



THE
WAR OF
THE SPANISH
SUCCESSION
1701~1714

JAMES FALKNER

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Introduction

‘Isolated and remote. A country divided within itself . . .
Fragmented, disparate, a complex of different races,
languages and civilizations.’¹

Whatever natural disadvantages Spain may have had to endure at the close of the seventeenth century, it was the object of much envy in European capitals and, while weakened by a lack of strong central government, was still potentially a force to be reckoned with. In particular the world-wide Spanish Empire, and the rich trading opportunities that went with it, was a prize of huge value that attracted the ill-concealed ambitions of other states, none of whom would view the advancement of the others with complacency. As a consequence, for thirty years or more one of the most burning issues that was discussed in council chambers across western Europe had been the matter of – ‘What was to be done about Spain’ – more particularly ‘what was to be done if the king in Madrid died having no legitimate heir’.

The awkward question would have to be answered once the ailing King Carlos II went to his grave; there was no obvious immediate successor, for that invalid and enfeebled monarch had no children or younger brother or sister, and yet the vast and immensely wealthy Spanish Empire, stretching from the Iberian peninsula across wide swathes of the Mediterranean and Italy, the Low Countries, enclaves in North Africa, across the high seas to the Americas, and even the far-off Philippines, plainly had to have a firm ruler. Yet, with so much at stake, who was that ruler to be?

In the second half of the 17th Century and the early decades of the 18th Century the most important single theme in European politics was the rivalry between the two hegemonal powers of Austria and France. Among the smaller states the neighbours of France inclined to Austria, and those of the Austrians to France.²

France and Austria had arguably good hereditary claims for their

princes – that was evident – but there were others, most notably the Duke of Savoy on the one hand, and that of the house of Wittelsbach, the Electors of Bavaria, on the other. The prolific descendants of King Philip II of Spain had sown a devil's harvest for a later generation, but these lesser claimants could hardly expect to make progress unless it was with the connivance and blessing of one or other, or perhaps a little optimistically of both, of the main contenders. Such an approach was not out of the question, for it would suit everyone to avoid outright war over the issue, as the closing decade of the seventeenth century had already been one of ruinously expensive conflict for western Europe.

The question over the succession was complex, and made more so because the aims and ambitions of the contenders, whether large or small, were hedged about by the needs and aspirations of their near neighbours, states that had also every reason to avoid war as long as their interests could be assured. Such assurances would be sought, over such diverse matters as the Protestant succession to the throne in London, the security of the southern border of Holland against any fresh French attack, and opportunities for English and Dutch merchants of the 'Maritime Powers' to trade in the wide Spanish empire, markets hitherto closed to them; guarantees needed to be given, or else they might have to be enforced.³ When matters came to a head in the late autumn of 1700, at first it seemed that King Louis XIV of France had got what he wanted without fighting, and hoped to retain the same without provoking a war. However, largely due to the king's untypical clumsy mistakes, it proved impossible to avoid war – a conflict that no-one sought but perhaps, given the complexity of the principal question of the succession to the throne in Madrid, it was not to be avoided.

Once embarked upon, the conflict itself was on an almost unprecedented scale, covering wide regions of western and north-western Europe, southern Germany, the Balearic islands of the Mediterranean, much of Italy, briefly an incursion into Scotland, the West Indies, battle-fleet naval actions and wide-scale privateering on the high seas, and even an attack on French-held parts of Canada. In Scandinavia, the Great Northern War would have its effect, at one distant but briefly dangerous remove, and rebellion against imperial rule in Hungary would sap the efforts of the Austrians to press home their claim. A war no one sought but which had to be – sometimes these

matters had to be put to the crucial test, and so it proved, but it is far easier to start a war than to stop one.

