

# BOHEMIA

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST INHABITANTS OF BOHEMIA (UP TO THE YEAR 431)

BOHEMIA, now a part of the great Habsburg Empire, has a history which is a record of much past greatness. It is situated in the centre of the European continent, and divided by high chains of mountains from the neighbouring German countries—Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, and Austria. Only in the direction of the sister-land, Moravia, is there no such mountainous frontier. Bohemia is inhabited by a population the largest part of which, except in the earliest times has always been of the Slavonic race; but all the surrounding countries, except Moravia, which is also mainly Slavonic, are inhabited by Germans. Moravia has almost always been under the same domination as Bohemia, and the two countries were together known as the lands of the Bohemian crown;<sup>1</sup> though during the days of Bohemia's greatness parts of Northern Germany and of the Slavonic lands joining Bohemia were also governed from Prague. The geographical position of Bohemia supplies to a great extent the key to the history of that country. The great chains of mountains which divide it from the neighbouring German lands give Bohemia a separate and isolated position. The country therefore forms a continent within the continent of Europe, as Göthe has well expressed it. This is, no doubt, one of the causes why the Slavonic race has to a great extent retained its hold over Bohemia, whilst the adjoining territories of Northern Germany, the population of which was formerly Slavonic, have long since been Germanized. Attempts were, however, always made by the German princes and people to attain a similar result in Bohemia also, and this struggle between rival races is the leading feature in Bohemian history. Modern research has proved that this idea dominates the many religious conflicts

<sup>1</sup> Silesia and Lusatia were also at certain periods counted among the lands of the Bohemian crown; but their connection with Bohemia was neither as close nor as lasting as that of Moravia.

in this country to a greater extent than would appear from the writings of the old historians, who treat the subject almost entirely from the point of view of religious controversy.

In consequence of the geographical position of Bohemia we find few references to that country in the old Greek and Latin writers, and its earliest history is therefore very obscure. According to a theory, whose origin can be traced back as far as Ænæas Sylvius, and which will be mentioned presently, Bohemia had first a Celtic and then a Teutonic population. Recent research, founded, in the absence of all historical evidence, on craniology and archæological research, has rendered it probable that at least part of Bohemia had an autochthonous Slavic population. Of the two great recent authorities on this difficult subject Dr. Pič affirms that there were certainly Slavs in Bohemia before the beginning of the Christian era, and Dr. Niederle that Slavs can be traced as far back as the fifth century before Christ. According to the formerly generally accepted account, the earliest inhabitants of Bohemia were the Boji, a branch of the Celtic race. Livy tells us that in the time of the king Tarquinius Priscus, the Celtic king Ambigatus in Gaul, finding it difficult, in consequence of his age, to rule over the ever-increasing population, ordered his nephews Sigoves and Belloves to lead a large part of the people to other lands. The flight of birds was to decide the direction of their travels, and according to it Sigoves set out for the east and settled in the Hercynian forest, a district that may be roughly identified with the present Bohemia. This legend, though its historical truth has (at least, as far as the date is concerned) been disproved by Niebuhr, is evidently founded on old traditions of the Celtic druids.

We find few references to these earliest inhabitants of Bohemia in the classical authors, and the first positive fact concerning them that has come down to us dates from the year 115 B.C. In that year the Cimbri left their homes in the country that is now Southern Russia, and marched westward through the present Galicia and Moravia, where in a battle, the probable site of which was in North-eastern Moravia, they were entirely defeated by the Boji. The Cimbri, in consequence of this defeat, altered their line of march, and passing through the countries now known as Styria, Switzerland, and France, entered Italy. This victory

over an army that even Rome only defeated with great difficulty, proves that the Boji were at that time a powerful and warlike nation.

We next hear of the Boji in connection with Julius Cæsar's campaigns in Gaul. A certain number of Boji had joined the Helvetii, who were also of Celtic race, in their attempt to settle in Gaul. Though this attempt was frustrated by Cæsar's victory at Bibracte, the Boji were, at the request of Cæsar's allies, the Aedui, allowed to settle in their country.<sup>1</sup> The evidence as to what number of Boji left their country and settled in Gaul is contradictory. It seems probable, however, that the nation was greatly weakened by this emigration; for it proved unable, ten years later, to resist the Dacian king, Boerebistes, who ruled over the lands now known as Transylvania and Hungary. He attacked them in that part of their country now known as the Archduchy of Austria, and defeated them in a battle which was probably fought in the neighbourhood of the river Raab. The Boji retreated to Bohemia, where Boerebistes does not seem to have pursued them; but he devastated the land he had conquered so cruelly, that it was known long after as the "Bojian Desert." The empire of Boerebistes does not seem to have survived his death; but the Boji, weakened by these unsuccessful wars, soon fell an easy prey to the Germanic tribe of the Marcomanni.<sup>2</sup>

Opinions differ as to the original home of the Marcomanni, though it seems most probable that they occupied lands near the upper course of the river Oder, and that they afterwards moved to Moravia and Upper Hungary. They were on terms of friendship with Rome, as Marbod, a son of one of their princes, was educated at the court of the Emperor Augustus. A man of great talent and ambition, his natural capacities as ruler and commander were developed by his residence in the capital of the world. On his return to his country he seized the sovereign power and organized his army according to the Roman fashion. The country he first attacked was that of the Boji, whom he seems to have conquered without great difficulty (probably in the year 12

<sup>1</sup> Cæsar, *Bell. Gall.* i. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Mommsen remarks (*Röm. Geschichte*, iii. 243, 244) that there is no historical evidence of the existence of the Marcomanni, as a separate people, before Marbod's time; the name may originally only have meant what it etymologically signifies—frontier defenders ("march-men").

