

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE DECLARATION OF WAR.

**A**ND now events of the most momentous nature succeeded each other with marvellous rapidity. The ex-queen, Isabella of Spain, an exile in Paris, on Sunday, the 26th of June, 1870, formally abdicated the throne in favor of her eldest son, Prince Alphonso. On Tuesday, the 6th of July, the intelligence was made public in the streets of Paris that the Prussian court was secretly intriguing to place Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern on the vacant throne of Spain. The abdication of Isabella in favor of Alphonso had but little force, since neither the ex-queen nor her son dared to cross the Pyrenees to enter the kingdom from which insurrection had expelled them.

It will be remembered, that, once before, the rumor had been circulated, that Prussia was intriguing to place one of her princes on the Spanish throne, and that Bismarck had declared that there was no foundation for the rumor. The tidings which now reached the French court, that a Prussian prince was again a candidate for the crown once worn by Charles V., caused agitation throughout the whole of Paris. It gave immediate rise to a very exciting debate in the Legislative Corps. All

parties seemed to be united in the conviction, that this renewed measure of Count Bismarck was a direct menace to the independence of France. Almost the universal press gave utterance to the popular feeling, that the proposed encroachment must be resisted, even at the peril of war.

The question was one in which imperialists, monarchists, and republicans were alike interested. If Prussia, with forty millions of inhabitants, in compact military organization, and already in possession of both banks of the Rhine, were virtually to annex Spain to her domain, France would be quite at her disposal. The republicans had more to fear from this movement than either the imperialists or the monarchists; for there could be no question respecting the deadly hostility of Prussia to a republic. France had already advanced, in the line of popular rights, from the old feudal monarchy to the republican empire, founded, not upon "legitimacy," but upon universal suffrage. Even this reform excited the hatred and the dread of Prussia. Should France still take another step, and advance to a republic, no one could question that Prussia would summon all her energies to crush out those institutions which would be threatening Europe with revolution.

Influenced by such considerations, after mature deliberation, the French minister (the Duke of Grammont) gave official notice to the Prussian court, on Monday, the 11th of July, that France could not permit a German prince to ascend the throne of Charles V. In the mean time, agitation was rapidly increasing all over France. The discussion clearly revealed the peril in which France was placed in having both banks of the Rhine in the possession of a power which had suddenly assumed such

gigantic proportions. The conviction became apparently universal, that France must immediately, and at all hazards, reclaim her ancient boundary of the Rhine. She did not demand both banks, but only the southern bank, as essential to the protection of France; leaving the northern bank with Prussia for the protection of Germany. The war-cry resounded through France; but that cry was not, "On to Berlin!" but "On to the Rhine!" All that France demanded was that ancient boundary which she deemed essential to her defence from Germanic invasion.

The next day, July 12, it was announced that Leopold was withdrawn from the candidature; but the agitation had become so great and extended, that something more than this was needed to allay it.

"To-morrow," it was said, "some new intrigue may place some other German prince upon that throne. It is not to Leopold *personally* that we object. We demand of Prussia the pledge that she will not place any of her princes on the Spanish throne. One Prussian prince is just as dangerous as another; and, moreover, these encroachments of Prussia show the peril of France. Since Prussia has trampled the treaties of 1815 beneath her feet in her enormous encroachments, a regard to our own safety imperatively demands that we should have surrendered back to us the provinces which Prussia holds on the south bank of the Rhine."

On the 14th of July, the King of Prussia refused to receive Count Benedetti, the French ambassador, under circumstances which increased the exasperation then rapidly rising between the two nations. King William accused the count of presenting his demands at an unseemly time and in an insolent manner. The French

court accused the king of insulting France in the person of her ambassador, and of rudely refusing to receive propositions intended to avert war. Each nation told its own story. Forty millions of Germans believed that their king had been impudently approached by the French ambassador: forty millions of Frenchmen believed that imperial France had been designedly insulted by the Prussian monarch.

On the 15th of July, the French Government, sustained by the Legislative Corps, by the Senate, and apparently by the enthusiastic acclaim of the French people, declared war against Prussia. Though there were individual remonstrants, it seems to be the undisputed testimony of the French press, and of all the American and English correspondents in France at that time, that the general voice of the nation was for war. It is said that the emperor, better acquainted than others with the military preparation of the two nations, was almost the only man in Paris opposed to the immediate declaration of hostilities; but the popular current was so strong, that even he could not resist it. A very intelligent American gentleman who was in Paris at the time, and who had resided in Paris so much of his time as to be quite at home in Parisian society, wrote me, —

"In respect to this war, it seems hardly fair to hold Napoleon responsible for it; since he said, so it is stated, that he was opposed to it at the outset, but that the French people '*slipped away from him*,' and that he was obliged to go with them, or lose hold of them entirely. This seems, I must acknowledge, rather against my theory of government by the will of the people; but so, they say, it was. At any rate, all of whom we inquired in Paris told us that the war was generally popular."

