remains ironic that the best social satire of the century was sponsored by the most complacent and authoritarian monarch in Europe.

With Molière's death, Racine's retirement, and Louis XIV's growing preoccupation with international war, the great age of the French theater drew to a close. To compare the art of Molière and Racine with that of Lope de Vega and Shakespeare is to see once again the bewildering diversity of European culture in the early modern period. Artists and intellectuals lived in closer proximity than ever before, yet the international cultural community established during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had been shattered. Scientists, to be sure, cooperated with unprecedented fruitfulness, sharing discoveries and building on one another's experiments and theories. Painters, sculptors, and architects congregated in Italy and in a few of the large northern cities for their training and roved over Europe in search of commissions. This helps explain the spread of the Baroque style from Italy to Spain, Belgium, and Austria. But the Baroque was not all conquering. In philosophy, as in theology, there was no consensus, scarcely even a dialogue. The art and thought of the seventeenth century has a deeply fragmented quality which reflects the loss of traditional religious unity and the rise of autonomous sovereign states. Catholics and Protestants evolved distinctly different responses to art. Literature, always the most chauvinistic art form, acquired a self-consciously national style in each vernacular language. At the close of the century, sophisticated persons everywhere wanted to copy French taste, but this attitude was symptomatic of the coming era, the Enlightenment. The seventeenth century was intellectually disorderly, contentious, intolerant. Audiences were easily unsettled by shocking ideas. Iconoclasts like Galileo and Spinoza were muzzled. Even poets like Milton and Molière risked persecution for their polemical art. Yet no censor or inquisitor could suppress the general intellectual revolt against authority, the richest legacy of the age.

CHAPTER 6

Toward a New Balance of Power

The years 1688–1715 saw massive power realignments throughout Europe. In a generation of warfare and diplomacy, the map was redrawn, the most divisive issues of the seventeenth century were resolved, and the stage was set for a new era, the eighteenth-century age of Enlightenment. During these eventful years, Louis XIV—who threatened in the 1680's to overrun all of his neighbors—was contained. The English, who had withdrawn from continental politics for much of the seventeenth century, established their position as leaders in European affairs. The Spanish empire, which had nearly dissolved by the close of the seventeenth century, received fresh leadership. The Austrian Habsburgs built a new and very extensive Danubian monarchy. The Russians, led by Peter the Great, entered actively for the first time into European politics. Above all, the chief European states worked out among themselves a new balance of power that stabilized international relations.

These changes were brought about through a series of interlocking wars, fought on a very extensive, expensive, and bloody scale. These wars marked the culmination of powerful trends that had been gathering force for a long time. In western Europe, the Nine Years' War of 1688–1697 and the War of the Spanish Succession of 1702–1713 constituted in effect a twenty-five-year combat between Louis XIV of France and a "Grand Alliance" of his adversaries headed by England, the Dutch republic, and Austria. Louis's long-standing ambition to dominate Europe was frustrated by his aroused neighbors. In eastern Europe, the Ottoman Turks battled from 1683 to 1699 against another alliance, one that included Austria, the papacy, Venice, Poland, and Russia, and then staged further wars against Russia, Venice, and Austria between 1711 and 1718. These Turkish wars resolved the long Ottoman-Habsburg struggle, dating back to the 1520's, for control of the middle Danube. And in the Baltic region, Sweden fought against Russia, Poland, and Denmark in the Great Northern War of 1700–1721. This war closed Sweden's brief season as a great power and signaled the emergence of Russia as a major European state.

These wars of 1683–1721 differed strikingly from the military operations examined earlier—the French civil wars of 1562–1598, the Dutch and English wars of 1566–1609 against Spain, the Thirty Years' War of 1618–
1648, and the English civil war of 1642-1646. The statesmen of late seventeenth-century Europe self-consciously pursued a new style. Their armies were far larger than ever before, yet better controlled and more professional. The officers who commanded these armies were servants of the state rather than captains of fortune. The enlisted men were no longer religious zealots on riotous crusades. They no longer parceled operations by mutinying for back pay, as Philip II's troops had done in Flanders, or agitating for political rights as the Levellers had done in England. The prolonged fighting gave ample scope to a galaxy of generals and warrior-kings, led by the Englishman Marlborough, the Austrian Eugen of Savoy, the Swedish Charles XII, and the Russian Peter the Great. There was a considerable difference between Marlborough's style of carefully programmed campaigning and the freewheeling maneuvers of Charles and Peter—reflecting continuing differences between western and eastern Europe. Everywhere, however, the generals were in firm command, and the troops they led into bloody combat were instruments of state policy. The kings and generals were still somewhat influenced by religious ideology, but mainly they fought for pleasure, glory, and reasons of state. Thus they put behind them the confessional tumult of 1559-1648 and restored warfare to its pre-Reformation status as the sport of kings.

THE WEST EUROPEAN WARS OF 1688-1713

In 1688 Louis XIV occupied a very strong position. He had been king of France for forty-five years, and personally in charge of his autocratic regime for twenty-seven years. During his reign the French had built the largest military machine in Europe, had won a string of victories against Spanish, Dutch, and imperial armies, and had steadily pushed their frontier northward and eastward by annexing much of Alsace in 1648, Artois in 1659, Lille in 1668, Lorraine in 1670, Franche-Comté in 1674, part of Flanders in 1678, the rest of Alsace in 1681, and Luxemburg in 1684. By pursuing this policy of piecemeal aggrandizement, Louis had managed to lull or intimidate most of his neighbors most of the time. Two efforts at alliance against him, in 1668 and in 1674, had broken down. At the rate he was going in the 1680's, Louis could eventually, nibble by nibble, acquire the rest of the Rhineland and the Netherlands. He already held more territory within the Holy Roman Empire than any German prince save Leopold of Austria and Frederick William of Brandenburg, and since six of the eight imperial electors were in his pay, he could reasonably hope to win the next imperial election. Furthermore, as indicated by the Habsburg dynastic chart on p. 61, Louis possessed through his mother and wife stronger dynastic claims than any other prince to the vast Spanish empire, claims which he expected to press when the present king, Charles II—childless and ailing—should die. Thus in 1688, glorious as his past success had been, the Sun King was building toward a still brighter future.

Louis XIV's expansionist policy has been poorly regarded by historians. He was indeed one of the most aggressive figures in European history. But Louis did not want to fight long and bloody wars, and until 1668 he avoided doing so. He was a traditionalist, who exploited more fully than Charles V or Philip II before him the rules of dynastic politics. As the first gentleman in Europe, he employed the high arts of diplomacy, strategy, and the law in order to secure his personal rights as king of France and as head of the house of Bourbon. These personal rights were essentially claims on property due either to the French crown through historical precedent or to the Bourbon family through inheritance. For example, having acquired much of Alsace at the Peace of Westphalia, Louis set up courts in 1679-1681 to rationalize the conflicting jurisdictions within this province; when these courts decreed that Strasbourg and the other Alsatian towns outside of his control were former dependencies of the Alsatian territory within his control, he "reunited" the entire province. Here his claim was based on historical precedent. On the other hand, he claimed Artois, Luxemburg, and Franche-Comté as his wife's inheritance, and in 1685 he claimed the Palatinate in the Rhineland as his sister-in-law's inheritance. Since the Bourbons had married into all of the chief princely families, Louis had potential claims on nearly every European territory.

To his neighbors, Louis XIV's strategy was even more alarming than Philip II's crusade against the Dutch, English, and French Protestants had been a hundred years before. Louis had at his command greater resources than Philip had possessed, a much larger army, and a more central geographical position. Between 1685 and 1688, the German princes, the Dutch, and the Austrian Habsburgs put together a new alliance against France—the League of Augsburg. But these allies had a difficult time sustaining an effective coalition because they were distracted by other problems. In 1688 Leopold I of Austria was fully occupied with war against the Turks in Hungary. William III of Orange had plunged into English affairs. It should be noted that William's decision to invade England and expel his father-in-law, James II, was a far bolder dynastic maneuver than anything Louis XIV ever dared.

Seeking to exploit the divisions among his opponents, Louis took the offensive in 1688. He could have blocked William's invasion of England by throwing his army against the Netherlands, as he had done repeatedly before, but Louis preferred to let William and James fight what he expected to be a mutually destructive Anglo-Dutch war. Besides, if he attacked the Netherlands he would offend the Spanish, and Louis needed to improve relations with Madrid if the Bourbons were to take over the Spanish empire of Charles II. Louis' main objective at the moment was...
expansion into the Rhineland, and he decided to move quickly, before Leopold and his German allies—who had just captured Belgrade from the Turks—could regroup their armies on their western front. So in September, 1688, Louis occupied Cologne and the Palatinate. But the French king miscalculated. The German princes mustered enough military strength so that he felt forced to withdraw across the Rhine. William ascended James II’s throne without bloodshed and brought England into the coalition. By 1690 Spain also was persuaded to join the Grand Alliance. Thus Louis’ quick campaign turned into a major war.

