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United Germany,
By
Chester N Ames.
1893.

Chester Nichols Ames, '93

Among the distinctive peculiarities of the modern, as distinguished from the medieval period, none is more striking than the constant endeavor to secularize politics. Ecclesiastical control has been almost universally renounced and political unity, in contradistinction to a common allegiance to one church, has come to be the one great thing desired. With this has naturally been associated an effort to combine the smaller states into large kingdoms, a project which in Germany has

been successful. To outline the successive movements which led to German unity; to glance at the situation of the empire as it exists today and, possibly, to form some opinion as to its obligations at the present critical period in European politics, will be the object of this address.

The history of German unity narrates the victory of a national desire over two opposing principles. The first was the Frankish custom of dividing among all the various heirs everything, even to a kingdom. This custom in time threw off from the empire the

great district that afterwards
developed into modern France.
The second was the never ceasing
effort to limit the power of the
emperor. Against this internal op-
position none save a Charles or an
Otto were able successfully to contend;
while preserving at the same time
the bounds claimed for the empire.
Even Frederick Barbarossa failed
to accomplish his gigantic hopes,
to make firm his hold on Italy,
and to prevail over his continually
rebellious vassals. No one more pow-
erful succeeded him, and on the
death of the last of the Hohenstaufen
ensued what is known as the "great

Interregnum" and a dreary civil war. Every force tending to disintegration now worked without restraint, and the empire seemed to be dissolved.

The ruins of imperial weakness were taken up by Rudolf; and then, as the fire of the Renaissance began to glow, and finally, upon the continent broke into flame, the house of Hapsburg, by its light, working out the principles of government, formed at length the great German empire. National feeling however was not present, and the two hundred independent estates were slow to yield to a centralized administration. The

"Fatherland" did not yet exist, that term being an expression of the modern German patriotism.

The Thirty Years War, omitting its religious consequences, was effective chiefly in intensifying hatreds, and in lessening the imperial authority.

Meanwhile a rival power to Austria had grown up in the north, ^{Prussia} and at the close of the eighteenth century these two great kingdoms stood face to face, ready for a conflict that could not be avoided.

Yet first, however, was to be endured the storm of the Napoleonic wars; and this baptism of fire did

for Germany what centuries of undisturbed development had not been able to accomplish. Beneath the stars at Lodi, Marengo, Blakenlinden, Jena and Auerstadt the German soldier, in his anguish, first realized that not alone his petty province, but all Germany was calling him for aid. He thought it brought forth the wars of the liberation. With Leipzig and Waterloo came at last the fatherland. Napoleon had made Germany patriotic.

The German Confederation formed by the Congress of Vienna was no union. Yet it preserved the kingdoms from internal war, un-

til the great tidal waves of thought of 1830 and 1848 had swept over Europe and freed political institutions. Then Protestant Prussia rose, and in the fulfillment of her long cherished purpose, forced Roman Catholic Austria out of Germany. Even this did not result in union. Two confederations were formed, the north and the South.

There is but one more chapter in the history of the movement. Again France, this time incited by the aggrandizement of Prussia, marched her vast army northward to the cry "on to Berlin." But the wave broke, and then

rolled back upon its source. Gravelotte, Metz, Sedan and the siege of Paris followed rapidly, and in the palace of Versailles itself was fulfilled the old dream of her prophets of a better day, and "Germany became at last, in truth "United Germany"

The history of "United Germany" since 1871 may be summed up in few words: The Rhine provinces recovered; France made to pay a heavy indemnity; and Strasbourg "the key of the house" a German fortress. Under the guiding hand of the "Iron Chancellor" the Union is made continually more strong. The conflict

with the Vatican is adjusted. Socialism is held down with a strong hand; and an alliance with Austria, made in 1879, the crowning triumph of Bismarck's diplomacy. Death twice enters the royal palace, and an eccentric young man the present William II succeeds. He soon rids himself of the Chancellor of his father, and makes for the government an enemy in the person of the world's greatest statesman.

On the day of this writing the German Reichstag sits in council, and the eyes of the world are turned in that direction. The safety of

the empire is the subject of discussion. Russia on the North, has not forgotten the Berlin Conference, when German diplomacy deprived her of the conquests made in the Russo-Turkish war. Her friendship with France is not a matter of mere sentiment. The hatred of France is no secret, nor the fact that she dreads war only because she distrusts the stability of her Republican institutions. She could today take the field with seventy thousand more regulars than Germany. At home the growth of socialism already threatens Bismarck's fabric. Taxes for the support of government bear very

heavily on the German people, less able by far to pay them than their richer southern foes.

