

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SPANISH TERROR

The cruel and unbalanced policy of Rudolph overstrained the chord. The feudal world became more and more conscious of the danger which menaced it by Habsburg absolutism. Under the milder régime of his successor, we witness a greater activity of the noble classes. We see the beginnings of a conscious foreign policy of the estates which the growing pressure of Turkish aggression made even more prominent. Already, under the rule of Rudolph, the Austrian feudal classes made a close alliance with the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian nobility as well as with the Hungarian, Transylvanian, and Croatian estates. We can even observe a conscious endeavor to establish a central council of the noble classes for the administration of all those affairs in the internal and foreign policy in which the nobility of the various countries were equally interested. This feudal coalition took a more and more menacing attitude against the centralizing policy of the Habsburgs. When Ferdinand II (1619–1637), an entirely bigoted, passionate personality of a purely Spanish type succeeded to the throne, the conflict between Protestant particularism and Habsburg Catholic universalism, a struggle of life and death, became inevitable which under the tempests of the Thirty Years War led to an atomization of Germany and to a consolidation of the Habsburg dynasty.

The personality of Ferdinand II was a real incarnation of the Jesuit ideal which did not know any moderation or regard. "A desert is better than a country with heretics," he used to say, and he remained loyal to this slogan. The extermination of Protestantism and by it the annihilation of the resistance of the nobility to the final establishment of the absolutistic rule upon the whole territory of his empire, that was his ideal of a state. The aristocratic Spanish priests who were always with him took care that the Emperor should not know hesitation and milder compromises. He heard every day two masses and he visited constantly the monasteries and often personally rang the bell in the hermitage of Neustadt for the vespers. He initiated the historical custom according to which the Kaiser at Vienna assisted publicly the procession on Corpus Christi Day and, beginning with 1622, the Emperor walked among the crowd with a candle. (This practice remained unaltered until the end of the monarchy.) Ferdinand regarded his political enemies simply as the enemies of God and he was devoured by a burning desire to annihilate the hated sect of Protestantism.

Such was the individual who, at an important turning-point of

history, found himself opposed by a big coalition of the feudal classes, especially by the proud and inflexible Czech and Transylvanian estates, which, under the leadership of Count Mathias of Thurn and of the powerful and clear-sighted Prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Bethlen, laid siege to Vienna and endangered his throne. Ferdinand made his first offensive against his Czech enemies and won a decisive victory over them in the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620. This signified a new epoch in the history of Austria. Ferdinand, with the cruelty of the religious fanatic and of the despot of God's grace, now undertook systematically the work of the extermination of the reformation and of the Czech national nobility. Perhaps there is no second example in history of such a total annihilation and extirpation of a whole political system. More than a score of noblemen were executed in Prague with cruel brutality. Before the execution even the Emperor seemed to vacillate but the mighty Jesuit, Lamormain, put an end to his meditations by declaring that he would take the whole matter on his conscience. The Emperor yielded but previously he did something in the interests of his victims. He prayed when they were executed for the salvation of their souls. For this purpose he went to the famous madonna picture of Maria Zell in Styria, where he knelt before the picture and implored the Virgin that the Czechs should obtain at least in their last moments an illumination and that they should be conducted before their death within the pale of the church.

It became his dogma to make the people blessed by terror. He boasted of torturing and executing his subjects out of love in order to save their successors from the damnation of heresy. But beside his transcendental aims the Spanish humanitarian did not forget his worldly purposes. He made colossal confiscations in Bohemia and Moravia, the value of which is estimated at fifty million golden florins, in those times an immense fortune, which he applied as a fund *to create a loyal aristocracy for his throne*. From all parts of the world hungry adventurers eager for booty poured into the unfortunate country as the representatives of Catholicism and of the Habsburg state idea, as bureaucrats and war lords of the Emperor. The pressure of executions, imprisonments, and confiscations upon the nation was so formidable that, beginning with 1623, a long wave of emigration began from Bohemia and Moravia. In the year 1628 alone thirty-six thousand emigrants left the country, among them one hundred and eighty-five noble families.¹

With this reign of terror Ferdinand reached his aim: he extirpated almost entirely the recalcitrant Protestant nobility in the Czech countries which signified in those times the complete extermination of the whole national life, because the real supporters of it belonged then to the noble classes. The whole Czech people sank into a long

¹ For other interesting details see Dr. Eduard Vehse, *Geschichte des österreichischen Hofes und Adels und der öst. Diplomatie*, Dritter Teil (Hamburg, 1851).

torpor of peasant unconsciousness. The new nobility, the so-called *Brief- und Hofadel* (nobility of letter and court) which Ferdinand put in the place of the feudal one, became an obedient instrument of the imperial will. In this way the mechanical unity of the empire was secured in the countries of the Czech crown, and the monarch, had no ulterior purposes or aims. The old struggle between the dynasty and nobility ceased and the servile court nobility seemed to be a sufficient basis for the unification of the empire. No new kind of administration was introduced into the country purged from feudalism, but the old administration of feudal nobility continued under the direction of the new nobility.