**The Nine Years’ War**

The war between Louis XIV and the Grand Alliance, fought from 1688 to 1697, was an exhausting defensive struggle, staged mainly in the Netherlands, an arena for siege warfare. The French were very good at this style of fighting. Marshal Vauban was renowned for the art with which he had conducted fifty-three sieges, and everyone sought to copy his techniques for attacking and defending fortified bastions. Many of the troops on both sides were foreign mercenaries; in peak years as many as thirty thousand Swiss were hired by either the French or the allies. Altogether, nearly 250,000 troops were put into the Netherlands theater for the 1693 campaign—and these big armies were not very mobile. The fighting grounds were filled with fortresses, strongpoints, and siege lines. Soldiers were segregated as much as possible from civilians, and kept close to their magazines to prevent looting and desertion. Battle drill was so formal that commanders took hours to deploy their men for action, thus removing any element of surprise. Since soldiers were expensive and battlefield casualties ran very high, commanders were reluctant to engage in pitched battles. The infantry were beginning to use flintlock muskets, quicker and easier to fire than the old matchlocks, and for close combat they had the newly designed ring bayonet. Infantry who were disciplined to stand their ground proved to be far more lethal than the cavalry and pikemen who had dominated the wars of the mid-century. At Fleurus, in 1690, 20 per cent of the seventy thousand combatants were killed or wounded in a few hours of fighting.

If Louis XIV had been willing to concentrate all of his troops in one theater—to risk an all-out assault on England, the Netherlands, or the Rhineland—he might have forced an early settlement in 1689 or 1690. William was tied up in Ireland, where James II had launched a counterattack, the Spanish were too weak to defend their Netherlands barrier forts, and Leopold’s forces in Germany were poorly coordinated. In 1690 the French navy defeated an Anglo-Dutch fleet at Beachy Head, on the English Channel, opening the possibility of an invasion of England. But Louis was not the man to gamble everything in one throw. By 1692 the
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loans, and they sold newly created bureaucratic offices. Then in 1693–1694, after two disastrous harvests, came the worst French subsistence crisis of the century. At least one tenth of the French population died during this famine year. Louis was forced to cut back his military operations, and French diplomats explored the possibilities of peace. But the allies, each hopeful of gaining something, kept on fighting until every participant finally recognized that the war was a hopeless stalemate. The Peace of Ryswick in 1697 basically restored the situation of 1679, when Louis, William, and Leopold had negotiated their last settlement. Louis dropped his claims to Cologne and the Palatinate, surrendered Luxemburg and Lorraine and some of the Alsatian territory he had annexed in 1679–1681, and recognized William as king of England. Ryswick canceled most of Louis’ territorial gains of the last two decades. But it did not cancel his belief in his property rights as king of France and head of the house of Bourbon.

The Ryswick settlement was only an armistice because it did not resolve the chief diplomatic question of the day: who would succeed the childless Charles II as king of Spain? Charles, who had reigned since 1665, was the pathetic end product of six generations of Habsburg inbreeding (since his parents were uncle and niece, Charles’s mother was also his first cousin).

Capture of Cambrai by Louis XIV. This old print shows the style of siege warfare favored by Louis. The French took this Spanish Netherlands town in 1677 by breaching the city walls (left center) with their siege guns. The king himself (lower center) is receiving an unobscured emissary from Cambrai.

English and Dutch were in clear command of the sea, and he had lost his chance. Meanwhile, William defeated James at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and chased him out of Ireland. For the rest of the war William campaigned in Flanders. Leopold stayed in Vienna, and Louis paid only occasional visits to the combat zone, but William was an active warring king in the tradition of Henry IV and Gustavus Adolphus. Though he won very few battles against the French, he did hold the allied coalition together.

By 1694 Louis was feeling the strain. He now had 400,000 soldiers in pay, absorbing about 74 per cent of France’s public revenues. Even in the peacetime era of Colbert, Louis’ fiscal system had been inelastic. To meet the new war costs, the French resorted to old and dubious tactics: they levied enlarged direct taxes on the peasantry, they negotiated high-interest
A backward child, he was neither weaned nor able to walk when he ascended the Spanish throne at the age of four. As he grew up, Charles bore the Habsburg genetic trademark, a lower jaw so protrudent that his teeth did not meet and he could not masticate his food. More important, he was mentally retarded and sexually infertile. When Charles’s first wife, a French princess, and his second, a German princess, both failed to conceive, the poor king supposed that he must be bewitched, and his priests exhorted him to drive the devils out. Meanwhile, two of his cousins—Louis XIV (who had married Charles’s elder sister) and Leopold I (who had married Charles’s second sister)—were maneuvering to secure the Spanish inheritance. The Spaniards naturally were determined to keep their empire intact, while the Dutch and English hated to see either Louis or Leopold gain so much. In particular, they would not tolerate a French take-over of the Spanish Netherlands or of trade with Spain’s overseas colonies. Louis, for his part, had damaged his chances by attacking Spain in the Nine Years’ War, so he made generous amends at Ryswick by restoring all the Spanish territory that he had taken since 1679. In 1698, he even joined William III in a diplomatic compromise: the two monarchs agreed to a treaty by which Spain and most of its possessions would go to a neutral candidate—the six-year-old Joseph Ferdinand of Bavaria, who was Charles II’s grandson—with Bourbon and Austrian Habsburg princes dividing the rest. This compromise was angrily received in Madrid and Vienna, but it might well have worked, except that Joseph Ferdinand died in 1699.

By now the likelihood of another general war, triggered by the Bourbon-Habsburg dynastic rivalry, was very great. Louis XIV played his cards more boldly than Leopold I. The French king did not want another big war, nor did he expect to obtain the entire Spanish inheritance, but he was ready to fight if necessary for his Bourbon rights, and he intended to start any fighting on his own terms. Knowing that England and the United Provinces had little enthusiasm for another war in which they had no territorial stake, Louis worked out a second partition treaty with William III. This time the two arbiters allotted most of the Spanish inheritance to Archduke Charles of Austria (the son of Leopold I), and Milan, Naples, and Sicily to the Grand Dauphin Louis (the French king’s son and heir). This arrangement, while seemingly favorable to Austria, would have put France in control of Italy, thus blocking effective collaboration between the Habsburgs in Austria and in Spain. Leopold and Charles II both indignantly refused these terms, Leopold because for Austria the most important part of the inheritance was Italy, and Charles because he rejected the whole idea of partition. But Louis’ agents were busy in Madrid, and they pointed out to Charles’s ministers that Spain would need a strong and active protector in order to prevent partition.

Therefore, as the Spanish king sank into his final illness in 1700, he was persuaded to sign a will which stipulated that the Spanish empire had to be kept whole, and which named Louis’ grandson Philip of Anjou his sole heir. If Philip declined the Spanish throne, the whole inheritance would pass to Archduke Charles of Austria.

Now Louis faced the most crucial decision of his reign: should he accept his own partition treaty or Charles’s will? The will was obviously preferable from the Bourbon perspective, but it precluded any territorial acquisition by France, whereas the treaty gave France direct control of Italy. If Louis violated his treaty, he risked war with England and the United Provinces. If he rejected the will, he alienated Spain. Since Leopold would accept neither treaty nor will, Louis would probably have to fight in any case. Not surprisingly, he quickly accepted the will and endorsed his grandson as Philip V of Spain. Even at this juncture, had Louis exercised exquisite restraint, he might have kept Philip in Spain without war by working out a deal with Leopold and William. But Louis’ success put him in a bravura mood. In 1701 he deliberately provoked the Dutch by moving French troops into the Spanish Netherlands; he deliberately provoked the English by recognizing James II’s son as king of England; and he deliberately provoked both states by sending French traders into the Spanish colonial empire. Obviously Louis, not Philip, was the effective new ruler of Spain. The Dutch, English, Austrians, and Prussians quickly formed another Grand Alliance against the Grand Monarque, and war resumed in 1702.

The War of the Spanish Succession

The second war between Louis XIV and the Grand Alliance, fought between 1702 and 1713, started out as a replay of the Nine Years’ War but developed into a much more dramatic and decisive conflict. What tipped the balance was England’s enlarged and vigorous participation in the fighting.

In 1702 the English appeared to be totally unready for combat. King William III had had a terrible time rallying English support for the Nine Years’ War, and he died just as the new war began. Since William’s cousin, Mary, had died before him, in 1694, the English crown passed to Mary’s sister Anne, the Protestant younger daughter of James II. Queen Anne (ruled 1702–1714) was a much weaker executive than William, and the political situation throughout her reign was extremely stormy and volatile.

