

CHAPTER II

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HABSBURG MONARCHY WAS NOT A MECHANICAL BUT AN ORGANIC PROCESS

Before proceeding to examine the causes which made the attempt at consolidation of the Habsburg empire a failure, a word may be said in anticipation of objections that may be taken to my viewpoint. There will be those who will resolve this whole problem into a sham by asserting that the dissolution of the monarchy was not the result of inner forces, but that it was due exclusively to external factors which had nothing to do with the psychic and political structure of the empire. This point of view, which in a former book I termed the "Habsburg legend" and which is disseminated by the propaganda of very influential dynastic and feudal groups, represents the Habsburg monarchy as an innocent lamb, a victim of the antagonism of German and English imperialism which, arousing the World War, buried under its ruins the free and happy Danubian League of Nations.

This historical materialism *à la Habsburg* has been recently advanced by a naïve and superficial historical and sociological literature which, investigating the responsibility for the World War, looks only on the diplomatic side of the problem, its chief interest consisting in the inquiry whether the world-catastrophe was actuated by the diplomatic maneuvers of Berchtold, Poincaré, Izvolsky, or Grey, or whether the Serb government did or did not have a previous knowledge of the murderous attack at Sarajevo. Such a point of view, which sees in the world-catastrophe exclusive personal intrigues and responsibilities, makes the real problem appear both shallow and obscure. For however great may be the crime of the individual politicians and statesmen in setting the date of the world-catastrophe, it is sufficiently clear that these men did not do more than detonate that mass of dynamite which the social and national unrest of Central Europe had piled up during the last hundred years.

Therefore, if we wish to understand history more clearly both from the point of view of the present and the future, and if we really try to follow a constructive policy of peace, we must have an end of that sentimental pacifism which considers all wars simply as the private affairs of criminal kings and diplomats or of capitalistic interests, and does not understand that the real causes of modern conflicts lie far deeper in the impeded evolutionary processes of the masses checked by stupid or criminal internal policies. I have no place here to amplify this point of view; I wish only to say that the warlike liquida-

tion of the former Habsburg monarchy is no sane argument for the assertion that its collapse was purely a mechanical process and not the end of an organic development of almost two hundred years. We know not a single national or social crisis on a large scale in world-history which could have created a radical new equilibrium without awakening a series of international and warlike complications. This concatenation of the inner evolution and of outer warlike complications is also clearly demonstrated by the genesis of the other national states; and it is not a sane argument against the organic nature of English and French national unity to say that the movement toward unity of the moral and economic forces was very often protected in both countries by the militaristic and political centralization of the respective dynasties.

The dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy and the establishment of new national states on its ruins was, in its essence, the same process which in many other states of Europe led to the state integration of those peoples having a common language and culture. The same fundamental causes working for unity in the nationally homogeneous states worked toward dissolution in the ethnographical mosaic of the Habsburg empire. Even the World War can only be fully understood from this historical perspective. The detonator of the European explosion was perhaps a capitalistic one, but its violence would have been unimaginable without the powder magazine formed by the unsolved and accumulating national and social problems of Central and Eastern Europe.

In whatever manner we may regard the Habsburg problem—whether we analyze its historical atmosphere, the mass psychology of its people, or the international complications arising from its national and economic conditions—from all these points of view we must come to the same conclusion, namely, that this vast historical drama was not the result of diplomatic quarrels, but grew out of the inevitable logic of a long series of social causes.

This conception is not merely an *a posteriori* assertion, but it was already alive many years, even decades before in the consciousness of all those who were capable of regarding the problems of the Danubian monarchy with sufficient intellectual force. Many of the best statesmen, poets, scholars, and publicists were unanimous in the understanding that the empire of the Habsburgs had become an anachronistic impossibility, that it was doomed to death or at least could have been saved only by a major operation. Such and similar declarations, even well-founded sociological analyses, are so abundant that I must limit myself to the most characteristic and conspicuous ones.

