

# INTO EXILE

The History of the Counter-Reformation  
in Bohemia (1620 - 1650)

BY

ERNEST SOMMER

TRANSLATED BY VICTOR GROVE, Ph.D.

FOREWORD

By THE VERY REV.

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## FOREWORD

There was a time—not so long ago—when eminent persons could speak of Czechoslovakia as a small country far away about which English people knew nothing. Even when these words were uttered they were an unfair aspersion on the intelligence of the inhabitants of this island. There were quite a number of people—professors, ministers of religion, business men, artists, musicians, students and adventurous holiday makers—who knew something of what lay beyond the Bohemian mountains. It was generally recognised in educated circles that the State created by the Czech and Slovak peoples had given an exceptionally good account of itself in its twenty years of existence. But even those who knew what these sturdy people were doing knew but little of what they had achieved in the past—or endured! They would not, perhaps, have made the mistake—with Shakespeare—of placing a shipwreck on the coast line of Bohemia. They would certainly have heard of John Hus, though probably unaware of the closeness of his links with England. They might have known that it was the sister of Charles I who, as Elizabeth of Bohemia, is so beautifully apostrophised by Sir Henry Wotton.

“By virtue first, then choice, a Queen,  
Tell me, if she were not design'd  
Th' eclipse and glory of her kind?”

But the tale of suffering, struggle and disaster, which for centuries was the lot of the Bohemian people—this is known to but a few experts in England or America.

It is this story that Dr. Sommer now puts before English-speaking readers. There are occasional nuances and emphases, about which historians equally objective in outlook might differ. But the substantial truth of the picture would remain. It is a record of people deprived of their natural leaders (the murder of the Czech noblemen by the imperial oppressor left a weakness behind that could only be sublimated in generations); a record of people driven into exile, though stubbornly attached to their soil and to the traditions that cling to the soil; a record of man-hunts and rebellions. But above all, it is a record of faith; a faith in which belief in People and in God were inextricably intertwined. It was this intermingling alone that made survival possible, and will, in God's good time, make restoration, after the latest disaster, possible.

The story has a significance for any reader, of whatever race or land, who reflects on the course of history. First of all, because of this deep religious note, that sounds like a burden through the longdrawn drama. Secondly, as a warning. The average man has always been on the side of the big battalions more than he is willing to admit. But the Czech history shows how illusory is the hope of a peace that flouts natural justice. The notion that Big Powers can do what they like with Small Powers lies at the root of the troubles of Central and Eastern Europe. It is from that part of the world—and from this illusion—that world-wars have come. Any attempts to deny the peoples of Eastern Europe the right of self-determination, which includes the right of combination, will come up against the Rock which is Righteousness, the justice that demands that nations great and small should alike be free. The sanctity of the individual and the sanctity of nations spring from the same root.

A. S. DUNCAN-JONES.



## TO THE READER OF THIS BOOK.

THIS book relates to history; but it is not a dry history of facts, nor a compilation of dates, quotations and footnotes. It would be difficult to write the history of the events which are the subject of this work without being profoundly affected and moved.

For it is a history of suffering which is unfolded in these pages, maybe less bloody than the one we are witnessing to-day but no less heart-stirring. It is a chronicle of the suffering of the Czech people after the battle on the White Mountain.

It is written by a foreigner who seeks to make known to the English speaking world what tribulations Bohemia had to pass through before she was assailed by the events of this century.

Maybe he is not eloquent enough. But in whatever manner the following events are presented, nothing can subdue their own inherent and powerful eloquence.

It is the power of the faith of the Czech people which makes them shine in the comity of nations, a faith which is not bound up with dogma, but derived from the deep-rooted attachment to the soil from which it grew. It is the strength of unshakable assuredness, of great patience and indescribable endurance. It is the will to life which alone enables a people to overcome every danger.

## NAMES

The names of the Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian towns, mentioned in this book, are those officially used by the Czechoslovak authorities. Yet I have found it necessary to add in many cases the German versions in brackets. While Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia were provinces of the Austrian Monarchy, the German versions were the official ones and were, therefore, entered into English historiography, where they have remained in use up to the present day.

## 1

Since the days of the Hussites Bohemia had been one of the vital religious centres of Europe. What Wycliffe thought Hus translated into reality. Even the social programme concealed in Wycliffe's writing was given practical realisation by the Hussites. For a whole generation Europe watched the functioning of a state based on the laws of the Bible and the words of the prophets. What one possessed belonged to all, and the tenets of the Gospel became the battle cries of a victorious army of peasants.

Once the unavoidable conflict between the Utraquists (the moderates) and the Taborites (the radicals) had arisen and the latter had been defeated, the dominance of the Utraquists was indisputably established. They were given the name because they demanded that the layman, no less than the cleric, should be entitled to the communion-cup (*Communio sub utraque specie*).

In spite of the political power of the Taborites having been extinct, the best part of their spiritual heritage has been preserved in the shape of the "Community of the Bohemian Brethren," right up to this day.

The first Habsburg on the throne of Wenceslas, Emperor Ferdinand I, actually seized the opportunity of a revolt of the Czech nobility temporarily to expel the Brethren from their native land. Even this mighty ruler could achieve no more. The Utraquists, on the other hand, availed themselves of the religious truce, concluded in Augsburg between Catholics and Protestants in 1555, to merge with all the other Protestant creeds in the "Bohemian Faith."