The exact character of English politics in the reign of Queen Anne is much disputed, but most historians would agree on two points: English politicians were the only public figures in Europe who addressed themselves to an extensive electorate (some 250,000 persons voted for members
of Parliament), and these politicians were far closer to operating under a two-party system than were public leaders elsewhere in Europe. The Tories and the Whigs, ideologically divergent since the 1670s (see p. 192), published propaganda in order to sway public opinion, campaigned in their constituencies in order to win parliamentary elections, and maneuvered at court in order to win the queen's support. These parties were far from tightly organized. Many politicians stayed "above party" or acted for purely personal reasons. But the political scene was far livelier in England than elsewhere because officeholders and office seekers tended to divide openly on basic issues.1 The Tories had never altogether reconciled themselves to the Glorious Revolution, and they were sharply critical of the enormous expenditures required for the war against Louis XIV. If there must be a French war, they felt, it should be fought at sea and not on land. Because of the partisan pattern of English politics, the Whigs in consequence became violently anti-French and pro-war.

Queen Anne, though temperamentally a Tory, was forced to support the war when Louis recognized her Catholic half brother, the Stuart Pretender, as rightful king of England. Also, she was personally loyal to the chief English general, John Churchill, duke of Marlborough (1650-1722), who wanted to fight the French on land. From 1702 to 1710 Anne's chief ministers were either political neutrals or Whigs, and they endorsed the war wholeheartedly. The Dutch accepted Marlborough as their commander in chief. Marlborough (an ancestor of Winston Churchill) turned out to be the most talented English soldier since Oliver Cromwell. He was a very different sort of soldier from that Puritan warrior, being totally worldly, with an immense appetite for wealth, title, and fame. In order to achieve these goals he spent long years in assiduous personal service to James II, William III, and Anne. In appearance, Marlborough was the perfect gentleman: superbly handsome, magnificently dressed, polished, affable, and correct. He was also the perfect diplomat, receiving the opinions of others while masking his own. He had deserted James II at the last minute in 1688, and was arrested in the 1690's on suspicion of treasonable dealings with the exiled king. But William wanted him to take over the command of the Anglo-Dutch army, because Marlborough knew how to win battles. And indeed he did defeat the French in three great battles—at Blenheim, Ramillies, and Oudenarde—fought between 1704 and 1708.

For two campaigns, in 1702-1703, Marlborough searched in vain for a way to overcome the siege mentality of his allies, the Dutch, and his ad-

1Geoffrey Holmes, British Politics in the Age of Anne (New York, 1967), argues that there was essentially a two-party system. Robert Walcott, English Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), argues that there was a multi-party system, in which ideology was unimportant.

The Duke of Marlborough. This portrait by John Closterman was painted around 1688, when Marlborough was switching allegiance from James II to William III. National Portrait Gallery, London.
Marlborough returned to the Netherlands theater and destroyed another crack French army at Ramilies in 1706. This defeat so demoralized the French that they abandoned most of the Spanish Netherlands to the allies. When Marshal Vendôme (1654–1712) tried to reconquer Flanders in 1708, he was caught by Marlborough and Eugene at Oudenarde and badly beaten. The allies, crossing the French border, captured the great fortress of Lille, and stood poised for an advance on Paris. Meanwhile, on the Italian front the anti-French coalition was equally successful. Louis XIV’s sole Italian ally, Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy (1666–1732), deserted to the Grand Alliance in 1703. Prince Eugene campaigned for Austria in Lombardy, and outfought a series of French generals. In 1706 he won a smashing victory at Turin; he drove the French across the Alps, and in 1707 set up the Austrian occupation of Naples. In the Spanish theater too the allies appeared to be on the road to success. Portugal joined the Grand Alliance in 1703. The English captured Gibraltar and the island of Minorca, and thus established for the first time an English naval presence in the Mediterranean. In 1705 an Anglo-Dutch force captured Barcelona, and Archduke Charles of Austria set up court as King Charles III of Spain. This proved to be the limit of allied success in Spain. Most Spaniards saw the Bourbon Philip V as their national choice, and Charles III as a foreign usurper. Philip’s cause was bolstered when his troops defeated Charles’s army at Almanza in 1707.

Though Philip V was surviving in Spain, his grandfather had lost Italy and the Netherlands, and by 1709 was desperate for peace. Not only was Louis XIV’s war going badly but—as in 1693–1694—disaster struck on the home front. A bad harvest in 1708 followed by the coldest January on record, guaranteeing another poor harvest and general famine in 1709. The price of bread quadrupled. Troops were called in to escort grain convoys, to control starving mobs, and to suppress tax revolts. Louis XIV had no option but to swallow his great pride and sue for peace. He was ready to surrender almost all the territories he had conquered since 1661, to accept the Austrian Charles as king of Spain, and to withdraw his military support from Philip V. Unfortunately, because Louis had broken his word in 1700, the allies did not believe his pledge concerning Spain. They wanted even more from him, especially when Marlborough told them that France would collapse completely after another campaign or two. Also, since each of the allied partners had different war goals, they could agree only on the highest possible demands. Accordingly, in May, 1709, they told Louis that if he wanted peace he must expel his grandson from Spain within two months. This the French king refused to do.

So the war continued. Louis XIV called upon his people to defend their country against invasion, and a new army of 80,000 raw recruits under Marshal Villars (1653–1734) faced Marlborough and Eugene with
The Battle of Blenheim. In this stylized panorama by van Huchttenburgh, Marlborough and Eugene (left center foreground) are savoring their victory, and the French Marshal Tallard (left foreground) is held captive in Marlborough's coach, while units of the allied army march in drilled precision across the broad plain below. The winding Danube and the village of Blenheim are to the left. The Franco-Bavarian camp is burning in the distance.

110,000 men at Malplaquet in September, 1709. It was the biggest and bloodiest of Marlborough's four great battles. The allies forced Villars to retire from the field, but were too exhausted to pursue him. Villars won the moral victory, for there were twenty-four thousand allied as against twelve thousand French casualties. Marlborough's attack was stalled, and the allies began to realize too late that they should have accepted Louis' peace terms. The campaigns of 1710-1711 brought the allies no closer to victory in either France or Spain.

Then in 1711 the Grand Alliance broke apart. In Austria, Emperor Joseph I (ruled 1705-1711), son of Leopold I, suddenly died, and was succeeded by his brother, the former Archduke Charles and would-be King Charles III of Spain. The accession of Charles VI (ruled 1711-1740)
posed a new dynastic threat, for besides being Holy Roman emperor, and
ruler of the vast Austrian Habsburg domain in central and eastern Europe,
he also held all of the Spanish territory in Italy and the Netherlands
which had been seized by allied armies during the war. Immediately, the
Dutch and English lost all interest in helping Charles to conquer Spain;
his success there would mean revival of the continent-wide monarchy of
Charles V.

Nor was this the only blow to the Grand Alliance. In England, Queen
Anne had grown sick of the Whigs, who kept the war going interminably.
In 1710 she replaced her Whig ministers with Tories, and in parliamentary
elections the Tories won a sweeping popular mandate. In 1711 the queen
dismissed Marlborough from his military command. The duke was
censured by Parliament for alleged corruption, and retired abroad, where
he remained until Anne died. Meanwhile, the Tory diplomat Henry St.
John, viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751) opened secret negotiations with
France, shamelessly flouting England’s treaty obligations to its allies. The
Dutch could not carry on alone, and even the stubborn Austrians soon
had to drop their unrealistic war goals and accept a peace settlement.

Since the Grand Alliance was hopelessly split, negotiation of a single
peace treaty was not feasible. Instead, the combatants concluded a com-
plex series of settlements, the most important being the Peace of Utrecht;
(1713) between France, England, the United Provinces, Prussia, and
Savoy, and the Peace of Rastatt (1714) between France, the Holy Roman
Empire, and Austria. Ironically, the settlements of Utrecht and Rastatt
were close in spirit to the partition treaties of 1698–1699 that Louis XIV
and William III had negotiated in their effort to avoid a major war. All of
the participants in the fighting gained something, but most of them also
had to make major concessions. Philip V was accepted as king of Spain;
but renounced his Bourbon tie to the French throne; his Spanish empire
lost three Mediterranean islands, and all territory in the Netherlands and
the Italian peninsula. Charles VI of Austria gained Lombardy, Naples,
Sardinia, and the Spanish Netherlands, but had to drop his claim to the
Spanish crown. Louis XIV secured the Spanish kingship for his grandson
and preserved France’s borders as of 1697, losing only some territory in
America. Yet the settlement exposed the utter bankruptcy of Louis’
expansionist policy, for he had failed to establish a Bourbon Franco-
Spanish empire, and in the last thirty-five years of international warfare
his only important acquisition was the city of Strasbourg. The United
Provinces gained some protection against future French attack when
Austria took over the Spanish Netherlands, but the Dutch suffered a
commercial defeat when the English made unilateral trade agreements
with Spain and Portugal. The English kept their Mediterranean outposts
at Gibraltar and Minorca, and took some American territory from France
—Newfoundland, Acadia, Hudson Bay, and the Caribbean island of St.
Kitts.