Mickiewicz, the great Polish poet, almost a hundred years ago wrote the following startlingly clear-sighted description of the Habsburg empire:

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This Empire counts thirty-four million inhabitants, but in reality it has no more than six million people; namely six million Germans keeping twenty-eight millions of other stocks in bondage. If one subtracts from these six millions the numbers of peasants, artisans, merchants, etc., who have no share at all in the government, there remain at most two million Austrians who rule all these masses. These two millions or rather their interests and opinions are represented approximately by a hundred families which are German, Hungarian, Polish, or Italian but which commonly speak French and have their capital largely outside the country. Using in their service two million bureaucrats and soldiers they rule through them the other thirty-two millions. That is a society modelled on the pattern of the English East Indian Company. . . . Ordinarily, people have a false idea of this Austrian Empire which never was a German, Hungarian or Slavish empire, but a kinship of all those who aim at drawing out the marrow of so many extensive countries rich in population.

Even more striking than this were the diagnoses and prognostications several times expressed by the great apostle and theoretical founder of the national idea, Giuseppe Mazzini. He clearly described the irresistible movement both of the Northern Slavs and the Southern Slavs toward unification. He prophesied that this movement, combined with the struggles for emancipation of the Greeks and the Rumanians, would inevitably destroy both the Austrian and the Turkish empires, "these two serpents which paralyze the heart of Europe." Already in 1843 he wrote that "in the Austrian Empire a movement of the Slav population is progressing" (he even foresaw the unification of Bohemia and Moravia with the Slovak tribes of Hungary) "for which nobody cares and which one day, united with our own efforts, will cancel Austria from the map of Europe. . . ."¹

In another direction, but scarcely less pessimistically, the situation of the monarchy was elucidated in 1822 by Charles Sealsfield, a brilliant German-American who fled before Austrian absolutism into the New World where he later wrote his powerful denunciation of the system of Metternich, an arraignment which is one of the most direct and penetrating documents of the empire of Emperor Francis. Sealsfield characterizes Austria as a "big agglomeration of provinces," and describes with vivid colors the exasperated public mind of the Slav majority against the German absolutist rule. He writes:

One can even hear the Bohemians gnash their teeth if one begins to praise English liberty. They are filled with unspeakable sorrow if their own country is mentioned, the battles which they were obliged to fight for a strange cause, the armies for which they furnish the soldiers and bear the costs and which in reality serve for their oppression. They feel depressed that they exist for a dynasty which remained foreign to them and

¹ These and many similar statements of Mazzini belong to the most miraculous products of political foresight. A luminous analysis of his theory and prognostication will be found in the book of Alessandro Levi, *La filosofia politica di Giuseppe Mazzini*, Bologna, 1917.

their wishes in spite of a rule of several hundred years, and which in its incapacity cares only how to subdue Bohemia and how to kill its national aims.²

This system, according to the opinion of Sealsfield, is untenable. The country as a unified whole is very near a crisis. Though it will not come to a general upheaval since the provinces are too sharply watched and the inner antagonisms are too great (the Bohemians would march against Hungary, the Poles against the Italians, and the Germans against both), the inner immorality of the system and its disregard for all loyal principles will ultimately destroy itself.

About ten years later the same *facies hippocratica* of the monarchy was seen by a Russian observer, by the Pan-Slav historian, Pogodin, who made several trips of investigation in Central Europe and gave an account of them to his government. He wrote:

The Slavs seem to be on the eve of a renaissance, the empire of the Danube must tremble even more than the Turkish empire in the face of twenty millions of a hostile race in its interior. Austria is a white sepulchre, an old tree which is rotten within, though it still bears leaves on the outside, but which the first blast of wind will uproot.

Again, ten years later, quite similar was the diagnosis of Charles Montalembert, the eminent French conservative statesman who spoke the following words (1846) on the tribune of the French Parliament: "The Austrian monarchy is a bizarre composition of twenty nations which justice could have maintained but which injustice will push into dissolution."

