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The Context of 1600

Historians regard the seventeenth century as one of political division, religious confrontation, social conflict, revolution and international rivalry leading to seemingly interminable wars. Such sombre themes must provide much of the material of the chapters which follow, yet there is a positive corollary: some of the finest minds of the age wrestled with the problem of how to bring order and stability out of insensate strife, and purge Europe of the self-destructive forces which precipitated that continent into sustained crisis. Some of the strategies which they pursued will look strange and unfamiliar to present-day eyes, for they were usually rooted in seventeenth-century realism rather than ahistorical idealism, the achievable rather than the utopian; yet, without adopting a simple, programmatic view that Europe progressed from disorder to order, chaos to harmony, this book will contend that headway towards order was made, and that by 1720 Europe in most respects was in a healthier condition than in 1600.

Pre-industrial Europe was vulnerable to the vicissitudes of nature to an extent inconceivable today, and the unfavourable environment which prevailed exerted a decisive influence on the history of the period. Historians of climate contend that the seventeenth century formed part of the 'little ice age' which affected the whole world from about 1400 to the mid-1750s. Summers frequently were cool and short, with autumn, winter and spring on average being longer, wetter and colder than at present. The relationship between climatic factors and the production of crops and maintenance of livestock, the management of agricultural prices and wages is extremely complex, for in all these spheres Europeans proved adaptable, adjusting their

agricultural and commercial practices accordingly. On the other hand, sudden extremes of cold or heat could have a widespread impact by creating a lethal combination of subsistence crisis and disease. Thus, in France, adverse weather conditions coincided with, and helped to cause, harvest failures from 1661 to 1663, from 1691 to 1694 and in 1709; they in turn led to famine which, in the case of the crisis of 1691–4, reduced the population of France by about 10 per cent. Some famines were general or sustained. Much of eastern Europe suffered famine between 1590 and 1602; likewise the entire Mediterranean region was badly hit from 1606 to 1609 and from 1628 to 1631; and serious food shortages verging on famine afflicted the whole continent during 1648–51, 1664–6, 1672–7 and, as in France, the early 1690s and 1709.

For the majority of Europeans – peasants and poorer townspeople – it was their generally meagre diet and unhealthy living conditions which diminished their capacity to resist disease. Most people relied upon local produce, for slow communications meant that perishable foodstuffs could not be transported over long distances. On the other hand, grain, which did not rot quickly, could be carried from, say, Poland to the Mediterranean. The diet of most Europeans was based on cereals – wheat, rye, barley, oats – made into various forms of bread, gruel, porridge or cakes. Depending upon its geographical location, a particular region's diet could be varied by the addition of seasonal vegetables, fruit, fish or dairy produce. Meat was comparatively rare, the most common being pork, but chicken, wildfowl and rabbit were also consumed. Crops had been introduced from the New World, but although they enriched the European diet in the long run, they were not sufficiently widespread in the early seventeenth century to have an appreciable effect. Traditional European diets continued to be rich in starches but low in proteins and vitamins.

The combination of adverse climatic conditions, unpredictable harvests and a limited diet meant that Europeans were, by modern standards, under-nourished and unhealthy. Infant mortality was high, often of the order of 15–25 per cent or even higher in times of famine, and only about half of those born survived long enough to reach the age of marriage. Women were especially vulnerable when giving birth; and since it was normal for married women of childbearing age to produce a child each year, the danger of succumbing to the experience itself, or to a related disease, was high. It was common, therefore, for men to marry more than once as they sought

new wives and stepmothers for their children. However, the life expectancy of men too was low, and women frequently were left as widows with several children to support. It has been calculated that even in the eighteenth century, when the climate was beginning to improve and the food supply was expanding, about half of the marriages in rural France lasted less than fifteen years because of the death of the husband or wife; and, if Europe as a whole is taken from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, about 25 per cent of all marriages were remarriages.[1]

The exigencies of nature in the seventeenth century, some of which are illustrated to telling effect in winter scenes depicted by landscape painters of the period, imposed their limitations on everybody. It will be seen in later chapters that warfare had to be seasonal, beginning in spring and ending with the onset of winter; commerce in northern Europe was regularly interrupted by frozen rivers and seas, while in southern Europe, during summer, bubonic plague and other diseases brought Mediterranean ports to a halt as ships suspected of carrying disease were debarred. The industrial and transportation revolutions of the nineteenth century enabled Europeans to overcome many of the limitations imposed by forces of nature; in the seventeenth century, Europeans had to adapt to nature.

Political Contours

A glance at a political map of Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century suggests that politically the continent was divided into three broad zones. First, the frontiers of most western European states bore a tolerable resemblance to those of their modern counte parts. Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal, even the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic (or United Provinces) have their modern continuities. By contrast, eastern Europe was very different from its twenty-first century profile. It was encompassed within the Ottoman Empire, an emerging Russia and the kingdom of Poland; but the apparent simplicity of this arrangement belied a more complex reality, for the populations of these multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious entities enjoyed considerable practical, if not theoretical, autonomy. The third zone likewise contrasts with modern configurations: a belt of kingdoms, principalities, duchies, bishoprics and city-states running from the German Baltic coastline, through central Europe and Italy down to Sicily. While some of these territories

were reasonably extensive, others were small; some were independent, some were dependencies of larger states, while yet others enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy. Many central European territories formed part of the Holy Roman Empire, a polity which, in spite of the grandiosity of its title, relied heavily on the consent of its member territories.

This rough division along geographical lines is more apparent than real and should not be elevated into a definitive classification. Like the eastern empires, the kingdoms of western Europe showed few signs of effective centralization. Even in France, normally placed by historians among the more centralized states, the king ruled a country which was a collection of disparate provinces, each with its own legal and financial traditions and privileges. Further west, the kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland shared the same monarch, but preserved their own parliamentary, legal and monetary systems. The theme of localism was especially characteristic of the Dutch Republic, where the powers of the provincial estates exceeded those of the Estates General. Governments everywhere lacked anything in the nature of a modern civil service. In central government, ministers were appointed by, and responsible to, the head of the state, but had few resources with which to administer the country. Bureaucracies in the present-day sense did not exist; in France, Spain and elsewhere, posts in such spheres as the administration of law or collection of taxation were put up for sale. Those who bought them – office-holders – regarded their posts as private property rather than positions through which to give dispassionate service to a minister or head of state. Powerful ministers tried to place their own followers in key central and provincial administrative positions, but otherwise had to contend with office-holders whose political reliability could not be taken for granted. Indeed, later chapters will show that some of the fiercest political and constitutional contests of the century were generated by conflict between ministers and office-holders.

