

CHAPTER XV.

THE POLICY OF COUNT BISMARCK.

FRANCE had felt very uneasy in having her northern provinces and fortresses in the hands of Prussia, even when that kingdom was a feeble power, numbering but eighteen millions. But France could not move to recover those provinces without bringing against her all of monarchical Europe, pledged to maintain the treaties of 1815.

But now Prussia, in entire disregard of those treaties, had engaged in as stupendous a system of conquests as Europe had ever witnessed. She had suddenly risen to the position of a first-class power. The Prussian kingdom had become an organized camp. Every man was a soldier. The armies of Austria had been scattered by her military bands like sheep by wolves. In population, in resources, in the number and appointment of her armies, she had become at least fully the equal of France. And yet she held both banks of the Rhine. She held the Valley of the Moselle. There was neither mountain-range nor river to present any barrier to the impetuous rush of her legions into the heart of France.

On the other hand, should an invading Prussian army be repelled, and find it necessary to retreat, it need only

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retire behind the broad and rapid Rhine, with all the bridges at its command, and the most formidable fortresses fringing both its banks; and there it could rest in security.

It is said that ambition grows with what it feeds upon. Prussia, instead of being satiated with the enormous acquisitions which she had made, was supposed to be looking around for new conquests. The French "Journal Officiel" says,—

"No one can ignore the ambitious designs of Prussia against Holland. Bismarck wishes that little nation to submit, as the Danish duchies were forced to submit. He wished to render Holland a naval State of the North German Confederation. But for the stand taken by France, Prussian policy would have proved fatal to the independence of the Netherlands."

Under these changed circumstances, every man, of all parties, in France, became alarmed. It was deemed fearful to leave the key of entrance into France in the hands of so majestic and menacing a power. Bourbonists, Orleanists, Imperialists, and Republicans, all alike were agitated. And yet the hands of France seemed tied. Prussia made no attack upon France: she was simply gaining gigantic strength, which would soon enable her to dictate laws to the French Empire, and to be the controlling power in Europe.

Such was the state of affairs when the sagacious Bismarck endeavored to place Leopold of Hohenzollern upon the throne of Spain. Leopold was a prince of one of the most important principalities of Prussia, a near relative of the royal family, and a colonel in the Prussian army. The successful accomplishment of this feat would indeed have been the revival of the empire of Charle-

magne; Spain would have been but a province of the great German Empire, submissive to the crown of Prussia; France would have been quite at the mercy of this gigantic power. And yet it was very adroitly done.

"You Frenchmen," said Bismarck through all his organs, "profess that the people have a right to choose their own sovereigns. Has not Spain, then, a right to choose her monarch? And, if Spain choose Leopold of Hohenzollern, is it not intolerable insolence in France to pretend to object to this free choice of a free people? and can Prussia submit to the insult of being commanded by France to forbid Leopold to accept the crown offered him by the suffrages of an independent nation?"

In reply, the French journal, "Le Gaulois," very forcibly puts the other side of the question:—

"Let us look back a little. Prussia seized Schleswig and Holstein: we said nothing. Prussia accomplished Sadowa: we were silent. Prussia made fresh annexations: we held our peace. Prussia occasioned the serious difficulty about Luxemburg: we were conciliatory. Prussia enthroned a Hohenzollern in Roumania: we said nothing. Prussia violated her engagements at the treaty of Prague: we do not resent it.

"Bismarck has now prepared for us a candidate for the throne of Spain to cut our hamstrings, and to crush us between him and the Spaniards as he crushed Austria between Germany and Italy. If we had submitted to this last affront, there is not a woman in the world who would have accepted the arm of a Frenchman."

A writer in "The New-York Herald," commenting upon this subject, writes, "No statement touching the war is more flagrantly impudent and unjust than that accredited to 'The London Times,'—that France, with-

out a shadow of excuse or justification, plunges Europe into war.

"On the contrary, regarding the situation from an impartial standpoint, it does not appear that France is without justification. So far from it, it appears that France could not, without humiliation, stand in any other position than that which she now assumes.

"It was not merely the candidacy of Hohenzollern France objected to: it was the appearance of Prussia beyond the Pyrenees; it was the assumption of Prussia to take possession of Spain as if it were a German duchy. France was fully justified in making an indignant protest against this."

A very interesting article upon the war recently appeared in "The New-York Observer," from the pen of Mr. J. T. Headley, who probably is as familiar with the politics of Europe as any other American. In this article, Mr. Headley says,—

"That Bismarck anticipated, nay, desired war, there can be little doubt. His object was twofold: first, to consolidate Germany; second, to secure a safe frontier against France. Most people may have forgotten that this question of placing a German prince on the throne of Spain was raised a year ago, and demanded an explanation. Bismarck ridiculed the whole thing as a fable.

