CHAPTER II

Religious Conflict and Territorial Triumph (1500-1714)

With his useful gift of hindsight, it is no problem for the historian to see that by 1500 the German world was on the threshold of momentous events. Alike in the political, economic, social, religious, and artistic spheres, developments were culminating simultaneously in such a way that an upheaval was almost bound to occur. The fifteenth century had shown the weakness of the imperial organization; the inert Frederick III had simply emphasized it. Power was certainly slipping from the head to the members, but the question was which of the groups of members would receive it: the electoral princes, the lesser princes, or perhaps the middle-class burghers of the prosperous German towns. The very prosperity of the towns based on their crafts and their extensive trade served to accentuate the misery of the peasantry, the overwhelming majority of the German population, burdened almost beyond endurance by dues and duties of various sorts levied by both state and church; in years of bad harvest their plight was tragic. To add to their sorrows, the quantity of coined money in Germany increased greatly during these years, bringing with it the evils of inflation. The German peasant was sufficiently wise to know how much better off he might be, an attitude always pregnant with trouble.

The religious situation was also charged with future problems. The influence of the Hussite heresy with its heavy anticlerical overtones was felt throughout Germany. The financial exactions imposed by the Renaissance papacy, careless of its transalpine public relations, made the established church unpopular in many places. In Germany, unlike England and France, there was no strong national government to check the most serious demands of the church. Along with the dislike of the church as a temporal institution, there was also a shift in theological emphasis. Probably some of this too was caused by the Hussite example. In this
period a number of mystics flourished, men and women who achieved their religious experience through immediate intuition of God without much reference to the mediation of church and sacraments. This movement culminated in the so-called devotio moderna, whose adherents preached a simplified Christianity with emphasis on personal morality and a personal relationship with God. One of the schools conducted by these men trained Erasmus of Rotterdam, the greatest German scholar of the time, who, though he remained within the mother church, nevertheless bitterly attacked some of its churchmen.

By this time the new attitudes, grouped together under the label "Renaissance," had reached Germany. Humanism, scholarship, the study of Greek, and the practice of the fine arts were no longer limited to Italy. It seems no accident that the three greatest German painters of all time, Mathias Grünewald, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Holbein the Younger, were all alive in the year 1500.

When Frederick III died in 1493, he was succeeded as emperor by his son Maximilian I (1493–1519), the "last of the knights," a flamboyant and chivalrous fellow who was, however, no fool. Familiar with the well-administered lands of his wife's Burgundian inheritance, Maximilian was anxious to institute reforms in the crumbling structure of the Empire. At a meeting (Diet) of the princes and estates of the Empire in 1495, an effort was made to modernize the old institutions. The Diet established a supreme court (Reichskammergericht) which was to adjudicate all quarrels endangering the public eternal peace of the Empire. The Empire was further divided into ten "circles," overlapping the boundaries of individual states to help preserve peace. These circles show the extent of the Empire according to the authorities of the time and point out that it was already a distinctly German state. As it turned out, the reforms were inadequate to handle the problems that were about to arise; they were at least a recognition of the needs of the moment.

Maximilian spent much of his reign in warfare, particularly with the kings of France. The quarrel between the French Valois kings and the Austrian Hapsburgs, arising from the settlement of the Burgundian inheritance, was to develop into a long-standing conflict lasting even after the house of Valois died out and was succeeded in 1589 by the house of Bourbon. Maximilian did not neglect the typical Hapsburg matrimonial diplomacy. By marrying his son to the heiress of Ferdinando and Isabella of Spain, he prepared for his grandson Charles one of the greatest inheritances in all history, an inheritance, however, which brought no happiness.

When Maximilian died in 1519, two powerful foreign rulers, Henry
VIII of England and Francis I of France, announced themselves as candidates for the imperial throne. The obvious candidate was Maximilian’s grandson, Charles of Hapsburg, now king of Spain. The prelude to the election was full of bribery and diplomatic chicanery. It was largely the support of the great Fugger banking house of Augsburg that secured the triumph for Charles, whose dominions were now immense. From his mother, he possessed Spain with her domains in Italy and across the Atlantic Ocean; from his grandmother, he controlled part of the lands of Burgundy, including the rich and powerful Low Countries; and from his grandfather, he inherited the Austrian Hapsburg possessions. And now he was Holy Roman emperor.

Charles V’s reign (1519–56) was a tragic one. Charles was not an attractive personality. He was dour and serious, but deeply devout and concerned with the high positions he held. In fact, his principal problem was that his dominions were so extensive that no sooner did he seem about to solve one conflict than he was called urgently to another. Three major preoccupations concerned him: the religious revolt in Germany, the endemic war with France, and the threat of the Ottoman Turks, who approached the gates of Vienna and convinced the Hapsburgs that the onus of the old crusading movement had devolved upon them. It is difficult not to be sympathetic with this ruler so beset by competing problems.

The religious revolt centers around the career of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther’s father, a peasant miner, planned a career in the law for his son; but after a deep religious experience, Martin gave up his legal studies and undertook a religious life, entering an Augustinian monastery. He was ordained a priest in 1508 and sent to the new University of Wittenberg in Saxony as a professor of philosophy. Two years later he went to Rome on church business and was bitterly shocked by the luxury and extravagance he found there in high clerical circles. He was a man of violence, a man burning for God, who lived in fear of eternal damnation and was sure that no deed of his could relieve the penalties of his terrible future in hell. Eventually, from his studies of the Bible he developed the consoling doctrine of justification through faith.

In 1517 a Dominican, John Tetzel, appeared in Wittenberg preaching an indulgence proclaimed by Pope Leo X to collect money to build the new church of St. Peter in Rome. Contributors to the fund, if repentent for their sins, were promised remission of the temporal punishment due for those sins. Luther considered this an intolerable abuse, and on October 31 nailed to the door of the university chapel ninety-five theses, or propositions, concerning the doctrine of indulgences, which he declared
himself ready to dispute with any opponent who might present himself. This typically medieval action is generally regarded as the opening event in the history of Protestantism.