The states of western Europe also displayed multi-linguistic features akin to those of central and eastern Europe. It was not simply that different languages were spoken within the same kingdom (in Spain, the Catalan and Basque languages flourished; in France, Occitan was commonly spoken in Languedoc, Provençal in Provence and Breton in Brittany); even the predominant language contained dialects which were almost mutually incomprehensible. When Jean Racine travelled from Paris to Uzès in 1661, he encountered confusions which he recounted to his friend, Jean de la Fontaine:

> From Lyon onwards I could scarcely make sense of the language of the region, and could hardly make myself understood in return. This difficulty increased at Valence where . . . when I asked a servant for a chamber pot [*un pot de chambre*], she put a heating stove [*un réchaud*] under my bed. You can imagine the result, and what misfortune could befall a sleepy fellow who tried to use this stove as a chamber pot during the night. But it is even worse here [Uzès]. I swear to you that I need an interpreter as much as a Muscovite would in Paris.[2]

Among learned sections of society, Latin still served as a lingua franca in 1600. Scholars frequently corresponded in Latin, much theology, philosophy and science was published in Latin, and, of course, for Catholics throughout Europe, Latin was the language of worship. Change nevertheless was in the air as modern languages advanced at the expense of Latin. In literature, most poetry, prose and plays were in vernacular languages by 1600, and even other printed works were showing the same trend. In Paris, about 30 per cent of books printed between 1601 and 1605 were in Latin, but by 1700 the figure had declined to under 10 per cent.[3]

By 1600, Portugal and Spain possessed extensive overseas colonies. In the seventeenth century, the United Provinces, Britain and France were to join them. The origins of European expansion to other parts of the world go back to the fifteenth century when the Portuguese established a chain of trading bases down the west coast of Africa and round to Mozambique; they crossed the Indian Ocean and created depots in Goa from which to conduct commerce with India, in Malacca for the Malay peninsula, and Macao for China. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Dutch merchants moved into the Indian Ocean and East Indies, and built up an extensive commercial network which rivalled that of the Portuguese. The Dutch established their first eastern trading base in Sumatra in 1595, followed by one in Mauritius in 1598. Thereafter they extended their activities to Java, Ceylon (which they conquered between 1638 and 1656), Malacca (taken from the Portuguese in 1640) and the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The Dutch also established bases in India, first at Pulikat near Madras (1609) and later at Hougli near the mouth of the Ganges.

On behalf of the Spanish crown, the expeditions of Christopher Columbus and other explorers in the 1490s and early 1500s sought a westerly sea route to Asia, and inadvertently encountered what Europeans only gradually recognized to be, as they put it, a New

World. The Spanish, Portuguese, and in due course the English, French and Dutch, established colonies there. As Europeans moved into America, as the New World came to be called, they brought with them political, legal and social systems, languages, educational institutions, and the Catholic and Protestant faiths. Colonial economies developed which required large labour forces, and as the indigenous populations suffered demographic collapse, mainly because of devastation wrought by diseases which Europeans brought, labour was acquired by transporting African slaves to the colonies. By 1600 colonial societies based on slave labour were flourishing in the Americas, and not only transformed the face of that continent, but had a profound impact upon the 'mother countries'.

American colonies gave Europeans access to plentiful supplies of primary materials, including precious metals, timber, and crops such as cane sugar and tobacco, which were grown on plantations. Plants from the New World were introduced into Europe and proved capable of being grown and harvested on a large scale. Two crops – maize and the potato – were to prove of inestimable benefit to Europeans in the long term. Both were highly nutritious and easy to grow, and their steadily increasing importance in the European diet made an outstanding contribution to the battle against food shortages. Ever-increasing Atlantic commerce led to the expansion of the great ports of Europe's western seaboard – Seville, Lisbon, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Bristol and others – which increasingly turned into commercial 'frontiers' linking the 'old' world to the 'new'. The commercial revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which owed much to the colonies in the Americas, stimulated 'home' industries such as ship-building and the manufacture of navigational instruments, and provided opportunities for Europeans to export finished goods overseas. Of all the commodities coming out of the New World by 1600, however, it was gold and silver which was of supreme political significance. The Spanish colonies in Mexico and Peru produced gold and silver on an immense scale, 20 per cent of which went to the king of Spain. The 'Spanish preponderance' in western Europe, which was to be one of the major themes in the international history of Europe down to 1660, was financed in large measure by New World precious metals.

When we turn to the varieties of government in Europe in 1600, the image of a tripartite division between east, centre and west should be replaced by that of a gigantic crescent, one horn of which was planted in Portugal and Spain and the other in Turkey. The

crescent describes an arc through France, Britain and Ireland, Scandinavia, down through Poland and Russia, the Balkans and so to Turkey. Generally speaking, the territory so covered was ruled by monarchs. Yet monarchy itself was far from uniform. Some countries, such as Castile, Sweden, England and Scotland, permitted a queen regnant. France, on the other hand, did not and could be ruled only by a king. In some monarchies, succession was governed by rules of heredity (France, England, Scotland and the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal were of this type), whereas in others it was by election: the Holy Roman Emperor and the kings of Poland, Hungary and Bohemia came into this category.

Most of the territory encompassed by the arms of this imaginary arc was ruled through non-monarchic forms of government, the main exception being southern Italy which, with the island of Sicily, formed a kingdom. A few republics existed: Venice, Switzerland and the self-styled Dutch Republic or United Provinces. The status of this last was still far from decided in 1600. The provinces of which it was composed were in rebellion against Spain, which had not recognized their independence. In 1609, Spain and the United Provinces signed a twelve-year truce, but the question of Dutch independence remained a contentious issue and was to return to the forefront of international affairs when the truce expired in 1621. Germany and much of Italy comprised principalities, duchies, city-states, ecclesiastical territories and a host of other entities intent upon preserving their distinctiveness. In a Europe wherein several of the larger states had predatory ambitions, the survival of smaller territories frequently depended on their ability to attach themselves to a protector.