The same mood is reflected in the opinions of many other foreign observers. Napoleon III called Austria a corpse with which nobody can make a contract. At the other pole of social life Karl Marx fixed the death-sentence of the Habsburg empire: "The only circumstance," he wrote in 1860, "which legitimates the existence of Austria since the middle of the eighteenth century is its resistance to the advances of Russia in eastern Europe . . . a resistance helpless, inconsequent, cowardly, but tough." And, following the trend of thought of his master, Frederick Engels in 1888 made the assertion that the destruction of Austria would have been a misfortune for European civilization before the approaching triumph of the Russian Revolution; after which its annihilation becomes unnecessary, for Austria, becoming superfluous, will go asunder by itself.

Similar considerations were expressed from a quite different angle by the noted French historian, Louis Leger, who on a pamphlet published in 1866 and treating the problem of Austria, alluding to the oppressed nationalities, put the following significative motto: *Ave*

² This quotation and those which follow are a translation from the German edition (*Österreich wie es ist*, Wien, 1919), because the original English was not available.

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Caesar resurrecturi te salutant! And in a more comprehensive work, in 1879, he wrote this judgment: "Abandoned to the blind egotism of the Germans and the Magyars the Habsburg Monarchy could not solve the problem of the East. She will witness its solution against its own interests."

It may be objected that the assertions quoted above emanate from strangers and from the enemies of the monarchy, but we shall soon see that the friends of the empire did not think otherwise than its enemies. Let us continue our survey with the opinion of two Hungarian statesmen of whom the first cannot be counted among the enemies of the dynasty. Count Stephen Széchenyi, the conservative promoter of the Hungarian renaissance, whom his noted political antagonist, Louis Kossuth, called the greatest Hungarian, prophesied as early as 1813 the dissolution of the monarchy. When, after the battle of Dresden, he was convalescing in a Prague hospital, he exposed before his officer colleagues the probable future of the monarchy. Of this conversation, a court spy (these men of Metternich filled even the hospitals) reported to Vienna that the count before an audience consisting chiefly of Prussian officers made the declaration that in spite of its victories, Austria would go asunder "within a century because its parts are unequal and they separate more and more from each other."

Louis Kossuth, in 1881, was naturally more capable of describing accurately the pathology of the monarchy. The Viennese secret police sent an able *agent provocateur* to Turin in order to extract from the great man in exile his point of view concerning the international situation. The maneuver succeeded, and Kossuth, knowing not to whom he was speaking, gave his unveiled opinion concerning the future of Austria, which was later reported to the Viennese commissioner by the spy. According to this report, Kossuth predicted the approach of the Russian Revolution which he thought would be a deathknell for Austria. As Augustulus was the last Roman emperor, so Rudolphus would be the last Habsburg. That was an allusion to Crown Prince Rudolph who died in 1889. It can scarcely be doubted that if the catastrophe of Meierling of which Rudolph became a victim had not happened and Rudolph had remained alive, the prophecy of Kossuth would have been literally realized.

But even the guiding spirits of Austria were not more optimistic over the situation of the monarchy. One may say, in terms of recent psychology, that the whole policy of Metternich stood under a "dissolution complex," and this attitude fomented his almost monomaniacal struggle against democracy and liberalism. His wife, the princess Melanie, called him often the "Cassandra of the monarchy," for he was saturated with alarming news about the collapse of the empire. It is quite natural that in such a milieu the judgment of the more liberal and freer spirits was even more emphatically unfavorable to the

reigning system and its consequences. So in 1830, after the revolution of July, Grillparzer, the greatest poet of Austria, wrote the following really visionary lines:

The whole world will be strengthened by the unexpected change, only Austria will go to pieces by it. The shameless Machiavellism of the leaders who, in order that the reigning dynasty should remain the only connecting tie of the state, have fomented and nourished the reciprocal national antipathies of the separate provinces, is responsible for it. The Hungarian hates the Bohemian, the Bohemian hates the German, and the Italian hates them all, and as horses absurdly harnessed together, they will scatter in all directions as soon as the advancing spirit of the times will weaken and break the bonds.