In a brief speech which the emperor made to the Senate on the occasion, he said, "War is legitimate when it is made with the assent of the country and the approbation of its representatives. You are right in recalling the words of Montesquieu, '*The true author of a war is not he who declares, but he who renders, it necessary.*'"

In an address to the French people, issued on the 23d of July, the emperor said, "There are in the life of peoples solemn moments, when the national honor, violently excited, presses itself irresistibly, rises above all other interests, and applies itself to the single purpose of directing the destinies of the nation. One of these decisive hours has now arrived for France.

"Prussia, to whom we have given evidence, during and since the war of 1866, of the most conciliatory disposition, has held our good will of no account, and has returned our forbearance by encroachments. She has aroused distrust in all quarters, in all quarters necessitating exaggerated armaments; and has made of Europe a camp, where reign disquiet, and fear of the morrow.

"A final moment has disclosed the instability of the international understanding, and shown the gravity of the situation. In the presence of her new pretensions, Prussia was made to understand our claims. They were evaded, and followed with contemptuous treatment. Our country manifested profound displeasure at this action; and quickly a war-cry resounded from one end of France to the other.

"There remains for us nothing but to confide our destinies to the chance of arms. We do not make war upon Germany, whose independence we respect. We pledge ourselves that the people composing the great

Germanic nationality shall dispose freely of their destinies. As for us, we demand the establishment of a state of things guaranteeing our security, and assuring the future. We wish to conquer a durable peace based on the true interests of the people, and to assist in abolishing that precarious condition of things when all nations are forced to employ their resources in arming against each other."

King William of Prussia, in accepting the gage of battle thus thrown down by France, addressed in the following terms the North German Parliament on the 20th of July:—

"The King of Prussia had no interest in the selection of the Prince of Hohenzollern for the Spanish throne, except that it might bring peace to a friendly people. It had, nevertheless, furnished the Emperor of the French with a pretext for war unknown to diplomacy; and, scorning peace, he has indulged in language to Germany which could only have been prompted by a miscalculation of her strength.

"Germany is powerful enough to resent such language and repel such violence. I say so in all reverence, knowing that the event is in God's hands. I have fully weighed the responsibility which rests on the man who drives into war and havoc two great and tranquil nations yearning for peace and the enjoyment of the common blessings of Christian civilization and prosperity, and for contests more salutary than those of blood."

In the declaration of war issued by the French Government, it was stated that the French were obliged to consider the proposal to elevate a Prussian prince to the throne of Spain as menacing the independence of France; that, consequently, France had requested Prus-

sia to *disavow that scheme*; that Prussia refused to do so; that this refusal imperilled France and the European equilibrium. The declaration concludes with the following words:—

“The French Government, therefore, in taking steps for the defence of its honor and injured interests, and having adopted all measures which the circumstances render necessary, considers itself at war with Prussia.”

The enthusiasm with which this declaration was greeted in France was equalled by the enthusiasm with which all Prussia sprung to arms. The whole population rose in support of the king. Somewhat to the surprise, and greatly to the disappointment, of France, the *South* German States declared their intention to support Prussia. Thus both North and South Germany became a unit in the prosecution of the war.

It was found that Prussia was thoroughly prepared for the conflict, as though she had anticipated it, and had made secret arrangements accordingly. France, on the other hand, was found singularly unprepared, indicating that her government was taken by surprise.

“The Moscow Gazette” declared, that, though France commenced the conflict, it was originated by Prussia. “A war with France,” it said, “was absolutely necessary for the unification of Germany. Prussia had felt this fatal necessity hanging over her for more than three years, and at last had seized the opportunity when it was ripe. The war was prepared by the astute policy of Berlin, not only at home, but also in the enemy’s camp; and when all was ready, and when France was quite incapable of entering on a great war, she was goaded into fighting, in such a manner that it seemed as if the provocation came from France herself.”

One of the largest armies of which history gives any record was immediately on the march from Prussia for the invasion of France,—an army, in the aggregate, estimated at over seven hundred thousand men. These troops were in the highest state of discipline, abundantly supplied, and armed with the most powerful weapons of destruction which modern art could create. Another German army, equal in numbers, was held in reserve, to be pushed forward in detachments as occasion might require.

The Southern German States co-operating with Prussia enabled Bismarck, from the Prussian fortresses upon the Rhine, to commence his march upon Paris with troops three or four times as numerous as France had in the field to repel them.