State and Society

The theme of variety which has run through the preceding few paragraphs applies with equal force when social structures in Europe are considered. The medieval notion that society is divided into three broad categories – those who safeguard the spiritual well-being of society (the clergy), those who rule and protect society (crown and nobility), and those who provide the material, legal, administrative and other frameworks necessary to communal life (commoners) – still found expression at the institutional level. Thus, the English parliament was composed of the House of Lords, comprising bishops

and nobles, and the House of Commons. In France, provincial estates and the Estates General were made up of clergy, nobility and the third estate (commoners). In reality, social structures were more complex and diverse than this tripartite division would suggest. All societies were hierarchical, but the nature of stratification varied. Formal hierarchies existed within the clergy and nobility (an archbishop was superior to a bishop, or a duke to a baron), but hierarchies among commoners were far from clear, as was the location of the 'frontier' between commoner and noble. England was unusual in that it possessed a land-owning group which was wealthy but not noble: the gentry.

Many ambiguities arose from the interaction between prestige and wealth. In predominantly rural regions across Europe, most wealth, as represented by land, was held by the nobility and the church. Within towns, cities and ports, and along the great commercial routes, however, the situation was more complicated. Profits generated by commerce, finance and their associated activities were usually in the hands of commoners, who often purchased land and even noble titles (several monarchies, including the French and English, sold titles in the seventeenth century). Were such upwardly mobile families genuinely noble, or were they impostors pretending to a status which they did not deserve? And if the monarch invented and sold noble titles, was he or she not allowing money to subvert the 'normal' social hierarchy? And what about noble families which lost all or part of their estates, perhaps in civil or international war, or because they sold them to pay off debts? Could they retain their social status, or did economic decline imply a reduction in social status?

Similar incertitude existed at the other end of society, among those who made their living on or from the land and are usually designated 'the peasantry'. The notion that there existed such a creature as the 'typical' peasant must be resisted. It is not just that the life of a peasant in, say, Sweden was different from that of his counterpart in, say, southern Italy because of climatic factors; peasants lived under different systems of government, law, land-owning practices (in some parts of Europe peasants could own or lease land, in others they could not) and social structure. Again, not all peasants earned their income exclusively from the land. Those who lived near urban markets or commercial networks commonly engaged in artisanal production and supplemented their earnings by selling the goods which they manufactured. Others lived in towns or villages rather than on a

farm, some members of the family working the land while others followed urban pursuits. There were also contrasts in the historical evolution of peasant life in Europe. Such factors as demographic trends within particular regions, the social and economic impact of warfare, patterns of the settlement or resettlement of population, and the great cultural, religious and intellectual changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, affected peasants in varying degrees and reinforced differences between them. In much of central and eastern Europe serfdom became the norm, tying peasants to the land to an extent that had no equivalent in western Europe. In short, we should stress the diversity of peasant life in Europe and avoid thinking in stereotypes.

Europe possessed many types of social structure. In the economically advanced areas of western Europe, notably those locked into Atlantic or Asian commerce, capitalist forces were at work and social classes as defined by economic criteria were emerging. In Russia, on the other hand, a social structure based on service to the tsar was being forged, as will be seen in later chapters. In the papal states, status was determined by service to the pope. Across large areas of central Europe and parts of Italy, a feudal nobility existed: it exercised legal powers over the lower social orders (noble estates often had their own law courts to hear cases involving tenants), and received labour service from tenants as well as a proportion of the produce of the land which they worked. Moreover, social structures were constantly changing in response to political, social and economic influences, even if slowly. The older idea that social structures in early modern Europe were rigid and immutable needs to be modified, and the reality of social change acknowledged.

International Relations and War

In the modern world, the term 'international relations' implies formal contacts between states through the medium of sophisticated engines of diplomacy; it also carries connotations of long-standing alliance systems and permanent international organizations devoted to the regulation of the conduct of member states. No such apparatus existed in the Europe of the early modern period, but relations between states were conducted through procedures appropriate to the age. Governments made use of ambassadors and other categories

of representatives and envoys, but on a scale which was small by modern standards; in 1715 even France maintained only fifteen ambassadors and about the same number of envoys. Professional diplomats did not exist in the seventeenth century. Ambassadors and other representatives were chosen because of their domestic political contacts, wealth or prestige, rather than because of their diplomatic skills; and when they went abroad they had to find their own residences and meet the costs of the embassy themselves (their governments might reimburse them, but frequently did not). Ambassadors and other envoys fully represented the majesty and honour of their monarch or other head of state, and were extremely sensitive to rebuffs or insults; countries could and did come close to war over real or imagined affronts offered to their representatives.

This raises another feature of international relations in this period: their intensely personal nature. The family interests, rights and claims of European monarchs determined the course of international affairs just as much as commercial, strategic or any other imperatives. This was bound to be the case given that marriages between royal families were arranged for political and diplomatic reasons. In the pages which follow, many instances will occur of marriages whose purpose was to harmonize relations between kingdoms, and even provide a foundation for coordinated action on the international stage. Yet royal marriages almost invariably stored trouble for the future: the partners brought to their marriage a wide range of titles and claims which, in due course, could be the occasion of disputes between their two dynasties. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century it is tempting to assume that seventeenth-century wars fought over, for example, economic resources or the control of commercial routes were 'modern', and that those arising from dynastic conflicts were relics of medieval mentalities. Yet it was precisely the 'succession wars', both great and small, which helped to create the map, certainly of western Europe, as we know it today. However, even contemporary rulers themselves gradually came to accept that the unrestrained pursuit of dynastic claims would condemn them and their territories to permanent warfare. One of the most influential ideas to emerge in international relations was that of 'equivalence': the readiness of a ruler to yield a particular dynastic claim on condition of being compensated by an equivalent concession elsewhere. The peace treaties and other international agreements signed during the course of the century reveal an increasing awareness by governments of the attrac-

tion of the principle of equivalence, and many months, even years, of negotiation were devoted to that end.