Thus the system of Ferdinand became a prototype of absolutist and Catholic concentration which remained a salient trait of the Habsburg rule. The idea that the state can be held together by purely military forces with the help of a court nobility entirely dependent upon the throne and with the protection of the Roman Catholic church, this conception of a *Machtstaat*, became as we shall see later in detail the chief obstacle to real co-operation and psychic penetration between the various peoples and classes of the monarchy. And the system had also another quality which slowly but surely ground up the moral forces of the monarchy. To press anything and anybody into the bed of Procrustes of the dynastic and patrimonial ideal, to persecute all originality and independence which sought for new ways and means and for a freer kind of co-operation, to reward the servile routine, and a formal loyalty revelling in words: these elements of the Spanish system infiltrated deeply into the Habsburg *fidei commissum* and envenomed its blood circulation.

But what still more undermined the system was its entire political immorality. Ferdinand II and Leopold I (1657–1705) applied literally the principles of Machiavelli though they probably were not familiar with them. Let us illustrate this spirit by a document produced by the official historian of the Habsburgs, Hormayr, who became the most severe critic of the system after he abandoned the country of Metternich. This document is almost symbolical of the methods of the *divide et impera* of Austrian absolutism. The document in question is a protocol of the state council which under the chairmanship of Ferdinand II was held relative to the matter of the pacification of Hungary. The council was assisted by the Papal Nuncio, by the family ambassador of Madrid and Florence, the governor of Bohemia, Cardinal Franz Dietrichstein, and by the chief military leader Wallenstein and other outstanding personalities of the epoch. The Spanish ambassador made a proposal according to which his lord and king would be inclined to supply for forty years forty thousand soldiers to the Emperor, in order to crush rebellion in Hungary. "In this manner this whole nation, so disloyal to the imperial majesty, could be exterminated root and branch and the capital and its neighborhood could

be made safe from the aggressions of these monsters." And when some members of the council expressed doubts concerning this plan because of the well-known bravery of the Hungarians, the Spanish ambassador continued his argumentation as follows:

The best wisdom would be to buy the Turks at any price and separate them from the Hungarians. . . . The Hungarians should be constantly irritated, the Turks should be made distrustful towards them and if possible an eternal peace should be settled with the latter. . . . The best method would be that already experienced in Spain: foreign governors should be set over these Hungarian barbarians to give them new, entirely arbitrary, laws without the possibility of any legal redress. . . . If the Hungarians complain at Vienna, the answer ought to be: His Majesty does not know anything about these procedures which are very disagreeable to his most high person. In this manner these beasts who do not see beyond their noses could not make any accusations against the emperor and would turn all their hatred against the governors. . . . In this way the Hungarian nation unaccustomed to such a yoke would attempt a rebellion against its severe governors. This rebellion would give a desired opportunity to punish the traitors with inhuman penalties and tortures.

This awful and almost incredible declaration given here in practically the same words as Hormayr reports it, was undersigned by the whole state council and the Emperor. On the basis of this document Wallenstein and the other military chiefs were charged with the control of all popular movements in Hungary.²

² *Anemonen aus dem Tagebuche eines alten Pilgermannes* (Jena, 1845), I, 116-19.

I know that the authenticity of this document will be questioned by a certain group. Baron Joseph Hormayr (1781-1848), a historian of immense knowledge and brilliancy became in 1816 the official historiographer of the Habsburgs, but in 1828 he abandoned the country and accepted a position in Bavaria in order to avoid the vexations of the Metternich system. From this time the historiographer became an acute critic of the Habsburg system and I will not question that he was biased against it. Nevertheless, I believe in the authenticity of the document (although it was not found in certain parts of the Viennese Archives) for the following reasons: (1) Some of the best Hungarian historians believed firmly in the trustworthiness of Hormayr. (2) Also competent Austrians told me that though he sometimes colors his statements they regard him incapable of a conscious falsification. (3) The disappearance of documents disagreeable to the Habsburgs was not exceptional. (4) The later spirit of the Habsburg policy in Hungary corroborates the principles of the document. (5) Some passages of it were already quoted in a sensational book of the noted Viennese critic and publicist, Hermann Bahr, in 1907. The book was mutilated by the censors and later seized by the police. Professor Joseph Redlich and his friends brought the matter before Parliament where the authenticity of the document was not questioned as far as I know.