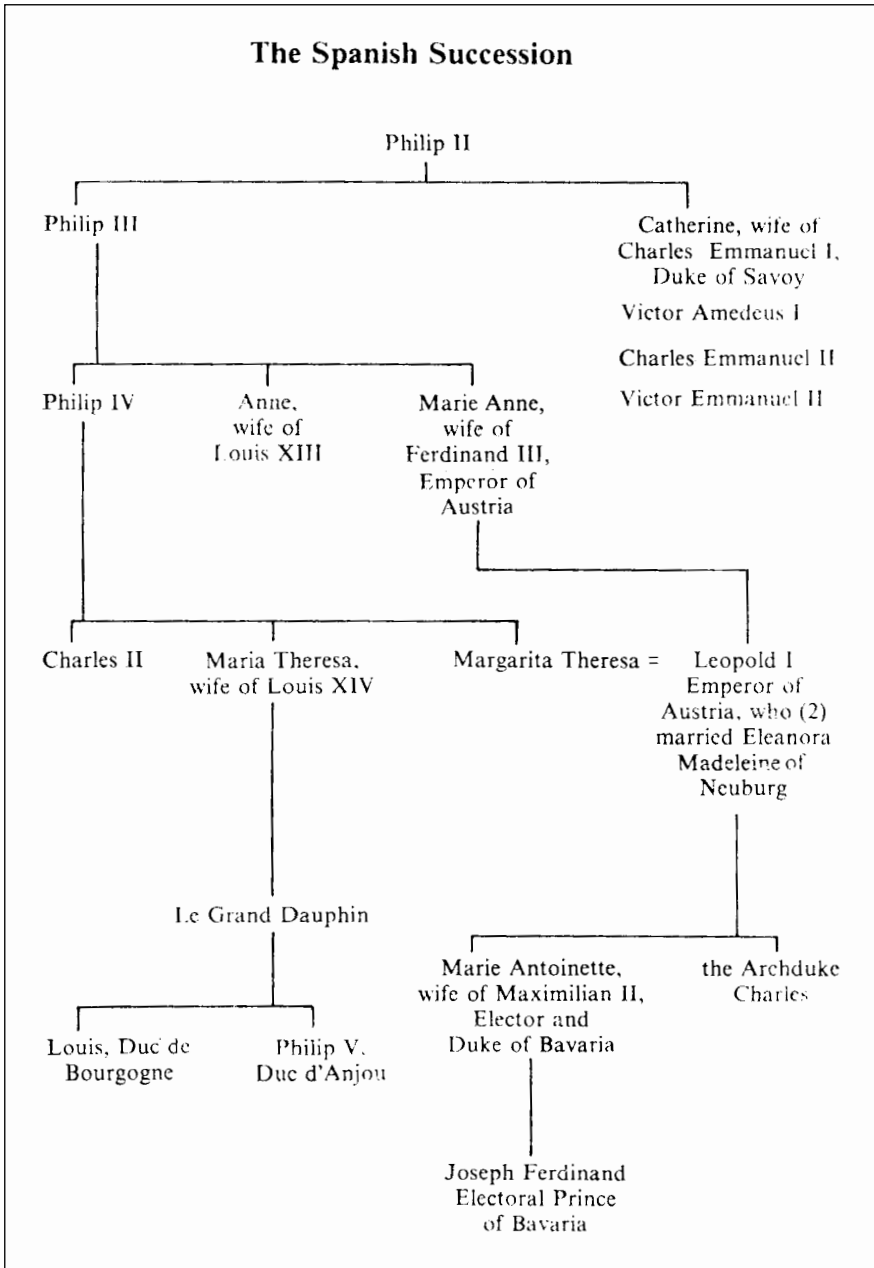
Great issues, both dynastic and national, were at stake but there was little apparent animosity between the belligerents, and despite the cruelties inevitably involved in warfare, barbarism was almost entirely absent from the conflict; prisoners of war were generally well treated (the exceptions at places like Calcinato in early 1706, and Brihuega four years later, were so uncommon as to attract wide comment and criticism). Commanding generals were in many cases well acquainted with their opponents, often listing them as friends and even, as with the Duke of Marlborough and the Duke of Berwick, close relations. The misfortunes of the common people who endured campaigning armies crossing their lands hardly need stating for such things, sadly, must be in warfare. Still, there was little of a fervent or religious nature about the conduct of the war, with all the attendant horrors common in such conflicts, even though the presence of large numbers of Protestant soldiers in staunchly Catholic Spain did the allied cause no good, and the assurance of a Protestant succession to the throne in London was one of the main planks of the Grand Alliance.