It is beyond our scope to enter into the details of the early history of the Protestant movement or to raise the theological problems involved. During the three years after 1517 Luther took part in various public disputes, and his positions were the subject of official inquiries. Gradually, as he attacked the primacy of the pope and later the doctrine of transubstantiation, Luther moved further and further from orthodoxy until his own intellectual integrity forced him to recognize that he was closer to Huss than to Rome. By 1520 he had written his major theological tracts. In that year Pope Leo condemned a number of Luther’s propositions and threatened excommunication. When this papal ruling (or bull) arrived in Wittenberg, Luther reacted by burning it publicly in the square before the university. Shortly thereafter the excommunication was decreed formally.

At about the same time the new emperor, Charles V, appeared in Germany and called a meeting of the imperial Diet at the city of Worms. The pope appealed to the emperor to place Luther under the ban of the Empire. The Diet summoned him to Worms under safe-conduct to give him one more chance to recant. In March 1521 Luther appeared twice before the Diet, on the second occasion delivering his famous speech in which he declared himself unable to change his views in any way. He then left Worms and on his way home was spirited away by his friend and patron, Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, to the peaceful seclusion of the castle of the Wartburg, near Eisenach, where he spent almost a year at his translation of the Bible. Aside from its religious importance, this work set the future literary form of the German language. In the meantime the Diet placed Luther under the ban of the Empire.

After his return from the Wartburg Luther married a former nun and spent most of the rest of his life advising on the formulation of the new doctrines and on the organization of the new churches. Since he could not depend for support on the Empire, Luther based the new institutions on the local territorial princes. Each of these in Lutheran areas became a supreme bishop for his own domain and controlled his own church. This obviously gave a mighty impetus to the growing power of the individual princes and also encouraged the less scrupulous of them to embrace the new faith because they could then seize the possessions and incomes of the old church.

The decade of the 1520’s was decisive for the Protestant revolution. In 1521 there was an expectation that Luther could be silenced; by 1530 the breach was complete, a statement of Lutheran beliefs had
been drawn up, and Germany was divided spiritually forever. During those years Charles V was not in Germany at all. His major preoccupa-
tions were two wars against France, wars which were only peripheral to German history except that they permitted the consolidation of Prot-
estantism without the presence of the emperor to do anything conclusive about it. In fact, in 1522 Charles abdicated further his position in Ger-
many by making his younger brother Ferdinand regent of all the German Hapsburg lands. Ferdinand was married to the heiress of Bohemia and Hungary, lands which fell to him on the death of their king in 1526. As ruler of those eastern territories, Ferdinand’s primary concern was to defend them against the Turks. From 1526 to 1532 he waged cam-
paigns in that direction, of which the most serious moment was the first Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529. Both Hapsburg brothers thus were able to give only secondary attention to Germany during this momen-
tous decade.

From the earliest days of his protest Luther was met with extreme popularity and enthusiasm by the masses with whom he came in contact. This was a measure of the unpopularity of the church at the time, but it was also a measure of the severe economic and social tensions of the moment. In fact, religious issues became so intertwined with social ones that it is almost impossible to separate them. As early as 1521 the towns of Wittenberg and Zwickau fell prey to leaders who not only pushed the religious revolution in an extreme radical direction far beyond any-
thing that Luther had ever preached, but also tried to set up a semi-
communist society aimed against the princes. Luther, furious at this, left his retreat at the Wartburg and in a week drove these “saints” from the new temple.

Another sign of discontent was the revolt of the imperial knights in 1522. They were not subject to any territorial prince but owed their allegiance directly to the emperor, and usually possessed a small estate from which they tried to wrest a livelihood. In the early sixteenth century they were in a very depressed condition. The prosperous elements in Germany were the princes and the towns. The knights were suffering badly from monetary inflation. Two of them, Franz von Sickingen and Ulrich von Hutten, assumed the leadership of the cause. These men espoused Lutheranism and decided to attack the ecclesiastical lands, in particular those of the archbishop of Trier. The attack on Trier failed, Sickingen was killed at a siege of his own castle, and Hutten died the next year in exile. This revolt is not intrinsically important but illustrates the turmoil of the period.

Much more important and bloody was the Peasants’ War of 1524 and 1525. There was nothing new about revolts of the oppressed peasantry.
The Holy Roman Empire at the Reformation

- Holy Roman Empire
- Austrian Hapsburg Possessions
- Spanish Hapsburg Possessions
During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries there was endemic unrest under the banner of the Bündschuh, the typical peasant footwear. There was nothing specifically religious about this peasant movement, though some of its attitudes resembled the Hussites’. However, the appearance of Lutheranism with its break from traditional authority, and the general ferment of the times, seemed to be propitious for the peasants. The peasant leaders, none of whom were men of great capability, adopted Luther’s views and were impressed with the anti-Roman program of Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, which lay near the area in which the peasant strength was greatest.

The peasants drew up a program called the Twelve Articles, which were both religious and economic, though on the whole limited in their demands. They called for an elective priesthood and the abolition of various oppressive feudal dues. Although some German leaders saw the justice of some of the demands, there was on the whole no sympathy with them, and the peasants decided to resort to force. By the spring of 1525 several hundred thousand peasants were under arms. They conducted a campaign of reprisal against their lords, which rapidly assumed the bloodthirsty character of social wars.

This was a crucial moment for Luther, whom the peasants were hailing as a leader. He had already shown his basic political conservatism in his attitude toward the radicals at Zwickau. He now made his position very clear in a violent and passionate pamphlet entitled Against the Murderous and Rapacious Hordes of the Peasants. This was all the propertied classes needed. They organized troops which in the course of several months put down the peasants with appalling brutality. The peasants were crushed, this time permanently, and Luther had placed his future squarely in the hands of the territorial princes.

From this time on Lutheranism ceased to spread among the lower classes. Its attraction was now to the educated, especially the local rulers, who tended to sweep their people along when they themselves became converts. An example is Albert of Hohenzollern, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. Lutheran teachings had reached as far as remote Prussia and attracted Albert. He paid a visit to Luther, who advised him to renounce his vows, marry, abolish the Order, and found a dynasty. Albert did exactly that and thus helped to establish the future greatness of the Hohenzollern family. Prussia joined ranks with Saxony, Hesse, and the other Lutheran territories.

