EUROPE

1598–1715

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PREFACE

I HAVE not attempted in the following pages to write the history of Europe in the seventeenth century in detail. The chronicle of events can be found without difficulty in many other works. I have therefore endeavoured as far as possible to fix attention upon those events only, which had permanent results, and upon those persons only whose life and character profoundly influenced those results. Other events and other persons I have merely referred to in passing, or left out of account altogether, such as for instance the history of Portugal and the Papacy, the internal affairs of Spain, Italy, and Russia. Following out this line of thought I have naturally found in the development of France the central fact of the period which gives unity to the whole. Round that development, and in relation to it, most of the other nations of Europe fall into their appropriate positions, and play their parts in the drama of the world's progress. Such a method of reading the history of a complicated period may, of course, be open to objection from the point of view of absolute historical truth. The effort to give unity to a period of history may easily fall into the inaccuracy of exaggeration. The picture may become a caricature, or so strong a light may be shed on one part as to throw the rest into disproportionate gloom. It would be presumptuous in me to claim that I have avoided such dangers.

All that I can say is, that they have been present to my mind continually as I was writing, and that I have been emboldened to face them both by the fact that the history of the seventeenth century lends itself in a very marked way to such a treatment, and by the conviction that it is far more important to the training of the human mind, and the true interests of historical truth that a beginner should learn the place which a period occupies in the story of the world than have an accurate knowledge of the smaller details of its history. To know the meaning and results of the Counter-Reformation is some education, to know the official and personal names of the Popes none at all.

With regard to the spelling of names I have endeavoured to follow what I humbly conceive to be the only reasonable and consistent rule, that of custom. It seems to me to be as pedantic to write Henri, Karl, or Friedrich, as it is admitted to be to write Wien or Napoli, and inconsistent on any theory except that of the law of custom to write anything else. But with regard to some names, custom permits more than one form of spelling. It is as customary to write Trier as Trêves, or Mainz as Mayence. These cases mainly arise with reference to names of places which are situated on border lands, and are spelt sometimes according to one language, and sometimes according to another. In these cases I have followed the language of the nation which was dominant in the period of which I treat, and accordingly write Alsace, Lorraine, Basel, Köln, Saluzzo, etc. The use of an historical atlas is presumed throughout.

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Importance of the century — France at the beginning of the century — The States-General, the Parlement de Paris, Religious Toleration — Germany — The Emperor, the Imperial Courts, the Diet — Disunion of Germany — England — Spain — Italy.

THE seventeenth century is the period when Europe, shattered in its political and religious ideas by the Reformation, reconstructed its political system upon the principle of territorialism under the rule of absolute monarchs. It opens with Henry IV., it closes with Peter the Great. It reaches its climax in Louis XIV. and the Great Elector. It is therefore the century in which the principal European States took the form, and acquired the position in Europe, which they have held more or less up to the present time. A century, in which France takes the lead in European affairs, and enters on a course of embittered rivalry with Germany, in which England assumes a position of first importance in the affairs of Europe, in which the Emperor, ousted from all effective control over German politics, finds the true centre of his power on the Danube, in which Prussia becomes the dominant state in north Germany, in which Russia begins to drive in the Turkish outposts on the Pruth and the Euxine — a century, in short, which saw the birth of the Franco-German Question and of the Eastern Question — cannot be said to be deficient in modern interest. The map of Europe at the close of the seventeenth shows the same great divisions as it does

Importance of the Seventeenth Century.

at the close of the nineteenth century, with the notable exception of Italy. Prussia and Russia have grown bigger, France and Turkey have grown smaller, the Empire has become definitely Austrian, but in all its main divisions the political map of Europe is practically unchanged. The states which were formed in the general reconstruction of Europe after the religious wars of the sixteenth century are the states of which modern Europe is now composed. Great nations are apt to change their forms of internal government much more often than they do their political boundaries and influence; but it is a remarkable thing that, with the great exception of France, the principal European states possess at the present time not only a similar political position, but a similar form of government to that which they possessed at the close of the seventeenth century. In spite of the wave of revolutionary principles, which flowed out from France over Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, the principal states of Europe at the present time are in all essentials absolute monarchies, and these monarchies are as absolute now as they were then, with the two exceptions of Italy, which did not then exist, and France, which is now a Republic, but has been everything in turn and nothing long. The formation of the modern European states system is therefore the main element of continuous interest and importance in the history of the seventeenth century, that is to say, the acquisition by the chief European states of the boundaries, which they have since substantially retained, the adoption by them of the form of government to which they have since adhered, and the assumption by them, relatively to the other states, of a position and influence in the affairs of Europe which they have since enjoyed. The sixteenth century saw the final dismemberment of medieval Europe, the seventeenth saw its reconstruction in the modern form in which we know it now.

