CHAPTER VI

The Revolutionary Year (1848-49)

The revolutions of 1848 are an extraordinarily complex series of events. They almost defy description and understanding for several reasons. In the first place there is no one line of development that can be followed, because important events were occurring simultaneously in a dozen or more different places. While major occurrences were happening in Vienna, for example, events were taking place at the same moment in Berlin, Frankfurt, Baden, Dresden, Prague, north Italy, and Budapest, which had an immediate influence on the whole movement.

Even more baffling is the interdependent ideological struggle. Professor Veit Valentin, the most eminent modern scholar of the period, points out three major levels of activity during 1848: liberalism, nationalism, and socialism. These movements were the most significant ones struggling to establish themselves in nineteenth-century Europe, and all three were particularly concerned with the events of 1848 in German Europe. There was an attempt in each of the thirty-nine German states to secure liberal constitutional reforms for their obsolete governments. There was an effort to establish a united German state; Italians, Czechs, Hungarians, and Croats even tried to establish their own national states free from the Hapsburg overlord. Finally, there were attempts at social revolution, both industrial and agrarian, at several different moments in several different areas. All these efforts overlapped in time and space.

The revolutionary year began with the February revolution in France, although the first of the German outbreaks occurred before the events in Paris. The first German revolt is in many ways an exception to the rule in 1848, for it was a revolution in the conservative sense and certainly came close to being a comic-opera revolution.

In Bavaria King Louis I had been reigning since 1825. He was a highly cultured, late product of the Enlightenment who transformed Munich from a town of breweries to a city of fine buildings with a deep
love of art. In his old age he took to his heart an Irish-born Spanish dancer named Lola Montez, even going so far as to give her a Bavarian title. She exerted considerable influence on the government usually in a liberal direction but managed to alienate the proud Bavarian aristocracy and, even more, the students at the University of Munich. On February 9 an outbreak of student opinion forced Lola to seek refuge; a few days later she fled from Munich. King Louis offered some reforms which would have diluted the enlightened character of his rule, but they proved insufficient; in March he abdicated in favor of his conservative son Maximilian, who established a duller rule but with more attention to the constitution. Lola made her way to the gold rush in California, where she settled for some time in the little town of Grass Valley before finally ending her career in New York.

The news of the revolt in France was influential in the southwest at first. In Baden, the most liberal of the German states, peasants, whose freedom had brought them only financial obligations, burnt mansions and threatened the aristocrats. In other western and central German states the governments were forced to change ministers and to issue liberalizing decrees. Most important, in Budapest Louis Kossuth, the great Hungarian nationalist, gave a rousing address in which he insisted on Hungary's right to autonomy and freedom under Hapsburg rule.

The first major revolt in German territory occurred in Vienna. Here there was general unrest from the time that the news arrived from France. Most of it centered around the students at the University of Vienna who were in a restive mood and started to demonstrate in favor of German unity. They looked forward to the meeting of the provincial diet of Lower Austria, scheduled for March 13, as an occasion for a public demonstration. On March 12 the students attended Mass at the university chapel, where they heard an encouraging sermon from a liberal priest, Father Anton Füster. The next morning they crowded around the meeting place of the diet where a copy of Kossuth's speech arrived from Budapest. Kossuth had called for a constitution for Austria as well as Hungary, for he insisted that even a personal union under the Hapsburg crown would be of no value if the Hungarians had a constitution while the German Austrians had none. The demonstration started to become intense and moved to the streets near the emperor's palace. It was joined by some of the new proletariat, workmen from outside the walls, until the gates were closed against them. There was some firing and several students were killed. The archdukes surrounding pitiful Emperor Ferdinand were terrified by the bloodshed and begged the emperor to make concessions. There was only one concession in which people would believe: the dismissal of Metternich. The stately old man accepted his fate with dignity.
and made his way to London where he remained for some years before returning to die in his beloved Vienna.

With the departure of Metternich there was little stability left in the Austrian government. The students had things their own way. A national guard was formed in Vienna of which an important and flamboyant part was the Academic Legion of the students. The government decreed freedom of the press and promised to call a constitutional assembly. One is reminded of the early days of the French Revolution when the old royal government and the people represented by the national guard tried to control affairs with some measure of decorum.