On May 25, 1609, the Bohemian Diet presented the draft of a religious settlement to the Emperor Rudolph II and extorted from him its solemn confirmation by the so-called "Letter of Majesty." This royal charter entitled every inhabitant of the Kingdom of Bohemia to choose between the Roman Catholic Faith (*sub una specie*) and the Bohemian Faith (*sub utraque specie*). Each member of the Three Estates, lords, knights and towns royal, had the right to build within their own territory churches and schools, in accordance with their own faith. Royal and ecclesiastical territory were both declared to be neutral ground. Either faith was entitled to free public worship. Special functionaries of the three Estates, called Defenders of the Faith, had the right to assemble, at any time, as well as to rally their fellow religionists to safeguard the preservation of their religious freedom.



The Catholic party *sub una* consisted of powerful officials of the crown and landlords. The majority of the lords, however, by far the greater part of the knights and all the towns—with the exception of Pilsen (Pilsen), Budejovice and Krumlov—were in the Protestant camp.

Rudolph II—Emperor, Archduke of Austria by hereditary right, King of Bohemia and Hungary by election only—was succeeded by his brother Matthias.

Whilst Matthias was still reigning, he presented his cousin and heir Ferdinand, Archduke of Styria, then forty years old, for acceptance as King-designate to the Czech Estates. The Utraquist, led by Count Henry Mathias Thurn, protested—they were aware of his attacks upon Protestantism in Styria, Carinthia and Carniola—but, intimidated by the presence of the Emperor and the Archdukes Ferdinand and Maximilian, the majority of the Protestants submitted to the wishes of their Habsburg sovereign.

Shortly afterwards the authority of Matthias was in the wane. Long before his death Ferdinand was incontestably the head of the Habsburg dynasty.

Before transferring his residence from Prague to Vienna Matthias appointed a regency of ten Czech nobles, seven Catholics and three Protestants.

## 2

Outrages had been perpetrated by the Catholics in two small towns. The Protestant citizens of Broumov—a city belonging to the Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of the same name—decided to build a church. The building was already under construction, when the abbot laid a complaint before the Emperor, and obtained a favourable decision. The Emperor ordered that the Protestants of Broumov should surrender their church to the Abbot. In spite of this demand the citizens of Broumov refused to obey.

The town Hrob (Klostergrab) was one of the domains of the Premonstratensian monastery of Osek, the revenue from which went to the Archbishop of Prague. The Protestants of Hrob had also built a church. The Archbishop acted more stringently than the Abbot. On his command the church was demolished within three days. This deed of violence caused formidable repercussions throughout Bohemia.

The Defenders of the Faith called an assembly of deputies, the first Protestant diet, which met in the capital on March 5th, 1618, and

appealed to the Emperor for the revocation of, and compensation for, the injustice inflicted on the Protestants.

Matthias declared the demands of the Defenders of the Faith and the attitude of the Estates, who expressed solidarity with them, to be acts of rebellion. The Catholic Regents hastened to inform the Estates of this pronouncement. Promptly, on the 21st of May, the second Protestant diet opened. The sessions were held in the *Carolinum*, a college of the famous Charles University. Adam of Sternberg, the Chief Burgrave, speaking for the Government, read the contents of the imperial letter to those present. The Estates listened without the least sign of approval or disapproval.

Two days later, however, on May 23rd, towards nine o'clock, an armed procession of about one hundred Protestant nobles, led by Thurn, marched in the direction of the castle Hradany and forced their way to the hall of the Regents. There the intruders found but four of their quarry, among them William of Slavata and Jaroslav of Martinic, the most hated of the Catholic Regents. After reading a resolution with the closing words, "that Slavata and Martinic are to be regarded as violators of the letter of Majesty and enemies of the Common-wealth," both these men and the secretary Fabricius were seized and thrown through the window into the moat, from which, slightly injured, they were later rescued.

On the day after the so-called "defenestration" a provisional government of thirty directors, ten from each Estate, was formed to defend the religious liberties of the realm, with Wenceslas William of Ruppas as its head and Count Thurn as Commander of its army.

The revolt against the house of Habsburg had begun.

## 3

Matthias, ill and exhausted, bewildered by the quick sequence of events, was prepared to take peaceful measures and preferred to give way rather than resort to force. But Ferdinand favoured war and persuaded the Emperor to issue a manifesto, threatening punishment to all who refused submission. The effect of the publication was to widen the gulf between the Czechs and the reigning House. An Imperial army, led by the Brabantine Count Buquoy, invaded Bohemia. They were repulsed. Four months later Thurn's troops entered Austria, but were also forced to retreat.



At the end of the year 1618 Emperor Mathias endeavoured to bring a peace mediation. But in the midst of the preliminary negotiations, on the 10th March, he died suddenly. After his death the Protestants gave up all thoughts of peace. Ferdinand always had maintained with unmistakable clarity that it was his intention to re-establish Catholicism in all the provinces of the Habsburgs. In these circumstances the eyes of the Czechs turned to Frederick V of Wittelsbach, Prince Palatine of the Rhine, son-in-law of King James I of England, the head of the Union of German Protestant Princes the more, as the upper Country of the Palatinate bordered upon Bohemia.