This conviction of the grave danger facing the monarchy gained a deep statesman-like elucidation ten years later in a book anonymously published at Hamburg in 1842, which, under the title *Austria and Its Future*, gave a pitiless analysis of the formidable inner antagonisms of the monarchy. The author of this book was Baron Victor Andrian von Werburg, a chamberlain and a high official in the court administration, and later vice-president of the National Assembly. As one of the most cultivated aristocrats of his time, his opinion may be regarded as representative. Andrian was of the opinion that "Austria is a purely imaginary name which does not signify any compact people, any country, any nation . . . a conventional term of several nationalities sharply distinct each from the other." There are Italians, Germans, Slavs, Magyars, but there is no Austrian national consciousness. The idea of the state is annihilated by the principle of nationality. There arose a Slav, a Hungarian, and an Italian national feeling which consolidated itself more from day to day, rejected all foreign elements, and expanded with a prophetic vehemence. The system of these particularistic consciousnesses menaces the very existence of Austria. Only inertia succeeds in holding the monarchy together. "This state of mind is like the buried corpses in Pompeii which, preserved during many centuries, fall into dust and ashes as soon as a beam of God's free sun or a blast of wind touches them." How could such a state resist the growing consciousness of unity of the Slavs which begins to form a compact phalanx from Troppau to Cattaro?

Thoughtful men of later generations judged the future of the monarchy with the same pessimism. Ferdinand Kürnberger, the greatest Austrian publicist of the second half of the nineteenth century, agreed with these opinions, and he always regarded Austria as an anachronistic country and contrary to the spirit of Europe. He repeatedly emphasized the essentially Asiatic nature of Austria.

And lest these remarks be regarded as the impressionist utterances of exacerbated poets and publicists, I would call attention to the diagnosis of Ottokar Lorenz, the distinguished historian who, though a native Austrian, did not hide his deeply pessimistic opinions.

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He too talked of the second "sick man of Europe," and he never took the so-called new constitutional era of Francis Joseph seriously. On the contrary, he considered the various constitutional experiments to be like the experiments of England to remold the Turkish empire, because he was of the opinion that the old Austria had died as a consequence of the Revolution of 1848.

This pessimistic attitude also gradually took possession of the leaders of practical politics, and Count Taaffe, prime minister of Austria during two decades, called his own policy, with crude honesty, the policy of *Fortwursteln* ("to go on in the old groove"). That this policy would earlier or later demoralize the national forces was clearly understood by the enlightened elements of the state. Professor Masaryk, now president of Czecho-Slovakia, disgusted by the petty compromises without principle, called the Austrian parliament a *Tandelmarkt* (a "junk market"). And Ernest Körber, one of the last premiers of the monarchy "saw the situation of the monarchy as darkly as Metternich did after 1848."

This pessimistic public opinion penetrated even the circles of the Viennese court itself. General von Margutti, one of the leaders of the chief military bureau, narrates in his memoirs that beginning with his earliest youth he heard that the monarchy was not an up-to-date state, that it had no right to existence, and that it was only upheld by the personality of the old Emperor after whose death it would fall asunder "like an old barrel robbed of its hoops." This conviction exasperated and perhaps drove to death Crown Prince Rudolph himself. "I am only anxious to know as a silent observer," he once wrote to a friend, "how much time such an old and tough edifice as this Austria takes before it cracks in all its joints and falls asunder." The successor of Rudolph, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir apparent, was even more impressed by the approaching catastrophe, and endeavored in vain to avoid the fate which menaced not only the state but his own life. This feeling of an approaching disaster dominated the more clear-sighted elements of the army also. Conrad von Hötzendorf, later the chief of general staff during the war, emphasized for many years in his memoranda to the Emperor that the Italian and Jugo-Slav *irredenta* threatened the monarchy with collapse. Similarly, General Auffenberg as minister of war judged the situation in 1912. At the time of the Balkan crisis he uttered the following prophetic words to the German ambassador:

We need at least a half century of peace in the Monarchy to put the southern Slavs in order and this quietness can be maintained only by eliminating all the hopes of the southern Slavs for Russian protection, otherwise the Monarchy goes to pieces.³

³ *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette: 1871-1914* (Berlin, 1926), XXXIII, 372-73.