The allies ranged against Louis XIV and his grandson did attempt to foment rebellion amongst the Protestants in southern France, but this unhelpful distraction for the king was limited, while his own support for the largely Protestant rebels in Hungary hampered the efforts of Catholic Vienna in the war. The rebellion in the Cevennes region was suppressed with some rigour, as were those Catalans who declared for the Habsburg claimant, but that was the way that rebels were dealt with, then and since. In fact, what each participant sought could have been achieved with judicious negotiation and an element of compromise, and this was proved to be so with the terms belatedly agreed in 1713. In particular, after the lavish expenditure in treasure, effort and blood, the end result would see the Spanish people, whose opinion in the matter had never been sought, on the whole quite content with a king who, contrary to expectation, had proved himself to be worthy of his calling and earned their trust and respect, and perhaps also their love. By a strange irony, when peace came at last, and given a dispassionate judgement, it appeared that everyone had achieved what they originally sought, but no-one was able to say so.

Dating, Grammar and Nomenclature

In the early eighteenth century the Julian Calendar was in use in the British Isles, while on the Continent the newer Gregorian Calendar was in use. From 1700 onwards the new system (N.S.) was eleven days ahead of the old system (O.S.). So, the declaration of war by the Grand Alliance on France is sometimes given as being made on 4 May 1702 in London, but this was regarded as being on 15 May in The Hague and Vienna. As most of the events described in this book take place in mainland Europe, (N.S.) has been used throughout for dating, unless otherwise stated. The often idiosyncratic and inconsistent grammar and spelling in many of the contemporary accounts quoted in this book have been corrected for greater clarity, sensitively it is hoped, with additional explanatory comments, where these seem to be appropriate, inserted in square brackets. Of the two active claimants for the throne of Spain, Philippe Duc d'Anjou and Archduke Charles, both were proclaimed as king, but only the young French prince made good his claim, after many years of war. Therefore I have referred to the Austrian Charles as Archduke as throughout, until he eventually ascended the imperial throne in Vienna, while according to Philippe the regal title eventually secured as King of Spain.

The Line of Succession to the Throne of Spain.
(The two main contenders only)*1



Chronology

The Principal Events of the War of the Spanish Succession

1700

- 7 October King Carlos II of Spain signs a new will, naming Philippe, Duc d'Anjou, as his successor
- 1 November Death of Carlos II in Madrid
- 8 November News of the late king's will reaches the French court
- 16 November Louis XIV recognises his second grandson as Philip V of Spain
Emperor Leopold I recognises the Elector of Brandenburg as King in Prussia
- 4 December Philip V leaves Versailles for Madrid

1701

- 6 February French troops begin to occupy the Barrier Towns in the Spanish Netherlands
- 18 February Philip V enters Madrid
- April King William III, and the Dutch States-General, recognise Philip V as king of Spain
- 20 May Prince Eugene of Savoy takes command of imperial troops in northern Italy
- 18 June King Pedro II of Portugal concludes treaty with France and Spain
- 9 July Prince Eugene forces Marshal Catinat's position at Carpi
- 1 September Eugene defeats the French and Savoyards at the battle of Chiari
- 7 September Treaty of Grand Alliance agreed between Austria, Holland and England

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- 11 September Philip V marries Marie-Louise of Savoy
16 September Death of exiled James II: Louis XIV acknowledges James Stuart as King of England
- 1702**
- 31 January French defeat at Cremona, Marshal Villeroi captured
18 March Death of King William III. Queen Anne succeeds to the throne in London
12 May Negotiations open to bring Portugal into the Grand Alliance
15 May Grand Alliance declares war on France and her allies
1 July Marlborough assumes command of the Anglo-Dutch army
18 August Benbow's naval action against Ducasse off Santa Maria
26 August Allied landings near to Cadiz
1 September French defeated at battle of Chiari
September Electors of Bavaria and Liège ally themselves to France
26 September Allied expedition to take Cadiz abandoned
22 October Spanish treasure fleet captured or sunk in Vigo Bay
26 October Allies capture Liège
December Anglo-Dutch treaty with Portugal agreed.
- 1703**
- 4 March Imperial army defeated at battle of Heyzempirne
9 May French capture Kehl
15 May Allies capture Bonn
16 May Anglo-Dutch-Portuguese treaty signed
30 June Dutch defeated at Eckeren near Antwerp
26 August Allies take Huy
13 September Archduke Charles of Austria proclaimed as King Carlos III of Spain
19 September Austrian army under Count Styrum defeated at Höchstädt
25 October Duke of Savoy declares for the Grand Alliance
15 November French victory at battle of Speyerbach
French re-take Landau
27 December Portugal joins the Grand Alliance