Ferdinand playing for time, sent a despatch to the Estates of Bohemia, expressing his willingness to enter negotiations, but gave no clue as to the manner in which these should be conducted. His main object was, at this time, to ensure his election as Emperor, as upon this the future of the Habsburg dynasty depended. Wasting no time he went to Frankfurt and by skilful diplomacy he was elected on August 28th.

In the meantime, on July 31st, the General Diet in Prague declared the Bohemian crown elective. The Czech Protestants dropped the name "Utraquists" and assumed the title "Adherents of the Evangelical confession of Faith." Articles of Confederation between Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia were made public. A treaty was concluded with the Protestant Estates of Austria, who had joined the revolt.

On August 19th the Estates were called upon to vote on the question of Ferdinand's deposition. The lords, knights and towns royal gave their votes for the deposition, which resolution was approved by the deputies of all the countries belonging to the Bohemian crown.

After having ascertained that the Prince Palatine was prepared to accept the crown, the General Diet on August 26th elected him King of Bohemia, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Silesia and Margrave of Higher and Lower Lusatia.

But the combination of two electoral dignities, that of the Palatinate and that of Bohemia, upon one Protestant sovereign not only induced the Catholic princes to support Ferdinand more strongly than ever, but it destroyed also the solidarity of the Evangelical camp. Most of the Protestants declared their neutrality in the struggle. The Lutheran princes did not even answer Frederick's summons to an assembly at

Nuremberg. While the Emperor never failed in winning new friends and resources and adding strength to the Catholic League, the King-elect met with new opponents, who finally found their way to the Emperor's party.

Even James I, abhorring revolutionary measures and expecting disaster, denied active assistance to his son-in-law. Moreover Frederick seemed to be unable to avoid serious mistakes. The two most able generals in his army, Count Thurn and Ernest of Mansfeld, were subordinated to less gifted leaders like Christian of Anhalt, as Generalissimo, and George Frederick of Hohenlohe.

Both parties proclaimed large-scale enlistments. The Catholic League, expending considerable sums, was far more successful in obtaining new recruits from all parts of Europe. On September 20th the enemy crossed the Bohemian border again. Seven weeks later the final clash took place between the poorly-equipped Czech Protestant Army, which, owing to arrears of pay was on the verge of mutiny, and the well fed and regularly paid Catholic troops under the Walloon cavalry general Count John Tzerklaes of Tilly.

The battle on the "Bílá Hora" (White Mountain) near Prague began on Sunday November 8th at noon. Frederick, after having entertained two English Ambassadors, Sir Edward Conway and Sir Richard Weston, set out for the White Mountain, to participate in the battle. He pressed his way through streets, thronged with churchgoing people. But as he reached the walls of the redoubt he caught sight of the troops in flight.

In the course of little more than an hour the victory of Ferdinand was achieved and the authority of the Emperor re-established. The destiny of the Czech people was decided for three hundred years.

Ferdinand became king, unhampered by a diet, master of Bohemia by force of conquest. His attention to make Bohemia Catholic and a domain of Habsburg was no longer impeded by any obstacles—barring the will of a powerless and unarmed people.

Here we find ourselves transplanted into the present age. The country of the Czechs is seized by brutal force. A new order is established. The provinces of the Bohemian crown are transferred according to the programme of a fanatic. The most valuable possessions



of the conquered are confiscated. From the retinue of the new lord an entirely new caste emerges, unscrupulously taking possession of the looted estates.

By every method of compulsion the people are systematically alienated from their former faith. The most severe penalties are imposed for heresy. But the Czechs resist. They cannot resort to violence. They have no arms. They refuse to accept the religion of the conqueror. Tenaciously they cling to their faith, which embraces this world as well as the world beyond. It is of the earth as well as of heaven.

They are quite unaware of their real role. They have no intention of becoming martyrs. They simply defend themselves. Vanquished, defenceless, shackled as they are, they have entrenched themselves behind their articles of faith. Their belief, whatever its name—provided it is independent of Rome as well as of Vienna—is their refuge, their invisible fortress, their catacomb, the great and imperishable love of their life.

They never knew but *we* know. To the Czechs their faith is life and their life faith. Theirs has always been a national church: for all their religious forms are permeated by their national characteristics.

## I. PORTRAIT OF A HABSBURG.

It is strange that the Emperor Ferdinand II, the powerful opponent of Protestantism, the executioner of the Czech national state, presented the appearance of a benevolent humanitarian. Few contemporary portraits show such jovial and even features. Nevertheless Ferdinand was possessed by the proud yet tormenting conviction of having a mission. He was the last Champion of the Faith. He was not content with his success in preserving the inherited power of the Emperors. Charles V and Ferdinand I when it slipped from the inert hands of Rudolph II. How could he hold together the powers of a realm which tended to disperse? He made a silent agreement with the Church. Caesar yielded to Her all the power vested in his person. In exchange the Church had to employ Her universal influence and might in the interest of the Emperor. Some authorities maintain that the Emperor went too far in the fulfilment of this agreement. There is no doubt that he conceded far-reaching liberties to his father-confessors, the Spaniard Martin Becan, and William Lamormaini of Luxembourg. And why not? He was not only their confessant but also a former pupil of the Jesuits. There was a secret shrine in the soul of every one of their disciples, unknown to themselves. The Order held the key.

