

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GERMAN WAR.

AUSTRIA, which had just emerged from a disastrous war with Italy aided by France, and now menaced with war by Prussia aided by newly-united Italy, had a standing army at her disposal of nine hundred thousand men. Prussia, having mobilized her whole force, could bring six hundred thousand into the field. Under the Italian banners, four hundred and fifty thousand troops were marshalled. Thus Prussia and Italy united could bring over a million of men to assail Austria in front and rear.

It was necessary for Austria to divide her forces to meet this double assault. Strong garrisons were also requisite to hold the Hungarians in subjection, who seemed upon the eve of rising. An outbreak in Hungary would surely lead to an insurrection in Poland. This would bring the armies of Russia into the arena. Thus all Europe was menaced with war.

In view of this awful conflagration which now threatened Europe, and to avert which the Emperor of the French had proposed a congress, England manifested regret in not having acceded to that pacific overture.

Lord Cowley was sent in haste with a despatch from

Lord Clarendon to the Emperor of the French, containing the announcement that England would withdraw her declinature to the proposal of a congress, and was now prepared to unite with France in that measure. The reply which the Emperor of the French made, as reported to the British cabinet by Lord Cowley, was as follows:—

“In 1859, England refused to assist me in the liberation of Italy, and, by her coalition with Germany, compelled me to stop short, leaving the work undone.

“When in 1864 I proposed a congress for the purpose of removing the endless complications which I foresaw would result from the Danish war, it was still England that opposed my project, and did her utmost to make it abortive.

“Now she wants peace, even at the price of the congress which she then rejected. I will, however, assure her Majesty that I am ready to do all I can to prevent war; but, as the most favorable opportunity for doing so has passed, I can no longer take upon myself the responsibility for any event that may occur.”

M. Thiers, in his very eloquent speech in the Legislative Corps against the liberation of Italy, had said, —

“No sovereign should create voluntarily, on his own frontier, a state of twenty-five millions of inhabitants. By committing such a fault, we have not promoted the welfare of France, of Italy, or of Europe.”

The ambitious desires of Prussia to unite all Germany under one empire, either roused M. Thiers' apprehensions anew, or presented him another favorable opportunity to attack the imperial government. He united with the democrats in this opposition, hoping to reconstruct upon the ruins of the empire the Orleans throne. On

the other hand, the democrats hoped upon those ruins to rear a republic.

With terrible energies of denunciation, M. Thiers condemned the government of being "guilty of the greatest of all possible blunders" in allowing the formation of a united Germany. With great powers of eloquence, he called upon France to rouse all her military strength to resist the ambitious encroachments of Prussia.

It is clear, that, had France then pursued the policy urged by Thiers, Prussia could have been overwhelmed. Comparatively weak as Prussia then was, France, aided by Austria, could, with all ease, have driven the Prussians across the Rhine, and have regained her ancient boundary. Thus the terrible humiliation which now overwhelms France would have been averted; and the empire, protected by the Rhine, could bid defiance to German invasion.

But, in pursuing this course, France must have proved false to her most sacredly-avowed principle of allowing the people of each nationality to unite in a consolidated government. She would also have been compelled to send her soldiers, fresh from the fields of Magenta and Solferino, to fight against the unification of Italy, by aiding Austria to retain her hold upon Venetia. The empire refused thus to ignore its principles, and embrace in their stead the doctrine of political expediency.

Therefore, in opposition to the forcible arguments of M. Thiers, the imperial government emphatically re-avowed its adhesion to the doctrine of "nationalities."

This doctrine had been unfolded in the following terms by the Emperor Napoleon I. at St. Helena:—

"One of my great plans," said Napoleon to Las Casas

on the 11th of November, 1816, "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; and 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.

"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 European family the application of the American Congress, or of 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. 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 with which they are now oppressed, and from the terrible agitations that 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 established in the unity of principles and legislation, and also

in the unity of thought and feeling, — that certain and infallible cement of human 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.

"All the south of Europe would soon have been rendered compact in point of locality, views, opinions, sentiments, and interests. The concentration of the Germans must have been effected more gradually; and therefore I had done no more than simplify their monstrous complication. 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, I should infallibly have governed the thirty millions of Germans combined.

"At all events, this concentration will certainly 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 nationalities. The sovereign who, in the first great conflict, shall sincerely embrace the cause of the people, will find himself at the head of all Europe, and may attempt whatever he pleases."¹

In advocacy of these views, France had assisted in liberating the Italians from the thralldom of Austria, and in promoting the unification of Italy. The emperor had also stated, in an address to the Corps Législatif, that

¹ Abbott's Napoleon at St. Helena, pp. 272-274.

France had neither the right nor the disposition to interfere with the attempts which might be made for the unification of Germany. These views were very violently assailed by the opposition, consisting of united legitimists and republicans.