During the next weeks Emperor Ferdinand heard continual bad news from the outlying parts of his empire. In March the Italians in Milan revolted and called for a united Italy. A few weeks later a similar development occurred among the Czechs in Prague. The Hapsburg empire seemed to be falling apart as news arrived from one province after the other.

The government tried to pacify Vienna by issuing a constitution in late April. It was a fairly liberal document but did not include the workers among those who might vote. The students, now sentimentally allied with the workers, refused to have anything to do with it and demonstrated anew, calling for a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage. At this point the imperial family became terrified and escaped to Innsbruck where it spent the next few months among the loyal peasants of the Tyrol and generals of the army, who were happy at the prospect of firing on the rebels. Elections were held for the constituent assembly which met in Vienna in July. It was a fairly radical body, eventually drew up a democratic constitution, and, as its one lasting enactment, decreed freedom for the serfs in the Empire. By midsummer it looked as if Austria were being added to the liberal democratic states of the world, and the future of the house of Hapsburg seemed very dim—especially when in June the Czechs called a Pan-Slav congress at Prague to announce to the world Slavic solidarity.

In Prussia the crucial day was March 18. There had been grumbling and demonstrations in the streets and coffee houses of Berlin for several days. The news from Paris and later from Vienna had an encouraging effect. There had even been some accidental bloodshed. Frederick William, as usual, blundered and fumbled from one suggestion to another. Finally on March 18 he announced a new ministry and also issued two proclamations. One recalled the United Diet presumably to act as a constituent assembly; the other uttered various generalizations concerning the reorganization of Germany. The people of the city were delighted and apparently satisfied by these gestures. During the afternoon thou-
sands thronged to the large square before the palace to applaud the king and indicate their good will. Troops were lined up too, but the scene appeared peaceful until suddenly two shots rang out. No one knows who fired the shots—perhaps some trigger-happy soldier, perhaps an accidental result of the quick movement of a horse. In any case the mood of the crowd changed immediately. There was a panic to get out of the range of the rifles. Within a matter of hours barricades were built in the streets, and the peaceful Berliners turned into an angry armed mob. Throughout the night there was firing which resulted in a large number of casualties. The king was horrified; this was not the way in which he wanted to be loved. He was also the last man to desire bloodshed. Early in the morning he had a white flag raised above the palace with the word “misunderstanding” in large letters. At the same time he had the city covered with a hurriedly printed placard which had been run off during the night. It was addressed “To my beloved Berliners” and promised that if the people would withdraw from their barricades, he in turn would order the troops away. This he did; the Prussian army left its positions in Berlin, and Frederick William threw himself without defense on the mercies of the population. That afternoon he stood bareheaded in the courtyard of the palace while crowds filed past him bearing the bodies of those who had been killed during the fighting. Two days later he announced his readiness to assume leadership of a new Germany stating that “Prussia would merge into Germany,” whatever that meant, and riding through the streets of Berlin wearing the black, red, and gold colors of the insurgents (a combination made up of medieval symbols which had been worn by the Free Corps of 1813). After these theatrical events the royal family moved out of Berlin to Potsdam, where they could be protected by the regular army.

Life in Berlin immediately took on the aura of Vienna. There was no more censorship; policing was done by a volunteer militia; in general, things were far freer. However, the stolid bourgeois of Berlin became alarmed at the increasing influence of the workers and breathed a sigh of relief as troops gradually took up their old posts in the city. The United Diet duly met and quickly approved plans for a new assembly. Elections were to be indirect, but the primary election was to be by universal male suffrage. These elections were held in mid-May and were attended with a great deal of confusion caused by the hopeless lack of experience of most of the Prussian people in such matters. The Assembly turned out to be a radical one with a good many peasants and Poles, who might be expected to vote with the radical leaders against the established order. The Camphausen ministry, which had been appointed in March, ruled from day to day without any particular philosophy guiding it, while
the king displayed his characteristic ambivalence by taking one series of attitudes in public and another in private.

Throughout Germany in almost all the capitals of the smaller states revolts broke out. They followed the pattern of those in Vienna and Berlin calling for assemblies to write constitutions. The word constitution had an almost holy overtone. So throughout Germany elections were held and assemblies convened. The classic home of autocratic government endured a rash of elections. In fact, some authorities feel that one of the many causes for the failure of the movement of 1848 was the fact that there were not enough intelligent, politically conscious men in the whole land to fill the hundreds of chairs in the dozens of assemblies. In the early summer it looked as if Germany were to become a series of liberal constitutional states or, just possibly, one great liberal constitutional state.