Of the European nations which were profoundly affected by the Reformation, France was the first to emerge from the conflict. French Calvinism differed from the south German

type by being more distinctly political in its objects, and the leaders of the French Catholics, especially the ambitious chiefs of the house of Guise, had quite as keen a desire for their own aggrandisement as they had for the supremacy of their religion. The religious wars in France soon became mainly faction fights among the nobles for political objects in which personal rivalry was embittered by religious division, and all honest and law-abiding citizens — that sturdy middle-class element which has always formed the backbone of the French nation — soon longed for the strong hand which should at any rate keep faction quiet. The authority of the Crown had ever been in France the sole guarantee of order and of progress. Under the weak princes of the House of Valois that guarantee ceased to exist. Shifty, irresolute, inconstant, they preferred the arts of the intriguer to the policy of the statesman, the poniard of the assassin to the sword of the soldier, and when Henry III., the murderer of the Duke of Guise, in his turn fell murdered by the dagger of the monk Clément, France drew a long sigh of relief. Like England after Bosworth Field, France after Ivry was ready to throw herself at the feet of a conqueror who was strong enough to ensure peace and suppress faction. The House of Bourbon ascended the French throne upon the same unwritten conditions as the House of Tudor ascended the English throne. It was to rule because it knew how to rule, and the conditions of its rule were to be internal peace, and national consolidation.

The condition of France, 1598.

But the task before the first Bourbon was far more difficult than that which absorbed all the energies of the first Tudor. He had no machinery to his hand which he could use to veil the arbitrariness of his action, or to guide public opinion. Parliament in England had often been the terror of a weak king. The Tudors soon made it the tool of a strong king. In France Henry had to rely openly upon the powers of the Crown and upon military force. It is true that the States-General still existed, though they were seldom summoned, but their constitution and

The States-General.

traditions rendered them unfit to play the part of an English Parliament. They met in three houses representing the Clergy, the Nobility, and the Commonalty, the latter house, the Tiers Etat as it was called, being usually about as large as the other two put together; but instead of there being a political division running through the three estates of those for the policy of the Crown and those against it, as was usually the case in England, the tendency in France always was for the two privileged houses to coalesce against the Tiers Etat. The Crown had therefore only to balance one against the other, and leave them to entangle themselves in mutual rivalries in order to gain the victory. In the long history of the English Parliament it is very rare to find serious questions raised between the two houses. Nobles and Commons have as a rule acted together for weal or for woe in attacking or supporting the policy of the Crown. The unity of Parliament has been its most significant feature. In France it has been quite otherwise. Mutual jealousy and social rivalry played their part with such effect that they destroyed the political usefulness of the States-General. Unable to act together they could not extort from the Crown either the power over the purse, or the right of legislation, which were the two effective checks upon the king's prerogative exercised by the English Parliament. All that they could do was to present a list of grievances and ask for a remedy. They had no power whatever of compelling a favourable answer, much less of giving effect to it. The procedure was for each Estate to draw up its own list (*cahier*) of those matters which it wished to press upon the attention of the Crown. When the lists were completed they were formally presented to the king and a formal answer of acceptance or rejection was expected from him, but as the Estates separated directly the answer was given, the Crown was apt not to be over prompt in fulfilling its promises.

