my hands the affairs of France, I would not have consented to it. I would say to you even, that, upon that question, the friendship, very ardent and sincere, which existed between Monsieur Cavour and me, has been interrupted."¹

The imperial government has been consistent and unwavering in its approval of Italian unity and German unity. But for the aid of France, Italy could by no possibility have shaken off the yoke of Austria, and have become consolidated; and nothing would have been easier than for France to have united her armies with those of Austria, and, thus driving back the invading Prussians to their native Brandenburg, to have prevented the unification of Germany. Truly does M. Thiers say, that France *created* the unification of Italy, and *permitted* that of Germany.

¹ "Je vous dirais même, sur cette question, l'amitié très sincère et très vive, qui existe entre M. Cavour et moi, a été interrompue." — *Moniteur*, March 18, 1867.