Alarmed at the threatening aspect of his neighbors, the emperor appears before the Reichstag with his now much discussed "Army Bill," the object of which briefly stated is to add ninety thousand regulars to the standing army, and twenty million of dollars, yearly, to the taxes. It is bitterly opposed, and seems likely not to pass. Want of money is the real obstacle. The nation can furnish all the flesh and blood the emperor may demand; but the country groans under the

crushing weight of taxation, and the loss of so many men from the employments of industrial life. already multitudes of true blooded Germans declare that the burden is even now too heavy to be borne, and that unity is not worth the price it costs. This, in brief, is the present situation.

We hold that the armament of Germany should be limited by ^{ought} to save the ultimate resources of the nation. Since the fall from power of Bismarck, the Triple Alliance, his creation, has practically been dissolved. The November '92 elections, in Italy, resulted in an overwhelming

victory for the peace party. Military expenditures are to be reduced almost one half. This is in effect a withdrawal of Italy from the alliance. Austria Hungary too is clamoring for retrenchment. The recently elected Gladstone ministry promises no aid. At present it is the German empire opposed to Russia and France.

It is vain to talk of peace unaccompanied by a change of frontiers. And who will say that France would be satisfied by the return of the two frontier provinces? Or that, were France satisfied, Russia would cease to heat against

the northern border? The Austro-Slunghanian monarchy, as ever, has its firmest bond of union in personal allegiance to its sovereign. On the death of Francis Joseph and the accession of his dissolute and unpopular son, almost all European statesmen seem to expect a revolution. In case of a dissolution of that monarchy, how could Germany avoid war? The terrible Thirty Years war has not to meet it disinclined. To lessen preparation now is to fail when the inevitable struggle shall have come. So long as danger lasts, may the words of the then king of Prussia, spoken at the beginning of the

Franco Prussian war be true.
He said: "Today, when the links
of intellectual and rightful com-
munity, which began to be knit
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We have endeavored to show,
that the ruin of Germany is the
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uation is fraught with immed-
iate peril; and that a state of

preparation for attack, to the most absolute limit of his possibilities can alone make sure her future.

Today the fatherland stands on the defensive. It is not she who threatens Europe's peace. In the speech quoted above, the emperor, speaking to the North German Confederation, did not hesitate to say: "Inasmuch as we pursue no other object than the indurable establishment of peace in Europe, - God be with us, as He was with our forefathers." Today the same prayer rises from all Germany.

Her children are industrious, frugal and religious. Within her

borders the Protestant faith has
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bright rays of light and cheer to
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dazzling electric sparks, struck out,
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man is the never fading torch,
set high aloft above the nation,
in the support of a government
made strong as well against
the waves of popular prejudice
as the abuse of regal power. Thus
has she gathered up the tiny rays
in which, combined, she saw her
possibilities, and thus today is
she sending forth a steady stream
of light in which men live and hope.

Commencement Oration of Chester N. Ames, Class of 1893
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002
Edited by Don Sailer, November 2009

United Germany
by Chester N. Ames
1893

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more slowly, the more surely – the different German races, - today that Germany's armament leaves no penny to the enemy.”

We have endeavored to show, that the union of Germany is the consummation of a struggle that has lasted for more than a thousand years. That the empires present situation is fraught with immediate perils; and that a state of

preparation for attack, to the most absolute limit of her possibilities can alone make sure her future.

Today the fatherland stands on the defensive. It is not she who threatens Europe's peace. In the speech quoted above, the emperor, speaking to the North German Confederation, did not hesitate to say: “Inasmuch, as we pursue no other object than the enduring establishment of peace in Europe, - God be with us, as He was with our forefathers.” Today the same prayer rises from all Germany.

Her children are industrious, frugal and religious. Within her

borders the Protestant faith has opportunity for complete development. Thence it is sending out bright rays of light and cheer to those in darkness. Aloft in her venerable universities, the artillery of Science points out into the deep blue vaults of the celestial sphere; while labors be patient, methodical sows bring up from the deep places of human research rich stores of intellectual and religious Truth. Fickle France in the dazzling electric spark, struck out, and disappearing, in ever uncertain intervals of bright ~~Cönt~~ light and deepest gloom. But Germany re-

mains the never fading torch, set high aloft above the nations, in the support of a government made strong as well against the waves of popular prejudice as the abuse of regal power. This has she gathered up the tiny rays, in which, combined, she saw her possibilities, and thus today is she sending forth a steady stream of light in which men live and hope.