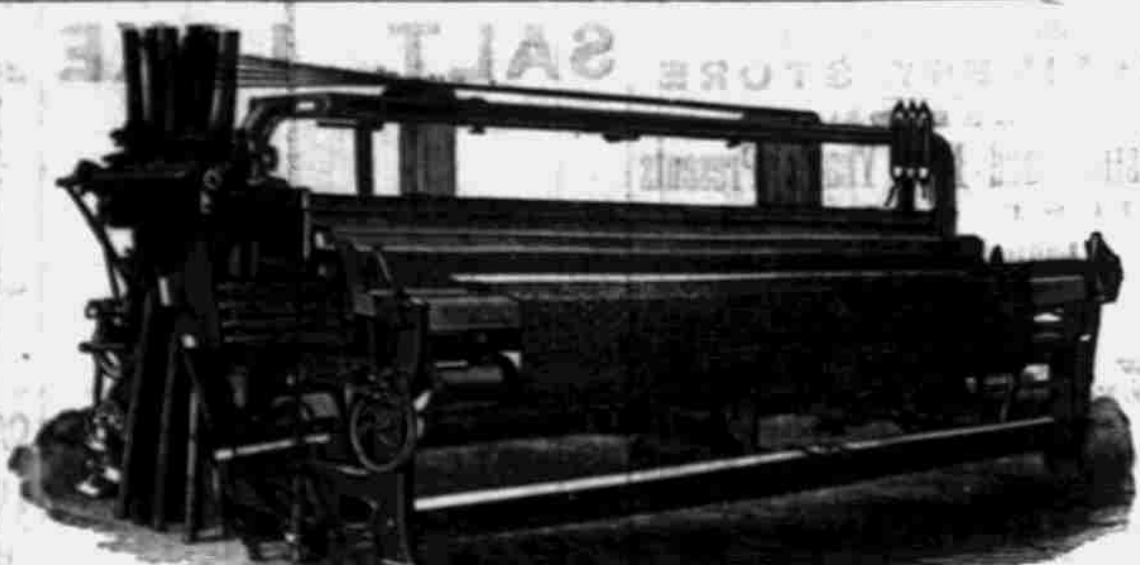


THE GROWTH OF PRUSSIA.

