CHAPTER XVII.

THE EASTERN QUESTION.

BEFORE proceeding any farther, let us turn aside for a moment to contemplate what is called "The Eastern Question," which has become inextricably involved in the complications of European diplomacy. It is confidently affirmed by the partisans of France, that Bismarck, anxious to extend along both sides of the Rhine the territory of the great German empire he was seeking to construct, goaded France into the war (for which Prussia was all prepared), and purchased the neutrality of Russia by a secret treaty, in which he agreed to co-operate with the czar in his designs upon Constantinople.

It has long been the great object of Russian ambition to drive the Turks back into Asia, and, seizing upon Constantinople, to make it the southern capital of the Russian Empire. A brief reference to the geography of those regions will show the vast importance of this measure to Russia.

The Mediterranean Sea is connected with the Sea of Marmora by a serpentine strait, usually called the Hellespont, which is from half a mile to a mile and a

half in width. At the mouth of this strait there are four strong Turkish forts, called the Dardanelles: consequently the strait itself frequently takes the same name. Nothing can be easier than to crown the crags and bluffs which line these waters with fortresses that no fleet can pass.

Having threaded the Strait of the Dardanelles, you pass into the Sea of Marmora, — a hundred and eighty miles in length, and sixty in breadth. Crossing this sea to its northern shore, you enter the Bosphorus. This strait, which is about fifteen miles long, and of an average width of half a mile, conducts you to the Black Sea, in itself an ocean, — seven hundred miles long, and three hundred broad. The Strait of the Bosphorus is considered the most attractive sheet of water upon the globe. But a short distance up the strait, on the European side, the imperial city of Constantine is reared. It seems to be the uncontradicted testimony of all observers, that earth presents no other site so favorable for a great metropolis.

The Black Sea receives into its immense reservoir not only the Danube, but nearly all the majestic rivers of Russia, — the Dnieper, the Dniester, and the Don.

The great empire of Russia, with a territory three times as large as that of the United States, and with more than twice its population, has no access to the ocean for purposes of commerce but by a few seaports on the Baltic, far away in the north, which, for a large portion of the year, are blocked by the ice. It seems essential to the prosperity of Russia, to the development of her resources, to her emergence from comparative barbarism, that she should have free commercial intercourse with the outside world. It is only through

the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles that Russia can find avenues to this commerce. But the Turks can at any time close this door, and refuse to allow any Russian ship to enter or depart. In case of war, Turkey can thus almost annihilate Russian commerce.

For about a hundred years it has been the constant object of Russian ambition to obtain Constantinople as her southern capital, and the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus as her commercial avenues. This has been the constant effort of her diplomacy; and it has led to many sanguinary conflicts.

When, in 1827, the Greeks emancipated themselves from the Turkish yoke, they were encouraged to the effort, and aided in the struggle, by Russia. As the result of that conflict, the czar took a long stride towards the possession of Constantinople; but all the European monarchies seem united in their determination that Russia shall not obtain Constantinople. They say that Russia, in possession of the imperial city and of the straits which lead to it, would be invulnerable, and could bid defiance to combined Europe: the Black Sea would become an impregnable harbor; its shores a navy-yard, which no fleet or army could penetrate.

The anxiety which England feels upon this subject may be inferred from the following extract from "The London Quarterly Review:" —

"The possession of the Dardanelles would give to Russia the means of creating and organizing an almost unlimited marine. It would enable her to prepare in the Black Sea an armament of any extent, without its being possible for any power in Europe to interrupt her proceedings, or even to watch or discover her designs. It is obvious, that, in the event of war, it would be in the

power of Russia to throw the whole weight of her disposable forces on any point in the Mediterranean, without any probability of our being able to prevent it. Her whole southern empire would be defended by a single impregnable fortress. The road to India would be open to her, with all Asia at her back. The finest materials in the world for an army destined to serve in the East would be at her disposal. Our power to overawe her in Europe would be gone; and, by even a demonstration against India, she could augment our national expenditure by millions annually, and render the government of the country difficult beyond all calculation."