The great set-pieces of negotiation were the principal peace congresses of the century. Warfare was endemic in Europe, and while some conflicts involved only two or three states, others turned into wider conflagrations which required large congresses to settle general peace. Those congresses – Westphalia, Nijmegen and others – will be discussed in later chapters, but a close study of their organization and conduct would reveal much about the evolving art of negotiation. Indeed, contemporaries themselves began to write about the subject; influential works included *El embajador* (1620) by Juan Antonio de Vera y Zuñiga (a French translation appeared in 1642), *Mémoires touchant les ambassadeurs et les ministres publics* (1677) and *L'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions* (1689), both by Abraham van Wicquefort; an English translation of this last work appeared in 1716. The possibility of regulating relations between states by appealing to a concept of international law was raised by the great Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius; his *De jura belli et pacis* (1625) called for an international system in which the conduct of states would be based on principles of reason rather than, for example, dynastic claims.

The statement has just been made that warfare was endemic in Europe, but what was war? It is not easy to establish a satisfactory definition. If we say that it was the use of force by one state against another in a formal conflict, that would be too restrictive: states frequently resorted to armed force without issuing declarations of war; furthermore, some parts of Europe, especially the Ukraine, existed under the nominal rule of a particular government, which used the army to assert a modicum of control. In the context of this book, therefore, warfare is deemed to be the use of military violence by states, irrespective of context: thus there will be declared and undeclared wars, civil wars, guerrilla wars, wars on land and sea. The changing nature of war in the early modern period has generated debate among historians as to whether a 'military revolution' took place. This is a subject to be discussed at a later juncture (see below, pp. 248–50). For the time being it is sufficient to note that the evolving nature and functions of war will raise such topics as the recruitment and training of armies, the means whereby they were administered and equipped, their leadership and control both from the government and on campaign, conditions of service, and the relationship between their purely military activities and the political and diplomatic purposes which they served.

The Holy Roman Empire

So far this chapter has introduced its subjects in general terms, but it is time to shift focus and become much more precise. Reference was made earlier to the Holy Roman Empire, an assemblage of some 360 territories under the largely nominal rule of the emperor. Its origins went back many centuries and it was involved in almost all of the great international crises of the seventeenth century. It had no parallel elsewhere in Europe, and certainly has none in the modern world. In view of its importance in early modern European history, however, its constitutional foundations, structure and organization should be understood, for they in turn were to influence the character of imperial policy, and the responses of the empire itself to the challenges of the century.

In the fourteenth century the empire encompassed Germany (with Austria) and regions which were either non-German or where German speakers were a minority: Bohemia, northern Italy, Switzerland, Dauphiné, Burgundy, Franche Comté and the Netherlands. Over the next two centuries some of these peripheral regions were lost, so that by 1600 it consisted, for practical purposes, of Germany, Austria and Bohemia. A product of medieval concepts and forces, the empire nevertheless proved to be remarkably durable; it was dismantled only in 1806 amidst the Napoleonic wars.

Although the Holy Roman Empire predated the fourteenth century, its structure was defined in 1356 when Emperor Charles IV issued the Golden Bull (a document so called because its seal or *bulla* was in gold). At the head of the empire was an elected emperor, chosen by a college of seven electors: there were three prelates (the archbishops of Mainz, Trier and Cologne) and four secular princes (the king of Bohemia, the count palatine of the Rhine, the duke of Saxony and the margrave of Brandenburg). It will be seen in later chapters that in 1623 the Count Palatine Frederick V was deprived of his vote because of his involvement in the Bohemian rebellion of 1618; his vote was transferred to the duke of Bavaria. At the Peace of Westphalia (1648), Frederick V's son, Charles-Louis, recovered the vote and Bavaria was elevated to an electorate, so making a total of eight. In 1692 Hanover acquired a ninth vote. When the imperial throne was vacant, the archbishop of Mainz convened a meeting of the college of electors in Frankfurt to choose a new emperor. If one of the electors was a candidate, he was permitted to vote for himself.

In the Middle Ages, the newly elected emperor had two coronations. He was crowned king of the Germans at Aix-la-Chapelle/Aachen, where Charlemagne, first of the emperors, was buried; he also went to Rome to be crowned by the pope as king of the Romans. This too maintained a link with Charlemagne, who was crowned there in AD 800. However, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these traditions were modified. Frederick III was the last emperor to be crowned in Rome (1452); when Charles V, elected in 1519, was crowned by Pope Clement VII in 1529, it was at Bologna, not Rome. Thereafter the ceremony relapsed, and no other papal crowning of the emperor occurred. One reason was that Frederick III had introduced a 'secondary' election which henceforth normally took place during an emperor's lifetime: the electors chose a separate 'king of the Romans', nominated by the emperor himself on the understanding that this person (in Frederick's case, his son Maximilian) later would be Holy Roman Emperor. Thereby the title 'king of the Romans' came to resemble that of prince of Wales in England or dauphin in France by signifying the heir apparent. This practice was one factor enabling the House of Habsburg, to which Frederick III belonged, to monopolize the imperial crown. To counterbalance this hereditary tendency, the electors, from the election of Charles V onwards, required the chosen candidate to agree to certain conditions (known as the *Wahlkapitulation*) before they proclaimed him emperor: he must swear to honour the rights of his subjects, consult his subjects in the traditional manner, and employ only Germans in imperial offices.

Imperial Government

The emperor enjoyed many of the attributes of a sovereign ruler: he was head of imperial justice, implemented foreign policy, and oversaw the security of the empire. Nevertheless, the Golden Bull provided little institutional apparatus through which to fulfil these duties. Imperial structures did gradually emerge, but the Holy Roman Empire was far from being a unitary state; it remained a collection of about 360 principalities and other territories which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. The empire functioned through negotiation, collaboration and persuasion rather than through formal instruments of government. Among the institutions which did exist, the most important was the imperial diet (*Reichstag*) which, until 1663, met

when and where the emperor convened it; thereafter it sat permanently in the imperial city of Regensburg. It was the principal forum wherein the emperor consulted the rulers of the imperial territories. The diet was composed of three colleges: the electors, the princes (usually about 150 attended), and representatives of the sixty or so free or imperial cities (cities responsible directly to the emperor, not to the local princes). For a matter to become law it required the consent of the emperor and two of the three colleges. Procedures were slow, for the colleges met separately and communicated only in writing.