With the creation of more Lutheran states the tendency developed among both Catholics and Lutherans to form leagues based on similarity of belief. While no one wanted civil war or the disruption of the Empire at this time, there is no question that these leagues paved the
way for the consolidation of the two groups and eventually for the tragic wars of religion. In 1526 Archduke Ferdinand summoned a Diet of the Empire to meet at Speyer. Ferdinand was intensely concerned with the imminent threat of the Turks and anxious to gain the support of all the German princes in his military efforts. Thus it would clearly not be possible to try to enforce the decisions made at Worms in their full strength. Emperor Charles now believed that a final settlement of the religious problem was not possible until a general council of the church could be convoked. Thus at Speyer a mild resolution was taken providing that, until this council met, the estates “with their subjects, would live, govern, and act in such a way as everyone trusted to justify before God and the Imperial Majesty.” Although it was not the intent, this edict seemed to consecrate the religious division in Germany and to make it easier for hesitant princes to embrace the new faith without fear of imperial reprisal.

Three years later the situation had changed a good deal. Charles V and Pope Clement VII had patched up their difficulties; the war with France was brought to a close; the Turkish peril was receding. It seemed possible to Ferdinand to take a stronger line. Accordingly he called another Diet at Speyer (1529) at which he read a message calling for no more religious innovations and announcing the imminent arrival of Charles in Germany and the immediate calling of a church council. The message was approved by the Catholic majority while the Lutherans drew up a “Protest,” from which the word Protestant derives.

The following year Charles did arrive in Germany for the first time in nine years and called a Diet of the Empire to meet at Augsburg. It was a splendid affair but ended in failure. It looked like a religious council rather than a political one. There was a full representation of Catholic theologians. The Protestant cause was upheld by Philipp Melanchthon, a young follower of Luther, who hoped that a compromise might be effected between the two parties. He had drawn up a statement of belief, the Augsburg Confession, which blunted some of the sharp edges of Protestantism and which he believed might be a document of conciliation. Although Melanchthon was constantly willing to compromise, there were points beyond which he could not go. No compromise was achieved, and the Diet decreed a return to the very strict prohibition of Lutheran teachings proclaimed at Worms in 1521. The Protestant princes left the Diet, and the status quo was hardly changed. The Augsburg Confession has remained a creed for orthodox Lutheran-ism ever since.

The Diet gave the Protestants six months to return to the old faith. The Protestant reply in early 1531 was to found the League of Schmal-
kalden, which eventually became a firm alliance of the Protestant princes and cities to protect them against Catholic attack. The drift toward open conflict continued.

It looked as if this time the Hapsburgs meant business in their resolve to stamp out Protestantism, but again their attention was diverted by pressing problems elsewhere. Once more the Turkish danger looked ominous. The emperor was forced to agree to the Religious Peace of Nuremberg (1532), a truce which was to continue the status quo until a council or the next Diet. In return the Protestant princes offered Charles help against the Turks.

As it developed, this temporary arrangement of 1532 lasted for almost fifteen years. Charles was out of Germany during most of this time. He undertook a campaign against the Turks, two wars with France, and two expeditions to North Africa. It was not until 1544 that he was free to take any important action in Germany. In the meantime the Protestant area in Germany increased enormously. By the mid-forties almost all of north Germany was Protestant and even Austria itself felt the impact of the new doctrines. Among the temporal principalities only Bavaria seemed safe for Rome. A special problem arose in the case of the ecclesiastical territories. If a bishop or abbot decided to turn Protestant, should he secularize the whole territory as Albert of Hohenzollern had done, or should he simply get out of the way himself and permit a new canonical appointment? The solution differed in various places according to the relative strengths involved. In some dioceses secular administrators were appointed to run the affairs of the area while the question remained unanswered. The problem of church lands in secular territories was serious too, especially when one realizes that the church had fulfilled all social and charitable functions. The usual solution was for the prince to confiscate all church property and to assume the responsibility for the church’s former duties. The temptation latent in this for avaricious princlings is obvious.

Still another serious problem arose with the introduction of the teachings of John Calvin in Germany. These teachings, far more radical in their opposition to the old faith than those of Luther, spread to southwestern Germany from Calvin’s headquarters in Geneva. They made special inroads into the lands of the Elector Palatine. The Lutherans were just as opposed to Calvinism as they were to Catholicism, so the struggle became three-cornered.

When Charles V returned to Germany in 1545, he at first appeared to temporize. However, before long it was clear that he was determined to wage war and was trying to win to his side some of the Protestant princes. He was successful in obtaining the help of Duke Maurice of
Saxony (not to be confused with his cousin from the other branch of the Saxon line, the elector of Saxony, who was a leader of the League of Schmalkalden). The War of Schmalkalden broke out in 1546. For some months nothing decisive happened; the Protestants in particular were hesitant and dilatory. In April 1547 Charles won an overwhelming victory over the Saxons at the battle of Mühlberg. The Saxon elector was captured and his dignity transferred to Maurice. It looked as if Charles and Catholicism were triumphant. The following year Charles issued the so-called Augsburg Interim, an attempt at religious peace. It was in fact hardly a compromise, though it did grant a few favors to the Protestants. For instance, they could maintain a married clergy and receive communion in two kinds if they obtained a papal dispensation. There was also an effort to reform some of the abuses of the old church.

Nobody liked the Interim very much. The pope was suspicious because Charles seemed to be arrogating religious decisions to himself, particularly at a time when the Council of Trent was already meeting to deal with the problem. The Protestants were, of course, dissatisfied. Even more significant perhaps was the fact that all the princes, Catholic and Protestant, were worried about the revival of the authority of the emperor—especially an emperor who was primarily a Spaniard. They had enjoyed too long the pleasures of practical independence to be willing to give them up.

The situation simmered for several years until in 1552 the Protestant princes revolted against Charles. This time they were led by Maurice, who had changed sides and gone to the length of making an alliance with Charles' bitterest enemy, Henry II of France. This phase of the war was unsuccessful for Charles, who was almost captured at Innsbruck and fled over the Brenner Pass into Italy.