The most colorful of the spring revolutions, and one which illustrates the radical and social aspects of the movement, occurred in liberal Baden and was the first of three outbreaks to take place in that state in little more than a year. Its leaders were Friedrich Hecker and Gustav von Struve, both republicans and idealists devoted to the concept of the brotherhood of man. They were dismayed by the wave of peasant rioting which had broken out in the area with the news from Paris. They decided to proclaim a republic for Germany and organize an army of the repressed population to achieve victory for it. They made their proclamation at Constance near the Swiss border and advanced northward. The government of Baden employed Friedrich von Gagern, a German officer in the Dutch army, to command its troops; at a battle in April Gagern was killed, but the insurgents were completely defeated. Struve fled to Switzerland to try again; Hecker went eventually to the United States where he had a distinguished career. An absurd, pathetic, bohemian legion led by the poet Herwegh and his wife left Paris to help the German republicans; however, it arrived at the border after the battle was over.

The most important effort to establish a united national German state began even before the outbreaks in Vienna and Berlin. On March 5 over fifty liberals and republicans met at Heidelberg to discuss plans. A cleavage developed which was to become wider as time went on. Most of the liberals did not want to go so far as to establish a republic. They felt that Germany was not ready for it and that much more could be achieved by some sort of limited monarchy. The leader of this group was Heinrich von Gagern, younger brother of the general, soon to become prime minister of Hesse-Darmstadt and later president of the Frankfurt Parliament. The committee agreed to call a larger group composed of
former state officials, liberals, and friends of unity to meet at the end of the month at Frankfurt. This Pre-parliament (Vor-parlament) met on March 31 and decided that elections should be held throughout Germany for a general parliament to represent all the people. There was some discussion about the qualifications for voting, but the group finally agreed on universal male suffrage. A rehearing of the dispute between the republicans and the limited monarchists resulted in the republican leader, Struve, leaving to establish his own republic.

The Federal Diet, also at Frankfurt, was in a quandary. In it reposed the legal power of the German Confederation, but the princes, whom it represented, were in the shadow and unable to give it any material support. Thus it became associated with the call for the elections, though privately many of the members recommended to their governments various degrees of electoral sabotage. The elections themselves were irregular. They were under the auspices of the local governments and although universal suffrage was supposed to be the rule, there was a tendency for those states which had any electoral laws to apply them. The others made up ad hoc regulations to suit the occasion, adding as many restrictions as they dared. Furthermore, the unsettled conditions of the time made orderly elections almost impossible. Thus the Parliament was not truly representative of the populations. In particular, Austria was very much underrepresented, Prussia less so, while the states of the center and southwest (Baden, Württemberg, etc.) were overrepresented. It is astonishing that in the chaotic state of affairs such a distinguished body of men could be brought together.

May 18, 1848, was a happy day in Frankfurt. More than eight hundred deputies marched in procession to the church of St. Paul where the Parliament was to sit. The streets and balconies were crowded; this day seemed to be a landmark in the tempestuous history of Germany. The next day the Assembly elected Gagern as president, took over the legal powers of the Federal Diet, and set up committees to work out a constitution and to see to the day-to-day administration of Germany.

The Assembly was composed of a remarkable group of men, one of the most distinguished ever elected. It represented the whole spectrum of German political thought from the right, headed by Frederick William's friend Radowitz, to the left, headed by the impoverished radical Robert Blum. This was not a body made up primarily of revolutionaries. There was a heavy emphasis on the free professions and the upper middle class. Thus, there were about a hundred university professors, about two hundred lawyers, and many businessmen, judges, clergymen, officers, and doctors. This group did not profess the overthrow of society; it was devoted to the preservation of property and of law and order, but in the
direction of liberal control by the articulate people. Much of the parlia-
mentary history of later Germany stems from this assembly because it
was not many days before small groups began to disperse and to meet
together in their favorite restaurants and beer halls. A system of parties
rapidly developed, some of which were the predecessors of later German
parties.