1704

- 7 March Archduke Charles arrives in Lisbon
May Allied advance from Portugal into Spain
19 May Marlborough begins march up the Rhine from Holland
30 May Allied attempt to take Barcelona fails
2 July The battle of the Schellenberg on the Danube
4 August Gibraltar captured by Anglo-Dutch forces
11 August Margrave of Baden begins siege of Ingolstadt
13 August Franco-Bavarian army defeated at Blenheim
24 August Naval battle off Málaga
7 October Inconclusive battle on the Agueda river in Spain
29 October Marlborough occupies Trier on the Moselle river
11 November Franco-Spanish attempt to recapture Gibraltar begins
15 November Admiral Leake relieves Gibraltar
28 November Allies capture Landau
20 December Allies take Trarbach

1705

- 20 March Second relief of Gibraltar by Leake
5 May Death of Emperor Leopold I of Austria. Emperor Joseph I succeeds his father
10 June French capture Huy
11 July Allies re-take Huy
18 July French defeated in battle at Elixheim
18 August Abortive allied attempt to attack the French at the Yssche stream
22 August Allied forces land in eastern Spain
6 September Allies capture Leau
14 October Barcelona captured by allies. Carlos III proclaimed.
December Allies occupy Valencia

1706

- 6 January French capture Nice
3 April French besiege Barcelona

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- 22 May Barcelona relieved of French siege by a naval squadron
- 23 May French defeated at battle of Ramillies
- 28 May French abandon Brussels
- 17 June Antwerp taken by allies
- 23 June Allies occupy Cartagena
- 27 June Anglo-Portuguese army enters Madrid
- 9 July Ostend captured by allies.
Peace proposal tentatively made by Louis XIV
- 4 August Allies evacuate Madrid
- 22 August Menin captured by allies
- 7 September French defeated at the battle of Turin
- 8 September Alicante captured by allies
- 13 September Majorca and Ibiza occupied by Anglo-Dutch forces
- 24 September Charles XII of Sweden invades Saxony
- 11 November Franco-Spanish forces re-take Cartagena
- 1707**
- 1 January King Pedro II of Portugal dies, succeeded by John V
- 13 February France and Austria agree to de-militarise northern Italy
- 25 April Allies defeated at Almanza in Spain
- 22 May Lines of Stollhofen on the Rhine stormed by the French.
Marshal Villars raids southern Germany
- July Imperial troops occupy Naples
- 22 August Allied attempt to take Toulon fails
- 4 October Ciudad Rodrigo captured from Portuguese
- 14 November Lerida captured by French and Spanish forces
- 1708**
- 16 April Allies surrender Alicante
- 30 April Imperial troops under von Starhemberg arrive in Catalonia
- May Jacobite invasion of Scotland fails
- 5 July French capture Bruges
- 7 July French seize Ghent
- 11 July French defeated at the battle of Oudenarde

August	Confidential peace negotiations opened
11 August	Sardinia occupied by the allies
29 August	Minorca captured by the allies
August–	
December	Allied siege of Lille
28 September	French defeat at battle of Wynendael
18 November	Denia capitulates to French forces
9 December	Citadel of Lille captured by allies

1709

2 January	Allies recapture Ghent and Bruges
February	Charles XII attacks Russia
9 April	Louis XIV declares intention to remove troops from Spain
7 May	Allies defeated at battle of Caya/Val Gudina in Portugal
May	Louis XIV agrees allied terms for peace, apart from one clause
July	Charles XII defeated at Poltava in Russia
3 September	Tournai captured by allies
11 September	Battle of Malplaquet
20 October	Mons taken by the allies
29 October	First Anglo-Dutch Barrier Treaty agreed

1710

25 June	Allies capture Douai
27 July	Allied victory at battle of Almenara
20 August	Allied victory at battle of Saragossa
28 August	Bethune captured by the allies
September	Carlos III enters Madrid
29 September	Allies capture St Venant
8 November	Aire taken by the allies
9 December	British army defeated at Brihuega. Philip V re-enters Madrid
10 December	Franco-Spanish success at battle of Villaviciosa

