


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-

lutism, was bitterly hostile to the republican principles which the empire advocated.

In a speech which M. Thiers addressed the Legislative Corps on the 3d of December, 1867, he said, —

“The Germanic Confederation, which, for fifty years, has been the principal authority for maintaining the peace of the world, has disappeared, and has been replaced by a military monarchy, which disposes of forty millions of men. You are placed between two unities, — one of which, Italy, you made; and the other, Prussia, you permitted. They are joining hands over the Alps. They only consent to preserve peace on condition that you will allow the one to complete itself by seizing upon the States of the pope, and the other to swallow up the German governments of the south. Such is the situation; and I defy any one to deny it.”

In the course of this exciting debate, the French minister, M. Drouyn de Lhuys, read a letter from the Emperor of the French in reference to the proposed congress, containing the following sentiments: —

“Had the conference assembled, my government would have declared that France repudiated all idea of territorial aggrandizement so long as the European equilibrium remained undisturbed.

“We should have desired for the German confederacy a position more worthy of its importance, — for Prussia, better geographical boundaries; for Austria, the maintenance of her distinguished position in Europe after the cession of Venetia to Italy in exchange for territorial compensation.

“France could only think of *an extension of her frontiers in the event of the map of Europe being altered to the profit of a great power, and of the bordering provinces*

*expressing by a formal and free vote their desire for annexation.”*¹

Alluding to the severe attacks upon the government for refusing to oppose the unification of Germany, the emperor had said in his discourse at the opening of the session of the Legislative Corps, on the 15th of February, 1865, —

“In reference to the conflict which has risen upon the Baltic, my government, cherishing sympathies for Denmark, and kind wishes for Germany, has observed the strictest neutrality. Summoned in a conference to express its opinion, it has limited itself to the avowal of the principle of nationalities, and of the right of the populations to be consulted respecting their destiny. Our language, corresponding with the attitude which we wish to preserve, has been moderate, and friendly towards both parties.”²

It is a little remarkable, that while the illustrious French statesman, M. Thiers, so severely censures the emperor for befriending German unity, the illustrious American senator, Mr. Sumner, with equal severity condemns him for opposing that unity.

“Early in life,” says Mr. Sumner, “a ‘charcoal’ conspirator against kings, he now became a crowned conspirator against republics. The name of a republic was to him a reproof; while its glory was a menace. Against the Roman republic he conspired early; and, when the rebellion waged by slavery seemed to afford opportunity, he conspired against our republic, promoting as far as he

¹ Moniteur, June 13, 1866.

² La Politique Impériale, Exposée par les Discours et Proclamations de l'Empereur Napoléon III., depuis le 10 Décembre, 1848, jusqu'en Juillet, 1865, p. 423.

dared the independence of the slave States, and at the same time, on the ruins of the Mexican republic, setting up a mock empire. *In similar spirit has he conspired against German unity, whose just strength promised to be a wall against his unprincipled ambition.*"¹

France had been terribly humiliated by the march of the allies to Paris, and by those treaties of 1815, which, wresting from her the natural boundary of the Rhine, had left the kingdom defenceless from invasion from the north. Even the Bourbons, who had taken part in those treaties, felt keenly the national humiliation; but they submitted to it from fear that the people might again rise in defence of popular rights, and that again the presence of the allied armies might be needed to maintain the Bourbon throne.

The years rolled on, — the sad years of disquiet and suffering which have imbittered all the centuries. At last, even the Bourbons could endure the shame no longer of having the northern provinces of France in the hands of a foreign nation, and those very fortresses which had been constructed to guard France from invasion garrisoned by foreign troops.

But these Rhine provinces had been assigned to Prussia by treaties which all the governments assembled at Vienna were pledged to maintain. Even the Bourbons themselves had agreed to hold them sacred. They could not be regained without war and also perfidy on the part of the Bourbon government.

The discontent, however, of the people was so great, in view of this degradation, that the Bourbons thought it would be a popular measure, and would strengthen

¹ Senator Sumner on the war, New-York Herald, Oct. 29.

them on the throne, should they make an attempt to regain these provinces, even at the expense of their plighted word and of a war.

Viscount Chateaubriand was one of the ministers of Charles X. He testifies in his memoirs that the government of Charles X. had entered into a secret treaty with Russia to aid her in her designs upon Constantinople; and, in return, Russia was to aid France in regaining her lost Rhenish provinces.

Just before there was time to execute this treaty, there was, in the year 1830, a new revolution, in which the French people a third time drove the Bourbons from the throne. By the adroit management of a few opulent and influential men in Paris, the crown was placed upon the brow of Louis Philippe, without submitting the question to the vote of the people.

Louis Philippe, who could claim the throne neither by right of the popular vote nor by the doctrine of legitimacy, fearing that the allies might again combine in defence of the "divine right" of sovereigns, and reinstate the Bourbons, endeavored to secure the support of the surrounding dynasties by pledging himself to the maintenance of their policy. He therefore wrote to each of the leading sovereigns, promising that, in case his government was recognized by them, he would respect the treaties of 1815; which was equivalent to saying that he would make no effort to regain the Rhine provinces.