The Whigs contended that England should have gained far more than
this at Utrecht, but in fact the war had brought substantial benefits to
the nation. It had stimulated English business and strengthened the
colonial empire; furthermore, during the war, England and Scotland had
joined in the parliamentary Union of 1707 to form the kingdom of Great
Britain. The British, as they should henceforth be called, were the only
major combatants who clearly emerged from the fighting in a much im-
proved position. Among the lesser participants, the duke of Savoy was
given Spanish Sicily (soon to be exchanged for Austrian Sardinia); Max
Emmanuel, the elector of Bavaria, was restored to the state he had lost
at Blenheim; and Frederick III, the elector of Brandenburg, was given
Spanish Gelderland and confirmation of his new royal title, king in
Prussia.

In one sense the peace of Utrecht and Rastatt was deliberately nega-
tive. It rejected Louis XIV’s expansionist aims of 1688 and 1701. It re-
jected the Grand Alliance’s vengeful demands of 1709. It rejected the
Habsburg effort to restore the empire of Charles V. In another sense, the
settlement was positive—an attempt to create a balance of power, in
which the chief states of Europe would counterweight one another. This
idea was hardly new, for the five leading Italian city-states had worked
out just such a diplomatic equilibrium in the fifteenth century. But when
the Valois and Habsburgs invaded Italy in the 1490’s and destroyed the
Italian system, they also rejected the idea of a power balance. The
dynastic rivals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries punctuated
their wars with truces—as when the Valois and Habsburgs made peace
in 1559, or the Bourbons and Habsburgs in 1598 and 1659—but these
simply provided breathing space; they were not efforts at equipoise. Royal
rivalry affected reconciliations through royal marriages, and such marriage
alliances created new property claims that ignited new wars. At Utrecht
and Rastatt, the diplomats endeavored to defuse dynastic rivalries as
far as possible. They tried to keep the French, Spanish, and Austrian
monarchies separate, to contain powerful France with powerful neighbors,
and to bolster a strategically placed small state like Savoy with added
territory. The balance-of-power idea which they revived was certainly no
cure-all, as modern history has repeatedly demonstrated. But the settle-
ment of 1713–1714 did much to rationalize international relations. It
set up a territorial system tolerable to all of the chief powers, and brought
peace and security to western Europe for a full generation, until the 1740’s.
THE EAST EUROPEAN WARS OF 1683–1721

While Louis XIV was battling the Grand Alliance, a parallel series of long and bloody wars unfolded east of the Elbe and the Alps. Here the political situation was far more fluid than in western Europe. With no eastern ruler even close to matching the concentrated power of the king of France, six states—Austria, Turkey, Russia, Sweden, Poland, and Brandenburg-Prussia—contended for leadership in the Turkish wars of 1683–1718 and the northern wars of 1700–1721. These states were all highly militaristic, with armies officered by the aristocratic landlords who everywhere dominated the social scene, and foot soldiers enrolled from the servile peasant labor force. The eastern states had far less per-capita wealth than France, England, or the United Provinces; their fighting arena was far larger; their population density was far lower. The style of warfare reflected these political, social, economic, and geographical conditions. Armies were generally smaller (except for the Turkish army) and less professional than in the west, campaigns were more far-flung, generals took more chances, and success or failure frequently hinged on individual heriocics—and sometimes luck—rather than on scientific strategy and logistics. Collectively, the Turkish and northern wars proved to be pivotal events. They altered the map extensively. They confirmed the rising strength of some states—notably Austria and Russia—and the declining strength of others—notably Turkey, Sweden, and Poland. And in conjunction with the western wars, they produced a new European balance of power.

Austria Versus Turkey

The Austrian conquest of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia, which were taken from the Ottoman Turks in the war of 1683–1699, has already been described (see pp. 96–98). It is instructive to ask why Leopold I's expansionist policy succeeded where Louis XIV's failed. By 1683 Leopold had been Holy Roman emperor, king of Bohemia, archduke of Austria, duke of Silesia, Carinthia, and Carniola, margrave of Moravia and Styria, and count of Tyrol for twenty-five years. His empire was larger than France, and about as populous. No ruler, not even Louis XIV, could excel Leopold in single-minded devotion to the property rights of his royal dynasty. Yet Leopold was a far less potent and aggressive prince than Louis. Bland and phlegmatic in temperament, the emperor was absorbed in his numbing court routine. Habsburg Austria, an atomistic collection of separate provinces, lacked the cohesive community strength of Bourbon France. Leopold's fiscal resources were quite inadequate to his needs. During the wars of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, despite arduous efforts to expand revenues, Austria's military
expenditures were only about one fifth those of France, and one third those of England. Leopold's armies were correspondingly limited: he could field 100,000 soldiers at most, as against Louis' peak force of 440,000. Furthermore, Austria was the only major state forced to face both east and west; hence, in the 1680's and 1690's Leopold had to maintain field armies and garrisons on two fronts, against Turkey and France. How could this monarch, who depended on his allies to do much of his fighting for him, be so successful?

It was the Turks, not the Austrians, who initiated war in 1683. The Ottoman Empire had always been highly militarized, but the army had long been mutinous and corrupt, and for the last thirty years the grand viziers who managed the military machine for Sultan Mehmed IV (ruled 1646–1687) had been able to keep control only by finding constant work for their restless soldiery: the janissaries (professional infantry), the spahis (professional cavalry), and the frontier legions of doubtful loyalty from dependencies in the Balkans and the Crimea. In 1682 the grand vizier Kara Mustafa decided to employ this army in a tremendously bold stroke—the capture of Vienna, capital of the Austrian Habsburg empire. We cannot be sure of Kara Mustafa's motivation, especially since modern scholars have not yet studied the voluminous seventeenth-century Ottoman records in Istanbul. Certainly the grand vizier had supreme contempt for Leopold I and the Christian nonbelievers who inhabited Austria. Certainly he had ready allies in Royal Hungary (the narrow strip held by Leopold), where Magyar patriots were currently rebelling against their Austrian overlord. Probably he reckoned that Austria was weaker (and temptingly richer) than Muscovite Russia, which had recently blocked his efforts to expand into the Ukraine.

The grand vizier's plan was recklessly daring—and he very nearly carried it out. On July 1, 1683, he reached the Turkish-Austrian border in Hungary with a vast army of at least a hundred thousand soldiers (the exact number is not known). Disdaining to besiege the border fortresses, and brushing aside the small Austrian field army that tried to divert him, Kara Mustafa struck directly up the Danube. In two weeks, virtually unopposed, the Turks advanced eighty miles and encircled Vienna. Placing their tents and baggage in a giant crescent around the city walls, they dug a spiderwork of deep trenches and tunnels leading up to and under the Austrian fortifications. Tartar cavalry roamed freely through the Danube valley, looting and burning villages. The emperor and his courtiers fled to the Bavarian border; the Vienna garrison of eleven thousand was greatly outnumbered; and Leopold's field army was far too small to lift the siege. Vienna could be rescued only by massive external help.

Shocked into action, Leopold's neighbors sent help. King John Sobieski of Poland marched from Warsaw with sixteen thousand men. Elector

The Turkish siege of Vienna. In this painting Franz Geffels depicts the climactic moment on September 12, 1683, when King John Sobieski's relief army charged down from the heights overlooking the city. The elaborate Turkish siegeworks (center distance) have nearly penetrated the city walls. Ottoman soldiers, tents, and camels can be seen in the foreground. Museen der Stadt, Vienna.

John George of Saxony marched from Dresden with ten thousand men. Elector Max Emanuel of Bavaria marched from Munich with eleven thousand men. Count Waldeck brought eight thousand Franconians from the Main River area. To be sure, some imperial princes, among them Elector Frederick William of Brandenburg-Prussia (who had the best army in Germany), pointedly declined to help. And the rescuing forces could not reach Vienna quickly, since they started late and came from far away. King John Sobieski needed six weeks to muster his men and move them four hundred miles—and though the Austrians thought he was dilatory, his pace was faster than that of Marlborough's march to the Danube in 1704. Fortunately for Austria, the Vienna garrison resisted the Turkish siege with the utmost tenacity. Even so, by August 12 the Turks had broken through the outworks of the city defenses, and on September 4 a Turkish mine tore a thirty-foot hole in the inner wall. But Kara Mustafa could not force his way inside the city. His artillery was ineffectual, and his screaming, saber-wielding warriors were stopped by Austrian pikemen and musketeers in close combat. Still, it appears that Kara Mustafa could have speeded up his assault and taken the city by September, had he seen any reason for haste. But it was obvious to him that the Austrians would never dare to counterattack his siege camp. His disorderly Tartar cavalry failed to track the approaching relief armies, let alone stop
them at vulnerable river crossings. Even when Kara Mustafa learned that the enemy forces had joined west of Vienna and were advancing to attack him, he did not bother to fortify his camp or post defenders in the hills overlooking his position.