The fact that the diet was unwieldy should not cause us to underestimate its significance. When it assembled, its members and their followers numbered several thousand, and whichever town hosted the diet was expected to provide hospitality on a lavish scale. The diet brought together the elites of the empire and was essential to the preservation of the imperial spirit. The principal binding forces of the empire were tradition, prestige and personal contact, rather than instruments of government. Meetings of the diet fostered loyalties and sentiments without which the empire could not have survived. In the sixteenth century, however, the religious and political controversies caused by the Protestant Reformation introduced ideological divisions into the diet, whose meetings turned into forums of conflict rather than cooperation. This is one reason why the diet met only six times between 1555 and 1603, and only once between 1608 and 1640.

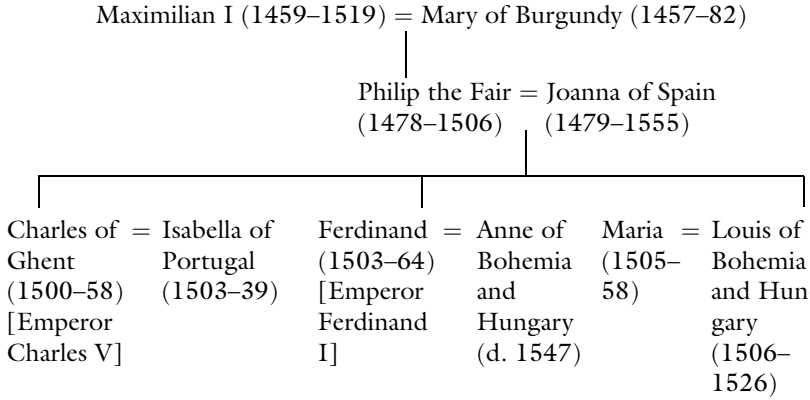
Once law had been created by the diet, responsibility for enforcement lay chiefly with the rulers of the territories of the empire, who in effect could ignore a law with which they disagreed. To assist the administration of imperial law, much of the empire had been divided into ten regions or 'circles' (*Kreise*) by the early 1500s, each with its own administrator and council.[4] By 1600, some of the circles had become obsolete; part of the circle of Burgundy, for example, had been absorbed by France and the rest by the Dutch Republic. The empire possessed only two law courts. One was the Supreme Court of the Empire (*Reichskammergericht*) which sat at Spire until 1693, when it transferred to Wetzlar; it served as a court of appeal. The other was the Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*) in Vienna, which generally dealt with cases involving the most important princes. There were other imperial institutions – for example, the Chancery (*Reichshofkanzlei*) in Vienna, which managed the diplomatic relations of the empire – but they were too few to administer its affairs efficiently.

This was not necessarily a source of weakness, since powerful vested interests were served. Although the heads of the territories took pride in belonging to the empire, they placed equal value on their autonomy, and had no desire to see the powers, as against the prestige, of the emperor augmented. This sense of independence was especially characteristic of larger states such as Bavaria, Brunswick, the Palatinate, Saxony and Brandenburg, which conducted domestic and foreign policies on a basis similar to that of any other European state.

It is a remarkable feature of the empire that, apart from a brief hiatus in the eighteenth century, every Holy Roman Emperor from 1452 to 1806 came from the Habsburg dynasty; and from this latter date they ruled the successor Austrian Empire until 1918. Given the unique imperial and European role of the Habsburgs, it is appropriate to cast a brief eye over their origins.

The House of Habsburg

The Habsburgs emerged in Switzerland in the twelfth century as lords in the Aargau region to the west of Zurich, and gradually extended their influence further afield. By the mid-fifteenth century they had become archdukes of Austria, which henceforth they regarded as their chief patrimonial possession. A simplified family tree will help to make the points which follow.



After Austria, the Habsburgs acquired three other major segments of territory: Burgundy (with Franche Comté and Flanders), Spain

and its possessions, and the kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary. The process began with Frederick III's son, Emperor Maximilian I, who in 1477 married Mary, daughter and heiress of the recently deceased Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy. Through his wife, Maximilian now ruled the Burgundian succession. He came into direct conflict with French interests, for Louis XI of France also claimed Burgundian lands. He and Maximilian fought two wars, but by the Treaty of Arras (1482) agreed on a partition. Louis XI received Burgundy and Artois, while Maximilian retained Flanders and Franche Comté. This episode marks the beginning of a major theme in European international relations: rivalry between the Habsburgs and France.

Two decades later another marriage paved the way to an even greater prize: Spain and its possessions. In 1496 the son of Maximilian and Mary, Philip the Fair, married the Spanish princess Joanna ('the Mad'), youngest daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Joanna was sixth in line to the Spanish throne, and, although she and Philip the Fair had two sons and a daughter, she had no serious expectation that she or her children would rule Spain. After her husband's death in 1506, her behaviour became so eccentric that she was incarcerated in a castle and her succession rights devolved to her children. Meanwhile the unexpected happened: her brothers and cousins, who preceded her children in line of succession, predeceased her father. When Ferdinand died in 1516, his successor was the elder son of Joanna and Philip the Fair, Charles of Ghent. The inheritance into which Charles entered in 1516 comprised Spain, the Spanish Netherlands, Spanish possessions in Italy, and a rapidly expanding empire in the New World. More was to come. Charles had been king of Spain for only three years when his grandfather, Emperor Maximilian I, died. From him Charles inherited Austria, Franche Comté and Flanders. As the Habsburg candidate for the imperial crown he was duly elected in 1519 and took the title Charles V. It was beyond the powers of one man to rule so many territories. In 1521 Charles ceded the regency of Austria to his younger brother Ferdinand, but retained Spain and its possessions, plus the Burgundian inheritance and the imperial crown.[5]

The central European presence of the Habsburgs – now overseen by Ferdinand – was augmented in 1526 when this prince secured the kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary through marriage. Maximilian I had agreed a compact with Wladislaus II, king of Bohemia and Hungary, whereby Wladislaus's son, Louis, married Maximilian's

granddaughter, Maria (1516), and Wladislaus's daughter, Anne, married Maximilian's grandson Ferdinand (1521). Wladislaus died in 1516, and his son Louis was duly elected king of Bohemia and Hungary. Louis died at the battle of Mohács (1526), fought against the Turks, and since he and Maria had no children, the Bohemian diet quickly elected Louis's brother-in-law, Ferdinand, as king of Bohemia.