The Parliament took the view from the outset that since it had re-
ceived the powers of the Federal Diet and represented all the German
people, it was the actual government of all Germany. The question
therefore arose of constituting an executive which would actually func-
tion as a government. After a good deal of discussion Gaern suggested
for the post of vicar the Archduke John, an uncle of Emperor Ferdinand,
who had a reputation for liberalism and had been very active in the
Austrian government since the departure of Metternich. This was a
shrewd choice because John was both a member of the premier German
family and willing to give an appearance of democracy. John arrived in
Frankfurt and was installed in a curious ceremony combining the old
and the new. He named a ministry composed of Germans from a num-
ber of different states. The degree of acceptance which the new govern-
ment received in Germany and abroad differed; in Austria, for instance,
it was not obeyed at all, while the United States gave it diplomatic rec-
ognition. The German states went ahead with the task of making their
own constitutions with little or no reference to the events at Frankfurt.

In foreign affairs the Frankfurt Parliament soon showed that in its
concept of the brotherhood of man Germans were to regard each other
as brothers before other peoples, for it had little disposition to be friendly
to the aspirations of other nations if these conflicted with German aspara-
tions. The oppressed Poles received no sympathy from the Parliament
because a great many of them were under Prussian rule and must not
be lost to Germany. Similarly the Parliament showed no favor to the
Czechs and regarded the Pan-Slav congress as coldly as the Austrian
government itself did.

The most urgent problem of the moment was the Schleswig-Holstein
affair. King Frederick VII was clearly under the influence of Danish
nationalists who wanted to integrate Schleswig into Denmark. The Ger-
man nationalists in the two duchies hated this policy and also refused
to recognize as their heir the Danish prince who descended in the female
line. Their candidate was the duke of Augustenburg, who was the
closest heir in the male line but to the Danes represented only a cadet
branch of the royal family. These considerations and the occupation of
Schleswig by Danish troops had led to a revolt by the two duchies and
the establishment of a provisional government at Kiel in late March.
King Frederick William saw in the whole imbroglio the chance to pose as the champion of German nationalism, although he had some misgivings about supporting a people in revolt against its legitimate sovereign. He accepted the mandate of the Frankfurt Parliament to make war against the Danes. This situation revealed clearly one of the basic weaknesses of the Parliament, the fact that it had no army or navy to enforce its decrees. Prussia also had no navy; this became a major obstacle to her success in the fighting, since the heart of Denmark is located on islands. To remedy this, the Parliament bought some ships and had others built, so that the first German navy was actually the property of the Parliament and was fated after the failure of that body to be sold at auction.

A further problem was that both Great Britain and Russia took a pro-Danish position in the struggle. They had no desire to see a strong German state control the strategic lands guarding the North Sea coast of Germany and the entrance to the Baltic Sea. The fighting went badly for Prussia, and as the weeks went by Frederick William became less and less enthusiastic about his war. In August he concluded at Malmö a truce for seven months providing that both Danish and Prussian soldiers leave the duchies and that a committee of representatives of the Danish government and of the German Confederation rule them in the interim.

The news of the armistice was received with dismay in Frankfurt. This seemed to be just another example of a monarch betraying the sacred character of German national spirit. At first the Parliament voted against the armistice and planned to prosecute the war, but cooler opinions were heard. The Parliament had no army; its chances of organizing one in time to be effective were nil. Thus the moderate leaders persuaded the Parliament to accept the armistice.

This action by the Parliament was viewed by the hot nationalists as another act of betrayal, even more serious than the king's because it was done by the representatives of the people. Riots broke out at Frankfurt and the insurgents even invaded the meeting hall. The Parliament sent for help to Mainz, where there were Austrian and Prussian garrisons. The rebels fought bravely; they even murdered several of the right-wing deputies, but they were no match for the regular soldiers, who took pleasure in mowing them down and treating them brutally. This seemed like still another betrayal, this time a betrayal of the people to the forces of police repression. Struve used this moment as his occasion for a second proclamation of a republic. He gathered a large but untrained mob, and once again was defeated by regular troops and thrown into prison. These events served to discredit the Frankfurt Parliament, which now stood on the side of law and order and was opposed to ex-
treme idealists or radicals. This explains part of the defeat of the Parliament. It suffered from what might be called sentimental attrition. As it assumed the responsibilities of government, it discovered that the extreme positions were untenable; a moderate majority developed. The coalition of ideas of the early spring dissolved and the hard disagreements remained. The same thing happened even more rapidly in the French republican experiment of the same year.

