

Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
Prince Metternich on the Death of Emperor Francis, 1835

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Prince Richard Metternich, ed. MEMOIRS OF PRINCE METTERNICH, 1830-1835.
Volume V. Translated by Gerard W. Smith. Classified and arranged by M.A. de
Klinkowstrom. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880-82.

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DEATH OF THE EMPEROR FRANCIS.

1140. Confidential circular despatch from Metternich to the Austrian Ambassadors at foreign Courts, Vienna, March 12, 1835.

1141 Metternich to Ficquelmont in St. Petersburg (confidential letter), Vienna, March 12, 1835.

1140. If the reign and the whole life of the Emperor are destined to fill pages in history deserving the study of men who are called upon to govern; if it is impossible to doubt that the goodness of heart, the spirit of justice, and the deep wisdom which have marked all the acts of this long and glorious reign, will assuredly be appreciated as they deserve by all good men, still it is only by being on the spot that it is possible to realise the impulse by which all alike are animated, the conservative instinct which finds such frank expression throughout the whole nation; the respect felt by classes as by individuals for the unalterable stability of men and things as they were established and left at his death by the revered Sovereign, whom the people have never ceased to recognise by the name of father: the only title the Emperor Francis was ever desirous to claim, and the only one which could ever have satisfied his heart.

The Emperor Francis died as he had lived. His last thoughts bore the impress of rectitude and simplicity, and were concerned far more with the interests of the country than his own. It was thus that, in the night of February 27-28, in the midst of an aggravated attack of his malady, he worked for four hours, some-

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times writing down with his own hand, sometimes dictating his last wishes. He has drawn up a will, regulating every private affair of importance, and in which, rising to the dignity of his vocation as a Sovereign, he has incorporated the article which the Emperor Ferdinand would have considered it a breach of faith towards the legates not to publish in its complete form.

The dying monarch who bequeaths his love to his people, his gratitude to his army and the servants who served him so well in the State, has listened to the voice of his heart, the voice which, throughout the course of his long life, has been so powerful, and which, now that he is dead, will ensure him the pious gratitude of those whom it has been his lot, under Providence, to govern for so long a period-and what a period!

In a letter addressed to his son, the Emperor has laid down, under the form of counsels, the principles which have served as the basis and guide of his own government. I feel it my duty to transcribe here certain passages of this remarkable document, which, in a few words, contains a complete code of governmental legislation:

' Disturb nothing in the foundations of the edifice of the State.

Govern, and change nothing. Take your firm and unshaken stand upon the principles, by adhering steadfastly to which, I have not only guided the monarchy through the tempests of the most difficult times, but ensured to it the high position which belongs to it of right, and which it occupies in the world.

' Respect all lawful rights, and then you may justly claim the reverence due to your own rights as a Sovereign.

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'Maintain Harmony in the family, and look upon it as one of the highest blessings.*
These, sir, are the principles which the new monarch will invariably follow.
You are authorised to bring this despatch to the notice, &c., &c.

Metternich to Ficquelmont at St. Petersburg (confidential Letter), Vienna, March 12, 1835.

1141. Let us say nothing of our feelings, but let our only thought be how we can best fulfil our duty! Thus must a letter from me to you begin, for you loved the monarch whom fate has taken from us as I loved him myself; you knew him as I knew him, and he, who knew all his friends, appreciated you at your true worth, as he did me the honour to appreciate my entire devotion to his person and the cause which was the cause of his whole life as it was of my own ! Were I to enter with you into the subject of our great grief, of our personal sorrow, we should launch into a theme to which there would be no end. I am deeply impressed with a sense of the duties devolving on me; they are arduous, but, nevertheless, I shall know how to fulfill them.

We are beginning to learn the impression which the Emperor's death has made in the most remote parts of

*The same document also contains the following passages among others:

'Repose in Prince Metternich, my truest servant and friend, that confidence which I have bestowed upon him through the course of so many years.

'Decide no question relating to public affairs or to persons, without first hearing what he has to say. And I call upon him, in his turn, to act toward you with the same rectitude and devotion which he has always exhibited to myself.-FRANCIS.'

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the Empire. It differs in no respect from that of which we have been witnesses in the capital. Thus it is that the good seed sown during his long reign by the wise Prince whose loss we deplore, covers all the fields, while the tares dare not show themselves for fear of being cut down.

From my profound acquaintance with the true position of the country, my anxiety respecting the transition from one reign to another, has been persistently directed less to the monarchy than abroad. Here, the way in which the blow was dealt by Heaven; the suddenness of the event, and the opportunity granted us of announcing at once the catastrophe and the unshaken stability of the Government, will serve as a counterpoise to the danger. It is in the nature of faction to wish to do a great deal, and to make no preparations beforehand against the favourable moment; we have been enabled to forestall them, and my fears on this head are greatly relieved.

I can assure you of one thing, and that is, that every one here, beginning with the Emperor, with the Imperial family-without a single exception-down to the meanest citizens, is doing his duty. The Archdukes are showing an admirable example of unity and of zeal for the public welfare. The Emperor Francis has commended me to his son in terms that go to my heart as no others could have done-calling me his tried and faithful servant and friend; the successor knows me as his father did; I shall continue to do my duty as I have done throughout my long and arduous career. May God be ever at hand to assist us, and we shall know how to serve a cause which is at the same time His, for God and truth are one!

Prince William of Prussia arrived here on the night

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of the 10th-11th. He was the bearer of condolences worthy of the King his father, and which told us only what we knew before. As long as the union between the three monarchs exist, there will be a chance of safety for the world, and as I know of no malign power which could invalidate this union, the gates of Hell shall not prevail!

Be pleased to assure the Emperor Nicholas of my entire devotion, and beg him to continue to bestow on me his entire confidence. I shall always know how to deserve it.'

* On the part of Russia, Count Orloff was sent with a message of condolence to Vienna. He was the bearer of a letter from the Emperor Nicholas to Prince Metternich, which ran as follows: ' I have received, Prince, with lively emotion, the letter by which you inform me of the last instructions of my august friend and ally, his late Majesty the Emperor Francis. They will be sacred for me. The assurances of which Count Orloff will be the exponent, will emphatically attest how firmly I am resolved to fulfil, in their widest extent, the engagements I contracted at Munchengratz. The memory of that time will never be effaced from my mind. This is only another way, Prince, of expressing to you the importance which I shall never cease to attach to the services which you are called upon, I trust, to render for a long time to come, to the cause of order and Royalty: and of assuring you at the same time of the constancy of those sentiments of high esteem which I have always entertained for you.--

' NICHOLAS.

'St. Petersburg, March 1, 1835.'

END OF THE FIFTH VOLUME.

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