M. Meneval, the private secretary of Napoleon I., testifies, that, in one of the interviews of the emperor with Alexander I., the czar offered to co-operate with the Emperor of France in all his plans of aggrandizement, if Napoleon would consent that Russia should take possession of Constantinople. The emperor, after a moment's reflection, replied, "Constantinople, never! It is the empire of the world." [1]

On the 6th of November, 1816, Napoleon, at St. Helena, conversing with Las Casas, said, "Russia has a vast superiority over the rest of Europe in regard to the immense powers she can call up for the purpose of invasion, together with the physical advantages of her situation under the pole, and backed by eternal bulwarks of ice, which, in case of need, will render her inaccessible. Who can avoid shuddering at the thought of such a vast mass, unassailable on the flanks or in the rear, descending upon us with impunity; if triumphant, overwhelming every thing in its course; or, if defeated, retiring amidst

[1] Meneval, Vie Privée de Napoléon.

the cold and desolation which may be called its forces of reserve, and possessing every facility of issuing forth again at every opportunity? Constantinople is, from its situation, calculated to be the seat and centre of universal dominion." [1]

Again: on the 14th of February, 1817, Dr. O'Meara inquired of the emperor if it were true that Alexander of Russia intended to seize Constantinople. The emperor replied, —

"All his thoughts are directed to the conquest of Turkey. We have had many discussions about it. At first I was pleased with his proposals, because I thought it would enlighten the world to drive those brutes, the Turks, out of Europe; but when I reflected upon the consequences, and saw what a tremendous weight of power it would give to Russia on account of the number of Greeks in the Turkish dominions who would naturally join the Russians, I refused to consent to it, especially as Alexander wanted to get Constantinople, which I would not allow; for it would destroy the equilibrium of power in Europe." [2]

A few months after this, on the 27th of May, 1817, the conversation again turned on this all-important subject, in the humble apartment of the exile at St. Helena. Speaking to Dr. O'Meara, the emperor said, —

"In the course of a few years, Russia will have Constantinople, the greatest part of Turkey, and all Greece. Almost all the cajoling and flattery which Alexander practised towards me was to gain my consent to effect this object. In the natural course of things, in a few years Turkey must fall to Russia. The powers it could

[1] Napoleon at St. Helena, p. 451. [2] Idem, p. 534.

injure, who could oppose it, are England, France, Prussia, and Austria. Now, as to Austria, it will be very easy for Russia to engage her assistance by giving her Servia, and other provinces bordering on the Austrian dominions. *The only hypothesis that France and England may ever be allied with sincerity will be in order to prevent this.* But even this alliance will not avail. France, England, and Prussia, united, cannot prevent it: Russia and Austria can at any time effect it." [1]

In the month of June, 1844, the Czar Nicholas of Russia visited the court of Queen Victoria. He was received in a blaze of splendor at Windsor Castle. All the honors which the court of St. James could confer were lavished upon him. It was subsequently made known to the world through the memorandum of the Russian minister, Count Nesselrode, that the object of the czar in this imperial visit was to induce England to lend her countenance and co-operation in driving the Turks out of Europe, and in dividing the conquered territory between them. It was indeed a princely estate which it was proposed thus to seize. Turkey in Europe covers a territory twice as large as the Island of Great Britain, and embraces a population of fourteen millions, only three millions of whom are Mohammedans.

The following, according to Count Nesselrode, was the proposition which the czar made to the British cabinet: Russia was to incorporate into her dominions the three splendid Danubian provinces of Moldavia, Wallachia, and Bulgaria. This would give her the entire command of the mouths of the Danube. The czar was also to be permitted to establish nominally a Greek

[1] Napoleon at St. Helena, p. 562.

power in Roumalia, but under Russian protection, with Constantinople as its capital. This was, of course, surrendering Constantinople to Russia.

Austria was to receive as her share in the division the fertile and beautiful provinces of Servia and Bothnia. These provinces, situated on the south side of the Danube, adjoined the Austrian possessions, and presented a territory of great fertility, which enjoyed the lovely clime of Italy. The provinces embraced over forty thousand square miles, being a little larger than the State of Kentucky, and contained about two million inhabitants. Austria was also to be permitted to extend her southern frontier so as to embrace nearly the whole of the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea.