The war continued against France, but in Germany negotiations went on for some time under the direction of Archduke Ferdinand, culminating in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, a landmark in German history. This treaty settled the religious question with the phrase, *cuius regio eius religio*. This meant that each prince might freely choose between Catholicism and Lutheranism and might require his subjects to conform to his beliefs. An "ecclesiastical reservation" provided that churchmen who henceforth wished to change their religion had to abandon the church property entrusted to them to the Catholic church, which would appoint a new incumbent. All church lands confiscated before 1552 were to remain Protestant; all others were to remain Catholic. The treaty gave no privileges of any sort to the Calvinists. This compromise agreement remained the legal basis of the religious settlement for the next century, though in practice it was often violated.
A few months later Charles V, tired and disgusted, abdicated his titles and functions, and retired to a monastery for the short remainder of his life. His Spanish and Italian possessions went to his son Philip, while his central European holdings went to his brother Ferdinand, who became Emperor Ferdinand I (1556–64). With these events a period in German history came to a close.

The focus of interest in Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century moves away from Germany. It shifts to France, which was on the eve of its long religious struggle; to England and Spain, where the long duel of the reigns of Elizabeth I and Philip II was about to be fought; and to the Netherlands, which was soon to start its war of independence under the house of Orange against Spain. Religiously speaking, the main interest in Germany lies in the loss of ground of Protestantism and the corresponding gains of Catholicism as a result of the Catholic Reformation.

The emperors of the period were not men of great strength or political competence. Ferdinand I's son, Maximilian II (1564–76), was a man of peace, who, however, was forced to protect his eastern possessions in a long struggle against the Turks. He was not fond of Spain and personally favored Protestantism, but left little imprint on history. His son, Rudolf II (1576–1612), had a curious personality. By choice he resided in Prague, where astrologers were his favorite companions. The impressive scientific names of Tycho Brahe and John Kepler are associated with his court. Content with the stars and his paintings, Rudolf displayed little political acumen.

For a time after 1555 Protestantism continued to grow and consolidate itself until within a few years it represented a considerable majority of the German population. The most extensive gains were made by the Calvinists, disliked by Lutherans and Catholics alike. The first important German prince to become a Calvinist was the Elector Palatine, who made of his capital, Heidelberg, a center of Calvinist thought. This belief spread into the lower Rhineland where it was encouraged by the neighboring Dutch. Calvinism also found adherents in Bohemia.

More impressive was the recuperative power displayed by the Roman Catholic church. The Catholic Reformation is linked with two important events. The main one was the Council of Trent, which met intermittently from 1545 to 1563. This council, from which Protestants were excluded, defined in detail the doctrine of the church, especially those parts of it which had been attacked by the Protestants. It also enacted a number of disciplinary and educational reforms which remedied many of the abuses against which Luther and the other reformers had raised their outcry. Hardly less important was the approval by Pope Paul III
in 1540 of a new order, the Society of Jesus or Jesuit Order, which had been founded a few years before by St. Ignatius Loyola. The first German Jesuit was St. Peter Canisius, sometimes called by Catholics the second apostle to Germany (St. Boniface having been the first). The Jesuits were active in founding schools and sending out preachers to confute the Protestants. They were very successful, and by the end of the century Protestantism hardly existed in Bavaria, Austria, parts of Bohemia, and large sections of the Rhineland.

The settlement at Augsburg contained a number of ambiguities, most of which involved the ecclesiastical reservation. On the whole the Lutherans displayed remarkable apathy in enforcing what they felt were their rights, while the Catholic princes were more adamant. A major test case occurred in Cologne in the early 1580's when the archbishop publicly declared himself a Protestant. The pope deposed him and named a Bavarian prince as his successor. The affair burst into open warfare, but the Catholics triumphed very quickly and Cologne remained Catholic thenceforward.

The Protestants watched the resurgence of Catholicism with concern but took no important action until a series of religious disturbances broke out in the little town of Donauwörth in the early years of the seventeenth century. Here Catholic Bavaria violently repossessed for the old church a Protestant town on the grounds that it had denied rights to a Catholic monastery in the neighborhood. As a result the leading Protestant princes simply walked out of a meeting of the Diet in 1608.

The following year a military step was taken with the formation of the Protestant Union. This alliance, under the leadership of Frederick IV, Elector Palatine, included as the years went on most of the leading Protestant princes. However, the continuing conflict between Lutheran and Calvinist tended to render it less powerful than might have been the case. A few months later some of the Catholic rulers formed a competing Catholic League under the aegis of Duke Maximilian of Bavaria. Here again there was weakness because a number of the members were ecclesiastical rulers whose military strength was negligible.

A general European war threatened during these years over the extremely complicated inheritance of Cleves-Jülich in northwestern Germany. Had it not been for the murder of Henry IV of France in 1610, war might have begun. As it developed, both the Union and the League backed down and the inheritance was divided between the two principal candidates, one of whom was the Hohenzollern elector of Brandenburg who had just inherited the duchy of Prussia. An important aspect of the Cleves-Jülich dispute was that foreign powers—France,
the Netherlands, Spain, and England—involved themselves actively in it, prefiguring the years to come when Germany was to become the prey and battleground for foreign antagonists.

The seedbed of the future great war lay in the Hapsburg dominions in Bohemia. Here the old Hussites were encouraged by the new German Protestants, and both Czechs and Germans of the new faith increased in spite of the efforts of the Jesuits. Emperor Rudolf, anxious to end his days peacefully with his studies, granted a charter of freedom of conscience in 1609 and even permitted a committee of Protestant leaders, called defensores, whose function was to defend the liberties of the Protestants. Rudolf's actions aroused the disgust of his family, particularly his brother, Archduke Matthias, who in 1612 forced him to resign all the Hapsburg hereditary lands but not the title of emperor. Rudolf tried to resist but died in 1613 before he accomplished anything, and Matthias was elected emperor (1613–19).