Hungary proved more problematic. After Mohács, the country in effect was divided into three parts. The largest – central Hungary – was occupied by the Turks. Next was 'Royal Hungary', a narrow band of territory adjoining the eastern border of Austria. This was all that remained outside direct or indirect Turkish control. The final portion was the province of Transylvania which, while not formally occupied by the Turks, was a Turkish dependency. Whereas Ferdinand was elected king of Bohemia with little difficulty, in Hungary he faced a rival, John Zapolya, former governor of Transylvania. The main Hungarian diet elected Ferdinand as king of Hungary (in effect, Royal Hungary), but a rival assembly of nobles in Transylvania chose Zapolya. Several wars followed in which Ferdinand tried to recover those parts of Hungary held by the Turks or Zapolya. The fighting was indecisive, and on Zapolya's death in 1540 the Transylvanian lords elected his son, John Sigismund, in his place. Transylvania retained its semi-autonomous state, acknowledging Turkish suzerainty in defiance of Ferdinand.

Notwithstanding the setbacks in Hungary, the Habsburgs were the wealthiest and politically the most powerful dynasty in Europe by the late 1520s, and herein lies an explanation for their monopoly of imperial elections over the next three centuries. It was an arrangement which satisfied two sets of imperatives. One was Habsburg family honour. The imperial crown carried unrivalled prestige, hence the readiness of the Habsburgs to stop at nothing to retain it. Correspondingly, they possessed the political, financial and military resources to make the Holy Roman Empire a reality as against a fiction. In view of the centrifugal forces and external threats to which the empire was vulnerable, the Habsburgs were the only German family with the capacity to hold it together. The electoral college understood this, and although imperial elections sometimes were contested, the electors never lost sight of this inescapable reality: no Habsburgs, no Holy Roman Empire. Accordingly, one Habsburg followed another as emperor.[6]

Religious Division in Europe

In the sixteenth century, no force fractured European society with such profound consequences as the Protestant Reformation. When, in 1517, Martin Luther publicly protested at what he regarded as abuses perpetrated by the Catholic church, he triggered a movement which spread across Europe with astonishing speed. His example spurred other reformers into action, so that within a few decades the Lutheran church had been joined by Calvinist and Zwinglian churches and a number of smaller, radical sects. Calvinism was widely embraced in France, Scotland and parts of Switzerland and Germany; in England a complicated religious mosaic emerged whose ambiguities were reflected in the nascent Anglican church, which combined elements of Catholicism and Protestantism.

So deeply were religious categories of thought embedded in the political institutions of Europe that the Reformation crisis rapidly acquired political as well as social implications. Much of Germany collapsed into socio-political turmoil overlaid by religious zealotry. After almost four decades of conflict, involving Emperor Charles V, many of the imperial territories and all classes of society, a comprehensive peace was signed at Augsburg (1555). It rested on the pragmatic acceptance that a multi-confessional Germany was a reality. To prevent future religious conflict, the Peace of Augsburg incorporated four major principles. One was that of *cuius regio, eius religio* ('whose the region, his the religion'): in each state or territory of the Holy Roman Empire, the religion of the head would be that of his subjects. This principle applied only to Catholicism and Lutheranism; it was not extended to Calvinism, which as yet had no legal status in the empire. The second provided that former Catholic church lands held by Lutheran princes in 1552 should remain so, but no more lands were to be sequestrated. The third stated that if any Catholic bishop or prelate became a Lutheran, he should resign his see in favour of a Catholic. The fourth confirmed that in imperial cities which had multi-confessional populations, Catholics and Lutherans would both enjoy freedom of worship.

Whatever the qualities of Augsburg as a settlement, the post-war conditions which it sought to create had changed by the end of the century, and the principles which it embodied were undergoing renewed tension. Part of the explanation is to be found in the evolving nature of Catholicism. In the second half of the sixteenth century the

Catholic church showed remarkable powers of recovery after the trauma of the Reformation. This movement of Counter-Reformation should be understood as a conjunction of militant anti-Protestantism and vigorous internal reform. The contours of the Counter-Reformation were defined by the General Council of the church which met in the Italian city of Trent (apart from a brief period at Bologna) in three sessions between 1545 and 1563.[7] The council condemned central tenets of Lutheran and Calvinist doctrine and ruled out any prospect of accommodation with Protestantism. It defined Catholic doctrine, took measures to raise the spiritual and educational standards of the priesthood, and imposed a more demanding discipline upon bishops and other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Council of Trent avoided decisions on two crucial issues, probably because they were highly contentious and risked dividing the council: a definition of the church, and of the exact nature of papal authority. Nevertheless, by the time it disbanded, the Council of Trent had endowed the Catholic church with formidable doctrinal and organizational powers with which to combat Protestantism.

The Counter-Reformation also drew inspiration from a reform movement which, while not independent of the Council of Trent, arose from tangential or even pre-Tridentine sources. Existing religious orders were reinvigorated and new ones founded. Especially significant in a German context was the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534; the order received papal approval in 1540. Unlike, say, Benedictines or Dominicans, the Jesuits were not a monastic order. They served as missionaries in Europe, Asia and the New World, and established colleges which, in their size, resources and quality of teaching, surpassed many universities. Jesuits were appointed as professors in some of the great universities of the Holy Roman Empire, including Vienna from 1552, Prague from 1556 and Innsbruck from 1561. Jesuit strategy in Germany was master-minded by Peter Kanis ('Canisius'), who was sent by the order to Vienna in 1552. He brought Jesuit professors into the university, founded a Jesuit college in Vienna in 1552, and opened a seminary in 1556. His famous catechism (1555) was adopted widely throughout Catholic Germany, where his organizational and educational talents made an outstanding contribution to the cause of Counter-Reformation.