On September 12, 1683, a relief army of sixty thousand deployed on the heights overlooking Vienna. The Polish king, John Sobieski, was in command. Three quarters of the soldiers were non-Austrian. They faced a Turkish cavalry force of only twenty-eight thousand—for Kara Mustafa threw away his numerical advantage by keeping most of his infantry in the siegeworks. As the allies attacked, the Turks resisted as best they could, but Kara Mustafa's recklessness exposed all of the glaring weaknesses in the Ottoman military system. Before nightfall the mighty Turkish army broke and fled, leaving behind ten thousand dead or captured soldiers, and all of the Turkish artillery, powder, wagons, tents, oxen, and camels, as well as an exotic assortment of silks, carpets, jeweled swords, birds in gilded cages, and so many coffee beans that the Viennese shortly opened their first coffeehouse. Thus Kara Mustafa's attack, the boldest maneuver in all of seventeenth-century warfare, had resulted in the most crushing defeat of the century.

The spectacular events of 1683 sent shock waves through the Ottoman system that persisted for years. Kara Mustafa was strangled on the sultan's orders, and Mehmed himself was deposed in 1687. Between 1683 and 1703, five sultans and twelve grand viziers tried unsuccessfully to restore stability. Meanwhile, the Austrian Habsburgs reckoned that the time had come to push back their obnoxious eastern neighbors and reconquer Turkish Hungary, held by the Ottomans since the 1520s. Venice, Poland, and the papacy also hoped to profit from the Turkish collapse. In 1684 they joined the Holy Roman emperor in the War of the Holy League, to expel Islam from Europe. Venice managed to push the Turks out of the Morea peninsula, but Poland accomplished very little. John Sobieski, the savior of Vienna, aimed to conquer Moldavia and establish a Polish outlet on the Black Sea, but the szlachta in the Polish diet gave him no support, and his unpaid troops captured only a few forts on the Dniester River. In contrast, Leopold I accomplished all of his aims. The imperial attack concentrated on the main Turkish fortresses along the middle Danube; Gran was captured in 1683, Neuhäusel in 1685, Buda in 1686, Esseg in 1687, and Belgrade in 1689. By taking this chain of forts, the Habsburgs short-circuited the Turkish frontier-control system, and cleared the Ottomans out of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia in only six years of fighting. The imperial armies were largely manned by non-Austrian soldiers, commanded by non-Austrian generals, and paid for by papal revenues, but Leopold was the great personal beneficiary. In 1687 and 1688 he summoned the Hungarian and Transylvanian diets, and they recognized him as their hereditary king.

It was during the Turkish campaigns of the 1680s that Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) first made his mark. Eugene was the ablest of Leopold I's international brigade of generals. He was the perfect cosmopolite. Paris was his birthplace, his father was a French count, his mother was a Roman beauty who was Mazarin's niece and Louis XIV's mistress, and his cousin was the duke of Savoy. Eugene inherited none of his mother's good looks: he was short, pallid, pockmarked, and slouching. Louis XIV considered him fit only for the priesthood, and rejected Eugene's petition for entry into the French officer corps. So the youth went to Austria to fight in the Turkish wars. He first saw action at the relief of Vienna in 1683. Rising quickly in the Austrian army, he led imperial forces in ten campaigns against the Turks, and (though born a Frenchman) in twenty campaigns against Louis XIV. Eugene fought all over Europe—on the middle Danube, in southern Germany, in northern Italy, in southern France, on the Rhine, and in the Netherlands. He was generally given few troops to work with, and being frequently outnumbered, he did lose some battles. But he won many more. No one did more than Eugene of Savoy to build the Austrian Habsburg empire.

After 1688, Austria had to fight on two fronts. When Louis XIV opened the Nine Years' War by invading the Palatinate, most of the imperial troops were hurriedly moved from the Danube to the Rhine. It was fortunate for Leopold that the Turkish campaigns of 1683–1688 had already accomplished so much. The Turks recaptured Belgrade in 1690, but were too disorganized to defeat the small Austrian armies that guarded Hungary and Transylvania. By 1697, with the western war coming to an end, Leopold could spare fifty thousand men, and Eugene of Savoy, for the Danubian front. Late one September afternoon, Eugene caught the sultan and his army in a perfect trap. The Turks were slowly crossing the Tisa River at Zenta, northwest of Belgrade, on a bridge of boats. The sultan and his sargs had reached the far bank, and the janissaries were following them across. By the time Eugene brought his army to the riverbank, only two hours of daylight were left, and his men were exhausted from a ten-hour forced march, but he immediately attacked the janissaries crowded at the bridgehead. The sultan ordered his sargs back across the river to help the janissaries, but this movement clogged the bridge, and lacking an escape route, the janissaries panicked. Thousands dashed into the river and drowned. Others butchered their own officers. The sultan fled, leaving behind all of his supplies. This overwhelming defeat demonstrated to the Turks that they could not recapture their lost provinces. They were forced to accept the Peace of Karlowitz, which was concluded with the Holy League in 1699. Islam was not expelled from Europe, but the Turks had been badly beaten, and Leopold's holdings were twice as large as in 1683.

The Peace of Karlowitz freed Leopold for his dynastic struggle with Louis XIV over the Spanish inheritance. But the War of the Spanish Suc-
cession quickly exposed Vienna to two-front problems once again, and showed that Austria was no real match for France. In 1703 Prince Francis Rákóczí (1675–1735) started a Magyar rebellion against Habsburg rule that swept Transylvania and Hungary, while Elector Max Emmanuel of Bavaria—Austria’s strongest imperial supporter in the Turkish war—joined forces with the French in southern Germany. As we have seen, Austria was only rescued from this threat by Marlborough’s victory at Blenheim. Eugene’s subsequent conquest of northern Italy freed enough troops so that the Habsburgs could put down Rákóczí’s rebellion in 1708. And Austria’s failure to conquer Spain helped to direct Habsburg attention back to the Turks after the Peace of Rastatt. In 1715 the Ottomans declared war on their weakest Christian neighbor, the republic of Venice, and swiftly reconquered the Morea. Austria intervened, and it was apparent that Prince Eugene had not lost his touch. In 1716 he routed a larger Turkish army at Peterwardein, and in 1717—again heavily outnumbered—he retook Belgrade. The Peace of Passarowitz, concluded between Austria and Turkey in 1718, added a further belt of Danubian territory to the Habsburg state: the Banat, northern Serbia, and western Walachia.

In this war, as in the earlier Turkish war, Austria had the rare good fortune to meet an adversary eager to fight and vulnerable to defeat. Furthermore, it turned out that Austria was the only state bordering on Turkish territory which was strong enough to beat the Ottomans. Venice tried but failed to regain its lost possessions in the eastern Mediterranean. Poland and Russia tried but failed to expand toward the Black Sea. Only the Austrian Habsburgs found it possible to profit from Turkish recklessness. It cannot be claimed that Leopold and his sons Joseph I and Charles VI had built a state equal in strength to France or England. Nor indeed was Austria a unitary state on the western model. But the Habsburgs had been marvelously successful at eliminating all alternatives to Austrian rule on the central Danube. They were no longer shadow leaders of an outmoded Holy Roman Empire, but absolute rulers of a new multinational central European dynastic state.

**Sweden Versus Russia**

In 1700, when the War of the Holy League had just concluded and the War of the Spanish Succession was soon to begin, fighting broke out in quite another quarter—the Baltic region. Here, Sweden was the dominant state, as it had been throughout the seventeenth century. Thanks to the martial exertions of the Vasa kings (most particularly Gustavus Adolphus), the Swedes had built an empire that incorporated Finland, Karelia, Ingria, and Estonia (blocking Russia’s access to the Baltic), Livonia (north of Poland), Pomerania (bordering Brandenburg), and Bremen and other small north German territories bordering Denmark.

Thus the Swedes controlled all of the northern and eastern portions of the Baltic coast, and much of the southern portion. With the Danes they shared control of the Sound, through which all Baltic shipping passed. As in Gustavus Adolphus’ day, Sweden had a small population and limited resources, but was very well organized for warfare. A standing army of twenty-three thousand garrisoned ninety forts and castles, and another seventy thousand soldiers and sailors could be mobilized from the peasantry. During the seventeenth century Sweden had repeatedly fought and defeated its Baltic neighbors, who were aching for revenge. When the Swedish king Charles XI (ruled 1660–1697), a tough warrior and autocrat, was succeeded by a fifteen-year-old boy, the time looked right for revenge. In 1698–1699, the kings of Denmark, Poland, and Russia secretly
planned a joint attack, and in 1700 they simultaneously assaulted Swedish strong points hundreds of miles apart, in Holstein, Livonia, and Ingrid.