1711

25 January	Gerona captured by Franco-Spanish forces
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14 April	Death of the Dauphin of France
17 April	Death of Emperor Joseph, succeeded by his brother Archduke Charles (Carlos III/Charles VI)
7 August	Lines of Non Plus Ultra breached by Marlborough
14 September	Capture of Bouchain by the allies
22 September	Archduke Charles leaves Barcelona – elected as Emperor Charles VI
8 October	Preliminary Articles for Peace agreed between France and Great Britain
31 December (O.S.)	Marlborough dismissed by Queen Anne
1712	
12 January	Congress for a peace opened at Utrecht
8 February	Death of the Duc de Bourgogne
21 May	Restraining Orders issued to the Duke of Ormonde
4 July	Le Quesnoy captured by the allies
16 July	British troops removed from active operations
24 July	Allied troops defeated at Denain by the French
30 July	French capture Marchiennes
2 August	Allies fail to capture Landrecies
8 September	French re-capture Douai
2 October	Hostilities suspended in Spain
3 October	Le Quesnoy re-taken by the French
19 October	French re-capture Bouchain
2 November	Philip V renounces any claim to the French throne
3 November	Hostilities suspended in Portugal
1713	
30 January	Second Anglo-Dutch Barrier Treaty agreed
11 April	Treaty of Utrecht agreed between France, Great Britain, Portugal, Prussia and Savoy
May	French re-capture Landau
26 June	Holland concludes Treaty of Utrecht
9 July	Barcelona declares support for King Carlos III
13 July	Anglo-Spanish Treaty agreed

1714

- 6 March Treaty of Rastadt agreed between France and Austria
- 26 June Treaty agreed between Holland and Spain
- 1 August Death of Queen Anne, accession of King George I
- 18 September Treaty of Baden agreed between France and the Austrian Empire.
Barcelona taken by Franco-Spanish forces under Berwick

1715

- 6 February Treaty agreed between Spain and Portugal
- 1 September Death of Louis XIV, succeeded by his great-grandson Louis XV (as a minor)
- 15 November Barrier Treaty agreed between Holland, France and Austria

Chapter 1

This is the King of Spain

‘He lingered till November 1700.’¹

In November 1659, long before the ill-health of an invalid king in Madrid became the matter for international concern, peace had come to the warring nations of France and Spain with the conclusion of the Treaty of the Pyrenees; this welcome event coincided with an agreement for the marriage of the young French King, Louis XIV, and the Spanish Infanta Maria-Theresa, the eldest daughter of King Philip IV. The details of both the treaty and the marriage were confirmed and ratified at Toulouse and Madrid at the end of the same month. As a part of the marriage settlement, Maria-Theresa renounced any claim she or any children she bore might have to succeed to the Spanish throne, receiving in recognition of this renunciation a dowry set at the fabulous sum of 500,000 gold crowns, all to be paid within eighteen months of the date of the marriage. The royal couple were married on 9 June 1660, at Bayonne close to the Franco-Spanish border. Within twelve months, Louis XIV was sounding opinion in Madrid whether the renunciation of the succession to the throne was valid, and in particular that any child or grandchild of Maria-Theresa might, despite the explicit terms of the marriage settlement, be eligible. Philip IV proved incapable of paying the huge dowry for his daughter, which might well have been expected, and this gave Louis XIV the excuse he needed to embark on a course of territorial aggrandisement at the expense of Spain. It also could be argued, just, that the failure to pay the money made the renunciations in the marriage settlement ineligible, but this was a weak and highly debateable point, as the renunciations had not been dependent upon actual payment of the huge dowry. The seeds of future trouble had, however, been sown.