As a constitutional check upon misgovernment the States-General in France were therefore of little use. That function,

as far as it was discharged at all, had by accident devolved upon the Parlement de Paris. The Parlement was in its origin nothing more than a court of law which sat at Paris to administer justice between the king and his subjects, and between subject and subject. In course of time it grew into a corporation of lawyers and judges, not altogether unlike our Inns of Court in England amalgamated into one, having just that kind of political influence which a close and learned corporation, whose business it was to make by judicial decision a great deal of the law of the country, could not fail to have. In one point indeed the Parlement had almost established a definite right. As the highest court of the realm its duty was to register the edicts of the king, a duty which was easily turned into a right to refuse to register them if it so willed. Thus the Parlement claimed an indirect veto upon the royal legislation. It is true that the king could always override the refusal of the Parlement to register an edict by coming in person to its session and holding what was called a *lit de justice;* but this was a proceeding which involved a good deal of inconvenience, and was not unlikely to excite tumults; it would not therefore be resorted to except on critical occasions. So completely had the constitution of France become in its structure despotic, that there was absolutely no constitutional means of exercising control over the king's will than this very doubtful right of the Parlement de Paris to refuse to register the king's edict. And if there was no constitutional check upon the king's will, there was also no machinery which the king could utilise in order to associate himself with his people in the task of government. He stood on a pedestal by himself in terrible isolation surrounded by his courtiers, faced by the nobility, backed by his army, unable to know his people's wants, and unable to help them to know their own.

The Parlement de Paris.

Position of the Crown.

But this was not all. Henry IV. had to encounter open enmity abroad, and give an earnest of religious peace at home, as well as to crush civil dissensions. It was not till his conver-

sion to Catholicism drew the teeth of Spain, and proved to the majority of his subjects that he desired above all things to be a national and not a party king, that he can be said really to have reigned. The peace of Vervins, concluded in 1598, marked the issue of France from the throes of her Reformation wars. Her religious struggle was over. Calvinism had made its great effort to win religious and political ascendency in France, and had failed. France was to remain a Catholic country, and the bull of absolution granted to Henry IV. by Pope Clement VIII. in 1595 duly emphasised the return of the Most Christian King into the pale of Catholic obedience. But if Calvinism had failed, neither had Papalism wholly won the day. Catholic, France had determined to be, but she was far from assuming as yet the mantle of the champion of rigid orthodoxy just laid down by Philip II. The same year which saw the death of Philip II. and the real beginning of the reign of Henry IV. saw also the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes with its announcement of the new policy of liberty of conscience. By this famous edict religious toleration and political recognition was accorded to the French Calvinists. They were to be allowed to worship as they pleased, provided they paid tithes to the Church, and observed religious festivals like other Frenchmen. They were to receive a grant from the State in return. They were to be equally eligible with Catholics for all public offices. They were to be represented in the Parlements, and were to have exclusive political control for eight years over certain towns in the south and west of France, of which the most important were Nismes, Montauban, and La Rochelle. Thus they obtained not merely toleration as a religious body, and part endowment by the State, but also recognition in certain places as a political organisation. The political settlement was evidently but a palliative, the religious settlement was a cure. No country as patriotic as France, no government as strong as an absolute monarchy could tolerate longer than was necessary an *imperium in imperio* under the

Religious toleration.

The Edict of Nantes.

control of a religious sect. But the toleration of Calvinism in a country professedly Catholic was a solution of the religious question thoroughly acceptable to the genius of the French nation. It enabled France at once to fix her whole attention upon the absorbing business of political aggrandisement. It excused her somewhat for not thinking it obligatory to play a purely Catholic rôle in the pursuit of that aggrandisement. The first of those nations of Europe, which had been seriously affected by the Reformation, to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the problem of religious division, she was able to set an example to Europe of a policy entirely outside religious considerations. Under a king who had conformed, but had not been converted, France, pacified, but not yet united, was ready to mix herself up in the web of political intrigue and religious rivalry in which Germany was helplessly struggling, with the simple if selfish object of using the misfortunes of her neighbours for her own advantage.

The state of Germany was indeed pitiable. The Empire had become but the shadow of a great name. The successor of Augustus had nothing in common with his pro- **Germany: The Emperor.** totype but his title. Roman Emperor he might be in the language of ceremony, punctiliously might the imperial hierarchy of dignity be ordered according to the solemnities of the Golden Bull, but all the world knew that in spite of this wealth of tradition and of prescription, the Emperor could wield little more power in German politics than that which he derived from his hereditary dominions. The archduke of Austria must indeed be a figure in Germany under any circumstances, still more so if he happened to be also king of Hungary and king of Bohemia; but if the electors set the Imperial Crown at his feet and hailed him as Cæsar, though much was thereby added to his dignity and something to his legal rights, not one whit accrued to him of effective force. It is true that his legal position as head and judge over the princes accrued to him, not so much because he was emperor and the representative of Augustus and Charles the

Great, as because he was German king and the successor of Henry the Fowler and Otto the Great. Nevertheless, the fact, from whatever quarter derived, that the German constitution gave to the Emperor the lordship over the other princes and the right of deciding disputes which arose between them, made him the only possible centre of German unity.