In Ferdinand's case, however, there was no need for such a key. Apart from an indulgence in Habsburg power and a childlike enjoyment of hunting and music, the whole wide domain of Ferdinand's soul was filled with religious beliefs. He had a radical, complex and violent kind of religious fervour which often exacted hours of prayer. He used to kneel before shrines and fervently kiss the floor. On other occasions his behaviour was comparable to the wild fanatic piety of crusaders who felt no religious scruples when they tied the defeated enemy to the tails of their horses, dragging the body along until it was mutilated beyond recognition.

Such a religious fanatic, constantly vacillating between ecstasy and contrition, must have been wax in the hands of his father confessors.

What, however, do we mean when we say that Ferdinand was a tool of the Society of Jesus? It would have been impossible for Jesuits to induce the Emperor to undertake a task that was not already part of his own plans, or rather *the* plan, the only, real, conscious task to be achieved in the life of the Habsburg ruler. For the Order and the Emperor were pursuing the very same goal: a Catholic Bohemia. In the eyes of the Jesuits this meant an additional province in the con-



templated universal empire of the Church, to the Emperor it signified a rose without a thorn, a perfect jewel in the imperial crown.

To achieve the complete realization of their plans the Order could not do without the Emperor and the Emperor could not succeed without the Order. Ferdinand laid hands on the temporal, the Jesuits on the immortal part of the nation. Ferdinand provided the temporal arm and the Jesuits the spiritual. What the Order lacked in power was supplied by the regiments of Waldstein, Breuner, Marradas, Collalto, Saxe-Lauenburg, Piccolomini. What the Emperor lacked in imagination was readily furnished by the Fathers Becan and Lamormanni. Thus the attainment of their aim was inevitable.

The conversion of the Czech people was accomplished by cruel devastation, all-consuming hatred and unspeakable bitterness. Ultimately all that remained in the hands of the confederates was the lacerated corpse, the desiccated skeleton of a once flourishing country.

When the booty was shared neither of the allies fared badly. The country was too vigorous to remain a corpse, too rich not to blossom forth again. While the church was satisfied with its share, Ferdinand's successors succumbed to the temptation of enlarging his gain. They were not content to rule over a Habsburg or—as Habsburg styled itself the House of Austria—an Austrian Bohemia. They tried to transform the inhabitants of the Czech country into Germans. But the attempt, though nearly successful, was doomed to end in failure. One day because of it the dynasty forfeited the crown.

## II. JUSTICE IS MURDER.

After the battle on the White Mountain when the vanquished accepted defeat without defending Prague, without finally rallying the loyal masses of peasants and townspeople who followed the Czech faith, the victory of the Emperor was indisputable. Whilst the imperial troops meeting with ever decreasing resistance occupied town after town, the problem of what would be done with the rebels had become a burning issue.

Some of them had crossed the border in time and were already in safety. The greater number, however, had surrendered to Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, who had been appointed by the Emperor to suppress the rising in Bohemia, Moravia and Austria. Upon the definite promise of Maximilian that the life and property of those who gave themselves up would be spared, they made a solemn declaration to pay homage unreservedly to the Emperor and to annul all agreements and treaties with foreign powers and even with the Estates of countries which actually belonged to the Bohemian crown. After this declaration and with the renewed promise of an amnesty Maximilian permitted them to return to their castles and homes. There they waited in fearful inactivity. It was strange no longer to act, but to suffer. With every day, however, their hopes increased. After all, Maximilian had given his assurances as a plenipotentiary of the Emperor. Moreover the defence of the Estates was prepared in several irrefutable pamphlets.

Over and over again those who had not fled the country debated the contents of these pamphlets which, though they had been answered by the Catholic party *sub una*, were still undisputed in their most essential points.

The first document, published by Samuel of Weleslavin in Prague in 1618, described itself as an "Apology expounding the reasons which made it paramount for the three Estates of the illustrious Kingdom of Bohemia *sub utraque specie* to resort to the institution of Defenders"; another, "An apology of the Estates of the Kingdom of Bohemia" was published by Jonathan Bohucky of Hranic in 1619; a third, and most comprehensive, work entitled "*Deductio*," was issued by the same publisher Bohucky in the following year.

All these accounts agreed that the closing of the churches in Broumov and Hrob and the suppression of all further defensive measures had been the sole cause of the outbreak of the revolt. Since the attitude of the Imperial House had clearly demonstrated that certain



advisers were trying to induce the Emperor to interfere with the privileges of the Estates and to disregard the Letter of Majesty, the Estates had decided to remove these advisers.

The "*Deductio*," the last of the enumerated pamphlets, maintained that the preservation of peace and order throughout the country, and the necessity of safeguarding the privileges of Estates had made it imperative to place the administration of the country provisionally in the hands of thirty representatives of the Diet, and to ally themselves with the Estates of countries with whom they were closely related. Even this step could not be interpreted as rebellion since it was in accordance with their defensive rights.