The major problem of Matthias' reign was the question of succession. He and his two brothers were aging and childless. The obvious heir was their cousin, young Archduke Ferdinand of Styria, whose principal quality was his devoted adherence to the Catholic church. The Austrian Hapsburgs, supported by their Spanish cousins, pressed for Ferdinand's proclamation even before the death of Matthias. He was in fact proclaimed in Hungary and Bohemia in 1618. Matthias died in early 1619, and Ferdinand II (1619–37) was elected emperor.

The Bohemian Protestant nobles were not disposed to accept the accomplished fact, insisting that their kingship was elective, not hereditary. The crisis occurred on May 18, 1618, when a number of Protestant leaders called on the royal governors in the castle in Prague to protest ill treatment. The discussion turned into a fight, and the two governors and one secretary were hurled out of a window to fall seventy feet. They were not seriously hurt, according to the Catholics because on their way down they called on the holy names of Jesus and Mary, and according to the Protestants because they landed on a soft dung heap. In any case, this so-called "defenestration of Prague" was the opening action in the Thirty Years' War.

It took a long time to get a war started in the seventeenth century. The diplomats played a slow complex game of conflicting alliances, while the generals were reluctant to expose their trained men in battle and preferred a dilatory strategy of maneuver. The Protestant princes were not anxious to unleash the full strength of the Catholic opposition—especially Saxony, the largest Protestant territory, which hated Calvinism and was determined to hold to its imperial moorings. In the
summer of 1619 a Bohemian army approached Vienna while Ferdinand was being crowned at Frankfurt, but it had to withdraw.

The Bohemian nobles did not hurry to elect a king. The foremost candidate was Frederick V, Elector Palatine, young, handsome, charming, the husband of a daughter of James I of England, and a Calvinist. In August he was elected and made the mistake of accepting the election. He started his rule in Prague in great state, but there were many who predicted that he would be only a "winter king," that his kingdom would disappear with the spring thaw. He received no help from his father-in-law in London, who was at the moment dallying with an alliance with the Spanish Hapsburgs.

The most important alliance concluded was between Emperor Ferdinand and Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, head of the Catholic League. Maximilian was the most astute of the German princes. He never allowed himself to be duped by the Hapsburgs but believed at this moment that he had much to gain from Ferdinand. The agreement provided that a League army would invade Bohemia, that Maximilian would be reimbursed for his expenses, and above all that he would receive the electoral title and some of the lands of his relative Frederick, who was put under the ban of the Empire. The League army under General Tilly moved into Bohemia and at the battle of the White Mountain in November 1620 crushed Frederick and his Protestant supporters.

The White Mountain was a crucial date in Bohemian history. It consecrated the hatred of Czech for German. The Hapsburg reprisals were violent and bitter. The lands of the rebel nobles were seized and resold to a new German nobility superimposed on the Czech population. One of the main immediate gainers was Albrecht von Wallenstein, a Protestant-born noble and a staunch believer in astrology, who had become a Catholic to marry an elderly wealthy widow and ran her lands and others which he bought so competently that he eventually became one of the richest men in Europe. With this money Wallenstein was able to raise a large private army which he rented to the emperor. He was the most impressive of the soldiers of fortune during this period, who enriched themselves by warfare at the expense of the unfortunate population.

The League army under Tilly now moved west to the Palatinate and in 1622 completed the conquest of Frederick’s hereditary domain. Ferdinand granted the electorship officially to Maximilian and the first phase of the war was over.

The second phase centered in northwestern Germany and was dominated by King Christian IV of Denmark. In this area there were a
number of important bishoprics which had been secularized in defiance of the ecclesiastical reservation. They would be obvious targets for Catholic Hapsburg action, since they were located strategically for the Spanish Hapsburgs to get at their rebellious Dutch subjects. For the opposite reason both the Dutch and the English were anxious to keep the Catholics out of the area. France, although of course a Catholic kingdom, was primarily interested in opposing Spain; she had just come under the control of her great minister, Cardinal Richelieu, who, although a prince of the church, was more concerned with keeping down the Hapsburgs than with supporting the Catholic cause. Thus the war gradually began its shift from a war of religion to a war of dynastic interests. The king of Denmark, as duke of Holstein, was a prince of the Empire. He was elected captain of the "Lower Saxon Circle" and with his army entered Germany.

There were two armies available to the Catholics. One was the army of the League under General Tilly. The other was the large body of well-trained men which Wallenstein offered to Emperor Ferdinand with the understanding that great gains would accrue to his ambitious self and that the army would live off the land wherever it happened to be. In 1626 Wallenstein defeated a Protestant soldier of fortune, Ernst von Mansfeld, at Dessau and pursued him eastward. Later the same year Tilly defeated King Christian decisively at the battle of Lutter. Both Catholic generals followed up their victories by an invasion of Denmark in 1627. The Protestants were routed. One of their princes, the duke of Mecklenburg, was deposed by the emperor, who gave the territory to Wallenstein, an unheard of reward for an upstart member of the lower nobility. Emperor Ferdinand then decided to achieve control of the Baltic coast of Germany where imperial influence had been negligible for many years. Therefore, during 1628 Wallenstein tried to capture the islandlike city of Stralsund. He had no naval equipment and thus failed in this project, but Catholic power was at a greater height than for generations before.

The emperor seized this moment to take his most ambitious step. In 1629 he proclaimed the Edict of Restitution, which provided that all the church lands and dioceses which had become Protestant since the religious peace of 1555 were to be restored to the Catholic church. This involved fourteen bishoprics and many convents and monasteries. Immediately members of the Hapsburg and Wittelsbach families were named to the vacant sees. Shortly after, the treaty of Lübeck was signed between the emperor and King Christian by which the Danish king repossessed his lands but promised to get out of German affairs. This was the height of the Hapsburg fortunes.
By this time the Catholic princes, especially Maximilian of Bavaria, were getting very uneasy. It was admittedly desirable to restore Catholicism to as much of Germany as possible, but this now seemed to redound only to the greater glory of the Spanish and Austrian Hapsburgs. There was a real fear that Ferdinand was aiming at the establishment of a strong, centralized monarchy in Germany at the expense of the cherished independence of the territorial princes. The princes and the League could exert some check over the emperor through their control of the League army under Tilly; but they had no control over the private army of Wallenstein, who was in the emperor’s personal employ and whose ambition, arrogance, and depredations seemed to have no end. They decided to force Wallenstein’s dismissal. This was accomplished at a meeting in Regensburg in 1630. The soldier of astrology returned to his lands to wait until he was needed once more.