B.C.). He made their capital, Buhamum, his residence, changing its name to Marobodum. From Bohemia, where his position in consequence of the mountains and dense forests which surrounded the country was very strong, Marbod undertook the conquest of the neighbouring German tribes, and appears to have become the chief of a powerful empire. He, however, soon found a rival competitor in Arminius, or Hermann, prince of the Cherusci, who by his victory over the Romans in the Teutoburg forest had delivered a great part of Germany from the Roman yoke. Marbod had remained neutral during the struggle between Rome and the German tribes led by Hermann, and had thereby incurred great hostility among the Germans. War soon broke out between the two chiefs—the first great war between German tribes known to history. A great battle was fought between the two armies in the country now known as Saxony; and, though the result was not decisive, Marbod retired into Bohemia and invoked the aid of the Emperor Tiberius. The Roman Emperor afforded him no aid, though he sent his son Drusus to mediate between the German princes; and as the German tribes formerly subject to Marbod now revolted against him, he soon lost all his conquests except Bohemia. This country also he was not destined to retain long. Kattwalda, prince of the Goths, secretly encouraged by the Romans, entered Bohemia (13 A.D.) with a large army, and by treachery possessed himself of Marbod's capital. Deserted by every one, Marbod was obliged to seek refuge in Italy; and, by permission of the Emperor Tiberius, he took up his residence at Ravenna, where he remained up to his death, eighteen years afterwards. Tacitus mentions that in his time the speech was still in existence in which the Emperor Tiberius expatiated on the former greatness of Marbod's power, and on the means by which he had been forced to surrender himself to Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Kattwalda was not destined to retain his conquest long. After a reign of only two years he was driven from his country by Vibilius, prince of the Hermunduri, whom the Romans (always desirous to create dissensions among the German tribes) had probably instigated. Kattwalda was obliged to seek refuge with the Romans, but they would not allow Vibilius to retain the land he had conquered. Aided by Rome, Vannius, king of the Quadi, possessed

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annales*, ii. 64.

himself of the lands of the Marcomanni ; and that name, which Marbod had rendered famous, now sinks into obscurity. The Marcomanni, as well as the Quadi, fell under the domination of other tribes, probably the Hermanduri. All these tribes appear to have been to a certain extent dependent on Rome ; and we read that the Emperor Domitian, having demanded aid from Quadi and Marcomanni in his war with Decebalus of Dacia and receiving an unsatisfactory answer, caused their envoys to be murdered and attacked their country (90).

During seventy-five years from this date we find no historical mention of the tribes which inhabited Bohemia, and only from the time of the beginning of the Marcomannic war (A.D. 165) we find some slight mention of Bohemia and the neighbouring countries. This war is known in history as the Marcomannic war ; probably more because the name was better known to the Romans than those of other tribes living further from the frontiers of the empire, than because that tribe took a very prominent part in it. Numerous tribes, whose partly-distorted names are recorded by the Roman historians, and among whom we find mentioned the Marcomanni and Quadi, driven southward by other—probably Slavonic—tribes, simultaneously attacked the Roman Empire. Only insufficient and contradictory accounts of this great war have reached us. The Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, having defeated the German tribes in several battles, formed the plan of incorporating the lands of the Marcomanni and Quadi (that is to say, the districts now known as Bohemia, Moravia, and Upper Hungary) entirely with the Roman Empire. A great insurrection in the east, however, obliged Marcus Aurelius to renounce these plans and to conclude peace. Faithful to the Roman system of separating the various German tribes, the Emperor granted them peace under different conditions ; and those imposed on the Marcomanni appear to have been the hardest. They and the Quadi were obliged to receive in their land and maintain a Roman army of 20,000 men. The severity of this condition, and the depredations committed by the Roman army of occupation, soon caused the Marcomanni to renew the war with Rome. They were again defeated by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, but he was not able completely to conquer their country ; and after his death the Emperor Commodus made

peace with the Marcomanni. The conditions were less onerous than those of the former treaty. Though they were to remain dependent on Rome, the land of the Marcomanni was no longer to be occupied by a Roman army. There can be no doubt that this long war had greatly weakened the Marcomanni and diminished their number. We find occasional mention of their name in connection with those of the German tribes who, during the reigns of the successors of Marcus Aurelius, invaded the Roman Empire in every direction. They are mentioned as having invaded the Roman territory during the reigns of the Emperors Caracalla, Alexander Severus, Maximinus, Valerianus, Gallienus, Aurelian, Probus, Diocletian, and (in 358) during the reign of the Emperor Julian. Hardly any records of these expeditions, that seem to have been undertaken more for the sake of plunder than of conquest, have reached us. In the year 404 the German prince Radagaisus attacked Italy at the head of a large army, to which the Marcomanni sent a contingent. He was, however, defeated in the following year, and almost his whole army perished on the battle-field. A great number of Marcomanni also joined Godegisil, king of the Vandals, in his expedition to Africa.

It is probable that only a scanty population now remained in the lands near the Hercynian forest. The Marcomanni who had remained in their former abode were, like the neighbouring tribes, unable to resist the attacks of the Huns, and soon became subject to them. The last notice concerning the Marcomanni which we find in history tells us that they were among the Germans subject to Attila, who formed part of the army with which he attacked Gaul. They took part in the battle of the Catalaunian fields, in which Attila was defeated, and it is probable that most of the few remaining Marcomanni perished there. Bohemia had after this battle probably but a small population. The Celtic Boji and the Teutonic Marcomanni were now, however, to have as successors Slavic tribes, of which the Čechs were the most powerful. Though there may have been an autochthonous Slavic population in Bohemia, it was only then that the Čechs began to form the majority of the population of Bohemia, as they have continued to do up to the present day.