This insecurity of the future oppressed even the old Emperor in spite of the fact that those around him tried carefully to keep all alarming news from him. A documentary witness of this pessimistic mood is a testamentary provision of the Emperor of 1901 in which Francis Joseph established a family property in trust of sixty-million gold crowns the purpose of which was determined by the following words:

If in the course of events and in the historical evolution, the form of government of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy should suffer a change and, what God may prevent, the crown should not remain in our house, the order of succession for the family property in trust established by me should be determined by those principles of common right which are in existence in the ordinary code of law from June first, 1811.

The chief ally of the Dual Monarchy, the German government itself, was also haunted by the ghost of the approaching dissolution of the Danube empire. The German chancellor, Prince Bülow, in order to avoid possible dangerous conflicts in the case of the disaster of Austria, suggested in 1905 through his ambassador in St. Petersburg, a plan of a "Treaty of Disinterestedness" according to which both Germany and Russia would declare not to make an annexation in the case of collapse of the Danube monarchy.⁴

These many and various declarations and utterances, which all denounce the extreme uncertainty of the existence of the monarchy, cannot be a pure accident, but are a symptom and almost a symbol of a deeply rooted organic crisis. There can be no doubt that many of the better intellects clearly saw or felt that the monarchy was being pushed toward disaster by irresistible historical forces.

⁴ Quoted verbatim in *Der Krieg*, May, 1928.

CHAPTER III

THE DOUBLE WAR OF THE HABSBURG MONARCHY

Not only does the foresight of isolated men demonstrate that the dissolution of the monarchy was not a mechanical accident, but the final crisis, the final collapse itself, proved this truth even to the satisfaction of those who are distrustful of the more subtle, causal connections in social things.

There is, before all, the striking fact that the World War and the Sarajevo plot, which was its immediate cause, were in the closest connection with the outer policy of the Habsburg monarchy which again was determined by the social and national structure of the monarchy. At this place I cannot enter now upon the detailed analysis of this connection as this can only be done after the reader understands the statics and dynamics of the empire.

At this juncture I wish only to say that the monarchy's collapse was due not only to its struggles with foreign enemies, but in a no less degree to another war which the monarchy was constrained to carry on with its own so-called inner enemies, that is to say, with a very important mass of its own peoples. There is no fact, as far as I see, which could prove the inner organic dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy with such an almost symbolical force as this double war of the monarchy amid the frightful embarrassments of the world-crisis.

The history of this inner war of the monarchy has not yet been written as the most influential personalities of the old régime, who knew the warlike events the most intimately, do not like to lift the veil from the inner disintegration of the empire which would put in an unfavorable light the problem of war responsibility. On the other hand those elements who face this problem objectively or even with sympathy have naturally only a fragmentary knowledge concerning the facts since the official archives relating to this period are still closed.¹

In spite of these difficulties sufficient facts about the inner war of the monarchy became manifest to convince any objective observer of the inner motivation of the crisis. In this connection nobody can deny

¹ Recently an important book was published connected with this matter by Edmund von Glaise-Horstenau, the director of the Viennese War Archives, under the title *Die Katastrophe* (Wien, 1929). Though the author has a natural tendency to show the loyalty of the peoples of the former monarchy, he is far too conscientious a historian to shut his eyes to the symptoms of inner dissolution. Even the facts mentioned by him would suffice to show the seriousness of what I call the inner warfare of the monarchy. At the same time Glaise-Horstenau describes very vividly the growing economic misery and technical inefficiency of the Austro-Hungarian army which was due to a large extent to maladministration and corruptive influences.