Alison writes in reference to the secret negotiations to which we have alluded between the *Bourbon cabinets* and Russia, "The result was a secret agreement that Russia should support France in the eventual extension of its frontier to the Rhine, and that France should

countenance Russia in the advancing its standards to Constantinople. Prussia was to be indemnified for the loss of its Rhenish provinces by the half of Hanover Holland, for the sacrifice of Belgium, by the other half. But this agreement, how carefully soever veiled in secrecy, came to the knowledge of the British Government; and it was the information which they had gained in regard to it which led to the immediate recognition of the government of Louis Philippe."¹

"The treaties of 1815," writes Louis Blanc, "had left burning traces in the hearts of Frenchmen. These, it was hoped, would be effaced by the recovery of the Rhine as the frontier of France."

Again he writes, speaking of the government of Louis Philippe, "The first thought of the new government had been to obtain recognition. It therefore resolved to base its policy upon the maintenance of the treaties of 1815. Louis Philippe promised to shield from every blow the European system established in 1815. His accession was therefore hailed with joy by the sovereigns who had in 1815 divided the spoils of France between them."²

This subserviency of Louis Philippe to the policy of the allies, rendered him, in France, by far the most unpopular monarch who had ever sat upon that throne. Still, sustained by the sympathies of all the surrounding monarchies, who regarded him as their agent in arresting the progress of liberal opinions, he retained the throne for about eighteen years.

The downfall of Louis Philippe in 1848 was followed

¹ Alison's History of Europe, vol. vi. p. 165; also France under Louis Philippe, vol. i. p. 88.

² Louis Blanc, vol. i. p. 290.

by the brief republic, and that by the re-establishment of the empire in 1851. Upon the establishment of the republic, it was feared by monarchical Europe that French armies would immediately be pushed forward to seize the ancient boundary of the Rhine. To allay these fears, and thus to prevent an armed alliance against the republic, the leaders of that party, Ledru Rollin and Louis Blanc, issued a circular to the governments of Europe, in which they said, —

"The treaties of 1815 do not exist in right in the eyes of the French Republic. But war does not necessarily follow from that declaration. The territorial limits fixed by those treaties are the bases which the republic is willing to take as the *point of departure* in its external relations with other nations."

They hoped by this declaration, that, *for the present*, they would make no attempt to push their boundaries to the Rhine to allay the fears of those who were pledged to maintain the treaties of Vienna.

When Louis Napoleon was chosen *president*, the allies were much alarmed. It was quite manifest that this election would prove but a stepping-stone to the re-establishment of the empire; and it was very certain that the empire, once consolidated in any thing like its former splendor, would insist, eventually, upon its ancient and only natural boundary on the Rhine. "The London Morning Post" of 1852 said, —

"The allies are willing to tolerate the *temporary presidency* of the nephew of Napoleon; but they will not tolerate the transformation of the presidency into an empire."

The French people do not appear to have been intimidated by this threat. They were not disposed to inquire

of the British cabinet what government France might adopt. In six months after the utterance of this threat, the French people, by majorities which astounded Europe, re-established the empire, and chose the heir of Napoleon as emperor.

The two extreme parties, the legitimists and the republicans, were united in the Corps Législatif in opposition to the imperial government. As we have mentioned, the government was severely censured by this opposition for aiding in the unification of Italy, and for permitting Prussia to create a great German nation of forty millions of population. In an address at the opening of the chambers on the 18th of November, 1866, the emperor said, in allusion to these censures, —

“Notwithstanding the declaration of my government, which has never varied in its pacific attitude, the belief has been spread that any modification in the internal system of Germany must become a cause of conflict. It is necessary to accept frankly the changes which have taken place on the other side of the Rhine; to proclaim, that, so long as our interests and our dignity shall not be threatened, we will not interfere in the transformations effected by the wish of the populations.”¹

On the 14th of February, 1867, the emperor, after the astounding conquests of Prussia, still more explicitly expressed his views upon the subject in the following words: —

“Since your last session, serious events have arisen in Europe. Although they may have astonished the world by their rapidity and by the importance of their results, it appears, that, according to the anticipation of the first

¹ *La Politique Impériale.*

emperor, there was a fatality in their fulfilment. Napoleon said at St. Helena, —

“One of my great ideas has been the agglomeration and concentration of the same nations, geographically considered, who have been scattered piecemeal by revolutions and policy. This agglomeration will take place sooner or later by force of circumstances. The impulse is given; and I do not think, that, after my fall and the disappearance of my system, there will be any other great equilibrium possible than the agglomeration and confederation of great nations.’

“The transformations,” continues Napoleon III., “which have taken place in Italy and Germany, pave the way for the realization of this vast programme of the union of the European States in one sole confederation. The spectacle of the efforts made by the neighboring nations to assemble their members, scattered abroad for so many centuries, cannot cause disquiet in such a country as ours, all the parts of which are irrevocably bound up with each other, and form a homogeneous and indestructible body.

“We have been impartial witnesses of the struggle which has been waged on the other side of the Rhine. In presence of these conflicts, the country strongly manifested its wish to keep aloof from it. Not only did I defer to this wish, but I used every effort to hasten the conclusion of peace.”¹

¹ Speech at the opening of the French Chambers, Feb. 14, 1867.