CHAPTER III

THE ARMY

The most powerful pillar of the Habsburg fortification which from its beginning until its breakdown represented the chief supporter and maintainer of the monarchy was the imperial army. This army from the beginning until the end—however masked it may have been by constitutional veils—was and remained under the autocratic disposition of the monarch uninfluenced in the really important issues by the parliamentary system. This army was the most individual creation of the dynasty, and it was further strengthened and developed from generation to generation. Especially the genius of Eugene of Savoy was a powerful influence in replacing the old feudal and mercenary spirit of the army by a more modern one. However, the patrimonial character of the army continued even in more recent times when the system of general conscription was introduced, carried on by feudal administration. Almost until the constitutional era the procedure of levying remained untouched, especially in Hungary where the conscription could not have been effectuated without the concurrence of the country administration very often in a fight against Vienna. This levying was not at all apt to promote any kind of civic consciousness. So writes the historian of the Austrian state administration:

> In the levying places the levyers chose as their headquarters an often frequented inn or an isolated tavern. When a man came in who seemed suitable for military service, he was invited to drink and they tried to make him intoxicated. If he could be seduced to put on a soldier's uniform for the sake of experiment or to wear a military helmet or to pronounce a *vivat* to the emperor he was immediately considered to be enrolled.[1]

It is manifest that such and similar procedures could not augment in the people its love toward the Habsburg army. Especially in the soul of the Hungarian people this practice appeared both as foreign domination and social oppression which popular songs carried further from village to village. One of these plaintive rhymes I heard personally in my childhood from the lips of the peasantry: "Now among us they enlist with a rope. . . . . The poor fellow is carried away by force. . . . . Five or six sons of the rich are undisturbed. . . . . An only son of the poor is captured. . . . ."

But even when the army was put under the semblance of a parliamentary control by the introduction of universal military obligation,

[1] Ignaz Beidtel, *Geschichte der Österreichischen Staatsverwaltung: 1740–1848* (Innsbruck, 1896), I, 64–65.

the army remained in its bulk, in the formations of the so-called *gemeinsame Armee*, "joint army" (in opposition to the local territorial formations, the so-called Austrian, Hungarian and Croatian *Landwehr* which remained in closer contact with the parental soil), the exclusive army of the Emperor and the dynasty, and reflecting their own spirit. Indeed the joint army remained until its end a "dynastic body guard," "a school of loyalty." And whatever our feelings may be concerning this institution we cannot deny that it attained its purpose during a long period. Unfortunately this state solidarity promoted by the mightily consolidated ideology of the army was an exclusively dynastic one, which became more and more confronted by the democratic and national consciousness of the various peoples. The overwhelming majority of the officers remained until the end German, a Germandom, however, which signified no national tendency but similarly, as in the bureaucratic and diplomatic organization, it represented only, so to say, the diplomatic language of the whole Habsburg joint monarchy. This spirit, the spirit of the Habsburg patrimonial state, was not only preponderant among the German element but also among the officers belonging to other nations who followed in a rather unconscious way the principle of Emperor Francis, being the patriots not of their nations but of the Habsburg dynasty. The following anecdote narrated to me by the editor of a great Hungarian daily characterizes very well this curious atmosphere. A correspondent of this paper interviewed Admiral Horthy, the present governor, in the military headquarters during the war, on the occasion of his being wounded. The glorifying report ended with the delicate allusion of the correspondent that manifestly the thoughts of the wounded hero abandoned often the imperial headquarters and returned to the Hungarian fatherland, the old home of his ancestors. When the next day the Admiral read the article, he was very much disappointed by its conclusion and repudiated energetically the imputation of the correspondent, saying to him ". . . . Remember that, if my chief war lord is in Baden, then my fatherland is also there! . . . ."