Only when the imperial army had invaded the country, ravaging, murdering and devastating everything, not even sparing women and children, did the Estates see themselves compelled to take up arms and to depose Ferdinand. Their course of action could not be called high treason. The King-designate was not yet in actual possession of his royal power. Thus who could prevent the Estates from electing a king and doing homage to him?

A subsequent examination of the procedure of the Estates *sub utraque* would reveal a number of reasons which could be raised against it and some which were in favour of it. The question of right or wrong was at least doubtful. But what was the meaning of the terms right and wrong? High treason when successful would result in royal honours. The defence of rights when unsuccessful would lead to the gallows and the wheel.

Justice and right are strange things. One feels them. Their power is unceasingly manifest. They are subject to their own laws. But if one goes deeply into their nature they seem to be but a shadow of power.

## 2

In the meantime, Ferdinand, with characteristic slowness, but not without thoroughness, had been considering the actions and the attitude of his adversaries. The result of his cogitations was that the opportunity must be exploited fully and ruthlessly. As long as landed property was in the hands of families who insisted not only on the right of a free election of their king, but also on the freedom of conscience, no Catholic king could feel safe.

These families, equals of kings, sat in their great castles. From their lofty balconies their gaze could roam over their vast territories. Their

villages were more impressive than many a town. Their towns were fortified and well guarded. Their estates resembled duchies. Their family vaults recorded the history of hundreds of years.

It had always been humiliating for the proud Habsburgs to receive the crown from hands that were not humbly entreating, but thrust out demanding and threateningly. The time was ripe when giving should be superseded by taking. These families should be rooted out like weeds. Worthier men should reign from these castles. The names of the former owners should be forgotten. Their shields and helmets should be smashed and their family tombs destroyed. Their time had passed. Their power was now extinct.

The leaders of the revolt? Their death was a foregone conclusion. Not only because they deserved it, but mainly because it was incompatible with the self-respect of a Habsburg that people who had dethroned him should be permitted to live. Moreover it was the will of God. God, from whom emanates the power of all kings, could not be insulted with impunity. To dethrone kings was to dethrone God. The amnesty promised by Maximilian? Well, it was granted on an erroneous assumption. Besides all undertakings given to men guilty of high treason were null and void.

It seemed, however, necessary to put the accused on trial. Ferdinand who did not believe in Czech laws showed the same disregard for Czech courts. There were laws which protected aristocratic traitors and even prevented the confiscation of their estates. There were Law Courts that displayed an independence that sometimes made them disregard the authority of a royal letter. Yet it would not be politic to avoid a legal course. The whole outside world was anxiously watching every step of the Emperor.

If, however, such a course had to be taken it should be a "Court Extraordinary," a law court which would not hedge behind nebulous principles but was aware of its specified duty.

First of all Charles of Liechtenstein, Governor of the Kingdom of Bohemia, whose powers equalled those of the Viceroys of Milan and Naples, received the order to arrest at once those men who so far had enjoyed complete freedom, guaranteed by the Duke of Bavaria on behalf of the Emperor himself. The list of persons to be put under arrest which was submitted to Liechtenstein contained sixty-one names. Forty-seven of these men were seized at the same time, in the first hour of the evening of February 20th, 1621. Eighteen of them had been former members of the Czech provisional government.



Soldiers surrounded their houses. It was a cold, stormy winter's day. The snow made the approaching soldiers almost invisible, and their footsteps inaudible. When the cordon was completed the houses were already shrouded in darkness. Suddenly a commandant, an imperial judge or representative of the Governor would enter the house and present the warrant for the arrest. Trembling hands would break the seal and anxious eyes read the circumlocutory contents. They experienced a presentiment of death. They felt their life ebb away from them. Almost mechanically they walked along the corridors of their houses. Blindly their hands grasped their mantles, handed to them by the servant. They hardly heard the crying of the women. House, estate, dignity, escutcheon seemed to dissolve in a vague mist. A carriage door was opened and shut. The guard surrounded the carriage.

## 3

In the meantime Ferdinand had established his Court Extraordinary which was called "Executive Commission" to leave no room for doubt. Liechtenstein was the president, Adam of Waldstein his deputy. The assistant judges were the President of the Court of Appeal, Frederick of Talmberk; the Commandant of Malá Strana (the small quarter) of Prague, Wladislav of Mitrovic; the Imperial Counsellors Laminger of Albenreuth, Otto Melander, John Wenzel; the Czech Counsels of the Court of Appeal, Gries of Kobach, Wenceslas of Fliesenpach, Daniel Kapper of Kapperstejn.

The case against the Czech-speaking accused was conducted by Daniel Kapper, that against the German-speaking prisoners by Otto Melander, both doctors of law and converts.

To thwart all attempts at obstruction the Emperor had instructed the public prosecutor Pribik Jenisek of Oujezd not to waste time with the hearing of evidence but to declare that the guilt of the accused was notorious and evident to the court.

If the prosecution need not prove the guilt of the accused it is only logical that the defence should not be allowed to submit any evidence that might establish their innocence. The question of guilty or not guilty did not enter into the deliberations of the "Executive Commission." Consequently the Commission was not what we would call a Court of Justice. Above all it was not their task to find the truth. They received it irrevocably established from Vienna. Whoever

belonged to the "Executive Commission," whether he was its president or one of its assistant judges, whether he was a famous legal authority or an ordinary functionary of the law, he was not a judge but actually an executioner. Like the latter he was supposed to carry out an act of a mechanical rather than of an intellectual nature. He was not allowed to do more than that.