[From the Mount Auburn "Index."]
Prussia was inhabited in ancient times by a tribe of pagans, called the Borani (whence some derive the name Prussia), of whom very little is known until about the year 1000. The effort then made to "Christianize" them, after the fiasco of the times, was successful but, unfortunately, during the process of conversion, they were nearly exterminated. In the thirteenth century the devastated district was re-peopled by German colonists, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century it became a duchy, and was attached to the Electorate of Brandenburg.
These two small states together formed the nucleus of the present mighty kingdom of Prussia. For one hundred and thirty years they acknowledged the King of Poland as their feudal lord, and then (in 1657) secured their independence under Frederick William, known as Prussia's "Great Elector." His successor was crowned first King of Prussia, with the title of Frederick I. At the coronation ceremony he placed the crown on his own brow, and then on that of his wife—an example which was followed one hundred years after by the Great Napoleon.
It was at the very opening of the eighteenth century (1701) that Prussia thus stepped into the family of nations. A more surprising of a kingdom she was, small and feeble, compared with the ancient and haughty monarchies by which she was surrounded on every side, yet, destined in time to become, perhaps, the greatest of them all. France was then the most formidable power in Europe, and little thought that in the new-born kingdom she would one day find a successful rival. In view of recent events, it becomes a matter of great interest to trace the growth of Prussia from this small beginning, one hundred and seventy years ago, down to the present time.
The first Frederick made important additions to his kingdom; he was with those it was after all a diminutive realm (about the size of Ohio in area and population), which was handed down to his grandson, Frederick the Great. This ambitious monarch made it the aim of his life to aggrandize Prussia, and, of course, himself. With a full treasury, an army of one hundred thousand of the best disciplined troops in Europe, and a conscience clear of all embarrassing questions of right and wrong, he started out on his career of conquest. After a series of wars, which extended over a period of twenty-three years (1740-1763), involving nearly every nation in Europe, and deluging the continent with blood, he succeeded in nearly doubling his kingdom, to area and raising it to importance from nothing, to an acknowledged position as one of the five great powers of Europe—the other four being England, France, Austria and Russia.
During the next forty-three years, Prussia, in pursuance of the policy inaugurated for her by Frederick, improved every opportunity for extending herself at the expense of her weaker neighbors, especially Poland, until in 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte swooped down upon her, made her relinquish her ill-gotten gains, and reduced her to a second-rate power. But Napoleon's turn soon came. In 1814 he was conquered and driven from France by a coalition of the powers of Europe, a coalition among whom, in her eagerness for revenge, was included Prussia. Then came the Congress of Vienna. Prussia recovered more than she had lost, and was assigned the second place in the new German Confederation, Austria being at the head. This arrangement lasted till 1866, when at a single bound Prussia placed herself at the head of Germany, and Austria found herself elsewhere.
To understand how this was brought about, we must consider the condition of Germany at the time. The confederation established in 1815 was rather a loose union of sovereign states and free cities, which numbered thirty-nine at first, but were reduced to thirty-three in the early part of 1866. All together, they covered an area of something over 245,000 square miles, less by 30,000 than the area of Texas, but with a population of over 40,000,000. Three-fifths of this territory was occupied by two states. The first of these was a portion of Austria, twice the size of Virginia, with a population of over 12,000,000; the second was a part of Prussia, somewhat smaller in area, with a population of over 13,000,000. The remaining two-fifths was divided up among the thirty-one smaller states, of which no less than sixteen were smaller than Rhode Island both in area and population. The disproportion in size between the States of the Confederation is very striking, and throws light upon what followed. Prussia, leader of Austria, pretty evenly matched with her in strength, and ambitious as ever, was ready to dispute with her the leadership of Germany. Austria was a good deal offensively, and Austria was well contented with things as they were, unable had good reason to be. The little states, glad to be protected by the great ones, were anxious to have the union last as long as possible, and after that were ready for the most part, to take a discreet course in their choice of the party whose fortunes they should follow.
In 1848 Austria and Prussia fell upon Denmark, and took from her Schleswig-Holstein and Lauenburg—an extent of territory nearly equal in area to Massachusetts. Prussia purchased from Austria exclusive possession of Lauenburg, but quarreled with her about Schleswig and Holstein. The disagreement between the two powers grew more and more serious until the month of June, 1866, when Prussia seceded from the existing German Confederation, and proposed the formation of a new one, with herself at the head, to which all the other States were to be admitted with the exception of Austria. This, of course, precipitated a war. Some of the smaller States had the good sense to see that it was not judicious for them to fight with a cat, and so contented to follow the lead of Prussia. Others were not so wise. Upon these Prussia suddenly poured, swiftness, a few, and then a terrible campaign, which will be remembered as long as the world endures, she humbled that proud nation in the last, deprived her for ever of all voice in German affairs, and obtained the coveted districts of Schleswig and Holstein. As to the little States, which she captured to begin with, they were what she wanted. Before the war, Prussia owned for the most part of two portions: the eastern part a little larger than Illinois and Indiana combined, and the western part about one-third the size of Illinois. These two districts were entirely separated from each other by independent States. This, of course, was inconvenient, it was not a good look well upon the map. By wonderful good fortune for Prussia, some of the States which turned against her at the beginning of the war were the very ones which lay between these two portions, so that by seizing them she was able to fill up this chasm and thus make it possible for her king to go from one end of his dominion to the other without stopping on either people's land. By the war, Prussia gained a Territory as large as one-half of Illinois, with a population of over 4,000,000; so, that she came out of the war increased one-fourth in area, and a little less than one-fourth in population. Besides this, she had fulfilled her heart's desire on Austria and become the acknowledged leader of Germany; and thus we find her at the beginning of the present war.



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