This spirit was nourished with a suspicious care by the leading elements of the army, especially by the Emperor himself. They visualized perfectly clearly that, while the national struggles of the monarchy were becoming more and more acute, their state could be maintained only on condition that they would be successful in keeping their army immune from the spirit of national quarrels. However dynastically and rigidly separated from the constitution the Austrian army may have been, two of its traits were in advantageous contrast with the general Austrian and Hungarian life. One is that there was less caste and class spirit than in the so-called fashionable offices of the monarchy which were a hotbed of the aristocracy and plutocracy. Especially, after the fatal catastrophe of 1866, the leading circles of

the army became aware of the fact that the aristocratic cult of the former army led to a hegemony of incapacities, and the work of purification was carried on with great energy which signified the democratization of the army. In the highest military ranks, with very few exceptions, there were for many years no longer aristocrats. Among the great war lords of the last war their names are absent. "The army was too important for the monarchs to build it up—after the experiences they had—on the connections of aristocratic families. . . . ."[2] (On the other hand these same devastating influences continued in a more indirect but no less pernicious way, as we shall soon see.)

Another trait of the army which might have been a model for the public spirit of the monarchy was the delicate and tactful handling of the national antagonisms. The joint army stood both in principle and in practice on the basis of national equality. As I previously mentioned the German language of command to which the leading circles so tightly clung as the chief dogma of army leadership, was not—at least in the more recent times—a Germanizing measure but the expression of the conviction that the introduction of various languages of command would make an effective war-activity impossible. However erroneous this measure may have been, it was dictated by a national consideration only in one respect: the leading military circles were aware of the fact that the claim for a Magyar language of command and for the Magyar regiment language (which led in the last two decades of the monarchy to a very serious constitutional crisis) became the war cry for a total Hungarian independence inclined only to recognize the joint person of the monarch and serving at the same time the purpose of employing the army as a means of Magyarization. And though, since the compromise of 1867, the Emperor cared practically nothing for his former allies, the nationalities of Hungary, in spite of this, and amid the growing difficulties and dangers of the Austrian nationality struggles, the more far-sighted Viennese circles shrank from the thought that the army should be employed as a means of artificial assimilation in the Hungarian half of the monarchy. As the different national consciousnesses could be tamed more and more by compromises only and not seldom by military force (for the using of the army for the maintenance of civic order belonged to the ordinary methods of the government in Bohemia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Galicia, in the Bocche, and at the electoral campaign in Hungary), it became manifest that in the very moment in which the army would be imbued by the same nationalism as the nations from which it was recruited, the monarchy would break to pieces under sanguinary civil wars. The supreme purpose remained the same, there-

[2] Acute remarks concerning this situation will be found in the excellent book already quoted of F. G. Kleinwaechter.

fore, until the last, and that was to fill the army with an exclusively Habsburg patriotism and to maintain the nationalism of the members of the army in a state of an *apolitical nationalism*, in the state of a linguistic, family, or, at most, of a racial nationalism which would have nothing to do with the political and state struggles of the single nations.

This endeavor was really successful for a long period. The joint army formed a real state within the state, the members of which—especially its officers and under-officers—breathed first of all throughout their whole life the spirit of their military colleges or their regiments and not that of their mother-nations. Indeed the fatherland of the officers' staff was the whole monarchy and not the territory of a particular nation. It was a real educational principle in the army to move the officers around from one country to another. These men who lived now in Vienna, now in Budapest, now in Prague and then in Zagreb, in Galicia, in Transylvania, in Bosnia, or in the Bocche represented a certain spirit of internationalism confronted with the impatient and hateful nationalism of their surroundings. They constituted something like an *anational caste* the members of which lived even in their private lives ordinarily distinct from their national environments and spoke very often a special language, the so-called *ärarisch deutsch* ("fiscal German") as it was ironically named by the representatives of the literary German, meaning by it a strange linguistic mixture which does not take the rules of grammar very seriously. During a long period it seemed that this Habsburg solidarity would remain stronger than the developing ideology of the national solidarities. It was an interesting symptom of this supra-national solidarity that when in 1903 the Hungarian government, under the pressure of the nationalist opposition, was successful in gaining from the Emperor the privilege for officers of Hungarian citizenship to be transferred into Hungarian regiments, more than a thousand officers of this category (belonging to the various nationalities) tried to gain Austrian citizenship in order to avoid the change, because they feared that growing Hungarian nationalism would put them in an awkward situation from the point of view of their own nations.[3] For a better understanding of this situation we must note that among the forty-seven infantry regiments located in Hungary, only five were purely Magyar whereas thirty-seven were nationally mixed. Among these latter, in sixteen the Magyars constituted the majority, in two they were even, but in nineteen they were in a minority. Besides, there were five regiments in which the Magyars were scarcely represented.[4]