In the meantime the Parliament went ahead with its work of drawing up a German constitution. It devoted itself at first to producing a statement of the rights of the German. This is a very eloquent document embodying the dreams of liberals and democrats. It is full and far more detailed than most other statements of a similar nature. It is a lasting monument to the high quality of the philosophers and political thinkers who framed it, but it never acquired the force of law.

Naturally the principal question which the constitution makers had to deal with was the question of just who were Germans and where was Germany. In other words, should all or part of the Austrian Empire be included in the new Germany? This was the old grossdeutsch vs. kleindeutsch question, and it assumed central urgency. There were Austrian representatives at the Parliament; an Austrian archduke controlled the executive. Yet the Austrian government paid little or no attention to Frankfurt and was concerned with regathering its scattered non-Germanic territories. As things developed, the left of the Parliament demanded the grossdeutsch solution. It had no reverence for Hapsburg or tradition. As a practical matter the kleindeutsch solution seemed the only one possible. The constitution finally provided that no part of the new state might be organically connected with non-Germanic territory. This would at best give the Hapsburg emperor a chance to establish a personal union between his non-Germanic and his Germanic lands, which would have to be parts of separate states, exactly the opposite of what the Austrian government was urgently trying to achieve at that very moment. Thus the matter really became academic. By early 1849 it was clear that there was no possibility of including Austria or any part of it in the new state and that it would be necessary to name Frederick William of Prussia as the new emperor.

The constitution, finally accepted by the Parliament on March 27, 1849, created a federal state with a hereditary emperor. The emperor was to have a suspensive veto only. The legislative power was vested in a bicameral body whose upper house was to be named by the various state governments and legislatures. The lower house was to be elected by universal male suffrage. The federal government had much wider powers than the old Federal Diet, including control of economic, military, and
foreign affairs. The next day the Parliament chose Frederick William IV of Prussia to be first emperor of the Germans.

Gagern and a committee of the Parliament now journeyed to Berlin to offer the crown to Frederick William. They were received coldly, even insultingly. The king temporized at first. He said that he must receive the consent of the other German states to the new organization. Many of the smaller ones expressed it right away, but some of the greater rulers, particularly the king of Bavaria, demurred, for which Frederick William expressed gratitude. Finally the Prussian king definitely refused the offer on the grounds that a ruler by divine right could not receive a crown from the people, a crown picked up from the gutter so to speak.

In late April the committee returned sadly to Frankfurt. When they arrived, they found that most of the German governments had withdrawn their representatives from the Parliament. Most of the sober, moderate deputies returned to their homes; only the radicals remained. Soon thereafter the free city of Frankfurt requested the remnants to leave the city. They made their way to Stuttgart, where they met a few more times until the troops of the king of Württemberg drove them out. At their last meeting on June 18, 1849, in a room over a wine shop, they sang a patriotic song and formally disbanded the first general representative assembly of the German people and ended the first modern effort at the unification of Germany.

The Parliament has been criticized a good deal in the intervening years. A frequent criticism is that the schoolmasters who dominated it spent so much time arguing abstract points of natural law and political philosophy that they lost the effective moment. It is certainly true that they argued endlessly, but it would seem that there were other more important reasons for the failure. As the months of the Parliament went on, it became clear that the majority was made up of liberals both in the political and economic sense. Many of the ills of Germany were economic, and the angry masses were not to be appeased by appeals to reason and immutable economic laws. Furthermore, and in the short run decisive, was the fact that the Parliament possessed no means of enforcing its decisions. Military forces remained with the states, that is, with the monarchs. As soon as the counterrevolution got under way and the rulers again became masters in their own houses, it was clear that they would abandon their lip service to the Parliament. In the great modern successful revolutions, e.g., the French Revolution of 1789 or the Russian ones of 1917, the regular troops transferred their allegiance to the rebels. This did not happen in 1848 (or in Russia in 1905). It may be that the German armies were composed mostly of ignorant peasants who had no idea what the revolution was about and were aware
only of their oath to their monarchs; this would set them apart from the French in the 1790’s. It was certainly true that the German armies had not undergone the almost incredible ordeal of war, weather, and incompetence that made the Russian soldiers so receptive to the revolution in 1917. Whatever the reason, the German forces remained true to their officers and to their rulers. This was decisive and nowhere more so than in the Austrian Empire where the counterrevolution began.