Thus began the Great Northern War, which no one in 1700 could imagine would last for twenty-one years. The three allies against Sweden started out with differing war aims. The Danes wanted to regain Scania (lost to Sweden in 1658), across the Sound from Copenhagen, so that they could once again control the entrance to the Baltic. The Poles had little interest in war with Sweden, but their king, Augustus II (ruled 1697–1733), badly needed military conquests. Augustus, who was also elector of Saxony, had just secured the Polish throne in a disputed election after the death of John Sobieski. He was nicknamed “the Strong” because he could bend horseshoes with bare hands—and also because he was reputedly the father of three hundred illegitimate children. This virile prince wanted to conquer Livonia (lost to Sweden in 1629); he would then either annex this province to Saxony in a dynastic union rivaling Brandenburg-Prussia, or present it to Poland, in an attempt—like that of John Sobieski before him—to strengthen his shaky hold on the Polish crown through his brilliant foreign victory.

The third party in the attack, the Russian tsar, was the most enigmatic. Peter I had not yet earned his sobriquet of Peter the Great; in 1700 he was an untested, half-barbaric figure. He was clearly the most energetic and ferocious Muscovite ruler in a long time, for he had already wrested control of the state from his sister Sophia, and had smashed a rebellion of the streets, or palace guard, through savage torture and wholesale executions. Peter was also clearly intent on opening Russia to western commerce and establishing a Russian navy: he had made a personal tour of Dutch and English shipyards, and had fought the Turks for access to the Black Sea. Now he was hoping to regain Ingrid and Estonia (lost to Sweden in the sixteenth century) and sail his navy into the Baltic.

Facing this trio of assailants stood the young Swedish king, a personage of great and disturbing gifts. Charles XII (ruled 1697–1718) had been absorbed from early childhood in shooting and war games. He killed his first deer at age eight, his first wolf at ten, his first bear at eleven. Adept at mathematics, he worked out tactical military problems in the schoolroom. As an adolescent king he amused himself in wintertime by jumping from ice floe to ice floe on horseback, and in springtime by chasing hare around the palace gallery and tossing furniture out the palace windows. But Charles soon developed Spartan, puritanical habits. Scorning the drunken orgies of monarchs like Augustus of Poland and Peter of Russia, he gave up alcohol. Scorning the fopperies of fashion, he refused to wear the great curly wig requisite for a gentleman in this era, and dressed as a man of action in a plain blue uniform with brass buttons. He showed no interest in girls, in court ceremonial, in civil administration. His sole delight was warfare. Thus in 1700 Charles eagerly took to the field with the Swedish army. He never returned to Stockholm during the remaining eighteen years of his reign.

The Swedes first invaded Denmark and closed in on Copenhagen. The Danes hurriedly made peace. Three months later, in November, 1700, Charles XII marched across Estonia with eleven thousand men to relieve the town of Narva, besieged by forty thousand Russians. Tsar Peter, suspecting that a four-to-one advantage was not enough for his untrained peasants, abruptly quit the Russian camp. In a driving snowstorm the Swedes attacked; Peter’s soldiers broke almost immediately and surrendered in droves. The Battle of Narva convinced Charles that the Russians did not know how to fight and could be beaten at any time, so he turned to deal with Augustus, of Saxony and Poland. In 1701 he defeated Augustus’ Saxon troops at the Livonian border, crossed into Poland, and demanded that the Poles depose their king. By now Charles XII was acting as Kara Mustafa, he had in 1683, pursuing radical solutions well beyond his military strength. For the next six years he mired himself in Polish politics. Charles could find Lithuanian allies who wanted to break up the Polish state, and Polish allies who wanted a weaker king than Augustus, but most Poles hated the Nordic intruders who plundered their territory. The Swedish army, in these years never larger than thirty thousand men, chased Saxon, Polish, and Russian contingents around the Polish countryside, and occupied each of the chief Polish towns in turn, without ever gaining mean-
Influential control. In 1704 at Warsaw a handful of szlachta, attended by Swedish soldiers, were persuaded to "elect" by voice vote Charles's nominee, Stanisław Leszczyński (1677-1766), as the new king of Poland. In 1706, when Charles moved his army into Saxony, Augustus signed a humiliating peace treaty in which he acknowledged his dethronement and even recognized King Stanisław. But nothing lasting had been accomplished; Charles's puppet regime in Poland depended entirely on military force. In 1707 the Swedish king marched his army toward Russia to deal with 'Tsar Peter.'

During the years Charles spent in Poland, Peter had kept working on his plan for a Baltic outlet. Viewed the disgrace at Narva in 1700 as a necessary lesson, he reorganized the Russian army and sent his troops back to fight the Swedish garrisons in Ingria, Estonia, and Livonia. Between 1702 and 1704, while Charles was chasing Augustus, the Russians captured most of the Swedish forts (including Narva) along the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland. These campaigns gave Peter's soldiers much-needed self-confidence and battle experience. In 1703 the tsar started to lay out a new city—St. Petersburg—on the Neva River, at the head of the Gulf of Finland. Russian naval vessels ventured out into the Gulf, while Peter welcomed the first western merchant ships into his new port. He was very eager for peace with Sweden—if Charles XII would relinquish his claim to St. Petersburg. Naturally, the all-victorious Swedish king saw no reason to surrender any Baltic territory to Russia, and Charles was in any case not eager for peace. Like the roving captains in the Thirty Years' War he had become a permanent campaigner. By 1707 the stage was set for a dramatic confrontation between these two maniac warrior-kings.

Charles XII marched east toward the Russian border with over forty thousand men, the largest and finest field army he ever assembled. Critics have wondered how he expected to conquer such a vast state as Russia with an army of this size when he had been unable to master Poland. The answer appears to be that Charles's aim was not to conquer Russia, but to catch and destroy Peter's army. An overwhelming military victory might generate a change of regime in Moscow and produce a more compliant new tsar, and it would certainly force the Russians back from the Baltic and thus seal the Swedish king's previous victories over Denmark, Poland, and Saxony. Charles aimed his attack at Moscow, taking the shortest route across Poland to the Dnieper River at Smolensk. Undoubtedly this was a mistake. He should have struck first at St. Petersburg, and if necessary moved from there toward Moscow, keeping open communication lines for supplies and reinforcements from the Swedish Baltic. Unlike western commanders, who stopped campaigning during the winter, Charles moved his troops across the frozen rivers and marshes in the coldest weather. In February, 1708, he almost caught Peter at Grodno, in Lithuania. Thereafter, nothing went well. Peter stayed always just out of reach, systemati
cally harassing the Swedish column with skirmishes and raids. The Russians ruthlessly laid waste to all surrounding territory, keeping the Swedes perpetually short of food. Charles spent the summer of 1708 near Smolensk, waiting for supplies from the Baltic which never arrived because the Russians cut them off. Now too weak for a direct assault on Moscow, he turned south and joined forces in the Ukraine with a rebel Cossack chieftain, Ivan Mazepa (c. 1644–1709). Charles gained some supplies and reinforcements by this move, but he was more dangerously isolated than ever. In the terrible winter of 1709—which (as we have seen) produced crop failure and famine in France—many Swedish soldiers froze to death. Battle casualties, hunger, disease, and weather inexorably reduced Charles’s army to scarcely more than twenty thousand combat troops.

In May, 1709, anxious to establish a base for further operations in the Ukraine, Charles laid siege to the town of Poltava. Peter closed in on him with an army of forty thousand. In late June the Swedish king received a bullet wound in his foot, was prostrated by fever, and could be moved only on a stretcher. Still he refused to retreat. On July 8 the Swedes attacked Peter’s encampment, although they had no artillery and were in a poor field position. The Russians outmaneuvered, outshot, and outfought them, and quickly turned the Battle of Poltava into a smashing victory. The Swedes fled toward the Crimea, leaving nearly ten thousand dead or captured. The invalid king, who considered Poltava to be only a temporary reverse, was carried to asylum in Turkey by a small guard. His remaining fourteen thousand troops, trapped on the east bank of the broad river Dnieper, tamely surrendered to Peter.

In practical terms, the Battle of Poltava abruptly ended Sweden’s era of great-power status. Between 1709 and 1713 all of Charles XII’s military gains were wiped out. Augustus recaptured the Polish throne, while Stanislas fled into exile. Hanover and Prussia joined the assault upon Sweden, and together with Denmark took over almost all the Swedish holdings on the south Baltic coast. Russia captured the territories bordering the eastern Baltic from Riga to Helsingfors. Charles XII stubbornly—some would say blindly—refused to recognize these losses. From 1709 to 1714 he stayed in Turkey, trying to organize campaigns against Russia and Poland. Then he traveled incognito, disguised by a dark wig and a moustache, through Austria and Germany to his one remaining territory on the Baltic coast, Swedish Pomerania. In 1715 he resumed campaigning against Prussia, Hanover, Saxony, and Denmark. In 1718 he was just starting an invasion of Norway, then under Danish rule, when he was killed by an enemy shot—or possibly murdered by one of his own soldiers.