An heir to the Spanish throne was born to Philip IV and his

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Austrian-born second wife Marie-Ann, on 6 November 1661, and was named Carlos, a sickly and weak child from the start who was not expected to live all that long. Louis XIV, meanwhile, embarked on a war to seize Spanish territory in the Low Countries, claiming his wife's 'rights' and unpaid dowry in the matter as rather spurious justification for his aggression. The king also concluded a confidential treaty with Emperor Leopold I of Austria who, like Louis XIV, was a grandson of Philip III of Spain. They would divide the Spanish inheritance and empire should, as widely anticipated, the young Spanish king, who had succeeded his father in 1665 at the tender age of four, not live long or be survived by an heir of his own. In effect, the treaty terms allowed for the emperor to succeed to the Spanish throne, together with the Spanish-held territories in Italy and the Indies, while Louis XIV would gain the southern Netherlands for France. In this way, the French king had no fear of renewed Habsburg encirclement such as had been achieved by Emperor Charles V many years before; he would, however, have gained extensive new territories in Flanders, Brabant, Guelders and Luxembourg. Understandably, Spanish opinion in the matter was not taken into account, and the whole arrangement was spoiled when Carlos II lived on much longer than had been thought likely. Diplomatic tensions, and intermittent wars waged by Louis XIV in order to expand his territories on the north-eastern borders of France, complicated the scene, and in growing concern the emperor sought the aid of England and Holland, the Maritime Powers as they were known, to counter-balance growing French power and influence.

William of Orange, the Dutch Stadtholder, replaced James II as King of England in 1688, becoming by Act of Parliament William III and ruling with his wife Mary, the elder daughter of the exiled king. The following year, England and Holland agreed to guarantee that Emperor Leopold should succeed Carlos II if he had no heir. The emperor's position was strengthened by the marriage in that same year of his sister-in-law, Maria Ana of Neuburg, to the feeble Spanish king, but ruinously expensive war came to western Europe in 1689, which trundled aimlessly on and was only brought to a tired end with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697. In the process, an apparently neat solution to the tricky problem of the succession had been devised by Louis XIV and his old opponent, William III, without, it should be said once again, consulting the Spanish nobility or their people on a matter of

such importance to them. A Partition Treaty, one element of the negotiations to bring an end to the Nine Years War, was agreed between France, Holland and England in September 1698, and provided that the young son of the Elector of Bavaria, Joseph-Ferdinand Wittelsbach, should succeed to the throne in Madrid once Carlos was in his grave. The electoral prince was the grandson of Emperor Leopold I, who would be expected to set aside his own claim and that of his immediate family, as would Louis XIV and his own son and three grandsons. Joseph-Ferdinand was, in effect, a neutral choice, being the grandson of Carlos II's younger sister, Margareta-Theresa, who had been the first wife of Emperor Leopold. In this way, by putting Joseph-Ferdinand on the throne once it became vacant it was intended that neither Imperial Austria or France would gain too great an accretion of power.

The French king's eldest son, the Dauphin, born of Carlos II's older half-sister Maria-Theresa, would receive Sicily, Naples and certain Italian territories, and Archduke Charles of Austria, the emperor's younger son by his second wife, would get Luxembourg and the Milanese region in northern Italy, as compensation for any disappointed hopes they may have. England and Holland would have better trading rights in the wide Spanish Empire of the Indies; the French king wrote to the Comte de Tallard, his ambassador in London:

I have examined with great attention all the problems that one could foresee either by suspending the negotiations with the King of England or concluding them. The first seems to me to be the greater [danger]. In breaking with that Prince we should indirectly decide to force him to enter relations with Bavaria, and the other princes of the Empire . . . it would be easy for him to draw out their ideas and treaties could be signed during his stay in Holland.²

Louis XIV wanted no more wars with powerful coalitions, the experience of the hard years between 1688 to 1697 had made him wary, and in any case his treasury would probably not bear renewed conflict. 'When one begins a war' he added 'one does not know the finish.' By this treaty of partition, judiciously arrived at but without reference to the Spanish king and nobility, England and Holland also hoped to avert

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complications which could arise from whatever Carlos II might do about the inheritance. In this way, a new king acceptable to both Versailles and Vienna, and to the Maritime Powers, would be on the throne, and the Spanish Empire would be divided on terms which might in a favourable light be seen as being equitable between the rival parties.

Emperor Leopold was ill at ease when he learned of what was intended, recalling his earlier agreement with William III, and believing that far too much was being given away without reference to him. Equally unhappy were the Spanish nobility, whose firm intent was that the empire should not be divided at all, certainly not at the wish of foreign rulers more concerned with their own interests than those of Spain. Accordingly, on 14 November 1698, Carlos II signed and declared a new will, leaving the throne to young Joseph-Ferdinand of Bavaria on his death, together with the Spanish Empire in its entirety. This declaration had a logic that defied argument and plainly had legitimacy, certainly more so than what had been proposed under the recently concluded Partition Treaty. A sensible and workable solution, it seemed, had been reached by the Spanish monarch without reference to the opinions of the other powers in western Europe.