My guess is, therefore, that Hormayr told the truth though he colored and vivified certain expressions. And another point: why should we be surprised by the infamous cruelty of this document from the beginning of the seventeenth century, when we have another analogous from August 30, 1905, a letter in which William II, so much admired by certain American radical pacifists, tells Prince Bülow that an alliance should be made with the Sultan in order "to put the Mohammedan forces under Prussian leadership," but, "before all the Socialists must be shot down, beheaded, and made harmless, if necessary, by a blood-bath and the foreign war later!" (Published by the *Berliner Tageblatt*, October 14, 1928.)

If we even take into consideration all the mitigating causes, the brutal atmosphere of the period, the cruel methods and eternal intrigues of feudalism, its predatory spirit against the working-classes and the poor, its continuous plots and treasons in the pay of foreign interests, the document quoted still remains a horrible reminiscence of the governing spirit under Ferdinand which remained the real spirit of the imperial policy under his successor Leopold I. The influence of a small group of prelates, Jesuits, rapacious aristocrats, the so-called *Viennese camarilla*, became even more preponderant and the Emperor continued the policy of the counter-reformation and of an absolutistic centralization in the whole monarchy, especially in Hungary, with a renewed vigor. The terrible "Blood Tribunal" in the city of Eperjes under Count Caraffa, the war lord of Leopold, crushed all constitutional and religious resistance. "From March to September, 1687, the butchery lasted," says an independent Hungarian historian, "and already in October the Diet was opened which surrounded by foreign military forces, voted all which was expected from it."³ The re-Catholization of the whole aristocracy in Hungary formerly belonging almost entirely to Protestantism was accomplished. In 1655 there were only three Protestant families and the work was continued with the forceful conversions of the cities and of the counties. A systematic warfare was carried on against the Protestant churches and many hundred processes of high treason were inaugurated. The fate of the Protestant-Hungarian galley slaves was so pathetic in Buccari and Naples that their condition repeatedly moved European public opinion. The system of confiscating landed property of the disloyal nobility continued and the new aristocracy loyal to the throne was reinforced. Especially the complot of some feudal aristocrats under the leadership of Nádasdy (all Catholics!) in which the motives of national exasperation were curiously intermingled with the purely private business interests of the rebel magnates was an excellent instrument for the court absolutism to complete the final blow against the deeply wounded feudalism. The rebellion was cruelly revenged, its leading men were executed. In 1670 about two thousand men, nobles, and distinguished citizens were imprisoned. Immense treasures in land and jewelry were confiscated. A terrible despair took hold of the whole country and the hatred against the court and the absolute system and the procedures of counter-reformation developed in the naïve consciousness of the great masses into a form of hatred against the Germans, and in those times were born those popular slogans which remained veritable symbols in the soul of the Hungarian people: the hatred against the *German* Vienna which sucks out the Hungarian blood and treasure. "The faith of a German

³ Professor Aladár Ballagi in his commemoration of the 250th birthday of Francis Rákóczi, II.

is a faith of a dog he promises all when he is in anguish but later he grants nothing rather under any devil than under the German. . . .” Such and similar outbursts were deeply rooted in the subconscious strata of the popular public opinion and made it always an easy manoeuver for the feudal classes to direct and canalize against Vienna all social or political discontent which could become dangerous for them. After the suppression of the feudal rebellion many thousands of fugitives fled to Turkish or Transylvanian territory and became the nucleus of a series of insurrections called *kurucz insurrections*, the ideology of which was a curious mixture of the feudal interests with the social and religious unrest of the disinherited classes.

In connection with the counter-reformation there was another movement in favor of Habsburg Catholicism which was directed against the Graeco-Oriental church and embittered the life of vast masses of Rumanian Serfs. The effort of the Roman Catholic church to push back toward Rome the masses of people living in Graeco-Oriental communities was protected by the Habsburgs with armed force. The history of the Greek-Catholic union constitutes one of the most horrible pages of the work of conversion made in the Habsburg monarchy, and contributed much to the exasperation of the bondsmen population.⁴