The third, or Swedish, and most dramatic period of the Thirty Years’ War opened with the landing of Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, on German soil in June 1630. Gustavus, the “Lion of the North,” was a young man who had already displayed brilliance as an administrator in his reorganization of Sweden and as a military leader in his campaigns against the Poles. He was a devoted Lutheran, who feared a Hapsburg triumph in Europe as a direct threat to his own position. He gained the alliance of several of the lesser north German rulers shortly after he landed, but his great achievement was the treaty of Bärwalde signed with France in early 1631. By this treaty France, which was not officially in the war, promised to subsidize the Swedes generously in their “liberation” of German states from Hapsburg domination. This was Richelieu’s greatest diplomatic stroke. Shortly thereafter Gustavus forced an alliance with the elector of Brandenburg and started to march south. Meanwhile Tilly’s army set out to meet the Swedish king and in May 1631 captured Magdeburg, whose administrator was an ally of Gustavus. The town was put to sack and burned almost to the ground. The war was becoming more general and more ferocious; Germany was becoming a charnel house.

When Tilly’s men advanced into Saxony and began to pillage, the Saxon elector, who had kept out of the war so far, joined the king of Sweden. On September 17, 1631, the battle of Breitenfeld, near Leipzig, was fought between Tilly and Gustavus with the aid of the Saxons. The Swedes annihilated Tilly’s army. After this there was almost no opposition to Gustavus Adolphus’ triumphant march across central Germany to Frankfurt, where he spent the winter.

The spectacular successes of the Swedes gave pause to the German rulers. What advantage was there in exchanging a Hapsburg ruler for a
Swedish one? Even Richelieu was worried. Emperor Ferdinand saw only one course open, the recall of Wallenstein. Wallenstein's price was high: he wanted supreme command, answerable to no one, and wished to make any treaty with Saxony of his choosing. Ferdinand had no alternative. Wallenstein put his forces on the move and began by pillaging Hapsburg Bohemia on his way to meet the Swedes. In early 1632 Gustavus started eastward. He defeated Tilly, who died shortly thereafter, and carried out a campaign of terror in Bavaria as bad as Wallenstein's in Bohemia. All summer the two armies lay near each other in Saxony. The battle of the titans occurred on November 16, 1632, at Lützen, also near Leipzig. It was a furious battle in which the Swedes were victorious, but, more important, Gustavus Adolphus was killed on the field.

The events of the next two years are confused. The Swedish crown passed to Gustavus' young daughter Christina under the regency of the able minister Axel Oxenstierna. The loss of Gustavus was a bitter blow; Sweden could not expect to play the large role that had been hers for two years. There was an understandable disposition on the part of the princes to end this war which had been so long and so cruel. The behavior of Wallenstein during 1633 will always remain something of a mystery. He missed various opportunities to demonstrate his force and instead busied himself negotiating with some of the Protestant princes. Some think that he saw himself as the ruler of a reorganized empire with a greater degree of religious toleration. Emperor Ferdinand turned against him and in February 1634 dismissed him. Wallenstein moved from Prague to Eger, and there on February 25 he was murdered by a group of his own officers. He remains one of the most enigmatic and fascinating characters in German history.

During 1634 and 1635 there were serious efforts in the direction of peace. The German princes, both Catholic and Protestant, realized that they had become simply the pawns of foreign interests. A feeling of common German nationality seemed to motivate them. This culminated in the Peace of Prague of 1635 between the emperor and Saxony. It modified the Edict of Restitution and set 1627 as the date of the possession of church holdings. This was a date favorable to the Catholics, but not so favorable as 1555. A number of German states acceded to the treaty, but the cause of peace was not to prevail. In the same year, 1635, Richelieu acted openly by declaring war on Spain and entering officially into the carnage in Germany.

The last thirteen years of the war are barely a part of German history. During them Germany was acted on rather than acting. The armies of France, Spain, Sweden, the Empire, and the German princes crossed
and crisscrossed the German land wreaking havoc and leaving behind them burning towns, ravaged fields, and rotting corpses. The war was now really a tangle of wars whose principal protagonists were the non-German states. The issues which had originally given it birth were almost forgotten. Germany had entered the period of her history in which she was the prey of other nations. Ferdinand II, so important in the early days of the struggle, died in 1637 after assuring the succession to his son. Ferdinand III (1637–57) was a shadowy figure, dominated by his Spanish Hapsburg cousins.

By the early 1640’s there was terrible war-weariness, especially in Germany, and negotiations to start real negotiations got under way as early as 1641. It took three years before the diplomats assembled and four more before the treaties of Westphalia were signed. Even then France and Spain remained at war for more than another decade. Rarely in history has diplomacy been more complex. The degree of wrangling over protocol and precedence, the squabbles on religious niceties, and the awkwardness of communication would be laughable if one did not realize that at the same time the armies were still on the march, fighting, killing, and ravaging. The representatives of the Catholic powers assembled at Münster, those of the Protestants at Osnabrück forty miles away. Somehow they agreed on a series of arrangements which became basic law for Germany for a century and a half to come.

The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 consecrated the essential independence of the German states. The Hapsburg thrust for a centralized German monarchy was never revived. Foreign nations (e.g., France and Sweden, both of which received imperial territories) became members of the German Diet. There were some territorial shifts within the Empire; Brandenburg increased considerably by receiving most of Pomerania and several secularized bishoprics, including the expectancy of Magdeburg, to the south. The Netherlands and Switzerland were recognized as independent of the Empire. Maximilian of Bavaria retained his electoral title and some of the lands of the Palatine elector, but a new electorate was set up for the “winter king’s” son, the new Elector Palatine. Within the Empire two bodies were established in the Diet—one of Catholics, the other of Protestants. Henceforth each was to run the concerns of its own group, and neither could come under the control of the other. The date for the ecclesiastical reservation was set at 1624. Calvinists were given equal status with Lutherans. These religious arrangements show a sense of toleration or, more particularly, that religious issues were no longer so urgent as formerly. From this time on there were no important changes in the religious map of Germany. This was a peace of exhaustion; it did not really settle any of
the basic issues, but at least it did create a pattern in which the old Holy Roman Empire could muddle along until it finally collapsed under the impact of the next general upheaval, the revolutionary period of the late eighteenth century.