[3] Interesting details concerning the struggle for the army may be found in Paul Samassa's *Der Völkerstreit im Habsburgerstaat* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 84–104.

[4] Theodor von Sosnosky, *Die Politik im Habsburgerreiche* (2d ed., Berlin, 1913), II, 204.

Therefore, the more vehemently Magyar nationalism came upon the stage and the more it endeavored to establish a distinct Hungarian army, or at least an exclusively Hungarian part inside of the joint army which could Magyarize the soldiers of the non-Magyar nationalities by the help of the single Hungarian regiment-language (the tongue employed in the joint army out of service was called regiment-language, playing the rôle of a colloquial, educational, and instructional idiom) and the more the ire of the Magyar opposition became exasperated with the imperial colors and emblems of the joint army the more grew the fear and apprehension of the court and the leading circles over this vehement and reckless movement.

In 1903 the situation became so acute that it assumed the character of an open conflict between the Emperor—that is to say the Hungarian king and the Hungarian parliament. At this juncture the Emperor issued his famous General Order of Chlopy (that is the name of the small Galician village where the headquarters of the maneuvers were) which in its rigid and severe formulation was almost a symbolical expression of the military policy of the imperial absolutism. The chief thesis of this manifesto read as follows:

> I shall never waive those rights and privileges which are warranted to the chief war lord. . . . . My army should remain as it is now, joint and united, the strong power for the defense of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy against all enemies. . . . ."

But this rigidity augmented all the more the centrifugal forces of nationalism, for the old imperial army with its Habsburg consciousness came in an increasing antagonism not only with the Hungarian effort for independence but also with the consciousness of the other nations which felt with greater force their national purposes in all the activities of states life. The unsolved constitutional and national problems of the monarchy pressed increasingly upon the conscience of the younger officers and soldiers. The sons of those nations which continued an exacerbated struggle against each other in parliament, diets, and local administration could not co-operate in the anational atmosphere of the Habsburg army which was enveloped with the suffocating atmosphere of an artificial dynastic hothouse.

The dangers of the situation were deeply felt by the more valuable elements of the army. Especially by the head of the staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, who, as the real conscience of the army followed with a fearful attention the manifestations of this state of mind, chiefly because he understood very well the fatal connection of the Jugo-Slav and Italian irredenta with the inner decomposition of the monarchy. In his memoir, addressed to the Emperor in 1907, he says, among other things, the following:

> Relating to the spirit of the army the national problem is the most important. Only in an army in which each of the various nationalities can

have the conviction of being regarded as equal in right and value can there be a common spirit and a united attachment to the great Common Cause. . . . . This equality finds its expression above all in the equal right of each nationality to use its peculiar language, in so far as it is not restricted by the necessary establishment of a common language of communication inside of the army. . . . .

But beside this connecting language everywhere the language of the soldiers must be decisive and every officer must know perfectly the mother tongue of his soldiers. And he continues:

The forceful introduction of the Magyar language in the joint army would, therefore, alienate from it all the other non-Magyar nationalities, nay, it would induce them to opposition against the army and undermine its spirit in a grievous way. . . . .

