

Chapter XXI.

THE GERMAN EMPIRE.

(1700-1871 A.D.)

WE are now in a position to understand better the steps by which the Holy Roman Empire was transformed into the German Empire, as distinct from Austria and Italy. In order to grasp these steps clearly let us try to realize, to begin with, that the old Empire of Germany consisted of three hundred petty states, ruled by kings, bishops, dukes, or counts, without any common interest to bring them together.

The first attempt at consolidation—that is, of uniting some of these together under one ruler—had been made, as we have seen, by Napoleon; but there were still thirty-eight independent states when the great Congress of Vienna met, after the fight at Waterloo, to consider the settlement of Europe after the upheaval caused by Napoleon.

Of these states the most important by far were Austria and Prussia; and the question now arose as to which of these was to have the controlling power in Germany.

At first it seemed impossible that Austria should be the leader among purely German states, for her population was of a completely mongrel kind, consisting of Slavs, Poles, Hungarians, Jews, and many