

an autonomous and considerable state: its rulers, while acknowledging the Emperor's nominal suzerainty, alternately leaned upon the French king and quarrelled with him, and often played an active part in French affairs. Alsace, for some hundreds of years before it became French, was little more than a geographic expression, in which were included self-governing republics and the Ten Free Towns, episcopal fiefs, hereditary fiefs of the House of Austria, and counties and baronies innumerable. The morality of the several transactions by which, between 1551 and 1766, the kingdom of France acquired the two provinces, has been diversely appreciated. In the religious wars Henry II protected the Protestant princes of Germany against Charles V, and was invited by them, as a reward, to take possession of the three episcopal cities of Metz, Toul, and Verdun. After the Thirty Years' War, the Empire ceded its rights over Alsace (but in terms of singular obscurity) to Louis XIV. Strasbourg retained its virtual independence until 1681, when it was beset by the King's armies and capitulated. The Duchy of Lorraine, with that of Bar, fell peacefully to France by a kind of family arrangement. Lastly, in 1798, the little Swiss Commonwealth of Mulhouse, once included in Alsace, was at its own desire incorporated in the French Republic. It is not pretended that in any of these instances a German population was wrenched by France from a homogeneous political system. No doubt Metz in the sixteenth century, Strasbourg in the seventeenth, would have preferred a prosperous neutrality, if in those troubled times independence could have been reconciled with safety. Perhaps between Stanislas and the Revolution Lorraine sometimes regretted the desertion of its last ruler of the native line, the husband