The Imperial Courts.

That right was exercised through a court (the *Reichskammergericht*) the members of which were mainly nominated by the princes themselves. For the purpose of ensuring the enforcement of its decrees, Germany was divided into circles, in which the princes and the representatives of the cities who were members of the diet met, and if necessary, raised troops to give effect to the sentences pronounced. Since the beginning of the Reformation, however, there had been a difficulty in getting this machinery to work, owing to the religious dissensions; and the Emperor had begun the practice of referring imperial questions which had arisen to the Imperial or Aulic Council (*Reichshofrath*), which was entirely nominated by him and under his influence.

The Diet.

In all important matters of administrative policy the Emperors, since the middle of the fifteenth century, had been obliged to consult the Diet; but the Diet was in no sense a representative assembly of the classes of which the nation was composed, as were the Parliament of England and the States-General of France, but was merely a feudal assembly of the chief feudal vassals of the Empire. It was, in fact, a congress of petty sovereigns gathered under their suzerain. It was divided into three houses. The first consisted of six of the seven electors, three ecclesiastical, *i.e.* the archbishops of Köln, Mainz, and Trier, and three lay, the electors of Saxony and Brandenburg and the elector palatine, for the fourth lay elector the king of Bohemia only appeared for an imperial election. The second was the House of Princes, the third that of the free Imperial Cities, but it was considered so inferior to the other houses that it was only permitted to discuss matters which had already received their

assent. It is obvious that in an assembly so constituted the only interest powerfully represented was that of the princes, and the only influence likely to be exercised by it was in favour of that desire for complete independence, which was natural to a body of rulers who already enjoyed most of the prerogatives of sovereignty. For there had ever been two divergent streams of tendency in German politics. Deep in the German heart lay a vague sense of nationality and patriotism, a dim desire that Germany should be one. This sentiment naturally centred round the Emperor as the visible head of German unity. If Germans ever were to be politically one it could only be under the Emperor. There was no other possible head among the seething mass of jarring interests known geographically as Germany. The other tendency had sprung from the strong love of local independence characteristic of the Teutonic race. Naturally each petty duke or prince tried to become as independent of outside authority as he could; and in the pursuit of this policy he found himself greatly aided by that spirit of local seclusion, which ever seeks to find its centre of patriotism in the side eddies of provincial life rather than in the broad stream of the national existence. The Emperors of the House of Habsburg had fully recognised these facts, and, since the days of Maximilian I., had set themselves resolutely to the task of rebuilding the imperial authority, and making the imperial institutions the true and only centre of German unity. They might have succeeded, had it not been for two events, the concurrent effect of which was completely to shatter the half begun work. The first was the Reformation, the second was the long rivalry with France. The Reformation cut Germany rudely at first into two afterwards into three pieces. Lutheranism, which absorbed nearly all northern Germany between the Main and the Baltic, drew its strength especially from the support of the north German princes. Luther himself effected a closer alliance with the princes and the nobles

German desire for unity.

Desire for sovereignty among the Princes.

Effect of the Reformation.

than he did with the people. It was to them he appealed for protection in the days of his earlier struggles, on them that he trustfully leaned in the later days of his power. Naturally, therefore, Lutheranism gave a strong impulse and sanction to the desire, which the northern princes uniformly felt, to assert their independence of a Catholic emperor. Calvinism, spreading from republican Switzerland down the upper valley of the Rhine into the heart of Germany, had a no less fatal influence upon the centralising policy of the Emperors. Subversive in its tendencies and impatient of recognised authority, it intensified the spirit of dislike to autocratic institutions. Still, in spite of the terrible disruption of Germany caused by the Reformation, a sovereign so powerful and so cautious as Charles v. might have been able to weather the storm, without suffering any loss of prerogative or influence, had it not been for the constant and paramount necessity laid upon him of counteracting the machinations of an enemy ever wakeful and absolutely unscrupulous. As long as Francis I. lived Charles v. was never able seriously to apply himself to German affairs. When he was dead it was too late. The religious divisions of Germany had taken definite political shape, and were inspired with definite political ambitions. The Emperor had ceased to be the acknowledged political head of Germany. He had sunk into the inferior position of becoming merely the chief of one political and religious party.