Although confronted by a more resolute Catholicism, Protestantism also displayed continuing powers of expansion and adaptation. Lutheranism profited from the sympathetic attitude shown towards it by Emperor Maximilian II, whose personal religious commitments were

Lutheran, even though he remained nominally Catholic. In 1568 Maximilian allowed his Austrian noble subjects to convert to Lutheranism if they wished. Lutheranism thereby gained a significant foothold in Austria, and these territorial gains were complemented in 1584 by an important doctrinal settlement. Since 1548, when Emperor Charles V had attempted to reconcile Lutheran and Catholic doctrine through a document known as the Interim of Augsburg, Lutherans had been divided in their attitude to this initiative. Those who followed the distinguished theologian Philipp Melanchthon (the 'Philippists') were favourably disposed towards the project, whereas the 'pure' or 'genuine' Lutherans (in German the *Gnesio-Lutheraner*) were hostile. The two camps remained divided until the 1580s, by which time the Counter-Reformation was making sufficient progress to persuade them that they must bury their differences and reunite. In 1584 they did so by the Formula of Concord, which brought Lutherans together again. On one point, however, all Lutherans were agreed: Calvinism should be resisted as resolutely as Catholicism. This question was especially sensitive in the Palatinate. During the reign of the Elector Palatine Frederick III (1559–1576), the Palatinate was a Calvinist state, even though the Peace of Augsburg denied recognition to Calvinism and a high proportion of the populace was Lutheran. Frederick's son, Louis VI (reigned 1576–1583), reverted to Lutheranism and, in accordance with the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, required his subjects to follow suit. At the same time, he oversaw discussions between Calvinist and Lutheran leaders in the hope of securing reconciliation, but without success. After his death, the pendulum swung back: his son and heir Frederick IV (reigned 1583–1610) reimposed Calvinism.

From the early 1560s to 1598, France too was torn asunder by socio-political conflict, the French Wars of Religion. The product of a disastrous combination of a weakened monarchy, aristocratic rivalry, socio-economic malaise, and the impact of dynamic Calvinist missionaries armed with a religious message which had radical social, political and perhaps even economic implications, the civil wars continued almost to the end of the century. They were punctuated by short-lived truces and peace treaties, and were the occasion of some of the worst atrocities of the century. Most notable was the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day (1572) when there began a massacre of many thousands of Huguenots, as French Calvinists were known.[8] In political and constitutional terms, the most critical moment came in 1589 when Henri III, last member of the Valois dynasty, was assas-

sinated. He had no direct heir, and his successor was a cousin twenty-three times removed, Henri de Navarre, a member of the Bourbon dynasty. However, Henri de Navarre (Henri IV) was a Huguenot. Civil war flared up again and was only moderated when Henri IV adopted two measures: in 1593 he converted to Catholicism, and in 1594 held his coronation. These acts were a public commitment to his Catholic subjects – about 90 per cent of the population – that he had embraced traditional French monarchy. In 1598 he ended religious conflict by issuing the Edict of Nantes, which incorporated Calvinists into the state. The edict listed those parts of the kingdom where they would enjoy rights of worship; it allowed them the liberty to pursue such careers as they wished; it created special tribunals to adjudicate disputes between Catholics and Huguenots; and, as a guarantee of their safety, it allowed the Huguenots to fortify certain towns. The Edict of Nantes was not founded on the principle of religious toleration, nor was it envisaged as a permanent settlement; like the Peace of Augsburg, it acknowledged the reality of a religious minority, and sought to avert further conflict by defining the place of that minority in French society. The edict was an act of the royal will and, by implication, would remain in force only as long as the king desired. In the event it lasted less than a hundred years, being revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. France began the new century in a state of domestic peace after almost forty years of civil war, but formidable tasks of political, economic and social reconstruction awaited the Bourbon regime.

Religious and Political Tensions in Germany

It is tempting to presume that, in a central Europe wherein a resurgent Catholicism was conducting a campaign of vigorous Counter-Reformation, it was only a matter of time before another conflagration occurred. We should beware of such a simple approach to historical causality, for the territorial rulers in the Holy Roman Empire needed no education in the horrors of religious warfare. From time to time problems arose which threatened the settlement arrived at by the Peace of Augsburg, but German political leaders mainly strove to preserve its essentials. One such crisis occurred in Cologne in 1582. The archbishop, Gebhardt Truchsess, was living openly with a mistress whom he intended marrying. To that end he became a Calvinist, but added to the sense of shock which his

announcement caused by proclaiming that he would remain in post. Here was a direct challenge to Augsburg, which had provided that any Catholic prelate who converted to Protestantism must resign in favour of a Catholic. Pope Gregory XIII deposed Truchsess in April 1583 and replaced him with Duke Ernest of Bavaria, bishop of Liège. This latter figure, who, like Truchsess, possessed little sense of religious vocation and was notorious for the debauchery of his lifestyle, nevertheless belonged to the powerful Wittelsbach family which ruled Bavaria and had the military resources to impose Duke Ernest by force. Accordingly, Bavarian troops, assisted by Spanish regiments, occupied Cologne and oversaw the enthronement of the new archbishop. For several years Gebhardt Truchsess sought to have the decision reversed, but in 1589 accepted defeat and retired to Strasbourg. The principle that a Catholic convert to Protestantism must relinquish his see had been upheld.

Some years later, another principle of Augsburg was reaffirmed, but only through a piece of neat legal legerdemain. It concerned the imperial city of Donauwörth, whose population and municipal council were overwhelmingly Protestant. Urged by monks of the Benedictine monastery of the Holy Cross in the city, Catholics affirmed their presence through public processions to mark the festivals of the Catholic calendar. The processions were a cause of much tension in the city as Protestants objected that they were offensive and triumphalist. In September 1606 a Catholic parade took place, accompanied by elaborate banners and loud music. It provoked extensive anti-Catholic rioting in the town. The affair was reported to Emperor Rudolf II, who referred it to the Aulic Council. The Aulic Council invited Duke Maximilian of Bavaria to suppress the violence and secure from the municipality a guarantee that Catholic worship and processions would continue unhindered. Maximilian moved into Donauwörth but, after several fruitless months of discussions, was unable to secure the necessary promises from the city fathers. The Aulic Council – with the consent of the emperor – revoked Donauwörth's status as an imperial city in 1607 and placed it under Maximilian's authority. Maximilian cancelled Protestant rights of worship, and with the help of teams of Jesuits reimposed Catholicism within the city. Neighbouring Protestant territories – Neuburg, Ansbach and Württemberg – objected that the emperor had broken the spirit, if not the letter, of Augsburg. The imperial response was that, because the status of Donauwörth had been annulled, the principle of Protestant rights of worship had been replaced by that of *cuius regio,*

eius religio; Augsburg had not been violated. Protestants also raised a question of imperial law. Donauwörth lay within the circle of Swabia, not of Bavaria; therefore, they argued, Maximilian ought not to have been involved in the city's problems. Their protest availed nothing, and Donauwörth remained in Maximilian's hands.