All might yet have been well, for despite the emperor's ill-feeling over the issue it seemed unlikely that he could over-turn the will, either by negotiation or by force, and Austria, with many distractions in eastern Europe, would not go to war over the issue without the active participation of firm allies. Then fate intervened dramatically, and the young Bavarian prince, heir now to the vast Spanish Empire, suddenly caught smallpox while visiting the Spanish Netherlands where his father was governor-general, and died on 6 February 1699. Dark suspicions were raised at this unexpected and curious turn of events, perhaps so fortunate for Austrian hopes of gaining the throne in Madrid, but nothing could be proved, and there it was. A convenient solution to a thorny problem had now passed by, and the whole matter was again alive and would soon trouble Europe for another fifteen years.

Once more Louis XIV and William III were active over the question, and a second Partition Treaty, agreed on 11 June 1699, named the young Archduke Charles of Austria, second son of the emperor, as heir to the throne, as long as Spain was never to be united with the

Empire. The Dauphin of France would receive Sicily, Naples and the Milanese as recompense for setting aside his own claim. Typically, Emperor Leopold, despite the glittering offer for his young son, was still reluctant to agree, concerned at such a growth in French power and influence in Italy, and he perversely refused to ratify the new treaty, England, France and Holland doing so alone on 25 March 1700. No amount of persuasion by England and Holland would move him, as his mind was set on gaining territories in Italy. 'Our condition would be very wretched if we were to give France what she asks.'³ In this respect Leopold might be thought that he had played his hand high and that he lost equally high, for the terms were patently generous to Austria, which for the moment was not in conflict with the Ottoman Turks, and the prospect of war with France loomed as a result of his stubborn stand, but all that was yet to be seen with any clarity. The French king was alert to the danger, and he noted that an offer that had been made to his distant cousin Duke Victor-Amadeus II of Savoy, to transfer certain territories around Nice on the border with France and receive in their place the Duchy of Milan, had not been accepted. The duke could also advance a claim to the throne in Madrid based on his grandmother, the Spanish Infanta Catherina Michelle having been the daughter of King Philip II of Spain, and whose dowry was, just like that of Marie-Theresa, never paid. Victor-Amadeus appeared to be playing for time, that was his nature, and although the French offer had advantages for Savoy he was, like the emperor, perhaps aiming for higher stakes, 'There is reason to believe,' Louis XIV wrote, 'that the Duke of Savoy, seeing himself the immediate successor to the Archduke [Charles] will lie up with the Emperor to obtain execution of the testament and the favour of the Emperor as soon as my grandchildren will have abandoned the new right that they could obtain from the testament.'⁴

A confidential clause in the treaty of partition allowed for the emperor to accept the provisions it contained no more than two months after the terms were agreed. Leopold did not take the opportunity to do so, and this clumsiness gave Louis XIV the chance, in the meantime, to accept the provisions of any new will in favour of his own son or grandson, without seeming to break his word over the treaty. Despite this legal nicety, Louis XIV in the meanwhile was certainly engaged in something of a double game, and his ambassador in Madrid, the

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Marquis de Blécourt, was exerting what influence he could, including the payment of large sums of money, to promote French interests, and in particular that of the king's second grandson, the seventeen-year-old Philippe, Duc d'Anjou, as an eligible successor to Carlos II. In this endeavour he was assisted by the not-unrealistic belief that the best, perhaps the only, way to maintain the Spanish Empire undivided was by means of harnessing French interest in doing so. The pro-Austrian faction in the court, encouraged by the king's wife who was the sister-in-law of Emperor Leopold, failed to prosper in part because of the overbearing manner of the imperial emissaries in their dealings with the proud Spanish nobles. The French king, however, was doubtful of the likelihood of success for his endeavours:

The King of Spain has always opposed the legitimate rights of my son. The mastery of the Queen over his mind and the attachment that she has for the Emperor's interests have been such that it is not surprising that I demand assurances before listening to any proposition [that d'Anjou would be named heir to the throne] so contrary to the conduct of the King of Spain throughout his life.⁵

In fact, the Council of State in Madrid had met in June 1700 and voted in favour of the French aspirant to the throne; Carlos II did not attend the council, so that the vote should be seen as impartial. The following month the Pope declared himself to be in favour of Anjou, as being the choice most likely to ensure the continuance of peace in western Europe, but stressed that the opinion of the Council of State had already indicated the best way forward.