The chief end should be, therefore, according to Conrad, that "the officer, irrespective of where he originates, should feel himself at home in any place in the monarchy. . . . ."[5]

But Conrad saw more than this. He clearly visualized that this spirit could not be established inside the army as long as they did not succeed in remolding the position of the nations outside of the army. Therefore, he advised that the dualist constitution should be changed and the relation between Hungary and Croatia be put on a new basis. For this purpose universal suffrage must be introduced by compulsory means if necessary. Conrad admonished the Emperor not to permit the utilization of the army during the electoral campaign for the terrorization of the national minorities. (A procedure which led sometimes to real massacres, as it happened for instance in Galicia in the village of Drohobycz, where, at the elections of 1911, a volley was loosed upon the electorate which resulted in twenty-seven deaths and eighty-four serious injuries in order that the reign of the Polish Szlachta should be maintained over the Ruthenian peasants.) Conrad was rightly convinced that without the complete equality of the various nations the unity and combative effectiveness of the army could not be safeguarded.

Furthermore, the army not only languished through the growing national antagonisms which vehemently opposed the increase of the military budget (the leading circles spoke always more anxiously of the *Verdorren der Armee*, "the withering of the army"), but the influence of the archdukes, the atmosphere of what was called the Court-Camarilla impaired its situation for very often talentless place-hunters were put above the really worthy elements. This spirit manifested itself in its complete baseness just at the time of the catastrophe of Königgrätz and produced an episode which with the force of a *fait saillant* (as Taine called the really characteristic facts of an epoch) throws light upon the secrets of the Habsburg dissolution process.

[5] *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906–18* (Wien, 1921), I, 503–4.

The tragedy of General Benedek, defeated by the Prussians at Sadowa, demonstrated how the private interests of the archdukes were triumphant over the most conspicuous necessities of the state and of the army itself. Benedek was one of the most popular generals after the death of Radetzky, who enjoyed great prestige in the army. The year 1866, when the empire was harassed both by the Prussians and the Italians, found the general in Italy where he had been for several years the chief commander of the Austrian forces. He was really the best leader imaginable for the southern field of operation, who according to his own words "knew each stone and tree in Lombardy," but at the last moment the order came to surrender his post to the uncle of the Emperor, to Archduke Albrecht, and to take over the northern battlefield in Bohemia against the Prussians. Benedek protested desperately against this order, explaining that he "would be an ass in Bohemia" where he did not even know the course of the river Elbe. He was determined to return to Italy but at the last moment such pressure was exercised upon him in the name of the Emperor that he was forced to comply. The background of this absurd order was the presumption that victory over the Italians was certain whereas the fight with the Prussians was very dubious, and under these circumstances they tried to secure the glory of the former to the extremely ambitious Archduke, and the possible defeat to the general. And that is what really happened. The Archduke returned as a hero, and Benedek as the scapegoat of the catastrophe of Sadowa. Against this calumniatory campaign Benedek tried to justify himself, but he was not received by the Emperor. Later Archduke Albrecht requested and received from the general the promise that on his word of honor he would suffer all attacks without a reply in the interest of the monarchy. But scarcely had the general given his vow when an article appeared in the official journal, the *Wiener Zeitung*, which in a perfidious way put the honor of Benedek into the pillory, blackened his whole career as a war lord, and emphasized the humiliation of the monarchy as only a result of the omissions and crimes of the general. The proofs of these defamatory articles were revised personally by the Archduke and by the minister of war. In spite of this Benedek kept his given word and maintained silence. Only in his testament he characterized this procedure as "surpassing his ideas concerning law, justice, and honesty. . . . ." And in order to demonstrate the tragedy of his life, he forbade that his corpse be buried with military honors.