Judgments of Charles XII differ widely. For some, he is the archetypal individualist who dared to challenge the whole world. Alternatively (and less flatteringly) he is regarded as a Greek tragic hero fatally flawed by hubris. Others see him as a madman who led his devoted followers to destruction. Russian historians have noted the ominous parallels with Napoleon in 1812 and Hitler in 1941–1943. Whatever one’s judgment of this warrior-king, the fact remains that he lost his war. Shortly after Charles’s death, Sweden formally ceded Livonia to Hanover, Holstein to Denmark, and Stettin to Prussia. More important, at the Peace of Nystad in 1721, Sweden surrendered Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, Karelia, and the southeastern part of Finland to Russia. Thus ended the Great Northern War.

**PETER THE GREAT**

Peter I, tsar of Russia (ruled 1682–1725), was surely the most remarkable public figure of his day—and an even more controversial leader than Charles XII. Until 1709 his method of rule seemed wildly eccentric to most foreign observers, and absolutely disastrous to most Russians. But Peter’s victory over the Swedes at Poltava vindicated his policies, and signaled Russia’s belated emergence as a major European power.

Peter was only ten years old when he ascended the Russian throne in 1682. He grew into his job slowly. Even after he overthrew the regency of his sister Sophia in 1689, he spent his time in war games (like the young Charles XII), in building boats, and in making rockets for fireworks displays. Peter grew into a giant of a man—nearly seven feet tall in an era when scarcely anyone was taller than five feet ten. His temper oscillated wildly between knockabout joviality and furious rage, and he had the constitution of an ox, so that he survived innumerable all-night drinking bouts with minimal damage. In the 1690’s he scandalized the Muscovites by dressing as a western craftsman or sailor, and carousing with foreign artisans and soldiers in the so-called German suburb of Moscow. He scandalized the aristocrats of the boyar class by favoring upstarts like Alexander Menshikov (1672–1729), who rose from hawking pies in the Moscow streets to become the prince of Izhma. Peter broke with tradition most sharply when he traveled to Holland and England in 1697–1698 in order to learn more about shipbuilding, to recruit foreign workers, and to see the sights. His western hosts found Russian housekeeping methods “right nasty” (in London, Peter’s entourage broke all fifty chairs in their house in order to stoke the fires), and guardedly described the tsar as a “quite gifted savage.” On returning home, Peter greeted his chief nobles scissor in hand, and cut off their long beards and the flowing sleeves of their Muscovite costumes. Next, he eagerly attended the interrogation and torture of hundreds of the shifty, the restless traditional Kremlin guards, who hated his “German” innovations. The tsar even

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Peter managed to treble government income during the war years—a feat matched only by England among the other European powers—and he accomplished this without contracting foreign or domestic loans; instead, he levied a new poll tax on all male serfs. To supply his army with guns, powder, and uniforms, the tsar set up many new state factories, including fifty-two new ironworks, largely staffed by forced peasant labor. It is estimated that the average Russian peasant household “contributed” the equivalent of 160 days of labor per year to Tsar Peter. Naturally, the landowners disliked the tsar’s heavy exactions upon their serfs, but they welcomed his decrees that no serf could move from his master’s estate without a written passport, which tightened their own control over their labor force.

Thus Peter’s regime intensified the social and economic polarity between lord and peasant in Russia.

The character of Peter’s “westernization” policy has been much debated: was it only window dressing, or did it produce fundamental change? Was it imposed artificially by the tsar, or did it reflect Russia’s needs and aspirations? Peter’s innovations in foreign policy were certainly more than window dressing. Before the 1690’s Russia had never played an important role in European affairs, but Peter campaigned extensively against Sweden.

**Peter the Great / 291**

Peter’s execution of the streltsy: 1698. This contemporary print shows scores of corpses gibbled outside the Kremlin walls. Peter kept the rotting bodies on display for months, to edify the Muscovites who passed by in their carriages.

Not since Ivan the Terrible had the Russians experienced such an overbearing ruler, and Peter was reminiscent of his sixteenth-century predecessor in another way: despite his western innovations, he followed Ivan’s traditional Muscovite prescription of autocratic power for the tsar, state service for the elite, and bondage for the masses. His adherence to this formula was especially evident in his reorganization of Russia’s armed forces during the Great Northern War. Having destroyed the streltsy, Peter discovered at Narva in 1700 that the foreign officers he had recruited made poor commanders, and the raw peasants he had conscripted made poor soldiers. So he set about fashioning a more professional Russian army. Henceforth, Peter kept up-to-date registers of Russia’s noble families, and required all noblemen to serve in the army, the navy, or the bureaucracy. Careers in the officer corps were reserved for the elite—men of high birth or exceptional talent. Young cadets received basic training in newly organized artillery or engineering schools, or began as privates in the regiments of the tsar’s elite guards (the successors to the streltsy).

Once commissioned as officers, they advanced in status as they were promoted in military rank. At the same time, Peter created an “immortal” standing army of 100,000 peasant soldiers by conscripting one man from every twenty peasant households, and requiring that each conscript who died or deserted be replaced by a substitute soldier. To pay for this army,
and Turkey and sent his armies into Poland and Germany. In terms of square miles annexed, Peter’s territorial acquisitions do not place him among the chief Russian expansionists. However, his conquests on the Baltic gave Russia direct access to the west; the tsar’s creation of the new capital of St. Petersburg—designed to resemble Amsterdam, and located on the western frontier of his state—was a symbolic act at least as meaningful as the construction of Philip II’s Escorial or Louis XIV’s palace at Versailles. Another break with the past was Peter’s decision to imitate western dynastic marriage practices by contracting foreign (especially German) marriages for the Romanovs—a practice continued until 1917. Peter’s army reforms were modeled on the Prussian system, and his bureaucratic reforms on the Swedish system. Many of these western borrowings buttressed existing tendencies in Russia; for example, in adopting western dress and speaking German or French the upper classes were bolstering their sense of social superiority over the peasants, who kept their beards and their national costume and language. Peter always wanted Russians to borrow what was useful from the west—mainly technology—with-
always anxious to preserve their traditional liberties, rose against Peter in 1707-1708. Far worse, his own son and heir Alexis (1690-1718) was totally opposed to everything Peter stood for. The more Peter tried to train him, the more Alexis shirked; the more Peter bullied him, the more Alexis feared and loathed his father. By 1716 he was plainly allied with reactionaries among the aristocracy and clergy, who planned to restore the old isolationist foreign policy, the old freedom for priests and landowners, and the old capital in Moscow, as soon as Peter died. Alexis fled to Vienna and then to Naples. Peter hunted him down and had him brought home for interrogation and torture. Alexis received forty strokes of the knout, and died of his wounds before he could be publicly executed.

Seven years later, in 1725, Peter himself died, to the general relief of almost everyone. Today, his memory is still painfully alive. Russians have mixed feelings about the leader who forced foreign manners and standards upon their society. Westerners have mixed feelings about the man who injected Russian power into European politics. Few leaders have displayed such an admixture of brutality and creativity. Few men have done more to shape the course of history. To be sure, Peter did not single-handedly transform Muscovy into Russia, nor did this transformation involve a complete break with the past. But Peter employed his immense personal energy to maximum effect. In a company of powerful kings, Peter was the most dynamic ruler of the day. For better or worse he earned his title: he was indeed Peter the Great.

EUROPE IN 1715

In August, 1715, in a setting far removed from the frontier crudity of Peter's Russia, another great king lay dying, at Versailles. Louis XIV was nearly seventy-seven; he had ascended the throne long ago, in 1643, and had been in personal charge since 1661. He had outlived his younger brother, his son, two of his three grandsons, and two of his five great-grandsons. His heir was a five-year-old great-grandson, who would ascend the throne as Louis XV. The passage of French royal authority from the all-powerful Sun King to a little child marked a symbolic pause in European affairs. Ceremonial throughout his reign, Louis kept to form right to the end. "I am leaving you, but the State will always remain," he told his courtiers. "Try to remain at peace with your neighbors. I loved war too much," he told the young dauphin. 3 This last point was true enough; the wars of 1688-1713 had brought Louis close to disaster. But the old king had no inkling of a deeper problem. The great Bourbon monarchy, his proudest legacy, was too rigidly constructed to meet the changing circum-
stances of the new century. The French formula for state building, which had provided such impressive internal stability and external power during the seventeenth century, would work significantly less well in the reign of Louis XV. And as the French aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and peasantry all pressed for fundamental changes, the formula would break down completely in 1789.