This episode was the catalyst which led to the formation in 1608 of the Evangelical Union. In that year an imperial diet was called at Regensburg. The emperor sought money and troops to fight the Turks, but recent events in Donauwörth left Protestants in the diet little disposed to cooperate. Catholic members likewise were in no mood to strike a deal with Protestants; indeed, several contended that, as far as they were concerned, the Peace of Augsburg was redundant: it was the decrees of the Council of Trent which now commanded their obedience, not the compromises of Augsburg. The Protestants staged a walk-out, and under the leadership of the Elector of the Palatinate formed the Evangelical Union. It was joined by most, although not all, Protestant territories; Saxony and Brandenburg, for example, remained aloof. The Union sought and acquired the protection of Henri IV of France who, although a Catholic, feared for the future of a part of Germany crucial to French interests. The following year a counter-organization was formed: the Catholic League led by Maximilian of Bavaria under the patronage of Philip III of Spain.

It is tempting to interpret the emergence of the Union and the League as evidence of a drift towards war in Germany. Even here we should exercise caution and remember that these organizations were an attempt to impose a measure of control upon a situation which otherwise might acquire unstoppable momentum. Although they did provide for self-defence, the Union and League were primarily pressure groups seeking to advance their causes through cooperation between their respective members. It is highly significant that they looked outside the empire for protectors. As will be seen in chapter 2, imperial authority at this juncture was dangerously weak, and Rudolf II was unable to provide the resolute leadership which the volatile politico-religious atmosphere required. Neither the French nor the Spanish government approached the affairs of the empire with unalloyed altruism, nor were the Union and League so naïve as to believe that they would. All recognized the dangers in allowing the French and Spanish an opportunity to intervene in the affairs of the Holy Roman Empire; the challenge was to secure sufficient French or Spanish support to realize the aims of the Union or the League, without allowing that support to turn into control.

The Jülich–Cleves Crisis

Just how difficult it could be to strike this balance was illustrated by the Jülich–Cleves crisis which broke out in 1609. In that year William, the Catholic duke of Jülich–Cleves, died without heir. His territories, which included Mark and Berg, lay in one of the most sensitive parts of the Rhineland. Apart from bestriding, and therefore controlling, movement up and down the Rhine, they gave easy access westwards into the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic, and eastwards into Germany. There were two chief claimants to the duchy, but both were Protestant: Elector John Sigismund of Brandenburg, and Duke Wolfgang William of Neuburg. Whoever succeeded, Jülich–Cleves would become a Protestant territory. Unwilling to countenance this eventuality, the emperor exercised his imperial privilege and proclaimed that he would hold the duchy himself until a Catholic successor was found. Both claimants resisted this course of action. They put troops into the duchy and agreed to hold it jointly until a tribunal of Protestant princes had adjudicated their respective claims. Although they occupied most of the duchy, they failed to secure the fortress of Jülich. The emperor had instructed Archduke Leopold, bishop of Passau and Strasbourg, to administer the duchy pending the choice of a Catholic successor. With a small force Leopold entered the fortress, and for the time being held it on behalf of the emperor.

Non-German interests quickly became involved. Henri IV of France had followed affairs in Jülich–Cleves for several years, his principal fear being that, if this strategically crucial territory passed under the direct control of the Habsburgs, it would add to the dangers on France's eastern frontier. In 1609 he devoted considerable energies to persuading the newly formed Evangelical Union that it was essential to preserve Jülich–Cleves as a Protestant territory. He urged the Union to make preparations for its defence, and promised extensive military assistance. At the same time his agents contacted leading members of the Catholic League, including Maximilian of Bavaria, to point out that a Habsburg victory in Jülich–Cleves would simply augment imperial and perhaps Spanish power at the expense of the autonomy of the imperial princes; the Catholic League should not sacrifice its long-term interest for the short-term gains of Catholicism in Jülich–Cleves. At Rome, French diplomats presented a similar case to the pope: Catholicism was being exploited by the Habsburgs to legitimate their pursuit of political power in Germany.

The governments of the Dutch Republic and England were also called upon by Henri IV to help to resist the Habsburgs in Jülich–Cleves.

Early in 1610 Henri IV invited Christian of Anhalt, a leading figure in the Evangelical Union, to Paris, where they planned a campaign to dislodge imperial forces from Jülich. A French army gathered in the east of the country, and James I of England sent a supporting force of 4,000 troops. For its part, the Catholic League had rejected French overtures and, with Spanish help, was mustering forces. War was imminent when there occurred the tragedy of 14 May in Paris: Henri IV was assassinated just a few days before he was to join his army. Although the campaign went ahead, and the mainly Franco-Union armies besieged Jülich (which capitulated on 1 September), the death of Henri removed the one figure who could have held the Protestant side together. His successor in France, Louis XIII, was only eight years old; Louis's mother, Marie de' Medici, became regent of France. Immersed in domestic crisis, she had no desire to be dragged into a European war. All the foreign troops quickly withdrew from Jülich–Cleves, and the Union and League both agreed that force alone could not decide the succession. They too stood down their armies in November 1610, leaving token forces to hold the duchy as before. Here matters remained until 1613 when Wolfgang William of Neuburg seized the initiative by becoming a Catholic and marrying the sister of Maximilian of Bavaria. In the short run, this again created the possibility of war, for the Spanish government sent troops to occupy Cleves as a first step towards imposing Wolfgang William throughout the duchy. But neither the two claimants nor the Evangelical Union and Catholic League desired war; the new emperor, Matthias, who had succeeded Rudolf II in 1612, similarly sought a peaceful resolution of the question. By the Treaty of Xanten (1614), John Sigismund and Wolfgang William agreed to partition the duchy: the former retained Cleves and Mark, and the latter Jülich and Berg.

The outcome was a compromise which demonstrated a willingness to repudiate a winner-take-all mentality. In 1609 the empire had come close to a general war because of French intentions, and could have done so again in 1613 had Spanish plans been realized. In spite of their belligerent stance, the Union and League had worked towards a settlement in Jülich–Cleves which conceded a modest advance of Protestantism in the interests of wider peace. But Germany could not isolate itself from events elsewhere. Within a few years

there occurred a crisis in Bohemia which quickly assumed implications for Germany; and out of this complex knot of problems came that European catastrophe, the Thirty Years War. To Bohemia we therefore turn our attention.