In a country where such dark things could have happened, the corruptive influence of the archdukes did not have a serious obstacle in the army. And though in the last decades of the monarchy, as it was previously mentioned, serious endeavors were undertaken for the

purification of the army and for the checking of illegal influences (especially Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his intimate circle were very active in this direction when Conrad von Hötzendorf was chief of the staff), it still remained under the suffocating atmosphere of the autocratic surroundings. The gravity of the crisis became manifest only in the period of the World War when the great majority of the leading generals failed completely. Not without reason did the old Emperor so strongly distrust his generals. The reports of Conrad and of the other more talented generals abound in eruptions against the unfitness of the leading military circles: "All the gravity of our defeat," said General Krausz, "falls exclusively to the share of the highest leadership. . . . . Never was an army, worthy of a better fate, pushed into disaster with such light-mindedness."[6]

Not only the corruptive influences of the court weakened the army, but the spirit of class domination, too, undermined its inner structure. This influence became particularly damaging during the war when all the privileged classes of the monarchy succeeded (naturally with many honorable individual exceptions) in avoiding the dangers of the fronts in a measure which is unparalleled, as far as I know, in the history of any other country. A new kind of class struggle pressed heavily upon the whole public life of the monarchy, a silent but awfully exasperated class struggle: a conflict between those who were driven into the trenches, abused, and their last energies spent, who were frequently wounded and not sufficiently restored; and on the other hand those who, as the result of their social standing, aristocratic, plutocratic, or influential journalistic connections, were successful in dodging the real dangers of the war. They did this chiefly by two methods. The one was the institution of the so-called "indispensability" by which many thousands were without cause retained from the fronts under the pretext that their services were absolutely necessary to the country in economic life or in higher offices or in the influential press. The other was that the youth belonging to the wealthy or aristocratic classes found employment far away from the trenches within the organization of the higher commanders which were relatively seldom exposed to direct war-activity. Everybody who had occasion to come into contact with these higher headquarters during the war had the unanimous experience that many thousands of elegant and perfectly healthy young men found bodily protection in these aristocratic detachments in or near the hinterland. This crude antagonism between the ragged and untrimmed soldiers of the trenches and the well-dressed and polished orderly officers of the higher quarters (the people of the trenches called them with disgust *Etapenschweine* or "swines of the hinterland") was indeed one of those mass-psychological forces which weakened in a great measure the solidarity of the fronts.

[6] Geza Supka, *The Great Drama* (Miskolcz, 1924), p. 359. In Hungarian.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARISTOCRACY

A liberal deputy once said in the Austrian parliament the following words, which became household words of political life:

> The thought was often expressed that there were in Austria some sixty aristocratic families who conducted the state as their private enterprise and attempts were made in an ingenious way to deduce the story of Austria from this proposition. This thought has some truth in it but it is incomplete. Add to these sixty aristocratic families thirty or forty bishops and you will have the whole truth.

The foreign reader might believe that these words belonged to those plastic exaggerations which political enemies so often employ against each other, but they signified in the monarchy the complete reality proved by any careful sociological or historical survey. This aristocracy was the most decisive factor in the monarchy even in times when it lost the majority of its legal privileges. Practically, its power rivalled that of the monarch until the very end of the empire.

As the historical roots of feudalism penetrated the entire soil of the monarchy, and as its effects until the end were more elementary than in any other state of Europe, with the possible exception of Russia, it will be wise to reconstruct with a few traits the genesis of this situation. Ignaz Beidtel, the able historian of the Austrian state administration, says:

> The relations of nobility and feudalism brought about this result that the monarch could regard only a relatively small part of the population as his direct subjects; the other, the far greater part, was only indirectly under his reign but directly under the rule of the feudal estates. With this situation the possessor of several estates was a great lord. Every year he had some hundreds of free peasant lots which he could grant as he liked, and in the eyes of his feudal subjects, he was a more important person than the monarch. Under these great lords or as the people called them between 1720 and 1830, the "Greats," very often stood poorer noblemen as officials or higher servants. . . . .

The possession of fifteen or twenty villages was quite common but it was not a rarity that some mighty lord was the owner of seventy-five to one hundred and twenty villages. These "Greats" had an unlimited administrative and judiciary power over their subjects. Some of them enjoyed an almost semi-sovereign situation. For instance, the Silesian princes had the right to establish a kind of "government." They had a "court" and a regular court session. The prince of Liechtenstein