

Century of Austrian History

Francis Joseph I, Emperor

ON May 30, 1814, the Treaty of Paris was signed between the allies and Louis XVIII of France. By this treaty Austria acquired Lombardy and Venetia. From September, 1814, to June, 1815, met the Congress of Vienna, one of the most important diplomatic gatherings in history. Here Austria consolidated her power in Southern and Central Europe by recovering her Polish possessions and a portion of Northern Italy; also provinces along the eastern coast of the Adriatic. She extended westward into Tyrol, planting herself firmly upon the Alps. Thus, after twenty years of continuous war, she emerged from the situation with a new strength, greater population and many important possessions. Austria's policy in this transaction was to establish its empire without any direct contact with France. At the same time, while Prussia became more straggling, Austria was achieving a compact empire. She was admirably situated for an important role in the policies of Europe.

Internally, however, Austria lacked unity—politically, racially or socially. It was composed of many nations. There were the Austrian Duchies, chiefly German; Bohemia, a kingdom acquired in 1526; Hungary, inhabited by the Magyars; while to the south was a province purely Italian. Even these four divisions were not unities, each having several nations and parties, which rendered government confused and unequal.

To rule so conglomerate a realm was a very difficult task. Francis I had the aid of Metternich, a statesman of great ability. Metternich's policy was against innovations. He was afraid of any new movement which might end beyond his control, consequently during this reign and that which followed Austrian progress was at a standstill. Gradually Metternich's influence spread over Prussia, and the Karlsbad conference gave Austria the leadership over this domain. As a result of the Congress of Vienna, Italy also was, for nearly fifty years, a dependent upon Austria. All of these causes gave the Austrian monarchy a commanding position after Napoleon.

In 1821 Austria was commissioned to send an army into the Kingdom of Naples, and Ferdinand I of Naples was established absolute monarch where constitutional government had formerly prevailed.