No prophet in 1715 could have predicted revolution, for never had the European political system been more stable. Everywhere strong rulers presided over centralized governments, domestic strife was minimal, and international rivalry was muted by the new balance-of-power system. To the intelligent contemporary observer, the close of Louis XIV's reign appeared to mark a gratifying stage of fulfillment in European civilization. How had the people of early eighteenth-century Europe resolved the problems that had precipitated so much turmoil and tension in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? First of all, they had redrawn the political map so as to accommodate the chief interests of all the leading states. The territorial boundaries of France, Britain, Austria, Russia, and Prussia had all been significantly enlarged since the mid-sixteenth century. Spain had lost territory, but this reflected its declining status and power. The Dutch republic was still constricted, but this reflected the fact that its prime interest was in commerce, not real estate, and also the fact that the Dutch were beginning to slip in status. Overall, the map of 1715 looks considerably more "modern" than the map of 1559. In the sixteenth century, Europe had been divided into three zones; now the division was simpler—between the commercial, capitalistic, national states of the west and the agricultural, multinational states of the east. The seven leading European powers, in roughly descending order of stature, were France, Britain, Austria, the United Provinces, Russia, Spain, and Prussia—four Atlantic states and three eastern states. The Ottoman Empire, still formidable enough to be ranked fourth or fifth in this hierarchy, remained outside the European system, isolated by religion and culture.

There were still large areas on the map of 1715 which were essentially political vacuums—western Germany, Italy, and Poland in particular. The only west German state to take a leading role in the recent wars, Bavaria, had been badly mauled in the fighting. Poland had also been mauled. Four of the largest Italian states—Lombardy, Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia—had been ignominiously handed over to new rulers at the settlement of 1713-1714. The danger in this situation was that one or several of the leading states might trigger new wars by expanding into the areas of vacuum. But the great powers had had their fill of combat for a while. The warrior-kings Charles XII and Peter the Great were winding up their career. The other chief monarchs in 1715 were much less bellicose. Louis XV was a child, and George I (of whom more shortly) in Great Britain, Charles VI

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in Austria, Philip V in Spain, and Frederick William I in Prussia all kept their dynastic ambitions in check. The treaties of Utrecht and Rastatt, soon to be supplemented by the treaties of 1718 and 1721 which ended the Turkish and northern wars, ratified the power shifts that had taken place since the mid-seventeenth century, created a viable international environment for the first half of the eighteenth century, and set up a state system that has continued, with many revisions, into our own day.

Religion was obviously a more muted issue than in the days of Calvin and Loyola. To be sure, Louis XIV's persecution of the Huguenots riled outraged Protestant opinion against him, but it did not lead to further conflict between Protestants and Catholics. When they found it necessary to fight Louis, the Protestant English, Dutch, and Prussians did not hesitate to team up with the ultra-Catholic Austrians and Spanish. At the peace settlement, no effort was made to revive Huguenot liberties, nor indeed did the confessional jurisdictions within any state. The Protestant-Catholic conflict was not merely hopeless or deadlocked; it had become irrelevant. The secular authorities were everywhere firmly in charge of organized religion, as they had been during the earliest stage of the Reformation, 1517-1540, before the religious wars began. Europe was covered by a network of territorial churches—some Catholic, some Protestant, but all managed by the state and subservient to the state. In Catholic territory, religious toleration was still considered to be intolerable. In Protestant territory, a measure of diversity was sometimes permitted, but only the Dutch practiced genuine pluralism. Church attendance was a matter of civic duty. Except for their black costumes, the parish clergy were hard to distinguish from other agents of local government, such as tax collectors, constables, and recruiting officers.

If the clergy had changed, so had the nobility, who had been so obstructive in the era of religious wars. As we have seen, the chief rebellions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been organized by local magnates hostile to central state authority: the German Protestant princes against Charles V, the Huguenot nobility against the Valois, the Netherlands nobility against Philip II, the Bohemian nobility against Ferdinand II, the English gentry against Charles I, the French frondeurs against Mazarin, the Whig and Tory aristocracy against James II, the Russian streltsy against Peter I. By 1715 such challenges had run their course. Both in absolutist states like France, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and in constitutional states like Britain and the Dutch republic, a working partnership—mutually advantageous—had evolved between the local magnates and the central administration. The composition of the "magnate" class differed markedly from place to place. But everywhere the political and social structure was at least as hierarchical and elitist in 1715 as in 1559. The upper orders were richer than ever, with fuller power over the un-
able to harness the private resources of the chief property holders—merchants, gentry, and nobility—to an unprecedented degree. In each of these states the government raised about a third of the money necessary to pay for the fighting through internal borrowing. The British achievement was particularly impressive. When England entered the war in 1689, it had no machinery for long-term borrowing; it had a past history of royal bankruptcy and default; and it had an annual royal revenue of only £2 million. Nevertheless, through the agency of the Bank of England (established in 1694), the London business community embarked on a massive program of loans to the government and quickly created a national debt, funded through private subscription. Between 1688 and 1714 the British raised £171 million to meet public expenditures, one third of this through loans. By 1714 the national debt stood at £40 million. Since the British government dared not repudiate this debt, it served as an effective deterrent against new wars for many years to come.

The business leaders of London, Amsterdam, and Paris could afford to be fiscal patriots, for the wars of 1688–1713 were highly profitable. Merchants who secured military contracts, opened up new wartime markets, or took advantage of commodity shortages and high prices, built magnificent private fortunes. To be sure, the wartime risks were great, and many traditional commercial patterns were badly dislocated. The Dutch were in the most vulnerable position because their North Sea herring fishery was disrupted by Dunkirk privateers and their Baltic trade in grain, timber, and tar was disrupted by the Swedish-Russian fighting. In 1715 Dutch merchants were still the chief middlemen of Europe, and operated the largest merchant fleet, but the British and French were closing the gap rapidly. During the wars both the British and French built up their long-distance trade, with America, Asia, and Africa, despite heavy shipping losses. This was the biggest boom period to date for the British overseas empire. In 1715 the British Caribbean planters were the world’s chief sugar exporters, and the British Chesapeake planters were the world’s chief tobacco exporters. To supply those colonial entrepreneurs with labor, the British shipped about 250,000 slaves from Africa to Americas during the war period—more than had been shipped in the entire English slave traffic up to 1688.

Despite their crucial fiscal power, businessmen played little role in politics, even in Britain and Holland. Politics was a game for leisured gentlemen or professional bureaucrats and lawyers. It is hard for us to conceive of how exclusive the world of politics was in 1715. The officials who managed the great absolute monarchies arrived at their decisions in closed councils and courts, or in palace cabals. Government decisions were transmitted to the man in the street by means of royal proclamations posted in churches and marketplaces. The press was strictly censored, and in any
To individual talent than their absolutist neighbors. In seventeenth-century Britain the quest for liberty had been more conspicuous than the preservation of order. But the peaceful accession of George I showed that domestic divisions were not so deep after all, that almost everyone now accepted the settlement of 1689, and that awkward decisions could be worked out peaceably by means of representative government.

Britain was also the home of Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke, apostles of the new mathematical science and the new confidence in intellectual progress. Newton was an old man in 1715, and Locke was dead, but the influence was immense and would continue to grow. Working at the close of the seventeenth-century intellectual revolution, Newton and Locke seemed to have reestablished cultural order by harmonizing and reconciling the iconoclastic, disputatious ideas and attitudes that had torn the European intellectual community apart for so long. This was particularly obvious in the case of Newton, who incorporated the discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo into his magisterial concept of the cosmos. But it can be seen also in Locke, who worked out a middle-of-the-road political credo more satisfying to his eighteenth-century audience than the divine-right theory of monarchy for which he stood, or the cynical absolutism of Machiavelli and Hobbes, or the visionary radicalism of the Levellers. And Locke's buoyant confidence in the powers of human reason gave hope that Newton's accomplishments in mathematics could be duplicated in other fields of knowledge. Thus Newton and Locke framed a mental outlook stripped of the mystery, poetry, passion, and terror of the sixteenth-century climate of opinion to which Shakespeare, Cervantes, Loyola, and Calvin had responded. The stage was set for the philosophers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

Thus the balance stood in 1715. It is essential to remember that in many respects the quality of European life was much the same as it had been in the mid-sixteenth century. The population had scarcely grown. Production methods, based on handicrafts, had scarcely changed. The laboring poor were still downtrodden. Women had no voice. The traditional, elitist structure of society was as firmly fixed as ever. This is why no prophet in 1715 could possibly have foreseen future events. For as Europe's population began to grow in the eighteenth century, as food production increased, industrialization began, and political pressure mounted, the traditional structure of society suddenly became as obsolete as witch-hunting or crusading. At the close of the century, the ordered, stable system of the Old Regime was dissolved by violent revolution. But that is another story.