

CHAPTER II

THE HABSBURG EMPIRE AS A FAMILY ESTATE (FIDEI COMMISSUM)

The Habsburg monarchy remained until its end a species of medieval entail held together by the same imperial will, and by the same insatiable desire for consolidation and expansion. Metternich, the mighty chancellor, said the following words to the ambassador of the German Bundestag after the death of Emperor Francis I (while Roman emperor, Francis II), in order to emphasize the continuity and unchangeableness of the Habsburg state:

Where the basis is not deranged, there is no serious danger; the old house stands solidly. The successors of the entail, of the *fidei commissum* is another but this other wishes nothing else than his predecessor has wished. In the same direction with the same force and endurance.

This sentence can be regarded as a most characteristic feature of the Habsburg rule, of the fundamental ideology which remained always the categorical imperative of *my house, my army*, a kind of a dynastic religion. The real founder of the dynasty, Rudolph Habsburg, who at the end of the thirteenth century had defeated the Czech King Ottokar and laid down the basis of the so-called Habsburg *Hausmacht*, the patrimonial nucleus of the later empire, was one of the most successful and daring state *accapareurs*. His family of *Alleman* blood already possessed in the eleventh century widely extended estates in Alsace and in Switzerland and had family connections with some of the most important dynasties of the age.

This desire for expansion, this trend of *l'art pour l'art* imperialism remained a chief motive force also in the successors of Rudolph in the interests of which the family practiced such a successful and extended activity in marriages and contracts for succession which was strange even in a period when there was a widely spread habit of gaining sovereignties by marriages, donations, and exchanges. On this field Maximilian I (1493–1519), called the “Last Knight,” was particularly skilful, and obtained by his marriage the Netherlands and Burgundy; by the marriage of his son Phillip, Spain and the Indies; while he gained by marriage contracts a right for his grandson Ferdinand both to the Hungarian and the Czech crowns. As a consequence of these feverish and fortunate marriage activities, with the purpose of uniting the most heterogeneous and remote countries under the scepter of his family, Charles V (1519–56) became really the proprietor of a world-empire so big that the “sun never sets on its

frontiers." This marriage expansion made such a great impression on the contemporaries that it gave rise to the often-quoted locution: *Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube!* ("Let others make wars, thou happy Austria, marry!")

This continuous imperialistic expansion of the Habsburg house found an almost symbolical expression in the title of the dynasty which until the end, not without a certain comic aspect, was the record of the innumerable marriages, hucksterings, and captures of the Habsburgs in many parts of the world and in various periods. I will fully quote this title because it seems to me that it will introduce the reader to the psychic structure of the monarchy more than many abstract considerations. This so-called *grand imperial title* was the following:

We, by God's grace, Emperor of Austria; King of Hungary, of Bohemia, of Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia, Lodomeria, and Illyria; King of Jerusalem, etc.; Archduke of Austria; Grand Duke of Tuscany and Cracow; Duke of Lothringia, of Salzburg, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and Bukovina; Grand Duke of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia; Duke of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Modena, Parma, Piacenza and Guastella, of Ausschwitz and Sator, of Teschen, Friaul, Ragusa and Zara; Princely Count of Habsburg and Tyrol, of Kyburg, Görz and Gradiska; Duke of Trient and Brixen; Margrave of Upper and Lower Lausitz and in Istria; Count of Hohenembs, Feldkirch, Bregenz, Sonnenberg, etc.; Lord of Trieste, of Cattaro and above the Windisch Mark; Great Voyvod of the Voyvodina, Servia, etc., etc.

CHAPTER III

THE FATA MORGANA OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

This expansion over countries far and near, well known and exotic, of which some are at present only known by the specialists of historical investigation, this incoherent and chaotic imperialism had three consequences of very great importance from the point of view of our problem: the first is of a biological nature, the second of an international, and the third of an inner political.

Under biological I mean the marriage contracted by Philip the son of Maximilian I, with the heiress of the Spanish throne, Johanna the Crazy. By this marriage the Habsburg and Burgundian blood, "already showing symptoms of degeneration, received a positively pathological synthesis" which in some successors to the throne manifested itself now as a childish playfulness, now as a tyranny inclining to melancholy.

Not less dangerous was the international consequence of Habsburg imperialism concerning the future of the monarchy. The Austrian dominions of the *fidei commissum* gave sufficient strength to the Habsburgs so that they were capable of securing the German imperial crown for the dynasty since the first half of the fifteenth century. This *Holy Roman Empire of the German nation* like a *fata morgana* was always before the Habsburgs and threw them into a series of warlike and diplomatic complications which meant very often the sacrifice both of the Austrian and Hungarian interests which often impeded the inner consolidation of the monarchy. Mr. Henry Wickham Steed, the keen English observer of the Habsburg drama, says correctly:

For centuries the Habsburgs had sacrificed the strength of Austria to the Roman German imperial dream. From Ferdinand I to Charles VI their aim had been to exercise universal sway. Maria Theresa, Joseph II, and Leopold recognized the chimerical nature of the dream but still struggled for undisputed hegemony in Germany. Not until the defeat of Sadowa in 1866, nor in reality until the foundation of the new German Empire at Versailles in 1871 did the Habsburgs give up their German ambitions and turn their eyes resolutely to their own realms.¹

This situation through centuries gave to the Habsburg policy the character of an *activity without a center*. The great Western dynasties realized more keenly the proper force of their powers and the real forces of which they disposed. But the Habsburg dynasty always vacillated between its two centers: they tried to base their rule now on

¹ *The Hapsburg Monarchy* (London, 1913), p. 12.