

THINKERS OF THE XVITH & XVIITH CENTURIES

ferocities of St Bartholomew's Day in France, seemed mild in comparison. Germany was wasted from end to end; its prosperous cities reduced to ruins; its commerce and industries rooted up; its churches and monasteries laid low. Of thirty-five thousand villages in Bohemia only six thousand survived. A total population in Germany of some sixteen millions in 1618 was represented, it is estimated, by not many more than six millions when at length the Peace of Westphalia was concluded. Scarcely, even in the present day, has Germany recovered from the devastations of that appalling catastrophe—a catastrophe brought upon her not by act of God or accident of nature, but purely and simply by the wickedness and folly, the fanaticism and fury, of her own demented sectaries.

The Peace of Westphalia (October 1648) settled nothing which could not have been readily and easily arranged, after brief discussion, thirty years before, by men of moderation and good will. It admitted the Calvinists to equal privileges with the Lutherans; it made an equitable division of the ecclesiastical lands; it effected certain territorial adjustments; it compensated Sweden and France for their kind interventions with some valuable German dominions; it recognised the independence of Switzerland and the Netherlands, thus excluding them from the confines of the Empire. Its net result was to leave the Empire shattered, divided, weakened beyond all hope of restitution—the mere shadow of a great name. Perhaps the best thing it did was to proclaim aloud to all mankind the impossibility of settling the religious differences which separated the sects of the period by either political persecution or military repression. It compelled all practical statesmen, and even many devout churchmen, to realise that *autos-da-fé* and dragonnades, however effective they might have been in the Middle Ages, were worse than impotent against the new and virulent heresies of the modern era. It forced them to face the problem of toleration, and to devise some sort of means by which men of different creeds could live together within the bounds of one and the same state. Hence the Peace of Westphalia marked the end of the Wars of Religion and the beginning of the end of active ecclesiastical persecution.