Effect of the rivalry with France.

In this way the desire for political independence from the authority of the Emperor went hand in hand with the achievement of religious independence from the authority of the Church. The Emperors who followed Charles v. in the latter years of the sixteenth century, Ferdinand I., Maximilian II., and Rudolf II., so far from being able in the least to extend their prerogative in Germany, were barely able to retain what shreds of it yet remained. But towards the close of the century the onward and destructive march of Lutheranism and of Calvinism

Consequent disunion of Germany.

stopped. The Reformation spent itself as a living force. It had reached its utmost limits and slowly the tide began to turn. The Counter-Reformation, with the spiritual exercises of S. Ignatius in one hand and the sword in the other, went forth to win back half Germany to the faith. When the peace of Vervins set France free, Germany was at her weakest. Jarring interests, political dissensions, religious hatreds were rife through the length and breadth of that unhappy land. The Lutheran princes of the north had succeeded in throwing off the leadership of the Emperor without themselves producing either a leader or a policy. The Calvinist princes of the Rhine-land, exasperated by the advance of the Counter-Reformation, were ready to throw all Germany into the crucible and rashly strike for a supremacy which they had not strength to win. In Bohemia men remembered with fierce glee the stubborn waggon fortresses of the unconquerable Ziska, and the concessions wrung from reluctant Pope and Emperor by the success of a rebellion. Meanwhile in Bavaria and the hereditary dominions of the House of Austria, by steady governmental pressure backed by the devotion and talent of the Society of Jesus, Calvinism was being gradually rooted out and swept away by the advancing tide of the Counter-Reformation. Yet the Emperor himself was incapable of directing the policy of his own party. A melancholy recluse given to astrology and fond of morbid religious exercises, Rudolf II. was the last man fitted to lead a crusade. He could not even inspire respect, much less command allegiance. Never certainly was country in a more pitiable plight. Torn from end to end by religious dissension, pierced through and through by personal and provincial rivalries, without a single public man on either side sufficiently respected to command obedience, without unity of political or religious ideal even among the Protestants, without that last hope of expiring patriotism, the power of union in the face of the foreign aggressor, Germany at the close of the sixteenth century lay extended at the feet of her jealous rival, a helpless prey, whenever it pleased him to spring and put an end to her miseries.

England, unlike France and Germany, had as yet escaped the necessity of making the sword the arbiter of religion, but she had not wholly settled her religious difficulties. Elizabeth, masterful in all things, had imposed upon the Church and the nation a solution of the religious question which was still upon its trial. The experiment of a Church, historically organised and doctrinally Catholic, but in hostility to the Pope, was hitherto unknown in the West, though common enough in the East; and it is not surprising that it soon found itself attacked from both sides by Roman Catholics and Protestants at once. During the reign of Elizabeth the personality of the Queen and the success of her policy, especially as the champion and leader of the national opposition to Spain which culminated in the defeat of the Armada in 1588, kept the disturbing elements in check. On the accession in 1603 of a prince who with some insight into statesmanship was wholly deficient in the faculty of governing, those elements rapidly gathered strength. When serious constitutional questions between the king and the Parliament were added to the religious complications, England soon became too much absorbed in her own internal affairs to be able to speak with authority in European politics. For fifty years after the accession of the House of Stuart, England became merely a diplomatic voice in Europe to which nations courteously listened but paid no attention.

England.

While England was failing to secure her newly won honours, Spain was trading upon a past reputation. Never was the retribution of an impossible policy so quick in coming. The transition from Philip II. to Philip III. is the transition from a first-rate to a third-rate power, and that without the shock of a great defeat. Enervated by a proud laziness, drained by a world-wide ambition, ruined by a false economy, depleted by a fatal fanaticism, Spain was already falling fast into the slough from which she is only just beginning now to emerge. Yet she was still a great power, great in her traditions, great in her well-trained infantry, great

Spain.