"From that moment, at least, he knew that an attempt to bring about such an event would result in war. Then why did he allow such a firebrand to be thrown into France? He knew, from the conduct of the French minister a year before, that war would follow; and, if he did not desire war, he could easily have prevented Prim's proposition from being offered or made

public. Moreover, Prim had no authority or power to make it; showing, conclusively, that the whole thing was concocted between him and Bismarck to bring about just what happened.

"To make this still more apparent, note, that from the time, a year before, when the manner in which the rumored proposition was received foretold the result, he commenced putting Germany on a war-footing. Cars for the express purpose of transporting troops were built and lay in trains along the various railroads of the State. More than this, the result proved, that, before the shell that had been prepared exploded, he had called out and concentrated his troops so near the frontier, that while Bonaparte, by his sudden declaration of war, and advance to the Rhine, expected to be eight or ten days ahead of his adversary, he was more than that time behind him.

"Such an accumulation of circumstantial evidence furnishes incontestable proof of a deep, well-laid plot, on the part of Bismarck, to provoke a war."¹

A nation of forty millions of people, as intelligent, as enlightened and liberty-loving, as any people on the globe, does not unanimously rush into war without truly believing that there is some provocation.²

In France, this is not a war of the government, but of the people; not a war to aggrandize a dynasty, but to rectify a frontier. It can, with more propriety, be

¹ New-York Observer, Oct. 27, 1870.

² "Bismarck, who had played with Austria before 1866 till he knew that he had a force in hand strong enough to crush her, gained time by fooling the French diplomatists till every thing was in so perfect a state of preparation, that, within a fortnight after war had been declared, half a million of trained soldiers were ready to enter France."—*Manchester (England) Guardian*, Aug. 25 1870

said that the people impelled the government to the war, than that the government dragged the people into it. It is the general admission, that the people, instinctively alarmed by the enormous growth of Prussia, and less informed of the relative strength of the two powers than the government, demanded war with a degree of unanimity which no government could have withstood, even if disposed to do so.

It has been the general impression in the United States, that the imperial government had sedulously fostered the war-spirit in France; that the whole empire was converted into a military camp, and that thus all Europe was compelled to keep up enormous armaments. The startling events which have occurred show how erroneous was this opinion. Just before the breaking-out of the war, the French minister, the Duke de Grammont, said, in a circular published in the "*Journal Officiel*,"—

"If Europe remains armed, if a million of men are on the eve of the shock of battle, it cannot be denied that the responsibility is Prussia's, *as she repulsed all idea of disarmament when we caused the proposal to be made and began by giving the example*. The conscience of Europe and history will say that Prussia sought this war by inflicting upon France, pre-occupied with the development of her political institutions, an outrage no nation could accept without incurring contempt."

The deputies of the Corps Législatif, chosen by universal suffrage, and consequently representing all parties, sustained the war by a vote of 246 to 10. In the Senate, composed of two hundred and fifty of the most illustrious men in France, it is not reported that there was a single dissentient voice. Immediately after the

decisive vote in the Corps Législatif, the Senate, in a body, on the 17th of July, repaired to St. Cloud to pledge to the emperor their cordial support in the conduct of the war. In a very emphatic speech which M. Rouher made upon the occasion, he said, "Your Majesty draws the sword, and the whole country goes with you."

"The right is on our side," exclaims the "*Courrier des États-Unis*:" "the world cannot refuse to see it. At this hour, the hearts of all Frenchmen beat in unison. '*To the Rhine*' is the cry of the whole nation."

One hundred million dollars were in a few hours subscribed to the war-fund. A hundred thousand volunteers came forward, almost in a day, to join the army.

In Germany, the people followed, they did not lead, the government; but they followed with the enthusiasm, and all the deep conviction, that they were in the right, which inspired the French. How deplorable is this spectacle! what a comment upon the frailty of human nature! Here are forty millions of people on either side of the Rhine. They are rushing against each other with the utmost conceivable fury, crimsoning the battle-fields with blood, and filling the two kingdoms with widowhood, orphanage, and misery; and each party, through thousands of churches, appeals to God in attestation of the righteousness of its cause. There can be no doubt that there are, on both sides, thousands of sincere Christians, who conscientiously invoke the assistance of Heaven.

France assumes that she is fighting to regain her original and legitimate boundaries, — boundaries which she deems essential to her independent existence under the changed state of affairs in Europe. Prussia assumes

that she is fighting to resist a wanton and unprovoked attack from France, who is endeavoring to wrest from her important portions of her territory, — territory which she has held, without dispute, for half a century.

Throughout Christendom, intelligent, conscientious religious communities are divided. Millions are in warm sympathy with Prussia: other millions are no less ardent in their prayers for the success of the arms of France. Surely such facts should teach a lesson of charity.