In the German war, France remained neutral. The hostile armies were soon upon the move. Two millions of men, along lines hundreds of leagues in extent, armed with the most formidable weapons of modern warfare, were rushing against each other. Europe looked on, appalled by the spectacle. The genius of Bismarck was conspicuous on this occasion. For years he had been preparing for the struggle which he knew that the measures he was introducing would inaugurate. The Prussian army was in the highest state of discipline; all the material of war abundant, and in the right position; and the infantry were provided with arms capable of such rapidity of fire, that, in effective service, one Prussian could throw as many bullets as three Austrians.

War was declared on the 18th of June, 1866, with the usual appeal to God, on both sides, for his aid, and the usual declaration that each party had drawn the sword only in defence of justice and liberty. At a given signal, the Prussian armies from the north plunged simultaneously and impetuously into the Austrian provinces. At the same time, the Italians from the south, in divisions whose united strength amounted to four hundred thousand men, rushed into Venetia.

The reader would be weary with the details of the battles, — the charges and the repulses, the awful scenes of carnage, conflagration, and misery, which ensued. For forty days, this tempest of war raged with scarcely a moment's intermission. The spectacle was such as

had seldom been witnessed on earth before. The discipline of the armies, their numbers, and the murderous engines of war which they wielded, secured results which had never before been accomplished in so short a period.

The advance of the Prussian armies was almost as resistless as the sweep of the tornado or of the avalanche. Their path was over smouldering ruins, and through pools of blood, as they drove before them their foes, ever desperately fighting. With perfect organization, and armed with the terrible needle-gun, they overran kingdoms, dukedoms, and principalities almost as fast as armies could march.

Francis Joseph, in terror, was compelled to withdraw his troops from Venetia, to repel, if possible, the Prussian advance upon his capital. Too proud to surrender the province to the Italians, he transferred it to France. It was probably his hope that France, in possession of so magnificent a pledge, would be able, by some friendly intervention, to arrest those devastations of war which the imperial government had, before hostilities commenced, endeavored to avert by means of a congress; but Prussia, now flushed with victory, would listen to no terms but such as she herself might dictate.

France immediately surrendered Venetia to Italy. Kossuth was in Italy, shouting the war-cry, and calling upon the Hungarians to rush into the Italian ranks.

"Hungarians!" he exclaimed, "flock to the standard of Victor Emanuel: here is your place of honor. Austria is our enemy. Italy gave shelter, bread, and kindness to the exiled Hungarians.

"Italy is for Italians: Hungary is for the Hungarians. Out with Austria from Italy! Out with Austria from Hungary! Come here, my braves! I await you; and I

call upon you also in the name of Garibaldi, who is ready to draw his glorious sword in behalf of Hungary, which will rise and break her chains."

In the terrible battle of Sadowa, which was fought near a small village of that name, about five miles from Königgratz, the military power of Austria was, for the time being, broken down. In that conflict there were two hundred and fifty thousand men engaged on each side. The very hills trembled beneath the concussion of fifteen hundred pieces of artillery. The Austrians were utterly routed, and with dreadful slaughter. In a campaign of seven weeks, Austria had lost nearly one hundred thousand men.

The banners of the victorious Prussians were now visible from the steeples of Vienna. Further resistance was hopeless. Humiliated Austria, prostrate and bleeding, was compelled to accede to whatever terms the conqueror proposed. Prussia demanded the sovereignty over all the provinces she had overrun. Thus she obtained both Schleswig and Holstein, the kingdom of Hanover, the kingdom of Saxony, the magnificent dukedom of Saxony, large parts of Bohemia, Austrian Silesia, and Bavaria, with minor dukedoms and principalities too numerous to mention.


Though there was, at first, a slight disposition manifested by Prussia to veil these conquests behind the verbiage of diplomatic phrases and pious utterances, it was soon evident that all these realms were virtually annexed to the Prussian kingdom. In a campaign of about forty days, Count Bismarck had doubled the territory, and doubled the population, of Prussia. Thus suddenly, Prussia, from a second-rate kingdom, had risen to an equality in rank with the most powerful mon-

archies in Europe. In population and in military strength, she was fully equal to France. In addition to this, she held both banks of the Rhine. Prussia could thus, from her strong fortresses on the Rhine, invade France at her pleasure. Should she meet with any reverse, her armies could retire behind that broad and rapid river, both banks frowning with Prussian fortresses, and bid defiance to pursuit.

The door from Prussia into France was wide open: the door from France into Prussia was hermetically sealed.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANCE DEMANDS HER ANCIENT BOUNDARY.

 IN consequence of the immense conquests made by Prussia, France found herself without any natural boundary to protect herself from one of the most formidable of European powers. By the treaties of 1815, the allies had placed in the hands of Prussia both banks of the Rhine and the Valley of the Moselle.

The avowed object of this cession to Prussia of those provinces south of the Rhine which had belonged to France was to deprive France of any available northern boundary; so that, should there be another popular uprising in France, an avenue would be opened, lined with Prussian fortresses, through which the allied troops might march into the heart of the kingdom.

All France now became agitated with the new peril with which the empire was menaced. A rival nation, with institutions in many respects hostile to those of France, and, in all the elements of national power, the equal of France; a nation ambitious, encroaching, and with apparently boundless designs of enlargement, — had the command of the portals of the empire from the north. And this government, adhering to feudal abso-