The War of the Spanish Succession

1701–14, last of the general European wars caused by the efforts of King Louis XIV to extend French power. The conflict in America corresponding to the period of the War of the Spanish Succession was known as Queen Anne’s War (see French and Indian Wars).

Causes

The precarious health of the childless King Charles II of Spain left the succession open to the claims of three principal pretenders—Louis XIV, in behalf of his eldest son, a grandson of King Philip IV of Spain through Philip’s daughter, Marie Thérèse, to whom Louis XIV had been married; the electoral prince of Bavaria, Joseph Ferdinand, a great-grandson of Philip IV; and Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, who had married a younger daughter of Philip IV, but claimed the succession in behalf of his son by a second marriage. Archduke Charles (later Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI). England and Holland were opposed to the union of French and Spanish dominions, which would have made France the leading world power and diverted Spanish trade from England and Holland to France. On the other hand, England, Holland, and France were all opposed to Archduke Charles, because his accession would reunite the Spanish and Austrian branches of the Hapsburg family.

Louis XIV, exhausted by the War of the Grand Alliance, sought a peaceful solution to the succession controversy and reached an agreement (1698) with King William III of England. This First Partition Treaty designated Joseph Ferdinand as the principal heir; in compensation, the French dauphin was to receive territory including Naples and Sicily, and Milan was to fall to Archduke Charles. Spain opposed the partition of its empire, and Charles II responded by naming Joseph Ferdinand sole heir to the entire Spanish Empire.

The unexpected death (1699) of Joseph Ferdinand rendered the Anglo-French treaty inoperative and led to the Second Partition Treaty (1700), agreed upon by France, England, and the Netherlands; under its terms, France was to receive Naples, Sicily, and Milan, while the rest of the Spanish dominions were to go to Archduke Charles. The treaty was acceptable to Louis XIV but was rejected by Leopold, who insisted upon gaining the entire inheritance for his son. While the diplomats were still seeking a peaceful solution, Spanish grandees, desiring to preserve territorial unity, persuaded the dying Charles II to name as his sole heir the grandson of Louis XIV—Philip, duke of Anjou, who became Philip V of Spain. Louis XIV, deciding to abide by Charles’s will, broke the partition treaty.

England and Holland, although willing to recognize Philip as king of Spain, were antagonized by France’s growing commercial competition. The French commercial threat, the reservation of Philip’s right of succession to the French crown (Dec., 1700), and the French occupation of border fortresses between the Dutch and the Spanish Netherlands (Feb., 1701) led to an anti-French alliance among England, Leopold, and the Dutch.

The Course of the War

Hostilities between the French and the imperial forces began in Italy, where the imperial general, Prince Eugene of Savoy, defeated Nicolas Catinat and the duke of Villeroi. The general war began in 1702, with England, Holland, and most of the German states opposing France, Spain, Bavaria, Portugal, and Savoy. The duke of Marlborough, though ill-supported by the Dutch, captured a number of places in the Low Countries (1702–3), while Eugene held his own against Villeroi and his successor, Louis Joseph, duc de Vendôme. The duke of Villars, however, defeated Louis of Baden at Friedlingen (1702).

The successes of the French in Alsace enabled them to menace Vienna (1703), but the opportunity was lost by dissension among their chiefs. In 1704, Marlborough succeeded in moving his troops from the Netherlands into Bavaria, where he joined Eugene and won the great victory of Blenheim over the French under the count of Tallard (see Blenheim, battle of), and the French lost Bavaria. Meanwhile, Portugal and Savoy had changed sides (1703), and in 1704 the English captured Gibraltar.
In 1705, Marlborough in the Netherlands and Eugene in Italy had modest successes, although Vendôme defeated Eugene at Cassano. The year 1706 was marked by Eugene’s victory at Turin, which resulted in French evacuation of N Italy, and by Marlborough’s triumph at Ramillies (see Ramillies, battle of), which compelled the French to retreat in the Low Countries. In the same year, Louis XIV proposed peace to the Dutch, but English interference forced the continuance of the war.

In 1707, Marlborough made little progress in the north and Eugene’s expedition into Provence resulted in the loss of 10,000 men; but in the following year Marlborough and Eugene won another great victory at Oudenarde, took Lille, and drove the French within their borders. Peace negotiations failed, and the allies won (1709) another success, though a costly one, at Malplaquet (see Malplaquet, battle of).

Meanwhile the indecisive allied campaigns in Spain (1708–10) did little to weaken Philip V. The death (1711) of Holy Roman Emperor Joseph I, who had succeeded Leopold, and the accession of Charles VI led to the withdrawal of the English, who were as much opposed to the union of Spain and Austria as to that of Spain and France.

**Negotiations for Peace**

Preliminary negotiations between England and France were pressed forward and a peace conference was opened (1712), followed shortly afterward by an Anglo-French armistice. In 1713, France, England, and Holland signed the Peace of Utrecht. Charles VI continued the war, although Eugene had been defeated (1712) at Denain and had been forced to retreat in the Spanish Netherlands. Seriously weakened by the defection of his allies, the emperor finally consented in 1714 to the treaties of Rastatt and of Baden, which complemented the general settlement (see Utrecht, Peace of). With this settlement, the principle of a balance of power took precedence over dynastic or national rights in the negotiation of European affairs.