

## CHAPTER V

### COHESION CREATED BY THE TURKISH PRESSURE

Another great force which protected the unifying work of the Habsburg rule was the need of the masses for protection against the Turkish danger. The real date of the formation of the Habsburg empire was the Battle of Mohács in 1526 when the Turks destroyed the completely demoralized and impotent Hungarian feudalism. The defeat at Mohács and the sudden death of the Hungarian king, Louis II, made the marriage contract of Maximilian valid and Ferdinand became king of the western parts of Hungary whereas the central parts, the most fertile third of the country, went under Turkish rule and Transylvania took the rank of a semi-independent principality under national rulers, but under Turkish suzerainty. From this time the nucleus of the Habsburg empire, the Austrian, the Czech, and the Hungarian center was from a military point of view united under Habsburg rule, which began a fight of two hundred years for the acquisition of the two other parts of Hungary by eliminating step by step the Turkish invasion.

The Hungarian dominions of Ferdinand formed for a long period a species of military bulwark of the West against the Turkish danger and the Austrian Archduke alone, in his quality as German emperor, disposed at this time of the financial means and military organizations on the basis of which the defense of the West became possible and the gradual expulsion of the Turks could be undertaken with the hope of success. And the more completely we understand the economic and social history of this epoch, the feudal disorganization and anarchy of the Hungarian and Czech state, the more we must acknowledge that the Habsburg dynasty was during those centuries the only sufficiently centralized and militarily organized power which could resist the growing trend of Turkish imperialism and begin later with its expulsion. The unrivaled heroism of some Hungarian and Croatian captains in their isolated fortifications (of a Zrinyi, a Dobó, a Losonczi) aroused the enthusiasm of the suffering nation but was utterly incapable of checking the terrible force of the highly efficient Turkish army.

We really witness that in the same measure as the danger of the Turk occupation grew more prominent since the fall of Constantinople, as the despair of the Christian people was augmented by the fall of Athens, of the Balkan states, of Belgrade, and of Buda, the more grew the conviction among the nations of the Danube basin that the old isolated state frames were no longer sufficient for the obstruction

of the formidable Asian danger. Already as early as the first half of the fifteenth century, King Sigmund of Hungary, of the Luxemburg dynasty, urged at his deathbed the unification of the Hungarian, Czech, and German crown in order to form a bulwark against Turkish aggression. The same need was felt even by the eternal antagonists of the dynastical power, by the upper classes and, from the beginning of the sixteenth century we often meet plans and aspirations which try to combine the nobility of various countries in order to support the Habsburgs in their struggle against the Turkish invasion.<sup>1</sup> This international co-operation of the noble classes, however, evoked the suspicion of the dynasty which in its continual fight against the feudal forces regarded this alliance of its natural opponents as a menace against its absolutistic system and impeded systematically these unifying tendencies from below, from which a kind of moral cohesion could have been evolved between the various countries of the monarchy. Therefore the struggle against the Turks became more and more a private enterprise of the Habsburgs for the consolidation and strengthening of their own power. That is the reason for this unheard-of indifference with which the liberation of Buda, of the heart of the country by the imperial troops in 1686 was accepted by Hungarian public opinion at a time when this exploit was greeted by the West with an outburst of enthusiasm. Those who know the deeper history of the epoch will, however, find this attitude not surprising, for there was no real feeling of national cohesion: the largest strata of the nobility hated the dynasty as the destroyer of the ancient privileges; the masses of bondsmen deprived of all rights regarded with a perfect indifference whether the imperial, the Turk, or the national armies would squeeze out of them the expenses and the blood-tribute of the war, whereas the lower middle classes, a very uninfluential factor, were exasperated by the religious persecutions of the dynasty to such an extent that Protestant priests began to consider the Turks as a bulwark against the intolerance of the Habsburgs. Whereas the fight of the French king for the unification of France against English foreign rule laid the cement for the first foundation of French patriotism, the struggle against the Turks was not accompanied in the consciousness of the contemporaries by any kind of international cohesion among those peoples the sons of which were the real instruments of this work of liberation. In spite of this, the great masses themselves felt more and more clearly the growing power of the dynasty in the face of which the chances of the feudal forces became weaker and weaker. Needless to say that in this growing military bureaucratic and financial force of the dynasty there were certain elements of a moral cohesion: in the leading German element a kind of a dynastical

<sup>1</sup> Bidermann, *op. cit.*, I, 6-7.

state consciousness began to evolve and in the imperial army, created by the genius of Eugene of Savoy, the prestige of victories evoked a feeling of military solidarity among the soldiers which gained the force of a popular movement. Those songs which glorified the hero, the great French *condottiere*, were, even during the World War, a powerful instrument for creating enthusiasm in the imperial army and remained real pillars of the military consciousness of the monarchy. In these songs which were taught in the Austrian schools until the collapse of the monarchy, we would seek in vain for the expression of a national or state solidarity: the great war lord had no real connection with any country or people. His genius served exclusively the interests and glory of the Habsburgs of whom he became the ardent supporter after the offenses which he suffered in the French court. How characteristic, for instance, are the following lines of one of the more representative songs:

Prinz Eugenius, der edle Ritter  
 Wollt dem Kaiser wieder kriegen  
 Stadt und Festung Belgerad.  
 (Prince Eugene, the noble knight,  
 Would try to capture for the Kaiser  
 The city and fortress of Belgrade.)

The song is exclusively militaristic and dynastic and has no bearing on fatherland and state.

## CHAPTER VI

### ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE DYNASTY AND THE OPPRESSED CLASSES OF THE PEOPLE

But in spite of this dynastical, patrimonial, and imperialistic nature of the Habsburg rule, we very early witness in it a character and tendency which became a further sustaining force in its work of centralization and unification. As the great Western national dynasties, the Habsburgs too, realized more or less clearly that, against the particularist forces of the feudal ages, against the petty kings, the robber knights, and the privileges of the estates, they needed the sympathy and protection of broader popular forces in order to get a more effective money and military support from the bondsmen and to strengthen the economic and financial power of the cities against the chronic rebellions of the feudal lords. There are many facts which demonstrate the growing tendency of the dynasty to protect the broader masses of population not only in the German provinces but also in other parts of the empire, even in rebellious Hungary. This character of the royal power was already clearly delineated under Ferdinand I. His constant fight against the misgivings of the feudal anarchy gained for him the sympathy even of a part of the lower nobility. Since 1545, he urged energetically the Hungarian Diet to abolish the *glebae adstrictus* ("tied to the soil") condition of the serfs and to give them back the right of the free migration because "their lamentations rise to the heavens continuously."

In a later period Basta, the cruel and bloody imperial general, of Italian origin (1550–1607), enjoyed the support of the Hungarian peasantry in Transylvania against the national nobility and he got a certain popularity among the poor masses. "Even a beggar could call on him," says one of the documents. The old policy of the former dynasties of the Árpáds and of the Anjous and of the great popular king Matthias Corvinus, the Just, defending the peoples against the extortions and robberies of the feudal classes became also a constant trait of the Habsburgs at least of their better type of representatives. Unfortunately this tendency could not have the same effects as in the West because the dynasty was foreign to most of its peoples and operated with a foreign army and bureaucracy. It awaked with its absolutistic despotic and bigoted Catholic tendencies the antipathy even of those masses which would have been its natural allies: of the German citizens of the cities. In spite of this the anti-oligarchical attitude of the Habsburgs was sometimes very prominent and found in the policy of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, as we soon shall see, a real sys-