To render the task of these so-called judges even easier the laws passed by the Diets in 1609 and 1610 in favour of Estates accused of high treason were explicitly abolished by the Emperor.

The Executive Commission fulfilled all the expectations of the Emperor. They worked with deadly precision. Persons who had fled the country were tried by special procedure for lese-majesty and condemned to death and confiscation of their estates, and their names were displayed on the gallows on the 25th April, 1621.

The points of the indictment against the accused were set out with great clarity and according to the suggestions from Vienna by counsels for the crown, Melander and Kapper. The German as well as the Czech did not even remotely touch upon the reasons and motives of the accused. Principles of the "Letter of Majesty" were not considered for a moment.

The final report of Prince Liechtenstein is dated 17th May, 1621. Enclosed with it were the sentences which imposed confiscation and, in most cases, death. The Prince submitted elaborate proposals regarding their execution. He regaled his lord with the outline of a long, magnificent and variegated "last hour" of his enemies.

Contemporaries maintain that Ferdinand battled many hours with himself. Chamberlains, ambassadors and servants are supposed to have seen him bent over the report pondering and irresolute. It is said that after a sleepless night he sent for Father Martin Becan and asked him whether it would be possible for him to pardon the Czech nobles without offending his duty. There are several versions of the answer he received. It is, however, probable that the whole episode belongs to the legend which subsequent historians built around the person of the Emperor.

## 4

There are not many scenes in world history which speak with such convincing power as the execution of the twenty-seven on June 2nd, 1621.



Every Czech has stood at least once in his life in front of the Town Hall in the old town of Prague and looked at the mural tablet, reading those names not without emotion and awe.

They still echo in his ear wherever he may be now, particularly the aristocratic names whose solemn titles seem to stream after them like magnificent cloaks. There are the members of the first Estate of Bohemia, Joachim Andrew Schlick, Count of Passoun and Holic; Wenceslas, Baron Budovec of Budova, Lord of Mníchovo Hradiste, Klasterec, Zasadka; Christoph Harant, Baron of Polcic and Bezdruzic, Lord of Pecka. Among the knights the name of the venerable Kaspar of Sulevic impressed itself deeply on the mind. Then there were Henry Otta of Loz, the German Frederick of Bila and Dionys Cernin of Chudenic—the latter had to die with the Protestants, though he was a Roman Catholic. Three names of patricians are unforgettable; that of the *rector magnificus* of the Charles University of Prague, Dr. John Jessenius, and those of the two Primators (Mayors), John Sulys of Kurná Hora and Maximilian Hostalek of Zatec.

Where is the chronicler whose pen is powerful enough to give a graphic account of the historic scene: the square in front of the Town Hall where the grim scaffold had been erected, framed by the Imperial Judges and the town councillors, with Prince Liechtenstein under a canopy. No less than four regiments, two foot and two horse had been called out to guard the square, and to control the streets leading into it. The air was filled with the incessant beating of drums and shrilling of fifes. We may imagine the slow approach of every prisoner in all the splendour of his rank to meet with his death on the platform. The glaring light of the summer's day beats on his brow, while divested of his garments by his servants, he is led to the block. There he kneels in prayer, awaiting the death stroke. As soon as the head has fallen, six cowed men will carry away the body.

The heads had a fate of their own. Those of the two mayors were sent to Kurná Hora and Zatec to be exhibited in public. The rest were thrown into an iron cage which was nailed to the bridge tower of the old city of Prague.

What a spectacle!

To many who witnessed these ghastly proceedings they seemed a spectacle and nothing more. But there may have been a few in the

crowd who, apart from the mingled horror and fascination which it aroused in them, were conscious of a vague uneasiness. This was not caused by the ordeal of the condemned, for what was taking place upon the platform was so intrinsically a spectacle that even the executioner looked like a mask, but rather by the display of military force, of the careful distribution of the regiments, and the standing-by of the troops even though the three towns of Prague appeared to be defenceless and inclined to submission. It was the effect of the news that hundreds of Imperial messengers and officials of the Czech Treasury were travelling along the roads leading from Prague to the provinces with instructions in their pockets whose contents were a secret. Those who were aware of these things could not fail to realise that the falling of the twenty-seven heads was only a prelude.



### III. THE CONFISCATION COMMISSION

Sequestrators travelled post-haste through all the regional districts. They were headed by the Secretary of the Czech Treasury, Paul Michna. In his capacity as an Imperial Commissary he made an inventory of the property, objects of art and furniture, livestock and agricultural implements of all the estates of the rebels situated in the regional districts of Pízen (Pilsen), Budejovice and Klatovv.

His father was a butcher who immigrated from Serbia. He himself, a pupil of the Jesuits, enjoyed the support of this extraordinarily powerful Order, to whose influence he owed his important position in the court chancery. As the head of that official body he was one of the signatories of the "Letter of Majesty." Very soon his career bore him to even greater dignities, with the title of Baron and Count of Waitzenhoefer. He unscrupulously ransacked the estates of the rebels from behind the screen of his office. Apart from the money he appropriated, he developed a great fondness for souvenirs, taking a miniature here, a precious ivory carving there, a Turkish carpet, a jewel, an *épergne*, valuable arms. His collection of precious stones, accumulated in this peculiar way, became high enough to purchase an estate from the Emperor. There was nobody to worry about such unimportant matters.