Emperor Ferdinand had the unusual luck for a Hapsburg of having three competent and loyal generals, Prince Windischgrätz, Field Marshal Radetzky, and the Croat governor, Baron Jellachich. Before the year ended, he also acquired a highly intelligent and unscrupulous minister, as authoritarian as Metternich himself, Prince Felix zu Schwarzenberg. This group used the old Austrian technique of setting one part of the empire against another, which was not difficult because the mutual hatreds of the nationalities in the empire was exceeded only by their joint hatred for their German masters. The first decisive event occurred in Prague in June when Windischgrätz, whose wife had just been shot by the Czechs, ordered up reinforcements, bombarded the city, and reduced it to submission.

In Italy the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia had joined with the rebellious Italian subjects of the Hapsburgs in an effort to liberate north Italy and start the unification of that peninsula. On July 24 Radetzky achieved complete victory over the joint Italian armies at the battle of Custozza. Lombardy and Venetia were returned to Austrian obedience amidst the usual repressive measures. Little by little Ferdinand was being reassured that he still ruled over an empire.

The clearest use of the policy of divide and rule was seen in the treatment of Croatia and Hungary. The Croats were a part of the kingdom of Hungary and devotedly hated the Hungarians as much as the Hungarians hated the German Austrians. In early 1848, when each nationality was making its bid for independence, the Croats did so too. To appease them the emperor appointed a native Croat, Jellachich, as their governor. For some months events elsewhere prevented the Austrian government from paying much attention to what was happening in Croatia, but there was friction between the two to the extent that Jellachich was suspended from his functions during the summer. However, in September Ferdinand’s government decided that it would be politic to reinstate Jellachich, and some weeks later he was put in charge of the attack against the Hungarian rebels. At first he was unsuccessful, having been driven by the Hungarians into Austria proper within a short distance of Vienna.
October was the decisive month for the Austrian revolution. The Constituent Assembly had been sitting in Vienna since July. Its tone had become increasingly radical and so had the attitude of the Viennese who declared their solidarity with the Hungarians and went so far as to murder in cold blood Count Latour, the minister of war. It was now time in the opinion of the government to settle with Vienna. This sort of outrage must not go unpunished. The first step was to order the Assembly out of Vienna to the little town of Kremsier in Moravia, where it would be away from the influence of the Vienna mob; its time would come later. The next was to order Windischgrätz to invest and besiege the city. The siege went on for several days with the regular army bombarding its own capital city. On October 31 Vienna submitted and the German part of the Austrian revolution of 1848 was over.

Schwarzenberg, who had now established himself as paramount at court, decided that it was necessary to arrange the abdication of Emperor Ferdinand. Ferdinand was clearly incompetent, and it was desirable to have a new imperial symbol for the work of reconstruction that lay ahead. Schwarzenberg was successful in persuading the emperor to give up his throne and also in convincing Ferdinand’s younger brother, the heir to the crown, to relinquish his rights. In this accomplishment he was much helped by the heir’s wife, Archduchess Sophia, who was ambitious for her son to be emperor rather than her husband. The son, Archduke Francis Joseph, was young, handsome, and brave. On December 2, 1848, at Olmütz, where the court was staying, he was proclaimed emperor of Austria and began one of the longest and saddest reigns in all history (1848–1916).

The Constituent Assembly was still working on the constitution at its new quarters in Kremsier. In March 1849 the task was completed and ready for presentation to the nation. The Kremsier constitution, which never went into operation, was a democratic document calling for a federal organization of the complex empire. Schwarzenberg did not approve of it and simply ordered the Assembly dissolved. In place of the new constitution Francis Joseph promulgated another, highly centralized in nature, but did not put even this one in effect because he chose to rule autocratically until things returned to normal.

