

The TRAGEDY of EMPIRE

By Gustav Kobbé

THE picture which accompanies this article was made in 1858. It tells at a glance the tragedy of the imperial house of Austria. The young man standing in the left of the picture is "unsor gute Kaiser Franz," the Austrian emperor, in the heyday of his youth, a graceful, buoyant figure which even in the picture seems to convey a sense of personal magnetism. Now he is an old man and still much beloved both for himself and for what he has suffered.

Upon no house has fate laid such a heavy hand as upon that of the Hapsburgs. Again look at the picture. Beside the emperor stands another young man. His uniform is that of an admiral in the Austrian navy. He is the emperor's younger brother, Maximilian, before whose eyes Fate, in the saturnine guise of the third Napoleon, dangled another crown of empire, that of Mexico, and who, after a brief reign there, was shot. Beside him stands his wife, the Empress Carlotta, who even before the final tragedy of Maximilian's career lost her reason, and for nearly forty years has lived with her mind a blank.

On the sofa sits a young mother with her baby boy in her lap. The boy is Rudolph, the crown prince of Austria, who was killed at Meyerling in 1889. His mother, the Empress Elizabeth, was the victim of Luccheni's knife at Geneva in September, 1898. The others in the picture are the elderly couple, Archduke Francis Charles and Archduchess Sophia, the parents of the emperor; the Archdukes Louis Victor and Charles Louis; and the little Princess Gisela, daughter of the emperor and empress, and who grew up to marry the present prince regent of Bavaria.

The list of tragedies which have affected the imperial house of Austria is, however, even longer than the one I have given. Archduke Ladislaus was shot in the hunting field. Prince Louis of Trani and Archduke John were drowned. Another tragedy affecting the imperial family was the awful fate of the empress' sister, the Duchesse d'Alençon, who was burned to death in 1897 in the Paris charity bazaar fire.

Among those in the picture, Fate first laid its hand upon Maximilian. At the time that the picture was taken he had been married a year. His wife was Princess Maria Carlotta Amelia, daughter of King Leopold I. of Belgium. She was only seventeen at the time of her marriage, tall, beautiful and graceful, and spoke and wrote French, German, English, Spanish and Italian.

In 1862 Napoleon III. proposed to Austria and England that they form an alliance to collect from Mexico by armed force certain debts due from that republic. The allies landed upon Mexican soil in May, 1862, and after sharp fighting deposed the government of Juarez. In September, 1863, and according to plans matured by the French emperor, a Mexican deputation appeared before Maximilian at Miramar, his residence in Austria, and tendered him the Mexican throne. He was an ambitious man, but lacked judgment; moreover he was not rich, and the emoluments of empire tempted him. His wife, too, was dazzled by the prospect, and it is not unlikely that he was influenced by her in his final decision. At all events, although he was warned against the enterprise by competent parties who had been sent to Mexico to investigate and report on the true state of affairs there, he accepted, on condition, however, that he should be elected by the people. This duly transpired. But the choice was deceptive—it was not the spontaneous expression of the popular will, for the

vote was taken by the French military authorities, with Bazaine and his veterans as inspectors of election.

In 1864 the crown was formally offered to Maximilian at Miramar. The oath was administered, and the imperial flag of Mexico was unfurled from the castle tower and greeted by salutes from the ships in the harbor. Space forbids that the whole heartrending story of

tragedies occurred at a hunting lodge at Meyerling, near Baden, twelve miles from Vienna.

It was given out that Rudolph had died of apoplexy, and Vetsera's name was not mentioned. But the physicians refused to sign the death certificate, and thus the truth, or rather the several versions of it, gradually came out.

It generally is accepted as fact that Rudolph and Marie were found dead together. One story is that Marie's brother, having learned of his sister's relations with the crown prince, offered the latter the alternative of fighting a duel or committing suicide; that Rudolph chose the latter; that he and the baroness resolved to die together; and that the Meyerling tragedy was the carrying out of their pact. Others say that it was at dinner at Meyerling that Marie's brother learned of her presence at the lodge, and killed the crown prince by a blow over the head with a champagne bottle. Then the dead prince was borne upstairs to his room, where Marie subsequently killed herself over his body.