The gaze of all was fixed upon the Emperor; everybody awaited the next move in Vienna. Had Ferdinand already arrived at a decision? Was Prince Liechtenstein in possession of more detailed information?

Fear and hope struggled in the hearts of those concerned. Their hopes rose when they remembered the law of Rudolph II, passed in 1608, which was intended to render the confiscation of estates practically impossible. Before that date George Popel of Lobkovic had lost all his vast estates, particularly the opulent and fine town of Chomutov (Komotau), because he had organised a violent opposition against the bestowal of high office, for which he was a candidate, upon an unworthy competitor. The fact that he was a devout Catholic and the founder of a Jesuit college in Chomutov had not protected him from the forfeiture of his property. Thus in 1608 the Diet had proposed a law which was decreed by the Emperor, by which a family should on no account be liable to punishment and held responsible for acts committed by its head. If the present owner should be punished by the confiscation of his property the estate should, nevertheless, pass on to his heirs. But nobody had great hopes that the Emperor would adhere to

this law. He had already declared null and void other laws and resolutions of that period and seized estates of nobles before he had started legal proceedings. Never before had the Estates been so powerless and so utterly at the mercy of the king.

Suddenly the news spread in Prague that a new Court of Law was going to be established in the near future, and that this was to be concerned, not with executions, but with confiscations.

Nobody knew who would sit on it, be called before it, and on what charges. Shortly afterwards the Imperial Prosecutor Pribik Jenisek of Oujezd was commissioned to find out "which persons during the rebellion had held an official position in the army, at court, town or council, had been on a special mission in the country or abroad, had sworn or signed allegiance to a confederacy, had taken part in meetings and supported resolutions, had incited others to rebellion, or in any other way promoted the cause of the rebels."

The more often one read these instructions, the more certain it became that there was no escape. The definition of guilt was wide, as wide as the horizon. Was it indeed conceivable that people existed who were not guilty, unless there were some who had actually fought against the rebels and could prove it? But even that was no safeguard.

Hopes were sinking fast. Millstones seemed to weigh down the people. Why had they not fled in time? Was the Emperor planning a new blood bath?

Then, on May 4th, 1622, the decree which had already been signed on February 3rd, and had the reassuring title "General amnesty," was made public.

All persons in any way connected with the revolt, apart from those who had fled the country, were promised the safety of their life and the integrity of their honour but not of possessions and property. All those who felt guilty were requested to report within six weeks, nobles and knights to the Court of Confiscation, citizens of towns royal to the Imperial Judge.

Those not mentioned in the decree, the peasants in the villages and the inhabitants of subjected towns were, of course, not regarded as rebels. The people who had no will of their own—how could they take part in a conspiracy?

Those who were summoned before the court had meekly to acknowledge "that they did deserve to lose life and limb, honour and property." The Emperor, however, in his benevolence, was prepared to spare their honour and life. But he would dispose of their possessions as he saw fit."



Seven hundred and twenty-eight nobles and knights, excluding councillors and citizens, walked into the trap.

The court adopted two procedures only: if innocence was so self-evident that even to an official of the Court of Confiscation it was obvious, the accused was acquitted. In all other cases, whether the "rebel" had served in the army of King Frederick or merely held an insignificant position during his rule, his guilt was considered to be satisfactorily established. The verdict was confiscation of the entire immovables.

Long before the passing of the first sentences the hands of all those who had given themselves up and were going to do so, had been held. An inventory of their property had been made. They were permitted to stay in their houses, to take the seeds out of their granaries, to till their fields, to maltreat their serfs, but no more. The "Deský Zemske" ("Register of Land"), that enormous and accurate record of the landed property of the nobles, was under Imperial control. It was prohibited to borrow or repay money, to buy or sell, to demolish or to build. All entries in the Register of Land, all provisions, testaments and contracts lost their validity. The economic life of a whole country was paralysed. No one knew what would still belong to him on the following day. Documents with most powerful seals were valueless. The grain accumulated in the barns—who would sell it to the mill? The grapes ripened on the sloping embankments of the Elbe—who would press them? Who was going to empty the ponds, harness the newly born colt to the plough, complete the new tower whose construction had to be interrupted?

Anxious creditors waylaid their debtors, demanding at least a payment by instalments. In vain. The debtors were not allowed to pay. Frantic buyers who wanted to cancel the recent acquisition of a plot had to be sent away. The verdict of the Court of Confiscation had not yet been pronounced.

It was not until late in the autumn (October, 1622), that the first verdict was made public. Only three out of fifteen nobles were acquitted. Those found guilty lost their entire landed property. But

the Emperor most graciously decided to restore part of the confiscated possessions. Not that he returned even one of the forfeited houses, a few of numerous acres of ground, a section of a forest, hop-field or vineyard. Only money was received.