The only remaining rebels were the Hungarians. Angered by the cavalier treatment given the Assembly, and even more by the centralized constitution which would put Hungary completely under the heel of Vienna, the Hungarian leaders abandoned the fiction of a personal union under the emperor and declared their independence. All out warfare ensued between the Austrians and the Hungarians, but the Austrians
made little headway at first because their armies were exhausted after the tensions of the year before. At this point Austria was saved from abroad.

Emperor Nicholas I of Russia was one of the blackest reactionaries of the century. He had spent 1848 in a state of rage against the revolutions and frustration that he could do nothing about them. Now he saw a chance. He offered to Francis Joseph the loan of a Russian army to help quell the rebellious Hungarians. The Austrians accepted the offer. General Paskievitch invaded Hungary with a Russian force, while the Austrian general Haynau attacked from the west. The combination was too powerful for the Hungarians to withstand, and in August they surrendered, not to the hated Austrians but to the Russians. The Russians handed the Hungarian leaders over to the Austrians, and the reprisals were brutal. Russia now withdrew happy from a mission well performed and content in having a new friend, Austria, who could no doubt be counted on in the future. By mid-1849 Francis Joseph was in control of his whole empire, but the bitterness that had been engendered was never to be allayed as long as the empire lasted.

Frederick William IV did not have as much trouble quelling the revolution in Prussia as the Austrian rulers. He did not have the nationality problem to deal with, and furthermore the Prussians had never shown themselves very adept at revolutions. He took heart from the successes in Austria and in November decided to copy the action there and exile his Constituent Assembly from feverish Berlin. In fact the Prussian Assembly was probably the most radical of the many German assemblies of the year and was hardly representative of the sober Prussian middle class and the loyal peasantry. On November 9, 1848, the king sent General Wrangel to order the Assembly from Berlin to the village of Brandenburg. It replied that it would move only by force; Wrangel assured it that he had plenty of force. The Assembly moved. It tried a last effort by calling on the people of Prussia to refuse to pay their taxes, but this gesture accomplished nothing; even the Frankfurt Parliament disapproved of it. In early December Frederick William dissolved the Assembly and at the same time promulgated a constitution. At first blush it looked as if the king’s constitution were almost the same as the one drawn up by the Assembly, but closer examination disclosed that behind all the liberal statements the king’s power was remarkably intact and the royal charter was a very authoritarian one. A number of changes were made in the new constitution during the following two years; it did not assume definitive form until 1850, so it will be logical to describe it in the next chapter.

There were two last pathetic flickers of the revolutionary movement
in the late spring of 1849, one in Saxony and the other in Baden. Both of them arose from the despair of liberals when Frederick William refused to accept the crown offered by the Frankfurt Parliament. Saxony was one of the most advanced areas in Germany, both intellectually (because Leipzig was the center of the book trade) and industrially. The Saxons had counted heavily on a new order in Germany and were furious that their own king had not urged Frederick William to become emperor. They rose in revolt in Dresden in early May. The revolt did not amount to much. The king of Saxony invited Prussian troops into his kingdom to put down the rebels. This they did swiftly. However, this revolt has lasting interest because involved in it were Michael Bakunin, the famous Russian anarchist, and also Richard Wagner, the composer. Wagner escaped but was forbidden to live in Germany for many years.

The revolt in restless Baden was more serious. It also was planned as a fight for the Frankfurt constitution. The rebels were numerous; it has been estimated that at one time they included half of the male inhabitants of Baden. Their leaders were impressive; Lorenz Brentano, a lawyer, became the head of the rebel government, with Struve, now released from prison, Mieroslawski, the Polish patriot, and Carl Schurz, later to become an important American political figure, as lieutenants. The Prussian army was again the agent of repression. There was a good deal of fighting but finally the rebels were driven into the fortress of Rastadt, where they were besieged during most of the month of July. Finally a shortage of food forced them to surrender. Although the rebels were promised freedom by the Prussians, they did not receive it; many of the liberal leaders of Germany languished for long periods in Prussian prisons. Schurz was one of the lucky ones who managed to escape and to enrich the United States by his presence.

With the defeat of the uprising in Baden the movement of 1848 ended. Things for some time after it were worse than they had been before, and the liberal professorial leaders were discredited for years to come. Other nations profited from the forty-eighters who left Germany to make their way abroad. At the present time, after the ordeals of the last fifty years, the new Germany may look back to 1848 with interest. Perhaps she will find that the men of that year are her best models.