These letters, the first of which was to the Duke of Braganza, and the second to Marie's mother, were published soon afterward:

Dear Friend—I must die. I cannot do otherwise. Keep well and happy.
Servus, thy RUDOLPH.

Dear Mother—I die with Rudolph. We love one another too much. Forgive me, and farewell.

From your unhappy
P. S. Bratfisch whistled admirably last night. MARIE.

The curious postscript in Vetsera's letter is an allusion to the whistling Rufus of Vienna, a cabman whom the prince frequently employed in his *incognito* escapades. The postscript shows us a woman who, for love, would laugh in the face of death.

From whatever point of view it is regarded, the affair at Meyerling, which occurred on January 30, 1889, was one of the greatest tragedies in the history of a reigning family. There was an echo of it when, in 1900, the crown prince's widow, Stephanie, formerly a princess of Belgium, married out of royalty and became the wife of Count Lonyay.

And lastly, there is the murder of the Empress Elizabeth by the anarchist Luccheni at Geneva in September, 1898. When, in 1854 and barely sixteen years old, Elizabeth, daughter of Prince Maximilian of Bavaria, was married to the emperor of Austria, she was a girl of incomparable grace and beauty. The Cinderella of her family, a merry little hoyden, the story is told that when the emperor came to woo her elder sister she was sliding down the banister, and inadvertently slid into his arms, where he decided to keep her.

What seemed such a brilliant marriage turned out, after a few years, to be a most unhappy one. The empress loathed the restraint of the Viennese court, the stiffest in Europe. She often violated etiquette, to the great scandal of her mother-in-law, and the great families of Austria slighted her. She was passionately fond of riding, and after awhile gave up the throne for the side-saddle. During the hunting season she often crossed the channel in search of her favorite sport, and often rode to hounds at Kildare and Meath. Later in life a nervous affection compelled her to give up the sport to which she was so fondly, passionately devoted. She took no part in politics, and asked nothing more of Vienna than to be let alone.



EMPEROR FRANCIS JOSEPH EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN PRINCESS GISELA EMPRESS CARLOTTA ARCHDUKE ARCHDUKE ARCHDUKE
EMPERESS ELIZABETH CROWN PRINCE RUDOLPH ARCHDUCHESS SOPHIA LOUIS VICTOR FRANCIS CHARLES CHARLES LOUIS

the Mexican tragedy be told here. Apparently welcomed with open arms, the imperial couple soon were to learn that their régime was upheld by foreign bayonets. The republic would not down. Juarez, Diaz and their followers waged an incessant warfare from their mountain fastnesses. The Civil war once over, the United States massed an army of sixty thousand men under Sheridan on the Rio Grande, and delivered to the French emperor an ultimatum which caused him, rather than risk a war with the United States, to withdraw the French troops from Mexico. In November, 1866, the United States, ignoring the claims of Maximilian, appointed a minister "to the republican government of Mexico, of which Mr. Juarez is president."

This was the beginning of the end. The French troops out of the way, the republican ranks swelled like a river in the spring. Maximilian finally was besieged at Queretaro, and betrayed by Lopez was taken prisoner. Then Europe received a lesson in South American military justice which it never has forgotten. Not a European court but believed that Maximilian simply would be exiled and would return safe and sound to Austria. The Mexican authorities knew, however, that exiles were the most dangerous plotters; and in spite of a protest that went up from all Europe, Maximilian and his generals, Miramon and Mejia, were, on June 19, 1867, stood up before three firing squads and shot to death.

Carlotta had gone to Europe to seek aid for Maximilian's cause. Before the final tragedy her mind, subjected to too great a strain, gave way. How, believing herself still to be empress of Mexico, she has all these years maintained a mock court at the secluded country seat in Belgium, where she is kept under surveillance, is a sad story that often has been told.

The death of Maximilian ends one chapter in the tragedy of Francis Joseph's reign; the murder of Crown Prince Rudolph another. There are various versions of the affair. But in all of them figure the same woman, the beautiful young Baroness Marie Vetsera, who either shot herself or was shot by someone else before or immediately after he was killed. Both