The second half of the seventeenth century was a tragic period for Germany. There was almost no German history. The first great need was to recover somehow from the frightful ravages of the Thirty Years' War, ravages so severe in both men and property that Germany was seriously retarded behind the other states of western Europe. Probably the most poignant description of this pitiful period occurs in the one important literary production of the time, Grimmelshausen's picaresque novel, *Simplicissimus*, which paints a horrendous picture.

The great figure of the period was Louis XIV of France. France had now replaced Spain as the major power on the continent, and Louis waged several wars to enlarge his domains—particularly in the northeast at the expense of the Rhenish parts of the Empire and of the Spanish Netherlands (modern Belgium). The first of his wars, the War of Devolution (1667–68), hardly concerned Germany at all, although Emperor Leopold I (1658–1705) was nominally in the alliance against France. Louis claimed that the Spanish Netherlands had "devolved" upon his Spanish wife because her dowry had never been paid, and proceeded to invade that territory. A combination of English, Dutch, and Swedish forces persuaded Louis to abandon his big enterprise, but in the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle he received several important towns for his trouble.

The ire of the French king now turned toward the Dutch; after having by diplomacy detached from them both England and Sweden, he launched his forces against the little republic in 1672. The Dutch, who were allied with Frederick William, the "great" elector of Brandenburg (1640–88), put up a surprising and vigorous resistance, overthrew their republican leaders, placed William III of Orange in control, and opened their floodgates to protect the province of Holland from conquest. In 1674 the war became general when the Empire and Spain allied themselves with Holland and declared war on France. At about the same time England withdrew from her French alliance and made peace with the Dutch.

German participation was halfhearted. Emperor Leopold entered the war at first on behalf of his Hapsburg territories, though the Empire in general did not join in until later, and sent a force under General Montecuccoli to the middle Rhine. Frederick William marched with the Austrians but became disgusted with their delays, particularly when they were soundly defeated by the great French general, Turenne, who had
The Empire at the Peace of Westphalia

The Empire

- Spanish Hapsburg Dominions
- Austrian Hapsburg Dominions
- Church Lands
been ravaging the Palatinate. The elector decided to go his own way and withdrew from the war accepting instead a French subsidy. This action has been a difficult one for enthusiastic Prussian historians to explain. Frederick William maintained this policy for only a year, however, because the Swedes, allied with France, descended on his domains. He marched rapidly to oppose them and in 1675 won the battle of Fehrbellin, the source of his title “the Great.” The war dragged on until 1678 when several treaties were signed at Nimwegen, by which France made a number of gains, mostly at the expense of Spain. Emperor Leopold, however, had to cede to Louis the city of Freiburg-im-Breisgau. Frederick William received nothing for his efforts because the French protected the interests of their Swedish allies.

When Louis XIV was not waging war, he was waging peace. He managed to achieve as many of his ambitions through clever diplomacy as through war. Much of this was at the expense of Germany. One device was the construction of a league of minor German princelings in the Rhineland, most of them ecclesiastical lords, to act as satellites of the great king in promoting French interests within the Empire. This was a phase of the centuries-long policy of France to keep Germany weak by luring the Rhineland into the French orbit. Napoleon I and Napoleon III undertook the same policy, as did the governments of France after both world wars in the twentieth century.

More important at the time was Louis’ creation of the so-called Chambers of Reunion, which operated very successfully in the first half of the 1680’s. Groups of lawyers searched the feudal records in order to discover all the territories which had at any time been dependencies of the areas which France had acquired in recent years. The French government then made legal claim to all these lands and occupied them by military force. Louis made a number of significant gains by this technique, including the important towns of Luxemburg and, most particularly, Strassburg. It is a measure of German weakness at the time that the French were nearly always unopposed in this process. In fairness, however, it should be added that during these years the Austrians were at war with the Turks, who in 1683 actually besieged Vienna.

By 1685 Louis XIV’s fortunes reached their apex; from then on they declined. This was caused partly by Louis’ increasing arrogance at home culminating in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the consequent persecution of the French Protestants, a policy which dismayed the Protestant rulers in Europe. Abroad, Louis’ German policy and the “reunions” were increasingly resented, and there was always William of Orange to encourage any moves against France. Finally in 1686 the League of Augsburg was established, an anti-French alliance
composed of Emperor Leopold, Sweden, Spain, Bavaria, Saxony, and the Palatinate. An immediate cause of this alliance was Louis' insistence that the Palatinate belonged to him because his sister-in-law was the sister of the childless elector, who had just died. Three years after the formation of the League, William of Orange became William III of England and was able to throw English strength and money behind the League. However, by that time the War of the League of Augsburg (1688–97) had already begun.

At its very outset the war brought fresh calamity to Germany for the French armies entered the Palatinate and completed the devastation which had been started by Turenne during the Dutch war. It was during these years that the famous castle in the lovely university town of Heidelberg was destroyed and became the picturesque ruin that it remains today. As the war continued, most of the principal fighting occurred in the Netherlands and Italy, and at sea, rather than in Germany. The fortunes of war were uneven; when the treaties of Ryswick were signed in 1697, French losses were as noticeable as French gains. In Germany Louis XIV was forced to relinquish to the Empire all of the "reunions" except the very important one of Alsace, including Strassburg, which was now lost to Germany until 1871.