As the ailing Carlos II sank towards his deathbed, the Archbishop of Toledo, prominent in the pro-French faction at the Spanish court, took charge of the king's sick chamber and had the German-born queen barred from entering. A new will, naming the Duc d'Anjou as successor with an undivided empire was drawn up, and completed on 7 October 1700, and the detailed provisions in the fifty-nine articles contained in the document were promptly conveyed in confidence to Louis XIV. The renunciations made by his mother, Anne of Austria, and his own Spanish wife, Maria-Theresa, were annulled and the succession was fixed on d'Anjou, or his younger brother.

Recognising as a result of several consultations with Minsters of State and of Justice that the reason why Doña Ana and Doña Maria Teresa, Queens of Spain, my aunt and sister, renounced succession to those kingdoms was to avoid the prejudice of uniting them to the Crown of France, and recognising that, this fundamental motive no longer existing, the right of succession in accordance with the laws of those kingdoms, and that today this condition is fulfilled by the second son of the French Dauphin, therefore, in obedience to these laws, I declare my successor to be (should God take me without leaving heirs) the Duke of Anjou, second son of that Dauphin; and as such, I call him to the succession in all my Kingdoms and dominions, without exception of any part of them.⁶

The Duc de Berry, Louis XIV's younger grandson, was named next in line of succession, and only then was Archduke Charles of Austria, second son of the emperor, mentioned as, in effect, the third and least favoured choice. In the unlikely event that all three of the young princes should refuse, then the throne was to be offered to the Duke of Savoy. In the meantime, a regency was to be established to govern Spain until the new king, whoever that might be, should arrive in Madrid. The difference between the non-partitioning provisions contained in the new will, and the terms of the newly-agreed treaty between France and the Maritime Powers, although not ratified in Vienna, were obvious with the potential for renewed conflict on a wide scale if great care was not taken by all concerned.

Aware of the offer contained in the will, Louis XIV awaited the arrival of the expected and fateful news with feelings of some unease. 'I see that from all sides one confirms that which you wrote to me about the disposition that he [Carlos II] made by his testament in favour of one of my grandsons.' The king wrote to his ambassador in Madrid:

Nothing makes it more evident than the secrecy that they keep on this subject with the Emperor's ministers' and at the same time by the fact that some of those who witnessed the signature of the testament have assured you of this disposition. But since I cannot change the resolutions that I have taken on the simple news that you give me, it will be necessary to await the declaration. There is

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even much chance that if the health of the King should improve, one would make him change the dispositions that he has made.⁷

Three weeks later, after rallying and seeming to recover his health a little, so much so that the Austrian ambassador, Von Harrach, felt rather fancifully that there might yet be hopes of an heir, Carlos II died in the early afternoon of All Saints Day, 1 November 1700. He had been ineffective and a semi-invalid for many years but was lamented by his people to whom he was, despite the manifest mental and physical difficulties of his short life and the economic distress of the times, a benevolent and well-liked monarch. The death of the king, and choice of successor on the throne, was duly declared to the assembled notables with a knife metaphorically being twisted in the side of the Austrian ambassador:

At length the folding doors being thrown open the duke of Abrantes appeared, and a general silence ensued to hear the nomination. Near the door stood the two ministers of France and Austria, Blécourt and Harrach. Blécourt advanced with the confidence of a man who expected a declaration in his favour; but the Spaniard, casting on him a look of indifference, advanced to Harrach and embraced him with a fervour which announced the most joyful tidings. Maliciously prolonging his compliment, and repeating his embrace, he said ‘Sir, it is with the greatest pleasure – Sir it is with the greatest satisfaction for my whole life – I take my leave of the most illustrious House of Austria!’⁸

The news of Carlos’ death, in a coded message, reached the French court at Fontainebleau on the morning of 8 November, and two further letters were shortly afterwards received by Louis XIV from the Junto, the council of ministers, in Madrid with additional details of the offer of the throne to his grandson:

We do by this express send your Majesty a copy of the will and Codicil, which the deceased King our Master, whom God absolve, has left behind him, that you may perfectly know all the Circumstances that are therein contained. We make use of this occasion (as we have done on all others) to acquaint your Majesty,