The lovely Island of Cyprus, the gem of the Eastern Mediterranean, a hundred and forty-six miles long and sixty miles broad, was to be transferred to England. With this island as a naval dépôt, England was also to take possession of the whole of Egypt. This would give her the command of the canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and would greatly facilitate her intercourse with India.[1]

And why did not England and Austria embrace this magnificent and perfectly feasible plan? That there was no moral principle to restrain them from any measure of national aggrandizement, the past history of the two kingdoms amply proves.

And, moreover, what claim, it might be asked, can the Turk show to his European possessions? He crossed the Hellespont a blood-stained robber. With dripping

[1] Alison, vol. viii. p. 40.

cimeter he hewed his path through the quivering nerves of the vanquished Christians. Smouldering ruins and gory corpses marked every step of his progress.

Why, then, did not England and Austria consent to this division of European Turkey? It was because this arrangement would make Russia so powerful, that she would be the undisputed monarch of the Eastern world. The balance of power in Europe would be destroyed, and Russia would attain a supremacy before which all other European powers would tremble.

And yet nothing in the future seems more certain than that Russia will advance to Constantinople. The late Crimean War did but postpone the event for a few years. On this side of the Atlantic, where questions of European balances of power disturb us not, the popular sympathies are almost unanimously in favor of Russia. There would be no mourning here should the crescent fall, and should the Greek cross be raised over the dome of St. Sophia, and over all the fortresses which frown along the heights of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

Such is the general aspect of the "Eastern Question." In all the diplomacy which now agitates Europe, this question invariably comes up as one of the most essential elements. There are many rumors that a secret understanding now exists between Russia and Prussia, by which Russia consents that Prussia shall organize an immense German empire in the heart of Europe, which shall overshadow the surrounding monarchies; and Prussia, in return, is to support Russia in her march to Constantinople. If this be the fact, Russia and Germany henceforth hold Europe in their grasp. All the other

monarchies will be virtually tributary to these two gigantic powers. Russia enthroned at Constantinople, and Prussia the head of imperial Germany, occupying the whole Valley of the Rhine, from the sea to the Alps, can bid defiance to Europe in arms.

France is now powerless. Prussia is acting in co-operation with Russia. England, without the aid of France, can accomplish but little. Any alliance between England and *democratic* France is impossible. The British Government has even more to fear from democracy across the Channel than from Russia on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

The last phase of this all-exciting and ever-changing question is, that England, Russia, and Prussia enter into a virtual alliance; that Prussia be permitted to work her will upon France, now prostrate before her; that Russia be permitted to do as she pleases with the Ottoman Empire; and that England seize upon the Suez Canal, thus appropriating to herself this new and magnificent avenue of East-Indian commerce, which France devised, engineered, and constructed. To this arrangement, France, without a government, without an army, impoverished, exhausted, bleeding, can present no opposition.[1]

[1] Telegram from London, Dec. 1, 1870.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRANCE INVADED.

ON Friday, the 22d of July, but one week after the declaration of war, immense divisions of the Prussian army were gathered on the French or left side of the Rhine. These vast military bands, numbering several hundred thousands, were marshalled between the two massive and almost impregnable fortresses of Coblentz and Mayence. Braver troops than these German soldiers, or troops better disciplined, armed, and officered, never marched to the sound of the drum. They were inspired, not only by patriotic fervor, but by the full conviction that their cause was just in the sight of God.

The next day, July 23, a division of this army, advancing from Saar-Louis, on the southern frontier of the Prussian-Rhine provinces, crossed the boundary, and, invading France, marched directly south, some ten or twelve miles, towards St. Avold. There was nothing to oppose them. The frontier was there but an imaginary line, unprotected by river, mountain, or fortress.

In these modern days there is great power in public opinion. Both France and Prussia were alike anxious to obtain the moral support of other nations. As the