In connection with this move a new inspiration came to Ferdinand, or the Exchequer, or the Privy Council, or Father Martin Becan, or to all of them collectively: the victim was not paid off in good honest money but in the recently minted wondrous new coin. Superficially it looked like the ordinary money, but it did not contain more real silver than in Ferdinand's opinion there was real Christianity in the Bohemian faith. Those who received this money were cheated. It was a bitter experience for those who sought to pay with it. They could only get rid of it for a fraction of its nominal value. It was the so-called "long coin." Thus, if the Emperor, as an act of grace, offered to repay a quarter of the estimated value of a person's property, he actually paid about the twenty-fifth part of it.

The Confiscation Commission worked with the cluney, creaking, unceasing inevitability of a mill, unmoved by lamentations, complaints, and cries of despair.

Their haul was not always equally large. This was not the result of an irregular method of work but of the intervals at which the Emperor sanctioned the verdicts.

In November, 1622, in a ten days' session, 122 persons were condemned and 81 acquitted; in December, within four days, 17 people were found guilty and 12 acquitted; in January, 1623, within four days, 23 of the accused were sentenced and 11 found to be not guilty; in February in four days, 38 of the men tried were condemned and 4 cleared.

In the beginning the mill-stones had spared much of their prey. But gradually this decreased. Provisions were made that good grain should be finely ground. What fell out unharmed had been chaff right from the beginning and unworthy of grinding.

The financial harvest became increasingly great. It would seem that the entire country was drawn between the now smoothly working mill-stones and had become a matter for confiscation.

Under the presidency of the Chief Controller of the Royal Household, Adam of Waldstein, the President of the Court of Appeal, Baron Talmberk, the Town Commandant of Prague, Sezima of Wrtba, the Counsellors, the Chief Justices and Court Judges were sitting in judgment upon the Czech nobility. Their keen eyes were not so much concentrated on the evidence before them as on the excerpts from the



Register of Land. The more precious the property the more difficult it was for its owner to establish his innocence. The more valuable the object the greater the suspicion.

Two secretaries, Johan Frobenius of Glatz and Johann Hegner of Rossfeld from Vienna, were constantly in touch with the Imperial Chamber.

In reality not persons were accused, but a whole countryside—the exhilarating, rich, fertile, sunny Bohemian countryside. It had been condemned in advance. Nobody could save it.

## 5

Ferdinand, however, dazzled and blinded by figures, created ever new regiments in his imagination under the command of the Holy Virgin, the *Sancta Generalissima*. Catholic armies fed with Protestant fortunes: what more conclusive proof could there be that Providence was on his side? He inspired the Court of Confiscation to even greater zeal.

Now and then it occurred that the accused not only owned landed property but also considerable sums of money, that some had no estates but only monetary fortunes. The Court, however, was only empowered to seize "immovables." The Imperial Treasury instructed the Court of Confiscation that this was easy to remedy. That which had not been exacted by the verdict of the Court the accused would certainly yield of their "own free will," provided they were prevailed upon to do so with gentle persuasion and convincing argument. Should kind entreaties prove ineffectual, the threat of opening fresh proceedings should not fail to impress anxious minds.

Thus not only two-thirds of the Czech country passed through the greedy millstones and valuable estates, glorious country seats, inestimable domains fell to the Emperor, but also huge sums of money which were given up "voluntarily."

## 6

Not merely the nobles but also the towns royal owned vast estates. As early as June 2nd, 1621, Ferdinand had entrusted Liechtenstein with the task of prosecuting the towns. His instructions were to make an

estimate of the financial capacity of the towns in question and in accordance with this to confiscate an adequate amount. Once the greed of the speculators was directed upon town property the real estates of the towns were declared to be forfeited in bulk. Thus the towns soon became completely impoverished. Their councils were no longer in a position to maintain schools, hospitals and almshouses.

The value of the confiscated property of twenty-five towns then amounted to 2½ million thaler, without the contributions subsequently imposed upon the towns of about seven million Rhenish florins.

Finally also, the town councillors and patricians were discovered to be worthy objects of spoliation. Since the imperial judges set about this new task in too leisurely a manner, Liechtenstein appointed a Special Commission, consisting of the head of the Zatec district, George Michna, and the imperial officials John Wenzel of Kolberg and Andrew Kotva of Freifeld, to investigate the misdeeds committed by citizens. Exorbitant fines were at first imposed upon them. As these fines could not always be extracted, partly because of the financial insolvency of the people concerned, and partly because of their flight, the imperial judges were asked not only to sell all their movable property, but to declare null and void all sales and transfers of property made by the fugitives.

## 7

The foreign powers, and not only those of the Protestant faith, watched with increasing amazement the destruction of a country by simple device. Every day another portion was severed from its body and devoured by the imperial vultures. The second richest aristocracy of Europe was being mercilessly robbed of its barest necessities, as though it had fallen into the hands of Tunisian corsairs or Algerian pirates.

The peasants saw how their old masters were driven out of their houses and estates. They did not rejoice although the Protestant hand of many a noble, mayor and councillor had pressed heavily upon them. But what advantage was it to them to get rid of their old tormentors, when new masters were to descend upon them, who had no link with the soil, no knowledge of their language, and no religion—beyond what faith they had in their own star. Not only did they bleed their subjects with even greater callousness but tried to turn them into Catholics