

The Unification of Germany



At the time of the first Roman invasion of Germany a tribe called the Cherusci occupied the southern part of what is now Hanover. Their chief, Hermann, had been taken to Rome as a hostage, and there had been educated. Hermann was the first to dream of German unity. While the infant Christ was growing into boyhood in Palestine, Hermann was studying Latin and history at Rome, and as he read he pondered. He found that the Romans had achieved tremendous power by combination. If his people would unite and stand as one before the world, why not might they too become great. The idea of German unity took possession of Hermann. He resolved to return to his country, to try and inspire his race with a sense of common brotherhood, and a comprehensive patriotism. But Hermann was not understood by the people whom he wished to inspire, and many many centuries were to roll away before his dream of unity was realized.

In the very earliest times there seems to have been among the Germans no trace of a national consciousness. The small tribes were sometimes friendly to one another, and sometimes hostile. Only the most closely related held together. They were a strong and self-reliant people who could get along only with natures like their own. Whenever they held together as a whole, no adversary was a match for them, and all their later enemies have agreed with Tacitus in exclaiming, "How fortunate that they are always quarreling among themselves." A long training in politics, in economics, and in mental discipline, was necessary before the Germans succeeded in establishing a German national government.

For long series of years conditions were inimical to the establishment of a German nation upon a firm basis. The step which was decisive in the advance of German civilization for a full thousand years was their admission into the Roman Empire and into the Roman Church. Like Augustus Caesar, Charlemagne was served by a heterogeneous body composed of widely differing races. No common bond was formed between Franks, Saxons and Bavarians.

During the regimes of the first Otto, the third Henry, and the first Frederick, the ideas of Charlemagne were taken up, namely, the protectorship over the universal Roman Church, and consequently the claim to the supreme authority throughout Christendom. Then a ruinous quarrel broke out between the two leaders,