Besides the counter-reformation and the extirpation of the disloyal feudal elements, a third great fact completed the final consolidation of the Habsburg rule in this epoch. That was the continuation and the victorious accomplishment of the war against the Turks under the brilliant leadership of Prince Eugene of Savoy. The Peace of Karlovicz, in 1699, put all of Hungary under Habsburg rule with the exception of the Banat of Temesvár. This event changed the whole situation of the monarchy. From this time on there was no further organized power against the Habsburgs. The resistance of the feudal classes was entirely broken before the prestige of the imperial dynasty and the new army organized by Prince Eugene on a modern Western pattern. This ascendancy of the Habsburgs was so elementary that immediately after the reconquest of Buda, the heart of the country, in 1687, the Diet accepted not only the legal succession of the male line of the Habsburgs but it extended this privilege also to the Spanish branch of the dynasty and renounced the old right of armed resistance against unlawful imperial acts. The same diet gave citizenship to 167 foreigners to the new aristocracy of the Habsburgs which became a reliable bodyguard of the now hereditary Habsburg monarchy.

But a more solid foundation than the constitutional guaranties

⁴ Benedek Jancsó, *History and Present State of the Rumanian National Aspirations* (Budapest, 1899), I, 733-97. In Hungarian.

above mentioned was bestowed upon the Habsburgs by a complete reorganization of the system of land ownership in the country. Following the advice of the Archbishop Kollonics, a leader of the counter-reformation and Germanization in Hungary, the Emperor constituted a special commission, the so-called *neoacquistica commissio* with the purpose of controlling the legal title of all those landed properties which were previously under Turkish rule. This whole territory was considered as conquered by the army of the Emperor and the committee claimed a heavy ransom from all those proprietors who now became imperial subjects. And as eight-tenths of the country was originally under Turkish domination the commission was able to extort large sums from the landed interests for decades and put above them the sword of Damocles of expropriation. All undesirable elements could easily be eliminated under the legal disguise. At the same time the Catholic and loyal elements were strengthened by opulent donations and the power of the high clergy with growing Germanizing tendencies became more and more preponderant. Many foreign ecclesiastic bodies and priests flooded the country with the purpose of paralyzing the native clergy of national tendency. Under such conditions the trend of the counter-reformation became almost irresistible. The Hungarian tradition attributes to Kollonics the ill-famed dictum, "I will make Hungary first a prisoner, then a beggar, and finally a Catholic." This maxim may be apocryphal but it expresses without doubt the state of mind, the hatred, and profound exasperation with which the great masses of the Hungarian population regarded the triumphant predominance of the Habsburgs.

CHAPTER IX

MERCANTILISM AND PRAGMATICA SANCTIO

The forces outlined above made the power of the Habsburg monarchy irresistible at the beginning of the eighteenth century in its whole empire. Against this daily growing power all resistances and rebellions of the feudal classes became futile. The last leader of all the dissatisfied elements of Hungary, a man of a remarkable and tragic personality, Francis Rákóczi II (1675–1735), of the famous stock of the Transylvanian princes, the hero of the last *Kurucz* insurrection against the hated world of the *Labancz* forces (the nickname of the Austrian crowd) tried in vain to oust the Habsburg rule. The whole movement was a curious mixture of narrow feudal local interests and of the aspirations for religious freedom and social emancipation. On the one hand stands Rákóczi the leader, a man with almost kingly powers who possessed in Hungary and Transylvania 445 villages on an area of 1,400,000 yokes.¹ On the other hand were all the impoverished masses of the country: noblemen whose estates were confiscated; poor priests; teachers driven by the counter-reformation from their offices; small peasants ruined by the eternal *kurucz-labancz* conflicts; soldiers dismissed from the imperial, Turkish, or national armies; and other uprooted parts of the population without bread and without any chance for the future. This fundamental contradiction, like a red thread running through the whole plot, of a feudal leader like Rákóczi with his immense landed estates and loyal Catholic feelings joining forces with the Protestant masses and with the disinherited peasantry, gave to the whole movement a kind of psychological danger and a lack of balance which the prince could scarcely appease by very vague and uncertain promises. In spite of this dilemma his standards *Pro Deo et libertate* and his famous proclamation issued in 1703, *Recrudescunt inclytæ gentis Hungaræ vulnera* (“the old wounds of the glorious Hungarian nation reappear”), and the kind, humanitarian spirit of the leader in sympathy with the sufferings of all the peoples oppressed by the Viennese absolutism evoked such a mass of popular enthusiasm that he succeeded for seven years in fomenting the spirit of rebellion against the Habsburgs whom he dethroned at the memorable Diet of Ónod in 1707. Large parts of the country were again covered with blood and the rebellion menaced not only the Austrian elements but at the same time the noble and wealthy circles of Hungary. Rebellions of famine and anarchical plunderings

¹ A Hungarian yoke (*hold*)=1.066 acre.