

Fascinating Folks & Exciting Events

Napoleon III (1808–1873)

Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was the nephew of Emperor Napoleon I. After the downfall of Napoleon at Waterloo, France was again under the rule of a king. That meant they went from a monarchy (with a king) to a republic (because of the French Revolution) to an empire (with Napoleon I) and then back to a monarchy (with a king). However, after about thirty years, the people had had enough of the monarchy. They wanted a republic again and were willing to fight to get it. So the king fled, the republic was proclaimed, the assembly was elected, and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was voted into the assembly on the basis of his famous name.

A few months later, he ran for president of the republic and won a smashing victory. But Louis Napoleon had more in common with his uncle than just the name. He saw visions of glory with himself as the emperor of a Second French Empire. So after four years of the presidency (where he had promised to uphold the republic!), he arrested everyone who would cause him trouble and had himself declared Emperor of the French. He took the new name Napoleon III (Napoleon II, son of Napoleon, had

died years earlier). The interesting thing about Napoleon III was that, though he said when he became emperor, "The Empire means peace," he constantly plunged France into war! The French army was at war in the Crimea, in Mexico, and in Italy, and they finally went to war against the Prussians in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

That was an unfortunate mistake, because the Prussians vastly outnumbered the French and were also better trained and better equipped. Within three weeks, Emperor Napoleon III and 124,000 of his troops were defeated by the Prussians at a fortress called Sedan. They were forced to an unconditional surrender that ended the Second French Empire. The Prussians continued to wage war against other parts of France, laying siege to Paris, which is the very "heart" of the French. Paris finally surrendered to the Prussians, which ended the war. This very quick war had the astounding results of converting the French Empire back into a republic and converting the loosely knit German Confederation into the German Empire!

Remember: Monarchy - Republic - Empire - Monarchy - Republic - Empire - Republic