The great crisis in European diplomacy in the last years of the seventeenth century revolved around the succession to the throne of Spain. Charles II, feeble and childless, was likely to die at any time without leaving an immediate legal heir to the vast Spanish possessions. The three main claimants, all of them related closely to Charles through the female line, were Louis XIV, Leopold I, and the elector of Bavaria. Neither of the two great monarchs expected to inherit this empire in his own name; Louis wished it for his young grandson Philip of Anjou, while Leopold claimed it for his second son Charles. Several treaties were made to arrange for the expected succession. Charles of Spain, annoyed that others were dividing his legacy during his lifetime, made a will granting the entire inheritance to Philip of Anjou, and died soon thereafter in 1700. Louis XIV accepted the throne of Spain for Philip and sent the young man to Madrid with the ill-judged remark, "There are no longer any Pyrenees."

Emperor Leopold was angry at the cavalier fashion in which his son had been treated; William III saw in the situation an opportunity to create further trouble for Louis XIV. The result was the Grand Alliance of all the major powers of Europe against France and Philip's Spain. Only Bavaria was allied with the French. In 1701 the War of the Spanish Succession began, which lasted for twelve years and bled further the nations which had seen so little of peace for a century.
Only one of the major figures in this war was "German"; only one of the major battles was fought on German soil. The "German" hero was Prince Eugene of Savoy, commander of the Austrian forces, who was in fact a Frenchman born in Italy. The battle was Blenheim, fought in Bavaria in 1704. In this battle Prince Eugene and his great English colleague, the Duke of Marlborough, defeated the French and Bavarians. For seven years in Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy severe battles were fought in which France was usually vanquished. During this time Emperor Leopold died and was succeeded by his son Joseph I (1705–11), an older brother of Charles, the claimant to the Spanish throne. The French nation had been bled dry, and in 1708 Louis XIV started peace negotiations. However, the terms were too high for France; the Allies insisted that France send her army to dislodge Louis’ grandson from Spain. Louis refused, and the war began anew. In 1711 Emperor Joseph died; his brother Charles inherited the Hapsburg possessions and was elected Holy Roman emperor as Charles VI (1711–40). This event changed the entire situation because England, Holland, and their allies had no more desire to see the resurrection of the empire of Charles V than to see the king of France control Spain. French arms became more successful; in England an important political change occurred dislodging Marlborough from the first position in the government of Queen Anne. The result was the negotiated treaties of Utrecht (1713) followed in the next year by treaties between France and Emperor Charles.

In the treaties between Louis XIV and Charles VI, known as the treaties of Rastadt and Baden, Charles obtained control of the Spanish Netherlands, which was then called for almost a century the Austrian Netherlands. The Hapsburgs also received most of the former holdings of Spain in Italy, including Milan, Naples, and Sardinia. Although these Italian territories were shifted about in a complicated manner during the following years, the Austrian Hapsburgs now had a solid foothold in Italy, which was to have important repercussions in the future and, combined with considerable Austrian conquests from Turkey, was to move the Viennese monarchy even further from its earlier position of primary concern with German affairs.

Some of the most interesting developments of this period center about the rise of Hapsburg power in the east. The long reign of Emperor Leopold I and the short reign of Joseph I resulted in a considerable increase in Hungarian and Slavic territories. There took form the multinational Hapsburg realm familiar to students of modern history. For the first time something specifically “Austrian” began to appear. The Otto-
man Empire, which had rested in a moribund fashion for a long time, took new spirit under the leadership of a dynasty of grand viziers, the Kuprili family. During this period it waged two wars against the Hapsburgs, in the course of which Turkey sustained great losses. The first war was short and inconclusive. However, after a truce had expired, a second and lengthy war ensued. In 1683 the Turks pushed as far as Vienna and laid it under siege. It was a moment of panic for Christian Europe. The hero of the occasion was the king of Poland, John Sobieski, who led an army to the relief of the Hapsburg capital. The Turks retired and for some years lost even more ground to the Austrians. At last the war came to an end in 1699 by the Treaty of Karlowitz in which Austria received almost all of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia. The wars continued in the eighteenth century and brought millions of Magyars and Slavs under Hapsburg rule, a fact which shifted the center of the Hapsburg realm well to the east and opened a new chapter in the long, tangled question of what really constitutes German Europe.

While these events were occurring in the southeast, the Wettin dynasty of Saxony also achieved greater power in non-German territories. In 1692 Elector Augustus II of Saxony was elected king of Poland by the nobles of that land after the death of Sobieski. To assume this new dignity Augustus became a Catholic, although he did not disturb the Lutheranism of his Saxon subjects and continued to preside over the Protestant body in the Imperial Diet. Augustus' son, Augustus III, was in his turn also elected king of Poland. Thus for a considerable period Saxony was more involved in Polish, Russian, and Swedish affairs than in German.

In northwestern Germany the Guelf family in Hanover was about to reach new heights. After the English revolution of 1688 Parliament stipulated that the sovereign must be a Protestant, thus specifically ruling out any Catholic heirs of the Stuart family. Other than William III and his sister-in-law Anne, the nearest Protestant heir was Princess Sophia of Hanover, daughter of the "winter king and queen." Hanover had developed and prospered greatly during these years and had become a center of learning and intellectual achievement. In 1692 the unwilling Emperor Leopold established a ninth electorate and granted it to the ruler of Hanover.

The Wittelsbach family did not achieve any foreign honors. However, after the Palatine electorate was inherited by a Catholic rather than a Calvinist Wittelsbach, the two branches, Palatine and Bavarian, were able to work in close harmony. Furthermore, the Wittelsbachs
were highly successful in promoting candidates of their family to important ecclesiastical territories. Thus this family assumed even greater importance in old Catholic Germany.

One important dynasty, the Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg, so far has been left out of account. There is no question that the rise of the electorate of Brandenburg into the kingdom of Prussia is the most important political development in Germany during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, this development culminates so pointedly with the achievements of Frederick the Great that it seems most logical to describe it in the next chapter.

The era of Louis XIV was a pitiable period of German weakness. Although the Holy Roman Empire still legally existed, the Peace of Westphalia had given it a death blow as far as any effective political power was concerned. Thus the interest in the years between 1648 and the French Revolution is frankly dynastic and particularist. More than ever the word Germany was simply a geographical expression. The eighteenth century was to witness the further development of the dynastic struggles and to narrow them down to a struggle between the south and the north, between Hapsburg and Hohenzollern.